A study of social media gratification of customer resonance on purchase intention

[Shari S. C. Shang, Amber Y. J. Sie]

Abstract—In recent years, social networks have become incredibly popular and gradually been an interpersonal communication platforms—away from traditional face-to-face and word-of-mouth interaction toward new forms of online communication referred to as electronic word-of-mouth such as user-generated content. Messages resonate when information is shared among individuals. We want to have a better understanding of the use and gratification that users obtain from social networks when topics resonate with them. The purpose of this study is to investigate what drives people to share or reply to content on social networks while customers' resonance arises and understand the impact of customer resonance on purchase intention.

Keywords—Social networks, customer resonance, e-commerce, purchase intention, use and gratification, self-presentation

I. Introduction

Social media is referred to as consumer-dominated media that enables customers to converse online [1]. There are many social media activities such as creating, modifying, discussing, and sharing Internet content. Social networks are generally defined as interactive communication environments that engage customers to express their opinions, exchange their experiences, disseminate messages, and share and reply to posts. Therefore, social media can rapidly facilitate information sharing on the social network [2]. Messages resonate when information is actived among individuals. This resonance phenomenon means that people will provide feedback such as sharing or replying when they are interested and pay more attention to specific topics. We want to have a better understanding of the use and gratification that users obtain from social networks when topics resonate with them. Social media gratifications, including content gratification, social relation gratification and self-presentation gratification, were examined as research variables. Once customer resonance is generated, we want to learn whether the resonance arising between customers has an impact on purchase intention.

Shari S. C. Shang

Department of Management Information Systems,
National Chengchi University, Taiwan
Taiwan

Amber Y. J. Sie

Department of Management Information Systems,
National Chengchi University, Taiwan
Taiwan

II. Resoance

Online communities such as Facebook, Youtube, and Flicker offer freely available user-created content that has enabled individuals to express their ideas and communicate their opinions to many people. When people are interested in a topic, they are more likely to discuss and share messages, thus creating resonance. The phenomenon of resonance is caused by massive responses that are triggered by someone who makes a posting and others react quickly [3]. Based on the viewpoints of individuals, resonance is a cognitive engagement when an audience participates in media [4]. In addition, resonance is a sub-condition of sharing and replying to word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth refers to a customer-to-customer interaction that describes interactions among customers in online environments. Once a customer is aware and engaged, he or she will have a willingness to communicate with others. Regardless of whether the person is satisfied or dissatisfied, they share their attitudes, opinions by posting, replying or even sharing. For example, retweeting on Twitter is a resonance phenomenon of information-sharing behavior and users are more likely to retweet a tweet that has a similar viewpoint [2]. Besides, previous researchers have used the repost rate as an indicator to evaluate the behavior of sharing about resonance on online platforms. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) indicated that metrics such as the number of reposts/shares and number of responses could be seen as a performance evaluation of resonance on social networks.

In this paper, we defined resonance as the condition of word-of-mouth from any interactions such as sharing and replying between individuals on a social networks platform. Resonance is the phenomenon of a message going through on social media. So resonance could be seen as an indicator to evaluate social media success. When strong resonance occurs, messages resonate more and reach a larger audience on social media platform. One of the most important results of customer engagement is that people are influenced directly or indirectly by engaged customers [6]. So we want to study what factors motivate individuals to share and how those factors then affect other customers in online environments.

III. Theoretical background

A. *Use and gratification theory*

Use and gratification (U&G) theory was proposed by Katz (1959) and developed based on the social and psychological needs that generated expectations of the media [7]. The theory explains that people have different gratification needs that result in different patterns of media usages. In a new technology environment, there are many choices of mass communication venues such as th

audiences to select and satisfy their needs [8]. Therefore, U&G suggests that different choices of media usage are used according to peoples' needs in order to satisfy their demands. In sum, different peoples' motivations result in different media usage.

Use and gratification theory speculates that people are goal directed with regard to their needs and motivations. Social and psychological literature has indicated five categories of use and gratification needs that result in people using mass media [9]. These needs include functions of cognitive, affective, social integrative, personal integrative, and tension release [9]. Cognitive needs are related to acquiring information for knowledge or a better understanding. Affective needs are related to aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experiences. Social-integrative needs are related to contact with family, friends, and others. Personal-integrative needs are related to the desire for an individual to be more credible and confident of their status. Tension-release needs are related to escape.

