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Preliminary Insights into Social Commerce in the Fitness Industry of Ghana

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to explore how value is created for customers in the fitness industry using social commerce. The study employed a single case study by which data was obtained through a one on one structured interview. Data gathered was analyzed by employing an explanation-building analysis approach. The findings of the study revealed that the fitness instructor leverage on the affordances and features of social media tools he is familiar with to create value for his customers, by using Facebook live for training sessions, uploaded videos of customers and work-outs on Instagram, and WhatsApp status together with WhatsApp video call. The strategy deduced was proposed to be an ideal one for the fitness industry to use to create value for customers, in conformity to the critical case sampling technique

Keywords: Social commerce, value creation, case study

1 Introduction

Social commerce is a form of commerce engaged on the platform of social media networking sites. In other words, the existence of social media created an opportunity for buying and selling. ‘social commerce,’ this term mainly refers to the provision and implementation of activities and transactions related to electronic commerce in social media, and particularly social networks (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019). Social commerce as defined by (Zhou et al., 2013) includes the use of online-based media that enables individuals to engage in commercial activities like selling, buying, marketing, curating, and sharing of products and services. Social commerce has become increasingly dominant on social media platforms (Alalwan et al., 2019) Social commerce has been on the rise since its inception in 2005 (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019), this is because of the numerous benefits it provides to both retailers and consumers who engage in it. The term social commerce is a combination of electronic commerce and social media.

The term social commerce is a combination of electronic commerce and social media. E-commerce is the use of information technology to mediate the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet. On the other hand, social media is an online environment that allows vast users to interact with each other, share media contents, and build relationships. Bringing these two elements together makes social commerce a potent tool as far as businesses are concerned.

Businesses have adopted social commerce to become a part of their business operations to increase revenue and sales, as well as customer retention. According to (Wang et al., 2016) Organizations are progressively using social media in business to enhance their customer engagement, collaborate with external stakeholders, and promote internal cooperation and communication. Social commerce has been the subject of many researchers for the past few years. Researchers have studied how businesses in various industries adopt social commerce as part of their business model. It can be seen from previous research that a lot of studies have been done in the area of social commerce. However, the value creation of social commerce that fitness instructors get from their implementation of social media into their business model has been overlooked. This paper is an appropriate response to the research gap observed. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore how value is created in the fitness industry by the application of social commerce in business activities.

2 Literature and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Previous Literature

Research on social commerce is enriched with multiple studies that seek to understand or explain the phenomenon from different perspectives (Entee et al., 2018). Such research can be divided into empirical and analytical research. Still, they cover themes such as user behaviour, business models, adoption strategy, social commerce website design, the study of social process channels, and firm performance (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). Previous research has studied social commerce features (Friedrich, Overhage, & Schlauderer, 2016; Tajvidi, Wang, & Hajli, 2018); and explain the influence social commerce features might have on buying behaviour. Also, Tajvidi, Wang, & Hajli (2018) conducted an empirical study to examine how social interaction, social support, relationship quality, and consumers' intention are related to co-create brand value. The study revealed that social commerce interaction, particularly, marketer perspective and user perspective, have a positive effect on social support and as a result, intention to create brand value.

Second, Factors affecting consumers' engagement and purchase intention in social commerce, The purpose was to examine how word-of-mouth influences purchase intentions in the social commerce domain, by using trust and value co-creation theories,

(Mikalef, Pappas, & Giannakos, 2017) established in a survey that word-of-mouth has both direct and indirect impact on purchase intentions. This investigation was conducted in the context of users of social commerce. (Maia, Lunardi, Longaray, & Munhoz, 2018) also surveyed to analyze the determining factors that influence consumers to engage in social commerce activities. The findings of this study showed that information quality and perceived usefulness are key factors why consumers engage in social commerce activities. According to Qin and Kong (2015), this paper explores the factors that drive the intention of users to pursue shopping recommendations on s-commerce sites. The results of this paper established that the perceived trustworthiness and perceived helpfulness of a particular social commerce user are the key drivers behind the influence of other users' intention to go after shopping recommendations on social commerce sites.

