THE EFFECT OF LONELINESS AND NOSTALGIC ADVERTISING ON MOBILE SHOPPING INTENTION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Factors influencing mobile shopping intention have been discussed very frequently in the literature. However, the effect of psychological reasons like loneliness on mobile shopping intention has received little attention in the consumer behaviour literature. Especially, there is a dearth of studies regarding how lonely consumers respond to mobile shopping intention when exposed to nostalgic advertising. Grounded on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), this article conceptualizes that lonely consumer when exposed to nostalgic advertising may enter the flow state and eventually engage in mobile shopping. Consistent with prior literature, the authors consider four distinct dimensions of advertising-evoked personal nostalgia: past imagery, positive emotions, negative emotions, and physiological reactions. Marketers face considerable challenges when appealing to lonely consumers to engage in mobile shopping. This article provides a framework to aid marketers to successfully develop marketing strategies to engage lonely consumers in mobile shopping. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a significant development in mobile devices and technologies (Malaquias & Hwang, 2016). Mobile applications and business services have multiplied rapidly in number across the world (Celik, 2016). Among e-shopping alternatives, mobile shopping has become a beloved behaviour (Hsieh, 2014). Through wireless connections, customers can connect to service providers which enable transactions to be completed from anywhere in the world (Lu, 2014).

When compared to computer-based e-commerce, mobile shopping fares better in speed, effectiveness, and power (Hsieh, 2014).

A comprehensive literature review reveals that factors affecting consumers' mobile shopping intention is one of the most frequently discussed topics. Well-known models such as the technology acceptance model and the theory of the diffusion of innovation are used in the literature to predict and explain consumers' mobile shopping intention. However, there is a dearth of studies examining psychological factors like the loneliness of consumers in explaining mobile shopping intention. Hence, there is a need to investigate the strategies that marketing managers and decision-makers can adopt to motivate lonely consumers to engage in mobile shopping. Also, there is a lack of studies that investigate how lonely consumers respond to nostalgic advertising to engage in mobile shopping (Hoffman et al., 2017). The above arguments serve as the motivation to this study which conceptualizes the effect of loneliness and nostalgic advertising on the consumers' mobile shopping intention. The study contributes to the marketing literature by providing insights into the reasons that encourage lonely consumers to engage in mobile shopping.

Several studies have explored the relationship between loneliness and consumer behaviour. For instance, older consumers engage in food and beverage consumption, reading, shopping, and gardening to reduce loneliness (Pettigrew, 2007). Lonely consumers gift cash, goods, or services to non-profit organisations to help them accomplish their goals (Merchant et al., 2011), and consume goods which make their lives comfortable (Troisi & Gabriel, 2011). Research has explored how lonely consumers consume and engage in decision making (Merchant et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Pieters, 2013).

This article aims to fill a pressing gap in the evolving consumer behaviour literature on loneliness. Lonely consumers tend to respond to customised advertising strategies. Marketers and advertisers need to devise effective advertising strategies to reach lonely consumers. Marketers face considerable challenges when trying to do so. However, marketers could also view these challenges as opportunities, especially, when the global ad market will reach $647 billion by 2021 (Letang, 2020). In the absence of in-person relationships, lonely individuals will prefer to use online connections (Gibson, 2010; Scheinbaum, 2016), and hence will watch many advertisements in social media (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). To capitalise on this growing trend, marketers need to be effective in developing advertising messages that will appeal to lonely consumers.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. First, the theory behind the conceptual framework is presented. This is followed by a review of the literature of the key constructs in the model. Next, the reasoning behind the hypotheses is presented along with the conceptual model. Finally, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) finds its application in many different types of media and technology. It explains why people use certain technology to satisfy specific needs. In the context of this study, UGT is used to explain why lonely individuals engage in mobile shopping. According to UGT, individuals choose technology to gratify themselves. Lonely individuals who want to gain knowledge and to socially interact may try to integrate technology into their daily routines (Severin & Tankard, 2000). Individuals use mobile phones to seek entertainment, pass time or to escape a situation or event that they don't like (Magsamen-Conrad et al., 2015). Mobile shopping services have many gratifications and uses attached to them. Mobility, psychological reassurance and immediate access are some of the uses and gratifications of engaging in mobile shopping (Leung & Wei, 2000). Grounded on the UGT, this study conceptualizes that lonely individual when exposed to nostalgic advertising may enter the flow state and eventually engage in mobile shopping.

