Analysing Consumer Behavior towards Social Media

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Abstract

Social media allows customers and prospects to communicate directly to your brand representative or about your brand with their friends. However, the obvious question is: who are the people interacting online and how engaged are they in online activities? The aim of this paper is to conceptualize consumers' activities in social media by examining the motivations behind the activities. By offering a more detailed description of the differences in consumer use of social media, the study extends existing research on consumer activities related to user-created content.

Key words: social media, consumer behavior, online community

INTRODUCTION

Today, consumers are involved in a variety of activities, ranging from consuming content to participating in discussions, sharing knowledge with other consumers, and contributing to other consumers' activities. With the enormous interest in social media sites, such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and Wikipedia, consumers are assumed to be actively contributing to marketing content.

In marketing, there is currently a growing interest in digital interactivity, especially in consumer activity in social media. Information technology is empowering consumers, and their role is shifting from being passive recipients of information to becoming active generators of information (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002). As consumers are increasingly performing activities previously controlled by companies, the entire marketing landscape is changing. Therefore, companies need to better understand the changing behavior of consumers, in order to create mutual benefits from the use of social media.

Consumers' online behavior is developing at a fast rate. Consumers are taking part in a variety of activities ranging from consuming content, participating in discussions, and sharing knowledge with other consumers to contributing to other consumers' activities. This active consumer behavior is changing the media and marketing landscape as consumers are invading companies' marketing sphere (Berthon *et al*., 2008). With the enormous interest in social media and user-generated content (UGC) on sites, such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and Wikipedia,

consumers are seen to be actively contributing to the marketing content(Khan et.al, 2012; Chandra et.al, 2012; Chandra et.al, 2012).

At the same time, although the opportunities for active involvement are good, some academic studies on the topic indicate that consumers are not necessarily as active online as it has been believed (Jones *et al*., 2004; Joyce and Kraut, 2006; Preece *et al*., 2004). Interestingly, consumers are typically described as being active and creative (Berthon *et al*., 2008), neglecting the fact that depending on differences in interest and resources only a small number of consumers in fact produce the majority of user-generated content (Courtois *et al*., 2009). Research has also shown that the increased choice and responsibility resulting from empowerment can be challenging and confusing (Davies and Elliot, 2006). As a result, social media activity is not necessarily as prevalent as expected and desired by researchers and practitioners (Chouhan & Verma, 2014:a; Chouhan. & Verma 2014:b; Chouhan, 2013). Therefore, more research is needed to identify the different levels of activity and the bases of such activities(Chouhan et.al, 2014; Chouhan et. al, 2013; Khan et.al, 2014).

Recent research on consumer activity in social media and on user-generated content has examined the motivations for using or not using social media (e.g. Park *et al*., 2009; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Baker and White, 2010; Shao, 2009). It has been proposed that consumers are either active as posters or contributors or passive as lurkers or consumers of content (e.g. Schlosser, 2005; Shang *et al*., 2006; Shao, 2009). In an online brand community context, practice-oriented research has focused on describing the practices related to brand communities (Schau *et al*., 2009). However, what is lacking in existing research is a detailed investigation of the different levels of activities consumers engage in(Naghshbandi et.al, 2016; Chouhan et.al, 2016, Chouhan, V., & Naghshbandi, N. 2015.).

However, despite the rich opportunities for contributing, recent academic research indicates that consumers are not necessarily as active online as has been believed. The aim of this paper is to conceptualize consumers' activities in social media by examining the motivations behind the activities. By offering a more detailed description of the differences in consumer use of social media, the study extends existing research on consumer activities related to user-created content (Goswami, Chandra & Chouhan, 2012; Chouhan & Gorana, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media, such as social networking sites and user-generated services, have emerged into mass use rather recently, basically from 2003 onward (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Academic research is appearing, and related concepts are explored, such as social networking sites (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Utz, 2010), user-generated content (Shao, 2009), and social media (Walker Rettberg, 2009). Basically, what characterizes user-generated content is the fact that consumers are the ones producing, designing, publishing, or editing the content in the media (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008), i.e. the service is user-created. Social media in turn enable people to share and interact with each other and the content becomes more democratized (Drury, 2008). Although differences between the many concepts describing this new media have been

implied and many would argue that user-generated content is a characteristic of social media, the concepts social media and user-generated content have been used semi-interchangeably (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In this paper, social media and user-generated media are seen to denote the same phenomenon that consumers are creating the content in the media.

Different typologies of social media depending on their type and characteristics have been suggested (e.g. Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008; Shao, 2009). For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorized social media into collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Similarly, in this paper, we categorize collaborative projects and blogs as content creation and publishing tools. Collaborative projects or wikis are websites that allow people to contribute or edit content in a collective way. Blogs refer to online publications where the most recent entries are published first and are written in a personal and conversational style. Content-sharing communities are focused on sharing particular content, not on building a network (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, and Dopplr). Social networking sites enable users to create and maintain a community of individuals. Virtual game worlds and social worlds, such as Second Life or World of Warcraft, are more entertainment-oriented and enable consumers to enter a virtual or other reality. In a multiplayer game-like environment, they encourage communication and interaction with others. Being different in terms of means and consequences, these social media types obviously involve different motivations and activities. In this paper, social media activities are examined by focusing on user-created services, such as blogs, online review/rating sites, social networking sites, and online communities.

