

Understanding the impact of Social Media Marketing on brand loyalty

Name of the student

URN number

Name of the program

Word Count: 1973

Abstract

This paper intends to present a proposal for conducting a research to understand the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. The proposed methodology of this research has been mentioned in the paper with proper justification. Furthermore, validity, reliability and ethical consideration associated with this research has also been explained in the paper.

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1. Introduction

Building and sustaining brand loyalty has been one of the primary fields of research for marketers over a very long period of time (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Olivier, 1997; Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2002). According to Keller (2008), brand loyalty can be referred to as the ultimate aspect of consumer brand quality, which signifies the supreme relationship between consumers and a particular brand as well as the level of identification between them. Given the fact that quality brand attains prominent, exclusive and positive meaning in minds of a wide consumer base, they become readily inimitable and appealing and thus, tend to win a high degree of customer loyalty (Erdogmus and Cicek, 2012). Consequently, brand loyalty fetches immense rewards for a company, in terms of higher revenue from sales, huge market share and profitability. Therefore, this helps a company to grow and sustain themselves in the competitive market place (Kapferer, 1997; Aaker, 1991).

Marketers throughout the world employ a variety of methods in order to preserve brand loyalty of their customers, which include conventional marketing mix variables, brand elements and modern marketing techniques, such as, sponsorships, promotional events, in-person marketing activities, internet and social media marketing (Kotler and Keller, 2007; Keller, 2008). The primary aim of this research paper is to focus on the impact of social media marketing on establishing brand loyalty, thereby developing a critical understanding of the same, given the fact that this concept is receiving wide attention from marketing practitioners and academia (McKee, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009).

In order to be able to conduct the research, the United Kingdom has been chosen as the context. Various reasons can be attributed to the decision of selecting the UK as context of this research. They are:

- The country has been ranked 14th, in terms of internet penetration rate (84.1%) with approximately 52.5 million users using the internet (Internet World Stats, 2012a).
- As of 2012, the country has been ranked 9th, in terms of number of internet users (Internet World Stats, 2012b).
- 36 million adults (73%) in the UK accessed internet every day in 2013 (an increase by 20 million from the number of users in 2006).

- 72% of the adults in the UK purchased goods and services online in 2013 (an increase by 19% from the number of online shoppers in 2008) (Office for national statistics, 2013).
- 21 million households in Great Britain (83%) had access to the internet in 2013 (Office for national statistics, 2013).

According to the statistics reported by the Office for national statistics, UK, it was noted that internet was used mostly for sending/receiving emails (75%), finding information regarding goods and services (66%), reading or downloading online, news, magazines or newspapers (55%) and social networking (53%) (Office for national statistics, 2013). As far as social media usage is concerned, it has been seen that in the year 2013, Twitter attracted the maximum number of users, beating Facebook, followed by other social media applications such as, Instagram and Pinterest (Social Media Today, 2013; Rose McGrory Social Media, 2014). Social media is used extensively in UK and has become an everyday habit or rather, need for residents in the sovereign state. Given this fact, this study bears a huge relevance, which will help the researcher to understand the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. The statistics provided above justifies the selection of the UK as a context for this research.

2. Research aim and objective

- To understand the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty.

3. Literature Review

Social media can be defined as an activity, behaviour or practice among a group of people, who gather online in order to share knowledge, information and views, through usage of conversational media (Safko and Brake, 2009). Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) explained that social media is a means of communication that have features similar to Web 2.0; i.e. they are mutual, participatory and have user-empowering and knowledge sharing tools, that are available on the web. A company, by implementing social media marketing strategies, is able to use time and resources efficiently and establish enhanced foundation for communication with the consumer base in order to promote brand loyalty beyond conventional methods (Akhtar, 2011; Jackson, 2011). According to a study by Info-graphics, at least half of Facebook and Twitter users have said that they become more inclined towards talking about, recommending or purchasing a company's product after engaging with the company over social media (Jackson, 2011). By using

different forms of social media, such as, content communities, social networking websites, blogs, virtual worlds, online gaming websites, micro-blogging sites, news sites, social book marking, online forums and many more, business can better promote their products and services, provide immediate support as and when required as well as develop an online community of brand enthusiasts (Weinberg, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009). In addition, social media facilitates information sharing between consumers regarding different brands of products and services (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). According to Gunelius (2011), the conversation that takes place between consumers over social media provides companies with an alternative, yet cost effective, way to augment brand awareness; boost brand appreciation; and henceforth, enhance brand loyalty. Therefore, as stated by McKee (2010), social media marketing enables firms to establish brand loyalty with the help of networking, conversation and community establishment.

