

ABSTRACT

Mapping Attitudes to Social Networking Sites: The Role of Online Social Presence

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With rising ownership of internet-enabled devices such as tablets and smartphones, increasing numbers of consumers are relying on information derived from online brand communities to guide their purchase decisions. In response, businesses have begun to utilize Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook more aggressively to promote their products and interact with customers. Many uncertainties still exist however, about the optimal way to design and leverage this media channel. This study develops a theoretical model to understand how varying levels of human-to-human interactivity influences social presence on the SNS, and affects consumer attitudes towards the site. An experiment manipulating source of interaction (content source: User-Generated Content vs. Marketer-Generated Content), frequency of interaction (posting frequency: High vs. Low) and quality of interaction (content type: Product-Related vs. Social-Related) is used to investigate the effect of the specific interaction elements on perceived social presence and attitudes. Theoretically, this study extends social presence research into new domains by introducing the concept of perceived product risk as a critical mediating variable in the model. It also offers practical guidance to marketers by establishing the role of social interaction as part of digital marketing communications strategy.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC); social presence; interactivity; human-to-human interactivity; online social presence; Social Networking Sites (SNS); attitude; attitude toward Social Networking Sites; product risk; perceived usefulness; Facebook.