

Social Media Perceptions on In-Group and Out-of-Group eWOM Interactions among Adolescents in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the relationship between motivation drivers, social media perception and eWOM behaviour. A social network paradigm and a human-computer interaction concept is used to predict the type of eWOM, whether as an in-group or out-of-group. The study used a cross-sectional quantitative survey to test the hypotheses. A convenient sampling method was used to recruit 158 respondents, aged between 18 and 25 years, who were social media users. Data was analysed using a regression analysis. Mood enhancement was found as a significant predictor for experiential learning and escapism. Escapism in turn was found to be a significant predictor for social interactions. Both experiential learning and social interactions were discovered to be significant predictors for all social media perceptions: openness, participation, connectedness, conversationality, and commonality. Only social media perceptions, openness, and connectedness were found to be significant predictors for eWOM, for in-group and out-of-group. Social media motivation drivers that promote learning and social interactions can be used to make social media users proactive in engaging with the brand. The underlying social media motivation drivers create social media perceptions that demand the need for social media to be creative, adaptable, and sociable.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth, in-group and out-of-group, motivation drivers, social media, social network

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital connectivity, the Internet has become an essential medium for most forms of communication. The traditional distant communication is being replaced by

internet-based communication. The social media platforms which function as the main interface for internet-based communication have become heavily used. Social media users create a perception about social media as part of their process to understand it. As it is directed to fulfil certain desires, these perceptions also influence the behaviour of using social media users.

Social Network

The term network refers to a set of factors with lines of connections (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). In this context, a social network is a concept where social structures are networks, where individuals are dots that are inter-connected by lines of relationships.

The social network paradigm is useful in explaining eWOM, especially because strong ties are often established for in-group communication, while weak ties connect different group clusters through out-of-group communication (Abrantes, Seabra, Lages, & Jayawardhena, 2013). This is useful in explaining the pattern of spread of information pattern in whole populations.

Social Media

Social media platforms are diverse and fast evolving making it hard to find a consensus on its definition (Chan-Olmsted, Cho, & Lee, 2013). Mayfield (2008) proposed five social media characteristics - participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. These characteristics were used by Chan-Olmsted et al. (2013) to create a construct of the perception of social media.

Chan-Olmsted et al. (2013) measurement tool for gauging social media perception is adopted in this study.

E-WOM

Marketing has been integrating eWOM as part of customer relationship management (CRM). Social networks (SNs) have asynchronous and connective characteristics that enable the influence of weak ties with external communities (Chu & Kim, 2011). As a part of SNs, eWOM are persistent and accessible and thereby highly effective compared with traditional communication (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). Therefore, it is important to study social groups in the digital world, something rarely discussed in literature as many are focused on the well accepted influence of strong ties.

Problem Statement

The importance of electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM, as a strong marketing tool, has been well acknowledged. However, there are few studies on the mechanism of how the differing social media platforms influence eWOM behaviour. Although previous studies have focused on the gratification of one kind of social media, research on comparing different social media is still limited (Gan & Wang, 2015). The current study focuses on users' demographics. The social media platforms, as the medium of digital social communication, certainly are influential in the behaviour of eWOM (Gunawan, Diana, Muchardie, & Sitinjak, 2016). Digital programs influence behaviour

through the interactions between its interface and the psychological factors of the users (Dix, Finlay, Abowad, & Beale, 2005). The focus group discussion conducted in this research also indicates different uses of social media platforms based on the interactions of in-group and out-of-group, as particular social media can be perceived as more convenient or intimate for certain social interactions.

Research Questions

The usage of the social network paradigm is essential in designing a marketing plan to create the desired eWOM type, between in-group and out-of-group. This research examines the relationship between the social network concept and social media platforms; hence several research questions were raised: 1) Does experiential learning as a social media usage driver influence the perceptions of social media platforms? 2) Does social interaction as the social media usage driver influence the perceptions of social media platforms? 3) Which social media perceptions significantly contribute to in-group eWOM? 4) Which social media perceptions significantly contribute to out-of-group eWOM?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Usage Motivation

One study adopted the uses and the gratification theory in its construct development (Abrantes et al., 2013). This is applicable because the Internet can be considered as a form of media.

Mood Enhancement

Humans have a certain optimal level of arousal that induces pleasure, while over-arousal and under-arousal is unpleasant (Litman, 2005). Under-arousal is often referred to as an emotional state of boredom. This is the reason that information seeking behaviour is part of human nature. A learning experience has intrinsic incentives, driving the general behaviour of learning. Information seeking is also part of the reason that drive people to use social media (Gangadharbatla, 2009). Social media facilitates the process of information seeking by giving access to information held by other people. This finding is supported by Parker and Plank (2000), who identified the desire for learning as a motivation of Internet usage. This justifies experiential learning as a mechanism to enhance the mood that drives social media usage. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media's use for mood enhancement is positively related to experiential learning.

