

Research Article

Posting strategically: The consumer as an online media planner[☆]Yu-Jen Chen^{a,*}, Amna Kirmani^b^a Lingnan University, Hong Kong^b Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, USA

Received 28 September 2012; received in revised form 5 February 2015; accepted 5 February 2015

Available online 12 February 2015

Abstract

How do consumers choose to post their brand reviews online? Whereas prior research examines what people say online, we investigate where consumers post their brand-related consumption experience on an online discussion forum. Using the framework of the Persuasion Knowledge Model, we suggest that consumers act as intuitive media planners to assess the extent to which they can reach their specific goals when targeting online audiences. Specifically, we examine the effects of posters' motives, message valence, and audience similarity on posting behavior. We propose and find that persuasion-motivated consumers focus on whether the message is effective in generating interest and emotion from the audience; therefore, they are more likely to post positive messages on a brand-general forum, such as a product forum, and negative messages on a brand-specific forum. In contrast, affiliation-motivated posters primarily focus on audience similarity, preferring to post on a forum where they perceive the audience as similar to them. Three experiments show the different posting patterns under the two motives and demonstrate the mediating role of message effectiveness under a persuasion motive.

© 2015 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Word-of-mouth; Online communication; Persuasion knowledge; Social influence

Introduction

Imagine that both Jeremy and Josh recently purchased a new Nikon camera. While Jeremy was very satisfied with the camera's performance, Josh found it quite disappointing. If both of them wanted to make their own purchase recommendations to prospective camera buyers on a camera discussion forum on the Internet, on which sub-forums would you expect them to post? How likely would they be to post a review on a sub-forum that focuses primarily on Nikon cameras? What about a sub-forum that focuses on digital cameras in general?

As this example reveals, the Internet makes ordinary consumers marketing agents. Consumers can shape others' opinions about a product or service by posting a review, discussing product features, and sharing product information. Prior to posting product-related information, however, consumers must decide what information to share (i.e., how to construct a message) as well as with whom to share (i.e., the target audience). Although both decisions are important, the literature on online word-of-mouth (WOM) has focused on *what* people say (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Liu, 2006; Moe & Schweidel, 2012; Ward & Ostrom, 2006) rather than with *whom* they communicate. We know little about how online posters decide which audience to target with their message (Moe & Schweidel, 2014). In the introductory example, for instance, both Jeremy and Josh could post their reviews on a forum with a brand loyal audience or a forum featuring an audience with more diverse tastes. We aim to fill this research gap by investigating how consumers select communication targets when posting their brand-related consumption experience on an online discussion forum.

Online discussion forums are frequented by individuals interested in a particular topic (e.g., digital photography) or

[☆] This research is part of the first author's dissertation. The authors would like to thank Rebecca Hamilton for her helpful comments on an earlier version of the paper.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Marketing and International Business, Lingnan University, 8 Castle Peak Road, SEK 101/12, Tuen Mun, New Territories 999077, Hong Kong.

E-mail address: yujenchen@ln.edu.hk (Y.-J. Chen).

brand (e.g., Nikon). Within an online discussion forum, posters can choose among a variety of forums that allow consumers to talk about brand-related experiences. Some of these forums are targeted at consumers interested in and loyal to specific brands (e.g., a brand-specific forum such as Nikon Forum), while others are targeted at a more diverse audience interested in several brands within the product category (e.g., a brand-general forum such as Camera Forum). We suggest that consumers behave as intuitive media planners, using both target knowledge and persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) to help make posting decisions.

