Chapter 79

The Influence of Customers Social Media Brand Community Engagement on Restaurants Visit Intentions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to study the relationships between brand community engagement of customers on social media networks and customer behavioral intentions with regard to visiting restaurants where the theory of planned behavior was applied. A conclusive-descriptive, cross-sectional research design was selected in order to determine the degree to which Brand Community Engagement, Attitude (ATT), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Restaurant's Visit Intentions (INT) and Visit Behavior (B) are interrelated and associated. The results indicated that BCE does affect customers attitude towards dining out and visiting restaurants and that SN cannot moderate the strong relationship between ATT and intention. In addition, customer intention can weakly predict their behavior of visiting restaurants. The results of this study suggest that management of restaurants should pay attention to their marketing communication strategies through social media restaurant's communities and should focus on how to increase the engagement levels of customers beside understanding and may be changing their attitudes towards experiences in restaurants. This study examined the relationship between Restaurants Brand Community Engagement on social media and customer intentions to dine out and visit restaurants.

INTRODUCTION

Visiting restaurants has multiple motives behind it; customers seek interpersonal relationships between (Ha and Jang, 2013) as well as fun and enjoyable experiences (Josiam and Henry, 2014).

Social media provide a great source of information for customers before selecting a restaurant to visit (Pantelidis, 2010), people feel free to spread their opinions and thoughts about products and services they experience (Bilgihan et al., 2014). Thus, social media helps to understand and analyze the user behavior (Weller, 2015). Social Media is a collection of applications inherent by Internet technology innovation of Web 2.0. which offers an enhancement on Internet which involves the emergence of web sites from static to dynamic or user-generated environments where interaction between users is basic (Ngai et al., 2015). As a concept, social media has many inherent applications like social media networks, blogs, content communities, collaborative projects virtual game world and virtual social worlds (Vlachvei Aspasia, 2014). Research reports showed that in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region Internet usage growth was about 73% in 2015. 90% of the internet users are on social media and Facebook ranked as the most used social network with a percentage of 96% of social media and internet users. (Ipsos, 2016).

Social media is beneficial for both consumers and Businesses. Consumers usually seek information from any available resources before they decide to buy as a way of estimation of what the product or service is offered referring to their needs and wants (Song and Yoo, 2016). Social Media also helped companies and businesses build reputation, empower the communication level with their customers, measure satisfaction and bring higher quality of products and services (Floreddu and Cabiddu, 2016). In addition, Social media is an effective tool to alter and direct buying intentions and decisions (Kwok et al., 2015). However, social media imposes many efforts on the marketing people to use this new marketing channel wisely to understand their consumers and know the way how they can drive their buying intention (Keegan and Rowley, 2017).

The information collected by the customers from online sources helps in shaping the final customer decision. Physical evidence of the webpage, pictures and customer rating and reviews play a vital role in customer final decision. Not to mention the customization capabilities of the social media to target very narrowly defined and specific audience.

This research tries to achieve an understanding of this in a specific context; the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. Many local and international companies are attracted to invest in Erbil considering that it is a city that has relative stability compared to other parts of Iraq. The city is blossoming and many businesses are being opened in the area. Not to mention that a large number of Iraqi investors whom moved outside Iraq are coming back home especially to Erbil to do business.

So, the focus of this article is on understanding the diversity of the new Erbil community evolved after the Iraqi war. Lots of people form several parts of Iraq and the world are moving their as investors or employees. Due to the diversity of people coming from different backgrounds; there is a diversity of tastes when it comes to the choice of restaurants. Many ethnic, international and local restaurants are being opened and social media is helping people to choose their time out with their beloved ones to socialized, eat and have fun.

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