Chapter 4

How Motivations for Social Media Usage Can Change and What It Means for E-Businesses

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ABSTRACT

Available research indicates that consumers are more likely to accept social media advertising when such content appeals to their motivations for joining the site. However, this research generally assumes that the forces driving a user’s initial motivations for social media acceptance and usage remain constant through time. Given the fact this assumption may, indeed, be a faulty one, this chapter is specifically concerned with exploring the idea that user motivations may exist as evolving factors with the potential to impact the efficacy of e-business initiatives on social media sites. In support of this goal, in this chapter we: (1) define and contextually discuss social media; (2) review extant literature as it relates to motivations for media use; (3) discuss the idea of temporal motivations; (4) present the results of a pilot study that provides empirical evidence for the evolving nature of motivations; and (5) discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our results.

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INTRODUCTION

With feverish irreverence, social networking sites (SNS) have rapidly come to occupy a significant space in the corporate world’s mediated consciousness. Marketers fret over consumer-generated content and its impact on their brand’s equity. Advertisers worry about reaching their audiences who now also assume the role of content creators. Public relations professionals have to deal with SNS and the rapid pace with which information spreads through these networks. Businesses work diligently to design, create, and implement effective viral campaigns and seek positive response in the form of reviews, likes, fan following, increase in website traffic, and ultimately, sales. In short, social media are transforming businesses, particularly e-businesses, in ways previously unimaginable.

Exploring the role of social media in e-business has proven to be a complex endeavor, especially for practitioners charged with making sense of the mercurial world of social media. Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that acquiring an understanding of social media is crucial to both the present and the future of e-business. Several practitioners, such as Edelman CEO, Richard Edelman, have called for present-day corporations to think beyond the paid and traditional media and embrace emerging media such as social networking sites (Van Grove, 2010). This comes in the light of increasing membership of social networking sites with over 70% of young adults in the US logging into one or more such sites and almost 50% of all adults using them regularly (Lenhart, 2009). Globally, 22% of all time spent online is spent on an SNS (Nielsen, 2010). Of the popular social media destinations, Facebook outranks others with almost 750 million global users (Facebook Facts, 2011). Twitter, a micro-blogging website that limits each post to 140 characters or less, is also quite popular, featuring over 175 million users worldwide (Twitter, 2011).

Many businesses and prominent personalities have already adopted social media as a powerful means of connecting with audiences. The amount of money spent by U.S. advertisers and marketers in 2010 was approximately $1.7 billion (USD). Worldwide, this number is almost double the amount ($3.3 billion USD) and is estimated to be growing rapidly (eMarketer, 2010). Advertising expenditures on Facebook have grown at an exponential rate for the last three years with the largest spenders on Facebook increasing their annual expenditures by nearly 900% (Womack, 2010). Many analysts, such as eMarketer’s Debra Williamson, claim that Facebook will soon become a dominant force not just for SNS advertising but also for all of online advertising (Brown, 2011). Despite these numbers and optimistic predictions, very little is known about the effectiveness of social media advertising. As more and more users flock to social networking sites, it becomes imperative for corporations interested in reaching these consumers with their marketing and promotional messages to develop a better understanding of how these new media vehicles function.

Very little research in the area of social media advertising has been done to date. Both academics and practitioners are only beginning to scratch of surface of understanding how to target SNS users with any real measure of effectiveness (Clemons, 2009; Zubcsek and Sarvary, 2011). Initial research seems to indicate that social media advertising may not be producing the desirable effects that e-businesses are hoping for (Johnson, 2010; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). In a 2010 study conducted by the online research firm Dynamic Logic, researchers found that only 22% of SNS users had a positive opinion of advertising on social network platforms and, further, that nearly 10% of SNS participants had abandoned online social networking because they perceived advertising content to be excessive. Similarly, researchers at the Internet Data Corporation (IDC) found that