

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONSUMER COMMUNICATIONS IN CRISIS PERIODS

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ABSTRACT: *Social media is used for several consumption related communications like word of mouth, information search, and information sharing and communicating with firm. Also, social media is used for reaching information about social fluctuations like social, economic and political crises. Researches indicate that the level of being effected by a crisis is related with various changes in consumption behavior. At this point, the role of social media has not been researched in spreading crises related messages among people. So, present study asserts that consumption behavior of people may differentiate in terms of crises awareness, information level and negative perceptions about crises due to using social media for crisis communication. At last, suggestions for researches and companies are made.*

KEYWORDS: Crisis and consumption, Crises and Social Media, Social Media and Consumption

INTRODUCTION

Social media is an online communication tool which have functions of self-expression, attending groups, sharing something (photos, picture, video etc.), chatting, finding friend, making collective events etc. (Isler and Andiç, 2011, Koksall and Ozdemir, 2013; 325, Eraslan, 2013; 29, Yavuz and Haseki, 2012; 127). As usage of internet and smart phones and addiction of social media increases, many people can make interactions without place restriction (Karahisar, 2013; 71-72). These tools affect societies in the economic, social, cultural and political area (Isler ve Andiç, 2011; 1, Terkan, 2014; 57). People change their behaviors, habits, traditions and communications styles. As they spent more times across the screen, they can not present in society physically, decrease face to face communication and faces many health problems. Nevertheless, people prefer using social media, since they obtain many utility like reaching innovations easily, relieving, suppressing feeling of loneliness, sharing and defending opinions (Dirik, et al., 2012), communicating and exchanging information (Kartal, 2011; 159) socializing, making fun (Akçay, 2011; 147, Koseoglu, 2012), having a sense of being every time in every where (Eraslan, 2013; 29), being favor, being taken into account and having reputation etc. (Uyanik, 2013, Arik, 2013).

Since social media usage among teenagers and middle age people is high and increasing as time goes by, indication the results and importance of communication in this channel is an

important subject for social sciences. This study takes attention to possible effects of crises related communication in social media to consumption behavior.

CONSUMERS AND FIRMS IN CRISES

Together with the globalization and increasing interactions among societies; economic, political or technological crises faced in any location may easily affect all economies and economic actors. Under crises conditions, people make purchasing decisions more carefully, consume less, search more information for purchasing, prefer cheaper and discounted products and stores, choose small size packages and cheaper substitute products if possible (Avraham, 1981, Bayraktaroglu, 2004; 71). Moreover as people decrease their consumption expenditures, their wants for being ready for unexpected life events increase in crises periods. As a result of increasing saving and decreasing demand, bad economic conditions deepening because of decreasing in financing sources and transactions (Marangoz and Uluyol, 2010; 82). The effect of crises may vary by the properties of people like value consciousness, risk aversion attitudes, materialism values and simple life style. Because, people don't change consumption patterns so much because of crises, who do not seek spend money's worth, don't afraid from uncertainty, don't give importance to money and wealth and already have a simple life style (Ozgul and Ozguven, 2011).

The effect of crises on purchasing behavior is related with disposable income, feeling of safe about future, relying to economy and businesses and lifestyle and values about consumption. But it is seen that, consumer confidence indexes are generally at the lowest level in the crisis periods (Quelch and Jocz, 2009). Consumer confidence index is an indicator of consumer evaluations, opinions and expectations about general economic conditions, financial situations, unemployment, suitability of consumption and saving etc. For Turkey, CCI's (Consumer Confidence Indexes) are at the lowest levels in 2008 economic crises or December 2013 political crisis as seen in the following table;

