

COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATION in SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Today, the internet has evolved into an instrument from which not only researchers but also ordinary people have great expectations. It offers easy access to information as well as entertainment and consumption opportunities. First, social networking sites started to become popular, then shopping websites gained widespread use, and thus social commerce began to rise. People started to search for others' experiences in websites before shopping. The internet has thus increasingly become a venue where people share their shopping experiences and preferences. A significant phenomenon of social commerce is perhaps more evident today than anything else in social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter. In this study, historical development and current situation of social commerce, in which small traders can participate alongside big commercial groups, are examined.

INTRODUCTION

The term "mass communication" was first used by Harold D. Laswell in the early 1940s in his studies on political power and propaganda. Mass communication is a product of mass society, which emerged as an outcome of industrialization and modernization (Mutlu, 1994:129-131). What makes the mass media unique is its limited and unidirectional nature (İlal, 1997:38). As newspaper, radio, television and cinema are the most effective social media, managing them or producing content for them require a significant economic power. The message is transferred from the source to the receiver in line with an approach. In this process of communication, the receiving audience never circulate their messages; or when they do, it is sent in a very slow and ineffective manner. The process of communication described so far is not regarded as valid today. With the transition from post-industrial to information society, strong hegemonies over the production and distribution of information have dissolved.

The concept of information society was first used by economist Fritz Machlup towards the end of the 1950s in his study evaluating the scope of the US economy in

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terms of producing and distributing information (Beginer, 2007:450). Today, possessing information and using it effectively is of utmost importance. Individuals, communities and organizations rise by using information. While factory production was important in the industrial society, what matters today is the information that leads to using a product. Computer technology was significant in the change in the direction of information society.

Means of communication have undergone social transformations throughout history. At the end of the Medieval Age, printing democratized the community of readers. In the 20th Century, radio and TV surpassed book and newspaper in terms of providing access to information. In the 1970s, computer technology along with microchips spread all over the industrial field. This technology penetrated into homes as personal computers began to be produced (Beginer, 2007:438).

As a result of the rapid advance of the computer technology, the internet has brought about a radical change in the world. Eric S. Raymond lists five mostly commerce-related myths that become widespread with the rise of the internet: widespread use of the internet by commercial enterprises, use of the internet in the field of information with entertainment content, popularity of making money through online shops, widespread internet journalism and education (Köse, 2007:275). The utilization of the internet by individuals and institutions has paved the way for the emergence of the concept of new media. The conventional form of communication has undergone a transformation. Inaccessible and expensive media as well as unidirectional communication are about to be things of the past.

METHOD AND PURPOSE

This study addresses social commerce, which emerged as a result of the combination of social media and electronic commerce. The literature on these fields was reviewed, and new media, electronic commerce and social media were examined. The idea that social commerce emerged after electronic commerce was articulated to social media was addressed. It was also aimed that people in virtual spaces are happy to lead virtual lives and perform their shopping activities, and also that they serve as mediators by helping the promotion of commercial products. These ideas are supported by benefiting from models of electronic commerce and psychology of social shopping.

NEW MEDIA

Although the concept of new media emerged in the 1970s, its scope has enlarged today embracing the internet and computer (Dilmen, 2007:115). Telecommunication, data transfer and mass communication have integrated and turned into a single medium. The internet is the most significant example of this integration. It is capable of distributing video, audio and written materials through a single channel; it makes mutual interaction possible; a significant portion of its content is created by both users and content providers; and it provides a greater degree of control over the production and selection of content (Aktaş, 2007:107-110). These features are regarded as the

differences of new media from conventional media. New media has transformed numerous fields from journalism to commerce. It is regarded as superior to conventional media. It offers vast opportunities to a large audience including those who got stuck in conventional media. Communication is now too fast to stay confined to television and radio.

In this new venue, e-commerce and social media have become significant. Behaviours of sellers and buyers have changed, and through social media people have rendered their lives online.

