

Chapter 90

Social Media and E-Commerce: A Study on Motivations for Sharing Content From E-Commerce Websites

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ABSTRACT

Several studies have approached the link between social media and e-commerce with different lenses, however, the study of motivations for sharing content specifically from e-commerce websites into social media has not been thoroughly approached and provides fertile ground for further exploration. This chapter uncovers which motivations serve as a background for individuals sharing intentions of e-commerce content. After a focus group with 7 individuals, results indicate participants focus more on intrinsic rewards than extrinsic ones when sharing, that self-interest is more predominant than reciprocity as a motivator for sharing, one-to-one exchanges are the preferential direction of exchange. Also, websites with cleaner designs and higher usability positively impact sharing intentions, experiences tend to be more likely shared than physical products, and participants are purposeful in their selection of sharing channels.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the motivations for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media networks is a field of knowledge that can be expanded and there are no studies about the motivations of users in a specific e-commerce context to share product and other information on social media channels. Therefore, we believe that going deeper and analyzing motivations in this very specific context should provide a new contribution to this field of study. On a more practical side, we believe that it is also in the best interest of companies operating e-commerce websites, to understand what consumers think and

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what drives them to share content in order to adapt their websites' content strategically, significantly improving the *shareability* of the content and efficiently using the users of social networks to spread the word about products or services promoted by the company.

BACKGROUND

E-Commerce and Social Media Sharing

Social media brings big challenges to companies as consumers have evolved from being passive recipients in business transactions (Zhao et al., 2013). With the empowerment given to consumers by social media these have been taking an increasingly active role in co-creating everything from product design to promotional messages. Customers want companies to listen, engage, and respond. However, when companies change their mentality from business-centered to consumer-centered thinking, they can see that social media bring them great opportunities for engaging consumers and listening to them for what they would like and need. As consumers spend more of their time on social media, purchase decisions have become highly influenced by interactions through these networks, a fact which has lead businesses to place more emphasis on marketing strategies which focus on two-way communication platforms to reach online consumers and take advantage of word-of-mouth (Song & Yoo, 2016). Internet-based social media are quickly merging into the domain of e-commerce as a wide range of applications has been adopted on e-commerce platforms because internet-based social media provide online retailers with great opportunities to build their brand, and to promote and sell their products (Qu, Wang, Wang, & Zhang, 2013). As a reflection of the growth of social media, commercial websites have shifted from a unidirectional information provider format, called web 1.0 to multidirectional collaborative web technologies, denominated web 2.0 (Aluri, Slevitch, & Larzelere, 2015).

Social media and the web 2.0 have provided a huge potential to transform e-commerce into a more organized environment. The impacts of web 2.0 on e-commerce encompass both business outcomes and social interaction between customers in the sense that, besides directly influencing business transactions, it can also provide opportunities to strengthen relationships with customers, increase traffic into company websites and also support product and brand development (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Within such an environment, customers have access to social knowledge and experiences which allow them to assess their online purchase purposes and help them in making more informed purchase decisions while, at the same time, businesses are given information on the customers' behaviors and shopping experiences, which can be used to enhance their business strategies. This practice can be considered as part the construct of *social embeddedness* which, as described by Hess, Lang and Xu (2011) refers to the extent to which organizations can be “*connected to other actors other actors via linkages of a social network or the extent to which human action of consumers (including their economic behavior) takes place within a web of social attachments such as friendship and kinship.*” (p. 157).

Today it is fairly simple for website administrators to add several social sharing buttons on their web pages such as Facebook “Share” or Twitter “Tweet this”. With hundreds of social networking sites all over the world currently and in order to facilitate the sharing of videos, news, information or online products with their friends via their preferred channels, several companies aggregate social sharing buttons and provide a simple widget for websites. These social sharing widgets always contain most popular social networking sites and traditional sharing media such as email for instance.

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