Table 1. Consumer Confidence Indexes In Turkey

		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
January	CCI	88,5	78,6	78,9	58,3	66	78,1	79	75,8	72,4
	% Δ	2,7	-0,3	-2,2	2,9	0,7	0,4	0,3	3	-3,5
February	CCI	87,9	79,5	74,4	60,8	68,6	80,3	79,6	76,7	69,2
	% Δ	-0,7	1,2	-5,7	4,2	4	2,9	0,8	1,2	-4,3
March	CCI	88,5	79,2	68,7	61,6	71,5	80,2	79,3	74,9	72,7
	% Δ	0,7	-0,4	-7,6	1,3	4,2	-0,2	-0,4	-2,3	5
April	CCI	89	80,4	63	67,5	72,6	80,2	75,7	75,6	78,5
	% Δ	0,6	1,5	-8,3	9,7	1,5	0,1	-4,5	0,9	7,9
May	CCI	86,8	81,7	62,1	70,1	73,4	79,6	78,1	77,5	76
	% Δ	-2,5	1,6	-1,4	3,7	1,1	-0,8	3,1	2,4	-3,1
June	CCI	78,9	80,9	61,8	72	74,8	83,2	76,8	76,2	
	% Δ	-9,1	-1	-0,6	2,8	2	4,5	-1,7	-1,6	
July	CCI	75,4	82,3	63,8	69,1	74,3	81,6	77	78,5	
	% Δ	-4,5	1,6	3,2	-4	-0,7	-1,9	0,3	2,9	
August	CCI	78,2	85	66,6	68,1	74,1	78,5	74,3	77,2	
	% Δ	3,7	3,3	4,5	-1,5	-0,2	-3,8	-3,5	-1,6	
September	CCI	78,1	83,9	67,5	68,7	77,2	80,5	72,1	72,1	
	% Δ	-0,1	-1,3	1,3	0,9	4,1	2,5	-3	-6,6	
October	CCI	78,3	83	61	67,2	75,8	76,5	69,3	75,5	
	% Δ	0,3	-1,1	-9,6	-2,1	-1,8	-4,9	-3,8	4,8	
November	CCI	80,1	79,3	55,7	65,2	78,1	77,8	72,6	77,5	
	% Δ	2,3	-4,4	-8,8	-3,1	3,1	1,7	4,7	2,6	
December	CCI	78,8	80,7	56,7	65,6	77,8	78,8	73,6	75	
	% Δ	-1,6	1,7	1,8	0,6	-0,4	1,3	1,4	-3,3	

Source: http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=1010, 28.05.2014.

In addition to these explanations, crisis affect companies like consumers. Companies should know and adapt changes in consumer behaviors. In accordance with changing priorities of consumers and decreasing expenditures; sales decrease. Firms are forced to decrease costs, reduce prices and delay new investments (Song, 1998, Zurawicki and Braidot, 2005). Under these conditions, hopelessness and depression level of owners or stockholders increases and negative perceptions about crises are arisen (Sututemiz, et al., 2009; 29).

To summarize the commercial changes in crises periods; consumption decreases, consumers make more information research and be price oriented, prefers cheaper or locally produced products, watch informative advertisements, look for discounted and promoted products (Yavuz, 2008), costs of raw materials and financing increase, investments decrease, bankruptcies are arisen, production and capacity utilization decreases, products are remains in hand and unemployment and poverty ascend (Hayta, 2012; Yuksel ve Murat, 2002).

In crises periods, using resources and making expenditure more carefully is become more important. To do so, focusing on valuable and loyal consumers, taking into consideration the marketing as investment opportunity rather than cost unit, being more visible in societal problems and events, benefiting from third party communications as public relations which is less costly than advertising, making small, cheap and effective advertisements in local newspapers and televisions (since they are cheaper and open to negotiation in crises) and using web sites and social media is possible (Weimann, 2009; 13).

In addition to these, governmental and legal regulations can be made to overcome the effect of crises. Developing free and transparent market structure and information network, encouraging the foundation and evolution of firms, eliminating the bureaucratic barriers (Yuksel and Murat, 2002), ensuring economic and political stability, controlling public borrowings, developing objective, simple, fair, general and stable tax system is necessary for this goal. What is more, consumers also can evaluate investment opportunities, follow and rehabilitate credibility in financing institutions, be careful in house buying and selling, use bargaining power and benefit from promotional campaigns of companies (Hayta, 2012; 21-22).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONSUMER BEHAVIORS

According as social media is being a part of daily life, using it as a marketing tool is inevitable (Cohn, 2012). Also people believe firms should use social media to make advertisement, adapt to developments and share information (Campbell, et al., 2013; 43). Moreover social media is an important information resource for consumers. Information sharing and opinions about goods and services which generated by other people and firms, affect purchasing decisions (Sarisik and Ozbay, 2012, Eroç and Dogdubay, 2012, Aymankuy et al., 2013). For example this effect is meaningful many industries like airline (Baker, 2012), confection etc. (Yengin and Sagiroglu, 2012; 9). In other words, consumers transforms into viral marketers. Because, messages are transferred to more consumers in a quicker way by consumers with respect to traditional face to face communication (Isler and Andıç, 2011).

People use social media in many ways to affect consumption. Consumers express themselves and their ideas continuously (Solmaz and Görkemli, 2012; 183). Especially opinion leaders,

who like new products and speaking about new products, illuminate and affect consumers who research information in social media (Ozgen and Kurt, 2013). Moreover, consumers have a tendency of sharing satisfactions and dissatisfactions about products after purchasing in social media (Islek, 2012; 144). For example, it is seen that mobile phone consumers share their main problems (related with product return, speaker, warranty etc.) in online sites which is founded to complaint sharing (Argan, 2014).

