

Shopping and Word-of-Mouth Intentions on Social Media

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Abstract

Social Media has been gaining popularity worldwide over the last years at an increasingly growing rate. Motivated by this fact, firms are piloting different approaches of promoting their products and services to consumers in order to capitalize on the prominence of such websites. However, there is much debate in the academic and business community about the potential of social media as a platform for marketing and commerce, and the viable strategies that could constitute them as a possible solution for future ventures. Research to date has been growing, with only a limited number of studies exploring the business potential of social media. The aim of this research is to elucidate how specific aspects of social media websites foster user intention to browse products, and the effect that this has in shaping purchasing and information sharing intentions. Utilitarian and Hedonic motivation theory provides the theoretical background on which we segregate the factors that contribute to product browsing on social media websites. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis is performed on data obtained from 165 social media users to test our research model. Outcomes indicate that specific aspects trigger Utilitarian (Convenience and Product Selection) and Hedonic (Idea and Adventure) motivations which in sequence impact user intention to browse products on such mediums. Finally, browsing intention is linked in a significantly positive manner with purchasing and word-of-mouth intention.

Keywords: Social media, Internet shopping, Purchase motivation, Utilitarian and hedonic motivation, Theory of planned behavior, Electronic word of mouth

1 Introduction

Social media has managed to revolutionize the way Internet users communicate and interact with each other within a very short period. Users have adopted in masses many such websites, taking advantage of the free services that they offer, enabling them to stay connected with their friends, meet new acquaintances, share user-generated content such as photos, videos and text, and get informed about news and trends [34]. Latest studies indicate that US users spend more than 22% of their online time on social networking websites [57]; while according to [58] Indian users spend more time on social media sites than on any other activity on the Internet. In addition to the increasing time spent on social media, user adoption has multiplied, with some prominent examples being Facebook (900 million users), Twitter (500 million users) and QZone (480 million users) [24]. The spectrum of social media however does not consist solely of social networking sites (SNS), but also encompasses a wide range of applications, such as media sharing (YouTube, Flickr, Jamendo), business and academia networking (LinkedIn, Academia), virtual worlds (Second Life), blogs (Blogspot), and many other platforms. The means by which social media has managed to attract and maintain users on their websites for extended periods of time has allured researchers in demarcating the facilitating factors of their success [35].

The attention that social media has received however has not been limited to research purposes only. Increasing emphasis now shifted to the business value that they may offer [53]. Over the past years business executives and marketers have realized the business potential that these platforms may have for gaining a competitive edge [9], [68]. The richness of media supported by social media, in combination with the vast user base, enables them to be used as a unique tool for attracting new customers and gaining direct customer feedback. These aspects of social media combined with promising reports from early business adopters which state that 61% of companies are somewhat to very satisfied with the returns of their investment [51], have put pressure on companies to formulate strategies with the aim of harvesting this potential.

Despite the rosy prospects of social media as a strategic tool for gaining a competitive advantage, a number of studies have revealed that in many occasions companies that have rushed into such websites without formulating a clear plan have not only failed to realize any gains, but have in some cases even had a damaging effect on their image [32]. The prime facilitating factors that have led to the engagement of companies in social media websites are the ease of use, and their low cost compared to conventional methods of marketing [44]. These aspects have created a wave of companies developing pages and profiles on the web, disregarding empirically validated practices that are proven to be successful [53]. A large percentage of firms have perceived social media as the panacea to advertising on the internet not realizing that these platforms were designed for users, and therefore any attempt to market on them is out of their locus of control [32]. Users are the core of social media and are involved in media generation, circulation, and commenting on any content that is entered into the web, even that which is consumer-oriented. To some extent we can contend that the failure to see any return on their investments is due to the lack of a well-defined social media strategy, which places emphasis on the particular aspects that users perceive as important. This friction between deployed approaches by firms and actual customer needs is apparent in many recent cases, where applications launched on social media by companies were either not used at all, or for other purposes that suited consumer needs [44].

The gap that exists between social media users and unsuccessful company strategies for product promotion can be attributed to the lack of solid empirical findings from the research area to help guide managers decisions [18]. The small number of quantitative studies undermines promotional efforts undertaken by small and medium enterprises and their respective strategies, since in most cases they do not have the know-how compared to larger firms. Other firms are even hesitant to engage in social media for marketing and commerce [52]. Findings from qualitative research studies have shown that consumers are willing to transact commerce over social media websites which justifies the movement of many firms to go social [3]. However, this finding by itself does not provide any guidelines as to how the user base can be leveraged into a consumer pool and in turn lead to profit gains. Literature in this direction is still scarce, especially with regard to large quantitative studies examining contributing factors to user adoption of company-hosted social media websites [53]. In their majority, research articles on this subject have been based either on expert opinions or on small scale qualitative studies [44]. The outcomes of these papers are indisputably very important since they pinpoint key aspects of business to customer interaction on social media platforms. However, quantitative studies are necessary in order to validate findings and generalize results through specifically formulated research questions. In the fields of conventional commerce as well as e-commerce, such large scale studies have produced results upon which theories have been developed [5], [13], [19].

The aim of this study is twofold. First we seek to define what aspects of social media websites impact user intention to browse products or services on them. These aspects are derived from past literature and grounded upon utilitarian and hedonic motivation theory. We contend that it is critical to first define the contributing factors that lead to product browsing specifically for social media platforms, and identify potential differences from conventional stores as well as e-shops. Second, we examine if user intention to browse products over social media websites influences the intention of future purchase and if it leads to sharing product or brand information (word-of-mouth) with friends and acquaintances. Both intention to purchase and information sharing are critical aspects for companies that are

skeptical about engaging in social media business, since they not only provide another channel for commerce but also allow for indirect marketing. Therefore, the combined research question can be stated as follows:

What are the critical aspects of social media websites that facilitate product browsing by users and how does this affect the intention to purchase and pass on information?

In the following section we introduce the theoretical background by first presenting related studies in the field of marketing and purchasing, and then proceed to describe the theoretical lens upon which this research is grounded. Section 3 introduces the core constructs of the study, and delineates how the development of the theoretical research model with the corresponding hypotheses was derived. In section 4 the dataset is described in detail, while in the following section the empirical research results are presented. In closing, we discuss the outcomes of the analysis, and highlight the implications that arise for practitioners and company executives.

2 Theoretical Background

Research on the business potential of social media is still relatively scarce. In particular, the effectiveness of social media as a vehicle for marketing and commerce has remained at an abstract and theoretical level. In order to tackle the research question posed we draw on literature regarding shopping motivations, social media, and browsing and purchase intentions.

