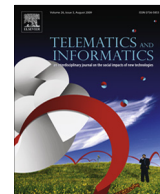




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Measuring consumer perception of social media marketing activities in e-commerce industry: Scale development & validation

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ABSTRACT

The internet has changed the nature of shopping in the past two decades, which has supported the proliferation of e-commerce sites and thus shopping has shifted to e-shopping. Also, customers use social media to gain information on preferred products with the best price options, as social media provides shoppers a voice, and facilitate them to interact and share their opinion worldwide. Moreover, social media is extensively adopted platform for e-commerce. Although, social media marketing has achieved wide acceptance in business, especially in e-commerce, there is no scale in the extant literature to measure perceived social media marketing activities (SMMA) in an e-commerce context. Therefore, this study develops and validates a 15-item, five-dimensional scale for measuring perceived SMMA of e-commerce based on extant literature on e-commerce and social media marketing and five different studies conducted in this research. The scale revealed comprehensive psychometric characteristics as per the results from the diverse reliability and validity checks. It was revealed that perceived SMMA positively influenced purchase intention and brand equity; which endorses the nomological validity of the developed scale. The new scale provides both theoretical as well as managerial implications along with the avenues for forthcoming research.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, social media marketing has appeared as a dominant research stream which highlights the changing aspects of customer relationships. Social media marketing is also one of the top research priorities of Marketing Science Institute 2014–16 (MSI, 2014) and 2016–18 (MSI, 2016). The significance of social media can be witnessed by the number of active users Facebook has in a month which is 1.86 billion (Facebook, 2017) as of December 2016. If we consider this 1.86 billion as a number, then Facebook has outshined the most populated country (China-1.38 billion) and the strongest economy in the world (US-325 million). This huge customer base makes social media quite popular not only among users but also among the companies, which utilize social media as a marketing communication medium (Hood and Day, 2014; Yadav, 2017). As reported by Rapp et al. (2013), approximately 88 percent of the companies (FMCG & Retail, Media, Information Technology & Telecommunication, and Travel & Leisure) have started utilizing different social media platforms and almost 42 percent of them have fully integrated different social media platforms in their day to day marketing strategies. Also, about

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39 percent of the users use social media to gain information about various products and services, due to which social media is considered to be one of the best prospects that companies across various industries have, so as to remain in direct contact with the customers (Casey, 2017). Indeed, Fortune 500 companies are widely adopting Facebook, Twitter, and other online communities to facilitate interactions with customers (Culnan et al., 2010). As per the recent findings from Center for Marketing research, almost 63 percent of millennials like and/or follow brands on Facebook and about 19 percent of the millennials follow them on Twitter (Barnes and Correia, 2016). Also, customers use social media to gain information on preferred goods with the best price options (Ismail, 2017), as social media provides shoppers a voice, and facilitate them to interact and share their opinion worldwide (Kozinets et al., 2010). As of June 2016, there are 3.6 billion internet users around the world and out of this 55 percent of the internet users are from Asia (Internet World Stats, 2016). Also, more than 82 million people around the world shop online and total e-commerce sales in the top 10 countries will surpass \$2277 billion by 2016 and China tops the chart in e-commerce (Willemsen et al., 2016).

The past decade has also experienced a considerable change in consumers' lifestyle as a result of the emergence of internet technologies. As far as online shopping is concerned, e-commerce has undergone a rapid expansion, and online shopping has emerged as one of the most preferred means of purchasing goods (Yan et al., 2016). Moreover, social media is widely utilized for e-commerce marketing activities (Yadav and Rahman, 2017). India and other Asian countries are no exception in this universal trend, and it has achieved high echelons of growth in the social media adoption by e-commerce during the past decade (Lee and Phang, 2016). Hence there is need to study perceived social media marketing activities (hereafter perceived SMMA) in an e-commerce context.

Social media marketing has achieved wide acceptance in business, especially in e-commerce, however, there is no scale in the extant literature to measure perceived SMMA in e-commerce. As e-commerce is a different industrial context in terms of both consumer and industry characteristics, there is a need to develop a separate scale that captures the perceived SMMA in E-commerce industry with special emphasis on e-retailing. Also, it has been recommended by Kim and Ko (2012) and Lu et al. (2016) to develop a more effective scale to capture perceived SMMA in different industries. Due to the non-existence of a scale that captures perceived SMMA carried out by e-commerce, companies had to rely on generic measures which may not be an appropriate measure of perceived SMMA in the e-commerce industry. Although social technologies or social media components have been widely incorporated in the e-commerce sites (e.g. Amazon, Flipkart etc.), its efficacy is rarely evaluated and confirmed in the extant literature (Lu et al., 2016). Hence a comprehension of perceived SMMA of e-commerce is essential, as it would offer new social media marketing management outlooks and insights to e-commerce industry, and research in this arena will further enrich the literature on e-commerce and social media.

Thus, to enhance research on e-commerce industry from social media marketing perspective and to develop further the practices and activities in e-commerce's social media marketing, it is essential to have a comprehensive approach to explore a set of e-commerce perceived SMMA. A valid and reliable scale that measures perceived SMMA in e-commerce context could fill this lacuna in e-commerce literature. The present study seeks to:

- develop and validate a scale for measuring perceived SMMA of e-commerce in e-retailing context.
- build nomological validity by specifying and testing the effect of perceived SMMA on brand equity and purchase intention.

This scale will enrich e-commerce and social media literature or the social commerce literature by delivering new insights into social media marketing research in the e-commerce industry. E-commerce companies will also benefit from this scale as it will help them to capture the perceived SMMA.

2. Social media marketing: the concept

Before we proceed to explore social media marketing, it is important to define and understand the meaning of the term 'social media'. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), "Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (p. 61). Social media can take various forms like social networking sites, blogs, wikis, microblogging sites, etc. Presently the most widely adopted social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, and content sharing website YouTube (Pham and Gammoh, 2015).

The extant literature has not reached a collective agreement as far as defining social media marketing (Table 1) is concerned, apart from the gaining popularity of the SMM in industry and academia. Some researchers define it as a means to connect and interact with existing and prospective customers and build customer relationships (Chan and Guillet, 2011; Chi, 2011; Chang et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2016), while others define it as a process of enhancing stakeholders' value through marketing activities by incorporating social media platforms in marketing communication (Pham and Gammoh, 2015; Tuten and Solomon, 2016; Felix et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some of the similar components of SMM among those definitions are the use of social media platforms and encouraging users to spread SMM content via SMMA like interaction, information, word of mouth, personalization etc. Since building and maintaining lasting stakeholder relationships is the goal of relationship marketing (Gronroos, 1994, 1997; American Marketing Association, 2017) and the essence of social media marketing also is rela-

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