Consumer motives for engaging in social media provide insights into consumers' activities. Several studies focusing on consumers' motivation have emerged recently (e.g. Ross *et al*., 2009; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Grace-Farfaglia *et al*., 2006). Many studies on social media and user-generated media apply a uses and gratification approach (c.f. Shao, 2009; Park *et al*., 2009). This approach focuses on consumers' motives for using a certain media and on the consequences that follow from those motives (Blumler and Katz, 1974). The gratification studies exploring social media show similar findings. Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) found that consumers' have three main gratifications or motives for using the internet as a medium, namely, information, entertainment, and social aspects. This finding has been supported and extended by more recent research on user-generated media, which has identified information, entertainment, social interaction and community development, self-actualization, and self-expression as motives (Shao, 2009; Courtois *et al*., 2009). Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) summarized the motivations into two main groups: rational motives, such as knowledge-sharing and advocacy, and emotional motives, such as social connection and self-expression. Park *et al*. (2009) found four motives for using social networking sites: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information. These gratifications are common motives for consumers' activities performed in social media, as will be proposed below.

Consumers' activities in social media has been explored based on how actively (or passively) consumers behave online. Community members have frequently been grouped according to their communication behavior and in this context the poster-lurker dichotomy has been widely used (e.g. Schlosser, 2005; Shang *et al*., 2006). Using this approach, de Valck *et al*., (2009) identified six different virtual community member types based on members' communication/participation

patterns: 1) Core members were those who contributed to the community the most by retrieving, supplying, and discussing information. 2) Conversationalists focused on discussing information. 3) Informationalists mainly retrieved and supplied information. 4) Hobbyists focused on maintaining and updating their personal information on the website. 5) Functionalists were interested in retrieving information. 6) Opportunists only retrieved marginal content from the website. This categorization is thus based on information activities and did not include other types of activities.

In contrast, Shao (2009) proposed that people perform a variety of activities online: 1) Consumption of information and entertainment, 2) participation in social interaction and community development, and 3) production of self-expression and self-actualization. Consumption means reading the content that is posted by other users; participation occurs when people comment on others' creations, and production means posting one's own content on the site. Shao (2009) also noted that these three activities are often integrated that people often engage in all three activities or in a combination of two, and that it is not always possible to differentiate clearly between the activities. Despite identifying the three main activities and the resulting consequences of these activities, Shao's study does not provide insights into the various subactivities that occur within the main categories. The activities of consumption, participation, and production may also include other activities that are not described by the categorization based on contribution levels. In other words, it is appropriate to identify other activities that can be relevant for users of social media

Data Analysis

As per the objectives of the research work various hypotheses were developed which are as under:

1. No significant reliable surfing behaviour was found among respondents for the social media sites.
2. No significant surfing behaviour was found among respondents for the social media sites in respect of time of surfing.
3. No significant difference exists between the number of friends surfing on the social media sites
4. No significant difference exists between the duration of surfing on the social media sites.
5. No significant difference exists between the hours per week spent on the social media sites.
6. No significant difference exists between the respondents for purpose of surfing on social media sites

Demographic Profile

Before the hypotheses were analysed it is essential to explain and understand the demographics of the respondents for better understanding of the responses. The demographics of the respondents were analysed in various terms explained in table-1 as under:

Table-1 : Demographic profile of the respondents: Descriptive						
		Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Income_Group
N	Valid	265	265	265	265	265
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0

Mean	1.9547	1.4566	1.2000	2.3509	1.9962
Std. Error of Mean	.04951	.03066	.02462	.04415	.05114
Std. Deviation	.80589	.49906	.40076	.71870	.83257
Variance	.649	.249	.161	.517	.693
Range	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00

To identify the that whether the respondents behaviour regarding surfing of social media websites significantly or not the chi-square test were conducted with following hypothesis:

H_1=*No significant surfing behaviour was found among respondents for the social media sites.*

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-2 as under:

Table-2: Descriptive Statistics and Chi square					
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Surf_Net	265	1.8189	.90308	1.00	3.00
Surf_Net					
	Observed N		**Expected N**		**Residual**
Never	136		88.3		47.7
1-10 times/week	41		88.3		-47.3
Every time connected	88		88.3		-.3
Total	265				
Test Statistics					
			Surf_Net		
Chi-Square			51.087[a]		
df			2		
Asymp. Sig.			.000		
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 88.3.					

From the table-2 findings we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant surfing behaviour was found among respondents for the social media sites.