2.1 Research on Shopping Motivations

The motivation behind shopping behavior is not a novel research subject. Early studies of shopping behavior defined taxonomies of retail shoppers in the attempt to distinct the different motivations that these classifications exhibit. In the study of Stone [62], a sample of housewives in the city of Chicago was classified into four groups of shoppers: economic, personalizing, ethical and apathetic shoppers. The author notes that each category is based on a number of unique social characteristics, and infers that due to the asymmetry between groups, differentiated motivations will propel the process of shopping for each one. Similar taxonomy approaches have been performed based on orientations related to, behavior during the shopping process [66], product usage [49], and attributes of the selected retailer [8], [49].

The shopping process is conceptualized as a sequential series of behaviors, along with the underlying motivations which lead to the purchase of an item [69]. It recognized that potential shoppers could be motivated to search and buy by the use that they would make of a purchased product or a service. However, additional factors, such as socializing, satisfaction of the new purchase or simply wasting time have a profound impact on evoking people to purchase [69]. The core finding from Tauber's research was that people do not only shop for the usability obtained from the purchased item, but also the satisfaction perceived in the process of searching and purchasing. Utilitarian and hedonic motivation theory tries to explain the reasons by which people are inclined to buy. Hirschman and Holbrook [40] extend this idea by including factors that are related to the hedonic motivation such as aesthetics, emotion and enjoyment and compare them to utilitarian shopping motivations.

Utilitarian and hedonic motivations differ fundamentally. Utilitarian motivation is defined as rational and goal oriented [7], [40]. Applied to shopping, it shows that the benefit depends on the efficiency during the process of acquisition. The initiation of the shopping process for utilitarian shoppers is triggered by a mission that must be completed, and the benefit which is perceived by the shopper depends on the efficiency and completeness of the process [5]. Hedonic motivation contrarily refers to the search of emotions such as happiness, enjoyment and fantasy, experienced during the shopping procedure. Therefore, consumers with a strong hedonic motivation seek the enjoyment of the process rather than the utility of the purchased product. Hence, hedonic shoppers receive satisfaction from the experience itself and the emotions which it creates. This is also the main differentiation between utilitarian and hedonic consumers with regard to their motives.

It is justifiable that much attention has been placed over the last years on hedonic motivation since it has become the extension of utilitarian motivation, both of which are necessary in order to sustain a competitive advantage for retailers [60]. The combined effect of these two motivations was put to test by Babin [5], who pinpoint that hedonic factors impact unplanned shopping while utilitarian factors do not. Therefore, it can be postulated that although factors that fall in either category may differ significantly, in order to view the shopping processes holistically, both utilitarian and hedonic aspects must be investigated simultaneously. The particularities that each motivation exhibits have also been subject of much attention over the past years, and provide interesting implications since the behavior of utilitarian and hedonic shoppers differ in many ways.

One of the most interesting studies that compared the differences in behaviors found that hedonic products have higher premiums than utilitarian ones [17]. Additionally, when hedonic products are coupled with hedonic advertising campaigns, they yield increased premiums, with the same principle possibly applying for utilitarian merchandise. This is particularly intriguing, since it distinguishes between products and promotional campaigns, and identifies their associations. However, a study by Dhar and Wertenbroch [27] showed that when faced with the choice to give up a product for pleasure or for use; products for pleasure are the ones to be given up first. This outcome reveals that the

type of product under certain circumstances leads to different shopping behaviors, and therefore it can be considered that they have a different degree of impact for users.

Although the aforementioned studies have provided insight over the factors that affect consumer behavior, they do not study the particularities that online shopping and advertising present. Over the past ten years, attention has been shifted to motivation and adoption studies on shopping through the internet [12]. A number of recent scientific articles have examined these types of motivations with respect to the design of online environments [47]. Most such studies have identified utilitarian motivation factors as being the primary force for shopping online. Some of these utilitarian factors include product diversity [1] convenience, information availability, customization [33] and time efficiency [56]. Blake et al. [10] compiled a list of several features for commercial sites that are important to internet shoppers with the majority being utilitarian factors. Despite the dominance of utilitarian factors in influencing shopping behavior, research on the hedonic aspects has not remained stagnant. According to Falk [29], whether consumers are faced with a storefront or a commercial website of a retailer, sensual stimulations and ability to browse freely are important. In alignment with what Falk suggested, Kim and Shim [46] argue that consumers do not navigate through electronic shops to collect information about a specific product that they may need, but also to fulfill the needs of experience and emotion. Similarly to traditional means of shopping, the decision to buy through an e-shop is influenced by the aesthetics and enjoyment which it provides [50]. Summarizing the above, it can be asserted that with regard to shopping, utilitarian and hedonic motivations exist regardless of the context in which they are promoted.

We can identify a broadening in perspective with the terms hedonic and utilitarian not only being applied to motivations, but also to perceived usefulness of systems and aspects of experience [59]. A number of studies have gone past the examination of motivations as predictors of product search intention and purchasing intention, and applied the concepts in the domain of Information Systems (IS) [71], software design [22], [38] and mobile device usage [73], [79]. However, to our knowledge little research has been performed so far on the motivations for browsing products on social media platforms through the utilitarian and hedonic motivation lens.

2.2 Social Media as an Enabler of Marketing and Commerce

The potential of social media for product and brand marketing was quickly realized by business executives, with a number of early attempts yielding very promising outcomes [9]. These results have placed emphasis on the importance of social media and now more and more companies are considering them as an essential part of their integrated marketing communications plans [18]. Although most companies have only recently considered social media as a marketing and commerce option, there is a high interest in investing on such websites in order to attract new clients and increase revenues. However, social media present a number of particularities in comparison with conventional marketing and commerce channels, which could potentially constitute findings in those fields non-applicable. Thus, there is a need to reconsider past findings and empirically put to test existing theories in order to validate their consonance applied to the social media domain. It is a well known fact that when considering different contexts, the same outcomes are not to be expected. A prominent example is the comparison between conventional and electronic shops, where the core aspects that form user's utilitarian and hedonic motivations differ [70]. We argue that the same will apply in the case of social media; hence, it is imperative to first distinguish what shapes utilitarian and hedonic motivations on these platforms.

This is a critical aspect which top executives should not neglect before proceeding to deploying marketing strategies that apply on other promotional channels. To our knowledge, no empirical studies have examined the critical success factors of social media as a platform for marketing and commerce. However, a number of research articles have investigated aspects that contribute to adoption of social media either for general purpose [48] or for case specific utility [23], [28]. In most of these cases, the aim is to determine the degree of social media penetration on internet users or enterprises and not to define what the critical aspects that leads to this engagement. Existing studies that attempt to address this very important aspect is primarily based on expert opinions, and is limited in providing advice on how to successfully deploy social media for business purposes in general. Although these guidelines are formulated on distilled expert knowledge, they do not specifically detail on critical success factors of marketing and commerce over such mediums, and are not supported by solid quantitative evidence [44].

