

How Posting Purchases on Social Media Influences Happiness: The Role of Self-Esteem

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The purpose of this article is to investigate the influences of posting one's purchases on the content creator's happiness attained from the purchases. A survey (n=207) was conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Multiple regression and floodlight analysis were utilized to examine the data, which show that posting purchases on social media as a new way of self-presentation interplays with self-esteem in influencing consumers' happiness obtained from the posted purchases. Specifically, posting behavior increases the happiness among consumers with higher self-esteem, but has no effects on consumers with lower self-esteem. This article fills the gap among literature about the influences of the different self-presentation styles caused by self-esteem, and advances our

understanding of how social media usage differently influences consumers with higher and lower self-esteem. This research also provides novel insights into the role of self-presentation in consumers' happiness from purchases and the affective benefits of creating user-generated content. This article is pioneering in investigating the behavior of posting purchases on social media. It is the first research revealing the complicated interaction between the behavior and the content creators' self-esteem in influencing happiness obtained from the purchases.

Keywords: Social media, user-generated content, self-presentation, self-esteem, posting purchases, happiness

In recent years, there has been an explosive growth of user-generated content (UGC) on social media (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). An increasing portion of UGC is about consumers' own purchases. Posting one's own purchases on social media has become a pervasive post-purchase consumer behavior. For instance, a music enthusiast posts the pictures of her recent concert experience on her Facebook; a fashion follower shares a photo of a new pair of sunglasses she just purchased to her Instagram followers; a food lover updates his Twitter about food he has been enjoying. When posting about their own purchases on social media, consumers are presenting themselves through the purchases in a broadcasting way. Importantly, such posting behavior is different from online reviews, which are generally driven by altruism or vengeance (Trigg, 2013). Instead, the posting behavior is mainly motivated by self-

presentation – one of the main factors that drive social media usage (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Self-presentation on social media may enhance users' happiness (Kim & Lee, 2011). Therefore, it is critical to investigate the behavior of posting purchases not only because it is becoming very common, but also due to its potential influences on consumers' happiness obtained from their own purchases. Existing research on creating UGC for the purpose of self-presentation mainly focuses on the behavior of posting one's portrait photos (e.g., Haferkamp et al., 2012; Rui & Stefanone, 2013), while the behavior of creating UGC about one's purchases to self-present has not been examined by existing research. The affective benefits of creating UGC are also underexplored in prior research on UGC.

To fill these gaps, this article builds upon the literature on self-presentation as well as the characteristics of social media to investigate the behavior of posting purchases on social media. Past research on self-presentation suggests that self-esteem significantly influences people's self-presentation styles (Arkin, 1981; Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990; Wolfe, Lennox, & Cutler, 1986). The goal of this research is to examine how posting one's own purchases on social media interplays with self-esteem in influencing the content creator's happiness from the purchases. Literature suggests that the features of social media magnify the differences in self-presentation between consumers with higher self-esteem and consumers with lower self-esteem. Therefore, it is hypothesized that posting purchases on social media as a new way of self-presentation has different effects on happiness among consumers with higher and lower self-esteem. To test the hypotheses, a survey was conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) involving 207 participants who were social media users.

This research has implications for self-presentation, self-esteem and UGC, and also provides managerial implications for social media marketing. Existing research has not examined the influences of the different self-presentation styles between consumers with higher self-esteem and consumers with lower self-esteem. This research fills the gap in the context of social media, showing that the self-presentation differences influence happiness obtained from purchases posted on social media. This research also advances our understanding of how social media usage differently influences consumers with high self-esteem and consumers with low self-esteem and provides insights into the role of self-

presentation through one's own purchases in consumers' happiness with the purchases. By focusing on the behavior of creating purchase-related UGC for self-presentation, this article is the first one to address the influences of the increasingly common post-purchase consumer behavior and the first one to investigate the affective benefits of creating UGC. Managerially, this article underlines the importance of encouraging consumers to create UGC about their consumption experiences to present themselves.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Presentation and Self-Esteem

Self-presentation refers to the act of expressing a specific image and identity to others (Baumeister et al., 1989; Joinson, 2003). It is the efforts to control how one is perceived by others (Leary, 1995). In order to convey positive images, people selectively provide information about themselves and carefully adjust this information in response to others' feedback (Goffman, 1959). Self-presentation therefore is a goal-oriented process of controlling information about the self to influence others' impressions (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959) and is the intentional and tangible component of identity (Goffman, 1959). Self-presentation is often consumption oriented and depends upon displaying material signs, such as brands, to communicate the desired impression (Bendelow & Williams, 1998). Indeed, consumers use purchases to build their self-concepts, reinforce and express self-identity, and differentiate themselves from others (e.g., Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995; McCracken, 1989).

