

E-Marketing Mix Variables to Create Online Brand Equity in the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to investigate and empirically validate e-marketing mix framework creating online brand equity suitable for adaptation in the Indian context. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis are used to identify and validate the e-marketing mix variables to create online brand equity. Primary product and service offerings, website content, customer care and relationship, website interactivity, website's security and reliability, and website speed are the six e-marketing mix elements identified. Also, a conceptual categorization is used to propose and develop a typology that classifies these six variables into primary and secondary activities. The identified e-marketing mix variables will be an insightful aid to planning various marketing activities and controlling other outcome variables like online satisfaction, e-loyalty, online brand equity, etc. This is one of the first attempts to propose and verify e-marketing mix variables for a developing economy like India and classify them under a generic parsimonious dimensional framework for e-commerce.

KEYWORDS

E-Commerce, E-Marketing Mix, Internet Marketing, Online Retail

1. INTRODUCTION

Coined by Neil Borden, the word “marketing mix” signifies different combinations of marketing activities, that lead to successful marketing programs. This has been a subject of considerable research for last 50 years. However, with the advent of electronic commerce (e-commerce), the existing marketing mix elements or marketing activities tend to be inadequate. Today, with Internet becoming an omnipresent market place, the traditional 4 Ps of marketing mix have shifted to relationship building, interactivity, customization, word of mouth, online reviews, social media marketing and building online communities (Allard et al., 2020; Bapna et al., 2019; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2017; Haikel-elsabeh et al., 2019; K. Wang et al., 2020; Zollo et al., 2020).

These e-marketing mix variables become even more complex when we turn our attention to fast growing emerging economies like India. Though electronic commerce as an industry and a marketing phenomenon existed since 1990, its advent into the Indian economy has been only in 1999. Since then, in last 22 years, the Indian e-commerce industry has established itself as a thriving and a fast-growing sector making forays into the developing the economy.

DOI: 10.4018/IJEBR.309394

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India is one of the most diverse countries in terms of culture and ethnicity. The value & belief system of Indian consumers are influenced by religious tradition and are significantly different from their western counterparts (Jain, 2020). In case of deeply-rooted culture, it becomes difficult for marketers and organizations to standardize strategies and outperform competition. For example, online shopping for Indian consumers was initially limited to only browsing and checking out prices (Khare, 2011). Later it was found that, once these consumers gain online shopping experience, the socio-economic factors do not affect their behavior. There are various other preference nuances of Indian consumer behavior which, like any other dynamic society, is continuously evolving.

It can be assumed that irrespective of the stage of economy (developed or developing) and ethnographic differences, the online milieu is characterized by multi-faceted and diversely complicated many-to-many communications. This has inherently transformed the consumer's decision making process (Novak & Hoffman, 2012). The generalizability of theories and framework like e-marketing mix framework developed in matured market is questioned from time to time as such theories and frameworks underplays the environment cues like the demand structures and cultural factors in emerging economies (M. Mukherjee, 2014). This leads us to our first research aim.

Aim 1: To investigate the applicability of existing e-marketing mix variables for the Indian e-commerce sector.

Marketing mix elements are pre-cursors to higher order marketing constructs such as brand equity (C. S. Park & Srinivasan, 1994). Established research has proven that, brand equity works as a source of competitive advantage and is a crucial dimension of business success (Aaker, 1991, 1992). For e-commerce companies, the e-marketing mix elements can similarly be assumed as pre-cursors to "online" brand equity. Availing information to understand how consumer decides before placing orders can help e-commerce platforms to build their brand (Maaya, 2020).

The Indian e-commerce sector is highly competitive. The competition becomes fiercer as global e-commerce companies (Amazon, Walmart-Flipkart, Alibaba) come forward to catch this fast-growing market. An important question that e-commerce companies are trying to answer is, the appropriate e-marketing mix elements needed to boost their online brand equity (C. H. Park, 2017; I. Park et al., 2010). E-marketing mix variables prescribed for building online brand equity needs to be affirmed for suitability in the Indian context. This leads us to our second research aim.

Aim 2: To validate the role of identified e-marketing mix variables in creating online brand equity for Indian e-commerce sector.

The following section highlights the existing e-marketing mix frameworks in the literature. Subsequently, related hypothesis is formed followed by the research methodology, analysis and results. The study has used exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to derive a list of e-marketing mix variables and its relationship with online brand equity.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Existing E-Marketing Mix Frameworks

Since the concept of four P's was proposed by McCarthy (McCarthy, 1960), the prime marketing classificatory schemata have been revisited from time to time. The evolution of the internet brought about a unique set of characteristics broadly different from the conventional brick - and - mortar setup, stretching the traditional marketing methods. In an attempt to define e-marketing and its activities, previous authors of the "revisionist" literature of the e-marketing mix has demanded a holistic view of the network system (Dennis et al., 2005; Kirithi & McIntyre, 2002).

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