SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR:
A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS PERSPECTIVE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment

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By

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Abstract

The proliferation of social media platforms in recent years has precipitated a paradigm shift among consumers, as they become more proactive in their direct interactions with brands. Practitioners recognise the value of these interactions, and are endeavouring to build engagement through their social media content. However, despite recent research in this field, theoretically-based academic guidance on a strategic approach to developing engagement in new-media social networks remains limited. In addition, while the Uses and Gratifications theoretical perspective has long claimed that media users are motivated by a need to engage with content, it is unclear whether this perspective can explain the engagement of customers in a social media context.

This dissertation aims to advance existing knowledge on social media content types by examining the effect of informational, entertaining, remunerative and relational content on the engagement behaviour of social media users. A social media engagement behaviour (SMEB) construct is developed to provide a richer understanding of the nature of engagement behaviour in this context. This construct includes six discrete levels of behavioural intensity that recognise the positively- and negatively-valenced nature of engagement behaviour.

This study used *Facebook Insights* and *NCapture* to extract data from Facebook to provide insight into the actual behaviours of consumers using social media, rather than relying on self-reported data to examine the proposed hypotheses. Social media data was collected from twelve Australian wine brands, yielding a total of 2,236 social media posts. Quantitative content analysis (QCA), binary logistic regression, and Process moderation analysis were used to analyse the set of data and establish the significance of the hypothesised relationships.

The results show that the four social media content types have distinct and independent effects on SMEB, demonstrating the need to consider each individually. Supported by the notion of information overload, the results demonstrate that for each type of content, the positive relationship with SMEB only exists at lower levels of each content type. This demonstrates that the amount of content is an important consideration impacting on the resultant engagement behaviour. Minimal interaction effects among content types were found, which suggests that there is little benefit in designing social media content that attempts to simultaneously appeal to users' needs for information, entertainment, remuneration and relational interaction. The results also showed significant moderating effects of media richness, community size, and congruity of the social media content, which affect the relationships with SMEB.

This study contributes to our knowledge of engagement by exploring online engagement behaviour in greater depth and integrating specific levels and valence of behaviour into a singular construct. It extends the utility of Uses and Gratifications Theory in engagement research, demonstrating how this theory can be evolved to explore emerging media such as social networking sites. The study supports the need for the strategic design of social media content in business by linking specific types of content to different aspects of SMEB. In doing so, it provides guidance to managers on delivering social media content to enhance engagement among social media users.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree. I give consent to this copy of my thesis when deposited in the University Library being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Date: 23rd December, 2015

Publications

The following publications are based upon the research presented in this thesis, and may contain results and materials presented herein.

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., and Goodman, S. (forthcoming) “Social Media Engagement Behaviour: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective” *Journal of Strategic Marketing*.

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., and Fahy, J. (forthcoming) “Social Media Engagement: A Construct of Positively and Negatively Valenced Engagement Behaviours” in R. Brodie, L.Hollebeek and J.Conduit, (Eds.) *Customer Engagement: Contemporary Issues and Challenges.* Routledge.

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Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Goodman. S., and Fahy, J (forthcoming) “Facebook for Wine Brands: An Analysis of Strategies for Facebook Posts and User Engagement Actions” *Academy of Wine Business Research Conference*, Adelaide Australia.

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Key Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations

The definitions of selected terms are listed to provide clarity and to set certain terminologies for the context in which they were utilised in this thesis;

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): An approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centred approach to understanding mass communication. It assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. Rather, the audience participants have power over their media consumption and assume an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives (Severin & Tankard, 1997).

Social Networking Sites (SNS): Web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 210).

Social Media Content: Social media content in this thesis refers to the content of posts to users, made by brands via Facebook. This content is categorised into four types: informational, entertaining, remunerative and relational.

Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB): defined as “a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase” (van Doorn et al., 2010 p.254).

Social Media Engagement Behaviour (SMEB): Social media engagement behaviours go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a social media focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.

Positively-Valenced Social Media Engagement Behaviour: is reflected in favourable or affirmative user behaviours. This thesis categorises three positively-valenced social media engagement behaviours: consuming, contributing and creating.

Negatively-Valenced Social Media Engagement Behaviour: Negatively-valenced engagement behaviour is exhibited through unfavourable behaviours directed towards the brand (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). This thesis categorises two negatively-valenced engagement behaviours in the social media context: detaching and destructing.

Creating SMEB: Users engage with brands and other users by creating positively-valenced content on social media platforms. Creating epitomises a highly active level of SMEB. Creating users exhibit specific creating behaviours of knowledge seeking, sharing experiences, advocating, socialising, co-developing and affirming.

Contributing SMEB: Users contribute to existing content in social media platforms. Contributing users exhibit a moderate level of positively-valenced SMEB.

Consuming SMEB: Users passively consume content without any form of active reciprocation or contribution. Consuming users demonstrate a minimum level of positive, passive SMEB.

Dormant SMEB: A temporary state of inactive, passive engagement by users who may have previously interacted with the focal brand.

Detaching SMEB: Users take action to remove content of the brand appearing in their news-feed or equivalent home page. Detaching users exhibit a moderate level of negatively-valenced SMEB.

Destructing SMEB: Negative, active contributions to existing content on social media platforms are created by destructive users. Destructive users represent a highest level of negatively-active SMEB.

Facebook Insights: Facebook Insights is a tool provided to administrators of Facebook brand pages to enable high-level monitoring of the activities on the Facebook page. Facebook Insights allows administrators to download data concerning the performance of a social media post.

NCapture: NCapture is a web browser extension developed by QSR International. It allows researchers to quickly and easily capture content including web pages, online PDF’s and social media for analysis within NVivo 10.

Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA): This research follows Neuendorf’s (2002) approach to quantitative content analysis (QCA), suitable for this study due to its focus on summarising the quantitative analysis of messages. Content analysis is most commonly defined as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952).