Purchase Motivation and Deterrents During the Social Media Experience

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Marketing, advertising, and public relations professionals (referred to simply as professionals throughout this literature review) utilize social media networks as a platform for advertising and ecommerce because it is affordable, measurable, and cost effective. Internet advertising, especially on social media networks, also allows these professionals to more easily target advertising directly towards specific consumers (Rodgers, Thorson & Jin, 2008). Elements within social media networks shape consumers' motivation towards adopting ideas or making purchases. Even though some people within a person's social media networks are not "neighbors" in regards to location, the Internet (especially social media) connects people of all distances, making them "neighbors" online. Using the diffusion theory of innovation, the following research will explore the importance of certain "neighbor" elements that affect adoption through social media experiences.

First, this literature review will explore the growth of the Internet as a vehicle for commerce, along with the connection and expansion of social media networks. The following research will examine the influence social media networks have had on consumers' everyday lives in addition to the impact it has had on the marketing and advertising professions.

Next, this review will investigate the specific elements that motivate people within social media networks to become adopters of ideas or purchase new products. Specifically looking to answer if it is native posts about a product or idea from other "neighbors" within or outside of one's network, paid advertising messages from professionals, or "endorsed" messages which combine one's network with paid advertising messages. As the plethora of social media networks grow, so do the unique strategies and platforms that professionals can use to target their online

audiences and disseminate their messages. The following research will define these strategies and platforms, and other elements as this literature review looks to answer the question of which strategy or platform is most productive and successful in accomplishing these tasks. In doing so, I will consider the importance that consumers place on their network of "neighbors" when adopting or purchasing through social media networks.

Then, the following research will look at the elements that deter consumers from adopting ideas or shopping through social media networks, and on the Internet in general. This review will examine whether or not professionals can overcome these deterrents to accomplish their goals of persuading consumers to purchase or adopt an idea.

Finally, this review will integrate the basic principles of the diffusion of innovations theory. Many scholars have applied this theory to their research on the Internet, ecommerce, and social media networks. It will explore this application and whether or not the diffusion of innovations theory is the best theory to use in this type of research.

Understanding the aspects within consumers' social media networks that make a greater impact regarding their purchasing decisions can directly affect the strategy that professionals use to successfully market and advertise to these consumers. This research is important because it helps professionals utilize social media advertising opportunities in more effective ways, which can save a company money. It can directly affect sales, while also allowing customers to connect with companies on a deeper level.

Rapid Growth & Change

Due to its wide adoption, the Internet is now recognized alongside print, television, and radio as the fourth mass medium (Messner & Garrison, 2008). Social media's rapid growth has

distinguished the Internet as a unique vehicle for connecting with audiences in more targeted and

deeper ways than the other mass mediums. Along with social media usage, Americans use the

Internet in a variety of ways that have become a habitual part of everyday life (Messner &

Garrison, 2008). Online activities are also differentiated from other mass mediums in terms of

the engagement factor that has been described as "leaning forward" towards a computer screen

or mobile device as opposed to consumers "leaning backward" as they do when they consume

the other forms of media (Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009). This "leaning forward"

experience also effects advertising reactions differently from more traditional forms of media

consumption (Calder et al., 2009).

A recent Pew Research Center study discovered that 65% of American adults now utilize

social media networks, which is an upward jump of 7% in the last decade (Perrin, 2015). This

report noted that this usage is consistent across racial and ethnic groups and includes all ages,

from young adults to older adults, 65 and over. Although Facebook continues to rank as the most

prominent social media network, a separate Pew study reported that Pinterest and Instagram

users have doubled in the last three years, when network adoption rate metrics were first tracked

(Duggan, 2015). This growth is unprecedented and continues to change how consumers

communicate with each other and companies.

The Internet, especially social media networks, have changed the way media outlets and

brands communicate with their audiences. The traditional notion of media gatekeeping has been

challenged (Messner & Garrison, 2008). Professionals can use this control shift to their

advantage as they manage their own brands' social media channels and the messages coming

from them, instead of pitching their stories to journalists or buying media.

At the same time, these professionals lose some control to consumers. Social media allows consumers to communicate with thousands of others in a variety of locations through a company's social media profile (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012).These consumers can connect with others who they would never have had the opportunity to communicate with prior to joining a common brand community that allows for this exchange.

