

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION VERSUS LOOKING FOR INTERACTIVITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONSUMERS' MOTIVES FOR USING WEBSITES AND WEBLOGS

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ABSTRACT

The present study employed Uses and Gratification Theory to analyze consumers' motives for using websites and weblogs to learn more about a specific product. In an online study (N = 182) four primary motives were located both for using websites and using weblogs: Convenience, information, entertainment and interactivity. Moreover, findings indicate that the motives differ significantly between the two media channels investigated.

INTRODUCTION

With the Internet, a broad range of computer-mediated technologies such as websites, bulletin boards, or weblogs have emerged and are employed to communicate in an increasingly interactive way with consumers. These new communication technologies have extended consumers' informational and interactive capabilities (Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). In line with this development, consumers rely less on traditional mass media to learn about products and services that are offered in the marketplace, but are beginning to actively seek out information they are interested in (Stafford and Stafford 2001). This shift from rather passive recipients to a more active audience entails a fundamental change in consumer behavior. Companies must react to this change in consumer behavior. Particularly, in a marketing and advertising context it becomes increasingly important to analyze and understand the motives that drive media use. Understanding which media channels consumers are accessing for information prior to and during the purchase process will help companies to better design their advertising campaigns. Employing the Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1974; Rosengren 1974; Rubin 2002), this working paper investigates and compares consumers' media usage motivations for websites with usage motivations for weblogs.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Uses and Gratification Theory is a psychological communication perspective that shifts the focus from a mechanistic view on media effects to individuals' purpose

of media use (e.g., Papacharissi and Rubin 2000; Rubin 2002). Uses and Gratification Theory is a well-established approach for identifying and analyzing motivations for media use (Rubin 2002; Ruggiero 2000). In particular, it is considered an appropriate perspective to develop a profound understanding of interactive media use (Luo 2002). The theory is grounded on the assumption that communication behavior, including the selection and use of media channels, is goal directed, purposive and motivated (Katz et al. 1974; Rosengren 1974). Therefore, Uses and Gratification Theory focuses on "the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in need gratifications and other consequences" (Rubin 2002, p. 527). Instead of being used by the media, consumers select and use media to satisfy their felt needs or desires. Moreover, the approach recognizes the importance and the variability of audience activity to explain the outcomes or consequences of mass communication (Levy and Windahl 1984; Rubin 1994).

Past research has applied Uses and Gratification Theory to analyze and compare motives across traditional media (for an overview see: Rubin 2002) like newspapers, radio, and television (Babrow 1987; Convey and Rubin 1991; Ferguson 1992; Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas 1973; Rubin 1983) as well as for newer media such as the Internet (Ferguson and Perse 2000; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000; Stafford and Stafford 2001). Therefore, the list of gratifications derived from mostly early television studies has been expanded with unique facets of the Internet medium (LaRose and Eastin 2004). Communication using the Internet differs from traditional communication particularly in respect to interactivity (Morris and Ogan 1996; Rafaeli and Sudweeks 1997). Interactivity is defined as "the degree to which participants have control over, and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse" (Williams, Rice, and Rogers 1988, p. 10).

Previous studies confirm the importance of different motives for Internet use: Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identified five motives for using the Internet: Interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. The motives information seeking,

entertainment, and convenience had the highest mean scores, whereas passing time and interpersonal utility were less important motives for using the Internet.

While predictors of Internet use in general are well researched (Charney and Greenberg 2001; Kaye 1998; LaRose and Eastin 2004; LaRose, Mastro, and Eastin 2001; Parker and Plank 2000), only few studies analyzed motives in a commercial context (Ko, Cho, and Roberts 2005; Luo 2002). Luo (2002) identified different motivational antecedents such as information seeking and entertainment on consumer behavior in the context of e-commerce. Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) investigated Internet uses and gratifications in the context of interactive advertising. Their research confirms the motives found by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and additionally differentiates between three different types of interactivity motivations: Social-interaction motivation, human-message interaction and human-human interaction (Ko et al. 2005). They found positive relationships between the traditional motives (information motivations) and human message interaction, and between the motives social interaction and human-human interaction. Both, human-message and human-human interaction had a positive effect on attitude toward the website and subsequently toward the brand and purchase intentions.

