

Antecedents of Adopting Social Media Marketing for Sales: Comparing Emerging and Developed Economies

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Social media now constitute the fastest-growing marketing channel, with US expenditures expected to grow 21% annually to reach US\$9.8 billion by 2016 (BIA/Kelsey, 2012). In contrast to paid online advertising (banner, text and search), Social Media Marketing (SMM) involves initiating viral consumer-to-consumer communication by creating company/brand fan pages, and managing promotions and public relations within most popular social networks, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. SMM offers benefits to salespeople due to moderate costs and the flexibility with which a salesperson can adapt social networks for marketing and selling purposes. While such benefits are strongly supported by experts, the decision by salespeople to adopt this new technology is not automatic. Challenges include lack of demonstrable results and difficulties in developing effective measurement metrics (Internet Advertising Bureau, 2010)

The objective of this paper is to investigate the roles of TAM-based antecedents, as well as personal and social factors in salespeople's adoption and continued use of SMM. In particular, the authors propose and test the impact of social influence (by colleagues, supervisors, competitors and customers) and personal innovativeness in SMM acceptance by salespeople, and compare their effect in the emerging (Poland) and developed (US) economies.

Theoretical Development

Derived from the social-psychology Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) posits that a user's intention to use a technology is determined by two beliefs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). PU is the extent to which a person believes use of the technology will enhance job performance, and PEU is the belief that use of the technology will be effortless. PEU is also posited to positively influence PU (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Receptivity toward adopting information technology has been emphasized in defining success of the technology (Agarwal and Prasad, 1998), while a salesperson's innovativeness has been shown to determine willingness to use technology for tasks requiring new selling routines (Churchill, Ford and Walker, 1993). It also has been found that personal innovativeness (PI) is a potent driver of the adoption of sales automation technology (Schillewaert *et al.*, 2005). A frequently proposed factor is social influence (SI), defined as a user's perception that important people believe the user should adopt the technology (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Based on this theory, we test the following hypotheses:

H1a: Salespeople who perceive greater usefulness of SMM are more likely to adopt SMM.

H1b: Salespeople who perceive greater ease of SMM use are more likely to adopt SMM.

H1c: PEU has an indirect positive effect (via PU) on salespeople's adoption of SMM.

H2: Salespeople with greater PI are more likely to adopt SMM.

H3: Salespeople who experience SI to adopt SMM are more likely to adopt SMM.

H4: Different types of SI will be salient in affecting SMM adoption in Poland and the US.

H5: Salespeople who experience SI to use SMM are more likely to continue using SMM.

Method

Utilizing commercial distribution lists, salespeople in Poland and the US were requested to complete an online survey about their experiences with, and plans for adopting and continuing to use, SMM. In total, 187 responses were obtained (72 from the US and 115 from Poland).

Discussion

Findings support the role of TAM in explaining technology-related drivers of salespersons' adoption of SMM for professional purposes in the US context, which is characterized by easy availability of information about positive and negative aspects of the new sales technology, professional reports and various polls. In the context of Poland, an emerging economy, where SMM is still in its nascent stages, only PEU is a significant predictor of SMM initial adoption. In the absence of usefulness criteria and bottom-line results, or particular SMM strategies, and with the overwhelming (potentially false) perception of easiness to use SMM, apparent ease of use may be the main factor in explaining the SMM phenomenon. The identified different roles of technology-related factors in Poland and the US underscore the need to explore other factors facilitating SMM adoption in diverse economic and cultural conditions.

References Used in this Abstract are Available upon Request