Chapter 41

Exploring M-Commerce and Social Media:
A Comparative Analysis of Mobile Phones and Tablets

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of mobile phones and tablets shape a new arena for online commercial activity with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. In this omnipresent mobile environment, understanding consumer behavior constitutes a challenge for m-commerce vendors, as they seek to understand factors that affect it, positively and negatively, and to integrate social media in their mobile strategy and across mobile devices. This paper presents an exploratory qualitative research examining separately mobile phones and tablets and the use of social media, in the context of m-commerce. The results of our qualitative analysis show important factors for m-commerce and social media adoption and use, highlighting the similarities and differences between mobile phones and tablets. Our qualitative results also reveal factors having a negative effect to m-commerce, for both mobile devices. Business opportunities enabled by social media for m-commerce and how these can be leveraged in this promising multiple-device mobile context are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile commerce presents tremendous growth, following and even outpacing the hype of electronic commerce. As smartphones and tablets gain increasing adoption, mobile users can engage in commercial activities anytime, anywhere. According to recent studies, mobile devices, phones and tablets, rapidly gain e-commerce purchase share in 2016 at the expense of desktop computers (Custora Ecommerce Pulse, 2016). Mobile commerce revenue continuously increases year by year, reaching 150 billions of US dollars with purchases on mobile phones and tablets being predicted to double by 2018 (Norton, 2015).

Although m-commerce was initially based on smartphones, the more recent advent of tablets has extended the mobile market, adding a new dynamic channel for online transactions and purchases that contributes to the further development of m-commerce. The percentage of the e-commerce traffic originating from mobile devices, including both smartphones and tablets is 39% for the last quarter of 2015 (Monetate Ecommerce Quarterly, 2016). Orders from mobile channels account for 30% of all e-commerce orders, with 20% coming from smartphones and 10% from tablets (Custora Ecommerce Pulse, 2016). Mobile phones and tablets together constitute a very powerful tool for m-commerce and have become an integral part of the mobile environment.

Social media favour such progression in the way consumers behave with their smartphones and tablets. Social media offer new opportunities for marketing and sales to companies, especially since they can be used anytime, anywhere thanks to mobile devices. Facebook, Twitter as well as more recent social media which focus on images, video or sounds, i.e. rich media, such as Instagram, Pinterest or Snapchat, are widely used globally, with the latter gaining increasing adoption compared to the other two. Their simple interface that easily shows important and recent information with brief content comprising images, short text or videos makes them a powerful tool to enhance sales. Mobile devices and social media, as well as their combination, provide strong business opportunities for a vivid and effective communication with customers.

Consumer behaviour has fundamentally changed since the prevalence of smartphones and tablets in daily activities and habits. The advent and adoption of tablets has further reinforced the power of mobile consumers. With easy access to user reviews, expert opinions, price comparisons, and other emerging facilities, consumers are enabled to make thorough assessments of available products and services in an increasing number of categories. For marketers, this suggests a need for a totally new way of thinking about how to influence consumers. The challenge also holds for information systems developers, as m-commerce websites and social media have to be carefully implemented and used in order to become effective marketing tools. Therefore, these two groups of actors, marketers and information systems developers, have to work "hand in hand".

The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of m-commerce and social media on mobile phones and tablets and how m-commerce can benefit from social media and location-based applications in each of these devices. In this direction, we present an exploratory qualitative study on consumer perceptions and behaviour in using m-commerce, mobile social media and their combination, in both mobile phones and tablets. Based on the interviews conducted for the study, we seek to understand factors that affect m-commerce as well as the use of social media on mobile devices and for m-commerce, comparing mobile phones and tablets. A discussion of our findings concludes the paper.

SMARTPHONES VS TABLETS

The worldwide adoption of smartphones and tablets as well as their continuous use, independent of time and place constitute typical characteristics of contemporary life. Undoubtedly smartphones prevail in terms of ownership and usage on a global scale compared to tablets. According to recent studies, 78% of Internet users own a smartphone while tablet owners are 47%. Mobile phone adoption is widespread, especially in young population, with smartphones being preferred by mobile Internet users aged 16-24, while tablets are more popular in older and more mature populations (Mander, 2015).

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