Professionals have also seen a shift in the power of agenda setting (Messner & Garrison, 2008). Often, consumers are the ones now tasked with setting the topics and tones of conversations, instead of the media. Professionals can view this shift as a negative loss of control, or they can also work this transition to their advantage. These professionals can latch onto the topics that consumers are already talking about and guide those conversations in favor of their companies. They can also learn from these conversations that consumers are already having to improve their products or services.

Through an in-depth qualitative study of the Apple Newton brand community, Muñiz and Schau (2007) shared an important example of how Internet technology has forever changed the landscape of traditional advertising. Their research shows that a brand community of consumers online not only understand the basics of advertising creation, but are more than willing to create their own, especially in the absence of leadership from the brand – in this case, Apple had abandoned the Newton invention and the consumers who used it (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). Consumers in the Apple Newton brand community were tagged as practicing "vigilante marketing" when they took control of the brand from the company's marketers and created their own product meanings to fit the community they had built on their own (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). This example shows a missed opportunity for the Apple brand to connect with these consumers. It also guides brands today to not only listen to their consumers through social media networks,

but to also help guide their conversations. If the brand is absent from these conversations, the consumers are more than willing to take over.

Rodgers et al. (2008) underscore the consumer control notion discussed above, labeling it as a "pull" model since consumers start initial contact with advertisers on social media networks by "liking" their brand profiles and "following" them on certain platforms like Facebook and Twitter; or as in the Apple Newton example, joining a brand community. Beyond this model, these authors identify six characteristics that set Internet advertising apart from other mediums. These include: interactivity, multimedia, rich content, direct marketing capabilities, targeting and ease of data collection (Rodgers et al., 2008).

Social media networks and advertising are not the only online activities that are growing quickly. Online shopping is becoming more popular (Wu & Ke, 2015). Later, this review will evaluate the reasons for this growth.

Motivators of Adoption & Purchase

Online communities make it easier for consumers to learn about products, evaluate, and share opinions about products or brands, and influence others' purchase decisions, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Miller, Fabian, & Lin, 2009). Consumers also trust opinions and online reviews from other consumers (some they do not even know) on social media networks much more than from the company itself because it appears more authentic and relatable (Segran, 2015).

Consumers are greatly willing and able to share their opinions with others whom they may or may not know on social media, which is a unique feature that sets it apart from other

forms of communication (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Trust, relatability and authenticity are driving motivators that influence adoption or purchase on a consumer-to-consumer level.

As mentioned above, consumers are willing to trust other consumers' opinions even if the consumers are not personally connected on a social network. Studies, however, also have proven that consumers' social connections serve as influence on adoption or purchase actions (Katona, Zubcsek & Sarvary, 2011). Do these personal connections on social media have a greater influence on consumers' behaviors compared to random opinions of other consumers one may not know? The short answer is, "It depends."

Naylor, Lamberton, & West (2012) studied the impact of "mere virtual presence" (MVP) on consumers opinions of brand communities. MVP represents the demographic information of people who are connected to a brand's online profiles, as displayed through the individuals' profile pictures. This photo information is publicly viewable to others. Naylor et al. (2012) define MVP as, a "passive exposure" of the brand's social media community. Through three experiments, these authors discovered that transparency is still important when developing a solid brand presence on social media networks; however, in some cases in which a brand's current MVP does not match the audience the brand is trying to target, it is better to adjust settings (if possible) so that MVP is ambiguous or not revealed. In other words, it is safest only to reveal your brand's MVP when the people's images are similar to the target audience or when your audience is viewing and comparing multiple brands' profiles at a time. The key takeaway is that transparency is key, but target audiences also want to feel a demographic connection among a brand's community where they will invest their time.

Demographics not only influence consumers' perception of a brand and its community, but can also help a brand identify potential consumer influencers and adopters (Katona et al.,

2011). One particular outcome of this study contradicts a traditional sociological finding that men have always had a higher social influence. Interestingly, these authors found that when looking at demographics of adoption influencers on social media networks, young female members possessed a greater power (Katona et al., 2011, p. 434). Although these results test conventional thinking, each social network will have a different audience, which may have their own hierarchical ranking of members within the community. What is more substantial in these results are the findings regarding network data at an individual level, since these serve as a guide for future marketing tactics.