Production of the industrial society has been replaced today by consumption. The monitoring of consumer behaviours and consumption patterns has become an obligation, as they have unprecedented degrees of importance today (Dolgun, 2008:262). The fact that consumers who have transferred their lives into social media exhibit their habits and behaviours makes the monitoring of consumer behaviours easier. It seems highly attractive to exploit the opportunities provided by new media. It is not very surprising that e-commerce and social media have merged.

E-COMMERCE

Commerce emerged as a result of human beings' desire to meet their needs. People wanted to obtain what they did not have from others, and bartering served for this purpose. As commercial products flourished, the need for a common means of exchange arose and thus people started to use money. This way, commerce became easier and more widespread. As the means of transportation and communication advanced, commerce took its current shape (Altaş, 2010:3).

Phone, fax, television, internet and electronic payment can be regarded as instruments of e-commerce (Çak, 2002:45). The World Trade Organization defines electronic commerce as a type of industry where the activities of presenting, advertising, ordering, selling and marketing of goods and services are conducted over electronic networks (Kırçova, 2009:6). E-commerce is a very appropriate type of commerce for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Successful SMEs have gone beyond selling to a specific group and established global e-commerce connections that boost productivity and creativity (Altaş, 2010:9). Marketing techniques have been developed, costs have been decreased and organizations have been integrated to the global economy.

Commerce conducted online has advanced very rapidly. Over time, different models of electronic commerce have emerged in response to different needs.

Business to consumer (b2c)

Business to business (b2b)

Consumer to consumer (c2c)

Business to government (b2g)

Blogs, forums and social media tools

Business to consumer (b2c) e-commerce is the most known version of e-commerce. This model includes all online shops. They sell goods and services. They have different revenue items such as profits on sales, advertisement revenues and commissions. Websites of retail businesses, shopping clubs, group shopping sites, betting sites, travelling sites, lease and rental sites and price comparison sites fall under this model (Altaş, 2010:16-28).

Conventional shops are now capable of reaching large masses through websites. Moreover, online shops do not have business hours. The internet has also made it easier to create brands. Shopping clubs can rapidly finish stocks of conventional shops. These websites require membership. Members can recommend the website to their friends and thus earn prizes.

Business to business (b2b) e-commerce connects business processes of firms. Orders between suppliers and vendors are made online. This model also ensures the communication between them (Altaş, 2010:32).

Consumer to consumer (c2c) e-commerce is an electronic marketplace. It is the marketing of handmade products online (Altaş, 2010:34).

Business to government (b2g) e-commerce covers commercial activities between businesses and governments. Examples could be online government tenders or electronic sales of state supply offices (Altınışık, 2003:32).

Blogs, forums and social media tools became possible with web 2.0. They do not refer to a software; but instead, to a sum of techniques that makes possible the development of websites in which users also participate. For example, Wikipedia is an online dictionary on which everybody can make changes (Aslan, 2007:351-353). Examples could be blogs, micro-blogging (twitter), Wikis (What I Know Is), YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, del.icio.us, meebo, Facebook, and Google docs. Users can add content to these sites. They can create contents such as photos, videos and texts. With Web 2.0, the internet ceased to be a platform where only information is sought. Users can share visual, auditory and textual materials. Social media became possible with Web 2.0. With social media, ordinary people started to take part in the process of producing and distributing information. Social media will further improve e-commerce, as it will proceed to another phase by becoming integrated with e-commerce.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Communication and sharing form the basis of social media. People communicate through texts, pictures, video and audio materials. The contents of social media can be demonstrated under general headings as follows:

Blogs

Microblogs

RSS feeds

Social networks

Forums

Communication sites

Photo and video sharing sites

Social media consist of web-based services through which users create real or fake profiles and share with other users.

Websites that are defined as social media have common features. These sites have users independent from the broadcaster, who establishes the infrastructure and leaves the rest to users. Contents are created by users, who can share texts, comments, photos, video or audio files. Users are in constant interaction with each other. They can communicate either publicly or privately. They can access these sites whenever they want using different devices such as personal computers and mobile devices (Erdem, 2009:95-100).

