Determination of Interaction Expectations of Consumer with Firm through Social Media: A Field Research with Kirikkale University Students

TULIN DURUKAN
Kirikkale University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Email: t.durukan@kku.edu.tr
Tel: +984562372326

IBRAHIM BOZACI
Kirikkale University, Keskin Vocational School
Email: iborganizer@gmail.com
Tel: +903334562372326

A. BUGRA HAMSIOGLU
Kirikkale University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Email: ahbugra@yahoo.com.tr

Abstract

This study is conducted to determine consumers' interaction expectations, behaviors and differences between them in social media. By this way important information is provided for the sake of understanding consumers' expectations from firms about this new communication channel. In this context, descriptive analyses were employed with obtained primary data which is gathered through a survey made with the students of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Kirikkale University. Frequency, correlation and factor analyzes are conducted with gathered data and results are interpreted. According to the findings, it is seen that although college students interact with companies rarely, they have high level of interaction expectations. Suggestions were made at last.

Key Words: Social media, interaction expectations, marketing.

Introduction

Social media which is a new and widely used communication tool, affect relationships between firms and customers. By facilitating the communications between firm and customer, understanding and meeting of customers expectations would be easier. Recently due to the increased use of social media tools for the purpose of social communication, occurrence of consumption related behaviors in these areas is unavoidable (Durukan et al., 2012;148). At this point, customer expectations about social media from firms should be understood, as a kind of customer expectation.

Internet, which led radical changes in business and social life, allows quick and easy shopping without place and time restrictions (Halis, 2012: 159) and is expressed as a mean of communication that marketers should not be ignored (Ozcan, 2010;30). In this direction, businesses develop social network sites and construct one and two sided communication channels to monitor customer wants (Marangoz et al., 2012;74). In other words, social media changes to a marketplace in which customers and firms come together and consumers share their thoughts with companies (Kara and Coskun, 2012;73). At this point, general encountered situation is; firm activities are based on traditional methods and experiences, especially with one way marketing communication activities (advertising, video, sharing, etc.) without analyzing customers' expectations about this communication area. However, the most important feature of social media separates it from traditional media is that it allows fast, easy and low cost interaction.

Researches about social media are generally about investigating communications between customers and marketing messages sent by firms. But it can be expected consumer may wish interact directly with firms and affect company decisions. This study is intended to determine the expectations from firms and current behaviors of customers in social network sites.

Because social media gives possibility of bi-directional communication to firms, developing products and designing campaigns according to customer comments and reactions is possible. It is asserted that the successful firms of future would be business looking for participation and interaction of customers through social media network and electronic commerce tools (Kara, 2012: 1435).

Literature Review

Investigating social media from viewpoints of firms and customers is possible. For one hand; necessary business activities in social network are researched. For another, the customer behaviors and effects of these behaviors are scrutinized.

From customer viewpoint, subjects of customer behaviors in social media and effect of social media in consumption are examined. At this point consumption related behaviors in social media may be like online word of mouth (Brown et al, 2007:2, Prendergast et al., 2010:687, Hong et al., 2011:1-4), making and reviewing positive or negative online comments, evaluations and comparisons (Hui, 2011:265-272, Hu et al., 2007:9, Zhang et al., 2010:694) etc.

Aymankuy, Soydas and Sacli (2013) asserts that social media is effective when making decisions about holidays, resorts, travel agencies etc. Likewise, Eroz and Dogdubay (2012) mention that social media is an important tool used by tourists in their decisions.

Islek (2012) examines the usage and effects of social media in consumption behavior. According to study, there is seen a meaningful and positive relationship between the level of use of social media and customer behaviors in social media before and after purchase. In addition, customer behaviors in social media before purchasing are positively related after purchasing.

Alabay (2011) reveals that, the great majority of internet user's benefits from product comments of consumers in shopping web sites, share satisfactory and unsatisfactory consumption events in social media and much people see social network sites as an important information source in purchasing process.

Uzkurt and Ozmen (2006) represent structure of social media and features of people in social media should be known well to manage or penetrate these social networks which have different rules. Moreover members of virtual communities of firms can be seen as promotion partners, feedback mechanisms and places in which firms exchange ideas. In other word firms can be also take action in these networks and not remain silent this current change and development.

Kara and Coskun (2012) take into consideration the issue from the companies' viewpoint and concluded that firms give importance to followers, customer likes, shares, comments and facebook ads. In their study it is seen that firms take into account the facebook comments and likes and these information is used in some activities.