H_2=*No significant surfing behaviour was found among respondents for the social media sites in respect of time of surfing.*

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-3 as under:

Table-3: Descriptive Statistics and chi Square test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Time_Surf	265	2.0113	.75118	1.00	3.00

Time_Surf			
	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Less than 1 Hour	73	88.3	-15.3
1 - 3 Hours per day	116	88.3	27.7
More than 3 Hours per day	76	88.3	-12.3
Total	265		

Test Statistics	
	Time_Surf
Chi-Square	13.049[a]
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.001
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 88.3.	

From data from table-3 we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant time difference for surfing on social media sites was found among respondents.

> H_3=No significant difference exists between the number of friends surfing on the social media sites

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-4 as under:

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Chi-sqaure					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Friends	265	3.1321	1.46212	1.00	5.00

Friends			
	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1-10	74	53.0	21.0
11-50	3	53.0	-50.0
51-100	44	53.0	-9.0
101-250	102	53.0	49.0
250+	42	53.0	-11.0
Total	265		

Table-4: Test Statistics	
	Friends
Chi-Square	104.604[a]
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 53.0.	

From table-4 statistics we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant differences for number of friends were recorded on social media sites among respondents.

H4=No significant difference exists between the duration of surfing on the social media sites

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-5 as under:

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics and Chi square test					
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Long_use	265	3.1434	1.88751	1.00	7.00
Long_use					
	Observed N		**Expected N**		**Residual**
Less thana month	98		37.9		60.1
1-6months	5		37.9		-32.9
6-12months	22		37.9		-15.9
1-2 years	84		37.9		46.1
1-2 years	26		37.9		-11.9
2-4 years	17		37.9		-20.9
+4 years	13		37.9		-24.9
Total	265				
Test Statistics					
			Long_use		
Chi-Square			218.475[a]		
df			6		
Asymp. Sig.			.000		
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 37.9.					

The table-5 confirms that the duration of surfing on social networking sites has significant difference between the respondents were found as $p<0.05$. Thus we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant differences for duration of surfing were recorded on social media sites among respondents.

H5=No significant difference exists between the hours per week spent on the social media sites

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-6 as under:

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics and chi square test					
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Hours_week	265	3.2679	1.83193	1.00	7.00
Hours_week					
	Observed N		**Expected N**		**Residual**
0-5	84		37.9		46.1
6-10	10		37.9		-27.9
11-20	23		37.9		-14.9
21-30	88		37.9		50.1
31-40	32		37.9		-5.9

41-50	15	37.9	-22.9
51+	13	37.9	-24.9
Total	265		

Test Statistics	
	Hours_week
Chi-Square	180.015[a]
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 37.9.	

On the basis of data in table-6 : we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant differences for hours per week surfing were recordedon social media sites among respondents.

> *H6=No significant difference exists between the respondents for purpose of surfing on social media sites*

To analyse the above factors Chi-square test were applied and the results were shown in table-7 as under:

Table-7: Descriptive Statistics and Chi square					
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
purpose_serf	265	3.0528	1.59219	1.00	5.00
purpose_serf					
	Observed N		**Expected N**		**Residual**
Entertainment	90		53.0		37.0
Search	4		53.0		-49.0
Shopping	27		53.0		-26.0
News	90		53.0		37.0
E-mail	54		53.0		1.0
Total	265				
Test Statistics					
	purpose_serf				
Chi-Square	109.736[a]				
df	4				
Asymp. Sig.	.000				
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 53.0.					

From the table-4.18, we can reject the hypothesis and state that significant the respondent's uses surfing on social media sites for different purposes, however the entertainment and news was the most common purpose for surfing.

CONCLUSION

Consumer input mainly concerned consumption and participation, and only some activities were related to production. Acquiring and consuming information were two of the main activities.

Most respondents visited different UGC sites, consumed the content, but did not write comments nor produce their own content on the sites. The majority of cases where the respondents also produced some content to an UGC were reported from social networking sites. Some respondents also reported production on other websites, such as leaving comments on discussion boards, writing reviews, posting and sharing their own music, and blogging.

the combination of the several categories of consumer input and motivations enabled a deeper understanding of activities performed using social media. The categories of consumption, participation, and production highlight different levels of contribution but do not detail further the characteristics of the different activities. The study indicates that the role of user-generated content in directing consumer behavior reduces the influence of traditional marketing communications. Rather than relying solely on marketing communication, companies should try to participate more in their customers' social media activities, in order to understand the impact of these on their brand image and also to facilitate interaction with potential customers.

In our study, which is using a cross-sectional design, the external validity would be weak because we did not apply a probability sampling technique meaning our results could not be generalised to a larger population. Our study could be consider credible because we tried at all cost to obtain unbiased answers from our respondents and we analysed exactly what we had as data from them with doing any additional to primary data on our part. This means a high degree of honesty was applied in the study.

Further research should be carried out in order to enhance the understanding of the concepts of social media marketing and customer satisfaction, how they are measured because they are very important for organisations in terms of profitability and growth. A similar study could be conducted with a larger sample size so that results could be generalised to a larger population. This study can be carried out in other areas comprised of multiple cultures in order to find out the applicability in other stores.

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