

The Effect of Different Information Sources on Consumers' Purchase Intention: The Moderating Role of Product Involvement

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In customer behavior research, the central problem is choice task performance. Since the outcome of a choice can only be known in the future, the consumer is forced to deal with uncertainty and risk associated with their decision (Taylor, 1974). Risk perception is often perceived to be painful in that it may produce anxiety, and consumers must deal with this in some manner when they make choice decision. Prior research indicated that uncertainty about consumer behavior can be reduced by acquiring and handling information (Arndt, 1968). To reduce uncertainty about consumer choice, customers look for as much as information from a variety of sources. Today, there are numerous information channels readily available (e.g., TV, newspaper, magazine, internet, social network sites, blogs, etc.) for consumers and the different channels are seen as, more or less, appropriate in reducing various types of risk. Recently, social network sites (SNSs) have emerged as a new information source due to technology innovation (e.g., internet, Wi-Fi, smart phones, etc.). SNSs are attracting more Internet users with greater level of popularity across broad segments of the Internet (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008). Although several studies examined the usage of social media by sports teams and athletes (Clavio, 2011), their focus is limited to motivation to use SNSs. Since SNSs have emerged as a new marketing tool, more systematic research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of SNS information compared to traditional advertisement information.

Prior research has categorized consumers using product involvement classes and reported that consumers showed different types of purchase behavior in each product category (Krugman, 1965). Additionally, their information quality perception is dependent on a consumer's product involvement level (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). Accordingly, this study attempts to compare the effectiveness of SNS comments and two other conventional advertising mediums (web-advertisement and opinion in blog) by focusing on consumers' purchase intention. We also examine the moderating effect of product involvement.

Theoretical Background

Uses and Gratification Theory: Uses and gratification theory explains how customers use different media these days. The theory centers on what people do with media, not what media does to people (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory focuses on the notion that audiences are not passive but take an active role in uses of media such as understanding and interpreting media. Because of developments in technology, customers easily get the information they want from more various information sources than ever before.

Two-step flow theory: This theory asserts that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) receive the information, interpret it, and pass on their own interpretation to others. Then, others (opinion followers) accept the information from opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are quite influential in getting people to change their attitudes and behaviors because people assume that the information from customers (opinion leader) hold true information (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Balance theory: A basic notion of balance theory is that people are motivated to keep an apparent consistency among the facts and beliefs they possess. If a person is exposed to new observations or beliefs that are inconsistent with present beliefs, the consumer is thrown into an "imbalance" condition. In imbalance conditions, people want to do something that will bring cognitive structure back into a balanced condition. To reduce this imbalance, people seek advice from opinion leaders and this advice can provide them with additional cognitions that bring them back into a balanced state.

Involvement: Prior research has categorized product classes (i.e., high and low involved product) and suggested different types of purchase behavior in each product category (Krugman, 1965). Low involved products are

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frequently purchased (e.g., toothpaste) and perceive little linkage to their important values and little consumer commitment to the brands. A high involvement product class is less frequently purchased, and results in more brand-differentiated product classes (e.g., automobiles or computer equipment). More direct linkage to personal values and more commitment to brands have been assumed in these latter product classes.

Prior research indicated that low involved customers were affected by quantity of information rather than the quality of information, while high involved customers were more influenced by quality information (Park et al., 2007). Therefore, on the basis of this evidence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: The information from blogs has a stronger positive effect on the purchasing intention of high involved products than of low involved products.

H2: The information from traditional information sources has a stronger positive effect on the purchasing intention of low involved products than of high involved products.

Method

Study Design and Pretests: The study will employ a three (information source: web-advertisement, SNSs comments, or blog review) by two (product involvement: high or low) mixed design. A Callaway Tour Authentic RAZR Fit Driver is selected to represent a high involvement product and golf tees were used to represent a low involvement product. For web-advertisement, Callaway's official web-page will be presented. For facebook comments, ten emotional, subjective, and simple recommendations without factual information will be presented. For blog reviews, five different blog reviews that contain more logical, persuasive reasons based on very specific facts about the product will be presented.

Before the main study, pre-consumption intention needs to be measured. The purpose of the current research is to examine how the purchase intention of high and low involved products will be changed by different information sources (i.e., web-advertisement, SNSs comments, & blog review). Therefore, the author needs to evaluate the pre-purchasing intention. Purchasing intention will be operationalized, following Kwon et al. (2007).

Main Experiment: Students from a large U.S. university will be invited to take part in the main experiment. Each of six experimental conditions need to have at least 30 subjects, therefore the total sample size will be more than 180. After the pre-test to measure their product purchasing intention, subjects will be randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions; there will be 25 to 30 subjects in each treatment group. The study will be conducted in a computer lab where subjects will be held for the duration of the experiment. Each participant will have a computer with one of the information sources and a booklet with the questionnaire; participants will respond to the questionnaire with no time restrictions (maximum response time was 25 minutes). In addition, participants will not see websites implemented for other experimental conditions. Finally, they will be asked to look at the website and respond to the questionnaire.

The authors will ensure that the complete results are presented with the discussion of theoretical implications at the conference. The presentation will also discuss practical implications by offering insights into promotional strategies of sport products based on the product involvement and consumers' behavioral intention in different advertising means.