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What drives consumers to interact with brands through social media? A motivation scale development study

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Abstract

Online platforms and social networks directly influence the consumer-brand relationship. Consumption behaviours evolve in this connective world as a vital part of individuals' self-concept whereas social identities come into prominence through these online platforms. Brands, offering identity extensions and symbolic values to their customers and seeking visibility over social networks, try to create interaction and engagement with consumers via their online presence. This study was conducted to explore consumers' motivations to interact with and/or about the brands on social media and to develop a related scale. Findings of exploratory and confirmatory analyses revealed five distinct motivation factors; "Brand Affiliation", "Investigation", "Opportunity Seeking", "Conversation", and "Entertainment". Comparison of these motivations and their relevancy with the consumer behaviour literature was discussed.

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1. Introduction

Social media (SM) with all of its applications and rising popularity makes significant contributions to companies in pursuit of consumer engagement, brand awareness and connectivity. In today's competitive environment, interaction and attainable knowledge resources are more vital than ever for brands. Consumers may contact with brands and other consumers in social networks in more interactive ways than ever which enables brands to deepen their relations with them. User-generated content and experience dominates the marketing communication implementations over social networks. Low costs, customization and ease of creating focused of

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messages through SM are advantages over the traditional communication channels. This makes SM not only relevant for large multinational firms, but also for small and medium sized companies, along with nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies as well. Though, using SM is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking (Kaplan, A.M. & Haenlein, M. 2010). Understanding the reasons of SM users to engage with brands in online virtual environments, which are created for social interaction between individuals is the main focus of this paper.

Companies are using SM not only for digital advertising, but also for handling customer services, mining innovation ideas, and creating engaged brand communities. There are diverse types of SM, which compasses formats such as blogs, social networking sites and content communities. User-generated content is an important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online. Brand related user-generated contents have the potential to shape consumer perceptions radically and to challenge the marketing professionals. Comprehension of this shift is important for marketers that are aiming the co-creation of their brands socially (Smith, A.N., Fischer, E. & Yongjian C. 2012). It is necessary for brands to build a connection with users and fostering a sense of belonging for customers. SM with its diverse domains satisfies the consumers' desire of engagement with a brand, which they wish to be associated with. Brands get strengthened through creating participation, allowing external audiences to identify with them, and become involved in (Yan, J. 2011). Among consumers, the opinions of the others are seen as more objective than the marketing messages of companies. SM inherently leads consumers to suspect of company-generated advertisements in SM (Akar, E. & B. Topçu 2011) whereas the real experience of experienced consumer is easily attainable. In order to explore the underlying constructs of consumption related SM usage, focusing on the characteristics of SM is vital. Mayfield (Mayfield, A. 2008) summarizes these characteristics as; participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. These characteristics provide an ideal medium for companies seeking engagement and loyalty with their customers. Communities on social networks enable better distribution, include more personal feelings, and convenience to reach non-customers (Shih, C. 2009). Consumers are more likely to rely on recommendations from a real consumer, rather than a marketing message. Although consumer decision process has significantly changed, the consumers' justification process of their purchase decisions has not. Where it was once enough to simply go shopping and make purchase, today's consumers do significant online research and information sharing via blogs, mini-blogs, forums, and so on (Agregta, S., & Bough, B. 2011). The major communicational challenges for marketers are identifying the digital word of mouth, as well as spotting the new online influencers (Kunz, M.B., Hackworth, B., Osborne, P., & High, J.D. 2011). Consumers receive and share information about products and services through digital platforms, especially with other consumers via online comments and social networks (Clemons, E. K. 2009). Social networks bring people together to share their interests, opinions, lifestyles and activities. SM integrates consumers with their own voice, not as passive respondents in their relationships with brands as in the past, rather as active members of brand communities (Miller, R., & Lammas, N. 2010). These attributes enable brands to reach the right people, in the right place and at the right time. Marketing the brands through SM is becoming precise, personal, interesting, interactive and social (Jothi, P.S.J., Neelamalar M. & Prasad, R.S. 2011). Sukoco and Wu (2010) indicate two main motivations for customers to join a brand community; self- and social-related motivations. Self-related motivation refers to members' interest to experience enjoyment, gain knowledge regarding a brand, and maintain their self-esteem. Social-related motivation refers to members' interest to join brand communities to have some affiliation with other members and acquire social status to maintain their collective self-esteem. Through social networks, consumers are entrenched in the dissemination of information. Consumers are brands' storytellers and the new brand ambassadors (Booth, N., & Matic, J.A. 2011).