In explaining social commerce capabilities, Entee et al. (2018), talked about the examination of how small entrepreneurs develop, deploy, and manage their social media platforms to form social commerce capabilities to maximize benefits. The findings of this paper were presented in three dimensions. First, the combination of technical and non-technical in the development of social commerce is needed. Second, no personal social capital is readily available for use in the development of s-commerce capabilities.

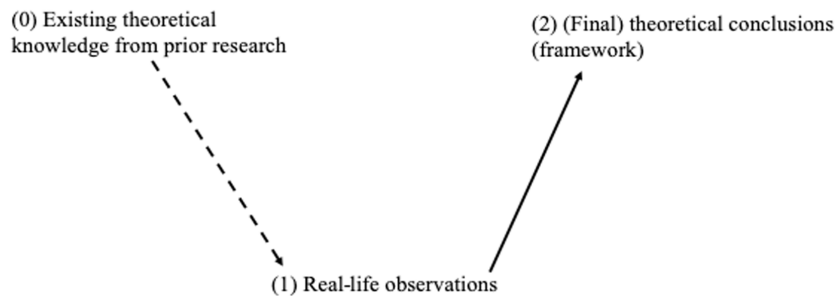
Third, the affordances of the current social media platform determine the level of s-commerce capabilities be developed. Another paper was constructed a social commerce adoption model (SCAM) to tackle the adoption of social commerce. This paper provided in its finding that the variable "trust" was shown to have a significant influence on the reason why people venture into social commerce activities. Hence, the importance of the position of trust in the SCAM model (Hajli, 2012). Other themes under social commerce concerns, social media use (Wang et al., 2016; (He & Yan, 2013), quality of service (Polyakova & Mirza, 2016), review and evolution of social commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012; Esmaili & Hashemi, 2019), and Technology and value creation (Criado & Gil-Garcia, 2019; Ormiston & Seymour, 2011; Chiu, Won, & Bae, 2019; Stephen & Toubia, 2010)

The reviewed articles in this paper shown clearly how social commerce is still a growing trend with vast issues that can be researched. In response, these issues would have to be tackled to broaden knowledge in the social commerce discipline and make it more effective. However, these studies neglect strategic issues such as the application of social commerce to create value for the customer. This issue is a significant research gap because social commerce is an information technology resource that needs to be built to meet business objectives. This gap is further reflected in the existing conceptual approaches to the study of social commerce. For instance, many businesses don't know how to assess or evaluate their customer co-creation efforts on social media. As a result, they have difficulty deciding if their social media usage and investments pay off or not. A new evaluation system would have to be built to solve this issue.

2.2 Research Framework

This study conforms to induction as a reasoning mode and argues for what informs the use of social commerce by fitness instructors. Induction includes generalizations of an object using observations of the particular instances of the object. This mode of reasoning contrasts with deduction in which one has to postulate a particular theory or theories which can be tested to produce results that will show a fit between the theory and the facts observed. This study does not postulate a priori theory because of the critiques of existing theories, as already presented.

Figure 1. (the inductive approach framework)



This study examined existing knowledge from previous research, which was under the literature review section, to guide how to look for real-life observations. The results section will include the real-life findings describing a corresponding set of theoretical contributions and generalizations. We would then draw a general conclusion describing the links between real-life observations and informing future forecasts in other cases (Entee et al., 2018). It is not arbitrary but justifiable to choose the induction for various reasons.

Firstly, a shift from deductions from the theory to the inference based on real beliefs is taking place (Evans & Over, 2013). This change may be due to the growing awareness that while theories are useful for understanding certain circumstances, the researcher works with little room for serendipity in a near corner. She has to prove or refute a certain theory.

Secondly, there is also a growing interest in the field in information system about studying its context influence (Wiredu 2007; Durkin et al. 2015; Avgerou 2008). For example, previous work demonstrates how contextual information system implementation processes can influence the implementing organization (Avgerou, 2001). If the context is so significant, observations must be made before generalizations are drawn rather than generalization before the study.

Induction affords us to make the observations first before drawing such general conclusions (Budu, 2020). Therefore, it is empirical to choose induction approach for this study, considering it allows observations to be made before making generalizations.

