

**ANALYSING THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS IN CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY**

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.ABSTRACT

This study reviews recently published research about consumers in digital and social media marketing settings. Five themes are identified: (i) consumer digital culture, (ii) responses to digital advertising, (iii) effects of digital environments on consumer behaviour, (iv) impact of social media platforms, and (v) online word of mouth (WOM). Holistically these articles shed light from many different angles on how consumers experience, affected, and are influenced by the digital environments in which they are situated as part of their daily lives. Much is still to be understood, and existing knowledge tends to be disproportionately focused on WOM, which is only part of the digital consumer experience. This study will also contribute academically by identifying some gaps in existing research and providing both plans for future research and probable road-mapping for decision-makers.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Consumer behaviour, social media platform, eWOM, Digital culture

INTRODUCTION

Using the internet, social media, mobile apps, and other digital communication technologies has become part of billions of people's daily lives. For instance, the current rate of internet use among American adults is about 87% and is closer to 100% for demographic groups such as college-educated and higher-income adults [1]. Younger people—the next generation of mass consumers—have similarly high levels [2]. People also spend increasing time online. For example, in the UK, over the last decade the number of hours spent online by adults has more than doubled, and now averages 20.5 hours per week [3]. Social media has fuelled part of this growth: worldwide there are now more than 2 billion people using social media [4], and Facebook alone now has approximately 1 billion active users per day [5]. Therefore, this responds to the marketers of this fundamental transformation through the increased use of digital marketing channels. It is expected that approximately two-thirds of global spending will be on advertisements streamed on digital channels (Park & Lee, 2008). Therefore, consumer marketing in the future will be implemented to a large extent in digital environments, particularly social media and mobile phones.

RESEARCH THEMES AND FINDINGS

Five distinct research themes emerge in recent consumer research on digital marketing and social media. The five themes are (i) consumer digital culture, (ii) advertising, (iii) impacts of digital environments, (iv) impact of smart phones, and (v) online WOM and reviews. The most popular themes are online WOM, which is covered by almost half of the articles, and advertising, represented by slightly over one-quarter of the articles. I now discuss each theme.

Consumer Digital Culture

Consumer digital culture research considers, quite deeply, the digital environments in which consumers are situated. A key aspect of this work has understood how consumers' identities and behaviours extend into digital worlds, such as work by Belk [6, 7]. Belk [6] extended his prior work on the "extended self" to incorporate the digital environments in which consumers now situate themselves, which is an important piece of theory development because it considers concepts such as the ability for consumers to have multiple selves due to possessing multiple online "personas." Belk also suggests many areas for future research. Other research under this theme looked at more specific phenomena. McQuarrie et al. [8] focused on fashion blogging as a means of documenting the "megaphone effect," which is the ability for regular consumers to access large audiences through

digital/social media. This is an important effect and they discussed how bloggers go about building audiences and accumulating social (or cultural) capital through demonstrations of “good taste.” In a social media setting this essentially means that a blogger (or “influencer”) makes recommendations that signal her expertise to others. This is in a specific setting, but has implications for understanding consumers’ content-generation behaviors on social media more generally, since signaling positive personal attributes is likely a common motivation for posting certain things on sites like Facebook. Together, these articles make an important conceptual contribution around how we see consumers in a digital world, particularly by implying an expanded conception of what it is to be a consumer in today’s digital world.

Advertising

Digital advertising is a major topic in the marketing literature and, with respect to consumer behavior, considers how consumers respond to various aspects of digital ads. A number of recent articles considered behavioral aspects of digital advertising from various perspectives. One interesting perspective taken in a few articles [12-14] was based around how to overcome (assumed) psychological reactance due to personalization of digital ad targeting. Schumann et al. [12] considered how negative reactions to personalization could be overcome with normative reciprocity appeals (instead of utility appeals). Lambrecht and Tucker [13] studied ad retargeting, which is when personalized recommendations based on prior web-browsing history are made when a consumer returns to a website. Negative responses to retargeting are found, but this is mitigated when consumers’ preferences have become more precise. Tucker [14] found that personalized website ads are more favorably received when consumers have a higher perception of being in control of the personal/private information used for personalization, which directly corresponds to literature on psychological reactance and suggests a theoretical way forward for research into consumer digital privacy, which is lacking.

