

Chapter 68

Brand Trust in Offline and Online Environments: Lessons for Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media operates in the online environment, and the challenge is to enhance the end-user experience. The chapter asserts that the consumer experience and behaviour in the online (e.g. e-commerce) and offline environments have some commonality with social media. Building a successful brand online is a prerequisite for success, but fundamental to trusting brand beliefs is the ability to create trust and by extension commitment. The trust-commitment relationship is fundamental to brand building and to influence end-user intentional behaviour. This relationship is enhanced by physical means (website design [aesthetics], website functionality [privacy and security]); although these are important factors alone, they do not guarantee a pleasant online experience. Online firms like social media need to create social interaction on the website to communicate affective involvement. Online effectiveness leads to positive behavioural intention and continual repeat usage via attitudinal formation.

INTRODUCTION

When environmental conditions are uncertain the impact on the brand is unpredictable. This is even more important for strong brands, however, they are also used as a defence mechanism in challenging environments to reduce the competitive threat and maintain profitability. Brands embody the consumers' identity due to the cultural nature of modern-day consumers (Da Silva & Alwi, 2008; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). To overcome uncertainty in brand activities (offline and online) including brand strategies organisations need to approach branding strategically. Consequently, organisations need to understand the uniqueness of the brand and how it distinguishes from the competitors. When products

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are similar consumers are more interested in the brand and simply defining and telling is not sufficient and the organisation must consider the environmental dimension and increasing competition (Carbonara & Caiazza, 2010; Gray, 1995). Product closeness intrigues the consumers about the organisations' brands and is a power opportunity for the organisations to develop a compelling story (leading to a competitive advantage) now that consumers' interest is aroused. Understanding the nature of the environment and the competitive threat are approaches to deal with challenging markets, but do online brands behave in a similar manner? Brands reflect the organisations and are culturally embedded in the values and beliefs of the organisation. Suggesting that brand orientation is part of the organisational management (Clatworthy, 2012; Simoes & Dibb, 2001). Are online brands embedded in the organisation or is a different approach required for them? This paper applies established brand trust models and concepts for the offline and online environments to social media. Morgan and Hunt (1994) developed a brand trust model for the offline environment, Mukherjee and Nath (2007) adapted the model for the online environment. However, they did not examine the social media environment. The gap identified is the focus of this paper, which is an area of growing importance.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Brand Concepts

The brand literature suggests that brand meaning is defined and driven by the firm, which gives rise to the idea of brand concept. Brand meaning is derived from the needs and wants of the consumers. It thus serves to differentiate brands and position them in the marketplace (Park et al., 1986). Riezebos, (2003) define two types of brand concepts 'expressive' and 'functional'. Expressive brands are appropriate for products that are associated with self-image such as luxury brands. Functional brands are associated by the consumers as problem solvers. The idea of brand meaning suggests that brands have a personality and by extension a brand image and brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990), A developed and strong brand personality is an factor in the decision-making process of consumers (Kaplan et al., 2010). However, brand names do change (Royal Mail to Consignia) and questions the justification attached to brands (Griff Round & Roper, 2012). The purpose of branding can be categorised as an identifier (Farquhar, 1989), secondly, it can reduce the complexity of the purchase decision (Jacoby et al., 1977). Thirdly, it identifies to consumers the quality (Jacoby et al., 1971; Kapferer, 2004) and finally, brands reduce the level risk to consumers (Aaker, 1991). Brands do change over time and challenges the requirement for the similarity between brands. This may have implications for online and offline brands and whether they have to be similar or tailored to the environment. Research by Griff Round and Roper (2012) suggest that consumers do perceive attributes from the brand name; namely 'rational', 'relationship', 'habitual' and 'symbolic' functions. Brand personality (Aaker, 1996) is more than a brand name and just changing it will not affect the brand personality. The symbolic nature of brands is determined by consumers and not the corporation. Firms select brand names to promote inherent associations that they want and use marketing activities to reinforce them (Lee & Hsu 2010; Keller, 2003). The above statement implies that brand names are flexible and the corporations can change them if marketing activities are implemented to reinforce the brand meaning. Thus the brand name itself is not important, but the association by the consumers has significant implications for the brand. There is increasing acceptance of the organisational influence in brand economic value (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Dowling (1993) further suggest

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