

# It's all about that post; opportunities and challenges of sharing information online

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# Valorization Addendum

This dissertation focuses on the consequences of sharing information online. It places particular emphasis on the positive and negative outcomes for the individual who is sharing information, an approach that is increasingly relevant as growing numbers of individuals are drawn to social networking sites that allow them to share their experiences and engage in relevant content. In this section, I discuss the relevance of each of the manuscripts in this dissertation to managers and policy makers.

## *Chapter 2: Sharing is rewarding*

This manuscript discusses the negative consequences that may arise from the use of social media, in line with recent research that finds participation in social networking sites results in debt and higher levels of body mass index (Wilcox and Stephen 2013). Despite the negative consequences that may stem from sharing information online, we see a growing number of people who post, tweet, and blog about their lives. There are also trends to integrate these social networks with purchase functions to increase sales. These developments are particularly troubling, and because customers are likely unaware of them. Industry associations should take it upon themselves to develop more specific guidelines for making customers more aware of the consequences of their online decisions. One finding of this manuscript that can help inform such guidelines is reviewers who write in an emotional manner are susceptible to impulsive behaviors. Therefore, firms can develop tools that integrate text mining to better identify reviewers who are more prone to writing in an emotional manner, and develop targeted strategies to manage them.

Firms can address this issue by integrating praise into their feedback systems and presenting it to customers immediately after they have submitted a review. However, one drawback to this approach is

customers may become accustomed to, or skeptical of, certain praise messages (Henderlong and Lepper 2002). Managers responsible for the social media functions of their companies must therefore take great care to make these messages as authentic as possible, and tailor them to individual accomplishments. Because individuals derive social rewards from a variety of sources, managers can also consider other socially rewarding feedback such as acknowledging and thanking the reviewers for their contributions.

Another initiative a firm can implement is the development of non-public channels that enable customers to communicate directly with the firm. Many firms already integrate such systems, such as private chat functions or simple “contact us” sections, into their websites. While these systems are typically used to manage complaints, they could also be used as a means for customers to express their personal feelings and opinions of products. Such insights could not only help the firm gain valuable product knowledge, but also mitigate impulsive behaviors that may result from expressing this information in a public forum.

### *Chapter 3: A (Re)View of myself*

This manuscript addresses a key issue that many manufacturers face: a lack of engagement within Channel Partner Programs (CPPs). Although participation in CPPs benefits both channel partners and manufacturers, a general lack of motivation on the part of some channel partners seems to prevent both parties from mutually benefitting from CPPs. The findings from this study suggest several ideas for increasing engagement and promoting CPPs through the use of review systems.

First, manufacturers should consider incorporating intrinsic motivators that might supplement their existing incentive programs. Extrinsic incentive programs that reward partners with luxury items or vacation destinations when they participate in learning modules might help motivate partners, but they can also be easily matched by competitors (Lane4 2012) and generally lack the elements that create engaging, meaningful experiences (Deloitte 2012). Review systems seem to be a powerful tool to trigger unmotivated channel partners to engage in reflective thinking, which motivates them to

take on additional learning modules. Therefore, I recommend such review systems be incorporated into CPPs.

Second, although reflective thinking brought about by writing reviews is a powerful behavioral motivator, it is limited in that it is effective only for partners who are not already intrinsically motivated to learn. To optimize the behavioral outcomes of reviewing, manufacturers should find ways to focus on essential information within the reviews, relevant to low learning oriented partners' personal experience with learning modules, in the task instructions. Similar to suggestions put forward by ZS Associates (2014), I recommend review tasks be customized to appeal to different segments of channel partners with distinct needs. For example, manufacturers could identify segments (such as those with low learning orientation) through a survey question, then invite certain channel partners to review modules while highlighting the benefits of these reviews for their peers.

Third, to increase partners' certainty, manufacturers should encourage their partners to draw conclusions about how learning programs have helped them. Reflective thinking is a key method, but certainty could also increase if channel partners read negative and positive appraisals from other business partners, or discern that a majority of other business partners hold similar perspectives (Rucker et al. 2014). Other methods for increasing certainty include sending e-mails that affirm what the channel partners learned a few days after they have completed a learning module or sharing the thoughts expressed by other channel partners about the learning module. Because of its strong, lasting impact on engagement, manufacturers should measure certainty, possibly using unobtrusive text mining methods similar to those in our study, to help them evaluate and predict their partners' behaviors.

Fourth, managers can advance the social functionalities of their CPPs to facilitate knowledge exchanges among business partners. They can develop and maintain communities that help channel partners discuss their experiences with the CPPs. These platforms would not only foster reflective thinking, as channel partners share their experiences, but also boost the degree of certainty among other channel partners when the partners encounter testimonials from their peers. However, for these functionalities to work effectively, managers must also educate their channel partners on how to effectively use such

tools, and provide them with support to ensure smooth adaptations (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Rapp 2005).

#### *Chapter 4: Unraveling the personalization paradox*

This manuscript highlights a growing issue that society is facing as technological advances make data collection ubiquitous and difficult to trace. The Internet is a prime example of this: as customers browse the Internet, firms collect their behavioral information and present them with personalized advertisements. However, as many customers are unaware their information is being collected, this lack of awareness may impact the effectiveness of firms' personalization attempts. This study offers valuable insights for firms engaging in such online personalization. Retailers, the most active group using such advertising strategies, should recognize personalization is not always effective; they should strategically vary their personalization efforts by carefully selecting which pieces of information to use. For example, firms might rely on information that is generally relevant to a customer but not overly or personally targeted, particularly if they have gathered the information from online social networks. The firms should carefully assess the level of information sensitivity and how closely the information is tied to each consumer's identity. Both elements determine consumer acceptance of a personalization strategy.

Additionally, online retailers should practice transparency with regard to when and how consumer data is being collected. Increased media attention and the spread of personalization practices mean consumers are increasingly aware that firms collect their information, online and offline. When they receive personalized advertising, consumers are likely to express more skepticism toward the retailer, especially if the company cites information they did not explicitly consent to provide. Consumers believe they own personal information; if retailers gain access to it, they must inform customers about their data collection strategies and seek implied consent, in the form of consumers' continued usage. Because customers must consciously consent, retailers should be proactive in providing comprehensible, visible notifications of their information collection practices.

Despite the importance of such information policies, it is difficult to implement proactive communications in all circumstances and across

the various complex relationships on the Web (e.g., among online publishers, retailers, and data brokers). For targeted advertising in social media, firms might benefit from placements on trustworthy websites or from the use of an informational icon included directly in their advertisements. The icons have been advocated by industry associations as a best practice solution (Internet Advertising Bureau UK 2011) but have not yet been universally implemented. My findings indicate the need for wider adoption; such tools can offset negative reactions to personalized advertising, enhance website credibility, and make personalized advertising more acceptable.

Finally, there has been much debate between government and industry regarding how to handle customer data. Policies have recently been implemented within the European Union to require firms such as Google to increase their transparency, and improve the information they provide to customers regarding how their information is collected and used (BBC 2015). These policies support the findings of this research and show both customers and companies benefit as personalization initiatives become more effective. Other policy makers should follow suit, and encourage more transparency from such firms.

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