2.3 Product Browsing and Purchase Intention

Browsing through a variety of products is considered as being a result of either a goal-oriented or an exploration-oriented behavior [42]. The former is considered to be the primary cause for consumers that want to gather information before a purchase of a specific product which they have in mind, while the latter emphasizes on consumers that have no specific task to complete with regard to purchasing an item [67]. These general categories of consumer attitudes can be found on both conventional stores as well as electronic platforms. However, through the Internet, exploration-oriented behavior is enhanced compared to conventional stores, since the 24 hour availability as well as the convenience that online stores offer, allow for users to browse through a selection of products or services on their own time. Extending on the theory of planned behavior, which postulates that users' intentions are a very powerful predictor to actual behavior [31], a number of articles have investigated consumers' intentions in order to predict actual purchases [41], [61]. According to Moe [55], purchase intention can be linked to both, goal-oriented and exploration-oriented browsing behavior. The main differentiation between the two behaviors

is that goal-oriented consumers will purchase once they find the product they are looking for, while exploration-oriented ones are likely to make an unplanned purchase providing they perceive a high hedonic stimulation. Therefore it is relevant to examine user intentions whether they are goal or exploration oriented since both are linked to purchase intention. The theory of planned behavior is intended to link attitudes to actual behavior in a context. Supported by evidence that proves this, we can assume that the same will apply for intentions over social media platforms.

3 Research Model

The purpose of this study is threefold. The first part involves exploring the factors that shape the perceived hedonic and utilitarian value of browsing products on social media websites. These factors will differ in comparison with other mediums for product promoting, such as conventional stores and electronic shops. In sequence we examine the impact that perceived utilitarian and hedonic value has on triggering user intention to browse products on such mediums. Past research has shown that distinguishing between hedonic and utilitarian motivation is imperative, since consumer behavior differs accordingly. Therefore we want to determine if social media users are inclined to browse for products based on utilitarian, hedonic motivations or both. The final part of our conceptual research model is to determine if the browsing of products on social media websites impacts the intention to purchase and/or share information about products and services to fellow peers. This final part of our research model is of great importance to practitioners, since it can potentially shed light on the value of social media for generating additional revenues and be used as a user-generated marketing platform. We therefore propose an integrated model by using hedonic and utilitarian motivation as mediating constructs in order to explain how they impact SM user's intention to browse products (Figure 1) encompassing all the aforementioned aspects.

From the utilitarian perspective, a number of studies have identified such factors that impact this category of motivations [5], [45] with regard to purchasing. In this study, and in adherence with the medium of social media which has been put to test, we make use of Wolfenbarger and Gilly's [78] categorization which distinguishes between convenience, information availability, product selection as well as the additional factor of customized advertisements. These factors are recurring in literature with a number of studies stressing their importance as part of the utilitarian motivation [16], [70]. The importance of customized advertisements has been noted as one of the greatest advantages of internet shopping since based on personal information it produces advertisements that are compatible to users likings [16], [37]. We select factors of the utilitarian spectrum based on two conditions; first that they are applicable to social media platforms, and second that they have been found to be significant in affecting motivations in studies tested in more than one context. The limitation to these four factors does not exclude additional ones from explaining social media utilitarian motivation; however a threshold has to be set regarding the plethora of selected aspects, since a large number of them could undermine the validity of results.

With regard to hedonic motivations we use the items identified by Arnold and Reynolds [4], Westbrook and Black [76], and To et al [70] who include trend discovery (keeping up with new trends and browsing new products), socializing (ability to socialize with friends and other shoppers), adventure (the stimulation felt during the browsing of products) and authority (the feeling of being able to control the medium in a way that suits the shoppers needs). As with the utilitarian factors selected, it is important to distinguish aspects that are applicable to a virtual platform from the hedonic perspective. Therefore, a number of motivational factors that are related to conventional stores are omitted. All motivations are discussed in detail in the subsequent sections and hypotheses are developed based on past literature. Hence, this model includes four utilitarian and four hedonic antecedents which are expected to affect the intention of a social media user to browse products through a social media platform. In order to capture the extent of these antecedents, two mediating constructs are developed (Utilitarian & Hedonic motivation) which are targeted in quantifying the use and enjoyment respectively that a social user experiences when browsing products. The purpose of these two constructs is to measure how each of the eight factors explains the utilitarian and hedonic value that users perceive social media to be offering with respect to product browsing.

Utilitarian and hedonic motivations are then adapted to user intention to browse product via social media, in order to determine if and to what extent they impact browsing on such mediums. The final part of the research model examines the direct effect that the intention to browse has on purchasing and word of mouth intentions, as depicted below (Figure 1).

In the following subsections we delineate each of the constructs represented in the research model figure, and proceed to develop hypotheses based on past work. Operational definitions for each construct are provided, along with references in which guided their conceptualization (Table 1).