> Network data enable us to discover how each individual's social connections influence his or her adoption decisions. Furthermore, it enables the measurement of each person's influence on others. The insights gained from such analyses are invaluable for marketers who search for new viral marketing tactics to foster new-product diffusion. (Katona et al., 2011, p. 441)

This finding is proof that professionals can learn tactics to influence the adoption of ideas or purchase decisions. When a consumer's social network consists of friends who have already adopted an idea or made a purchase it results positively on that person's probability of also adopting or purchasing. Professionals can use this knowledge along with the person's connectivity level among friends (which also has a positive effect) to target marketing tactics and possibly predict adoption or purchase rates. These results show that connectivity within a social network is as important as size of a person's social network, which also can be used to predict the effectiveness of a marketing campaign hosted on social media networks (Katona et al., 2011, p. 442). Clearly, professionals want to target consumers that are highly connected.

To accentuate these findings, Alkemade & Castaldi (2005) discovered that professionals can learn strategies to discover the connectedness of their consumer base even if they have little information regarding consumer characteristics. These authors note the high expense that accompanies consumer marketing research, which can make it difficult for many professionals to perform or purchase (Alkemade & Castaldi, 2005). However, they proved by utilizing existing models, professionals cannot only gather enough consumer information to develop directed advertising strategies, but that these strategies perform more successfully than random advertising (Alkemad & Castaldi 2005).

Through researching motivators of adoption, the discovery was made that although neighbors and endorsements from neighbors inside and outside of one's social network are important, just as relevant are the "customer experiences" and psychological connections that come from a marketing tactic to consumers (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009. Huang, Zhang, Jin, & Wang, 2014). Palmer & Koenig-Lewis (2009) emphasize the importance of "nurturing" a community through transparency without pushing an agenda on the users.

> If online brand communities are perceived by users as not being trust-worthy, open interesting, relevant and engaging with the target audience, they can rapidly harm a company's reputation. (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009, p.167).

The responsibility of the customer experience falls on the brand to create this nurturing environment, while making consumers feel like they still have control and the ability to share their authentic opinions.

Huang et al. (2014) stress the importance of perception through their studying of online shopping, specifically to impulse buying which the authors disclose is higher among online shoppers than those consumers at a brick and mortar store. Perception can be bolstered by two

factors: social presence and psychological distance. Social presence can be formed through social media networks or through other aspects of the customer experience. However, in any case social presence coupled with psychological distance boosts the "togetherness" perception that positively affects impulse buying online (Huang et al., 2014).

Personality traits and attitudes are also cited as motivators for online shopping. Wu & Ke (2015) identify the personality traits of "individual playfulness" and "personal innovativeness" as positive factors that can indirectly influence consumers' willingness to shop online. These authors studied the correlation of these personality traits in conjunction with attitudes towards shopping online through the technology acceptance model. They concluded that "perceived ease of use" (of technology or online shopping platform) along with "perceived usefulness" are attitudes that can influence whether or not consumers decided to adopt or purchase (Wu & Ke, 2015).

Paid advertising, such as celebrity endorsements, do not seem to resonate as well with today's Internet audience as these traditional tactics have in the past. A recent study by SheKnows Media researched female consumers' shopping habits and noted that since these consumers can find reliable online reviews and opinions on social media, they are less trusting of companies' traditional advertising (Segran 2015).

Now that companies know their traditional efforts are less trustworthy coupled with the growing number of emerging, online advertising platforms and trends, companies are experimenting with "endorsed" messages that combine their traditional paid message with the appearance of people in a consumers' social network that support that brand, with or without those supporters' knowledge of how often their profile photos are used. This idea of "endorsed" messages uses the MVP element previously mentioned. Other forms of emerging advertising

include native advertising, where companies write and produce paid content that matches the platform where it appears; and content marketing, which encompasses a wide range of tactics that have often been hard for companies to define. It can sometimes come in the form of native advertising, but can also include product placements, branded entertainment, and social media posts, among other tactics (Neff, 2015). Content marketing can fall in the public relations, marketing, advertising, or communications departments, but it comes down to simply creating and publishing content in the interest of a brand and its consumers. The content marketing strategy is not new, per se, but as the previously mentioned departments blur with digital media, content marketing is definitely growing. Ad Age reported that according to research by PQ Media, more than $67 billion were spent on content marketing, which is just $3 billion shy of the U.S. television advertising spending the same year (Neff, 2015). Clearly, the budget difference between these two strategies is closing.

