To Study the Consumer Perceptions towards Building Self-motivation through Various Online Marketing Strategies

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Abstract Marketers have long understood that consumers' self-concepts influence the products they purchase; conversely, products purchased influence people's self-concepts. Using the symbolic interactionist perspective of identity theory, this study empirically tests the proposition that online consumers use electronic word of mouth, and specifically the sharing of online advertising, to construct and express their self-concepts. The results suggest that self-brand congruity, entertainment value, and product category involvement increase the self-expressiveness of online ads, which then increase the likelihood of sharing those ads. These findings have both theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords: Viral marketing, Electronic word of mouth, Online Marketing, Consumer Behaviour

1. Introduction

This study suggests an additional motivation for sharing messages: to express a sense of identity. Marketers have long understood that consumers purchase products not just for their practical or utilitarian benefits but also for their symbolic value. Driving a Porsche, carrying a Coach bag, or using a Macintosh computer all express something about the consumer's own image which in turn motivates the consumer to purchase them. This study proposes that a similar phenomenon exists for electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Consumers should be more likely to share advertising that is consistent with their self-concept or how they see themselves. An online experiment examines whether consumers' likelihood to share an online ad depends on the extent to which the ad expresses their own images, and the results suggest that consumers are indeed more likely to share ads that express their self-concepts. In addition, the extent to which the ad expresses self-concepts depends on the similarity between the brand image and the self-image, the importance of the product category to the consumer, and how entertaining the consumer finds the ad. Consumers believe that

what they find says something about who they are, which affects the likelihood that they share that entertaining content. Advertisers should consider the symbolic and self-expressive properties of their online ads and match them to targeted consumers' self-concepts. Internet-based social media and communication network shave supercharged the power of word of mouth (WOM).Consumer-to-consumer WOM has long been recognized as a promotional technique with strong influences on purchase decisions, primarily because WOM communications seem more trustworthy and reliable (e.g., Arndt 2011; Bayus 2013;Dichter 2013; Engle, Kegerreis, and Blackwell 2013; Richins 2015). However, the speed and global reach of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) communications provide marketers with a means to transcend the effectiveness of traditional WOM. When initiating eWOM, consumers can communicate with multiple receivers simultaneously through e-mail, microblogging media, instant messaging, or social networking sites; they also can transmit advertising messages, such as website links, videos, or games. An advertiser can distribute content to select recipients, who then will forward the message to multiple recipients in their network (friends, family, co-workers), who in turn forward the content to larger multiples of recipients. Thus, advertising content can spread quickly and exponentially from a handful of recipients to millions of consumers, prompting the moniker "viral marketing" (Watts and Peretti 2016). Viral replication remains a hit-or-miss proposition though; for all of the hype and discussion surrounding it, the keys to successful execution remain unknown (Eccleston and Griseri 2008). For both practitioners and academics, identifying the factors that motivate consumers to share online advertisements is important steps in understanding why some ads go viral while others do not.

We instead approach self-enhancement motives for forwarding online advertising messages from a new perspective. Focusing on ads designed to entertain; we propose that consumers share ads to

express their sense of identity, as well as to share the hedonic experience. The clothes consumers wear, the cars they drive, and brands they seek out reflect their self-image. We posit that self-image similarly influences the online ads consumers deem entertaining enough to forward. Using an analysis of motivations related to self-expression, we propose that consumers use viral ads to represent their identity to others. Specifically, we describe, model, and empirically test a process by which consumers extract self-enhancement from online ads, according to the degree to which the ads are congruent with their perceptions of themselves. Advertising that consumers perceive as able to communicate this self-perception is more likely to be forwarded, such that consumers' self-concepts exert a strong influence on their forwarding behaviors. Self-Enhancement and Consumption the concept of the self refers to a schema that organizes self referent memories and guides the processing and categorization of self-referent information (Kihlstrom and Cantor 1983; Markus 1977, 1980; Nasby 1985, 1989). The self is "an abstract representation of past experience with personal data" (Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker 1977, p. 677) that provides a framework for interpreting incoming data. It captures the totality of individual thoughts and feelings about themselves as objects (Rosenberg 1979). To reinforce a sense of self and express self-identities, consumer use possessions, products, and brands (Belk 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Levy 1959; McCracken 1986; Richins 1994a, 1994b), to which they assign meanings. When consumers perceive these meanings as consistent with their self-concepts, they transfer the meaning to their own identity (Levy 1959), using rituals. McCracken (1986) identifies four consumption rituals for transferring meaning: possession, exchange, grooming, and divestment. We focus on possession rituals, through which meaning gets transferred by the display of or discussion about the object. A transfer of meaning through a consumption display (i.e., public consumption of product or brand) is the focus of most marketing research in this area, though McCracken also considers discussion an effective means to transfer meaning.

