Chapter 63
Social Media, Interfacing Brands in Relation to the Social Media Ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

Much of the existing research in social media has been directed at examining the consequences of the interactive nature of the evolving medium and communication issues, with little to say about the impact of this medium on brands. Drawing on Fiske's relational model, this current chapter examines the interface between social media and brands, particularly on the breadth and the dimensions of the level of engagement. Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, are revolutionising the way companies market their products. New means of interaction and dialogue are used in part because of the inherent structure and features of these social media platforms. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of the analysis for understanding of new terminology in the evolving marketing environment.

INTRODUCTION

Social media interfacing brands in a synchronous and asynchronous ecosystem addresses elements of consumer culture from an interdisciplinary perspective, with special reference to commercial exchanges. This exploratory chapter questions what kind of online social tendencies brands should execute to express their core values and engage with customers in the future.

The question addresses the nature and dimension of social interaction on brand-oriented social media platforms (Thackeray, Neiger, Hansson, & McKenzie, 2008), and it is explored with special reference to Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter. Whether we can categorise 'this type of social interaction'

to our notion of brand communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) will be addressed by redefining what brand communities connote.

Understanding brands as symbols within an offline and online space intersects various disciplines. This chapter considers a postmodern approach that challenges marketing as a practice and concept bridging earlier critiques by academics, in particular. Brown (1993) surmised that postmodern marketing is a breakdown of the grand narratives. Brown also stated that marketing on the whole has been based on modernist principles of analysis, implementation planning, and control, yet the process and drive behind the 'postmodernism condition' is a challenge of the established institutional pillars and the dismantling of grand narratives. From this, Brown further questioned the whole evolution of marketing as a modernist concept from its Fordist-production, sales, and marketing orientation eras. He questioned the foundations of this belief.

Brown discussed two key components that are of relevance to this chapter in questioning and establishing the nature of marketing within the new media paradigm. The first component concerns the reproach between marketing theory and practice, of which social media explicitly exemplifies this wedge. The second component addresses the issue of terminology. This theoretical study argues for social media analysis to incorporate an anthropological approach at its centre to amalgamate the ever-changing phraseology in marketing terminology, such as cybermarketing and multichannel marketing, as well as nondefinable issues, such as ethics, privacy, and data (Brown, 1993).

Marketing scholarship has moved to the centre of concurrent discussions of postmodernity in the humanities and the social sciences (Gould & Lerman, 1998). The amorphous function of marketing, defined by the British Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) as a 'management process identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer needs for profit' (CIM, 2009), has grown since is inception in 1911, when modernist tendencies were becoming transformative (for example, the Wright brothers in 1903). However, the implications for how marketing processes and phenomena are researched and studied have a bearing on theory and practice.

To further this discussion, an interdisciplinary approach with an anthropological leaning is posited as being central to understanding consumerism and consumer-oriented brands through the social process (Horst, 2014). More so, that the nature of goods and services, available in an information-driven society through social networks with brand interface social media Web 2.0 platforms sits central to the discussions that critically address the schism between marketing and media. This chapter argues that marketing should be studied because the sociocultural process defines postmodern society (Firat, Dholakia, & Venkatesh, 1995). The marketing function, when broken down, cannot be captured solely by empirical positivist analysis, and it is this relational approach to the subject that enables brands to come alive and become 'experienceable' (Firat & Schultz, 1997).

That brands play on symbolism and allude to more than their sum of parts (Berry, Smith, & Pulford, 1999) as meaning culturally, is discussed within the remit as what to social media encompasses, including its and functions and ever-expanding remit and capabilities. The principles of eWoM, which is defined by Shu-Chuan and Kim (2011) as a distinctive derivate of social media, are applied to discussions relating to brand engagements with symbolism at the centre of this interaction. Analytical insight is applied on social processes through symbolic interactionism and Johari's window in relation to the Facebook ecosystem. This is continued in greater depth when the need is stated to understand normative values and groups in related contexts (Fiske, 1992) from a macro perspective so that these groups can be understood within and beyond geopolitical proximities, with defining indices.

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