Deterring Elements

Now that we know the factors that motivate consumers to adopt an idea or make a purchase, we must discover what elements deter a consumer from taking action and evaluate whether or not professionals can learn strategies and tactics that can overcome these deterrents.

Deroïan (2002) took a different approach to studying the diffusion of innovations theory. Instead of looking at how quickly an idea spread throughout a social system, he looked at what caused slow diffusion. This viewpoint can point us in the direction of some deterring elements. For example, a lack of opinion leaders in a social network can lead to slow diffusion. Opinions leaders spark adoption among others. Deroïan (2002) also notes that slow diffusion can be good

in some cases compared to an idea that is adopted too quickly. Slow and steady diffusion can lead to a better overall outcome in the long run.

Noise or variability is another factor that determines consumers' rate of adoption. Surprisingly, greater noise can speed up the spread of adoption, because it can bring about more excitement surrounding the innovation in the form of experimentation rather than distracting consumers (Kreindler & Young, 2014). These authors also mention the important dynamic of payoff gains in conjunction with noise. If the innovation does not have large payoff gains (or return on investment), then adoption rates tend to be lower compared to higher payoff gains. The most unique aspect of Kreindler & Young's (2014) research is that it is topology-free, unlike more traditional diffusion experiments. The reasoning behind this is the fact that social network size can constantly change.

Perceived risk is a large component affecting the speed of adoption or purchase. Multiple studies analyze why and how consumers perceive risk differently. Wu & Ke (2015) mention that perceived risk affects consumers' attitudes and shopping intention, both vital in the adoption process. Trust serves as an important strategy for professionals to use, since gaining a consumer's trust can have a direct effect on minimizing the perceived risk of adopting an idea or making a purchase (Wu & Ke 2015).

Purchasing products online has been flagged as a higher-risk activity on the Internet, due to security concerns involving stolen identities and bank information, along with virus or malware issues (Yoon, 2010). Online shopping is put in the same high-risk category as sharing and downloading files online because users who are engaging in these activities have to share their personal information with known or unknown sources (Yoon, 2010).

By studying demographic identifiers, Yoon (2010) determined several strategies that professionals can use to overcome the deterrent of risk. Racial and ethnic backgrounds were not as big of a direct determinant of these high-risk activities as were education and socio-economic levels. Specifically, higher education level typically equaled more experience and knowledge with computers. This is the same for socio-economic level. Perceived risk decreases when consumers have more experience using a computer and Internet platforms, and therefore are already aware of the protocols when engaging in a high-risk activity on the Internet, such as making a purchase with personal banking information (Yoon, 2010).

Yoon (2010) suggests that these findings can be used as an important step in lowering perceived risk. Professionals need to educate consumers with less computer experience and knowledge on the risks and how to overcome them, in order to persuade them to make an online purchase. Teachings on security nets, return policies, and other safety technology can help consumers feel more at ease when engaging in a high risk activity on the Internet (Yoon, 2010). Taking a transparent approach regarding the dangers, but reassuring consumers with the safety precautions is a successful strategy for encouraging online purchases, while also providing helpful customer service.

Other strategies for overcoming adoption deterrents include high quality content and systems, virtual interactivity, and rewards (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2015). Each of these factors have a positive effect on brand awareness through online social media networks (Barreda et al., 2015). High brand awareness and reputation leads to more trust, which can lead to a higher willingness to respond to a company's call to action by consumers.

Integration of Diffusion Theory

Throughout this literature review, readers may have noticed the mention and common elements of the diffusion of innovations theory, which studies the spread of a new ideas, technology, or information. It is easy to apply this classic theory in discovering the adoption of Internet technology platforms. Many of the previously mentioned social media and online shopping experiments prove the familiar S-shaped pattern that shows a slow start among the earliest adopters that then accelerates to a long tail of popular adoption that is defined as the basic building blocks of the diffusion of innovations theory (McQuail, 2010).

