Chapter 100
Consumer–Brand Relationship:
Foundation and State–of–the–Art

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between a brand and consumers is known to produce positive outcomes for both partners. Consumers develop relationships with diverse brands regarding brands as partners. Brands are humanized in the minds of consumers and therefore provide symbolic meanings and social and cultural value, which is beyond the utilitarian benefits. Following this paradigm, the purpose of this chapter is to show an overview of the research from customer relationship management to consumer-brand relationship and propose a theoretical model of consumer-brand relationship process. In this vein, the chapter begins with the conceptualization of customer relationship management. Then, the foundation, an overview of main theories, and the seminal models of consumer-brand relationship are shown. Finally, a model of consumer-brand relationship process is proposed and insights for further research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR) has attracted interest and relevance since late nineties of 20th Century. More and more organizations are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate to brands, why some brands are preferred to others and even loved. Thus, these and other issues associated to the bonds established between consumers and brands, which may be associated to goods, services, organizations, celebrities, destinations, cities, and even counties, have gained prominence amongst researchers and practitioners.

Indeed, all types of organizations, profit or non-profit, are adopting customer-centric strategies, programs, tools, and technology for efficient and effective customer relationship management. Even tourism related public entities are realizing the need for in-depth and integrated tourist knowledge in order to build close cooperative and partnering relationships with their tourists.

In fact, since Fournier (1998) suggested the metaphor of human relationships in their awarded article, and proposed the Brand Quality model, several other researchers and practitioners become more and more interested in understanding the mechanisms behind the relationship between a brand and consumers. The human relationship metaphor of marriage provides structure for the understanding of consumer–brand relationships phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Brand Quality model focuses on the relationship dimensions of love/passion, brand partner quality, intimacy, interdependence, commitment, self-connection, but it does not illustrate how these dimensions are related each other; in other words, it is not a causal relational model. Several studies have been analyzing how these and other relational constructs are related (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), as well as, antecedents and consequents of the relational constructs (e.g., Chang & Chieng, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Tsai, 2011; Loureiro, Kaufmann, & Vrontis, 2012), or how to improve the measure of each construct (e.g., Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

From the practitioners' perspective, we can find several evidence of the growing interest of company CEOs and brand manager on this topic. The relationship metaphor is proposed to enhance the understanding of brand loyalty. The love for a brand modifies the influence of attitude strength on loyalty (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2008). Therefore, Roberts (2004), CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi, proposes the theory of "Lovemarks" and alludes that brands should be about consumers and their relationship with them. For Roberts (2004), in the same way the products evolved to carry trademarks, and trademarks evolved into brands, nowadays, brands should evolve into "Lovemarks." In this regard, "Lovemarks" are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers. The website "lovemarkscampus" provides information about the companies, consumer opinions, and events around the topic: from brands to lovebrands. There, in the webpage "resources,"

it is also possible to find some academic literature on the topic of emotional marketing.

Accordingly, McEwen, a Global Practice Leader at The Gallup Organization, and previous senior planning and account management in several leading advertising agencies, including McCann-Erickson, FCB, and D'Arcy, launched in 2005 the book "Married to the Brand." This book advocates the thesis that great brands are built upon strong customer relationships.

In this vein, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the evolution of the concept of consumer-brand relationship, providing insight about the main proposed models and major constructs. A framework is also presented and intends to suggest a sequential causal order from identity to outcomes in the relationship between consumers and their loved brands. The antecedents and consequents of love for a brand are not yet properly established and so the framework, based on literature review, intends to contribute for fulfill this gap.

In this chapter, the conceptual foundation of CBR is explored by examining the literature on relationship marketing and other disciplines that contribute to the knowledge of CBR. Thus, the following sections start with a definition of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and the sequential process that has led to the Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR). Then, a parsimonious view is given of the various theories together with a conceptual discussion on major constructs along with existing models so far developed in various conceptual and empirical studies.

Finally, the chapter presents an overview of the process behind the consumer-brand relationship and provides some insights for further research.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

In the marketing literature the expression Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has been

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