These developments lead to burn new economic places that firms have to compete (Terkan, 2014; 57). Most of the successful companies invest in marketing in social media. Some of them found departments that concern for social media communications, develop new plans according to opinions and comments on products and companies and determine properties, opinions and experiences of new and old consumers by the help of social media (Solam and Gorkemli, 2012; 183). Even general managers and managers of firms involve in social media sharing, establish friendships with employees and consumers and making trade communications (Dunn; 2010). Likewise, institutional communication occurs in social media since workers and other stakeholders transfer their opinions and complaints to firms and receive messages (Akinici and Oksuz, 2012).

In short, in addition to making social communication, social media is used to make transactions (Halis, 2012; 149), segment markets (Alabay, 2011), develop customer specific marketing communications (Ziemnowicz, et al., 2013, Bekaroglu, 2011; 157), advertise, share information and opinion about brands, construct consumer pools, making finance, banking and publication transactions etc. As a result new and sound economic structures are arisen and developing (Baslar, 2013). Social media is used as a tool for realizing relations among consumers and firms inevitably. Also it may be expected that social media give people ability of reaching information around the crises like economic or financial fluctuations in society. Moreover, as social media usage increases, people may be more conscious and reactive to these changes. So relationships between crisis communications in social media and changes in consumer behavior because of crisis perceptions must be pointed out.

COMMUNICATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS PERIODS

Social media is used in crisis periods by companies and people for instant and mutual communications like other times (Newsletter, 201). In addition to scarcity of researches about using properties of social media in a general crisis periods, consumer can use social media to make decisions about products in crisis. At this point, financial, physical and crime risk perceptions, age and level of social media usage of consumers are important determinant of social media usage (Pennington-Gray et al., 2013). Social media gives people several communication opportunities. Typical advantages are low cost, learning and attending different opinions, taking education, making organizations with others, decreasing problem of place and time in communications and being interactive etc. As a result, it leads people to move together, announce opinions more effectively with a more atomistic way (Ozgul, 2012, Paptic and Noonan, 2011, Kaplan and Erturk, 2012; 11). Developing interactive and multi dimensional communications represents a structural change with respect to traditional mass communication. Even the effects of new communication channel (social media) in social changes like the Arab Spring are discussed (Babacan et al., 2014). Because sharing opinions about any subject, learning the ideas of others, supporting an idea, eliciting response in a very

short time period and creating a controversial based communication environment is not so difficult phenomenon for people in social media (Solmaz and Gorkemli, 2012; 183).

Just like every subjects, social media is used for crisis communications. At the same time, politicians use social media in decision and persuasion processes (Bayraktutan et al., 2012; 5, Kartal, 2013; 159). Although attending protests in social media is not sufficient for physical reactions (street protests etc.) (Papic and Noonan, 2011), being affected from crisis interactions in terms of general economic and social conditions may be a natural result of them.

In this regard, particularly for individuals who use social media extensively, it can be expected to expose crisis related messages and be affected by them. In crisis periods, people are exposed to written, verbal and visual messages about details of crises and they make private and public communications about crisis. As a result, they receive much more and manipulated information about social changes and would be more aware of the level of social or environmental problems.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

By reducing communication restrictions like space, time and control, social media makes information to be spread, grow and effective in a much shorter time period among people. This changing communication structure results to being informed, aware and effected from environmental changes of people especially who use social media heavily. In other words the use of social media increases sensitivity of people to social changes like economic crises. Under the assumption of social media usage will increase and be used great majority of people, this sensitivity will be more effective in future. It is expected that, especially people who can easily reach intended, desired and effective messages about a crisis, would decrease consumption since the effect of perceived crisis.

As a result, business should be aware of the consumers, who are more sensitive to crises and affected by crises in a shorter time, and take necessary measures for this group of consumers. For example, to reduce the consequences of an economic crisis or benefit from possible opportunities, marketing campaigns can be developed and initiated in social networking sites. Thus, more effective and selective marketing offers can be developed. This study draw attention to the potential impact of crisis related social media communications to consumer behavior. Elaboration and researching the subject with field studies, would gain useful results for consumers and businesses. Under this framework, following subjects are suggested to researchers;

Determining the role of social media using properties and using social media for crisis related communication on crisis sensitivity and conscious.

Investigating the structure, density and results of specific crisis related communications like natural disaster, food safety, financial crisis, accidents, political crisis etc.

Determining relationships among crisis perceptions and consumption changes depending upon communications about crisis in social media.

Investigating the sensitivity of industries to crisis communications in social media in terms of a specific crisis.

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