Technology-Based Communication Patterns of Youth

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This ongoing research explores consumption practices of young consumers in their use of technology. We used qualitative research methods and collected data from ten informants in California. Analysis reveals evolving communication patterns among young consumers. Key underlying motivation for use of communication mediums is guided by young consumers’ need for connectedness. Consumers select specific communication technologies depending on structural properties of a particular technology and level of intimacy in social relationships. We contribute to consumer research by illustrating the role of communication technologies in enabling different patterns of information exchange. These exchanges have implications for diffusion of product information.

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watchdogs’, campaigning about this type of fraud by educating their more naïve counterparts. This research is concerned with two key issues—firstly the question of what motivates certain consumers to set themselves up in this way and give their time (and often money) to aid in the education of consumers about purchasing on the internet, and secondly to assess how consumers in general react to such ‘watchdogs’ and to what extent they utilize these services.

The research is exploratory in nature, and is designed to be conducted in two distinct phases. A number of organizations (including ‘watchdog’ sites, online auction sites and regulatory bodies) have been identified to form the basis of the initial development of this research, with depth interviews to be conducted with individuals representing these organizations. The second phase of the research involves qualitative analysis of consumer responses to a number of watchdog sites and online auction chat forums. Responses will be content analysed to determine overall themes and a guidelines for the development of watchdog sites that disseminate brand specific anti-counterfeiting related information to consumers. It is hoped that in the future such sites may be adopted by large scale trading sites such as E-bay as a consumer information resource, allowing greater protection of consumer interests than is currently provided.

References:

URLs:
http://www.mypoupette.com

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Extended Abstract
This paper explores the consumption practices of young consumers in relation to their use of technology. We seek to understand the use of communication technologies, the underlying motivations for these uses and how young consumers select these communication technologies.

Consumer researchers have studied consumer practices and experiences centered on technological products. Specifically, scholars have considered various aspects of technology consumption such as use-diffusion of technology (Shih and Venkatesh 2004), consumer self-presentation through websites (Schau and Gilly 2004), disappointment in consumer technology (Thompson 1994), paradoxes of technology (Mick and Fournier 1998), and intimate self-disclosure via computers (Moon 2000). Whereas the focus of most of these studies has been on adults, our study focuses on young consumers.

There are two main reasons for our focus on young consumers. First, technology occupies a central position in the lives of these consumers. They have grown up with technology such as television, video, arcade games and CD players (Sefton-Green 1998). These technologies form a ubiquitous part of their cultural environment (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 2001, Pearce and Mallan 2003). Second, young consumers form one of the most viable segments for targeting technological products. For instance, online spending by American 18-24 year olds was four times greater than among older age groups (Pastore 2000 in Osgerby 2004).

The research reported here is part of an ongoing study. We used qualitative research methods and collected data from eight informants in Southern California. This sample size is deemed adequate for generating themes and cultural categories (McCracken 1988). The informants were all undergraduate students and their ages ranged from 18-25 years. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews which lasted from 90 to 120 minutes. We followed the general procedures of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) in our data analysis. First, we identified conceptual categories and themes. Then we established relations among the emerging patterns. Nvivo, data management software (QSR1999) was employed in the analysis.

The results indicate that there are evolving communication patterns among young consumers. They use various types of technological products for communication purposes. These communicative mediums include phones, cell phones, instant messaging, email, chat rooms, blogs and websites. Our analysis reveals that the underlying motivations for use of these mediums are guided mostly by young consumers’ need for connectedness, and to a lesser degree, by their need for self-expression and instrumental purposes. Self-expression as an underlying motivation is specifically evident in case of blogs. Blogs constitute a medium to reflect and express one’s self to others in the
virtual world. Our participants argue that blogs can be personalized in various ways to reflect the blogger’s identity and can constitute a medium through which individuals carry their real-life self to the virtual world. The instrumental reasons, on the other hand, are reflected in instances such as the use of instant messenger to discuss schoolwork with classmates and the use of blogs to organize and maintain a record of daily activities.

Consumers’ need for connectedness emerged as the central theme which motivates the use of different communication mediums. Our findings suggest that participants use different technologies to connect with their existing friends, family members, new people and communities of interest. In doing so, they cultivate their existing relations, bond with friends, meet new people and become members of broader communities.

The data also reveals that there are two main factors guiding consumers’ selection of specific communication technologies. These are structural properties of a particular technology and the level of intimacy in social relationships. Informants describe their choice of a particular medium in terms of its convenience in communicating and maintaining contact with others. Convenience of different forms of communication technologies stems from their inherent properties. For instance, participants view instant messaging as suitable for maintaining contact with friends. The structural properties of instant messaging allows participants to create a ‘buddy list’ composed of their community of friends and to engage in different levels of participation ranging from active conversations to merely observing others. Consumer discourses also reveal that participants act quite intuitively in their selection of different modes of on/off line communication technologies available to them based on intimacy in relationships, intimacy of content as well as the interplay between intimacy and structural properties.

Both the nature and the intimacy of relationship determine the appropriateness of the medium. Participants easily delineate among “family”, “friends”, and “acquaintances”. They use different communicative mediums depending on whom they want to communicate with. For instance, some young consumers communicate with email and instant messenger at the start of a relationship, then as the relationship progresses they use communication mediums such as phone. The subject matter of conversation is also found to affect the selection of a particular communication medium. For example, participants use online chat for impersonal conversations, while they prefer using the phone for more personal conversations. Finally, there is interplay between intimacy and structural properties which provides a sense of control and empowerment to participants. For example, they maintain several email accounts not only to channel different kinds of information, but also to differentially communicate with other individuals depending on the level of intimacy in the relationship.

We contribute to the existing literature by illustrating the ways in which intimacy in social relationships influence and guide young consumers’ use of communication technologies. Overall as consumers’ relations with social actors in their lives move along the continuums of impersonal to personal and distant to intimate, the use of particular technological products also changes. Consumer narratives reveal the role of technology in mediating social and personal relationships. These accounts highlight how technology usage shapes and structures, and in turn is shaped and structured by consumers’ relationships. This study has implications for consumer research. Due to changing communication patterns, marketers should consider the role of communication technologies in enabling different patterns of information exchange. These exchanges have implications for diffusion of product information. Given that this is an ongoing study, further work is anticipated to extend the findings.

A Blind Mind’s Eye: Perceptual Defense Mechanisms and Aschematic Visual Information
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This research reports on an eyetracker experiment exploring aschematic perception in visual processing. While eighty percent of those exposed to an urban image containing a woman committing suicide fixated on the woman, only thirty-five percent reported seeing her. Another thirty-five percent reported schema consistent items in her place and were three times as likely to insert other false schematic items into image recall. Schematic responders were also partially protected from the negative affect the image created. These findings suggest that people ignore aschematic stimuli due to top-down cognitive frameworks that transform images between sight and memory, rather than changing the visual search pattern itself.

‘Do I Know You?’: Constraints on the Recognition of the Celebrity Endorser
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Jerome D. Williams, The University of Texas, Austin
Carol M. Motley, Howard University

We explore a celebrity recognition framework in which the ability to recognize other-race faces is based upon not only the race of the viewer relative to the celebrity, but also the amount of exposure/familiarity the viewer has had with others who are of the same race as the celebrity. The other-race-effect is pertinent for marketing researchers to understand because it has significant implications for not only multicultural celebrity facial recognition in advertising, but also for other marketing-related issues, including customer service, direct marketing, and personal selling.