What digital content marketing works for e-commerce platforms? An analysis of customers' passive use in enhancing purchase intention[★]

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Abstract. Drawn on Uses and gratifications theory (UGT), this study analyzes the influence of customers' digital content marketing (DCM) motivations on their purchase intention on e-commerce platform. By using quantitative methods with a sample size of 414 young customers and Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) to test the conceptual model, the research results indicated that information, entertainment and remuneration have a positive impact on customer passive use, which can lead to purchase intention. Thus, our study extends the UGT research by introducing a theoretical framework of DCM and advancing our understanding of how to promote online purchase intention. Our framework may provide managers insights into their digital marketing strategy and help them make use of customers' passive use e-commerce platforms to enhance sales.

Keywords: Digital content marketing (DCM), UGT, Passive use, Purchase intention, E-commerce

1 Introduction

The Internet is developing rapidly that provides brand opportunities to sell products to customers through e-commerce platforms (Fan et al., 2020). According to a report of We Are Social (2021), there were 45.6 million Vietnamese people purchasing products via the Internet in 2020. It is obvious that Vietnamese customers are getting used to online shopping, especially in Covid-19 pandemic period. Thus, how to attract and keep customers purchasing with this volume is a main concern for e-commerce managers.

Regarding online shopping, Pavlou (2003) defined purchase intention as customers' willingness to engage in an online transaction, which can drive in more sales. While

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competition among online vendors becomes stronger, understanding customer behavior through purchase intention as well as the effective way to communicate with them is gaining importance. The report of We Are Social (2021) also pointed out that 85.5 percent of Vietnamese Internet users have already searched for a product to buy. However, few recent studies relating to online purchase intention have investigated how to enhance customers' intention to buy via providing value content. Consequently, the e-commerce managers still have no instructions to deliver brand-related content to customers based on their needs to promote them to buy products. Thus, our study will fill this gap by exploring the way to develop customers' purchase intention via their passive use, considering if there is a difference among males and females. Hence, the purpose of our study is to (1) enhance understanding of customer motivation relating to brand's DCM; (2) develop a conceptualization of DCM in e-commerce; (3) suggest a guidance regarding efficient DCM strategy for brand managers on e-commerce platforms.

2   Conceptual background

2.1   Digital content marketing

Customers are becoming to doubt advertising and other traditional marketing communications, thus setting the stage for the growth of DCM (Matteo & Dal Zotto, 2015). Breidbach et al. (2014) argued that DCM represents content marketing activities performed through digital platforms (e.g., company website, social media) in different formats such as live streaming/video, guides, and others (Taylor, 2012). In e-commerce platforms (e.g., Shopee), DCM can be displayed on brands' home page or product information. In addition, Wang et al. (2017) considered DCM can boost customer convert to brand outcomes such as brand awareness, engagement, brand trust, and sales leads (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Thus, DCM is becoming more important; however, there are few papers investigating its role in e-commerce platforms. To fill this gap, this study considers DCM as "the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms to develop their favorable brand engagement, trust, and relationships" (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

2.2   Uses and Gratification theory

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) has been widely applied to assess people's motivation to use media. In contrast to effects-oriented research traditions that take the view of the communicator, UGT examines media effects from the perspective of the individual user (Aitken et al., 2008) by exploring why and how they use a media rather than how the media influence them (Katz et al., 1974). UGT has been applied in many research areas to explore communication tool usage (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Dimmick et al., 2000). Similarly, this study considers UGT as the theoretical background to understand why customer consume DCM. Because brands target to attract customers by creating and distributing value content, it's important to explore customers' motivations to build suitable marketing strategies. Thus, this study applies the UGT classification

of Piehler et al. (2019) to comprehend the DCM motivations through four factors: information, entertainment, social interaction, and remuneration, which are the most applied to understanding the customers' activities relating to brand-related content.

2.3   Passive use

E-commerce platforms have added several functions which allow customers to consume brand-related content from firms or other customers (e.g., Shopee Feed of Shopee). Muntinga et al. (2011) argued that these activities represent the engagement of passive customers, who consume by reading reviews or following home pages of a brand. Thus, by consuming brand-related content on e-commerce platforms, customers can satisfy their needs through the brand's DCM. Gainous et al. (2021) considered passive use to have the same meaning as "consumption" of social media, which was defined by Muntinga et al. (2011). Thus, this research argues that the literature relating to content consumption can be used to build the theoretical basis of passive use.

2.4   Purchase intention

Most industries concentrate on enhancing customers' purchase intention. In the context of e-commerce, purchase intention is the state when a customer is willing to enter into an online transaction (Pavlou, 2003). Zhang et al. (2014) argued measuring actual behaviors is difficult so purchase intention is a good factor to represent actual behavior. Moreover, lack of intention to buy on online platforms creates many barriers in the progress of e-commerce (He et al., 2008). Hence, investigating purchase intention in the e-commerce context is essential to have a better understanding of the needs and expectations of customers (Shaari & Arifin, 2010). Therefore, this study considers purchase intention as the process that customers plan to buy a product or service (Huarng et al., 2010) based on information obtained from the company's DCM strategies.

