Chapter 5

Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in Online Social Networks: The Motivational Antecedents of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Engagement in Online Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

Online social networks (oSNS) enable users to construct strong relationships with friends, family, as well as strangers. They also enable users to share information concerning experiences and opinions about products, brands and companies via electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The unique nature of oSNS-eWOM relationship forms the basis of this research. The authors report the results of a research investigating six motivational factors for engaging in eWOM communication, investigated under three dimensions; producing, consuming and forwarding of content on oSNSs. Results reveal that eWOM production behavior on oSNS is mainly motivated by altruism, self enhancement, electronic social interaction and exhibitionism. The motivating factors of eWOM forwarding behavior showed up as electronic social interaction and exhibitionism, whereas the motivating factors for eWOM consumption behavior are altruism, electronic social interaction and need for intellectual engagement. Aversion of cognitive activities appeared to have a negative effect on consumption of eWOM communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Online social networks (oSNSs) are facing a rapid growth around the world. They help users build and maintain personal relationships with friends, family and as well as strangers (Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011). As a web based service oSNSs help individuals to construct a public profile, communicate with others and also to follow the content that is provided by other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The main objective of SNS users is social interaction and connection with peers (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2010).

As a new construct oSNSs attract many researchers around the world. Most studies concerning oSNSs emphasize the motives behind the use (Bolar, 2009; Cheung, Chiu and Lee, 2010; Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011; Kraeuter et al., 2011; Lin & Lu, 2010; Peeling et al., 2009). People use and engage in oSNSs for many reasons. The most significant reasons are self-reflection (Bolar, 2009; Peeling et al., 2009), utility (Bolar, 2009; Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011; Lin & Lu, 2010), information seeking and gathering (Bolar, 2009; Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011), entertainment (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2010; Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011; Lin & Lu, 2010), peer influence (Bolar, 2009; Kraeuter et al., 2011), social enhancement (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2010; Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011), social support (Kim, Sohn & Choi, 2011), and belongingness (Peeling et al., 2009). The motives behind the engagement with social networks also provide an insight about the eWOM communication of the users. Two of the most important motives concerning oSNS use and eWOM tendencies are seeking social support and fulfilling information needs(Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011).

The rapid growth of oSNSs provides users to construct strong relationships between users and these relationships have a strong effect on consumer behavior and attitudes (Quinton & March, 2010). As an example, according to Ipsos OTX survey (June 2012), 22% of respondents (N=12,000) state that they would buy a brand because a friend ‘likes’ or follows a brand on a social network. As a communication platform, oSNSs also enables users to share information about brands and products more rapidly than any other online platform. Internet technology and oSNSs provide a possibility for consumers to share information concerning experiences and opinions about products, brands and companies via electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Jalilvand et al., 2011). OSNSs provide a communication channel for consumers and, are an effective channel for building consumer-brand relationships (Chu & Kim, 2011).

eWOM may include positive and negative comments about a product or brand that is shared between actual and potential consumers via the Internet (Jalilvand et al., 2011). eWOM is seen as more effective than traditional WOM and should get more attention from practitioners due to their great reach potential (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006; Sache & Mangold, 2010; Zhang et al., 2010).

There are differences between traditional WOM and eWOM communication. First, traditional WOM consists of face-to-face interpersonal communication. The main motivation behind that communication is to warn and help others about products and brands (Kozinets et al., 2010). As a result, it acts as a means for opinion leaders. But eWOM not only helps opinion leaders to help others, it also helps opinion seekers to search for relative information about their purchases (Sun et al., 2006). Second, eWOM is considered more influential when compared to traditional WOM, as the messages are shared more quickly, the opinion seekers can reach to information more easily and messages can reach to a higher number of people. Finally, traditional WOM messages are shared privately while eWOM messages are shared more publicly (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009). Although the spread of information is quick and the number of shared information is high, the monitoring and control capabilities of the marketers are higher.