2.2 Loneliness

Loneliness is the subjective feeling that occurs due to lack of contact between an individual and society. It is an undesirable feeling (Burt, 1986; Kim et al., 2005). Loneliness does not mean that the individual is alone nor does it mean that being with others guarantee the individual will not experience the feeling of loneliness (Peplau &Perlman, 1982). Rather, loneliness occurs when there is a disparity between ideal and perceived interpersonal relationships. Lonely individuals are likely to perceive their world as threatening (Han et al., 2015). Social skills research shows that lonely individuals are excessively concerned about themselves, do not pay much attention to partners, do not interact much with partners, and do not participate in group activities (Marangoni & Ickes, 1989).

Personality research shows that lonely individuals tend to be shy with low optimism (Marangoni & Ickes, 1989). Also, isolated individuals are more aggressive and do not cooperate with others (Twenge et al., 2007). Health, adjustment, and well-being of lonely consumers get negatively affected. One might think that increased connectivity through social media and cell phones will lead to a reduction of emotional seclusion and loneliness. However, research studies suggest that the increase in the usage of social media leads to people feeling unhappy (Konnikova, 2013; Kross et al., 2013). Kraut et al. (1998) also found that the increase in usage frequency of web usage leads to an increase in loneliness. Most consumers do not like to lead solitary lives. Consumption related and shopping-related experiences are the means lonely consumers use to find desired social connections and to reduce or minimize the duration of the loneliness (Forman & Sriram, 1991; Kang & Ridgway, 1996).

2.3 Nostalgic Advertising

Advertisers expose consumers to abundant advertisements each day, and this endangers the advertising effectiveness (Ha & Litman, 1997). Consumers do not pay attention, get frustrated, and avoid advertising because of advertising clutter (Rotfeld, 2006; Klopfenstein, 2011). Advertisers are looking for ways to effectively communicate with consumers (Speck & Elliott, 1997). Nostalgic marketing is considered as an effective strategy to grab the attention of consumers (Reisenwitz et al., 2004). Nostalgia is defined as a "positively valenced complex feeling, emotion, or mood produced by reflection on things (objects, persons, experiences, ideas) associated with the past" (Holak & Havlena, 1998, p. 218).

Nostalgia marketing has become extremely popular worldwide. Through nostalgic marketing, advertisers target senses and feelings of consumers. Marketers allow consumers to go back and relive a cherished moment that happened in the past which forms the basis for nostalgia marketing (Srivastava et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2016).To bring out the positive emotions and feelings of nostalgia,marketers can expose consumers to the product itself or nostalgic advertising themes. Past research studies indicate that nostalgia discourages consumers from worrying about spending money and encourages favourable purchase decisions (Lasaleta et al., 2014).

During crises times (e.g. political or financial) marketing managers' main objective is to make consumers feel secure and safe. Marketing managers use nostalgic advertising to create such comfort (Boyle, 2009; Elliott, 2009b; Baldwin et al., 2015). Advertising executives believe that in challenging times, nostalgic advertising helps to boost brand sales (Foley, 2009). Consumer goods and services such as colas, beer, banking, insurance use personal nostalgia in the advertising (Sullivan, 2009). Marketers in the United States, Russia, India and United Kingdom evoke nostalgia through advertising strategies (Foley, 2009).

Past research reveals that they are two types of nostalgia: personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia. There are some differences between the two types of nostalgia. The major difference lies in the time. Lived past forms the basis of personal nostalgia. Personal nostalgia is "A preference toward objects that were more common when one was younger" (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991, p. 332). People elicit nostalgia by reminiscing memories (Muehling, 2013; Muehling & Pascal 2011). In personal nostalgia, childhood or adolescent experiences play a role in forming positive emotions (Dickinson & Erben 2006; Davis, 1979). Family members, friends, and close others help to evoke personal nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006). Period outside of the lived past forms the basis of historical nostalgic advertising (Muehling, 2013; Muehling & Pascal 2011). The assumption behind the historical nostalgia is that the time outside of the lived past is better than the current time (Stern, 1992). The current study focuses on personal

nostalgia. Personal nostalgia influences the consumer's preferences for a variety of products and services. It influences consumers' purchase of automobiles, foods, cigarettes and tea.

