

Product Category, Consumer Motivation, and the Use of Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the influence of product category and consumer, on the use of social media platforms. The online surveys were administered to Thai consumers with 365 respondents. Results suggested that consumers used Twitter and YouTube for search goods more than experience goods, but used Facebook for experience goods more than search goods. In terms of consumers' contribution to each social media platform, consumers contributed more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter for both search and experience goods. In addition, consumers having utilitarian motivation in social media significantly contributed more to Twitter, whereas consumers having hedonic motivation in social media contributed more to Facebook. In addition to addressing some of the gaps in knowledge that exist, this study contributes to the existing literature in the areas of motivation and online consumer behavior in the context of Thailand. Practical implications of the study are discussed. Limitations and directions for future research are also provided.

Keywords: Marketing Communication; Motivation; Online Behavior; Product Category; Social Media

Introduction

The advent of social media has changed the way that marketing communication is performed these days. Currently, a social media platform such as Facebook has more than 890 million active users whereas more than 284 million are active users of Twitter (Socialbaker, 2015). The significant popularity of social media platforms prompts businesses to invest their resources in promoting their products/services through this media. Evans (2011) reports that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are now considered cornerstones of most social-media strategies in companies. These social media platforms have become a vital channel of engaging consumers for various industries. For example, it was reported that one of three apparel brands considering having social media built into their marketing strategy (Affinitive, 2012). Similarly, more than eight out of ten restaurant operators stated their intention to use social media as a key tool in their marketing strategy and over half of them intended to do within two years (Brandwatch, 2012). The burgeoning growth of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) as a communication vehicle has inspired a number of researchers to measure its impact in various contexts such as tourism, entertainment, and fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Based on the fact that social media becomes a popular marketing tool, understanding motivations that drive consumers to use a particular social media platform and factors that influence the use of social media platform will benefit not only academic scholars but also practitioners. However, previous research into social media has focused on the impact of social media on consumers' attitude, sales or brand equity (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schafer, 2012), limited attempts have been made to examine the relationships between the use of social media platforms, consumer's motivations, and product categories. Thus, the current study aims at understanding how these factors influence on the use of social media platforms.

The purpose of this research is twofold: 1) to examine the relative efficacies of consumer motivations on the use of social media platforms namely Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, and 2) to examine the differences, if any, between the use of each social media platform for search and experience goods. The research findings will contribute to providing practical and

applicable directions for establishing social media strategies in order to effectively communicate with target markets. Thailand was selected as the desirable context for the study because it stands at one of the most top ten growing countries on social media – with 37 million Facebook users and 4.5 million Twitter users (Tech in Asia, 2015). However, given the ubiquitous consumption of online social venues, no-known studies have examined the use of social media platforms among Thai consumers. This study, thus, contributes to the limited body of scholarly research towards social media settings and provides marketing with insights into how an understanding of the use of social media platform can be integrated into online marketing communication programs.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Social media was defined as online applications, platforms and media which aim to simplify interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content (Kim & Ko, 2012). There is no systematic way in which different social media platforms can be categorized (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, to create a classification scheme, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify social media by relying on a set of theories in the field of media research such as presence theory (e.g., social presence, media richness) and social process (e.g., self-presentation, self-disclosure).

Presence theory and media richness

According to presence theory, media differs in the degree of social presence (e.g., the visual) they allow emerging between two communication partners. The higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behavior (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) examine that the concept of media richness closely relates to the idea of social presence. That is, media richness theory is based on the assumption that the goal of any communication is the resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty (Draft & Lengel, 1986). Furthermore, media differs in the degree of richness (e.g., the amount of information) they process, therefore some media are more effective than

others in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) apply these theories to the context of social media by suggesting a first classification of media based on the richness of the medium and the degree of social presence it allows.

Self-presentation and self-disclosure

According to the concept of self-presentation, in any type of social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them by creating their image and presenting themselves and generally such a presentation is done through self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). That is, the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information is consistent with the image one would like to present (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Accordingly, the second classification was proposed based on the degree of self-disclosure it requires and the type of self-presentation media allows (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

With respect to social presence and media richness, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) indicate that Twitter score lowest, as they are often text-based and thus only allow for a relatively simple exchange. On the next level, YouTube (visual-based communication, media sharing) and Facebook (text-based communication and some forms of media sharing) score higher compared to Twitter. That is, two characteristics shared by both Facebook and YouTube are the capability to provide social presence and media richness to consumers. Furthermore, consider self-presentation and self-disclosure, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that Twitter and Facebook allow for more self-disclosure than YouTube.

