

Chapter 6

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.

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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 its 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

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