By applying the diffusion theory, professionals are learning whether or not they can predict the factors that will increase the rate of adoption or purchase of their products or services. Messner & Garrison (2008) mention that as of 2003 less than 15 percent of Internet studies were rooted in theory, which is a shortcoming of the growing field. As Internet platforms, social media networks, and online shopping quickly evolve, a call has been made by researchers for scholars to develop theory specifically designed for the Internet (Messner & Garrison, 2008). While this notion is important since the Internet as a mass medium and advertising channel carries unique characteristics that the other three mass mediums lack, the diffusion of innovations theory has been widely and successfully applied to this area of study.

The diffusion of innovation theory specifically applies to social media networks because at its core, it studies the makeup of a social system (Rogers, Singhal, & Quinlan, 2008). Social media networks also involve mass media (brand pages of companies) coupled with interpersonal communication (one's individual social connections on a given social media platform), which are both factors in the diffusion process (Rogers, et al., 2008).

In order to apply the diffusion theory, the communicated messages must apply to something *new*. With the rapid evolution and growth of social media channels and online shopping, this novelty characteristic is easy to apply to this field of research. Consumers are often met with a high degree of uncertainty in learning and using new platforms (Rogers et al., 2008).

Through the previously mentioned research of Wu & Ke (2008), we notice another common element of the diffusion of innovations theory: research focuses on attitudes, decision making, and final action, in addition to awareness, which are also distinctive characteristics of diffusion research (Rogers et al., 2008).

Although the diffusion of innovations theory has roots in anthropology, it is applied today to marketing, education, sociology, and agriculture, among many other disciplines (Rogers et al., 2008). *Applied* is the key word that makes this theory so popular. With the ever-evolving blur between marketing, advertising, communications, and public relations, this theory can successfully be applied to each of these professions, which makes it useful to study.

Quantitative methods are more commonly used in diffusion research, although other methods have been utilized. An excellent example of a qualitative analysis is the above mentioned Apple Newton brand community study that examined vigilante marketing as a result of technology and media effects on advertising practices (Muñiz & Schau, 2007).

Rogers et al. (2008) note that the wide usage and acceptance of the diffusion theory is most likely due to its practical and applied results. As more professionals look to academics to develop social media, online shopping, and Internet-based theories, this applied nature is essential since these channels evolve so quickly.

Through some experiments cited throughout this literature review, researchers believe that professionals can learn strategies to affect the rate of diffusion on social media sites or online shopping. Huang, Zhang, Liu, & Liang (2014) confidently state that these professionals can indeed control the rate of diffusion to then predict demand of a product and strategically manage stock, which they admit is more complicated in the Internet era, since consumers and companies alike are inundated with more information that is communicated faster. However, applying classic theory like the Bass diffusion model to the Internet age can prove to be a successful endeavor. Common diffusion disputes like the rates of adoption of highly cliquish networks need more research when applying these classic theory elements to today's ever-evolving social media and online shopping arenas. Cowan & Jonard (2004) studied these types of networks and noted that long-term economy success can be enhanced when studying an offline social network's makeup and influencers. Today's Internet researchers need to apply and expand these finding to social media networks.

Conclusion

This paper's initial purpose was to determine which specific aspects of a consumer's social media "neighbors", paid advertising and marketing messages, or a combination have a greater effect on their decisions to act regarding new ideas or purchases. Although a person's social network is an important factor in the rate of diffusion, other elements such as customer experience and psychological factors were discovered to have a large influence on consumers' actions.

A combination of outside "neighbors," close social connections, and marketing messages all have an effect on the diffusion process in varying degrees, but to say one has more influence

than the other is still unclear. It depends on the context in which the consumer is viewing the brand. Attitudes, emotions, and quality all must be factored into this experience.

Common adoption deterrents such as perceived risk, lack of Internet experience or knowledge, and low payoff gains must also be considered. Transparency and trust are key characteristics that companies must portray in order to persuade consumers to make a purchase or adopt a new idea.

Although researchers encourage the discovery of an Internet-specific theory, the diffusion of innovations theory is an excellent guide to apply to social media and online shopping studies. As the Internet continues to evolve, so will the types and sophistication of advertising tactics and platforms. As Rodgers et al. (2008) note, there are many opportunities available for Internet researchers to study and most importantly apply theory.

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