Chapter 4

Social Media Activities:
Understanding What Consumers Do in Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Consumers are increasingly consuming, participating, contributing, and sharing different types of online content. This is influencing the marketing activities traditionally controlled and performed by companies. The aim of this chapter is to conceptualize the activities consumers perform in social media. Social media denote content created by individual consumers such as online ratings or verbal reviews, online message boards/forums, photos/video sites, blogs, tags, and social networking sites. A conceptual framework for consumers' social media activities is developed and qualitatively substantiated. Social media activities are based on the motives for the activities, including information, social connection, and entertainment. The chapter contributes to research on social media and online communities by describing user behavior and motivations related to the user-created services. Managerially, the study deepens the understanding of different challenges related to users' activities on social media and the motivations associated with those activities.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers are increasingly active online. They are consuming, participating, contributing, and sharing different types of online content. Where individuals have traditionally been seen as passive consumers of different marketing content, they are gradually influencing the marketing activities traditionally controlled and performed by companies. Although the use of social media is growing and user-generated content (UGC) is exploding in sites like YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and Wikipedia, few academic studies have been conducted concerning individuals' use of social media, and many studies are conceptually oriented. Many emerging studies are currently focusing on the use of social media in different service sectors, including museums, libraries, sports and entertainment venues (Kidd, 2011; Hall, 2011; Rotschild, 2011). But what citizens and active consumers are doing in social media needs more attention. Studies have shown that

consumers' activity influences the value that is created in the use of a service (Heinonen, 2009; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2009). More studies of social media are needed to respond to consumers' enormous interests in and activity related to social media.

Current social media research emphasizes individuals' motivations for creating content or the role of personality on social media use. The majority of recent studies are exploring individuals' reasons to use social media (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Baker & White, 2011; Shao, 2009). Many studies are also emphasizing social networking sites (Ross et al., 2009; Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Utz, 2010), leaving other types of social media unexplored. Some research positioned in the service science field has used activity theory to describe social media services (Multisilta, 2009). However, what is lacking is a deeper understanding of what individuals do and the influence of these activities on individuals' perceptions and behavior. More importantly, little is known about individuals' interest in activity and willingness to collaborate in this type of peer-created and-dominated service.

The aim of this chapter is to conceptialize the activities consumers perform in social media. Social media denote the content created by individual consumers such as online ratings or verbal reviews, online discussions/conversations, photos/video sites, blogs, tags, and social networking sites. A conceptual framework for consumer activities and perceptions of user-created content is developed and qualitatively substantiated. The following research questions are addressed: What activities regarding social media are consumers involved in? What motivates consumers' activities in social media?

The chapter contributes to research on social media and online communities by describing consumer behavior and motivations related to the user-created services. Managerially, the study deepens the understanding of different strategies related to consumers' activities in social media and the motivations associated with those activities.

The chapter is structured in the following way. First is a general overview of the perspective and approach on social media and user-generated content taken in this chapter. Secondly follows a review of previous research on consumers' motivations to use social media as well as a review of research on consumers' activities on social media. Next, a conceptual framework for consumers' activities social media is proposed. Thereafter the empirical study is presented, and the findings are used to develop and substantiate the conceptual framework. The findings are then discussed on a more general level and managerial strategies based on social media activities are presented. The final conclusions include implications and recommendations for researchers and managers. Based on issues not covered in the current study agendas for future research are also identified.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Social media is a rather new phenomenon, the use of social networking sites and user-generated services intensified from 2003 onward (Boyd & Ellison 2008). The social media research has been approached from different perspectives, using various concepts including social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison 2008, Utz 2010), user-generated content (Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Shao, 2009), and social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Essentially, user-generated content are used to describe the phenomenon where consumers are creating, designing, consuming, or editing content created by others (Krishnamurthy & Dou 2008). Social media in turn are connected platforms for the public exchange of information between consumers (Boyd & Ellison 2008) in a democratic manner (Drury, 2008). Although there are implied differences between the many concepts of these media, the concepts social media and user-generated

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