This conceptualization suggests that people need not consume a product or brand to transfer its meaning. Rather, by discussing a product-for our study, sharing electronic brand- or product-related message-consumers may shift inherent meanings from the brand or product to their own images. We test this proposition according to the extent to which consumers perceive that sharing eWOM will express their identity to others, which then should be a determinant of their likelihood of sharing. Self-enhancement occurs when the consumer "believes the good he has purchased is recognized publicly and classified in a manner that supports and matches his self-concept" (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967, p. 25). The construct of selfexpressiveness expands on this idea; we can conceptualize a continuum along which an eWOM message is perceived as able to express the self. For this study, self-expressiveness is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive that an eWOM message supports and enacts their self-concept and will be recognized publicly as such.Extant literature suggests the symbolic value of a product can be transferred through consumption, in the form of private or public purchase, display, or use (e.g., Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Grubb and Hupp 1968; McCracken 1986). However, engaging in eWOM about the product may achieve the same transfer. The symbolic value of the product, message, or brand gets enacted through eWOM performance, rather than by purchasing or using the product. When consumers perceive that an eWOM message possesses some degree of self-expressiveness, they should be motivated to extract this value by sharing the message, to reinforce their identity or construct an identity closer to their ideal. Prior research into blogger behavior suggests that self expression motivates bloggers to post video blogs (Huang et al. 2007). Similarly, a study of offline WOM reveals that consumers are more likely to discuss products that are self relevant and communicate something about them (Chung and Darke 2006). Chu (2011) shows that college-age consumers are more likely to engage in viral activities when they are more prone to self-disclosure. Although not directly linked to viral activities, another study indicates that social identity affects consumers' likelihood to accept advertising (Zeng, Huang, and Dou 2009). Building on these findings, we propose that the self-expressiveness of advertising messages motivates consumers to share ads; that is, when self-expressiveness is high, consumers are more likely to share eWOM messages.

2. Research Method and Tools

H1: The self-expressiveness of an eWOM message has a direct positive effect on the likelihood that the message will be shared with others. For any brand, a consumer considers a complex set of associations that reflect the brand attributes, both product related (e.g., size, shape, quality, taste, smell) and non product-related (e.g., price, packaging, user/usage imagery), as well as functional, experiential, and symbolic benefits that consumers can derive from those attributes (Keller 1993). With entertainment-focused advertising,

product-related attributes and benefits that the customer associates with the brand are less important than non-product-related elements, especially symbolic associations. Therefore, we consider self brand congruity, or the match between the brand's value expressive attributes (i.e., product/user images) and the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy 1985). Consumers compare the imagery of a brand to their self-concept; the greater the congruity, the more positive their attitudes toward the brand. Self-brand congruity also exerts a powerful effect on attitudes and behaviors. For example, when it is high, brand relationship quality and brand loyalty increase (Kressmann et al. 2006), and the overall connection between the consumer and brand grows stronger (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Selfbrand congruity thus may have a dual influence on the likelihood to share eWOM messages. First, the bond between the consumer and the brand likely is stronger when self-brand congruity is higher, and because brand loyalty is stronger, the consumer's attitude toward the brand will be more positive. Various studies demonstrate the link between attitude and behavior (e.g., Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Logic and theory suggest self-brand congruity prompts more positive attitudes about the brand, and thus, people should be more likely to share the brand message.

We thus predict a direct relationship between self-brand congruity and the likelihood of sharing eWOM messages: H2a: The level of perceived congruity between the self and the brand has direct positive effects on the likelihood that the message will be shared. Second, Sirgy's (1985) definition of self-brand congruity measures the match between brand image and self-image, so greater self-brand congruity increases the self-expressiveness of the eWOM message. Recent studies support the notion of a dual effect. For example, Ahn and Bailenson (2011) present evidence that self-referencing ads provide a secondary mediating path between brand associations and purchase intentions. Building on this finding, we predict a secondary mediating role for self-expressiveness in the relationship between self-brand congruity and sharing likelihood: H2b: The level of perceived congruity between the self and the brand has direct positive effects on the self-expressiveness of the message.In brief, the perceived congruity of a brand with a self-concept should have a direct positive effect on the likelihood of sharingan eWOM message, as well as help increase the self-expressiveness of the eWOM message, resulting in a secondary indirect effect on sharing likelihood.

