

Chapter 17

Capturing Market Mavens among Advergamers: A Case of Mobile-Based Social Networking Site in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to identify a market maven segment among advergamers on a mobile-based social networking site (SNS). A real online campaign with a multiplayer game is designed for Procter & Gamble's Pringles, after which online surveys are conducted via mobile device. Finite mixture models are employed to identify clusters. The estimation results suggest four clusters. The majority group belongs to Clusters 1 (67%) and 2 (21%), while Clusters 3 (6.8%) and 4 (4.8%) exhibit the propensity of market mavens. Specifically, the members of Cluster 3 are likely to have been actively engaged in information search, purchased the sponsor brand, and disseminated their brand knowledge of the brand, mainly through personal conversation after the game play. By contrast, the members of Cluster 4 are unlikely to have sought information, nor to have purchased the brand after the game, but are very likely to have spread their brand knowledge through word-of-mouth. Furthermore, they did so via not only personal conversation but also SNS functions (i.e., messaging, blog, and discussion board). Given this, Clusters 3 and 4 could be labeled as traditional and innovative market mavens, respectively. Our findings suggest that online marketers should identify and incentivize market mavens by branded entertainment so that they can then disseminate information, encourage followers, and generate a viral chain of word-of-mouth.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research is to identify a market maven segment among advergammers on a mobile-based social networking site (SNS). Advergaming refers to “a form of branded entertainment that features advertising messages, logos, and trade characters in a game format” (Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007). It is a practical use of interactive gaming technology to deliver explicit or implicit advertising messages to the consumer (Winkler & Buckner 2006), in which brand-related images or themes are embedded within it. Technically, advergames can be offline or online, but the majority are presented to the general public via websites (Deal, 2005).

Our assumption is that there is a “market maven” segment: that is, a small group of people who are genuinely interested in helping others’ consumption needs. They are likely to play the advergame and to engage in some kind of brand-related activities. For example, after playing the game, market mavens may seek information about the sponsor brand, visit a shop to purchase it, and disseminate their brand knowledge through word-of-mouth (WOM). Prior research confirms these behavioral assumptions (Nelson 2004).

In this article, we describe a case study that uses a real promotional campaign of Procter & Gamble. More specifically, we use, as a stimulus, an advergame that was designed as an integrated part of a cross-media campaign for their potato chips brand, Pringles. In this campaign, the game is embedded on the largest mobile SNS, MobageTown in Japan, and the subsequent diffusion of the game within the network is observed. The focus of the study is mainly descriptive and exploratory, and we attempt to present a preliminary picture of advergammers’ demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral patterns.

Despite the inherent limitations of a case study with a single-product, single-game situation, this research sets out to make significant contributions to the literature, in three ways. First, advergammers

were quickly converted into one of the merging ‘jargons’ in online marketing, although empirical evidence is still scarce. Most published studies are experimental, and hardly provide a clear picture of how advergammers are used in an actual situation. In particular, advergame players’ profiles have rarely been considered. However, in developing effective business-to-consumer branded entertainment, how do online marketers or advertisers identify their target segment, without knowing their profiles? An effort to classify advergame players based on specific attributes may therefore help them to achieve this goal.

Second, advergammers are often embedded on SNS, because they generate a ‘stickiness’ factor that stimulates word-of-mouth (WOM). However, prior research does not report the magnitude of this effect. This study addresses a basic question: to what extent do people spread the word after playing the game? This includes not only personal conversation, but also a diverse range of SNS functions. For example, would SNS users use messaging, chat, or post comments on their experience in SNS after playing an advergame? Or, would they personally seek information about the sponsor brand in a shop? These questions are important, because the ultimate purpose of advergaming is to increase branding effectiveness and purchase intention.

Third, this study employs finite mixture models, one of the data mining techniques that have been used in clustering consumer segments. Data mining is a technique that describes the process of trawling through data in the hope of identifying statistical patterns (Hand, 1998). When applied to our dataset, finite mixture models can provide useful information for managers because they identify behavioral patterns that examine customer responsiveness in a probabilistic manner, thus avoiding the general arbitrariness of traditional cluster analysis.

In what follows, we first review the literature on advergammers as the background of the study. Then, we establish our theoretical framework and

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