Chapter 31
Social Media Usage in Online Consumer Decision Process and Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the usage of social media in predicting consumer buying process. A mixed method approach has been applied, a cross sectional survey and in-depth interviews were conducted in three universities in Ghana. The responses were collected from individuals in the age group of 18 -30. Data was analysed using Logistics Regression and Thematic analyses. The findings revealed that the social media behaviour of young consumers could significantly influence their behaviour at the pre-purchase information search and evaluation levels. The findings suggest young consumers are more likely to use social media for marketing activities such as purchasing, hence industries should redirect more activities towards this digital channel. This implies that social media is driving young consumers into e-commerce and that presents a huge opportunity for business and marketers.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as technology beyond cell phone and one of the most dynamic, interdisciplinary socially facilitated media of contemporary society (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Hjorth & Hendry, 2015). Social media combines wed 2.0 and social networking technological applications to connect users to a wide range of sites such Facebook, Wechat, Instagram etc. (Wei, Huang & Zheng, 2018). Social media comprises of different digital network platforms including Social Networking Sites (SNS). SNS's are platforms where individuals are able to connect with others on sites such as Facebook, Myspace, Whatapp, Instagram, Twitter, Wechat, Snapchat, etc to share information, personal images, blogs and others (Khan, 2017; Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Social networking sites have become the most popular aspect of social media and it is used for social connection, for sharing of media content, for academic work and

searching for and buying of goods and services generated by these contents (Watulak & Whitefield, 2016). This is followed by social news sites, internet sites that feature users-posted stories. Such stories are graded based on popularity, as voted on by other users of the site or by site administrators. It's also known as Social Bookmarking sites and they include Digg, Reddit, and Scoop. Another aspect of social media is the media sharing sites which permits users to upload your photos, videos and audio to or from other sites anywhere in the world. One predominant example of social media sharing site is YouTube. com where most people share videos with others and tag them. There is also yet another form of social media referred to as blogging which is publication on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, diary-style entries referred to as post.

Emergent usage behaviour on social media and social networking sites is growing higher among young consumers especially college students. Carter & Yeo (2016) reported that young university students both undergraduates and postgraduates on daily basis averagely use chat about 20 times especially familiar social networking sites such as Wechat, Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram (Khan, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Due to the prolific usage of social media, its usage in businesses is becoming growing significantly (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014). Although, Social media presents a digital media challenge to businesses and marketers in view of the fact that it is totally different from traditional media and other digital media. It portrays a dual communication channel which demonstrate superior business interaction and effective tool which offers more power to customers (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Yet there is an increasing usage for this digital media at different levels of business processes

The important role of social media in emergent business and marketing practices cannot be over emphasized as it serves different functions in e-commerce processes including communication, brand building, market space, customer engagements, customer relationship management and market research and intelligence (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014; Song & Yoo, 2016; Zhang, 2017). Social media in recent times has taken dominance in communicating the value of products and services and creating a superior customer experiences in digital marketplace. Businesses and marketers are engaging in social media strategies to reach and engage customers in various ways such as advertising, promotion, branding, data and viral marketing, other commercial activities on social media. Social networks have become a platform for enhancing the overall marketing strategy Social Media content are used to access and generate product and services and build product referrals and responses (Dolan et al., 2015).

Customers are be able to monitor their favorite brands, post questions and make comments related to services or products on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. Businesses on the other hand have developed digital competences to connect directly with consumers, engage in business interactions and ascertain discussions about their brands through these social media platforms. Due to the usage of social media in the shopping experiences of consumers there is growing interest in social media consumer decision and buying behaviour (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014; Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011; Zhang et al., 2017)

However, there has been limited research focus on online social media and consumer decision making. Few studies have been directed at the social media decision making at managerial level. For instance, Keegan and Rowley (2017) posit that social media should be planned, implemented and evaluated at the managerial levels to ascertain the achievement of marketing objectives based on key performance indicators. Some have researches have also focused on smart phone usage online purchasing behaviour (Arif, Aslam & Ali, 2016; Byrne & Rowley, 2013). While a few have concentrated on the use of social media in the various stages of the consumer decision process (Song & Yoo, 2016). However the extent to

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