Impacts of Digital Environments

A still-emerging theme in recent years is how digital/social media environments impact consumer behavior [15-17]. The consequences can be thought of as environment-integral (i.e., digital environments influence behavior in those environments) or environment-incident (i.e., digital environments influence behavior in other, unrelated environments). It is interesting to see how the various informational and social characteristics of digital/social environments, such as being exposed to other consumers’ opinions (e.g., reviews) or choices (e.g., bids in online auctions), or even just to friends’ lives through social media, can impact subsequent behaviors. For instance, with respect to environment-integral consequences, Lamberton et al. [15] and Norton et al. [16] considered learning from strangers in digital environments. They find that consumers in competitive online settings infer interpersonal dissimilarity and act aggressively against ambiguous others (strangers) [15], and find that seeing online that others made the same choices as oneself can reduce, not increase, confidence in one’s choices if others’ justifications (e.g., in online reviews) are dissimilar [16]. Adopting a different perspective, Wilcox and Stephen [17] examined an environment-incident response with respect to how using Facebook affected self-control. They found that when exposed to closer friends on Facebook, consumers subsequently exhibited lower self-control in choices related to, for example, healthy behaviors (e.g., choosing a cookie instead of a healthier granola bar).

Impact of social media platforms

All types of social media platforms now try to achieve the objectives of different sectors in the world. Moreover, the presence of many applications in social media has contributed to changing the traditional ways in marketing and communication (Alghizzawi, Ghani, et al., 2018; Alghizzawi, Salloum, et al., 2018; Mohammed Habes, Salloum, Alghizzawi, & Alshibly, 2018; S. A. Salloum, Maqableh, Mhamdi, Al Kurdi, & Shaalan, 2018; S. A. Salloum, Mhamdi, Al Kurdi, & Shaalan, 2018). According to the statistical report in 2019, the global social media use a wide range of social

media platforms (The Statistics Portal, 2019) as shown in Figure 1. Social media have evolved in the past few years to encompass a variety of input capabilities, various features and unlimited Internet access, and powerful location awareness function. Importantly, the increased capabilities of the mobile application support thousands of social media which extend the functionality of social media to a wide range of information services such as specialized information search and marketing (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011; M. Habes et al., 2018). Indeed, recent studies indicate that social media and their apps have the potential to assist travelers by providing easy access to information anytime and (almost) anywhere. From a very small base, marketers have already begun to explore a wide array of approaches towards leveraging the social media medium (Galan, Lawley, & Clements, 2015). Marketers in the field of tourism have made attempts and experienced both early and encouraging successes and helpful and informative bombs. Direct-to-consumer advertising has understandably become the accepted norm of social media marketing because it is well understood as the direct, linear descendant of old-style advertising messages that have always been pushed at customers from helping tourists find resources important to them at the moment they need them; to assisting people with finding critical information whenever and where ever they need it (Alghizzawi, Ghani, et al., 2018; Bazazo & Alananzeh, 2016).

