



Social media use by young Latin American consumers: An exploration

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that was undertaken to explore the factors that drive social media use among young consumers in Latin America, a region of the world in which such studies have been sparse. The research involves the application of an extended TAM, with the addition of three new model variables whose impact on social media use have not been explored previously: social facilitation experience, fear of missing out (FoMO), and general online social interaction propensity (GOSIP). In addition, the outcome variable relates to active social media behaviors, a novel dependent variable in this stream of research. The model is tested using SEM. The results show that social influence, social facilitation experience, perceived ease of use (PEOU), and perceived enjoyment (PE) are all significantly linked to perceived usefulness (PU) of social media; however, FoMO is not. GOSIP, PU, and PE are positively related to attitude toward social media use, which is positively related to active social media behaviors. We discuss the results and provide limitations and avenues for future research.

1. Introduction

One of the key developments in the global marketplace that has had major implications for marketers is the explosion in the use of social media by consumers all over the globe to interact among themselves and with marketers. Recent research by digital marketing company *We Are Social* (2017) revealed that at the start of 2017, there were 2.80 billion global social media users, equaling 37% penetration in global social media use. Of this number, almost 600 million were in the Americas—North America (66% penetration), Central America (51% penetration), and South America (59% penetration) (<https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview>). This increasing penetration of social media presents opportunities and challenges for marketers. On the one hand, marketers now have a new way of connecting with consumers; on the other hand, consumers have more control over marketing messages and more interactions with each other. For these reasons, researchers and marketers have shown increased interest in understanding consumer use of social media, in the hope that the knowledge gleaned from this stream of research can be harnessed in shaping digital marketing strategy, in general, and digital communications, in particular.

As a consequence of the foregoing observation, social media use, its antecedents, and consequences have generated a lot of recent research. This stream of research has looked at issues such as motives for engaging in electronic word-of-mouth on social media platforms (Shin et al.,

2014; Wolny and Mueller, 2013); use of social media in complaining behavior (Balaji et al., 2015); factors that drive social media use in sales (Guesalaga, 2016); and social media use in sharing consumption experiences (Sotiriadis, 2017), among other issues. Previous research in this stream has also looked at the application of models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the theory of planned behavior in an effort to better understand social media use (Rauniar et al., 2014; Wirtz and Göttel, 2016; Yang and Wang, 2015)

Social media use specifically by young consumers has also become a global phenomenon and has generated some recent research (Bardhi et al., 2010; Muk et al., 2014; Singh, 2016). However, research on social media use varies by region of the world, with limited or no focus on social media use in certain regions. In addition, exploring factors that influence young consumers to use social media has not often been the focus of empirical investigation. Consumer use of social media continues to attract the attention of marketers and researchers, given the impact that social media can have on marketers' communication activities. Social media place people from all over the globe in contact, with the possibility of spreading messages that can have positive or negative impact on brands. It is therefore important to explore social media use in different regions of the globe.

This paper, therefore, explores social media use among young consumers in Latin America in an effort to understand some of the factors that drive use in this region and to add to this stream of research. This research applies an extended technology acceptance model

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(TAM) (Davis, 1989) in an exploration of social media use among these consumers. The TAM was developed by Davis (1989) to explain organizational information system use and has been adopted by a number of researchers to explain adoption of various kinds of technologies and innovations. Young Latin American consumers represent an attractive market not only for companies in that region but also for global companies that do business there. Ortégón (2015) proffered that there is economic power even among low-income Latin American Millennials. She reported that Latin American Millennials who lived on US\$10 or less per day will shape the middle class in the coming years. According to her, this segment is “roughly 20% of a Latin American BoP market of 405 million people, worth \$759 billion per year – are more connected, more educated, and have more disposable income than ever before” (<https://www.forbes.com/>). She also opined that the best way to reach this group is through technology and the Internet, thus underscoring the importance of understanding their social media use.

