GOSIP in Cyberspace: Conceptualization and Scale Development for General Online Social Interaction Propensity

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Abstract

The interactive nature of the Internet has boosted online communication for both social and business purposes. However, individual consumers differ in their predisposition to interact online with others. Whereas an impressive stream of research has investigated media interactivity, the existence of individual differences in the use of different online media, that is, differences in general online social interaction propensity, has so far received less research attention. An individual’s predisposition to interact online affects many important consumer behaviors, such as online engagement and participation. Thus, in this paper, we propose and conceptualize general online social interaction propensity as a trait-based individual difference that captures the differences between consumers in their predisposition to interact with others in an online environment. Based on eight studies, we develop and validate a scale for measuring general online social interaction propensity and demonstrate its usefulness in understanding diversity in levels of engagement and in predicting online interaction behaviors.

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Keywords: Scale development; General online social interaction propensity; Individual difference; Social media

Introduction

The global penetration of Internet technologies has profoundly changed the scope and boundaries of social and economic interactions. Currently, an estimated 2.4 billion users regularly access the Internet to find information, connect with others, entertain themselves and complete transactions, unconstrained by distances in time and space (IWS 2012). About 90% of these Internet users access social media, such as blogs (e.g., Huffington Post), online video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), online social networks (e.g., Facebook, MySpace), microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter), brand communities (e.g., Harley Davidson) and peer support communities (e.g., Microsoft support forums). These social media applications allow consumers to consume, create and exchange content, and organizations exploit interactive social media opportunities to engage consumers more effectively. Engaged consumers feel a stronger connection to the brand and/or firm (Calder and Malthouse 2008), are more likely to support viral marketing campaigns (Brodie et al. 2009), to participate in firms’ brand and fan communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005) and to provide feedback to firms for innovation (Kumar et al. 2010). At the same time, however, the distribution of participants in online environments is certainly skewed. There are some consumers who predominantly use social media sparingly, and avoid active engagement in social platforms (Daniels, Matiesanu, and Schatsky 2003). Despite these notable variations in people’s online behavior, research on individual differences with regards to online interaction behavior is scarce (Tremayne 2005, Wiertz and de Ruyter 2007).

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