On the other hand, over-arousal will create a motivation to decrease the source of stimulation. Thus, this will become an avoidance behavior or escapism. Escapism is a psychological state where people escape from their existing concerns and responsibilities (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004). Meanwhile, the Internet as a media has the gratification of relaxation (Parker & Plank, 2000). Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) identified the internet as having content gratification for its entertainment

value. Based on its uses and the gratification theory, users who need escapism will use the internet to obtain gratification. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Social media's use for mood enhancement is positively related to escapism.

Escapism

Maintaining relationships through social interactions is part of the driver of social media usage (Gangadharbatla, 2009). Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe and Sanz-Blas (2014) reported networks are seen by social media users as a diversion and a source of fun. Parker and Plank (2000) also identified the Internet as being used to fulfil the need for socialisation. The existence of the Internet as a form of escapism allows users to extend the social networks of the users (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Social media's use for escapism is positively related to social interactions.

Experiential Learning

Social media facilitates social learning by observing others and via active feedback between users (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012), both of which correspond with reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation in experiential learning. A social media platform is a medium of experiential learning. These perceptions are meta-models of the users regarding the social media platform. Consequently, these meta-

models are subjective perceptions about the social media based on an evaluation of the user's experience of the users. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social media's use for experiential learning is positively related to social media's perception of openness, participation, connectedness, conversationality, and commonality.

Social Interactions

The social interactions that occur in the platform can lead to certain perceptions of the social media through the transfer of attributions. Fischer and Reuber (2010) argued that social interactions via social media can trigger effectual thinking, which influences decision making under uncertainty. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Social media's use for social interactions is positively related to its perception of openness, participation, connectedness, conversationality, and commonality.

Social Media's Perception and E-WOM

As an Interface of users' experiences, social media limits the behaviours of its users through its functionality.

E-WOM greatly influences purchasing decisions and is more effective than traditional marketing efforts (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008). In a social network, the actors are people, where their ties represent their social behaviours and relationships. There are many types of ties,

such as target of trust, mutual conflict, or perceived intimacy. This allows for the classification of the ties based on their strength, strong and weak ties (Abrantes et al., 2013). A combination of strong ties weak ties in a social network is important to explain the diffusion of information between members of social groups and further in-between social groups, making information spread to the whole social segment (Abrantes et al., 2013; Gravanotter, 1973). From a marketing perspective, social ties can be used to explain its influence in WOM referral behaviour (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

The-WOM can be categorised into two types: in-group e-WOM and out-of-group e-WOM. Strong ties are often created within an in-group. This includes people with immediate frequent contact such as family members, close friends, and colleagues (Abrantes et al., 2013; Gravanotter 1973). A strong relationship is required for participation in a social network because it necessitates a high commitment (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Thelwall (2009) argues that one of the purposes of social networking sites is to revive existing relationships in real life through the digital world. This indicates communication within an in-group might be the main form of online communication.

On the other hand, weak ties happen with people who are rarely contacted, indicating out-of-group communication (Abrantes et al., 2013). Granovetter (1976) highlighted the importance of weak ties in offering access to information and resources

because of the different backgrounds of social actors.

Openness

Social media is open to feedback and participation with a lack of barriers to access and use its content (Mayfield, 2008). Myers, Knox, Pawlowski and Ropog (1999) pointed out that open communication can become ego-threatening, making the communication differ between the type of audience, dependent on the purpose and strength of the relationship. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

H6: The social media perception of openness is positively related to in-group and out-group eWOM.

Participation

According to Mayfield (2008), contributions and feedback are encouraged in social media that blur the distinction between the media and audience. He further argued that a strong relationship is necessary for participation because of its requirement of involvement. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H7: The social media perception of participation is positively related to in-group and out-of-group eWOM.

Connectedness

A social group in real life also transfers itself to the digital world, and many social media groups offer features to find those existing social contacts. Some social media are focused on the networking functionality,

which make them dependent on it (Thelwall, 2009). This feature is also in accordance with users' motivation to use social media as a means for maintaining or improving social relationships (Dholakia et al., 2004). Thus, it can be hypothesised that:

H8: The social media perception of connectedness is positively related to in-group and out-of-group eWOM.

Conversationality

Social media has the characteristic of two-way communication that is different from traditional media (Mayfield, 2008). The high Internet connectivity allows users to connect and interact with multiple people that is physically inconvenient for interactions through other methods of communication. Henceforth, it can be hypothesised that:

H9: The social media perception of conversationality is positively related to in-group and out-of-group eWOM.

Commonality

Users with a common interest become a community because social media facilitate its quick formation and effective communication (Mayfield, 2008). Commonality or a shared background is often the basis of relationships and therefore, social interactions. People with

similar backgrounds often have clusters of social groups that easily become in-groups. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H10: The social media perception of commonality is positively related to in-group and out-of-group eWOM.

