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Chapter 4

Exploring the Relationship Between Social Media and Social Influence

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ABSTRACT

Online behavioral tailoring has become an integral part of online marketing strategies. Contemporary marketers increasingly seek to create an influential environment on social media to empower online users to participate in online brand communities. By interacting in this way, online communities hosted by brands marketers can enhance the nature of the complex interactions that occur amongst those that participate. Such online interactions lead to three different types of social influence compliance, internalization, and identity, which develop the consumers' purchase intentions. This chapter explains how the social influence support the change in beliefs, attitude, and intentions of the online consumers in the user-generated social media networking sites (SNSs). Furthermore, it discusses the functional impact of such online social influence that enables companies to understand the perceptions and needs of online users making sense of how multiple levels of social influence phenomenon on social media impact on consumers purchase intentions.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from traditional modes of marketing to a consumer-centric marketing approach in B2C environments has had an explicit impact on the psychological behaviours of consumers. Such developments have captured the attention of marketers and academic researchers (Michaelidou et al., 2011). The shift to an integrated marketing communication paradigm from traditional media to internet based multi-channel marketing has revolutionised the concept of integrated marketing communication (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Furthermore, the continuous development of online media from computer mediated

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marketing applications to more sophisticated Web 2.0-based social media has dramatically transformed the purchase behaviours of online users by enhancing the speed of communications between businesses and consumers and reducing the costs associated with doing so (Tsai & Men, 2013). The development of social media has become one of the prime tools of online marketing, and this has captured the attention of stakeholders due to its significant impact on promotional communications between businesses and consumers, as well as amongst consumers (Ansarin & Ozuem, 2014). However, the empirical efforts for online consumers behavioural modelling on social media could result in its greater acceptability, making it a real-time online marketing tool for transforming online users into potential customers through change of behaviour via valuable information exchange. The extent to which social media and the development of behavioural modelling based on networked online social interactions can determine changes to purchase intentions and decision making behaviour lacks empirical understanding (Zhu & Chen, 2015). The aim of this chapter is to explain recent changes in the beliefs, opinions, attitudes and intentions of individuals as a result of complex heterogenic online social interactions among online users. Such interactions take place to expedite exchange information. They are valued for facilitating collaborative learning and circulating vital information about products and services (Lim & Heide, 2015). Further, this chapter also reveals how group-based online social interactions develop multiple levels of social influence to create behavioural uniformity among members of online social groups based on social influence.

The development of appropriate marketing and communication strategy on the basis of impartial changes to integrated marketing communication helps businesses to establish a direct connection with end-consumers at relatively low cost, and in an efficient timely manner. Such exchanges can socially influence the purchase behaviour of online users (Bhatli & Mehri, 2015). Businesses can exert significant influence by taking advantage of interactions between online members who join communities to satisfy a need to belong. This is achieved when they associate themselves with certain brand communities to feel socially connected and recognised after interacting with similar, like-minded online users (Bamberg et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2015). Such an enhanced sense of belonging increases the desire of online users to become part of an online brand community. It also significantly increases the level of trust that exists between online users in financial services and enhances interactions and information sharing between group members who engage with financial services brands. Such online users feel more valued and recognised when associating with certain brands, and this is a direct result of engagement which significantly influences purchase intentions (Zhou, 2011).

Social media is facilitated by Web 2.0 technologies and is based on user-generated content. This is also known as user-generated media since it enables active participation amongst online users allowing them to communicate with, and respond to, promotional content that they interact with on social media (Nelson-Field et al. 2012). User-generated content has changed the layout of social media which helps in shaping the behaviour of customers by making social media a prevalent information source which, as a result, creates positive Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) (Ozuem et al. 2015). User-generated media has transformed communication tools and strategies in such a way as to control information and the speed of information that is exchanged. Such control rests with consumers rather than with marketing experts (Gallaughar & Ransbotham, 2010). This phenomenon not only supports two-way communication between consumers and businesses, but also transforms online users into active participants rather than passive recipients of promotional communications based on traditional models of media. For example, on a Social Networking Site (SNS) an online user can actively express his or her views at an individual level or in a group setting. They can circulate messages and evaluate information on the basis of informational exchanges and knowledge sharing. The use of social networking sites for business has greatly

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