2. Aims and Methodology of the Research

Primary objective of this study was to develop a multi-item scale measuring the SM users' motivations to interact with and/or about the brands over social networks. Virtual presence gains importance for the companies each and every day to acquire competitive advantage. Understanding the consumers' underlying motivations of their consumption related activities over SM is the key for marketers to develop better strategies. Developing a sound and precise scale constituted the major purpose of this study in the pursuit of both theoretical and managerial outcomes. The second objective of the study was analyzing and comparing the relative importance of each motivation factor underlying the online interaction behavior of consumers with brands.

2.1. Sample and Procedure

In order to develop a motivation scale, two focus groups and four depth interviews were conducted after the literature review. Subjects of focus groups were selected from the under-graduate and post-graduate students from the business administration department who are active SM users. Depth interviews were administrated with social media specialists from leading brands of different product categories (service, technology, FMCG). This qualitative phase and previous research on the SM usage provided the base of our study. After the detection of diverse consumption related SM usage patterns in this qualitative phase, items were developed to measure each different motive. A final focus group was utilized with the post-graduate students to test the wording and clarity of the generated items. Following the qualitative phase an online survey was prepared. Post-graduate students who accepted to participate in the study in return of extra credits were assigned to share the survey link to their social networks. Direct messages including an instructional text, which states the academic aims of the study were sent to respondents. Message including the survey link was sent to 854 people by 10 volunteered students and 493 admissible surveys were collected with a response rate of 58%. Data was analyzed with a random sample split approach. First sample (n=246) was utilized for a principle component analysis (PCA) with SPSS 21 and the second sample (n=247) for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with LISREL 8.80. Regarding the demographic characteristics and online behavioral patterns of two samples as represented in Table 1, there is no remarkable discrepancy in between. Each sample's mod category for age, education and online time in the day variables are the same. First sample (56%) contains slightly more females than the second sample (50%). Two samples were deemed comparable according to their similar profiles.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Sample Characteristics

	Sample 1	Sample2		Sample 1	Sample2
Gender			Education		
Female	56%	50%	Elementary	4%	4%
Male	44%	50%	High School	10%	16%
			Under-Grad	71%	65%
			Post-Grad	15%	15%
Age			Daily Online Time		
17 or younger	5%	8%	0-2 hours	26%	21%
18-24	56%	47%	3-5 hours	2%	6%
25-34	29%	31%	6-8 hours	46%	33%
35-44	7%	12%	9-11 hours	20%	24%
45-55	2%	2%	12-14 hours	5%	11%
55-64	0.8%	1%			

65 or older 0.2% none + 14 hours 1% 5%

2.2. Measures

After qualitative phase, items were generated to build a multidimensional scale. Eighteen motivation related statements in a 7-point response format were developed which are anchored as “0 = Not at all descriptive of me” and “6 = Completely descriptive of me”. First sample was analyzed with several PCAs to explore the underlying constructs of motivations and to label them if possible. Three items were eliminated from the analysis due to their cross loadings on multiple factors and/or unreasonable solutions. The retained items are listed in Table 2. Although these three items (“Social media helps me to reach other consumers who are experienced and knowledgeable about the brands that I am interested with.”, “I would not follow a brand on SM if it did not offer any promotion and discount on its page”, “I post my opinions about the successful/unsuccessful brands on SM to make the people in my social networks aware.”) were excluded from the analysis, these items are suggested to be considered in the further research because of their relevancy in the qualitative findings.