3 Methodology

Data was collected through interviews. An interview is a vital data collection technique encompassing verbal interaction between the researcher and the subject (Xie & Zhang, 2005). We formulated a case study protocol which included a data collection and data collection procedures instrument, to make my case study more reliable. Data collected comprises structured interviews, observation, and private documentary material, and Including public sources. We interviewed our respondent over a telephone call. All research questions were asked, and the interviewee took the time to answer them accordingly. The whole session lasted for one hour and twenty-three minutes. However, the method used in collecting the data does not affect the reliability of the data collected. For the analysis of this case study, explanation-building approach. The approach consists of developing a case description, which would provide an organizational framework for the case study.

4 Case Findings

Jay Fitness Club is an indigenous fitness training centre, popularly known as JFC. It has been in existence for about four years now. It started when a young entrepreneur known as “Jay Ice” discovered his passion for staying fit and healthy at all times. He understood how relevant it was to keep up with regular training to keep the body in shape and still maintain a healthy life, for this reason, he started personal training which he called “one-on-one” training with friends and people in his neighbourhood. Not only limited to body training, but Jay is also a swimming pro. So, he combined the swimming lessons with the physical training and offered free service to his friends and people who needed his help in training. Jay worked with MTN gym, pipers, and many other local gym centres in Accra. Jay, with his over 20 years’ experience in swimming and Body training, decided to venture into his own business in the fitness industry. He began with a small group of customers who stayed committed to what they sought to achieve.

As of now, Jay has a membership of about 140 customers who are consistent with their daily training sessions. The group meets at the forecourt of Trade fair centre- La, Accra. Every morning, members of Jay Fitness Club meet at exactly 5:00 am for their daily training session with their coach, Jay. The training duration is exactly 1 hour, which means they close at 6:00 am. Members are happy with the training duration because

there are both government and private workers who are a part of the membership, and these people go to work after their daily training session with Jay. During this one-hour training session, daily work-out tasks are accomplished. Aside from the group training sessions, Jay trains customers at personal levels at their various homes. He has about 11 customers; he engages them in training at their homes. Outside the borders of Ghana, Jay has three customers he trains over the internet, using WhatsApp video call. These are customers who cannot be with Jay physically for the training session. Jay uses social commerce in his business for several reasons. He currently has accounts on three social media platforms, where he shares videos of himself training and also the team work-out daily. He has been consistent with it ever since he started using these social media tools. Although this strategy helps him market his business, he also shares the video on his platform to create value for his customers, in the sense that the videos and pictures he shares on his social media platforms help customers to have self-training using the videos as their guide. So, Jay's use of social commerce enables continuity in terms of customers working out daily, even if they couldn't be with him physically.

Questions were asked to find out how the interviewee as a fitness instructor uses social media tools in his business.

To set the grounds, it was essential to know from the interviewee about his business. Hence the question;

How did your business start and what the business entails?

"I started training people for free with the aim of getting customers too. I train people for fitness and swimming, everything about fitness and wellness. I was able to reach out to several people, and those people referred me to other people who needed to train for weight-loss and swimming lessons also. "

What type of customers do you serve?

"I train people from all walks of life, both children and adults. Once they are ready to commit to the health goals they have set."

Why did you start using social media for your business, and how did it start?

"I began with taking videos and pictures of myself; this happened when I recorded a video of my first client while he was taking his swimming lessons and I shared it on my Facebook page, this got the attention of my Facebook friends and other people. I was excited about the feedback I got from my first post; then, I was motivated by the swimming posts. The first social media started with Facebook, Instagram, and now WhatsApp."

What social media tools do you use? And how do you use them?

"Currently, I have business accounts on three social media platforms. I started with Facebook and later progressed to Instagram and WhatsApp. I share my pictures and videos of our daily work-out and swimming lessons with friends and the public across Facebook and Instagram. I run a paid advertisement page on Facebook. And on WhatsApp, I share daily videos and pictures on my WhatsApp status."

5 Case Findings

Nature of s-commerce use in the fitness industry.

The response from the trainer found two features of social commerce in the fitness company, i.e. marketing and training video.

First, the response from Jay Ice shows that his fitness club as a business started marketing when he took a picture of himself and his first client and uploading it on Facebook. He later got feedback from people who had the intention of exercising. Social media platform helps to manage social media solution and services. The platform helps to advertise primarily with a specific person or broadcast to all. This presents continuous content that is visible and persistence to target people. The primary purpose of using social media for his fitness club was to let his training video get a vast number of people. The application used to share and advertise at the beginning stage was Facebook. Mostly, the WhatsApp platform helps him to get in touch with his customers by sharing videos.