3   Hypothesis development

3.1   Digital content marketing and Passive use

Digital content marketing motivations are considered to drive positively customers' passive use. Foremost, information motivation refers the customers' search for information about products, reviews of others or any information relating to their purchase or use of the brand's products (Muntinga et al., 2011). Thus, lack of information about a product or brand can lead to customers' informative needs, which result in content consuming activities. Next, entertainment motivation involves relaxation, escapism, amusement and fun (Muntinga et al., 2011; de Vries & Carlson, 2014). Hence, customers tend to consume brand's hilarious posts to escape from reality or have fun. Third, social interaction motivation includes satisfaction in relation to others, such as social identity (accomplishing a sense of connection, belonging). According to previous studies (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Popp & Wilson, 2018), customers can find a belonging feeling by browsing a brand's homepage. Thus, social interaction motivation can lead to content consuming behavior. Finally, remuneration relates to economic rewards such

as gifts, coupons and discounts (Tsai et al., 2017). To receive them, customers have to consume brand-related content first. Consequently, the more remuneration motivation customers have, the more content they consume. Hence, the hypotheses are proposed:

H1: (a) Information, (b) Entertainment, (c) Social interaction, and (d) Remuneration respectively has a positive relationship with Passive use.

3.2   Passive use and Purchase intention

According to Flynn et al. (1996), customers regularly seek guidance and permission before deciding to buy a product. Thus, they tend to browse an online community or read reviews from others to obtain necessary information. As such when customers are gratified by consuming brand-related content, they will have more willingness to buy. Additionally, Pöyry et al. (2013) point out that when customers repeat browsing brand home page, customers will visit online communities with stronger needs to purchase in mind. This study argues that e-commerce users (also online customers) can be enhanced purchase intention through consuming brand-related content.

Moreover, some consumer behavior analyses show that males and females differ in information processing (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). While females are more concerned with the risk of buying online (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004), males tend to be risk-taking and take benefits from these activities (Fan & Miao, 2012). They are also told that "females did not trust e-commerce to the same extent as males did" (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005). Furthermore, in the context of the physical environment, females are more sensitive than males (Chiu et al., 2005). It is obvious that female customers will focus more on available information on e-commerce to understand a product or brand than males, thus leading to higher purchase intention. Thus, the hypotheses are developed:

H2: Passive use has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H3: The relationship between passive use and purchase intention is stronger for females than for males.

4   Research method

This study conducted a survey through questionnaires to collect primary data. The questionnaire aims to collect customers' opinion about DCM motivation, their passive use and purchase intention on Shopee. The questionnaire was built in English, then translated to Vietnamese. It consists of three parts. Specifically, part 1 provides an introduction, part 2 is to obtain respondent's personal information, and part 3 includes all items to measure six constructs. The scale items were measured by a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to represent "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and were adopted from previous studies. Particularly, DCM consists of four factors adopted from de Vries et al. (2017); Passive use's scales were developed by Schivinski et al. (2016) and purchase intention were from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016). Besides, the respondents were

over 18 years old from The University of Danang - University of Economics as well as followers of Nescafé on Shopee platform. Moreover, to perform and analysis data, this study used Microsoft Excel, SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS 3.0.

5 Data analysis

5.1 Demographic

In total, most (69.1%) of respondents are from 18 to 20, 52.4% of respondents have monthly income from 1 million VND to 5 million VND. Due to the aim of examining the moderator effect of gender on purchase intention, the number of male and female respondents is nearly equal (203 men and 211 women). Moreover, most (88.9%) of respondents confirmed to access Shopee regularly every day.

5.2 Testing the measurement model

Construct reliability was measured through testing the extent to which items are free of random errors and expose persistent results. When Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability (CR) of all constructs are larger than 0.7, the standard of reliability is accepted (Nunnally, 1978). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of all constructs was greater than 0.7 and CRs ranged from 0.879 to 0.922.

Convergent validity was measured by assessing via two criteria: (1) factor loading of each item exceeded 0.7 (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000), and (2) averaged variance extracted (AVE) should be larger than 0.5 (Fornell & Larchker, 1981). The results indicated that two items of Information (IN6, IN7) and two items of Social interaction (SI3, SI4) were dropped. All factor loadings of remaining items were greater than 0.7 and AVE ranged from 0.622 to 0.782.

Discriminant validity was measured using the square root of the AVE by a structure from its indicators that must exceed that structure's correlation with other structures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results showed that the square roots of AVE are greater than the off-diagonal elements present. In summary, this model meets both standards of reliability and validity, thus accepting the measurement model.