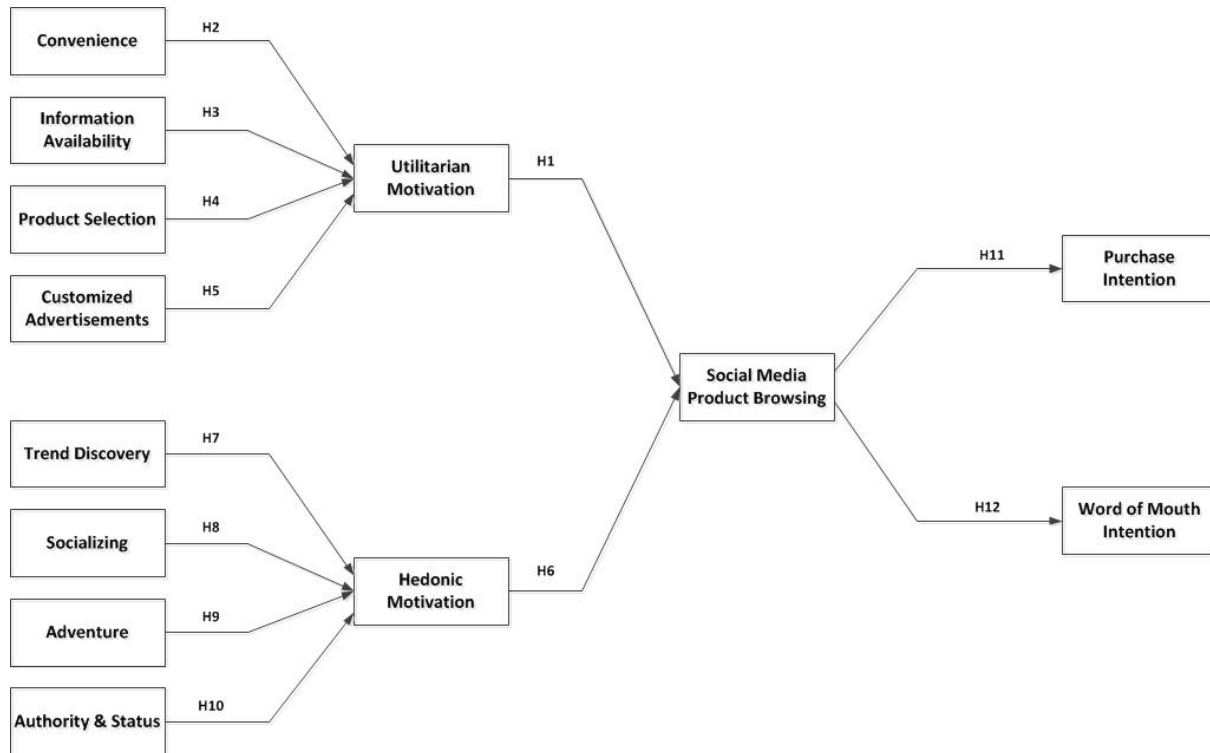


Figure 1: Research model

Table 1: Construct operational definitions

Construct	Operational Definition	Representative references guiding our conceptualization
Convenience	<i>The degree of convenience which social media sites offer for product browsing</i>	[16], [20], [70]
Information Availability	<i>The amount of available information regarding products or services on social media platforms</i>	[70], [78]
Product Selection	<i>The selection of products found on company-hosted social media sites</i>	[70], [78]
Customized Advertisements	<i>The compatibility of customized advertisements presented to users of social media based on their likings</i>	[16], [30], [37], [70]
Trend Discovery	<i>The effectiveness of social media sites in providing latest information about new trends and fashions</i>	[4], [70]
Socializing	<i>The ability to engage in a conversation (synchronous or asynchronous) with fellow peers during the browsing of products on social media sites</i>	[26], [70], [78]
Adventure	<i>The degree to which a social media site provides a novel and interesting browsing experience towards users, and the sense of excitement which they get from using it</i>	[76]
Authority & Status	<i>The sense of authority which users of social media obtain over the platform when browsing products</i>	[60]
Utilitarian Motivation	<i>The degree to which users perceive social media to be a useful and effective means to browse products.</i>	[21], [59]
Hedonic Motivation	<i>The degree to which users perceive browsing products on social media to be a fun and emotionally stimulating experience.</i>	[21], [59]
Social Media Product Browsing	<i>The degree to which users of social engage in the process of using such sites in order to browse for products</i>	[11], [65]
Purchase Intention	<i>Consumers intentions to purchase a product which they have seen on a social media website</i>	[15], [72]
Word of Mouth Intention	<i>The intention of social media users to share information with peers about products or services which they find relevant or interesting through such platforms.</i>	[14], [39], [63]

3.1 Utilitarian Motivation

Utilitarian motivations are noted repeatedly in literature as being one of the two taxonomies of forces that engage consumers in the buying process [13], [70]. In fact, it has been suggested that users with a strong utilitarian motivation, will both browse and purchase items that they are looking for regardless of the medium which they are presented with [70]. The utilitarian motive is not only concerned with the product itself, but also with the medium, that is used to promote it [47], thus placing emphasis on the characteristics that should be considered when designing it. Taking into account that the first step in the purchasing process is the seeking of information about a product, whether goal-oriented or exploration-oriented, and in conjunction with the importance which is noted regarding the platform which it is promoted, we hypothesize the following regarding social media:

H1: The intention to browse products through social media websites will be positively and significantly influenced by user's perceived utilitarian value (motivation) that such platforms offer for such tasks.

We argue that the perceived utilitarian value that social media websites offer in respect to product browsing will be dependent on the following aspects which they may exhibit.

3.1.1 Convenience

In a number of studies it has been found that shopping over the internet is more convenient since shoppers can access a vast array of products at their own time avoiding in that way the transportation needed in traditional means of shopping [16]. Additionally, in contrast with conventional shops, online shops do not have working hours, thus allowing consumers to browse or shop at any time convenient to them. Wolfenbarger & Gilly [78] support this thought, stating that the space in which the browsing and purchasing of products, contributes to the convenience of shoppers. A study by Chiang and Dholakia [20] puts to test this proposition and finds that the convenience of online shops is one of the core aspects in driving consumers to engage in the process. Similarly to electronic shops, social media websites operate at all times of the day, therefore exhibiting many resemblances. We extend on these findings, and with regard to social hypothesize the following:

H2: Convenience will have a significant positive influence on the utilitarian motivation of browsing products via social media websites.

3.1.2 Information Availability

The Internet is undoubtedly the largest and most efficient source of information acquisition. This also applies to the case of shopping by which consumers can gather information about the product that they are interested in. Bakos [6] states that the Internet allows users to easily find all necessary information they may need with only a few clicks, therefore increasing the utilitarian motivation of consumers to use it for browsing products. The availability of product information is important for consumers, from the selection of the resource that provides it, to the impact it has on influencing purchase intentions [21], [54]. Social media integrates information from a number of sources thus providing users with all necessary information about a product. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: Information availability has a positive and significant impact on the utilitarian motivation of browsing products through social media platforms.

3.1.3 Product Selection

In comparison with traditional stores, online consumers can find a greater range of products fitting their needs since more retailers exist and there is no need for large inventories [1]. The plethora of products present on one location increases the probability that a compatible match will be found according to consumers needs, thus constituting online mediums as an attractive alternative for product searching. Companies engaging in product promotion through social media websites can present the full range of products without having to stock them in their inventory [78] unlike with conventional stores. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H4: The selection of products presented on social media websites has a positive and significant impact on the utilitarian motivation of consumers to browse through them on these platforms.

3.1.4 Customized Advertisements

Han and Han [37] point out that the internet is a unique medium in order to provide consumers with customized advertisements. Through profiling performed by social media websites, customized advertisements appear to users based on his or hers specific interests and likings. Such personalized advertising has been found to enhance user's intention to both, the intention to search for products and purchase them [55], therefore acting as an initiator of the purchasing process. An early study by Gordon and Lima-Turner [36] found that consumers would be more prone to follow an advertisement that is customized to their likings than on that is not. Therefore, we can make the following hypothesis with respect to social media advertisements:

H5: Customized advertisements presented to social media users will have a positive and significant impact on the utilitarian motivation of consumers to browse products on such websites.

