



**Social media in the store environment: The impact of social network applications on consumer emotions, cognitions, and purchase intentions**

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**Introduction**

Social media is rapidly changing the online retail landscape (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). Because of social media, consumers can now blog, review, tweet, and post on Facebook about their consumption experiences. Social media includes social network sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, but also includes social network applications, such as online ratings and reviews. Social network applications give retailers the opportunity to add a human element, or social cues, to their online retail websites. Research in traditional brick and mortar environments has shown that an increase in social cues can lead to an increase in positive emotions, attitudes, and purchase intentions towards a retailer (Hu & Jasper, 2006; Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994). This research attempts to understand the influence that three social network applications have on consumer decision-making and behaviors.

**Framework & Methodology**

In 1974, Mehrabian and Russell adapted the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model suggesting that the features of an environment will stimulate an emotional response which will cause individuals to either approach or avoid an environment (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Baker et al. (1994) further refined the environmental element of Mehrabian and Russell's model, identifying three components of the store environment: ambient factors, design factors, and social factors. While the S-O-R model is often used to study the effect of store environment on behavior, the model does not consider the cognitive element of consumer decision-making. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) suggests that consumer decision-making is ultimately the result of attitudes, social norms, and control factors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Therefore, to understand the affect that social network applications have on consumer decision-making, the variables of both the cognitive TPB and the emotion based S-O-R model are considered. This results in the following hypotheses: The inclusion of social network applications in an online retail website will result in more favorable cognitions and emotions towards the store, including attitudes (H1a), injunctive norms (H1b), descriptive norms (H1c), perceived behavioral control (H1d), pleasure (H1e), and arousal (H1f). The four cognitive elements and the two emotional elements are hypothesized to influence purchase intentions towards the retailer (H2a through H2f). Finally, the combined cognitive and emotional model is proposed to be more effective at predicting consumer behavior than each model in isolation (H3).

A 2 x 2 x 2 between subjects experimental design was used to assess the impact of three social network applications on consumer behavior. Fictitious retail apparel websites were developed and manipulated for the inclusion or exclusion of the three social network applications. A convenience sample of college students was recruited for the study and compensated with extra credit points resulting in 498 respondents. Forty four percent of the participants were female and the average age of participants was twenty-four. After removing incomplete responses, 439 remained for analysis. On a device of their choosing, participants

viewed a randomly assigned test website for three minutes and then answered online survey questions assessing the dependent variables. Developed from the results of a pilot study, all cognitive items including attitudes, injunctive norms, descriptive norms, perceived behavioral control, and purchase intentions were measured with a total of 31 questions. The emotional variables of pleasure and arousal were based on prior research and assessed with 12 items. All measures had reliabilities greater than 0.8 using Cronbach's alpha.

### Results

The influence of the social networking applications on the cognitive and emotional variables was assessed using MANOVA. No significant main effects for social media applications on consumer emotions and cognitions were found, thus H1 was not supported. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationships between the consumer emotion and cognition variables and purchase intentions. Pleasure ( $b^* = .306$ ), arousal ( $b^* = .108$ ), attitudes ( $b^* = .189$ ), and descriptive norms ( $b^* = .217$ ) were all significant predictors of purchase intentions ( $p < .05$ ). Injunctive norms ( $b^* = .013$ ) and perceived behavioral control ( $b^* = .050$ ) were not significantly related to purchase intentions ( $p > .05$ ). Thus, H2 was only partially supported. Finally, H3 was supported with the proposed model explaining 52% of the variance in purchase intentions compared to 44% percent for both the cognitive and emotional models alone.

### Conclusion

Despite the positive effects of social cues on consumer behavior in brick and mortar settings, the social media applications did not exert a significant influence on consumer decision-making in the online retail environment. It is suggested that future research explore online social cues in combination with the other elements of store environment proposed by Baker et al. (1994) to determine the relative importance of each element in the online environment. The proposed model explained more of the variance in purchase intentions than each of the TPB and S-O-R models alone, which is consistent with the suggestions of Kim and Kim (2012). Limitations of the study include the use of a convenience sample and the lack of environmental controls, such as Internet browser type and computer model.

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