Entertainment Value: The entertainment value of a message reflects the extent to which an online advertisement provides pleasure, diversion, or amusement to consumers. Similar to self-brand congruity, an online message's entertainment value should exert a direct influence on likelihood to share, as well as an indirect influence mediated by self-enhancement value. The first effect is both intuitive and empirically supported. When consumers perceive online ads as entertaining, they are more likely to share the messages with others. Phelps and colleagues (2004) demonstrate that the most common motivation for passing along e-mail messages is entertainment or enjoyment. Dobele and colleagues (2007) also argue that emotional reactions (e.g., surprise, joy, anger, sadness, fear) are fundamental to forwarding behavior. Similarly, Porter and Golan (2006) find that titillating messages are likely to be forwarded, and Brown, Bhadury and Pope (2010) uncover similar results for comedic, violent ads. Such affective responses, ranging from joy and amusement to surprise and fear, all may be categorized as entertainment; for example, roller coasters, "freak shows," and "tearjerker" movies are all entertaining, though they provoke different emotional responses.

Thus, we predict that online advertisements with higher entertainment value are more likely to be shared or forwarded: H3a: The entertainment value of the message has direct positive effects on the likelihood to share the message. The connection between entertainment value and self-enhancement value is less obvious; it requires consideration of the consumer's process of viewing and interpreting communications. According to the meaning approach of information processing (Lannon and Cooper 1983; McCracken 1987; Mick 1988; Mick and Buhl 1992), consumers construct meanings for communications on the basis of their unique world views. All advertisements are subjectively experienced, "amid the consumer's history (past, current, and projected) and sociocultural milieu" (Mick and Buhl 1992, p. 317). Interpreting any message entails concepts of "the self, of the family, of status, of nation, of world" (McCracken 1987, p. 121) Thus, a message's derived meaning, and any entertainment value the consumer receives from that message, is inexorably intertwined with the consumer's own identity.

Interpretations of and reactions to humor appeals, for example, are clearly affected by gender, ethnicity, national origin, personality, and social attitudes (Kelly and Paul 1975) H3b: The entertainment value of the message has direct positive effects on the self-expressiveness of the message.Product Category Involvement The consumer's level of involvement reflects the perceived personal importance attached to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of a good, service, or idea (Celsi and Olson 1988). Involvement may be situational, such as when replacing a product, or enduring, as when a consumer is committed to and concerned about a

product class (Richins and Bloch 2006) Consumer A is highly involved in the purchase of shoes and handbags; B is highly involved in the purchase of power tools and fishing equipment; and C's involvement centers on comic books and Star Wars memorabilia. Even without any information about these consumers' ages, genders, or socio-economic status, the indication of two high involvement conduct categories likely prompts a strong visualization of each consumer's identity. Thus, product category involvement also should directly affect the self-enhancement value of a message.

3. Research Design and Data Collection

We conducted the study among graduate students at a large renowned university in the Amity University. Student samples are often criticized, but college students are appropriate for this study for two reasons. First, they are highly representative of the at-large population of interest: Internet users likely to engage in eWOM. Second, student samples are comparatively homogeneous, which facilitates theory extraction and reduces Type II error compared with more heterogeneous samples (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1981). Participants, recruited from several marketing courses, received extra credit for participation. An online survey that took 15-20 minutes to complete collected the data. To ensure a natural setting, participants received a URL that they could visit at their leisure over a two-week period. Therefore, participants could access the survey from their home computer, mobile device, or with whatever method they typically use to go online. The students were randomly assigned one of three groups, each of which considered a different branded product and its online advertisement. From Ad Age's list of top viral videos during the study period, we selected three ads for brands and products that were likely to elicit different levels of product category involvement, self-brand congruity, and other constructs. Specifically, we chose: (1) a Lava mobile cell phone service ad featuring a "flash mob" dance at GIP Mall, Noida, (2) Mineral bottled water, with an ad featuring celebrities for brand endorsement and (3) Puma Shoes with an ad featuring cricketer Virat Kohli, accompanied by music. After reviewing the corresponding online and offline brands (Lava mobile, Mineral water, or Puma Shoes), the participants completed the self-brand congruity measure.

Next, the survey asked them about message content (i.e., entertainment and self-enhancement values). Finally, participants indicated their likelihood of sharing the viewed message with others. To test for possible confounding effects of

previous familiarity with the ads, respondents indicated whether they had seen the ad before and if they had previously shared the ad. Among the 643 responses, we obtained 615 usable observations. The sample demographics were as follows: 27% Female students and 73% Male students. This across was divided regionally 56.7% North Indian Male and female Students, 13.7% East Indian students, 13.5% North-East students, and 4.6% west, with 1% declining to answer. Age target had been millenial generation along with the generation Z, but the sample generally consisted of graduate students between the ages of 20 and 24 years. Brand and Description Screen Capture Mineral Water.

