

Chapter 35

Mobile Phone Purchasing and Brand Presence on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the mobile phones sector, this study explores how the social networking site 'Facebook' is used by consumers in their purchasing. Although there is extensive work on the influences on the buying decision process relevant to mobile phone purchasing, it is mainly set outside of a social media context. This paper assists in filling a gap in contemporary research, revealing the presence of different behavioural segments on Facebook. The authors analyse the consumer decision sequence in response to the notion of 'brand presence', manifested through online advertising, fan and group pages. The approach is interpretative. The study is based on young professional user's experiences, collected through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. The findings show that Facebook fan pages are shown to have a degree of influence, particularly in the early stages of buying behaviour. In this context, five novel behavioural segments of consumer interactions with Smartphone brands on Facebook have been identified by the research. These are the Avoider, the Suspicious, the Passive, the Receptive, and the Active. Future research of cross comparative studies could be taken on the issues the authors examine and consider them in relation to not only Facebook, but additionally, to other social network sites. Companies could utilise the findings in the future development of social media strategy. The research highlights the socially networked and collective nature of much activity on Facebook, which impacts on the consumer decision-making process for mobile phones.

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INTRODUCTION

Social network sites (SNS) represent an important and relatively new category of influence for firms (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; McLaughlin and Lee, 2011; Narayanan and Shmatikov, 2009). Social network sites allow customers to create profiles, connect with people and to share interests, opinions and other content (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Trusov et al., 2009). From this, two important marketing factors emerge. Firstly, as Narayanan and Shmatikov (2009) point out, a key reason why social networking platforms have attracted businesses is that they can provide personalised and targeted advertising platforms. Additionally, electronic word of mouth (ewom) marketing represents an effective promotional technique, capable of influencing purchasing (Trusov et al., 2009). Concurrently, a new prolific stream of studies has developed, focussing on the effects of online advertising on the consumer buying decision (Al-Alak and Alnawas, 2010; Sathish, 2011; Li and Leckenby, 2004; Poyry et al., 2013; Yousif, 2012). In terms of ewom, a social network site like Facebook - the most popular SNS site in the world (TNW, 2013) - has the ability to generate considerable impact when products are reviewed and 'liked' by consumers. Other consumers see this, alongside any sponsored advertising the company may undertake on the same site. (Tsimonis and Dimitriadi, 2014). To date, whilst it is clear that mobile phone companies have a presence on Facebook, there has been very little empirical work carried out on the impact of this medium on purchasing, particularly in relation to young professionals. In addition, significantly, a review of the literature shows that although there is extensive work on influences on the buying decision process relevant to mobile phone purchasing, it is often set outside of the SNS context.

Any existing studies on the mobile phone market are mainly from traditional company driven advertising and branding perspectives, some examples being Hoy and Milne (2010); Logan (2013); McLaughlin and Lee (2011); Parsons (2013); Villiard and Moreno (2011); Wen-Kuei and Meng-Sheng, (2013). Little research therefore, has investigated and analysed consumer behaviour in terms of the use of SNS in the buying decision process for mobile phones, or more particularly, offer up interpretative based explanations of this phenomenon. The objective of this paper is to address these issues. Here, there are two key factors to consider, both being concerned with the notion termed 'brand presence'. In this respect, we follow the work of McCathy et al (2014) who, when using this term in a virtual context, take it to mean customers social media engagement with the brand. For our study, brand presence implies any internet based interactions among and between consumers and brands and the subsequent impact on the purchasing of mobile phones. Secondly, brand presence also includes the role of online advertising on SNS sites. The purpose of this study is to attempt to explore qualitatively these two areas of brand presence and to offer an analysis of the subsequent findings. Explicitly, the paper seeks to answer the following question. In terms of Facebook, how significant an impact on the consumer purchasing process does the presence of mobile phone brands have? Here we examine Facebook using the traditional buying decision sequence, in the context of the brand presence phenomenon. Whilst some scepticism has been raised as to the efficacy of the traditional buying sequence in the light of web 2.0 developments and the notion of alternative customer journeys, (Wolny 2014; Berthon et al 2012), we argue that it still represents a powerful tool for analysing the buying process. The papers structure is as follows. The next two sections examine background literature and issues related to on line advertising, fan and group behaviour on Facebook. The paper then addresses the consumer decision sequence, in the context of mobile phones. From there, the study's methodology is considered and findings analysed. Finally, there is a discussion of implications and a conclusion is then drawn.

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