

Acknowledgement: The work described in this study was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. “UGC/FDS24/B08/21”).

108

Are Virtual influencers effective in promoting prosocial causes? Exploring value congruence between virtual influencers and consumers

Jamie (Note: Requested to note that this is a funding winner submission) Thompson¹, Reika Igarashi¹, Kshitij Bhounik²

¹Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom. ²Leeds University, United Kingdom

Summary Statement

Within the sphere of social media influencers, there is increasing attention being paid to ‘virtual influencers’ who are human-like but entirely computer-generated characters rendered to perform the marketing roles of organisations (Koles et al., 2024; Mrad et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2024). This study explores the marketing potential and implications of using virtual influencers in promoting prosocial marketing campaigns.

110

Adopting social media affordances to facilitate value co-creation in SMEs

Ariya Nithikulsak

University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom

Summary Statement

Despite the growing importance of social media-enabled value co-creation, the understanding of how firms, specifically SMEs, can maximise the use of social media affordances for value co-creation remains limited. This research explores the adoption of different social media affordances to facilitate value co-creation activities with customers. We adopted an inductive multiple-case study approach and the findings reveal some affordances as mechanisms to facilitate co-creation for multiple outcomes while others may not contribute significantly.

Competitive Short Paper

Firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), shifted their focus to using social media as a cost-effective practice for connecting and collaborating with customers to create and deliver superior value (Pfister & Lehmann, 2023). Social media-enabled value co-creation is the process of adopting social media to facilitate value co-creation with customers (Zhang et al., 2023) more quickly and at higher levels of efficiency than in traditional ways of communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media creates a multiplicity of interactive system environments that connect

and enhance knowledge exchange and conversations and transform customers into active participants and co-creators of the firms (Leonardi & Vaast, 2016). Thus, information and knowledge exchange between firms and customers contribute to the firm's accumulation of knowledge capital (Eigenraam et al., 2022). As a result, firms can create interactive dialogues while customers become active participants in solving real-time problems and adding value to the products and services in terms of creativity and innovation (Bhimani et al. 2019). This, in turn, reduces risk and uncertainty and promotes higher possibilities of marketing success in the competitive market (Ranjan & Read, 2016).

Despite the growth of research focusing on social media in value co-creation (Rashid et al., 2019), very few studied how firms, particularly SMEs, can adopt different social media affordances to co-create different outcomes with customers (Benitez et al., 2023). Through the lens of affordances, firms can utilise four affordances of social media to engage customers in knowledge sharing and conversations (Majchrzak et al., 2013). First, meta-voicing affordance enables the sharing of opinions and adding meta-knowledge to existing content by reacting online to activities (e.g. likes and comments) (Ghantous & Alnawas, 2021). Second, trigger attending affordance promotes engagement in online activities through alerts or notifications (Kim & Choi, 2019). Third, network-informed associating affordance enables customers to engage with the firm's activities through content and relational ties (e.g. hashtags and tagging) (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Finally, generative role-taking affordance promotes continuous and productive dialogues and engagement among participants (di Gandi et al., 2010).

This research aims to contribute to an increasing understanding of social media-enabled value co-creation adopted by SMEs for different marketing outcomes. The paper develops a contingency framework and explores the adoption of social media affordances, namely meta-voicing, triggered attending, network-informed associating and generative role-taking, in supporting value co-creation activities with customers. We adopt an inductive multiple-case study approach from six companies to explore the adoption of social media affordances to facilitate value co-creation in SMEs. Based on framework analysis, the findings reveal that different sets of social media affordances enable firms to co-create different outcomes with customers. Some affordances of social media underpin SMEs' ability to understand customers and effectively co-create different outcomes, including ideas, products and services, as well as experiences, while some affordances remain limited in their abilities to facilitate value co-creation activities. This study provides researchers and organisations with in-depth insights into how SMEs adopt social media affordances more effectively and efficiently to facilitate value co-creation practices for greater marketing and innovation success.

111

Niche Markets – A Safe Haven for the Ideologically Polarized Consumer?

Lavy Khoushinsky, Jacob Brower

Queen's University, Canada

Summary Statement

This paper explores niche markets as refuges for ideologically polarized consumers and brands, quantifying nicheness and its impact on ideology and strategy. Using a Reddit dataset spanning from