In the context of online posting, target knowledge includes beliefs about audience characteristics, such as brand loyalty, diversity of brand interests, openness to persuasion, and audience similarity. Persuasion knowledge refers to beliefs about the effectiveness of different types of messages in reaching forum audiences. We suggest that the use of target and persuasion knowledge depends on a poster's motivation. Based on prior work on online posters' motives (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004), we examine two common posting motives: persuasion and affiliation. We define a persuasion motive broadly as the desire to get others to do something, such as changing opinions, buying a product, or responding to the post (Rule, Bisanz, & Kohn, 1985). Because an effective persuasive attempt requires knowledge of the audience, we expect a persuasion-motivated poster to use both target and persuasion knowledge. In contrast, an affiliation motive refers to one's desire to establish a positive connection with others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). We expect an affiliation-motivated poster to use primarily target knowledge to assess the likelihood of making friends. Since persuasion is not the main purpose for posting, persuasion knowledge is less likely to be used under an affiliation motive.

Based on the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994), we predict that two factors, message valence and audience similarity, explain poster behavior under the two motives. Specifically, message valence (i.e., positive vs. negative) is expected to impact the posting behavior of persuasion-motivated posters, who will assess the effectiveness of the message for different audiences. Effectiveness refers to the ability of the message to produce psychological effects, such as generating interest or emotion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Effectiveness may be thought of as appropriateness of the message given audience characteristics. We suggest that posters may see negative messages as more effective than positive messages for readers of a brand-specific forum, while the opposite is true for readers of brand-general forums. Because most readers of a brand-specific forum have positive brand attitudes, an additional positive review about the brand may not be likely to generate interest. In contrast, a negative review may provide unexpected, counterattitudinal opinions about the brand, thereby generating interest and potentially leading to attitude change. On a brand-general forum, however, a positive review may be relatively more effective because it better fits with the audience's openness to persuasion, as readers are not yet committed to any specific brand.

We suggest that affiliation-motivated posters will focus on audience characteristics rather than message valence when

making a posting decision. Specifically, these posters may want to establish friendships with people who share similar interests or may find it easier to join a community when connecting to like-minded others (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Thus, we predict that affiliation-motivated posters are more likely to focus on audience similarity when making posting decision. Message valence will be of less concern because posters expect that similar others will be accommodating of contradictory views by the sense of consciousness of kind (Gusfield, 1978; Mathwick, Wiertz, & de Ruyter, 2008).

We conduct three studies to test these predictions. Study 1 shows that message valence affects posting under a persuasion motive. Study 2 replicates this effect in a different product category and demonstrates that message valence does not matter under an affiliation motive. In addition, we examine the role of target knowledge and persuasion knowledge under the two posting motives. Finally, study 3 shows that whereas message valence affects posting under a persuasion motive, audience similarity affects posting under an affiliation motive.

The paper makes a contribution to research on both online communication and the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). Although existing research has studied how online posters may act as proactive persuasion agents (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Moe & Schweidel, 2012), to the best of our knowledge, none has studied how consumers use the choice of an online forum as a means of attaining their posting goals. Our paper suggests that consumers access target knowledge in assessing where to post. In addition, they use persuasion knowledge under a persuasion motive but not under an affiliation motive. We, therefore, contribute to literature on the PKM by identifying the content of both target knowledge and persuasion knowledge in an online posting context. In the next section, we examine the PKM in greater detail and develop hypotheses for persuasion and affiliation motivated posters. Three lab studies test the hypotheses. We conclude with a consideration of contributions and implications for theory and practice.

Conceptual framework

According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994), consumers can be both persuasion targets and influence agents. The PKM identifies three types of knowledge that can be used by consumers in the role of influence agents: persuasion knowledge, target knowledge, and topic knowledge. Target knowledge refers to beliefs about the recipient of the persuasion attempt, in our case, beliefs about characteristics of forum audiences. Persuasion knowledge refers to consumers' beliefs and intuitive theories about how to influence others (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In our context, this would be posters' beliefs about how forum audiences will be influenced by messages of different valences. Finally, topic knowledge refers to beliefs about the domain of the encounter, e.g., digital cameras in a camera forum.

As influence agents, consumers use a variety of strategies to get others to help consumers achieve their own goals (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). Prior literature suggests that consumers act strategically in their online behavior (Kozinets et al., 2010;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882019>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882019>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)