Botha and Mills (2012) describe further that among these three social media platforms, Twitter enables users to post and read very short message, restricted by the number of characters in the message and type of content that can be posted (known as “tweet”). That is, the text-based posts (tweets) of up to 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers (known as followers). By using Twitter, users can send and receive tweets via Twitter website and through text messaging on cell phones. YouTube, on the other hand, is a video sharing website which allows

users to watch, upload and share videos. Unlike other social media platforms that require registrations before using, unregistered users are permitted to watch videos already posted to the site, but only registered users are permitted to upload videos and comment on other users' videos. In contrast, Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to create their profile page as well as join fan-page of any brands by combining several other social media technologies into one platform (Botha & Mills, 2012). For instance, Facebook allows users to post status update (similar to Twitter), upload pictures and videos (similar to YouTube). By using Facebook, users are able to create additional links between users and content. As a result, Facebook was referred in previous studies as a popular social media platform with a generally social orientation (Botha & Mills, 2012).

Categorization of Goods and Information Search

In his seminal work on the economics of information and advertising, Nelson (1974) classified goods into search and experience goods. Unlike other goods classification schemes such as low-involvement/ high-involvement (Krungman, 1965), Nelson (1974) relies primarily on the fundamental attributes of the product itself, not the buyer's perceptions on it. According to Nelson (1974), goods can be classified successfully by whether the quality variation was ascertained predominantly by search or by experience, and the respective goods were called search goods and experience goods. Furthermore, Klein (1998) asserts that a good is defined as a search good when full information for dominant product attributes can be known prior to purchase. In contrast, any good is defined as an experience good when either condition holds full information on dominant attributes cannot be known without direct experience (Klein, 1998). Therefore, Nelson (1974) suggests that information search for experience goods will greatly rely on word-of-mouth and advertising. Based on these criteria, previous studies referred clothing, household furniture, footwear, and jewelry as a search good, whereas foods, wine, drugs, perfume, and motor vehicles are referred as an experiences good (Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Nelson, 1974). In addition, previous studies suggest that the way consumers appear to recognize and value the impact of information, etc.

delivered in media vary by product categories (Eighmey & McCord, 1998).

Based on the characteristics of social media platforms and the good classifications previously discussed, it was expected that the consumer use of social media platforms will be different by product categories. That is, Twitter, as the text-based communication, can provide consumers with enough useful information of search goods but may not be able to provide them with enough information of experience goods. Compared to Twitter, Facebook allows consumers to have more information through text, photo, and communication with brands or other consumers. Whereas, YouTube provides consumers with video clip helping them having a clear picture of products. Thus, by using Facebook and YouTube rather than using Twitter, ambiguity and uncertainty that consumers may have on experience goods may be resolved. Therefore, we posit:

H1a: Twitter will be used more in search goods than experience goods.

H1b: Facebook will be used more in experience goods than search goods.

H1c: YouTube will be used more in experience goods than search goods.

H2a: In search goods, consumers will contribute more to Twitter and Facebook than YouTube.

H2b: In experience goods, consumers will contribute more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter.

Consumer Motivations: Hedonic versus Utilitarian

Hedonic and utilitarian motivations have been widely stated its impact on consumption behavior (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Rintamaki, Kanto, Kuusela, & Spence, 2006). Rintamaki et al. (2006) stated that utilitarian motivations stem from monetary savings and convenience and relate to goal oriented and rational behavior. Whereas hedonic motivations stem from exploration and entertainment, as a result, consumers having hedonic motivations are concerned with aspects of fun, playfulness and enjoyment (Rintamaki et al., 2006). Hedonic and utilitarian motivations were also studied as dimensions of web consumption. According to Parasuraman and Zinkhan (2002), web consumption consists of multitude of possible behaviors (e.g., browsing, searching, entertaining) which are inherently

practical, objective and goal-directed or subjective and experiential (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Van der Heijden (2004) also explains that the website itself can be hedonic, utilitarian or their combination. The hedonic or utilitarian value of websites can be determined by a degree of the utility or enjoyment the website provides for web users (Van der Heijden, 2004).

When considering the nature of each social media platform based on utilitarian and hedonic value, YouTube is likely to have hedonic values (visual-based), Twitter contains utilitarian value (text-based), and Facebook has the combination of hedonic and utilitarian value. According to Van der Heijden (2004), the nature of websites and the hedonic and utilitarian benefits sought from the use of that website will determine what kind of usage behavior the user engages in. Thus, it was expected that consumers driven by utilitarian and hedonic motivation are likely to have different contribution to Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Therefore, the next hypotheses are:

H3a: Consumers having utilitarian motivation in social media will significantly contribute more to Twitter than Facebook and YouTube.