Research Design

This is a descriptive research using a quantitative method. The survey was conducted for two weeks, from 16th December 2016 until 29th December 2016. The questionnaire consisted of 56 items adapted from original studies (Abrantes et al., 2013; Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). The respondents of this research are university students in Jakarta, aged between 18 and 25 years.

The self-administered questionnaire was distributed both digitally and physically through convenient sampling. The platform of Google Docs for Google Form was used to post the questionnaire online. A total of 195 responses was collected - 120 coming from physical questionnaires and 75 from online questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of data analysis are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Simple linear regression

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R ²	β	Sig.	Acceptable Alpha	Conclusion
Experiential learning	Constant	0.267	2.301	0.000	0.05	-
	Mood enhancement		0.527	0.000		H1: Supported
Escapism	Constant	0.131	2.018	0.000		-
	Mood enhancement		0.495	0.000		H2: Supported
Social interaction	Constant	0.225	2.410	0.000		-
	Escapism		0.449	0.000		H3: Supported

Table 2
Multiple linear regressions

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R ²	β	Sig.	Acceptable Alpha	Conclusion
Openness	Constant	0.283	1.779	0.000	0.05	-
	Experiential Learning		0.318	0.000		H4a: Supported
	Social Interaction		0.282	0.000		H5a: Supported
Participation	Constant	0.305	1.308	0.002		-
	Experiential Learning		0.293	0.001		H4b: Supported
	Social Interaction		0.393	0.000		H5b: Supported
Connectedness	Constant	0.481	1.496	0.000		-
	Experiential Learning		0.136	0.043		H4c: Supported
	Social Interaction		0.535	0.000		H5c: Supported
Conversationality	Constant	0.387	1.516	0.000		-
	Experiential Learning		0.273	0.000		H4d: Supported
	Social Interaction		0.366	0.000		H5d: Supported
Commonality	Constant	0.365	1.720	0.000		-
	Experiential Learning		0.226	0.002		H4e: Supported
	Social Interaction		0.387	0.000		H5e: Supported

Table 2 (continue)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R ²	β	Sig.	Acceptable Alpha	Conclusion
EWOM in-group	Constant	0.252	1.613	0.00	0.05	-
	Openness		0.286	0.016		H6a: Supported
	Participation		0.124	0.249		H7a: Not supported
	Connected-ness		0.383	0.001		H8a: Supported
	Conversationality		-0.259	0.105		H9a: Not supported
	Commonality		0.091	0.502		H10a: Not supported
EWOM out-of-group	Constant	0.356	1.148	0.003		-
	Openness		0.289	0.006		H6b: Supported
	Participation		0.187	0.052		H7b: Not supported
	Connected-ness		0.355	0.001		H8b: Supported
	Conversationality		-0.067	0.636		H9b: Not supported
	Commonality		-0.037	0.759		H10b: Not supported

Every hypothesis related to social media motivation was supported (H1-H3). The relationships between social media motivation drivers and the social media platforms were also all supported (H4 and H5). Meanwhile, the only relationships between social media perception and eWOM (in-group and out-of-group) were for social media perceptions of openness (H6) and connectedness (H8).

CONCLUSION

RQ 1: Does experiential learning via social media influence the perceptions of social media platforms?

Mood enhancement was found as a significant predictor for experiential learning. This suggests that users are motivated to seek experiential learning, because their hedonistic values will always seek to improve their mood, and experiential

learning can fulfil that desire. This finding is also consistent with Abrantes et al. (2013).

The findings show that experiential learning contributes to all social media perceptions discussed: openness, participation, connectedness, conversationality, and commonality. This suggests that the experience of learning in social media affects the way users perceive social media.

RQ 2: Does social interaction influence the perceptions of social media platforms?

The findings suggest that significant relationships exist between escapism and mood enhancement. Hence, escapism can be seen as a means to enhance the mood of Internet users. Escapism was also found as a significant predictor of social interactions. Consequently, users will seek

social interactions to enhance their moods. This also confirmed the result of previous research by Abrantes et al. (2013).

A multiple regression analysis for social interactions as a predictor for social media perceptions found it to be a significant predictor for them, which are openness, participation, connectedness, conversationality, and commonality. This suggests that the process of socially interacting with other users in social media affects the perception of social media. This can be important for social media platforms because the behaviour of some users can make other users also associate such behavior with the social media.

RQ 3: Which social media perceptions significantly contribute to in-group eWOM?

The social media perceptions found to be significant predictors of the eWOM in-group are openness and connectedness. The other perceptions of participation, conversationality, and commonality are not found to be significant in the research.

RQ 4: Which social media perceptions significantly contribute to out-of-group eWOM?

Similar with eWOM in-group, the social media perceptions that significantly contribute to eWOM out-of-group are openness and connectedness. This might suggest that social media users do not

treat in-group and out-of-group in terms of eWOM behaviour.

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