Overall, the paper contributes to the discourse on social media by exploring social media use in a Latin American context. The study enhances our understanding of this issue by introducing new explanatory variables to the TAM—social facilitation experience (SFE), general online social interaction propensity (GOSIP), and fear of missing out (FoMO) (see, for example, Perry, 2016, for a similar model). These are in addition to previous variables that have been used in TAM extensions: social influence and perceived enjoyment. In addition, the model introduces an outcome variable that focuses on active online social behaviors. After reviewing the theoretical background that forms the basis for the conceptual model and the resulting hypotheses, the research study, along with a discussion of the results and implications, will be presented.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

In this section, the conceptual model depicted in Fig. 1 (see below) is described, along with the hypotheses derived from it. First, a brief overview of the TAM is provided. There is a discussion of multiple variables, including social facilitation experience (SFE), social influence, social exclusion and FoMO, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, perceived usefulness, and online interaction propensity and

GOSIP. The discussion of each variable is followed by the resulting hypothesis. The section concludes by positing the link between attitude and an outcome variable, specifically, active online social behaviors, in the conceptual model.

2.1. Technology acceptance model (TAM)

The TAM provides substantial insights into consumers’ adoption and use of information technology. TAM posits that an individual’s behavioral intentions to use such technology is determined by that individual’s belief that using the technology will improve his/her job performance (perceived usefulness) and the extent to which that individual believes that using the technology will be relatively uncomplicated (perceived ease of use) (Davis, 1989). TAM also hypothesizes that perceived ease of use influences perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989). Venkatesh and Davis (2000) extended TAM in an effort to explain perceived usefulness and usage intentions in terms of social influence and cognitive instrumental processes. The TAM has been expanded and applied to exploration of adoption of innovations in a number of different domains, for example, email usage (Gefen and Straub, 1997); e-commerce acceptance (Pavlou, 2003); e-shopping acceptance (Ha and Stoel, 2009); consumer use of social media, specifically Facebook (Rauniar et al., 2014); and acceptance of mobile shopping applications (Natarajan et al., 2017). The current study enhances the TAM by incorporating social and individual difference factors into the model and linking them to the perceived usefulness of social media and attitude toward social media, as well as to social media behaviors. The hypotheses that flow from the model (see Fig. 1) are discussed below (Fig. 2).

2.2. Model variables and hypotheses

2.2.1. Social facilitation experience

Calder et al. (2009) introduced the concept of social facilitation experiences on websites as being one of the different engagement experiences that consumers can have in an online domain. They argued that, in the online context, social facilitation experience was one of the types of online engagement, whereby online participants found

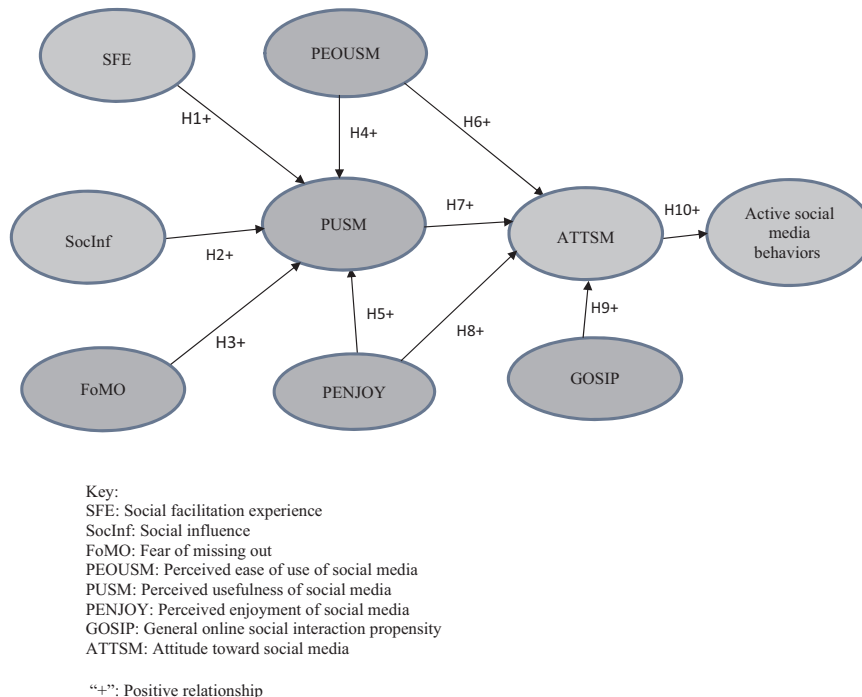


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of social media use.

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