5.3 Testing the structural model

According to Henseler et al. (2014), SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) is a good indicator to assess the suitability of a model to its sample. This index is expected to be <0.08 or 0.1 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The PLS analysis showed that SRMR (0.061) was less than 0.1. Besides, the results also indicated the coefficient of determination (R square) equal to 0.375 and larger than 0.2, which is considered as high in consumer behavior domain (Hair et al., 2011). The hypothetical structural model is examined based on the significance levels and path coefficient of each factor. This study

applied the path coefficient significance levels of $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$ to test the hypotheses.
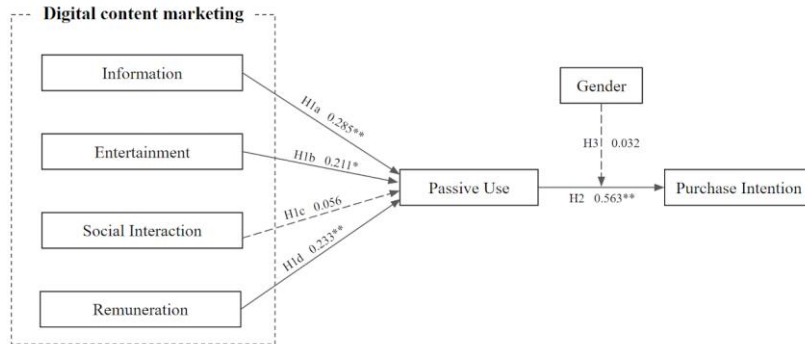

Fig. 1. Results of analysis of the structural model.

Table 1. Summary of hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Original samples	T-statistics	P-value	Conclude
H1a: Information has a positive relationship with passive use	0.285	4.894	0.000	Supported
H1b: Entertainment has a positive relationship with passive use	0.211	2.558	0.011	Supported
H1c: Social interaction has a positive relationship with passive use	0.056	0.962	0.336	Not supported
H1d: Remuneration has a positive relationship with passive use	0.233	3.609	0.000	Supported
H2: Passive use has a positive impact on purchase intention.	0.563	4.679	0.000	Supported
H3: The relationship between passive use and purchase intentions is stronger for females than for males.	0.032	0.381	0.704	Not supported

6   Discussion

The results have confirmed the relationships between customers' motivation to use DCM and purchase intention via their passive use in the e-commerce context, considering the moderating effect of customers' gender. This study explored that information, entertainment, and remuneration affect positively on their passive use on e-commerce platforms, while social interaction has no effect. This relationship is in line with the

study of Muntinga et al. (2011). In terms of information, customers are becoming depending on others' experiences about a brand/product, which leads to more regularity in their content consumption. Besides, customers who have higher entertainment motivation tend to consume brand-related content. This can be explained by the strong impact of Covid-19 pandemic, which gives most people fear and facilitates them to pass time and escape from reality. Moreover, Piehler et al. (2019) stated that remuneration content requires a more active level of customers' participation (e.g., commenting, sharing), thus remuneration has no effect on content consumption. This study argued that before customers have more active use, they have to consume DCM passively. Hence, remuneration affects passive use positively.

In contrast, when social interaction is well drawn in previous social media studies (Piehler et al., 2019), the result showed that this motivation is not relevant to customers' passive use (p = 0.336). This can be explained by some different features between social media and e-commerce platforms. While social media has brand community function to promote customers to consume brand-related content then interact with others, e-commerce platforms don't have a place for customers to share content. Thus, customers tend to choose social media when they want to interact through a brand's DCM.

The result also showed that customers' passive use influences positively on their purchase intention in the context of e-commerce, which is consistent with the outcomes of previous social media studies (Pöyry et al., 2013; Qin, 2020). However, gender has no moderating effect on the relationship between passive use and purchase intention (p = 0.704). This implies that both male and female customers have similar content consuming behavior and purchase intention on e-commerce platforms.

7   Implication and limitation

Based on the research results, this study provides some practical implications. First, besides adding three characteristics (e.i. information, entertainment, and remuneration) into the brand's DCM to facilitate customer passive use, brand managers on e-commerce platforms should promote customer feedback about product/brand via remuneration (e.g., gifts, coupons) to enrich the source of reliable information. Second, e-commerce developers should aim to create new features such as group/community to improve social interaction among customers, which can lead to their passive use (Piehler et al., 2019) and purchase intention. Third, managers should pay attention to both male and female customers, due to their similar passive use on e-commerce platforms.

This study still has some limitations. First, only gender was examined as a moderating variable between customers' passive use and purchase intention. Further research can consider other variables such as ages, incomes, etc. Second, the research was conducted in only Danang, the generalisability of these findings is limited. Thus, there is a need to examine the research in other cities or nations. Third, this study only accessed

customers' purchase intention, further research should explore their actual online behavior.

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