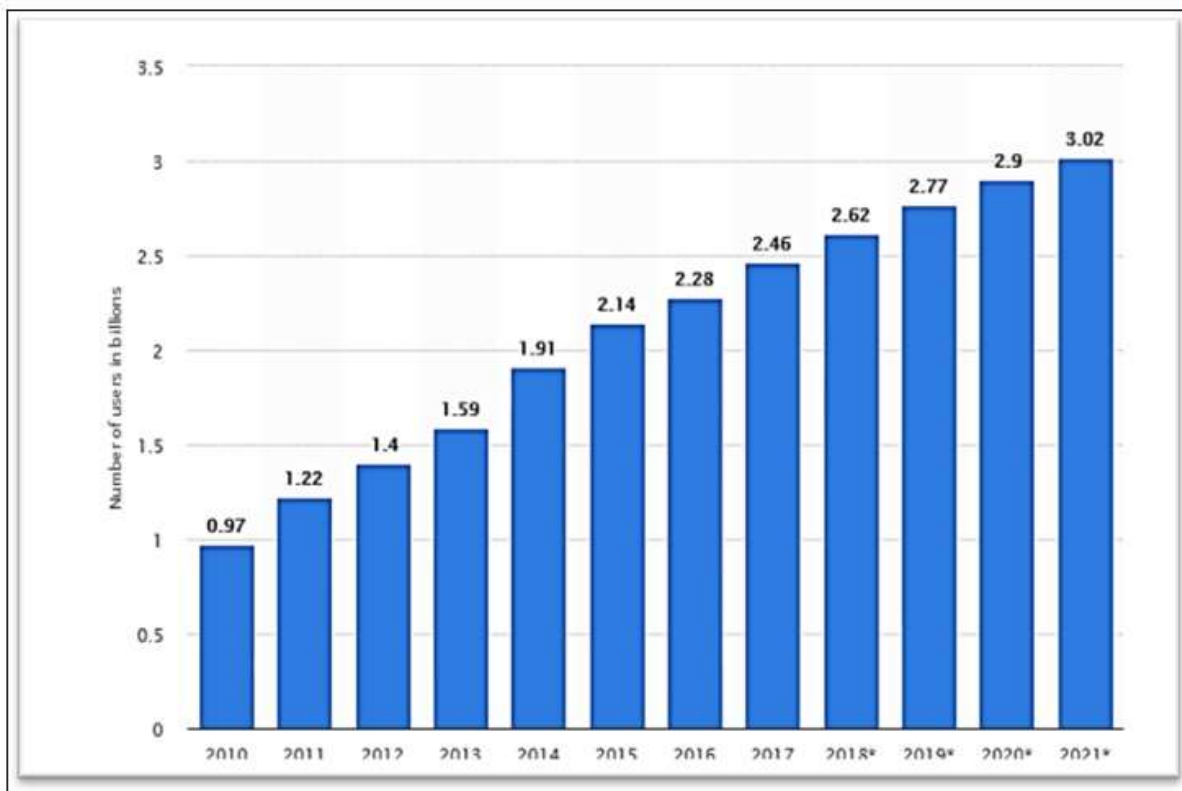


Figure 1. Number of social media users worldwide (from 2010 to 2021) (in billions) (The Statistics Portal, 2019)

According to Abd Al-sameem (2012), it is recommended to increase the efficiency of using social media platforms in tourism marketing for its many advantages. In their study, all respondents accepted the idea of using social media to promote tourism in Egypt. Social media platforms play an important role for consumers in providing travel information and services such as lists of hotels, maps, and tourist destinations (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Moreover, Miguéns, Baggio, and Costa (2008) confirmed the importance of social media platforms in promoting tourism destinations. According to that, managers in the tourism sector need to recognize this important role; and thus, make extra efforts to develop their usage of interactive technologies in order to improve their position in the market.

Online WOM and Reviews

WOM is the most-represented topic in digital and social marketing research, which is unsurprising given the reliance consumers seem to have on socially sourced online information. A number of sub-themes were covered recently. First, an interesting set of articles considered linguistic properties of online WOM and/or reviews [20-27], generally showing how perceptions of reviews and how influential they are can depend on subtle language-based properties. For instance, Kronrod and Danziger [20] showed that figurative (vs. literal) language in online reviews positively affected consumer attitudes and choice for hedonic goods. Moore [21] considered explanatory language in online reviews, finding that whether consumers explained actions or reactions affected perceived review helpfulness. Hamilton et al. [22] considered negative WOM, finding that using softening language when conveying negative opinions (e.g., “I don’t want to be negative, but...”) increases perceived reviewer credibility and likability. Tang et al. [23] considered two kinds of neutral language, mixed (positive and negative) versus indifferent. They show that mixed neutral (vs. indifferent) WOM amplifies effects of WOM on purchasing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The digital/social media consumer behavior literature is fast-growing and largely focuses on phenomena that are practically relevant and theoretically interesting. Researchers have mostly considered how consumers use information (e.g., online WOM, reviews) available to them in digital/social media environments. Future research should continue this approach, although in a more expanded fashion. Consumers’ behaviors other than those related to online WOM/reviews should be considered, and other types of information found (and inferences made) in online environments should be considered. For example, it would be interesting to consider the complex interplay between transmitter, receiver, linguistic/content, and context factors when it comes to antecedents and consequences of online WOM. Another high-potential direction for future research is to consider how various kinds of digital environments (including social media and mobile) impact a wide variety of consumer outcomes, including psychological and economic constructs. Few articles have done this, though it is likely that a multitude of consumer outcomes are influenced by the digital environments in which they are increasingly situated. It is also possible that some adverse consequences may be detected, similar to Wilcox and Stephen’s [17] finding linking Facebook use to lower self-control. In addition to this, the ways that consumers physically interact (i.e., interface) with digital environments needs deeper exploration, given what Brasel and Gips [19] found in terms of feelings of endowment when using touch-based interfaces to shop. In studying the impacts of digital environments on consumers, it will also be necessary to consider longer-term responses because these effects may be subtle but cumulatively important. Thus, one-shot experimental studies should be complemented by longitudinal experiments and archival data capturing consumers’ digital exposures, online social interactions, and behaviors over time.

Finally, researchers should consider emerging important topics, particularly consumer privacy issues in the context of digital marketing and social media. Tucker [14] considered this to an extent, though a comprehensive understanding of how consumers think about their privacy, what they want to do to protect it, and how they value (or devalue) digital media services that protect (or not) privacy is still needed.

In conclusion, there has been much recent activity in the consumer behavior/psychology literature related to digital and social media marketing, and many important contributions to knowledge have been made. To move this literature forward, particularly given the fast-moving nature of digital settings, research that attempts to broaden our understandings of key phenomena, examines brand-new phenomena, and develops theories in an area that lacks an established theoretical base will be most valuable.

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