Multiple research studies have linked self-presentation with self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to a series of psychological self-evaluation which influences both self-perception and social behavior (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Brown & Harris, 1978). It includes an essential affective quality – positive vs. negative feelings about oneself (Brown, 1993). Extensive research has demonstrated that people with high self-esteem have a more positive outlook and are more independent, persistent, self-directed, and autonomous than those with low self-esteem, who tend to be more negative, lonely, insecure, anxious and depressed (e.g., Brown & Marshall, 2001; Cruz Perez, 1973; Mruk, 1999; Shrauger & Sorman, 1977).

Consequently, high self-esteem users want to enhance their self-esteem, while low self-esteem individuals want to protect their self-esteem (Tice, 1993). Individuals with

high self-esteem have different self-presentation styles compared to low self-esteem people (Arkin, 1981; Baumeister et al., 1989; Schlenker et al., 1990; Wolfe et al., 1986). There are generally two styles of self-presentation, one is acquisitive self-presentation, which involves efforts to gain social approval; another one is protective self-presentation, which involves attempts to avoid losses in approval (Arkin, 1981). When presenting themselves, individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in acquisitive self-presentation focusing on good qualities, calling attention to self, and seeking social approval (Baumeister et al., 1989; Schlenker et al., 1990). Through such acquisitive self-presentation, people with high self-esteem strive to increase their self-esteem further (Baumeister, 1982; Swann, 1990).

Individuals with low self-esteem, on the other hand, tend to be more cautious and self-protective (Arkin, 1981; Joinson, 2003; Wolfe et al., 1986). They attempt to prevent or lessen any social disapproval by avoidance of bad qualities and strategic ploys, as well as reluctance to draw attention to self (Baumeister et al., 1989). Such protective self-presentation tendency explains why people with low self-esteem prefer consistent self-presentation – they are unwilling to make unverified and disprovable claims about their positive qualities (Baumeister, 1989). Therefore, they are less interested in compensatory presentations (Baumeister, 1982; Swann, 1990).

Self-Presentation on Social Media

Self-presentation is based on a specific setting with an audience, for example, a shopping mall or an opera (Goffman, 1959). Social media represent a new and digital setting for consumers to self-present. It provides an assortment of tools specifically designed for self-presentation (Manago et al., 2008). In fact, self-presentation is the main motivation of social media usage (Back et al., 2010; Boyle & Johnson, 2010; Ibrahim, 2009; Kramer & Winter, 2008; Toubia & Stephen, 2013). Self-presentation on social media provides self-validation (Stern, 2004), which can resonate for a longer period of time compared to off-line situations (boyd, 2007).

The audience scope of self-presentation on social media overlaps with a user's offline network (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2008), but also expands beyond one's offline social network (Acar, 2008). Therefore, whereas traditional self-presentation

through one's purchases usually takes place via one-to-one or one-to-few narrowcasting, purchases posted on social media are broadcasted to an individual's social network containing a much larger audience. Recent research has demonstrated that compared to narrowcasting, broadcasting encourages self-focus, which leads people to think more about themselves and disclose more self-relevant information (Barasch & Berger, 2014).

The use of digital photos plays a critical role in self-presentation on social networking sites (Pempek, Yevdokiya, & Calvert, 2009; Siibak, 2009; Strano, 2008). Digital photography transforms "taking pictures" to "making pictures" as it offers increased power over the editing process (Chalfen, 2002). Research has revealed that consumers use deliberately selected and edited photos to present a desired self-image on social media (Manago et al., 2008; Siibak, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008). Such self-presentation is a method of implicit expression rather than explicit verbal communication (Goffman, 1959). The implicit mode of self-presentation allows consumers to visualize the subjects they are communicating about and express the things that are important to them (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Mikkola, Oinas, & Kumpulainen, 2008). As a result, the functions of photos extend beyond capturing moments and preserving memories to constructing and presenting one's identity (Chalfen, 2002; Van Dijck, 2008). Therefore, posting pictures of one's purchases on social media can be quite self-focused.

Social media offer immediacy (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), which encourages users to self-disclosure at times and places that are most convenient for them (Sun et al., 2006). Immediacy allows consumers to self-present through their purchases right after material products (e.g., sunglasses) are acquired or in the middle of enjoying experiential purchases (e.g., trips). Indeed, over 70% of social media posts are about the self or one's own immediate experiences (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010). Mobile access to social media further increases immediacy of self-disclosure (Kaplan, 2012). As self-disclosure leads to self-awareness (Rosenfeld, 1979), the immediacy that social media offers may also increase self-focus among users.

