I'm Proud of It: Consumer Technology Appropriation and Psychological Ownership

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Abstract While a common narrative is that we are increasingly living in a "technology-mediated" world, a quick assessment of emerging digital technologies suggests that today's standards will soon seem old-fashioned and quaint. For example, advances in circuitry, flexible displays, projection, and wearable computing promise to literally and figuratively weave technology into the fabric of our lives.

Introduction

While a common narrative is that we are increasingly living in a "technology-mediated" world, a quick assessment of emerging digital technologies suggests that today's standards will soon seem old-fashioned and quaint. For example, advances in circuitry, flexible displays, projection, and wearable computing promise to literally and figuratively weave technology into the fabric of our lives.

While researchers have long sought to understand when, why and how consumers choose to adopt new technologies (Davis et al. 1989; Rogers 1962, 2003; Srinivasan et al. 2002), such research typically focuses on the point in time at which a consumer or organization purchases a new technology product (Van Ittersum and Feinberg 2010). In this conceptual paper, we argue that as technology becomes

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increasingly pervasive, a critical question today is less whether consumers accept or adopt technology (Davis 1989), but rather whether and how they appropriate value in its use (Vargo and Lusch 2004).

Psychological ownership refers to feelings of possession towards a target object, invoking feelings of "*mine*!" (Jussila et al. 2013; Pierce et al. 2003: 86). Similarly, technology appropriation is the extent to which users take possession of a technology through customization and idiosyncratic use (Orlikowski 2000). We propose that as consumers use technology, psychological ownership may emerge both toward the technological medium itself as well as toward the people, brands, and products consumers communicate with *through* the medium, driving their perceptions of value in use. To understand this process, we draw on the information systems theory of technology appropriation (Gaskin and Lyytinen 2012; Orlikowski 2000) to propose that psychological ownership is enabled by technologies which facilitate consumer technology appropriation.

In this paper we examine consumer technology appropriation through the lens of self-design (Moreau and Herd 2010) to explain and predict psychological ownership, distinguishing it from related concepts such as perceived ease of use (Davis 1989) and customization (Franke et al. 2009). Appropriation refers to the "way in which technology or technological artifacts are adopted, shaped and then used" (Carroll et al. 2002: 2). According to Dourish (2003: 467), technology appropriation "might involve customization in the traditional sense … but it might also simply involve making use of the technology … to serve new ends." Users pick and choose among affordances, or elements, of a technology product or service, trying and appropriating some, not choosing or even discarding or disappropriating others (Carroll et al. 2002).

We propose that one of the key ways that consumers appropriate technology is to communicate or interact with it and that this process of technology appropriation enhances their sense of psychological ownership over the technology or digital medium. By empowering consumers to communicate both with a medium as well as through a medium to other people (Hoffman and Novak 1996), computer-mediated communication enhances consumers' sense of control, encourages their investment and even "co-construction" of self (Belk 2013), and augments their sense of intimate knowledge of the medium, facilitating the emergence of psychological ownership.

We further propose that pride plays a multifaceted role in understanding consumers' appropriation and psychological ownership of technology. Pride is a self-conscious emotion that has recently generated significant interest in psychology (Tracy and Robins 2007b) and marketing (Decrop and Derbaix 2010). A review of the limited literature of pride and ownership in consumer behavior produces seemingly conflicting results. On one hand, researchers find that "pride of ownership" affects willingness to pay (Townsend and Shu 2010), suggesting pride operates *subsequent* to a consumer's ownership (psychological or legal) of a product. Further, this pride affects outcomes only in a public consumption context (Di Muro and Noseworthy 2013). On the other hand, other researchers find that pride of accomplishment from customization has a positive impact on psychological ownership

(Kirk and Swain 2013) and willingness to pay (Franke et al. 2010), suggesting that pride operates as an *antecedent* to psychological ownership.

A more detailed examination of theoretical and empirical research about pride suggests an explanation for these divergent findings. Tracy and Robins (2007b) find strong evidence of two facets of pride, each with different antecedents which depend on an individual's attribution of the source. Authentic pride results from public or self-assessment of an individual's effort and is unstable and controllable ("I did well on this exam because I studied hard"), while hubristic pride results from an individual's assessment of their own innate ability, which is stable and uncontrollable ("The exam was easy for me because I am smart"; Tracy and Robins 2007a). We propose that authentic pride serves as a driver of psychological ownership because it reflects a consumer's cognitive acknowledgement of their own investment of self in a task. At the same time, once psychological ownership emerges, a product becomes an extension of self (Belk 1988) and hubristic pride, as a global assessment of the self, moderates the effect of psychological ownership on outcomes, especially in a public consumption context or on a public outcome such as word of mouth. In this paper, we explore multiple sources of both authentic and hubristic pride as they relate to consumer technology appropriation, psychological ownership, and consumer valuation of product and process, and discuss moderating effects of situation and person.

References

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