Chapter 37
Consumer Socialization Process for the Highly Connected Customers:
The Use of Instagram to Gain Product Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, social media has developed exponentially and significantly changed the customers' shopping behavior. Social media apps enable customers to interact with retailers and other customers closely, and influences their purchase decision. Hence, it is small wonder that businesses are investing time and resources to promote their products and brand image on social media applications. Instagram is best known for its enriched visual features in both image and footage and suitable for developing strong brand engagement. It is a viable platform for businesses to promote their products to customers. This chapter proposes a framework of product learning process with the use of Instagram. It contributes in effective management of social media marketing and provides marketers with the guidelines in using Instagram creatively to roll out customer engagement strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the internet, particularly Web 2.0 has provided access to the views and opinions of a wide range of individuals opening up opportunities for new forms of communication and knowledge formation. Previous ways of navigating and filtering available information are likely to prove ineffec-

tive in today's context. Social media provides the connectivity needed for virtual environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It has become a significant part of daily personal communication. In 2015 90% of young adults in the age group 18-29 often use of social media (Perrin, 2015). Additionally, social media enables users to share their product experiences through consumer reviews (Y. Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011). Thus, it promotes communication among consumers (Abzari, Ghassemi, & Vosta, 2014). Social media referred as Social Networking Sites (SNS). Social networking sites is cyber-environment where individuals can create a personal profile, share photos, images and text with each other.

Arguably, Instagram may not be the most popular social media sites. However, known for its visual features in both image and footage with limited words. Does the lack of text by Instagram affect perceptions of popularity? This chapter explores the viability of Instagram in developing product attitude via consumer socialization process. Contents from Instagram are validated as antecedents in molding consumer socialization process. The two components of the consumer socialization process, namely peer communication and product involvement elucidates consumers learning about product knowledge.

Aims and Motivations

Social media generally refers to a collective of online communication channels built on community-based input, interaction, and collaboration. Typically, it is comprised of social networking sites, video sharing platforms, blogs and micro-blogging platforms, forums and messaging platforms. Social media channels are two-way communication platforms that enable people to respond and react to information. Primarily it is a medium for people to connect with each other; social media provides a unique opportunity for brands to leverage the power of peer-to-peer recommendation and word of mouth. The increasing marketing communication in the social media space has catapulted Instagram, translating into augmented popularity.

Instagram reaches the younger generation, and appeals to diverse societies more prevailingly than other social networking services (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013; Salomon, 2013). As the reach and impact of social channels has grown and advertising models become established across key platforms, social media has evolved from being fan and community building platforms into highly powerful paid media channels capable of driving real business results at every stage of the customer touchpoints. As a result, social interaction gained in social media can assist consumer in making purchase decision. To tap into these opportunities, it is important to understand customer's purchase intent and delineate the moments in people's lives where social can play a role. For example, hospitality/tourism segment used social media for pre-trip planning as well as post-trip to share experiences with family and friends.

Understanding this initial start-point enable brands to define clearly their business objectives and strategies. Instagram is delivering clear business value beyond traditional likes, shares and comments in the form of images and videos. As such, the sharing of images rather than words alone has made communication with friends and broader groups of users who share similar interests more ideal, convenient and fascinating via the trend of aesthetic content in image and footage where consumers comment, post, and share consumer experience (Virtanen, Björk, & Sjöström, 2017). This chapter aims to uncover the consumer socialization process in the use of Instagram content, and the understanding of the product knowledge by consumers in facilitating the purchase decision. The elements such as the label and designs, color can sway the perception of consumers into actual purchase. Indeed, the consumer socialization process within Instagram can go beyond social purpose.

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