

How and Whys That Lead to Online Brand Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to digital branding and customer involvement via social media. To improve online brand engagement, this study examined brand awareness, social linkage, and online trust value. Effective web survey design acquired 317 empirical online sample answers for the paper. The current study uses structural equation modeling to evaluate and verify the postulated model. In this competitive internet era, social networking-supported marketing may raise brand engagement to increase online brand trust, positive brand attitude, and deeper customer emotional connection and brand likability. This study proposes a unique paradigm to improve online brand engagement by investigating brand awareness, social, and online trust value correlations.

KEYWORDS

Online Brand Engagement, Online Trust Value, OSN-Led Branding, Social Linkage, Social Media-Led Branding

INTRODUCTION

Social media and new online platforms have greatly impacted communication and information exchange (Qualman, 2009). Hence, social media/Internet has enabled direct and interactive contact (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). Social media helps consumers share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Smart Insights (2016) reports 2.306 billion social media users. At least one tweet in five mentions a brand, and 20% of these tweets express favorable or negative views about that brand (Jansen et al., 2009).

Digital content and word-of-mouth boost brand exposure, trust, and buyer engagement (Baldus et al., 2015; Islam and Rahman, 2016; Dessart et al., 2015). Brand engagement and likeability may rise with customer connectedness (Berger, 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Laroche et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2011; Morgan-Thomas et al., 2013; Nepomuceno et al., 2014; Wirtz et al., 2013).

Barari et al. (2020) presented functional, relational, and transformational engagement behavior in their meta-analysis. Transformational is customer- and firm-initiated, whereas functional is firm-initiated. In a functional approach, consumers want valued assets like money, and enterprises take advantage (e.g., encouraging customers). Customers co-create value in a relational way, creating engagement (engagement with brand). Technology drives consumer involvement in the transformative approach. Yet, the relational approach may strongly affect consumer engagement by recognizing consumers' voluntary resource contribution (e.g., knowledge, experience, and time) in their brand connection (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). The internet and new technologies have revolutionized

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consumer interaction and brought attention to the transformative level. Barari et al. (2020) also found various consumer engagement precursors: trust, dedication, and excellence. Second, adopting a consumer relational approach, Loureiro et al. (2017) identified brand involvement, online brand experience, and self-brand image congruency as online consumer brand engagement antecedents. Consumer interest in a brand based on their needs and beliefs is called brand participation (Zaichkowsky, 1985; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). Customers' brand interactions online (Gentile et al., 2007). Consumer self-concept and brand image congruency are called self-brand image congruency (Sirgy, 1982).

Brand engagement strengthens consumer-brand bonds via emotional and intellectual connections (Goldsmith et al., 2011). Engaging customers and building a virtual brand community in the online marketplace are difficult. It increases customer trust and brand likeability (Morgan-Thomas et al., 2013; Nepomuceno, 2014). (e.g., Casalo et al., 2007; Hollebeek, 2011). Online Brand Engagement supports emotional attachment to the brand (Chan and Li, 2010) and good brand attitude (Zuroni et al., 2012; Romaniuk, 2013). (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kozinets, 2014; Pletikosa et al., 2013; Wirtz et al., 2013). In this study, we propose a framework to understand and explore the linkages between Brand Awareness Linkages (Barreda et al., 2015; Bija & Balaş, 2014; Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012); Social Linkages (Berger, 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Hollebeek, 2014; Laroche, 2012; Lee, 2011; Morgan-Thomas, 2013; Nepomuceno, 2014; Wirtz, 2013); and Online Trust Value Linkages (Brodie et al., 2013). The theorized model shows integrated Online Brand Engagement.

The theoretical background section shows the four dimensions employed in this study: brand awareness, social connection, online trust value links, and online brand engagement. Social media-led marketing techniques and activities have been studied (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Bernoff & Li, 2008; Bianchi & Andrews, 2015; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Social media also affects consumer purchasing behavior, according to studies (Pooja et al., 2012; Chang, Yu, & Lu, 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Relling et al., 2016). Several studies underlined the importance of social media-led customer relationship management (Trainor et al., 2014; Malthouse et al., 2013; Baird & Parasnis, 2011); branding and brand management at post-social networking environment (De Vries et al., 2014; Habibi et al., 2014; Asmussen, Harridge-March et al., 2013; Laroche et al., 2013; Laroche et al., 2012). The aforementioned research examined the purchase behavior of new-age customers who actively use social media. They still only studied social-networking groups and eWOMs. Several studies have focused on brand loyalty and purchasing trust. Thus far, research has shown that consumer brand selection behavior in digital and online social networks is unintegrated. Online Brand Engagement in OSN-led marketing environments has received minimal integrated study. This gap has inspired us to develop the objectives of the research:

- To identify the underlying factors of Online Brand Engagement.
- To examine the effect of Brand Awareness, Social Linkages, Online Trust on Online Brand Engagement.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Customers are more likely to enhance brand interactions (Groenroos, 1997; Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Further, customers develop a perceived value from specific brand interactions, which may be influenced by their cognitive, emotional and/or physical commitments (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Drawing meaning from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), in a brand context, it can be anticipated that consumers are likely to respond with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward a specific brand (Hollebeek, 2011; Pervan *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, online brand engagement is likely to be influenced.

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