

Chapter 41

Cyber Behavior in Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Emerging online environments not only provide the most pertinent tools to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in a variety of daily and business-oriented tasks, but also drive and shape expectations, norms, lifestyle, and culture of the emerging crowd of postmodern consumers. These changes inflict a tremendous impact on the universe of marketing; hence, online human behavior has been drawing increasing attention from marketing scholars. The research of cyber behavior in marketing merits come from the relevant bodies of literature in multiple disciplines, including sociology, computer-mediated-communication, and Information Systems. The present chapter aims to present an overview of this accumulated scientific knowledge and highlight latest research trends on human behavior in cyber environments with a marketing-oriented focus.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the drastic impact of the Internet on many aspects of daily life and commerce, a variety of disciplines have been focusing on online human behavior. To begin with, computer-mediated-communication, sociology, information systems, and marketing literatures have taken huge leaps and have established and empirically validated many explanatory and predictive models. The

present chapter aims to present an overview of this accumulated scientific knowledge and highlight latest research trends on human behavior in cyber environments with a marketing-oriented focus. *Cyber behavior in marketing* refers to human behavior in online environments explored through the perspective of marketing. The chapter will be organized as follows: First, a profile for the emergent hybrid consumer will be drawn and the evolving nature of online communities will be

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described; then the latest research on interaction and self-presentation in online environments will be reviewed; finally, with a more explicit marketing focus, recent hot topics in digital marketing and factors influencing online consumer experience and acceptance of online advertisements will be discussed. As the chapter unfolds, the impact of new media on the universe of marketing will be evident and fruitful future research avenues will be pinpointed.

OVERVIEW

PC-based internet connectivity required people to connect to the internet in a stationary position, usually in isolation, most probably in-doors. This allowed one to be mentally and physically present either in online social environments or offline social environments, but rarely both at the same time. Pervasive connectivity enabled by the mobile handsets has given birth to the age of perpetual contact (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). This represents a new state of existence for human beings. Presence in the cyber space is now spatially and temporally integrated with presence in the real physical world. Today, we are seamlessly connected to the Internet, interact with our online social networks and real-time face-to-face acquaintances simultaneously, utilize the power of search engines and social media *on-the-go* wherever and whenever necessary, and engage in all kinds of online activities regardless of time and location (Varnali, Toker, & Yilmaz, 2010). Consequently, a very powerful hybrid consumer with timeless needs has emerged. Wind and Mahajan (2002) have beautifully described this new breed of consumers using the metaphor of the Centaur of the Greek mythology: “They are like Centaurs, half human and half horse, running with the rapid feet of new technology, yet carrying the same ancient and unpredictable human heart” (Wind & Mahajan, 2002, p. 65). Since marketing

is essentially about understanding, communicating with, and delivering value to consumers, marketing scholars and marketers had to adapt to this change and explore how to leverage ubiquitous networks to create a pervasive presence alongside this new breed of consumers.

MAIN TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

Recent research in cyber behavior in marketing focuses across three major areas: (1) online communities and the social/cultural dynamics within these communities (e.g., Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2007; Kozinets, 1999), (2) interaction and self-presentation in online environments (e.g., Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Tufekci, 2008), and (3) acceptance of and attitude towards online services and advertising (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Okazaki, 2004; Schlosser, White & Lloyd, 2006; Varnali, Toker, and Yilmaz, 2010). The current scientific knowledge in these three main areas will be synthesized and discussed in detail.

Online Communities

Emerging online environments not only provide the most pertinent tools to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in a variety of daily and business-oriented tasks but also drive and shape expectations, norms, lifestyle, and culture of the emerging crowd of post-modern consumers (Simmons, 2008). Driven by the interaction of users’ social needs and the perceived technological features of the Internet, online environments has a generative effect that leads to the formation of online communities which give birth to new norms of self-disclosure and social interaction (Rheingold, 1993). The term “community” describes groups of people that identify themselves with a common

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