3.2 Hedonic Motivation

Although the impact of hedonic motivations in relation to purchasing was noted late in comparison with utilitarian shopping motivations, its importance has dominated the attention of researchers. This is primarily due to the fact that exploration-oriented consumers are influenced by hedonic aspects, which if sufficiently stimulating result in unplanned purchasing of products. Accordingly, hedonic aspects are of importance when considering mediums of product browsing and commerce. Although marketers typically provide web-stores that fulfill all functional requirements because of their association with purchasing, it is emphasized that they should not neglect more escapist items [40]. The authors note that such elements that are intrinsically enjoyable facilitate greater user participation. Hence, we can assume that for social media the same will apply and hypothesize that:

H6: Hedonic motivation will have a positive and significant effect on the intention of users to browse products by means of social media websites.

3.2.1 Trend Discovery

The concept of Trend Discovery refers to the procedure which consumers undergo in order to learn about new fashions, products, and brands. This process is found to give pleasure to consumers [4] thus stimulating the hedonic value which they perceive. One of the strongest motivations, especially of internet shoppers, is browsing and discovering new trends and fashions according to quantitative research [1]. Social media allow for a large concentration of information from various sources, a lot of which are about commercial products and for rapid renewal of this information due to their user-friendly back-end. Discovering new products according to trends is an exploration-oriented procedure. Hence it is assumed that users that engage in this process are lead by hedonic motivations. Therefore, we can set the following hypothesis:

H7: Trend Discovery will have a positive and significant impact on the hedonic motivation of internet users to browse products through social media websites.

3.2.2 Socializing

A great number of studies have identified that one of the main reasons why consumers go shopping is due to the enjoyment which the social interaction provides [26]. This aspect is particularly relevant to the hedonic motivation of consumers. This is an aspect which is noted to be a prime motivator for product browsing and purchasing in conventional stores [64], since electronic shops in their majority do not enable the socialization between consumers. Through the emergence of Web 2.0 applications and especially social media, users can transfer this experience in an online community in a synchronous or/and asynchronous manner. According to Wolfinbarger and Gilly [78], engaging in online conversations during the browsing process could provide the users with pleasure, and motivate them in doing so in the future. Consequently, for social media as a product browsing platform we hypothesize that:

H8: Social interaction will have a positive and significant effect on hedonic motivation of browsing products through social media platforms.

3.2.3 Adventure

The main proposition lying behind the concept of adventure is that consumers will experience a novel and enjoying process when shopping. The hedonic shopper is in fact more interested in this aspect of shopping than any other utilitarian motivation. When considering this aspect with regard to human-computer interaction, Webster et al. [74] argue that people should experience this sense during their time on a computer. The novelty of performing a task, i.e. product browsing, on new medium could influence the sense of adventure experienced by users. Building on this claim, we hypothesize that for social media the following will stand:

H9: The feeling of adventure has a positive and significant impact on the intention for browsing products through social media websites as a hedonic motivation factor.

3.2.4 Authority & Status

Control over the shopping experience is noted as being an important hedonic motivation when considering online shopping [60]. Differing significantly from the authority which a consumer has in a physical store, online authority and status is derived by the sense of control over the technology used. Authority is a result of the ability of a user to decide what product to browse, retrieve all information about that product in an effortless way and provide feedback which has an impact. With social media being one of the most widely adopted concepts of the past decade and the ease of use and number of functions which they offer, we can propose the hypothesis that:

H10: The sense of authority and status that internet users have over social media will have a significant and positive impact on their intention to browse products on such platforms.

3.3 Purchase Intention

From the theory of planned behavior it is debated that intentions are equally as important as actual actions, since in most cases they are a strong predictor of future outcomes. The intention to purchase is one of the most frequently applied constructs developed on the basis of this theory and applied in many occasions. The intention to purchase has been found to be influenced by numerous factors and contingencies, such as product price, information availability and quality, product type, discount level and others [2]. However, the purchasing process is initiated when a consumer browses products, which in turn may lead to the purchase of a specific item. Therefore, it is crucial to consider purchasing as a sequential process of steps, in which the browsing activity precedes of the purchasing activity. This relationship between browsing and purchase intention has been noted in literature and is particularly strong when applied to online searching and purchasing [65]. With social media rising as an extension of the online marketing and commerce paradigm, we can hypothesize the following:

H11: Browsing products over social media websites will impact user's intention to purchase them in positive and significant manner.

3.4 Word of Mouth Intention

An equally important aspect of the shopping experience is the sharing of information that a consumer will proceed to after he has engaged in the shopping process. Referral marketing as it is also termed is an aspect that is cited by practitioners and scholars at an increasing rate. This fact is attributed the importance which it is gaining, since more empirical studies reveal that positive word of mouth has an impact on new consumers attraction [43]. Additionally, users tend to share information on a product that they have seen and would be of interest to friends and peers, a typical action of post-browsing. Being familiar with a product and aware of recent product trends also leads to relatively high levels of word-of-mouth activity. Thus, a product browser might be considered as a *socially integrated* consumer [25], [65]. This creates new implications for marketing managers since consumers are generators of informal campaigns to their circle of acquaintances. The ease of sharing information is greatly increased through internet technologies and especially by use of social media. Therefore, we can state the following hypothesis based on the previous:

H12: Browsing products over social media websites will impact user's intention to share information (Word of Mouth) about the products or services which have been searched.

4 Data Collection and Measurements

In order to meet the objectives of this research a survey study was designed to examine the hypotheses stated in the previous chapter. For each of the constructs described in the conceptual model a number of items were developed in order to measure them. The items used to measure these concepts were based on the study of To et. al. [70] and O'Brien [59] and were measured by applying a 7-point likert scale. The questions corresponding to each of these items were applied in a custom built electronic questionnaire (Appendix A) which was sent out to respondents and users of social media websites, to fill out. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, the first designed to gather information about the demographics of the sample, the second to measure the utilitarian and hedonic motivation constructs, while the third was targeted in measuring the impact that these motivations have on browsing intention and intention to purchase and information sharing intention. Questionnaire links were e-mailed to respondents through a mailing list of over 600 respondents of an academic institution, and posted on 20 forum boards which ranged in subject (Fashion, computers, hobbies etc.). The questionnaire was active for a period of 7 months approximately, from December 2011 to June 2012. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 55 questions divided accordingly into the sections which were aforementioned. In total 165 responses were received and retained for further analysis with a valid response rate of 16,9% (from the mailing list). The choice of two data gathering methods was done to reduce response bias by gathering from a variety of sources rather than just from one.