Since online word of mouth is an important part of communication in online networks (Brown et al., 2007;2), firms can encourage this type of communication (Trusoy et al., 2010;26-33). Hong et al. (2011) also represent, firms should draw attention the accurate and reliable information generated by customers, create positive word of mouth and emphasis on opinion leaders in social networks.

As a result, it is understood that firms and customer use social media to communicate with the each other. But there is not seen a distinctive study researches the customer expectations about these communications and interactions. In other words, sufficiency of the relationships in social network sites is unclear. Although it is a fact that customers contact with firms, request information, seek resolve their problems, effect marketing activities; determining whether these behaviors are at the desired level or not, is important for clarifying necessary firm activities should be taken. This study is carried out in order to contribute to take care of this space in research area.

Interactive Marketing

Interactive marketing concept can be expressed as a marketing approach in which; learning from customers, evaluating customers actively in consumption process, giving importance to seamless exchange of messages, giving chance of feedback to firms is important (Dogan, 2002:1-9).

In other words, the interactive marketing approach claims, customers should play greater role in business decisions and there should be more cooperation and communication between firm and customer. This situation is more pronounced especially in the service sector (Tek and Ozgul, 2007;4). At this point interaction is an important element of creating mutual trust (Tek, 2006;138).

Interactive marketing, which aims to offer products to customers with the most suitable place, time and way according to customer preferences, has advantages like reducing inventory levels, minimizing costs, eliminating the problems of time and space (Dogan, 2002;43). Moreover the level of interaction with customer, is positively correlated with the business performance (Ramani and Kumar, 2008;27, Chen et al., 2012;1).

Technological advances contribute to overcome the main problem of traditional media tools (customer passiveness). The new communication area is more participative and two sided (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009;4). Customers now have a more personal relationship with company, want to be in interaction with firms (Vlasic and Kesic, 2007;109-113).

Firms, develop products, ensure customer to be more satisfied and reach objectives more easily by providing feedback from large number of customers in online communication tools (Ding et al., 2012;347). Also communicating with firm simultaneously through web sites and discussion forums, affects customer information, attitudes, behaviors and firm performance positively (Noort et al., 2012;1-5).

Today, thanks to social networks, the capacity and capability of interacting with customers has increased. However, it is uncertain that whether these possibilities and capabilities are evaluated adequately by businesses, or not. Results of this study provide important information to firms, about social media expectations of customers which would facilitate the necessary and right firm activities about social media.

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Goal, Method and Constraints

Developing technology makes businesses being customer centric and considering customer wants in business decisions. Toward to demonstrate the potential for businesses to benefit from social media tools, this study is important since depicting the customer expectations and behaviors about social media. By this way determining true and effective social media strategies would be easier.

Since the study is performed on university students and only in Kirikkale, results cannot be generalized to all customers and places. Moreover, survey method is used as measurement tool and this method is assumed to be sufficient to measure research variables. To reach research objectives following hypotheses are established:

Table 1. Research Hypotheses

H1: Interaction behavior in social media is meaningfully related with interaction expectations.
H2: Interaction expectation in social media differs in terms of gender.
H3: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with monthly revenue.
H4: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with social media usage frequency.
H5: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with daily social media usage time.
H6: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with social media usage time (year).

In the study, questions, which are aimed to measure research variables, are constructed by in-depth interviews done with university students, about interaction behaviors and expectations. Survey forms conducted on 450 university students and 387 valid questionnaires were evaluated.

Analysis

Research questions were subjected to analysis of reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficient identified as 0,88. This coefficient is indicates the reliability of survey form.
General information about social media usage of participants is as follows;

Table 2. Social Media Usage Features

Whether using one of social media tool		
	N	**%**
Using	367	94,8
Not using	20	5,2
Social Media Usage Frequency		
Few times in a day	174	45,0
One time in a day	56	14,5
Few times in a week	107	27,6
One time in a week	11	2,8
Few time in a month	39	10,1
Daily social media usage time		
30 minute or less	122	31,5
30 min-1 hour	103	26,6
1 - 2 hours	121	31,3
3- 4 hours	38	9,8
5 hours and more	3	,8
Social media usage years		
1 year and less	34	8,8
2 years	49	12,7
3 years	70	18,1
4 years	67	17,3
5 years and more	167	43,2
Friend Quantity		
0-99	62	16,0
100-199	122	31,5
200-299	121	31,3
300-399	50	12,9
400-499	27	7,0
500-599	3	,8
600 and more	2	,5

