

Chapter 9

Friendship to Kinship: Evaluating the Role of Consumer Brand Engagement to Promote Brand Evangelism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the effect of brand engagement on brand evangelism in an Indian context. It explores the motives that drive fans in brand engagement that leads to brand evangelism behavior. A nomological model is developed based on literature reviews and authors tested empirically using a survey design for two mobile phone brands. Results of the empirical study reinforces the role of brand engagement as a significant influencer of brand evangelism. Additionally, brand involvement, brand personality and self-brand connect are the constructs elucidating brand engagement, whereas brand interactivity has a direct effect on brand evangelism. Conceptual model tested among users of premium and value brand of mobile phones enlightens that customers of premium brand demonstrate stronger brand engagement and evangelism intent.

INTRODUCTION

With increasing digitization, there is greater emphasis on individualized marketing communication rather than mass marketing. The concept of word-of-mouth communication has become more effective than traditional communication strategies. Word-of-mouth can be either face to face interaction or through social media, but creates greater impact of almost 20 times greater than television advertisement (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Considering this, it would be better for brands to focus on satisfied customers to spread positive word-of-mouth than spend on mass communication to optimize marketing costs. A satisfied customer tends to behave as a brand ambassador in preaching the advantages of the brand to which they are emotionally connected, and this kind of behavior is defined by Kawasaki (1991)

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as 'Brand Evangelism'. Brand evangelism, therefore, is an extension of positive word-of-mouth (Doss, 2013) and is described as an active way of zealously spreading positive opinions about the focal brand and persuading others to get engaged with the same. (Lee & Hsieh, 2016).

In order to convert the customers into brand evangelists, the firm should build strong relationship with existing customers who in turn will be publicizing about the brand. The relationship developed over a period of time is expected to strengthen the engagement towards the brand or the firm. Thus, brand engagement is expected to provide the fillip to customers to become brand evangelists. According to Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), a firm's value will be determined based on how it engages the customers to be proactive and develops long term relationship (Brodie, et al., 2011).

Based on the above approach, this chapter attempts to examine the impact of consumer brand engagement on brand evangelism behavior and also identifies the antecedents that leads to brand engagement. The smartphone industry in India is rapidly evolving and many new players have entered the market in the past few years. According to counterpointresearch.com, India is expected to have second largest customer base for smartphones by 2022 at 442.5 million units next to China.

In this context, the chapter contributes to the existing brand evangelism literature by studying the customers towards high involvement products in India. Additionally, the study also delineates the various dimensions of brand engagement as mediator and its direct influence on brand evangelism. Drawing from the literature of brand evangelism, customer brand engagement and drivers of brand engagement, the purpose of the study is to ascertain the following: (i) Can engaged customers can be converted to be a brand evangelists?; (ii) What are the brand related antecedents of customer brand engagement?; and (iii) the theoretical framework developed is tested and compared for premium brand and value brand smartphones in India.

This chapter is organized as follows: We begin by explaining Brand Evangelism followed by Brand Engagement and antecedents to engagement. A theoretical model with testable hypotheses are formulated next. Subsequently, we explain the methodology and data collection method for testing the theoretical model. We conclude by discussing results, managerial implications and results.

BRAND EVANGELISM

The Greek word '*evangelos*' has taken its shape as "evangelist" and it is used to refer a person transmitting positive message amongst people (Meiners, et al., 2010). To become an evangelist, customers should first experience the product and the meaningful experience created post purchase empowers them to spread positive word-of-mouth leading to evangelism. Below is the experience pyramid developed by Tarssanen & Kylanen (2007), depicting six brand elements on horizontal axis and five levels of consumer experience on vertical axis. From the pyramid, it is evident that the experience becomes meaningful only when consumers emotionally get connected to the brand (Arkonsuo, et al., 2014) and higher levels of emotional connect will transform them into brand evangelists.

Brand evangelists tend to regularly purchase the brand, influence the non-users to purchase the brand, by propagating the brand-related experience to them and in some cases, they prevent others from purchasing rival brands (McConnell & Huba, 2003). According to Sng (2015), brand evangelists could include mainstream customers (regular purchasers with emotional attachment to brands), passionate customers (who exchange information about the brands vigorously), news hunters (who seek information about new products and spread acquired information actively in their networks), communicators (customers

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