The descriptive statistics of the dataset are depicted below, in which descriptions are presented regarding distribution of, age group, gender, spending category, educational level and frequency of social media usage (Table 2). Only respondents that maintained at least one social media account were qualified to participate in the research. An almost equal distribution with respect to gender is observed, with a tendency of younger user groups being active in social media websites. Our sample consists mostly of respondents with a relatively high educational level and belonging to a young age group in its majority. The distribution of ages is justified since the vast majority of social media users also belong to these age categories (15-44). With respect to spending habits online, the descriptive indicate that almost all users are accustomed to purchasing, therefore exhibiting a familiarity with online purchasing. Finally, outcomes from respondent's replies confirm recent suggestions that social media users check their accounts very frequently, thus inferring that they spend a lot of time on them on a daily basis.

Table 2: Sample descriptive statistics

Variable	Percentage (N=165)
Gender	
Male	56%
Female	44%
Education	
Primary School	1%
Junior High School	1%
High School	14%
University	56%
Post Graduate	28%
Age Group	
<24	50%
25-34	37%
35-44	7%
45-54	6%
>55	0%
Online Expenditure (€/Month)	
Never Purchased Online	6%
1-24 €	44%
25-50 €	25%
51-100 €	16%
101-250 €	7%
> 250 €	2%
Frequency of Social Media use	
Several times a day	55%
About once a day	21%
3-5 times a week	8%
1-2 times a week	4%
Every few weeks	4%
Less often	7%

Considering a list of social media websites as defined by Kaplan & Haenlein [44], we developed a list of social media websites from which users could select multiple items according to which ones they had an account in [77]. Furthermore, we included the option for additions of social media websites which we had not included initially by users and after examining if indeed they belonged to the social media spectrum where either kept or omitted from the list. As results indicate (Table 3), the most popular websites among our group of respondents are YouTube, with 92% of users maintaining an active account, followed by Facebook (82%) and Wikipedia (74%).

Table 3: Social media website use

Social Media Website	Number of users	Percentage of use (N=165)
Facebook	134	82%
YouTube	151	92%
Twitter	59	36%
Wikipedia	121	74%
Blogspot	52	32%
Flickr	16	10%
LinkedIn	40	24%
Google Plus+	46	28%
MySpace	11	7%
Blogger	13	8%
Second Life	3	2%
SlideShare	6	4%
World of Warcraft	4	2%
Digg	2	1%
Lastfm	14	9%
StumbleUpon	7	4%
Metacafe	4	2%
Reddit	5	3%
DeviantArt	16	10%
FourSquare	11	7%
Other	14	9%

5 Analysis

Partial least squares path modeling is applied in order to validate the causal relationships amongst variables as defined in the research model. The selection of the PLS regression was based on the ability to incorporate a network of causal relationships through latent variables with a relatively small dataset in comparison with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. We select the Smart PLS software which also allow for validity and reliability testing. The minimum amount of observations according to Smart PLS documentation is ten for each of the hypotheses; thus the sample of 165 users surpasses this threshold.

Consequently, the first step in our analysis is to identify the validity and reliability of the item measures used and to run a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) which will verify construct development. The descriptive statistics for each of the constructs built from the items are presented below (Table 4).

Table 4: Construct descriptive statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Utilitarian Motivation (UT)	5	3.915	1.750
Hedonic Motivation (HE)	5	3.348	1.896
Convenience (CNV)	3	4.687	2.009
Information Availability (IA)	3	4.842	1.798
Product Selection (PS)	3	4.347	1.848
Customized Advertisements (CA)	3	3.096	1.907
Trend Discovery (TD)	3	4.274	1.817
Socializing (SC)	3	4.051	1.963
Adventure (ADV)	3	2.672	1.745
Authority & Status (AUS)	3	3.546	1.809
Social Media Product Browsing (SMPB)	4	3.691	1.923
Purchase Intention (PI)	5	3.138	1.976
Word of Mouth Intention (WOMI)	5	3.071	2.017

The validity and reliability of the items were tested first, checking for item reliability measures to be at acceptable levels and standardized items loadings (above 0.5). Consequently, since loadings were well above 0.7, we can be sure that convergent validity was attained. The confirmatory factor analysis also provides evidence that the selected items are a reflection of the same underlying construct in each case, thus justifying their use to describe the given variable.

Having evaluated all items, constructs were in turn examined to determine if they are reliable to work upon. Composite reliability values [75], measuring the internal consistency of each construct, were all above 0.89, and are therefore considered reliable [25]. A general rule of the thumb for high consistent constructs is to set a threshold of 0.70. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was greater than the proposed threshold value of 0.5; hence, we can conclude that the discriminant validity is achieved. The purpose of discriminant validity is to determine if constructs are in fact unrelated with one another, hence measuring different theoretical concepts. The outcomes of the discriminant and convergent validation tests are detailed below (Table 5).

Having performed all the prerequisite tests of validity and reliability, the PLS algorithm was applied to the proposed model in order to test the hypotheses formulated above and in accordance with the constructed research model. The results (Figure 2), depict the weights of the association along with their significance. With respect to the mediating value of utilitarian motivation, two constructs are found to be positive and significant determinants of hedonic motivation. Convenience of social media along with product selection explain 70,61% of the utilitarian motivation ($R^2=0.701$), thus confirming hypotheses H2 and H4. Contrarily, the amount of information available on social media websites and the customized advertisements are not found to influence the utilitarian motivation of social media users when it comes to browsing products on such mediums.

When considering the factors that influence the hedonic motivation, results from the analysis indicate that the two of the proposed hedonic factors can be considered as significant predictors. Trend discovery and adventure present a highly significant positive relationship with the hedonic motivation of consumers, while the socializing aspect of social media and the authority over the medium do not exhibit any important relationship. The two constructs which are found to be significant predictors explain the hedonic motivation at a degree of 55% ($R^2=0.551$). Hence, hypotheses H7 and H9 are accepted.

The mediating constructs of utilitarian and hedonic motivation are found to impact the intention of users to browse products on social media platforms in a significantly positive manner. The impact of utilitarian motivation is found to be a stronger driver in making users browse for products on social media than the hedonic motivation. In combination, they explain 57,3% of the variance ($R^2=0.573$) with hypotheses H1 and H6 being adequately supported.

This preliminary finding indicates that social media users initiate the browsing process based on both the perceived usability of the medium as well as the enjoyment in doing so.

