

Vicarious Consumption in Internet Forums
How Internet Forum Use Impacts both the Consumer and the Firm

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Abstract

An increasing proportion of everyday life is being lived through the Internet. Unfortunately, little is understood about how living life in the Internet sphere impacts the lives, attitudes and behaviors of the individual.

This research is aimed at exploring how different levels of engagement in online forums impacts both product related behaviors and psychological factors with respect to the individual. Furthermore, where most of the extant research looks at a monolithic “Internet Use” construct, this research breaks this down into content consumption and content creation. A diverse set of outcomes was shown to result from high levels in either of these variables signifying that these behaviors should be assessed separately in future research.

The two empirical studies show conflicting results in terms of content consumption/content creation’s link to product purchase and use. The studies did not conflict with respect to the impact of forum use on the psychological outcomes of Internet addiction and site commitment. Both content consumption and creation were found to be strongly and positively linked to these outcomes. More importantly, the Self-Determination Theory benefits of autonomy, competence and relatedness were found to mediate the links in both studies. This finding could lead to increasing our understanding of the mechanism of addiction in the Internet realm.