So far only one study (Ko et al. 2005) has investigated the motives that drive usage for commercial websites in an advertising context. This study focused on gratifications obtained (Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren 1985). In line with insights from recent research that report improved explanation of usage motives, the present research will focus on prospective, or expected gratifications (LaRose and Eastin 2004). The first research question is designed to confirm the motives for using websites in order to learn about a product or service that is offered in the marketplace focusing on prospective gratifications.

RQ1: What are the motives to use commercial websites to learn about an offer in the marketplace?

Further, only a small number of studies investigate uses and gratifications of social-media applications (Joinson 2008; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2008; Shao 2008). Shao (2008) explores the question of motives for using user-generated content from a conceptual perspective. A few studies investigated the specific uses of Facebook (Joinson 2008; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2008), finding motives such as social connection, shared identities, etc. as prevalent motives for using this social networking site.

Previous research – to the best of our knowledge – has not yet investigated the motives related to the use of weblogs in an advertising context. Therefore, the second research question is aimed at uncovering the expected

gratifications consumers derive from using a products weblog:

RQ2: What are the motives to use commercial weblogs to learn about an offer in the marketplace?

Previous studies so far have not compared motives for the use of different interactive media such as websites and weblogs. Therefore, one critical question will concern the differences between motives that drive the use of websites and motives that drive the use of weblogs.

RQ3: What motives drive the use of weblogs as compared to the use of websites in a commercial context?

Previous studies have investigated the relationship between motives and actual usage in a non-commercial context (LaRose and Eastin 2004; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000) and the relationship between motives and attitudes toward the website and purchase intentions (Ko et al. 2005). Thus, the present study investigates the relationship between motives and intentions to use the website or the weblog respectively.

RQ4: What website-related motives are linked to usage intentions of websites?

RQ5: What weblog-related motives are linked to usage intentions of weblogs?

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

An online study was conducted in September and October 2009. Six hundred ten college students of a Swiss business school were contacted per e-Mail and invited to participate in an online survey. College students are a common and appropriate sample motives for new media use (Ferguson and Perse 2000; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). Participation was voluntary and participants could take part in a raffle for four gift certificates of a total value of \$200. A sample of 182 college students in Switzerland participated in the study (29.9% total response rate). Recent research assessing response rates indicates that the present rates were consistent with studies employing online surveys (Yun and Trumbo 2000). As a total sample (N = 182) participants were 46 percent male and 54 percent female. Age ranged between 19 and 36 (Mean = 24; Median = 23; SD = 3.3). All analyses were conducted using SPSS statistics version 16.

Measures

To measure motives for using the website and weblogs to learn more about a product or service we used an

abbreviated version of the measurement scales used by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000). Measures include the following motivations: Information seeking, interactivity, entertainment and convenience. Each motive was measured with two to four items. In total, respondents indicated their agreement with 15 statements about their expectations on the gratifications to use the website and to use the weblog on a five point-scale, ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). This way of measuring motives is in line with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1986, 1989, 2002; LaRose and Eastin 2004; LaRose et al. 2001). Social Cognitive Theory proposes that expected gratifications are better predictors for actual usage than obtained gratifications (LaRose and Eastin 2004; LaRose et al. 2001). Respondents were asked to answer the questions concerning their motives to use the media channels in respect to a specific and real new consumer durable (a messenger bag with an integrated solar panel) in order to increase the external validity of the study. The measures are listed in Table 1. The same statements were used for the website and for the weblog.

Participants also indicated which medium they would use to learn more about the specific new product on a six point-scale (TV, radio, flyer, billboard, newspaper, magazine, website, blog, or bulletin board). Finally, they indicated their trust in those different media channels on a five point-scale and how often they used those different media from 1 (several times daily) to 5 (several times per week).