Table 5: Inter-construct correlations and validity measures

CR		UT	HE	CNV	IA	PS	CA	TD	SC	ADV	AUS	SMPB	PI	WOMI
0.939	UT	0.739												
0.959	HE	0.722	0.826											
0.953	CNV	0.718	0.706	0.871										
0.927	IA	0.705	0.548	0.748	0.809									
0.960	PS	0.716	0.696	0.783	0.799	0.889								
0.908	CA	0.284	0.278	0.315	0.458	0.398	0.768							
0.925	TD	0.682	0.692	0.784	0.753	0.762	0.473	0.805						
0.890	SC	0.490	0.485	0.520	0.668	0.592	0.494	0.683	0.730					
0.925	ADV	0.547	0.655	0.472	0.437	0.509	0.454	0.552	0.411	0.804				
0.942	AUS	0.616	0.552	0.617	0.565	0.598	0.423	0.666	0.495	0.632	0.842			
0.961	SMPB	0.707	0.601	0.709	0.638	0.705	0.426	0.762	0.502	0.668	0.720	0.861		
0.928	PI	0.597	0.555	0.591	0.588	0.631	0.474	0.625	0.558	0.672	0.684	0.635	0.722	
0.922	WOMI	0.453	0.463	0.418	0.425	0.427	0.503	0.514	0.565	0.515	0.511	0.584	0.557	0.702

The last part of the analysis reveals that the engagement of social media users in the browsing process, impacts both their intention to purchase and the word of mouth intention. More specifically, browsing products has a very strong positive association with user intention to purchase, explaining 64% of the variance ($R^2=0.640$) confirming the claim that social media marketing leads to a purchasing intention, as applies for electronic stores. In closing, our hypothesis regarding the intention of users to share information about products with peers in their circle is also supported, since browsing on social media explains word of mouth intention at a degree of 34,1 % ($R^2=0.341$). These findings are particularly interesting since they provide solid evidence that social media is a viable solution for marketing and product promotion.

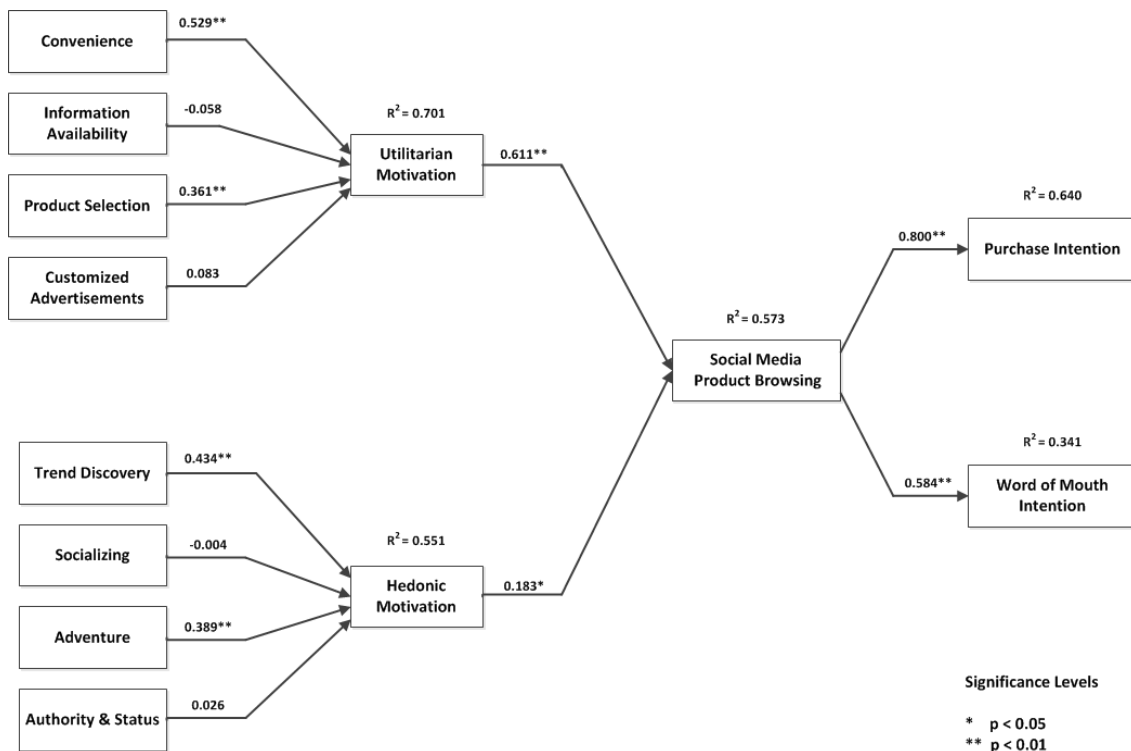


Figure 2: Structural model with path coefficients

6 Discussion and Conclusions

Utilitarian and Hedonic motivations have been applied extensively in research studies associated with shopping, both for physical and electronic shops. However, limited studies to date have applied this theory to company-hosted sites hosted over social media platforms. Social media presents unique characteristics since they allow for user generated content, facilitate synchronous and asynchronous communication between users, and enable immediate content sharing with peers. Building on the potential that such websites have in providing a new medium for doing business, we apply the theory of utilitarian and hedonic motivations in order to determine what factors of such platforms encourage users to browse for products on them. In sequence, we examine if the browsing of products promotes the intention of purchasing them and sharing information with fellow peers. These questions are a major concern for marketers who wish to engage in the social media world in order to be more competitive. Therefore, it must be clear to them as to what particular aspects of social media websites attract users to browse, in order to deploy appropriate strategies.

In order to actualize the objectives of this research, a quantitative analysis was performed on data gathered from 165 active social media users. Outcomes from the analysis indicate that both utilitarian and hedonic motivations have a significantly positive impact on influencing user intention to browse products over such websites with the prior being a stronger motivator than the latter. With respect to utilitarian motivation, the convenience of using social media and the selection of products available on such websites are found to be the most important contributors in explaining why consumers browse products. This finding is in accordance to what has been found to date for online shops where users engage in the browsing process much more effortlessly than in conventional stores. In contrast, the information available regarding a product as well the existence of personalized advertisements does not impact the intention of a user to browse through SM. The finding that information availability does not impact browsing can be attributed to the richness of the media present on social media sites which users seem to prefer rather than plain text. An alternative explanation may be due to the ease of finding information elsewhere over the internet, therefore reducing the importance of that aspect on social media. An in depth analysis of the impact of information is required, since aspects such as information quality are also relevant when considering product browsing and purchasing. Additionally, due to the vast amount of content generated by fellow peers, personalized advertisements which are usually placed on side panes may not be viewed as expected, thus explaining the low impact on product browsing. It also may be the case that users perceive advertisements as annoying in the way they are presented to them, which could serve as an indicator that a more translucent approach should be considered.