Hypotheses Development

Research on self-esteem has demonstrated that when focusing on oneself, people with high self-esteem tend to pay more attention to their abilities, strengths and good

qualities, while people with low self-esteem tend to pay more attention to their deficiencies, weaknesses and bad qualities (Baumeister & Tice, 1985, Brockner, 1979). Since broadcasting, digital photography and immediacy promote self-focus, posting purchases on social media would lead to more salient differences in self-presentation between individuals with high and low self-esteem. As a result, higher self-esteem consumers may engage in more acquisitive self-presentation while lower self-esteem consumers may engage in more protective self-presentation.

Recent research on self-presentation suggests that, compared to protective self-presentation, acquisitive self-presentation brings immediate affective benefits because it triggers upward mood regulation in social interactions (Dunn, Biesanz, Human, & Finn, 2007) and is cheerful and pleasant itself (Human et al., 2012). This is why acquisitive self-presentation increases happiness and subjective wellbeing (Kim & Lee, 2011; Wojcik & Ditto, 2014). There is no evidence showing that protective self-presentation positively influences happiness or well-being. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the behavior of posting purchases on social media would interact with self-esteem in influencing happiness obtained from the purchases.

H1: Posting purchases on social media increases higher self-esteem consumers' happiness obtained from the purchases.

H2: Posting purchases on social media has no effects on lower self-esteem consumers' happiness obtained from the purchases.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

To test the hypotheses, a web-based survey on Amazon Mechanical Turk was conducted. A filter was used in the survey to ensure the participants were social media users. A total of 207 participants (including 83 females, average age 34.82) who either agreed or strongly agreed that using social media was a part of their everyday activity completed in the survey. Each worker was paid \$1.50 for completing the study.

Following the procedure developed by Richins (2013), the participants were first asked to identify an important purchase that they had made during the past six months. Then the participants were shown the definitions of experiential and material purchase proposed by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) and asked to self-code the type of that

identified purchase. Next the participants were asked if they had posted the purchase on social media, and were asked to indicate the price paid for the purchase. The participants then responded to a scale measuring happiness obtained from the purchase. The scale is a 2-item (“when you think about this purchase, how happy does it make you”, “how much does this purchase contribute to your happiness in life”) 7-point (not at all – moderately – extremely) measure developed by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003). Next the participants responded to a 10-item (see Appendix for details) 4-point scale (strongly disagree – disagree – agree – strongly agree) that measures self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). Finally, they answered demographic questions. The average survey completion time was 12 minutes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Among the 207 participants, 67 (32.7%) indicated that they posted the purchase on social media. The price of the purchase did not correlate with happiness with the purchase ($B = .05$, NS) or self-esteem ($B = .10$, NS), eliminating the possibility of price being a confound. Self-esteem did not predict purchase type (coded 0 = material, 1 = experiential) ($B = -.12$, NS) or the posting behavior (coded 1 = posted, 0 = did not post) ($B = -.04$, NS), which suggests that higher and lower self-esteem participants did not differ in the purchase type and posting behavior reported. Reliability tests showed that the items of the self-esteem scale were internally consistent ($\alpha = .94$), so were the items of the happiness scale ($\alpha = .74$).

To test the hypotheses that self-esteem moderates the effects of the posting behavior on happiness, first, a multiple regression was performed on happiness as the dependent variable with self-esteem ($M = 3.08$, $\min = 1.0$, $\max = 4.0$, $SD = .68$), the posting behavior (coded 1 = posted, 0 = did not post) and their interaction as independent variables. Because one of the independent variables (self-esteem) was a continuous variable, multiple regression was used to eliminate the arbitrariness of choosing one standard deviation above and below the mean (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006; Spiller et al., 2013). The results showed a significant two-way interaction between self-esteem and posting ($B = .54$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .017$; see Table 1 for details). The main effect of self-

esteem and the main effect of the posting behavior were both non-significant ($B = -.04$, NS; $B = -1.02$, NS).