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) classify two dimensions that include utilitarian and hedonic value in the area of consumer consumption. Information is one of the most important dimensions in use and gratification theory for users of social networks [11]. Jahn and Kunz (2012) mention that the functional and hedonic values in content play important roles for users' browsing information on social-network fan pages. Thus, cognitive needs and affective needs could be categorized into two values of content gratification here. Chu and Kim (2011) state that social relationship-related factors are crucially related to all activities on social network platforms. The components of social relationships on a social network are tie strength, homophily, trust, and interpersonal influence [13]. Therefore, social-integrative needs are related to social-relationship gratification. Tufekci (2008) states that people participate in activities on social networks because customer behavior could be recognized as a form of self-presentation as theorized by Goffman (2002). Hence, personal-integrative needs could be seen as self-presentation gratification. Exploring customer resonance, we think that the motivation of escape in tension-released needs is not feasible. So we discard this construct and do not discuss it here. Therefore, to view customer resonance on social media, we divide it into three dimensions of gratification: content gratification, social-relation gratification, and self-presentation gratification.

B. *Content gratification*

The most important reason that people take part in social networking is to gather information or provide information to others. According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), consumer consumption is divided into utilitarian and hedonic by their perceived values. Hence, in the field of content area, we divide the utilitarian and hedonic function into two values delivered on the social network.

Utilitarian is one dimension through which to evaluate consumer attitudes [15]. Bloch and Richins (1983) define utilitarian value as a customer-involving process such as collecting information out of necessity rather than recreation. Utilitarian value is mostly relevant to "an errand," "work," or

"useful" [16]. It is a cognitively consumptive object that means "how useful or beneficial the object is." Based on an information perspective, Jin, Cheung et al. (2009) also define information usefulness as the degree to which information is perceived by individuals to be helpful and informative. Thus, the utilitarian value of content means how useful or beneficial the information is on social networks [15]. For example, individuals are more likely to talk about topics when they feel they are well informed [1]. Hence, we consider that when more detailed information exists, people might be more willing to discuss and share the message. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1A: The utilitarian value of content is positively related to resonance on social networks.

The other dimension through which to evaluate consumer attitudes is hedonic value [15]. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) define hedonic consumption as involving emotional arousal and feelings such as joy, jealousy, fear, rage, and rapture. It is a cognitively consumption object meaning "how pleasant and agreeable those associated feelings are." Therefore, the hedonic value of content means how pleasant and agreeable the feelings associated with the benefits of information on social networks [15]. In the online environment, content often reflect an author's emotional state such as someone's evaluation or judgment about a topics or product [2]. In addition, content that is fun, surprising, highly visible, with emotional attributes is more likely to promote conversation and sharing of information [1]. Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that people like to discuss something that they feel is outrageous or something that makes them feel special. So emotional messages are a successful factor in getting customers to pass messages along [18]. For example, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) find that emotional Twitter messages tend to be retweeted quickly and more often than neutral messages. In other words, customers are more likely to tell others things they are emotionally connected to. In sum, researchers have suggested that emotional content is a main driver of information diffusion that results in user information-sharing behavior [2]. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1B: The hedonic value of content is positively related to resonance on social networks.

C. *Social relation gratification*

Chu and Kim (2011) develop a conceptual model of social relation that has an influence on customer engagement that includes five factors: tie strength, homophily, trust, and normative and informational-interpersonal influence are all important factors resulting in word-of-mouth behavior.

Tie strength refers to 'the potency of the bond between members of a network' [24]. Researchers divided strength of a relationship can be divided strong and weak relation and users are connected not only by one type of relationship [21,27]. Strong ties such as close friends or family means that we develop deep relationships with these people and a strong tie of social relation means that we are within an individual's personal network in order to provide substantive and emotional support [23]. One the other hand, relation such as

acquaintances seeking information on specific topic are those that we would not develop a deep relationship with and weak ties of social relation are often among weaker and less personal social relationships [23]. While customer browsing on social networks, choices of different kinds of products may be influenced by both stable and intimate "strong-tie" interactions and randomly or remotely connected "weak ties" [13]. For example, friendships on YouTube could be seen as based on users' interests and tastes [37]. Users can follow their friends or classmates to learn about their online actions. This is called a strong tie. On the other hand, users can communicate with people whose identity they may not know to acquire information. In other words, we consider that strong ties definitely have an impact between individuals or groups replying to posts from their friends, but the anonymous characteristic of weak ties on social network sites will make individuals more willing to express their opinions or share posts with their friends. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2A: The tie strength of a social relation is positively related to resonance in a social network.