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a summary of measures and descriptives for motives measured for website and for weblog use. We used principal component analysis with Varimax rotation to extract and interpret motivational factors. The analysis accounted for 59.6 percent of the variance for websites and 68.6 percent of the variance for weblogs. Additionally, we conducted reliability analysis for each factor. Responses to the items were summed and averaged to form the scales representing each factor. The reliability (Cronbach's α) of the resulting multi-item scales was marginally acceptable, as the reliability values ranged from .61 (website: interactivity motivation) to .89 (blog: convenience motivation). The generally agreed lower limit for Cronbach's α is .70, although it may decrease to .60 in exploratory research (Hair, Money, Samouel, and Page 2007).

The first research question explores the motives for website use. Table 1 summarizes the scale scores. Paired t-tests identified differences among the strength of motives. Convenience motivation was the most salient motive for using the website to learn about the specified product. Paired t-test showed that it was significantly more endorsed than information motivation ($t[181] = -9.9, p < .001$), than interactivity motivation ($t[181] = -31.3, p < .001$) and

entertainment motivation ($t[181] = -27.8, p < .001$). Although the difference is significant, information motivation ($M = 4.11$) was almost as strong a motivation as convenience motivation ($M = 4.62$) for using the website. Information motivation differed also significantly from interactivity motivation ($t[181] = 28.2, p < .001$), and entertainment motivation ($t[181] = 22.7, p < .001$). The motivation for entertainment and the motivation for interaction on the website were significantly weaker than the other two motives and did not differ significantly ($t[181] = -1.9, p = .06$).

The second research question explores the motives for weblog use. The strength of motives is in tendency similar to the motives to use the website. Both convenience and information motivation were significantly more endorsed than entertainment motivation (convenience: $t[181] = -6.5, p < .001$; information: $t[181] = -9.9, p < .001$), and interactivity motivation (convenience: $t[181] = -3.33, p < .001$; information: ($t[181] = 7.18, p < .001$) but did not differ between them ($t[181] = -.93, p = .35$).

The third research question compares the motives for website use with motives for weblog use. Respondents were significantly more motivated to seek information on websites than on weblogs ($t[181] = 5.52, p < .001$) and significantly more convenience motivated ($t[181] = 14.12, p < .001$). However, entertainment ($t[181] = -5.5, p < .001$), and interactivity ($t[181] = -11.02, p < .001$) were significantly more salient for weblogs.

Research question four and five concerned how the different motives to use the website or to use the weblog are linked to the intention to use the website or the weblog, respectively. Table 2 summarizes the bivariate Pearson correlations. The only significant correlations are found between the information and convenience motivation and the intention to use the website.

Multiple regression was also used to explore the multivariate relationship of the four motives to use the website and intentions to use the website to learn more about the specified product. Information motivation ($\beta = .20$) was the only significant predictor of the intention to use the website ($R = .279, R^2 = .06, F(4, 178) = 3.97, p < .01$). There was no significant predictor for the intention to use the weblog.

DISCUSSION

The present study employed Uses and Gratification Theory to analyze consumers' motives for using websites and weblogs to learn more about a specific new product. Results shed light on the underlying motives that guide consumers' media usage. In this investigation four primary motives were located both for using websites and

TABLE 1
Summary of Measures and Descriptive Statistics

Items/Scale	Website		beta	α	Weblog		beta	α
	M	SD			M	SD		
Information seeking	4.11	.68		.70	3.63	1.20		.88
Learning about product benefits	4.57	.85	.71		3.83	1.37	.82	
Learn something new	4.03	.91	.67		3.82	1.34	.89	
Learn about technical properties	3.37	1.08	.64		3.09	1.44	.81	
Learn something useful	4.13	.93	.70		3.77	1.40	.90	
Interactivity	2.37	.70		.61	3.33	1.26		.84
Learn what other people said	3.34	1.12	.42		3.92	1.40	.78	
Meet people with my interests	1.70	.89	.76		2.85	1.51	.81	
Provide my feedback	2.69	1.13	.74		3.31	1.49	.90	
Participate in customer discussions	1.71	.88	.79		3.21	1.59	.88	
Entertainment	2.40	.82		.67	2.95	1.27		.83
It's entertaining	2.89	1.10	.84		3.21	1.45	.86	
To pass time	1.67	.89	.60		2.51	1.57	.80	
It's enjoyable	2.87	1.08	.87		3.13	1.37	.92	
Convenience	4.62	.71		.79	3.69	1.35		.89
It's convenient to use	4.61	.84	.64		3.67	1.38	.81	
Get what I want for less effort	4.64	.74	.75		3.71	1.43	.83	