Fitness industry Use of social commerce to create value

In this section, the response from the trainer shows that motivation happens to be the value created for customers to be engaged in training activities. Customers are motivated anytime they see their pictures and videos being shared on the trainer's pages. This motivation has been effectual on their urge to continue with their daily training.

The motive of using social commerce in their business activity.

The response from the trainer found Four reasons why the trainer uses social media to engage and get new customers. These are convenience, accessibility, cost, and motivation. First, the trainer uses social media to interact with his old customers by sending them himself training videos, which they can follow up to train on their own when they can't join us physically.

Second, accessibility refers to trainee finding it more accessible to have free access to training videos from his/her trainer that will help to practice for some time continuously. Old clients receive updates on all work-out they missed and can catch up. Through the videos and pictures, the trainers share on my page. He also reaches out to new customers who later join the fitness club.

Third, the means of transport from home to training centre is more expensive as compared to the use of social media to engage in training activities.

Four, trainees are given a reason for doing something, especially when they see themselves in video training. This motivates them to train more, and they also become excited and proud of seeing themselves being posted on the trainer's social media pages.

6 Conclusions

Having dealt with the objectives set out in this research, the study revealed how value is created for customers in the fitness industry using social commerce. Through the gathered data, the case of Jay fitness club explained how fitness instructors use social media tools to create value for their customers, and also the perception of customers on how value is created for them by the presence of the fitness club on social media. From the trainer's point of view, the responses found four reasons why the trainer uses social media to engage and get new customers. These are convenience, accessibility, cost, and motivation.

First, the trainer uses social media to interact with his old customers by sending them himself training videos, which they can follow up to train on their own when they can't join us physically.

Second, accessibility refers to trainee finding it more accessible to have free access to training videos from his/her trainer that will help to practice for some time continuously. Old clients receive updates on all work-out they missed and can catch up. Through the videos and pictures, the trainers share on my page. He also reaches out to new customers who later join the fitness club.

Third, the means of transport from home to training centre is more expensive as compared to the use of social media to engage in training activities. Fourth, trainees are given a reason for doing something, especially when they see themselves in video training. This motivates them to train more.

Also, the response from the trainer shows that motivation happens to be the value created for customers to be engaged in training activities. Customers are motivated anytime they see their pictures and videos being shared on the trainer's pages. This motivation has been effectual on their urge to continue with their daily training.

From the perspective of the customers, the following responses were gathered concerning the social media use of Jay fitness club. These responses were essential to understanding how value is created for them. A trainee finds it more comfortable to engage in either live training activity or follow the instruction of already made video just to save him/her from travelling from a far distance to a training centre. Accessibility was revealed as another factor - most of the time, trainees will find it easier to have free access to training videos from his/her trainer that will help to practice for some time continuously. Jay fitness club's social media presence provides accessibility means to customers who won't continue with their daily work-out. The accessibility has to do with how they can get to train easily when it is inconvenient for them. Also, Cost-effectiveness has to do with the means of transport from home to training centre is more expensive as compared to the use of social media to engage in training activities. Trainees are given a reason to do more, especially when they see themselves in a video training. This motivates them to train more.

This study now recommends that for fitness instructors to create value for their customers, they have to adopt the strategies and framework of Jay fitness club. Customers' perception of the fitness club's online/social media presence has a significant effect on how fitness instructors create value for them. For instance, how customers comment

and share feedback on their videos posted on social media encourages the fitness instructor to keep on posting and sharing those videos. Consistency is also revealed by the case and analysis of Jay fitness club as another factor to create value for customers.

This study is an attempt that has dealt with the problem identified in this discipline. These issues have been tackled to broaden knowledge in the social commerce discipline and make it more effective. However, there is still more to be done in this topic area. For instance, many businesses don't know how to assess or evaluate their customer co-creation efforts on social media. As a result, they have difficulty deciding if their social media usage and investments pay off. Hence, a new evaluation system will have to be built to solve this issue. Future research can also focus on adopting multiple case studies to validate the framework proposed in this study.

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