Printing, telegram, wireless telegram, phone, radio and television have all brought about cultural changes. Today, the internet creates this cultural transformation. The term Millennial Generation (Generation Y) refers to the post-TV generation. Its members, who were born in the early 1980s, are users not of TV but of social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter (Hatipoğlu, 2009:1). Members of this generation grow up by exploring the ways of accessing information and services online in much easier ways. They can communicate and share with other people in much more entertaining ways. Therefore, consumers today can be accessed in venues other than television. In the consumption process, consumers take into consideration opinions and reviews found in social media. These reviews create a sense of confidence in prospective buyers. It is therefore impossible for producers to remain unresponsive to these online opinions.

In post-TV technologies, alternative and compensatory realities are offered. It is possible to experience pleasure and safety throughout the process of consumption. The real world can be abolished and then replaced by an alternative which is capable of responding to consumers' unlimited desires and fantasies (Robins, 1999:203). Users of social media are very powerful as they have the authority to create the content. A world is created in line with their desires for pleasure and confidence.

SOCIAL COMMERCE

Conventional stores firstly went online. Following this experience called e-commerce; electronic commerce went even further and coalesced with social media. These spaces where users of social media communicate with each other are reminiscent of conventional marketplaces. Producers and sellers attach great importance to this bidirectional process of communication in which consumers can like goods and services, comment on them and recommend them to others.

All sorts of information on social media tools related to consumers are highly valuable for businesses for growing and competing with others. Thus, surveillance becomes an important issue also for government institutions, intelligence services and

central authorities (Dolgun, 2008:262). Users who enter profile information on social media also publicize their everyday activities and states of minds. In other words, they provide important sources to be followed and constantly monitored for producers and sellers.

While consumers' information is recorded in databases, consumption patterns are also determined. In databases, all kinds of information from hobbies, to sexual orientations and religious beliefs can be found (Dolgun, 2008:264-266). Proponents of the virtual-techno-logical revolution speak as if there really is a new and alternative reality and try to seduce people into leaving the existing world and moving to this alternative space. They argue that we can easily overcome disappointment and frustration (Robins, 1999:143). This is what makes the virtual space attractive. Social media creates the illusion of creating alternative spaces. These spaces, which are regarded as more blissful, introduce people with similar preferences to one another and forms groups with people who have similar hobbies. Firms are not inattentive to these platforms where people gather. Embarking on marketing their products or services on social media, they created the concept of social commerce. Commerce has become social. People can influence potential customers by sharing their positive or negative observations and experiences. Social media can become a reference for products and businesses cannot remain indifferent to complaints.

Social media is an effective venue for sales and marketing. Here, brands can be promoted, products can be sold and customer affairs can be performed. The most powerful aspect of social media is that comments, photos and videos shared by different individuals are more effective than advertisements. Social media is a playground where brands are talked about, discussed and criticized. Virtual reality is the combination of the objectivity of the physical world and the unlimited and uncensored pleasure that is linked with dreams and imagination. Technology is supplied with fantasies of absolute power (Robbins, 1999:148). It is not surprising that individuals who think that they are in a free and uncensored environment prefer it over the real world for shopping. A video or a text shared on social media can be much more effective than an advertisement on conventional media. The generation that grew up in the era of post-TV communication benefits from the experiences of other users or friends who produce content in a platform in which everyone can participate. Grades, 'likes' or comments given to a product or service on social media give confidence to potential customers.

It could be argued that the internet represents the biggest cultural change after printing. It has clearly transformed ways of doing business. Money goes to where people are. Then, it is Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr or Twitter. Advertisers now exploit these venues. Radio, TV, newspaper and magazine are retreating in the face of the advance of the virtual space (Vaynerchuk, 2009:5-6).

Social networks make it possible to create a brand without needing to use TV, cinema, radio, magazine or newspaper. It is possible via the internet to accomplish this with much lower cost and without needing to receive anyone's approval. Although

word-of mouth marketing is an old business, it can cover a much larger area today (Vaynerchuk, 2009:19-23).