Table 2. Principal Components Analysis of the First Sample with the Varimax Rotation

Component Names	Items	Components				
		1	2	3	4	5
Brand Affiliation	I generally follow the brands on social media (SM) which are congruent with my life style. [BrAff1]	.672	.318			
	On SM, I follow some brands that I fancy to buy in future, although I can not afford buying right now. [BrAff2]	.762				
	I follow the brands on SM which I consume and/or purchase often. [BrAff3]	.750				
	I think that my involvement with a brand on SM due to my satisfaction / dissatisfaction influences my friends in my social network. [BrAff4]	.710				
Opportunity Seeking	Promotions and discount campaigns offered on SM by the brands generate financial benefits for the customers. [Opp1]		.782			
	By following the SM pages of brands, I can be informed of the discounts and promotions without visiting any stores and/or shops. [Opp2]		.803			
	Following brands on SM helps me to get information about new offerings. [Opp3]		.722			
Conversation	To me, social media (SM) is a very convenient tool for the customers to transmit their complaints and suggestions to the brands. [Con1]			.824		
	I think it is possible to communicate instantly with brands on SM without any time and space boundaries. [Con2]			.843		
	Getting into contact with companies is easy through SM because it's simple and free. [Con3]			.797		
Entertainment	I like the influential and creative contents on SM which were generated by the brands. [Ent1]				.734	
	Games and / or videos created by brands, provides opportunity for me to have fun time over SM. [Ent2]				.885	
	I think the entertaining content provided by a brand on SM positively influences the customer attitudes and company's image. [Ent3]		.416		.612	
Investigation	I believe that the product related information which can be gathered from SM is relatively reliable. [Inv1]					.867
	SM provides a reliable information resource by enabling a transparent integration between brands and consumers. [Inv2]					.754
	Component reliability statistics (Cronbach's alpha)	.772	.791	.821	.747	.706
	Eigenvalues	5.459	1.658	1.263	1.139	1.031

Cumulative variance explained (%)	16.00	31.57	46.96	59.88	70.33
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2.3. Principle Component Analysis

PCAs with multiples extraction methods were utilized to compare the alternative solutions. After the five-component solution was extracted with varimax rotation and eigenvalues criteria, component number was fixed to six and seven consequently to extract alternative solutions. Interpretational alternatives and contributions of the additional constructs to the amount of explained variance were evaluated. Solutions with six and seven components did not provide clearly identifiable and distinct constructs as much as the five-component solution. Consequently internal consistency of the constructs was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Fornell, C. & Larcker, D. F. 1981) and all of them were above suggested .7 level.

As presented in Table 2, five components explained the 70.33% of the total variance, which is higher than the satisfactory level of 60% (Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. 2004). Cut off value for the item loadings was specified as .3 in the analysis and only two items loaded on multiple components with higher loadings. After the statistical assessment, components were interpreted according to related item loadings. First component was labeled as brand affiliation because it reflects a consumer's motivation to follow a brand on SM because of its congruity with his/her lifestyle, possession desires, preference tendency, and intention to promote it. Brand affiliation component explains 16 percent of the total variance. Second component, opportunity seeking, represents the beneficial reasoning of the consumers to follow a brand and it explains nearly 16 percent of the total variance. Third component, conversation, represents SM's role on consumers' need to communicate with the brands and other consumers. Conversation component explains nearly 15 percent of the total variance. Fourth component, entertainment, reflects the consumers' affection with the corporate pages and/or brand related contents to have amusement and fun. This component explains 13 percent of the total variance. Fifth component, investigation, contains items which reflect the SM's role on consumers' quest of reliable information about the brands and products and it explains approximately 11 percent of the total variance but consists of only two items which might be a drawback in CFA phase.