The definition of homophily is the degree to which individuals who interact with others have certain similar characteristics [25]. In an online environment, individuals like to find others with similar interests and with whom they feel would be a member of their community. Sometimes people spread an online message because they want to meet others who share their interests [39]. For example, on YouTube's social network platform people who reply and share user-generated contents such as videos based on user interests could be characterized as a phenomenon of homophily between users [37]. From the perspective of sociology, people who feel a high level of similarity tend to form relationships [28]. In addition, individuals are more likely to communicate and interact with those who share similar attributes. In other words, interpersonal communication often happens under conditions in which two individuals have similar preferences [13]. According to the above discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2B: Homophily within a social relation is positively related to resonance in a social network.

Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange with partners in whom one has confidence [30]. Morgan and Hunt (1994) also define trust as the perception of confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity and state that trust can be seen as an important factor to maintaining successful relationships. In an online virtual community, trust is an essential factor for individuals who take part in exchange messaging to other member. In social media, reputation helps to identify the status of others and is considered a matter of trust, referring to people and content [21]. The reputation of a video may be based on the "counts of views," "ratings" or "number of comments and replies" on the YouTube platform content [21]. Thus trust is one factor that affects customer-engagement behavior in a customer-based relationship [40]. From the users in online environments, Ridings, Gefen et al. (2002) suggest that trust plays an important role in disseminating messages or exchanging information. Most

individuals on social networks are relatively invisible rather face-to-face; thus, it is hard to communicate or share information. As a result, a higher level of trust will lead to a higher level of word-of-mouth behavior. We assume that trust can create an open atmosphere in which communication and sharing are more likely to occur. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2C: Trust within a social relation is positively related to resonance in a social network.

Interpersonal influence is an important social factor that affects customer decision-making [13,32,33]. Interpersonal influence could be classified into two dimensions: normative influences and informational influences [35]. The definition of normative influences is the idea of corresponding to expectations from others, which affects attitudes, norms and values [31]. People who have a high level of normative influence are more likely to correspond to others' expectations and seek others' approval [13]. In the online environment, Dholakia, Bagozzi et al. (2004) have mentioned that individuals hope to receive acceptance and approval from other members [34]. Many individuals take part in activities to escape their loneliness, find other members who have similar interests, or obtain approval from others [34]. For instance, people taking part in YouTube could be seen as representing a form of normative influence because users customize their personal pages in order to obtain peer recognition from interacting with other users [37]. According to the studies discussed above, we consider that people who refer to a high degree of normative influence tend to communicate, reply, or share information because they want to be accepted or find others who have the same interests. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2D: Normative influences of a social relation are positively related to resonance in a social network.

The definition of informational influence is the tendency to accept information from others and the degree to which an individual is directed to search topics, products, or brand [35]. People who have a high level of informational influence tend to gain more social benefits such as friendship, supports, or knowledge in an online environment [34]. In addition, Chu and Kim (2011) state that people who with a high level of informational influence are likely to obtain information and acquire useful contacts from others while they seek or decide whether to buy. According to the above viewpoints, people who refer to a high degree of informational influence tend to communicate, reply, or share information because they want to obtain more useful information from others in social networks. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2E: Informational influences of social relation are positively related to resonance in a social network.

D. *Self-presentation gratification*

Self-presentation is built as identity and social performance in Goffman's theory and defined such that people want more self-assurance and personal identity in a social environment [12]. People who display signs and symbols would communicate their desired impression to others [38]. In

recent years, social networks have become popular platforms for people to express themselves on. Tufekci (2008) has found that there are many activities on a social network that can be seen as a form of self-presentation according to the theory by Goffman (2002). People are willing to talk about certain topics online when those issues may present the way they want others to see them or sustain their desired self-image to others in a social network [1]. With the ease of creating a personal page, individuals engaging in the YouTube platform could be seen as self-expressive to others [37]. We suppose that if people have a strong intention to intensify their self-image, they communicate through talking more often, replying to posts from others, or even sharing posts or messages. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Self-presentation is positively related to resonance in a social network.