SOCIAL COMMERCE TOOLS

Blogs are the venues where producers or sellers can describe the essence of their brands, publish short or long texts, and upload photos or videos. Blogs are regarded as a necessity for the brand's promotion even though they have an e-commerce website. Blogs can be socially shared by users through links such as stumble upon, digg, Facebook and e-mail this (Vaynerchuk, 2009:33).

Opening a Facebook fan page facilitates the efforts of businesses. Consumers can easily subscribe to these pages. Twitter is seen as the strongest brand development tool. It is suitable to mobile systems as short texts shared on it can easily be followed on mobile devices. Sector leaders announce to the world what they are doing and planning. Besides, firms can instantly respond to the complaints of their customers (Vaynerchuk, 2009:37-38).

Twitter, Facebook and other social networking websites enable entrepreneurs and firms to closely monitor their customers' opinions on them. Twitter can also be used as a tool of development. Entrepreneurs get their followers' opinions by asking questions. A question sometimes initiates a conversation. While Google or YouTube are unidirectional, Twitter is bidirectional. It seems to be stronger in terms of helping attain commercial targets, which can be published on Twitter and then followers' responses can be obtained. It can also be used to invite followers to the entrepreneur's blog. The entrepreneur can search and find appropriate people on Twitter and then initiate word-of-mouth marketing by sending tweets accordingly (Vaynerchuk, 2009:38-39).

Producers can attract attention by sharing photos of their products in photo sharing websites such as Flickr. Such websites include comments alongside photos. They can also be informative about vacation destinations or places to visit. Customers influence enterprises by sharing photos and leaving positive or negative comments. Similarly, videos shared by customers create the same effect. The power of word-of-mouth marketing continues today on social media thanks to photos and videos (Vaynerchuk, 2009:40).

As an example of changing methods of advertising and commerce, we witness viral videos today on video sharing sites. The aim in videos is to appeal to a high number of viewers in a short time. Viral videos rapidly become popular on social networking websites. They are entertaining advertisement videos that attract viewers' attention, inform and excite them (Burgess, 2008). In such videos, amateur shooting techniques and actors are employed. The name of the advertised brand is not emphasized, or not used at all. Such videos can be produced by firms as well as by customers. These videos have become very significant in social media as a type of advertisement that is influential and realistic.

Being successful in social commerce is directly linked with correctly using social media. It is not enough only to have a high number of followers. What really matters is keeping the relations with followers alive.

The ability to start the conversation forms the basis of creating an audience. A blog or a video should be prepared first, then topics of discussion on social networks should be studied, and then crowd-pulling comments should be left to relevant topics. If the entrepreneur succeeds in drawing people's attention, then these people will get curious also about the blog (Vaynerchuk, 2009:52).

PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL SHOPPING

Influence and the psychology of persuasion can be regarded as a good point of departure for making sense of the psychology of social shopping. This psychology is deliberately performed by people who specialized in social commerce.

Techniques of persuasion and influence are examined under the following six categories in **Cialdini's** book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*: reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof, like, authority and scarcity (Cialdini, 2006). Reciprocity refers to people's tendency towards returning favours. It is assumed that people's statements reflect the reality, and people have a deep desire to be consistent. What others do and say earn people's trust as social proof. We are more likely to like and to be influenced by others who are familiar or similar to us, as we feel close to them and would like to have what they have. Individuals with knowledge and experience have authority in the eyes of others. They are respected as experts. Things are always regarded by people as more attractive and precious when their availability is limited.

When we apply the psychology of shopping to social commerce, we see many social commerce tools. The plenitude of social commerce practices in which psychology of shopping is applied requires a separate research article. It seems more appropriate, also physically, to examine it in headings.

The psychology of shopping underlies social shopping websites. Upon this foundation, six social shopping strategies have been developed (Marsden, 2009).