From the hedonic factors used in the present study, the constructs of trend discovery and adventure were found to impact user intention to browse products. The significantly positive association of trend discovery with product browsing can be justified by the continuous update of products on social media which can be renewed with little effort, especially compared to conventional shopping, therefore providing users with the latest trends and fashions regarding products. Also comments by other users and online discussions can influence the discovery of trends by users on such websites. Consequently, it is logical that this aspect of social media will facilitate as an attraction to users who are keen in finding out latest trends. The sense of adventure is also found to be a contributing factor in explaining why users use social media to browse for products. Constituting a novel means of browsing products and differing significantly from traditional shopping, the experience of navigating through a selection of products on a medium with numerous functionalities enhances user's hedonic motivation. Contrarily, the ability to socialize over social media websites and the sense of authority & status, do not promote the browsing of products by users. In differentiation with studies performed on traditional stores where socialization was found to positively influence hedonic motivation, over social media websites this construct does not seem to be of the greatest importance in explaining the hedonic motivation. This can be justified by the fact that users who browse products via social media, prefer to do so uninterrupted by others. The same applies to authority & status which is also insignificantly correlated with the hedonic motivation of consumers. This aspect is particularly important in conventional stores where users feel that they have an authority over a sales person, which is not a contributing factor when taking into account the authority over a medium of marketing in the case of social media.

The most important findings however, is the highly significant link between browsing and purchase intention since it validates the claim that social media can be used for marketing reasons, resulting in increased sales. This outcome is one of the first to be empirically proven through quantitative research methods, therefore reflecting a tendency of the majority. A large number of initiatives over social media were done in order to promote brand recognition, with few company-hosted sites on such mediums presenting a product range with related information. This finding could propel firms that have been hesitant, in investing in a structured adoption plan with the aim of increasing commerce transactions. Additionally, users that engage in the browsing of product are prone to share the information that they have found with friends, attracting in that way more potential customers. Word of mouth as it has been coined is gaining increasing attention amongst marketers, since positive feedback from a peer about a product is a strong motivator for future purchasing. This finding stresses the importance which firms must place on customer feedback, since negative comments may result in negative word of mouth. Therefore, since the product browsing and word of mouth intention are inextricably linked, firms must be very careful on all the customer responses they can collect and act accordingly and in a timely fashion since dissatisfied consumers could potentially backfire on these investments.

The results of this study add to our knowledge and open up new avenues of thinking about the impact of social media on B2C e-commerce. For merchants, the need for integrating their online shops on attractive social media emerges, due to the phenomenal growth of such websites and the strong connection of product browsing and purchase intention. Additionally, by identifying what antecedents affect the browsing of products on such sites, business executives can focus on them without placing unnecessary emphasis on aspects which are proven to be less important. However, additional research must be performed in the context of such mediums. Users, ability to generate content, and act as indirect advertisers, attracting in that way more consumers to corporate social media websites is a very interesting area. This view, that regards social media not only as a set of tools and applications that enable users to engage in communication with fellow users, but as an integral part of their shopping activity, can be an indicative element of a relation between a successful social media website and a satisfied customer. This aspect of social media is of great importance, since firms place marketing and advertising as a top priority on their concern lists.

Research of conducting business over social media websites is still in its infancy. We encourage future researchers to investigate more detailed aspects of social media commerce, especially means by which firms can engage users to promote their products and services to fellow peers. One of the main limitations of the current study is that it examines social media as a whole. It may be beneficial to examine how the different types of social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes. It is our firm belief that this aspect of social media is revolutionary in comparison with traditional means of shopping and even electronic shopping.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Convenience
Social Media websites are a convenient medium since I can browse products whenever i want to
It is convenient to browse products through Social Media since I can do so in the comfort of my own space
Through Social Media I can browse products/services in accordance with my schedule
Information Availability
Social Media provide me with quick access to large volumes of information about products/services
I can collect useful information about a product/service I want through Social Media websites
Comments by other users of Social Media websites help in giving feedback about a product/service advertised
Product Selection
Social Media help me find more products that I was unfamiliar with before
I can find a wide selection of products in one website through Social Media
With Social Media I can browse through a large array of products
Customized Advertisements
I find that through information from my profile on Social Media websites, I am presented with product advertisements that are more compatible to my likings
Products presented to me on Social Media platforms are customized to my needs
Product recommendations on Social Media websites make me feel as an important customer
Trend Discovery
Social Media provide a great platform in order to exchange information with my friends regarding products
Through Social Media I can effectively share my experience of a newly purchased product or service with others
I can engage in friendships with other shoppers through Social Media websites
Socializing
Social Media provide a great platform in order to exchange information with my friends regarding products
Through Social Media I can effectively share my experience of a newly purchased product or service with others
I can engage in friendships with other shoppers through Social Media websites
Adventure
I find browsing products through Social Media to be stimulating
To me, browsing products via Social Media websites is an adventure
I get drawn in to a world of my own when browsing products on Social Media Platforms
Authority & Status
When browsing products on Social Media websites I feel I am in control
Through Social Media websites I feel that I have a good understanding on the product features which I am browsing
Social Media enable me to control my product browsing
Utilitarian Motivation
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Effective
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Helpful
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Functional
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Practical
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Necessary
Hedonic Motivation
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Fun
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Exciting
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Delightful
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Enjoyable
(Browsing products through) Social Media websites is Thrilling
Social Media Product Browsing
Social Media provide a wonderful means in order to browse products/services online
I use Social Media to go through product/services on company hosted pages when I am online
I will continue to browse through products and services online via Social Media websites in the future
I plan to use Social Media websites in the future to browse for products
Purchase Intention
After some time of thought I buy one or more products which I have browsed on Social Media sites
I purchase some of the products or services which I have browsed through Social Media
Some of my recent purchases were based on information which I found via Social Media sites

<i>Appendix A: continuation</i>
I buy products I see advertised on Social Media through e-shops
I buy products I see advertised on Social Media through shops nearby me
Word of Mouth Intention
I sometimes share with my friends through Social Media, products, brands or services that I like
I send invitations to my friends to join a group of a product/brand on a Social Media site
When I see a product I like on a Social Media website I use a “Like” or “+1” function to show my appreciation
I would say positive things through a Social Media website about products I like
I send invitations to friends so that they can join groups of brands and products which I believe they would like