2.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Although previous studies suggest that factor solutions provided with PCAs and EFAs generally fails to fit the CFA models (Mangold, W.G. & Faulds, D.J. 2009), the second sample was utilized with CFA to evaluate the construct validity and model-data fit. CFA model is specified just as the same solution extracted from the PCA with five components. Each item was specified as the reflective indicators of their latent factors. Although the data did not meet the multivariate-normality assumption, maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method with the covariance matrix was chosen because of the limited sample size ($n=247$). However ML creates inflated chi-square statistics due to low standard errors (Crawford, K., 2009), an alternative estimation method (i.e. corrected normal theory methods) could not be applied because of big sample requirements and further interpretations were made with this limitation being considered.

Results of the CFA model are presented in Table 3 which showed acceptable model-data correspondence without any modification or re-specification requirement. Although the model chi-square was significant ($\chi^2=125.233$ [$p=0.000924$]), χ^2 / df ratio was satisfactory (125.233/80). The values of RMSEA (=0.0479, [.0309-.0636]), CFI (=0.992), GFI(=0.936), AGFI (=0.905) and SRMR (=0.0393) were all in acceptable ranges to retain the model. Observed residuals were symmetrically distributed along the model without any significant pattern and without a major magnitude. In terms of convergent validity all indicators but one ($\beta_{\text{BrandAff4}}=.67$) had factor loadings over recommended level of .707 and average variance extracted (AVE) by each factor is higher than .50 (.59-.74). Evaluation of discriminant validity is based on the lack of excessively high inter-correlations ($r \geq .9$)

between latent factors as suggested by Kline (Crawford, K., 2009). Correlations between factors are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Component Names	Items	β	SE	T
Brand Affiliation AVE= .59 α = .848	I generally follow the brands on social media (SM) which are congruent with my life style. [BrAff1]	.768	.097	13.684
	On SM, I follow some brands that I fancy to buy in future, although I can't afford buying right now. [BrAff2]	.808	.102	14.678
	I follow the brands on SM which I consume and/or purchase often. [BrAff3]	.824	.09	15.184
	I think that my involvement with a brand on SM due to my satisfaction / dissatisfaction influences my friends in my social network. [BrAff4]	.67	.098	11.370
Opportunity Seeking AVE= .71 α = .868	Promotions and discount campaigns offered on SM by the brands generate financial benefits for the customers. [Opp1]	.831	.087	15.504
	By following the SM pages of brands, I can be informed of the discounts and promotions without visiting any stores and/or shops. [Opp2]	.802	.088	14.696
	Following brands on SM helps me to get information about new offerings. [Opp3]	.854	.082	16.148
Conversation AVE= .69 α = .869	To me, social media (SM) is a very convenient tool for the customers to transmit their complaints and suggestions to the brands. [Con1]	.836	.092	15.493
	I think it is possible to communicate instantly with brands on SM without any time and space boundaries. [Con2]	.849	.09	15.854
	Getting in to contact with companies is easy through SM because it's simple and free. [Con3]	.808	.092	14.73
Entertainment AVE= .60 α = .815	I like the influential and creative contents on SM which were generated by the brands. [Ent1]	.784	.097	13.926
	Games and / or videos created by brands, provides opportunity for me to have fun time over SM. [Ent2]	.703	.113	11.981
	I think the entertaining content provided by a brand on SM positively influences the customer attitudes and company's image. [Ent3]	.829	.089	15.065
Investigation AVE= .74 α = .852	I believe that the product related information which can be gathered from SM is relatively reliable. [Inv1]	.844	.084	15.675
	SM provides a reliable information resource by enabling a transparent integration between brands and consumers. [Inv2]	.88	.085	16.65

2.5. Comparison of the Motivation Factors

Following the evaluation of construct validity and internal reliability of the scale and its factors, it's concluded that each factor measures distinct motivations. Consequently each motivation factor's mean was calculated as presented in Table 4. Factor means are calculated with the division of the summated scores of items under each factor by the number of items. In this sense each factor score is measured between the values of 0 and 6, while former represents absence of any related motivation for the respondent, the latter signifies a complete correspondence of the motivation for the respondent. The highest motivation of the SM users to interact with a brand over social networks appears as the opportunity seeking ($\mu = 4.163$, $SD = 1.251$). Conversation ($\mu = 3.835$, $SD = 1.291$) is the second highest motivation of brand followers. Other three motivations, "investigation" ($\mu = 3.489$, $SD = 1.237$), "brand affiliation" ($\mu = 3.487$, $SD = 1.261$), and "entertainment" ($\mu = 3.415$, $SD = 1.4$) follow these two motivations with very close levels. All factor averages are above the scale mid-points (3), which means that in average, our sample units have higher motivations than moderate levels at each factor.