E. *Purchase intention*

Purchase intention is a result of pre-purchase satisfaction [40]. In an online environment, consumers could be influenced by information on purchasing decisions [1]. In reality, user-generated content is online information generated by customers, which is another form of word-of-mouth that would influence both an online and offline purchase [39]. Sharing action in resonance is one word-of-mouth content-creation activity that influences purchasing decisions. An example of this is the social-shopping service Groupon, which sells discounts to customers online. These types of corporate make use of mapping a user's connectivity to share discount information on a social network [21]. The sharing of customer behavior leads to purchase intention and then to purchase. Form the perspective of customers, Mangold and Faulds (2009) mention that using search information to make purchase intentions in social media is a trustworthy platform through which to obtain information about products and services. Individuals read comments or opinions posted by other users before they make a purchase intention. Thus, we consider that people who search and see user-generated content with higher volumes of sharing will lead to a higher-purchase intention. So the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Resonance in a social network is positively related to purchase intention.

IV.   **Methodology**

A. *Research framework*

This study describes a better understanding of what factors potentially raise resonance while participating in social-network activities and whether resonance among customers affects their intention to buy. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the use and gratification theory. We separately use content construct, the social-relation construct, and the self-presentation construct to develop the framework in which to explore customer resonance and purchase intention. The framework is examined in Fig. 1.
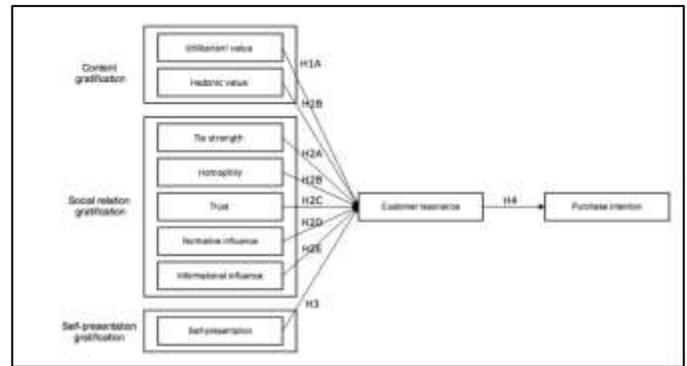

Figure 1.   Constructs definition and research framework.

B. *Data collection*

We will focus on three social media platforms that provide user-generated content in which customer can discuss new products or recommendations for specific product categories. The social network platforms we selected not only have user-generated content but also product- or service-directed websites that promote discussion and purchasing among users. We will then separately offer three kinds of questionnaires for each social network platform to customers. For each questionnaire, we will provide one type of user-generated content such as product reviews to other users who are engaged in social network platforms to browse and ask them to answer questions on the questionnaire.

C. *Measurement and data analysis*

We use multi-item scales to test the constructs in our model according to collected data from different social network platforms. Each construct is designed by adapting existing scales and modified to accommodate the research construct. The measurement of informational and hedonic value of content gratification is adapted from the scale from Jahn and Kunz (2012) . The hedonic scales were also based on those designed by Babin, Darden et al. (1994) . For tie strength, homophily, trust, interpersonal influence we adapted from the social-relation conceptual model via the social network from Chu and Kim (2011). Self-presentation gratification scales were based on the social-value component of customer-value framework from Jahn and Kunz (2012) . Customer-resonance scales were based on Chiu, Hsu et al. (2006) and this study. The measurement of purchase intention is based on the scale from Lu, Zhao et al. (2010). The constructs contain several observable indicators that represent some questions on the questionnaire. All survey items are evaluated by five-point interval scales, ranging from 1 (strong disagree) to 5 (strong agree). A two-step approach was employed to analyze the data. In the first phase, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) would be performed to access the goodness of fit, composite reliability, and construct validity of the measurement model. In the second phase of the analysis, we will test the proposed hypotheses by using a structural equation model with a maximum- likelihood method to test the relationship among constructs. Each construct is estimated by AMOS 7.0 and SPSS 17.0.

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About Authors:

Shari Shang is an associate professor of Management Information Systems at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Her professional expertise includes business innovation, business process management, enterprise systems (CRM and ERP), and strategic technology management. She received her Ph.D. in Information Systems from the University of Melbourne in Australia. Her research has been published in Information Systems Journal, International Journal of Technology Management, Behaviour & Information Tech- nology, Service Industries Journal, and Total Quality Management & Business Excellence. Before undertaking her doctoral study, Dr. Shang worked as a Consulting Manager, MIS Manager, Business Analyst, and EDP specialist in global companies such as IBM, KPMG, and AICPA, in both Taiwan and the United States.

Amber Sie is currently a master student in the department of Management Information System at National Chengchi University. Amber's research interests include Electronic commerce, Web 2.0, Innovation and Business model. She also has experience in system analysis, PHP programming and database management.