Examining the Role of Mobile Self-Efficacy in the Word-of-Mouth / Mobile Product Reviews Relationship

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the role that mobile self-efficacy plays in the relationship between word of mouth and mobile product reviews. Using a mobile product review simulator, the authors demonstrate an inverted U-shape relationship where individuals prefer moderate information quality rather than either low or excessive information quality when assessing the trustworthiness of on-line reviews. Furthermore, mobile self-efficacy was shown to interact with information quality to increase trust and purchase intention.

KEYWORDS
Information Load, Mobile Commerce, Mobile Product Reviews, Word of Mouth

INTRODUCTION
Marketing researchers have long studied the influence of word-of-mouth (WOM), or the sharing of information about product or service experiences between a consumer and their acquaintances (Chih, Wang, Hsu & Huang, 2013). Online WOM expanded the dynamics of information exchange between consumers in a number of ways (Meuter, McCabe & Curran, 2013). For instance, in traditional WOM, the reach of a consumer was limited to their personal network of acquaintances, however online WOM enabled by online product review systems, their reach expands from the consumers’ immediate friends and family to millions of potential consumers (Ha, 2006). Further, potential consumers have far more information available to them, in the form of reviews from multiple past consumers.

This abundance of information creates challenges for the potential consumer: 1) the consumer is limited in his/her ability to process information, and 2) the consumer must evaluate the veracity of the review based on very little information. These challenges did not exist in the traditional WOM environment: 1) the consumer had less information to consider, as this information only came from those in the potential consumer’s personal knowledge sharing network and 2) the consumer would already have established a level of trust or distrust toward the reviewer via past experience with them.

According to Husson, Parrish, Ask, and Kwan (2013), researchers and industry experts have projected a substantial shift from stationary desktop computing to mobile computing for both work and...
personal computing tasks, and that shift is upon us. More and more people are using mobile devices to meet their computing needs, including information seeking about products and services (Furner, Racherla, & Babb, 2015). Indeed, a study by AdMob indicated that for the first time, smartphone and table shipments exceeded those of desktop and laptop computers (AdMob, 2011). This trend toward mobile computing is well noticed by marketers, who view mobile computing as a central component of their marketing and consumer engagement strategies (Schadler & McCarthy, 2013). Indeed, Mäki and Kokko (2017) echo this point, and highlight the importance of designing mobile applications which create interactive experiences for consumers.

As consumers continue to shift toward mobile computing, it becomes more and more important for marketers to understand the differences in user experience between mobile and web-based platforms (Furner & Zinko, 2018). Mobile devices and websites differ in a number of important ways, some of which are particularly relevant in the context of online WOM. Mobile browsers and PC based browsers differ in their ability to foster focus as well as dexterity (the ability to control, manipulate and navigate information on a device) (Lee & Benbasat, 2004). With this in mind our research objective is to better understand the ways in which consumers process the information contained in online reviews in a mobile environment.

Specifically, consumers in an online interaction space have been shown to suffer from information overload (Jones, Ravid, & Rafaeli, 2004). In this paper, we will argue that mobile devices exacerbate the problems associated with information overload by 1) failing to foster adequate focus for the consumer to process information and 2) frustrating the user due to a lack of dexterity. We will further argue that that this information overload will prevent potential consumers from forming trusting beliefs about the reviews, and subsequently reduce purchase intention. Our first research question follows:

**RQ1:** In a mobile computing environment, how does information overload influence trust in online product reviews?

Mobile self-efficacy (MSE), or the extent to which an individual report being confident in their ability to use mobile devices to accomplish tasks has been posited as a way to overcome many of the challenges associated with mobile computing (Keith, Babb, Lowry, Furner, & Abdullat, 2015). That is, individuals who score highly on MSE are not only better able to use mobile devices innovatively, but experience better focus and less frustration from the lack of dexterity associated with mobile devices. In this study, we will argue that MSE can reduce the information overload challenges that a mobile computing context. This is the basis of our second research question:

**RQ2:** In a mobile computing environment, how does MSE influence trust in online product reviews?

In this paper, we evaluate these RQ by developing a model of trust and purchase intention based on online reviews, which we test using a scenario-based experiment using a mobile device simulator. This paper proceeds as follows: in the following section, we review relevant literature regarding product selection under uncertainty, WOM, information overload, trust and MSE. Next, we outline our model and hypotheses. We then introduce our proposed methods. A discussion of potential implications of any findings is then presented, and summarizing remarks conclude the paper.

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT**

In order to evaluate the influence of information overload on online reviews, we develop a model of trust formation and purchase intention, which, consistent with Gefen (2000) and Ghose (2011), treats trust and purchase intention as pivotal outcomes in one’s intention to engage in e-commerce. This model and the associated hypotheses are discussed below.
Bridging the Gap between Business Process Models and Service Composition Specifications
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