Table 4. Means and Std. Deviations of SM Users' Motivations of Interaction with Brands and Correlations between Factors

	Brand Affiliation	Investigation	Opportunity Seeking	Entertainment	Conversation
Brand Affiliation	1				
Investigation	.774	1			
Opportunity Seeking	.751	.836	1		
Entertainment	.782	.739	.714	1	
Conversation	.552	.697	.756	.742	1
Factor Mean	3.487	3.489	4.163	3.415	3.835
SD	1.261	1.237	1.251	1.400	1.291

3. Discussions and Implications

Consumers' motivations to interact with and/or about the brands over SM are analyzed and a related scale was developed. Psychometric properties and empirical findings indicated that the scale is valid in multiple samples and internally reliable. Five distinct and reliable motivations were explored as, brand affiliation, conversation, opportunity seeking, entertainment and investigation. Motivations are the needs, which lead the person to seek satisfaction of it (Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. 2004). According to this definition, explored motivations of consumers in this study, which leads them to engage with a brand over SM, should be considered carefully for effective marketing implications in social networks. Considering the importance of SM as a tool for brand engagement and brand communities (Yan, J. 2011), (Miller, R., & Lammas, N. 2010), the brand affiliation and conversation motives might have a key role in SM marketing implications. Both the self and the social aspects of brand communities on SM (Sukoco, B.M., & Wu, W.Y. 2010) are closely relevant for these two motivations. As pointed out by Mangold, (Mangold, W.G. & Faulds, D.J. 2009) SM has become a primary source for consumers searching for reliable information. In order to benefit of it, marketers should observe and recognize the consumers' conversation and investigation motivations over SM. These motivations are crucial because SM is not only an effective tool to response consumers back, but also it's a promising environment to listen the conversation between consumers (Crawford, K., 2009). Entertainment and opportunity seeking motivations examined in this research are novel characteristics for SM brand engagement literature. Although these aspects of consumer-brand interaction were not paid much attention, they seem critical to create online consumer involvement with a brand. Viral marketing campaigns, and efforts to create online buzz between consumers seem to create an entertainment and amusement expectancy for some consumers. This factor is important for brands seeking brand awareness, image building and leverage. On the other hand, most companies have recently spilled promotions and offers through their SM channels to increase their online reach and engagement. It seems to have created an opportunistic motive for some members of these online communities. These two motivation factors should also be paid significant attention while building an online strategy. These findings will contribute to both consumer behavior theory and implications of online marketers. Digital revolution in consumption nurtures its unique attributes along with the transformed old habits of consumers. The motivations examined in this study, and probably some other one(s) overlooked will worth significant attention because of the ever increasing connectedness

4. Conclusions and Limitations

Conceptualization of the motivations to engage with brands over SM and a related valid measurement tool was sought with this study. An empirically sound and reliable scale was developed to be utilized by further

researchers and scholars in the domain as well as the marketing professionals to evaluate the characteristics of their target SM users. Although satisfactory statistical outcomes had been provided, there are some important limitations of the study. Convenient sampling and the non-normally distributed data are important drawbacks to generalize the findings to any population. Also satisfactory results were obtained in the quantitative analyses, conceptual validity is another issue to be considered. There might be some omitted motivation factor(s) which could not be detected with quantitative testing. Further researchers are strongly encouraged to consider these qualitative judgments about probable overlooked factors and to quantitatively test to refine and purify the indicated motivations in different populations. Despite these limitations a conceptual distinction and comparable measurement tool is achieved with this research.

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