Table 1
Multiple Regression Results

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	5.443	.461		11.817	.000
Self-Esteem Behavior of Posting	-.044	.146	-.026	-.299	.765
Self-Esteem x Behavior of Posting	-1.022	.711	-.419	-1.438	.152
	.542	.226	.707	2.399	.017

To demonstrate the interaction, a floodlight analysis (Johnson-Neyman technique) (Spiller et al., 2013; e.g., Kristofferson, White, & Pelozo, 2014) was performed. The floodlight analysis illuminates the entire range of the continuous independent variable to show where the simple effect of the categorical variable is significant and where it is not (Spiller et al., 2013). The border between these regions is known as the Johnson-Neyman point (Spiller et al., 2013). As shown in Figure 1, the analysis identified the range of self-esteem for which the simple effects of posting purchase was significant and revealed that there was a significant positive effect of the posting behavior on happiness among the participants who had self-esteem score higher than 2.59 ($BJN = .38$, $SE = .19$, $t = 1.97$, $p = .05$), but not among those who had self-esteem score less than 2.59. In other words, the floodlight analysis showed that posting purchases on social media increased higher self-esteem consumers' (self-esteem score > 2.59 in this sample) happiness obtained from the purchases, but had no effects on lower self-esteem consumers' (self-esteem score < 2.59 in this sample) happiness obtained from the purchases. H1 and H2 were thus supported.

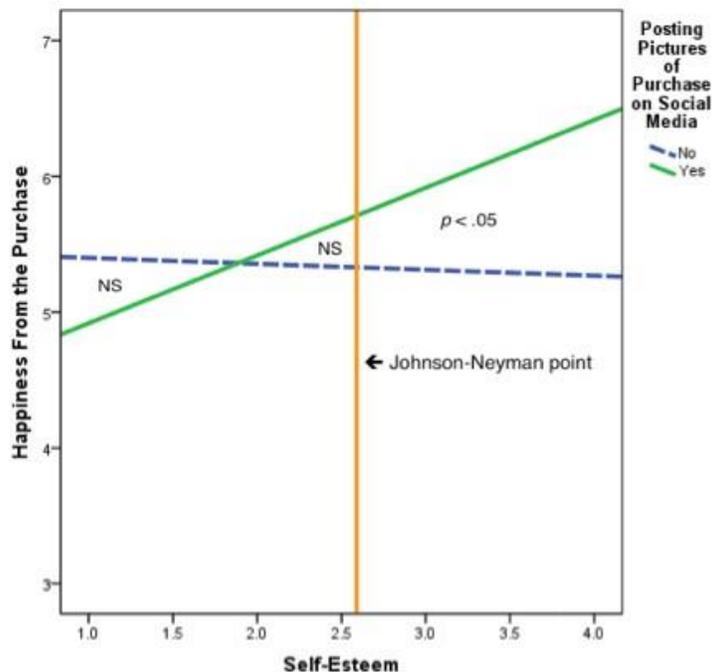


Figure 1. Floodlight Analysis: The Interaction between Self-Esteem and Posting Purchase on Happiness

Note. The vertical line (not the axis of the Happiness from the Purchase) shows the Johnson- Neyman point (self-esteem score = 2.59 in the sample of this article) of the floodlight analysis. It shows the boundary effects of the purchase-posting behavior on consumers' happiness obtained from the purchase.

This study highlights the boundary condition of the effects of the purchase-posting behavior on consumers' happiness obtained from the purchase, based on a survey collecting the real-life posting behavior. The results of the survey showed that the interaction between posting purchases and self-esteem was significant on happiness obtained from the purchases. Importantly, the interaction effects were independent from the prices and types of the purchases as the results eliminated the possibility of prices and types of the purchases as confounds. The nature of the interaction was explored by the floodlights analysis which identified a Johnson-Neyman point of 2.59 in the self-esteem score. Among individuals with higher self-esteem, posting an important purchase leads to more happiness obtained from the purchase. However, among those with lower self-esteem, posting an important purchase has no significant effects on happiness obtained from the purchase. This suggests that self-presentation through one's purchases on social

media has differential consequences among consumers with higher self-esteem and consumers with lower self-esteem.

DISCUSSION

As generating content about one's own purchases is getting common on social media, we need to understand how such behavior influences the content creator's happiness with the purchases. This research identifies the behavior as a digital self-presentation through one's own purchases, and demonstrates that the behavior leads consumers with different self-esteem levels to receive distinct amounts of happiness from the purchases. This may be due to the characteristics of social media. Self-presentation on social media is broadcast, utilizes digital photography and offers immediacy, which promote self-focus. Self-focus leads consumers with high self-esteem to be more self-enhancing in presenting themselves through their purchases, which results in more happiness obtained from the posted purchases. Consumers with low self-esteem, on the other hand, would take more efforts in protective self-presentation due to the increased self-focus, which does not help to increase happiness with the posted purchases. This research has several contributions.