H3b: Consumers having hedonic motivation in social media will significantly contribute more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter

Methodology

Sample and procedures

With respect to Nelson's goods classification scheme (1974) and the popularity use of social media in apparel and restaurant industry, the current study selects clothing and restaurant to represent search goods and experience goods, respectively. The online surveys were administered to Thai consumers. A personalized email invitation with an embedded link was sent by the researcher to friends, asking them to forward the survey to others who were interested to participate in the study. For the purpose of the study, only responses from those who were current social media users and had used Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to search information of clothing and restaurant in the past three months were considered for analysis. Specifically, the two surveys will be randomly assigned to respondents. The first survey relates to search goods is represented by clothing, whereas the second survey relates to experience goods

is represented by restaurant. A total of 372 participants completed the survey; however, seven of those responses were incomplete. Thus, 365 usable responses were analyzed, which was comprised of 56.99% female and 43.01% male respondents. The large percentage of participants belonging to the age group of 18 to 25 (47.40%), followed by 26 to 30 (30.68%). The majority was single (85.75%) and approximately 65 percent of respondents reported an average monthly income less than 20,001 THB and had at least a 4-year undergraduate degree (65.21%) (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of respondents' demographics (n = 365)

Variables	N	Percent
Age		
18-25	173	47.40
26-30	112	30.68
31-35	30	8.22
36-40	40	10.96
41 or more	10	2.74
Gender		
Female	208	56.99
Male	157	43.01
Marital status		
Single/ never married	313	85.75
Married	47	12.88
Widowed	2	0.55
Divorced	3	0.82
Education		
High school	36	9.86
Associate degree	21	5.75
Undergraduate degree	238	65.21
Graduate degree	70	19.18
Monthly income (THB)		
Under 10,001	94	25.75
10,001 – 20,000	143	39.18
20,001 – 30,000	62	16.99
30,001 – 40, 000	30	8.22
40,001 or more	36	9.86

Measurement

The online questionnaire was first developed in English and translated into Thai by a bilingual professor. The Thai version of the survey was then back-translated by a bilingual copywriter to ensure translation equivalence (Douglas & Craig, 1983). To increase the content validity of the measurement, five Thai consumers who are a current user of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were asked to examine the questionnaire for meaningfulness, relevance, and clarity. The questionnaire was slightly modified based on their suggestions. The items used to operationalize the constructs came from previous published sources. That is, social media motivations were measured with six items (Malmivaara, 2011), and consumers' contribution was assessed with nine items (Malmivaara, 2011). These items were measured by a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In addition, the questionnaire includes general questions such as the frequency use of each social media platform and demographic information. Demographic information was obtained with categorical items.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

A total of eight items related to consumers' motivations were adapted from previous study (Malmivaara, 2011). A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted. Factors with eigenvalue greater than 1.0 and items with rotated factors loadings of .50 or greater were retained (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), as a result two factors emerged (Table 2). Consistently with previous studies, the first factor of consumers' motivations was labeled as "utilitarian" and the second was labeled as "hedonic". In addition, consider the Cronbach's alpha value greater than .60 as having acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2010), Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these two factors ranged from .76 to .81 indicating good reliability.

Table 2 Factors and reliability for social media motivations

Factor labels and statement	Factor loading	Eigenvalues	Percent of variance	Alpha coefficient
<i>Utilitarian</i>	.76	3.95	33.13	.76
I'm able to find relevant information without much effort by using social media				
I like social media for the useful information it provides	.85			
Social media is a convenient source of information	.84			
Social media helps me to plan my shopping in a more efficient way	.55			
<i>Hedonic</i>				
Social media offers a good way to pass time	.60	1.22	31.46	.81
The time spent in social media is truly enjoyable	.87			
Using social media is fun	.84			
Using social media is fun considering what else I could have been doing	.76			

Test of Hypotheses

The result from independent sample t tests indicates that Twitter is more frequently used by consumers for search goods (clothing) than experience goods (restaurant), $t(318) = .454, p = .32$ and Facebook is more frequently used for restaurant than clothing, $t(363) = -.93, p = .18$. However, these relationships are not significant. In contrast, the data indicates that YouTube is more significantly used for search goods (clothing) than experience goods (restaurant), $t(229) = 3.36, p < .001$, which is different from our H1c stating that YouTube will be used more in experience goods than search goods. Although the result are not significant, the data indicates that consumers used Twitter and YouTube for search goods (clothing) more than experience goods (restaurant), but used Facebook for experience goods more than search goods.

We may explain that Twitter, as the text-based communication, is likely to provide consumers with expected useful information for search goods (clothing), such as size, style, and price. Facebook, on the other hand, contains high degree of social presence, media richness with a generally social orientation (Botha & Mills, 2012), so it is likely to be an effective information source consumers used in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty that they have on restaurant (e.g., taste, services). Surprisingly, YouTube was found to be used more for search goods (clothing) than experience good (restaurant). In this case, we may explain that for clothing, consumers may need not only product information, but also need to see if the cloth fits on them or others. Thus, YouTube with its high degree of social presence and media richness can help consumers in ways that serve to resolve ambiguity and uncertainty via videos sharing (e.g., fashion show).