As general social media using properties of attendants investigated, it is seen most of the students (% 95) uses one of social network site. In addition great majority of attendants use social media few times in a week or more frequent. In terms of daily social media using time, most of them uses social media 30 minutes to 2 hours (% 57,9) in a day and important amount of attendants uses less than 30 minutes (% 31,5). Moreover great majority of attendants uses social media since 5 years (%%43,2). And most of the students have less than 399 friends in social media.
Moreover factor analysis was conducted. KMO coefficient is specified as 0,87, which shows the suitability of research questions for factor analysis. As a result, 11 research questions summed in two factors which describes 73.1 % of total variance. The results of factor analysis are as follows;

Table 3. Factor Components Matrix

	1	2
Ibeh4	,894	,021
Ibeh2	,827	-,135
Ibeh6	,826	-,070
Ibeh1	,810	,187
Ibeh3	,806	,239
Ibeh5	,794	,200
Iexp3	,066	,902
Iexp2	,045	,898
Iexp4	,095	,873
Iexp1	,009	,845
Iexp5	,116	,811

Factor groups are named as "interaction behaviors" and "interaction expectations".

Table 4. Factor Groups

Interaction behaviors with firms	
1.	I forward my views on social media sites to companies
2.	I make comments on products in social media sites of firms.
3.	I share my views on companies marketing activities on social media sites.
4.	I respond to communication demands of firms in social media sites.
5.	I try to solve complaint about products by social media sites of firms.
6.	I provide my satisfaction about products to companies in social media.
Interaction expectations from firms	
7.	Companies should use social media sites to consult consumers.
8.	Firms must interact with consumers using social media sites.
9.	Firms should take opinions from customers by social media sites.
10.	Firms should consult consumers when creation of products.
11.	Firms are welcome to communicate with me through social media.
Explained variance: % 75,3	

As averages for the research variables examined, it is seen that participants represents interaction behaviors more than "seldom" (2,2) in a five point scale (1: "never", 2: "seldom", 3: "sometimes", 4: "often", 5: "always"). On the other hand, participants are generally "agree" (3,6) with the statements about interaction expectations (1: "strongly disagree", 2: "disagree", 3: "undecided", 4: "agree", 5: "strongly agree"). That is to say, customers seldom interact with firms although they generally expect interactions from firms.
Averages of research variables are as follows:

Table 6. Averages of Variables

	Averages
Interaction Behavior	2,2356
Interaction Expectation	3,6078

In order to test the hypotheses of the study, the correlation analysis carried out between the variables. In this context, there is not seen a meaningful relationship between interaction expectation and duration of daily use, frequency of use and income level. On the other hand, low and statistically meaningful relationship between social media usage year and interaction expectation is seen. And interaction behavior is meaningfully related with the interaction expectation. The analyses results are shown in the table below:

Table 7. Correlation analysis

		Interaction Expectation
Interaction Behavior	*Pearson Correlation*	,164(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001
Social media usage frequency	*Pearson Correlation*	-,073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,154
Daily social media usage time	*Pearson Correlation*	,028
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,590
Social media usage time (year).	*Pearson Correlation*	,139(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,005
Income	*Pearson Correlation*	0,08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,11

It is understood although customer interact with firms seldom, their expectations about interactions are high. Also interaction expectations are related with interaction behaviors. But there are not seen relationships between interaction expectations and other general variables. (Usage frequency, daily usage, income).

Acceptance/rejection conditions of determined hypotheses are as follows:

Table 8. Testing the Hypothesis

	Accept/Reject
H1: Interaction behavior in social media is meaningfully related with interaction expectations.	Accept
H2: Interaction expectation in social media differs in terms of gender.	Reject
H3: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with monthly revenue.	Reject
H4: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with social media usage frequency.	Reject
H5: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with daily social media usage time.	Reject
H6: Interaction expectation in social media is meaningfully related with social media usage time (year).	Accept

Conclusion and Suggestions

Research results indicate that interaction expectations of customer's thorough social media (receiving opinions, consulting etc.) are high, although customers rarely interact. This result shows that firms should take actions to interact with customers more closely on social networking sites and encourage customers for interactions to stimulate the behaviors to fill the expectations. This kind of communication strategies may contribute to differentiation of companies in today's intense competitive environment in which value creation activities shift from tangible products to intangible services.

This study illuminates the expectations of companies to interact with customers, drawing attention to the existence of these expectations, however, does not specify the details of the methods to be followed by companies to meet them. So studies may be performed, which research the effectiveness of methods to meet the interaction expectations of customers like instant messaging, customer satisfaction tracking systems, making shares on customer pages etc.

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