2.4 Flow

The concept of flow has been discussed in various disciplines (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). The primary idea behind the concept of flow is enjoyment. The state of flow occurs when a person is completely absorbed in the activity he or she is undertaking. Irrelevant perceptions and thoughts are completely filtered out and people become highly focused when experiencing flow. Individuals' consciousness becomes contracted and they focus only on limited targets (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In-depth interviews were conducted by previous studies to explore the concept of flow. Interviewees, such as music composers and chess playerswere able to experience high levels of pleasure by immersing in their activities (Zwick, 2005). Research studies have applied the concept of flow in the field of information technology (Novak et al., 2000; Zwick, 2005).When browsing a website; the mental immersion of users takes place (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Carlson et al., 2017).

Online shopping is capable of creating a sense of immersion and generating flow experiences (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Teng et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2020). Browsing online stores can result in positive human-computer interaction, and as a result, consumers may enter the flow state (Gao & Bai, 2014). To maximise enjoyment, consumers may initially begin to search the products and finally end up in the transaction phase(Hsu et al., 2012; Wang & Hsiao, 2012). When enjoyment occurs, consumers may choose to purchase goods or services. Because of time limitations, consumers use a mobile platform to experience enjoyment.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Studies show marketers elicit personal nostalgia through effective advertising. In line with Merchant et al. (2013), the authors propose that advertising-evoked personal nostalgia will have four distinct dimensions: past-imagery, positive emotions, negative emotions, and physiological reactions. Marketers can use the study's multidimensional scale to develop and fine-tune advertising strategies to induce nostalgia among consumers. Past imagery factor refers to the images of the past that come to the consumers' mind. Examples include "It was like a flashback"; "It was a dreamlike experience"; "The images were impressionistic." The second dimension refers to a set of positive emotions that the advertisements elicit. Examples include "relaxed"; "pleasant"; and "secure." The third dimension refers to a set of negative emotions that the advertisements elicit. Examples include "anxiety"; "guilty"; and "grief." The fourth dimension refers to a set of physiological reactions that the advertisements elicit.

Examples include "My breathing became steady/slow"; "I could feel shivers/trembling"; "I was sweating." Previous studies found that higher levels of loneliness resulted in higher levels of the consumer's nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2008; Merchant et al., 2013). Hence, the authors propose that higher the consumer's level of loneliness, higher is the personal nostalgia evoked by advertising.

H1: There is a positive relationship between loneliness and nostalgic advertising-evoked past imagery.

H2: There is a positive relationship between loneliness and nostalgic advertising-evoked physiological reaction.

H3: There is a positive relationship between loneliness and nostalgic advertising-evoked negative emotions.

H4: There is a negative relationship between loneliness and nostalgic advertising-evoked positive emotions.

Advertising value is the customers' perceived judgment of the advertisement (Ducoffe, 1995). The authors argue that nostalgic advertisements will be valued by consumers. If consumers value the advertisement, the message in the advertisement will have a positive impact on the consumers. Involvement of the consumers in the campaign will be more and as a result, the involvement in the product or service will also be more (Kim & Han, 2014). This involvement will help the consumers to enter the internal state of flow as the consumers will focus entirely and uniquely on the information and contents included in the advertisement (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Based on the above arguments, the authors propose that higher levels of advertising evoked personal nostalgia will positively influence flow. So, past imageries, physiological reactions, and positive emotions will positively influence flow. Events that evoke negative emotions will negatively influence flow (Hanmann, 2012). Also, past research shows that there is a negative correlation between anxiety and flow (Asakawa, 2010). Hence, negative emotions will negatively influence flow.

H5. Higher levels of past imageries positively influence flow.
H6. Higher levels of physiological reactions positively influence flow.
H7. Higher levels of negative emotions negatively influence flow.
H8. Higher levels of positive emotions positively influence flow.

Attitude means whether a person consistently likes or dislikes a given object. It represents the level of affection a consumer exhibits towards the object. Intention represents the probability that a consumer will exhibit certain behavioural characteristics (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). If consumers enter the flow state, it will facilitate learning and will alter their attitude and behaviour (Korzaan, 2003). Online shopping immersion helps consumers to come back and revisit a website and complete online transactions in the future (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005).

