



ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

Consumers' Representations of Social Media

Jonathan Deschenes, HEC Montreal, Canada

Lana Jurdak, HEC Montreal, Canada

Sylvain Senecal, HEC Montreal, Canada

Existing literature exposes isolated pieces of information related to social media such as usage motivations and purchasing processes. A thorough understanding of how consumers experience the social media is missing. A ZMET analysis is performed with consumers in order to understand what social media represents to them.

[to cite]:

Jonathan Deschenes, Lana Jurdak, and Sylvain Senecal (2015) ,"Consumers' Representations of Social Media", in AP - Asia-Pacific Advances in Consumer Research Volume 11, eds. Echo Wen Wan and Meng Zhang, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 126-127.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1018945/volumes/ap11/AP-11>

[copyright notice]:

This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at <http://www.copyright.com/>.

Consumers' Representations of Social Media

Lana Jurdak, M.Sc. HEC Montreal
Jonathan Deschenes, PhD, HEC Montreal
Sylvain Senecal, PhD, HEC Montreal

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, social media has been studied by academics under different perspectives. They include topics such as the different degrees of usage of social networks (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2011), the relationship between personality traits and social media use (Özgüven and Mucan, 2013), the purchasing processes involving social media for specific activities such as travelling (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010), and social media engagement and its effect on online product purchase decision behaviors (Dhar and Jha, 2014). These studies contribute to our understanding of how consumers behave on or use social media but they generally overlook how consumers make sense of this universe.

In a general sense, some scholars have looked at the experience of the Internet and suggested that it can be used by consumers to extend one's identity and sense of self (Belk, 2013), present one's self to others (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Schlosser, 2005) and that it can be a source of freedom, information, empowerment or enslavement, fear and chaos (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh and Deschenes, 2009). However, to our knowledge, no academic research has studied how consumers experience the specificity of social media scape. As individuals' perceptions have not been studied by a thorough exploration, we still cannot fully comprehend how consumers understand these media that they navigate on a regular basis. Consequently, the goal of this paper is to provide a detailed account of what social media represents to consumers. It provides a fundamental exploration of social media, of how it is perceived by consumers, and of what it involves in their lives.

In order to do so, we explore the metaphors evoked by consumers to express their perceptions of social media. Metaphors shape the way individuals think and act (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Researchers use metaphors to analyze consumers' dialogue as they convey meaning easily (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh and Deschenes, 2009). For complex concepts in research, the process of eliciting metaphors is useful because it serves to represent a topic in its totality (Moser, 2000). Further, it helps to organize the data in a structural manner, give a new and creative perspective of analysis, and facilitates the emergence of deep feelings and emotions (Carpenter, 2008).

Method

The ZMET method was used in this research, a technique by which researchers elicit metaphors with the use of imagery to analyze consumers' discourse (Zaltman, 1997). Images allow unconscious feelings and emotions about a topic to emerge (Zaltman, 1997). Ten in-depth ZMET interviews lasting approximately two hours were conducted with consumers of social media.

Findings and Discussion

Findings highlight that consumers' representations of social media are complex and multi-faceted. Primarily, we observed that three deep metaphors (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008) are central to consumers' perceptions: the metaphors of *connection* (the important need to connect with others physically, socially, or mentally, to belong and form attachments), *control* (the unconscious motivation to control themselves, other people, and situations, yielding a sense of empowerment when exerting control, or a sense of disorientation when losing of control), and *resource* (use of intermediate instru-

ments to achieve goals). These three metaphors are further refined through the lenses of the spatial-temporal continuum represented by *space* (social media representing an open area that is penetrated and navigated), *time* (evolution of existence and events in the past, present, and future), and *speed* (rapidity of movement). Together, the three metaphors and the spatial-temporal continuum present a multi-dimensional understanding of consumers' representations of social media.

The union of metaphorical and spatial-temporal dimensions used in this research provides an original way of looking at how consumers experience different aspects of social media platforms. Researchers may advance studies about specific social media platforms combined with the dimensions of space, time, and speed, to enhance precision about consumers' experiences with social media. The findings are valuable to managers of numerous domains for the purpose of enhancing online platforms according to consumers' needs and wants, as well as for the implementation of new strategies which can improve the customers' online experiences.

REFERENCES

- Belk, Russell W. (2013), "Extended Self in a Digital World," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (October), 477-500.
- Carpenter, Jacquie (2008), "Metaphors in Qualitative Research: Shedding Light or Casting Shadows?" *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31 (3), 274-282.
- Dhar, Joydip, and Abhishek Kumar Jha (2014), "Analyzing Social Media Engagement and its Effect on Online Product Purchase Decision Behavior," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24 (7), 791-798.
- Hargittai, Eszter and Yu-li Patrick Hsieh (2011), "From Dabblers to Omnivores A Typology of Social Network Site," in Zizi Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites*, New York: Routledge, 146-168.
- Joy, Annamma, John F. Sherry Jr., Alladi Venkatesh and Jonathan Deschenes (2009), "Perceiving Images and Telling Tales: A Visual and Verbal Analysis of the Meaning of the Internet," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19 (3), 556-566.
- Lakoff, George and Marc Johnson (2003), *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago: University of Chicago press.
- Moser, Karin S. (2000), "Metaphor Analysis in Psychology-Method, Theory, and Fields of Application," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1 (2).
- Özgüven, Nihan and Burcu Mucan (2013), "The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Social Media Use," *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 41(3) 517-528.
- Schau, Hope Jensen and Mary C. Gilly (2003), "We Are What We Post? Self-Presentation In Personal Webpage," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (December), 385-404.
- Schlosser, Ann E (2005), "Posting versus Lurking: Communicating in a Multiple Audience Context," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (2), 260-265.
- Xiang, Zheng and Ulrike Gretzel (2010), "Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search," *Tourism management*, 31 (2), 179-188.

Zaltman, Gerald (1997), "Rethinking Market Research : Putting People Back In," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34 (4), 424-437.

Zaltman, Gerald and Lindsay H. Zaltman (2008), *Marketing Metaphoria: What deep metaphors reveal about the minds of consumers*, Boston: Harvard Business Press.