Chapter 2
Be or Not Be Online Engaged:
Exploring the Flow From Stimuli to e-WOM on Online Retail Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Relationship marketing is a field of knowledge that emerged in the 1980s. The relationship between online consumers and brands is embedded in the same relationship marketing paradigm but become a significant issue for companies in the 21st century with the proliferation of Web 2.0. In order to give insights about online engagement and the process behind, this chapter aims (1) to conduct a systematic literature review on online stimuli experience, adaptability, e-WOM, positive/negative emotions, memory, and online engagement; (2) to present a comprehensive framework exposing the flow from stimuli to e-WOM on online retail consumers. Findings allow the authors propose online retailer recommendations and suggestions for further research.

INTRODUCTION

Society is evolving fast in technology and internet users are growing all over the world (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). Actually, more than 60% of individuals in the Europe of 28 countries (EU28) use the internet daily (Eurostat, 2016a).

In the European Union (EU28), the proportion of individuals aged 16 to 74 having ordered goods or services (mainly clothes and sport goods) for private use over the internet ("e-buyers") has continuously risen, from 30% in 2007 to 53% in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016b) and 68% in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018). Therefore, the relationship between the market, consumers and brands are constantly being challenged. In this turbulent environment, consumers make choices bearing in mind several variables in their decision process.

As Internet usage grows, brands are becoming even more important than they have been in other channels or environments. With new options emerging every day from many unknown providers all over the world, consumers want to choose a supplier that represents a set of values or attributes that are meaningful, clear and truthful (Bergstrom, 2000).

In a highly competitive world, goods and services are easily duplicated or replaceable. Therefore, brands become an important asset for simplifying the decision-making process for consumers. If we are able to properly manage this asset, this can create differentiation, relevance and affinity (Otim & Grover, 2006). Actually, brand name is one of the main factors that consumers use to differentiate providers, due to its connection to the perception of brand trust (Ruparelia, White, & Hughes, 2010).

This changing world leads to a profound transformation on brand management for those who seek to operate within the new global business environment, particularly the online environment. Indeed, in what new companies concern, branding is a crucial issue for their success in market because helps to capture customers, retain customers and build a favorable reputation (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010).

Therefore, in recent years many people have spent time and effort to study online consumer behavior. From top researchers to college students, the online environment has become a "must follow" area in marketing trends. Inside this wide spectrum, the online retail consumers have been object to high attention. Thus, a question arises: what are the main topics and issues that have been discussed in literature about online retail context?

The stimulus-organism-response paradigm (or S-O-R) has been employed to analyze consumer behavior (online and offline) with companies. This paradigm is aligned with consumer-brand relationship field of research. Therefore, could literature provide an explanation for the following questions? Which online stimuli and experience (and type of adaptability) are more effective in influencing the consumer intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)? Particularly, could emotions and memory created have an important role on enhancing a favorable response by online consumers?

The main aims of this chapter are (i) to conduct a systematic literature review on online stimuli experience, adaptability, e-WOM, positive/negative emotions, memory and online engagement; (ii) to present a comprehensive framework exposing the flow from stimuli to e-WOM on online retail consumers.

BACKGROUND

Relationship marketing emerges in the 1980's as a new paradigm that shift from transactions to relationships. Relationship marketing create, involve, integrate and maintain suppliers, distributors, consumers and other partners within a company or an organization, working together in activities of marketing and development. Several conceptualizations of relationship marketing are shown in Table 1.

Although all definitions focus the ongoing process of stablish and maintain relational exchanges, the one provided by Gummesson (1999) open the door to the online relationships, social networks and other online platforms. Concomitantly, Fournier (1998) publishes her seminal article on the relationship theory associated to brands. Brands can be born, live and interact with consumers. This anthropomorphic metaphor - considering a brand as a partner in a relationship - gave wings to the research line of consumer-brand relationships. The brand relationship quality model comprises six components that express the quality of the relationship consumer and brand: love/passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy and brand partner quality. Between a brand and a consumer can grow an emotional attachment (e.g., Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Ahuvia, 2005; Thomson, 2006), a kind

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