Table 1. Scales and measures

Likelihood to share online WOM (α = .96, AVE = 68.63, CR = .94)

Unlikely-likely .86
Improbable-probable .86
Probably would not-probably would .86
Definitely would not-definitely would .85
Nonexistent-existent .84
Impossible-possible .81
Uncertain-certain .71

Perception about online entertainment value (α = .96, AVE = 72.80, CR = .93)

This message is entertaining. .89
This message was fun. .88
This message was amusing. .84
I enjoyed this message. .83
This message was pleasant. .83
Self-expressiveness (α = .92, AVE = 76.48, CR = .93)
This message reflects who I consider myself to be. .83
This message reflects who I am. .80
Passing along this message would communicate who I am to other people. .79
This message is consistent with how I want to present myself to others. .77
I can identify with this message. .72
My reaction to this message would tell others something important about me. .68
Product category involvement (α = .91, AVE = 71.20, CR = .92)
In general, (product) is very important to me. .93
In general, (product) matters a lot to me. .92
In general, I have a strong interest in (product). .90
In general, (product) is very relevant to me. .87
I get bored when other people talk to me about (product). (R) .62
Self-brand congruity (α = .92, AVE = 73.02, CR = .92)
People who use this brand are like me. .90
I am very much like the typical person who uses this brand. .87
The image of this brand's users is consistent with how I see myself. .86
I can identify with people who use this brand. .86

Notes: a = Cronbach's alpha value; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability, and (R) = reversed item.

4. Results

To establish the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, we adopted the two-step procedure described by Anderson and Gerbing (2011). We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS Statistics 18.0; the constructs loaded cleanly on five factors, and the Cronbach's alpha values exceeded .90 for each scale. Next, with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using AMOS 20.0 software, we examined the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). For reliability, we noted the item and construct reliability (Peter 2011). All item loadings were significant (p < .001), and exceeded the recommended .60 parameter value.

Both CR and AVE values were well above the recommended thresholds of .60 and .50, respectively, indicating acceptable reliability (Bagozzi and Yi 2011). Furthermore, the CFA indicated an acceptable fit between the model and the data ($\chi2$ = 474, df = 309, root mean square error of approximation = .043, confirmatory fit index = .979). To assess discriminant validity, we also compared the square root of each construct against its correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker 2013). As we show in Table, the square root of AVE for each construct (on the diagonal) exceeded all correlations with other constructs. To test the hypotheses, we used structural equation modeling (SEM), which allows for the simultaneous examination of all paths, in the SPSS AMOS 20.0 software. As we show in Table3, the structural model offered satisfactory fit with the data ($\chi2$ = 716, df = 312, p < .001, CFI = .98, goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = .92, adjusted goodness-of-fit index [AGFI] = .91 RMSEA = .05). The relatively large R-square values for self-expressiveness (.45) and likelihood to share (.50) indicated that their respective antecedents accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in each construct. As expected, self-expressiveness had a significant positive effect on likelihood to share (standardized coefficient = .43, p < .001), in support of H1. We found significant direct and mediated, through self-enhancement value, effects on likelihood to share for involvement (direct coefficient = .08; indirect coefficient = .05; total effect = .12) and entertainment value (direct coefficient = .34; indirect coefficient = .20; total effect = .53), in support of H3. However, the direct relationship between selfbrand congruity and likelihood to share was insignificant direct coefficient = .03, p = .34), so we must reject H2a. Its effect appears totally mediated by self-enhancement value (indirect coefficient = .14), in support of H2b.

Table 3 : Summary of hypotheses tests

Casual Path	Est.	S.E	P value	Result
H1: Likelihood to share and express self	.42	.06	<.001	Supported
H2a: Likelihood to share and Brand Conguity	.03	.05	.339	Not Supported
H2b: Brand Conguity and Self Expressiveness	.34	.04	<.001	Supported
H3a: Likelihood to share and Online Entertainment Value	.34	.06	<.001	Supported
H3b: Online Entertainment Value and Self Expressiveness	.48	.04	<.001	Supported

To test whether familiarity with the ad affected any of these relationships, we conducted a multigroup analysis with AMOS. The sample split divided those who had previously seen the ad (n = 114) from those who had not (n = 501). We compared the models for each group using critical ratios, that is, the differences between the estimate of each path for the first group and the path estimate of the second group, divided by an estimate of the standard error of the difference. A critical ratio above 1.96 indicates a significant difference between the two path estimates. Only one path estimate was significant, namely, the relationship between product category involvement and likelihood to share (critical ratio = 2.15). The path was not significant (p = .404) for those who had seen the ad before, whereas the standardized path estimate for the group who had not seen the ad reached .167 (p < .001). Thus, previous viewership appears to moderate only the relationship between involvement and likelihood to share.

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