TABLE 2
Pearson Correlations: Motives to use the Website and to use the Weblog

Intention to use:	Motives Information	Interactivity	Entertainment	Convenience
Website	.263***	.118	.037	.191**
Weblog	.097	.114	.088	.083

Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p > .05$ (2-tailed)

using weblogs. The most salient motive to use the website and the weblog was convenience motivation. In previous research the notion of convenience was not endorsed as strongly as in the present research (Ko et al. 2005; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). Probably, in the context of advertising and information on products consumers are most interested in being informed in a fast and practical way. Similarly, important for both investigated media channels was the information seeking motivation. This finding is consistent with previous research on predictors of internet use (Ko et al. 2005; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). In contrast to previous findings, interaction motives (Ko et al. 2005; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000) and enter-

tainment motives (Ferguson and Perse 2000) have been found less important.

Additionally, findings indicate that the motives that bring consumers to utilize websites or blogs differ significantly. Motives for interaction and for entertainment are stronger for weblogs as compared to websites. The reverse is true for the information and convenience motivations which are stronger for the website than for the weblog. Further, the investigation of the relationship between motives and the intention to use websites and weblogs revealed that information motives are a reliable predictor for website use. Likewise the expectation of convenience

significantly influences consumers' intention to use the website. Surprisingly, neither entertainment nor interactivity motivations were related to intentions to use the website or the weblog.

Managerial Implications

With the changing patterns of consumers' media use, practitioners are no longer confronted with the question whether or not to engage in Web 2.0 activities. Rather they have to face the question how to use Web 2.0 applications in means of relationship marketing. The findings of this research can help marketing and communication managers to better design advertising and communication campaigns to promote new products or services. Primarily, when promoting a new product or service information and convenience are the two most important needs to be fulfilled. Findings indicate that on websites information should be accessible and conveniently to find. Conversely, consumers seem not to be interested in being entertained or in interactivity. Likewise, weblogs should be designed to enable convenience oriented information seekers to orient themselves. Consumers are more likely to accept offers for entertainment and interactivity on weblogs than on websites. However, companies have to be aware of the fact, that in regard to new products consumers show only little interest in entertainment and interactivity.

With respect to the findings regarding the motives for weblogs and websites to learn more about a new product, practitioners should consider the implementation of Brand Community (BC) to communicate with their target groups. As a specified form of a website, Brand Communities enable companies to link both salient motives convenience motivation and information seeking motivation. Due to the brand knowledge and the commitment of the community members a lot of brand and product information can easily be found on such BC-Websites. Moreover

companies can gain useful information and ideas for the development of new products and have a well-established peer-group at hand for testing new products.

Limitations and Further Research

Similar to all research endeavors, this study does have its limitations. First, the nonrandom sample of college students might weaken the generalizability of these findings to the population as a whole. Second, we do not find an interrelation between the intention to use the weblog and the regarding motives. This missing finding might be explained with a presumably low interest in the new product used in the study. Third, self-reported data for the intention to use specific media channels to learn more about a product or service in the marketplace may not be a valid measure.

Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the relationship between motives to use websites and weblogs and actual usage of these interactive media. In particular, further research is needed to explain the missing correlation between intention to use a weblog and the regarding motives. In this further research special attention will be paid to possible confounding factors such as interest in the product, familiarity with website or weblog use and individual differences. Methods for this future research will be qualitative interviews. Additionally, further applied research is needed to explore the use of online Brand Communities.

In spite of its limitations, this research helps to better understand the motivations that drive media use in a commercial context from a psychological perspective. Additionally, insights from this research may help practitioners to design communication strategies for new products in accordance with consumers' expected uses and gratifications.

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