The proof strategy

The authority strategy

The scarcity strategy

The liking strategy

The consistency strategy

The reciprocity strategy

Social proof (follow the crowd) refers to people's tendency to follow what others' do especially when they feel uncertain, Popular lists and lists with most comments on shopping websites, comments on social media, and systems of social recommendation can be shown as examples of this strategy.

Authority (follow the authority) is naturally taken into consideration by people in the shopping process. Prominent members of shopping websites and forum users in a certain area of interest are regarded as authorities.

Scarcity always brings about value. It creates a fear of losing what we have in the face of the limited product. Examples could be short term discounts and opportunities that are announced to only a limited number of people.

Liking means social trust. People tend to follow people with similar views. They also tend to follow whom they admire. Twitter and Facebook are the venues where people can follow whom they like.

Consistency makes people feel better. Social media comments and forums or websites where questions can be asked prevent suspicions.

Reciprocity enables people to share opportunities. Human beings tend to return favours. People return the favour by publicizing discounts or opportunities on social media. An example could be the users of shopping clubs who publicize the opportunities on social media.

CONCLUSION

Tools based on the unidirectional mode of communication are now retreating in the face of the advance of social media. In the bidirectional process of communication, the audience can also produce content and draw the attention of firms that used to be inaccessible. Today, we can speak of post-TV communication. Members of this generation produce content, shop and communicate online rather than watching TV. These venues where people gather and establish social relationships have attracted the attention of commercial parties. Entrepreneurs act according to the idea that money goes to where people are.

Electronic stores are seen as the first phase of social commerce. It has integrated itself into the social media. For instance, the term F-commerce (Facebook commerce) is now used as an expression. It manifests itself through firms' opening of Facebook pages. Other examples could be advertisements that appear on certain Facebook pages according to areas of interest or sharing of discounts or opportunities by Facebook users. For example, the worldwide retail corporation Walmart uses Facebook in the form of local stores and sells its products at the local level through Facebook.

Social media is an appropriate venue not only for selling but also for advertising goods and services. It functions with the power of word-of-mouth marketing. People who tell each other about brands or special discounts constitute big advertising campaigns. Especially viral videos have the capacity to become popular quickly and even to be covered in prime-time news bulletins on TVs. They are produced at a very low cost. What makes these videos striking is that sometimes consumers can be the producers of them. On the other hand, sometimes TV commercials become much more popular as people talk about them on social media. Also, a good TV commercial can sometimes be re-shot by an amateur consumer with a humorous language, and then the

product enters the social media. Video sharing websites or social networks can also become means of advertisement through users' special videos. Positive comments left under photos of a hotel or a holiday camp become much more influential than conventional advertisements.

Firms cannot shut their ears to consumers' complaints, they use social media as a field of advertising, and they bring customer services into social media. Today, social media experts are seen as a necessity for firms. It is an obligation to attend to comments and questions related to the firm shared on Facebook or Twitter. Firms also have to attract followers or subscribers.

Consumers now learn about products through word-of-mouth marketing. This process is reminiscent of conversations taking place in the marketplace of a small village where everybody knows each other. A consumer can promote a product that he has bought very easily, and he can compare the prices of items using price scanning websites.

Commercial activities now take place in a virtual field, where people gather and create blissful lives for themselves using the power of technology. Besides, shopping is safer in this virtual world. Comments on products, price comparison websites or easy access to the producer/seller creates a feeling of confidence.

Firms that are unable to access conventional media can carve out spaces for themselves on social media. Brand development has become systematized and firms have learned how to use social media tools professionally. Psychology of shopping helps them as well. Existing brands could not resist to innovations. They now can advertise at lower costs and earn consumers' trust more easily.

Social media is essentially a commercial enterprise. However, a great majority of those who produce commercial content in this field are consumers. We now witness a hitherto unseen chain of commercial relations. While the conventional media and its methods are becoming increasingly less effective, methods that are developed on social media in line with consumer psychology and behaviours are bringing a new dimension to commerce.

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