



Modern consumer socialization: The influence of peers, family, and online social networking usage

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Online social networking (SNS) usage has been a revolutionary topic of interest for researchers and consumers since online social networking websites' popularity spiked. Online social networking utilized by an individual engages family members, friends, and retailers. Since SNS have integrated into many individuals' daily lives, consumer socialization patterns previously observed have undoubtedly changed. Although the influence of SNS usage on attitudes and purchase intentions toward product reviews have rarely been researched, preceding studies have found socialization agents such as peers, family, and media to be influential on the socialization of consumers (Nelson & McLeod, 2005). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the current influences that consumer socialization has upon college-aged individuals.

A theoretical model created by Moschis and Churchill (1978) was utilized for the current study. The model accounts for current sources of influence on young individuals when making buying decisions. At the time of the model's creation, various forms of technology, such as online social networking interfaces, were not applicable. Thus, the consumer socialization theory was chosen for this study based on the model's reliability and validity found by previous researchers, enabling the inclusion of new technologies. The model is also comprehensive and flexible, as antecedent variables (gender) can be accurately studied. Gender has been found to influence the interactions of all socialization agents. Socialization agents such as peers, family members (e.g., parents), and SNS usage is thought to influence attitudes and the intention to purchase recommended products. Therefore, attitudes and the intention to purchase products based on product reviews were also measured for this study. These two outcomes can be influenced by antecedents and socialization processes through socialization agents. Results from this study enhance knowledge of the influences that guide young consumers in today's market.

Based on the rationale above, the following hypotheses were developed: When making a purchase decision, peer (H1a) and family (H1b) communication, and online social networking site (SNS) usage (H1c) will have a greater impact for females than males. Females will have a more positive attitude toward product reviews available on SNS (H2) and have a higher intention to purchase products reviewed on SNS than males (H3), Peer (H4a) and family (H4b) communication, and SNS usage (H4c) will positively influence the individual's attitude toward product reviews available on SNS, Peer (H5a) and family (H5b) communication, and SNS usage (H5c) will positively influence the individual's intention to purchase a product reviewed on SNS, and Attitude toward product reviews available on SNS will positively influence intention to purchase the product reviewed on SNS (H6).

An online survey was conducted with a randomly selected sample of college students, as they are currently the highest users of SNS. Two hundred and eighteen useable surveys were

collected and statistically analyzed. Demographically, females (65%) participated in the study more than males (35%). A strong mean age of 20 was obtained, however a large range of ages from 18 to 51 responded. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure peer and family influences, as well as online social networking usage. A 7-point semantic differential scale was utilized to measure the attitude toward product reviews and purchase intention.

Hypotheses were examined using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and multiple regression. MANOVA was used to determine the relationships among Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. The results showed significant gender differences for familial communication (H1b: $F(1,216)=5.728, p<.05$), SNS usage (H1c: $F(1,216)=13.804, p<.0001$), and attitude (H2: $F(1,216)=4.133, p<.05$). Inspection of mean scores confirm that females significantly use familial communication [Female: $M=2.80, SD=.77$ vs. Male: $M=2.53, SD=.82$] and SNS usage [Female: $M=3.13, SD=1.05$ vs. Male: $M=2.57, SD=1.11$] more than males. However, no significant gender difference was found for peer influence. Females also have a significant difference in attitude [Female: $M=3.58, SD=1.36$ vs. Male: $M=3.17, SD=1.50$] toward online product reviews based on socialization agents. Thus, H1b, H1c, and H2 were supported. H3, however, was not supported, as females were not found to have a higher intention to purchase products reviewed on SNS over males. Multiple regression was used to test Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6. H4a and H4b were not found to be significant. However, SNS usage does have a significant impact on attitude ($t=4.267, p<.0001$), supporting H4c. In addition, the study revealed that peer communication ($t=2.169, p<.05$) and SNS usage ($t=2.220, p<.05$) positively influence consumers' intention to purchase a product reviewed online. Therefore, H5a and H5c were supported by the results. As predicted, attitude toward product reviews available on SNS showed a positive impact on purchase intention ($t=13.292, p<.0001$), supporting H6.

Results of this study indicate familial communication and online social networking usage is influenced by gender, as females tend to use these two mediums and therefore engage in more online and offline communication than males. Gender and SNS usage were found to influence attitude toward product reviews on SNS. Peer communication and SNS usage were also found to affect purchase intention toward the product reviewed on SNS. As indicated in the results, SNS is found to be a more significant factor than peer communication and familial communication when influencing young consumers' attitudes and purchase intention toward an online product review. Not surprisingly, a more positive attitude toward products reviewed led to a higher intention to purchase the products reviewed through SNS. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that all variables in this study were influential upon certain relationships defined by the consumer socialization model.

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