Using mobile shopping services may help consumers to enter the flow state, which in turn may lead to positive emotions and satisfaction. When consumers enter the flow state, they may experience positive emotions which will impact the attitude and purchase intention (Korzaan, 2003). Moreover, in mobile shopping contexts, Yang (2010) reported that there is a positive relationship between consumers' attitude and purchase intention. If there is a negative experience, it results in unfavorable attitude and intention (Dabholkar & Sheng, 2009). Flow experience leads to a positive attitude and intention to use mobile shopping services (Chen et al., 2018). Based on the above arguments, the authors propose the following hypotheses.

H9. There is a positive relationship between flow and consumers' attitudes toward mobile shopping.

H10. There is a positive relationship between consumers' attitudes and the intention to use mobile shopping.

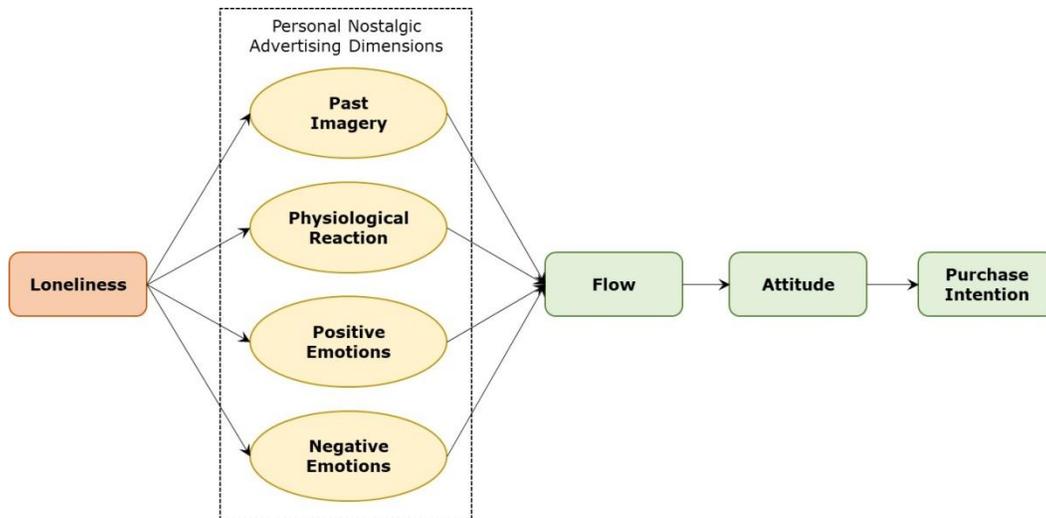The conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Usage of mobile devices has increased. Mobile devices have a smaller screen size than computers. Typically, the time it takes to complete a transaction using mobile devices is less. Determining the factors influencing consumers' decision to engage in mobile shopping is of importance to marketers. Marketers should evoke personal nostalgia through effective advertising to help lonely consumers enter the flow state.

Advertisers should focus on engaging consumers rather than providing advertisements which are liked by consumers. One way of engaging consumers is by invoking personal nostalgia. As marketing to lonely consumers presents a significant challenge, advertisers are advised to use nostalgic themes.

The authors propose that if marketers can invoke personal nostalgia through advertising, lonely consumers may become engaged and enter the flow state and eventually develop a positive attitude and intention towards mobile shopping. The theoretical model suggests that if marketers are to effectively induce personal nostalgia through their advertisements, they must elicit images from the past, positive emotions, physiological reactions and suppress the negative emotions. Negative emotions may hinder the consumers from reaching the flow state and developing positive attitude and intention towards mobile shopping services. These insights into the lonely consumers' nostalgic response are novel to the literature and might provide strategic directions to marketers. The model also proposes that the flow state has the potential to positively influence the attitudes of lonely consumers. If lonely consumers have positive attitudes, they are most likely to engage in purchase behaviour.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Researchers could further empirically test the model proposed in this article. Structural equation modeling (SEM) could be used to empirically test the model. The dimensions used in the previous research study have been considered for advertising-evoked personal nostalgia. If the same study is conducted across different cultures, it is necessary to use the dimensions of personal nostalgia that are appropriate to those cultures. Qualitative research studies can be conducted to come up with dimensions for advertising-evoked personal nostalgia that are apt for different cultures. Previous research studies have suggested many dimensions to measure flow. To empirically validate the model, careful consideration should be given to identify the appropriate dimensions of flow. More psychological variables apart from loneliness can also be considered to determine the consumers' intention to use mobile shopping services.

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