Chapter 68

This Thing of Social Media!
Is Purchasing Through Its Clout Habit or Sheer Influence?

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ABSTRACT

Studies on online purchases abound, but are rarely on social media or social networking service (SNS) to highlight its influence on participants with regards to online purchases. This paper dares to do this. The SNS, although it was envisaged to be a platform for socialisation, has transmuted into a business model that is actually impacting on sales volume of organisations. Predictably, it could be said that the sustainability of this new business phenomenon depends on the continuance patronage of the SNS participants. This study investigated the dynamics impacting on SNS participant to find out whether what makes them purchase through it depends on habit or sheer influence. The study embarked on an online data collection process and performed a structural equation modelling (SEM) with the aid of a partial least square (PLS) program known as PLS-SEM.

1. INTRODUCTION

The third (3) paragraph of the online Oxford English Dictionary (OED) describes a "thing" as a matter with which one is concerned in action, speech, or thought: an affair, a business, a concern, a subject, and these days, in *plural as* affairs, matters, or circumstances (www.oed.com). It cited an example as public thing or thing public. True to the above definition, social media could therefore, be said to have become a "Thing" for business these days, deriving support from the LoyaltyOne study that, positive social media interaction can, and does lead to a significant and sustained increase in transaction volume from participating customers (Everett & Sullivan 2012).

Many other studies have also depicted prominence impacts of social media on consumer purchasing behaviour (Goh et al., 2013; Rapp et al., 2013), giving the impression that this thing of social media is a "silver bullet" that automatically leads to business when used for that intention. Nevertheless, after some period of its existence (of which it has now transmogrified to include social networking services (SNSs), researchers still battle to establish how doing business on this platform differ from traditional website, popularly known as ecommerce. Studies are yet to establish the difference between the socio-psychological dynamics that underpin the modalities of social media and that of the traditional website. Researchers are still wondering whether social media and their networks are able to influence business (Everett & Sullivan, 2012), and if so, are these dynamics different from what pertains in the traditional ecommerce platforms?

The objectives of this study is therefore meant to show that (1) social media is really able to lead to actual business, and that (2) purchasing through the clout of social media is mainly due to influence on the platform than being habitual. These are intended to help SNSs and their vendors take full advantage of the platform in these times of global pandemic, dubbed COVID-19 and beyond..

Business models of SNS which are integral parts of social media abounds with majority of them primarily focusing on the general issues surrounding online trading, the architecture of business, trends of SNS and identification of key users of SNS (Trainor et al., 2014; Shiau & Luo, 2013). This notwithstanding, to the best of this study's knowledge, no study has proven that SNS really translates into business and that purchasing through "this thing of social media" is due to sheer influence more than habit. From the extensive review of literature, no study has done this through the arms of social norm, satisfaction, trust and habit to demonstrate their influence on the phenomenon under consideration. These constructs are popular sociopsychological concepts, commonly used to investigate online purchasing behaviour. Nevertheless, social media and for that matter SNS is a novel business model, whereby, if care is not taken, could be treated as "just another online platform". This study argues to differ by showing that SNS is fundamentally different from the traditional website (Maamar et al., 2011; Assensoh-Kodua, 2015).

Sections 2 presents background information about SNSs followed by extension of theories to the SNS environment in 3 and discussion of methods used in 4. Section 5 is data analysis and results, and 5.4 is testing the role of habit where this study really kicks in to prove that habit plays no role of online purchasing through SNS, but instead, influence is the main reasons why participants buy through their SNS. The paper ends with a discussion of the two scenarios, limitations and then conclusion after making some recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Social media is a virtual community where users create public profiles, build social collaborations, interact with friends and meet people based on shared interests (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Clark, Algoe, & Green, 2018) either in the user's blogs or communities of networks. Thus, social networks are websites that link millions of users all over the world with same interests, ideas, beliefs and hobbies within the social media, making the two terms to be used interchangeably. The Blogs, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are examples of SNSs that are popular amongst all levels of consumers of social media (Sin et al., 2012). The level of patronage of social networks compared to traditional websites made industry leaders to argue in favour of SNS usage (Trainor et al., 2014; White et al., 2016).

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