The result from independent sample t tests suggests that for clothing, consumers contributed more to Facebook, $t(363) = .77, p = .22$; YouTube, $t(363) = 1.76, p < .05$; and Twitter, $t(363) = 1.04, p = .15$ respectively. In the same way for restaurant, consumers contributed more to Facebook, $t(363) = .77, p = .22$; YouTube, $t(363) = 1.76, p < .05$; and Twitter, $t(363) = 1.04, p = .15$ respectively. However, these relationships are not significant. Although the results are not significant, the data indicates that in searching for both search goods (clothing) and experience goods (restaurant), consumers contributed more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter. It could be explained by the fact that compared to Facebook and YouTube, Twitter has allowed consumers to post and read very short message, and restricted by the number of characters in the message and type of content that can be tweet. In contrast, by using Facebook and YouTube, consumers can contribute more in terms of posting text, uploading pictures, and watching and sharing videos. As a result, this study found that consumers contributed more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter for both search goods (clothing) and experience goods (restaurant).

The result from regression analysis (Table 3) indicates that consumers having utilitarian motivation significantly positively contributed more to Twitter ($B = .31, \beta = .17, t = 2.71, p < .01$) than YouTube ($B = .29, \beta = .18, t$

= 3.00, $p < .01$) and Facebook ($B = .18, \beta = .18, t = 3.10, p < .01$). On the other hand, although there are not significant, the data shows that consumers having hedonic motivation in social media positively contributed to Facebook ($B = .19, \beta = .20, t = 3.44, p < .01$) and YouTube ($B = .12, \beta = .08, t = 1.27, p = .21$) but negatively contributed to Twitter ($B = -.20, \beta = -.11, t = -1.70, p = .09$). That is, consumers having hedonic motivation in social media were more likely to contribute to Facebook and YouTube but were less likely to contribute to Twitter. This could be explained by the fact that consumers having hedonic motivation prefer using social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube) that provide entertainment or enjoyment rather than using Twitter which relates to utilitarian. Based on the results, H3a is supported.

Table 3 The contribution to social media (utilitarian versus hedonic)

<div>Motivations</div> <div>Contributions</div>	Utilitarian				Hedonic				F	adj R ²	R ²
	B	β	SE	t	B	β	SE	t			
Twitter	.31	.17	.12	2.71**	-.20	-.11	.12	-1.70	3.71*	.01	.02
Facebook	.18	.18	.06	3.10**	.19	.20	.06	3.44**	23.62**	.11	.12
YouTube	.15	.18	.10	3.00**	.12	.08	.09	1.27	10.57**	.05	.06

Note: Independent variables: utilitarian and hedonic motivation.

Dependent variables: contributions to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, this study contributes to marketing literature by shedding light on the relationship between the use of social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), consumer’s motivations (utilitarian versus hedonic), and product categories (search goods versus experience goods). This study has found that consumers used Twitter and YouTube for search goods (clothing) more than experience goods (restaurant), but used Facebook for experience goods more than search goods. However, in terms of consumers’ contribution to each social media platform, consumers contributed more to Facebook and YouTube than Twitter for both search and experience goods. The overall finding provides support for the usefulness of these three social media platforms in ways that serve marketing communicators to reach their target

markets. In addition, the result suggests marketing communicators to put weight on using Twitter and YouTube in promoting search goods (e.g., clothing) and use Facebook to promote experience goods (e.g., restaurant). Furthermore, they may create word-of-mouth through the social media platforms by employing Facebook and YouTube as the main communication channel. Since it was found that consumers contributed more to these two social media platforms in both product categories, indicating that consumers are likely to take part in activities, conversation, and sharing information in Facebook and YouTube for both search and experience goods. Thus, encouraging consumers to involve in brand activity campaigns on Facebook and YouTube must be considered.

In addition, the study has found that consumers having utilitarian motivation in social media significantly contributed more to Twitter, whereas consumers having hedonic motivation in social media contributed more to Facebook. Therefore, companies need to maintain delivering utilitarian values (e.g., information and convenience) through Twitter, whereas delivering hedonic values (e.g., enjoyment, entertainment) through Facebook.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study provides a number of new insights, a few limitations should be acknowledged. The sampling size in this study (365 respondents) is considered good for statistics used to examine relationships (Harris, 1985; Green, 1991), however all respondents are Thai consumers. Given the fact that the popularity of each social media platform can be different in different countries, the result may not be applicable in other countries. Second, whereas search goods and experience goods consist of many products, the researcher studied only one product in each category. As a result, although the finding provided useful insights for promoting search and experience goods (clothing and restaurant), the generalizability of the findings is limited. Therefore, future research is needed that empirically tests the patterns that emerged in this analysis, as well as research that applies this analysis to the use of social media platforms within other countries.

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