First, extensive research has examined the self-presentation differences between consumers with high self-esteem and consumers with low self-esteem (e.g., Arkin, 1981; Baumeister et al., 1989; Schlenker et al., 1990; Wolfe et al., 1986), but little research has looked into the influences of these differences. This research fills the gap in the context of social media, showing that the features of social media magnify the differences in self-presentation, which result in more happiness obtained from the purchases for high self-esteem consumers. Therefore, this research sheds light on how self-esteem affects the results of self-presentation – consumers' self-esteem levels can influence how much happiness they get from their own purchases by self-presenting via the purchases on social media.

Second, this study also advances our understanding of how social media usage differently influences consumers with high self-esteem and consumers with low self-esteem. Past research has explored how social media usage affects self-esteem (e.g. Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). No existing research

has compared the differences in affective benefits between consumers with high self-esteem and consumers with low self-esteem as the consequences of social media usage. This research demonstrates that posting purchases on social media increases higher self-esteem consumers' happiness obtained from the purchases, but has no effects on lower self-esteem consumers, which suggests that social media is powerful in heightening the effects of individual differences.

Third, this research provides insights into the importance of self-presentation through one's own purchases in influencing consumers' happiness with the purchases. Although extensive research has investigated the formation and management of online impressions through self-presentation (e.g., Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), little research has examined how presenting oneself through purchases influences happiness from the purchases. Consumers self-present through purchases offline as they select clothes, hairstyles, automobiles, and so forth, to impress others and signal their self-concepts (Belk, 1988; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Now social media allow them to self-present 24/7 beyond a regional offline setting to a large audience. Given the pervasiveness of such self-presentation, it is important to understand the impact of self-presentation on consumer well-being. This article builds a bridge between self-presentation and happiness, highlighting the complicated relationship between them.

Fourth, existing research on the behavior of creating UGC focuses on the predicting factors of the behavior (e.g., Goldsmith, Pagani, & Lu, 2013). This research examines the specific behavior of creating UGC to self-present through one's purchases and its consequences rather than predicting factors. Recent research has looked into UGC as a format of self-presentation with different foci, such as gender (Haferkamp et al., 2012), personality (Seidman, 2013), and social norms (Uski & Lampinen, 2016). By focusing on the behavior of creating purchase-related UGC for self-presentation, this article is a cutting-edge one to address the increasingly common post-purchase consumer behavior. Additionally, emotions-related topics in prior UGC research limitedly concentrated on the emotions expressed in the content (e.g., Serna, Gerrikagoitia, & Bernabé, 2016). There is a gap existing in the UGC literature about the emotional benefits of creating UGC to the content creators themselves. This article fills the gap, suggesting that this new post-purchase behavior interplays with individual differences in influencing consumers'

happiness gained from the purchases, therefore providing novel insights for research on UGC and post-purchase consumer behavior.

Managerially, this article underlines the importance of encouraging consumers to create UGC about their consumption experiences to present themselves – creating UGC increases higher self-esteem consumers' happiness from the purchases; for lower self-esteem consumers, creating UGC does not bring negative influences on them. This suggests that creating UGC about brands to self-present can increase consumers' satisfaction with the purchases as well as consumer engagement on social media. Therefore, marketers may need to put efforts on encouraging consumers to create UGC about their brands on social media and facilitate the ways that consumers use their brands to self-present. For example, marketers can consider to strengthen the link between their brands' personality and target consumers' ideal self-image to promote the chances that consumers use the brands to present themselves. Marketers also need to encourage consumers to engage in the self-presentation on social media by offering financial incentives (e.g., discounts, coupons) or social incentives (e.g., getting their UGCs reposted on the company's social media sites; having influencers to repost their UGCs) to consumers. Additionally, on brands' official social media sites, marketers can organize creative brand-related UGC campaigns (e.g. contests) more often.

This research has several limitations which entail several directions for future research. First, in the survey, participants were asked to identify a specific recent purchase that was important to them and if they had posted it on social media, which limits the investigation to one-time posting behavior instead of a habitual behavior. Future research may conduct longitudinal studies to look into the posting behavior for multiple purchases. Second, the survey did not deal with a real purchase that was universal to each participant. Future research can consider a common-purchase based experiment to eliminate the influences of the heterogeneous impacts originated from purchases. Third, this research did not look into the time gap between purchase and posting. Future research can work on a design that randomly assigns participants to post a purchase on social media right after the purchase is made to eliminate some confounding factors. Additionally, this study suggests that the distinct amount of happiness from purchases for higher and lower self-esteem consumers may be resulted from the different

self-presentation styles caused by self-esteem. Future research can empirically test the underlying mechanism of the findings. Another potentially fruitful opportunity for future research is extending the topic to see if the purchase posting behavior will influence people's self-esteem in the long run. It is possible that the purchase posting behavior increases self-esteem for people with higher self-esteem but not for people with lower self-esteem.

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