Presently, in order to stay competitive in the rapid growing business landscape, a sound social media marketing strategy is a fundamental requirement. Companies in the contemporary society have been seen hiring social media marketing experts and professionals so as to decide regarding the characteristics and contents of their activities and offerings over the social media world, so that feelings of consumers are influenced and brand loyalty comes as an outcome (Coon, 2010). In the light of this perspective, the primary aim of this research paper is to analyze the perspective of consumers on effects of social media on brand loyalty, so that inferences can be drawn for companies to formulate efficient social media marketing strategies. This is done in order to support their brands. Empirical researches have concluded that consumers visit social media websites for keeping themselves up-to-date with brand products and ad campaigns. They prefer to see updated and simplified contents on the websites. Thus, uploading relevant content is a crucial strategy in order to manage brands successfully. Another reason for consumers to be engaged with social media is popularity of social media content among friends. Given the fact that there are numerous social media platforms, marketers need to understand their target customers and aim for the appropriate platform as such. Additionally, introducing a smart phone application is also a smart strategy, which will keep customers aware about the brand on a daily basis and also, build brand loyalty.

4. Hypothesis

Brand loyalty of customers:

H1: Is affected positively when a company offers beneficial campaigns over the social media.

H2: Is affected positively when a company uploads relevant content over the social media.

H3: Is affected positively when contents popular among friends over the social media are offered.

H4: Is affected positively, when the brand appears on multiple platforms.

5. Data collection

Both primary and secondary data will be collected for the purpose of conducting this research. The secondary data will be extracted from journals, books and authentic online databases. Furthermore, multiple sources, such as, newspapers and magazines, will also be used. The primary data will be obtained by conducting a questionnaire survey with a sample of respondents, who are active social media users and have followed a minimum of one brand on social media platforms. The questionnaire will be closed-ended and will also include certain filtering questions in order to ensure that the respondents are qualified to take part.

6. Sample Size

The sample size that has been deemed appropriate for the purpose of this research is 200. The sampling technique to be implemented for the purpose of conducting this research is simple random sampling, which will help the researcher to reduce any biasness and offer even opportunities to every potential respondent.

7. Methodology

7.1. Research Philosophy

Since the paper involves an in-depth analysis of quantitative data, positivist philosophy will be implemented. The fundamental aim of this study is to understand the impact of social media marketing (internal variable) on brand loyalty (external determinant) in the UK. Therefore,

implementing positivist philosophy will allow the researcher to identify the association between the two factors mentioned above (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006).

7.2. Research Approach

Given the fact that this study initially explores a generalised issue and then focuses on specific dimensions, inductive approach has been deemed appropriate. The fundamental reason behind adopting inductive approach is that it will allow the researcher to interpret observations into theoretical conclusions (Mukherji and Albon, 2009).

7.3. Analysis model

Stepwise multiple regression analysis in SPSS will be used in order to test the hypothesized relationships.

8. Validity and reliability

8.1. Construct Validity

This involves proper creation of operational methods, which will be adopted for this study. So, in order to enhance the construct validity of this research, the research report will involve collection of data from numerous authentic sources, such as, journal databases and books.

8.2. Internal validity

This is related to the accuracy with which research findings are drawn. Internal validity explains the degree to which research outcomes can be aligned to the research objectives. In order to align these variables with the objectives as precisely as possible, a number of methods will be taken. Firstly, data will be collected from authentic sources, which will ensure validity of the research. Additionally, methodologies that will be adopted are practical, tested and verified. The concerned methodologies have been adopted in number of empirical researches and are acknowledged for delivering precise results.

8.3. External validity

External validity involves generalization of research findings. This method can also be referred to as the transferability and comparability of research findings in association with qualitative and quantitative analysis that is conducted. Implementing such an approach will augment diversity of this

research, alongside allowing the researcher to reduce biasness associated with the data. Subsequently, this will improve validity of the research.

8.4. Reliability

Reliability illustrates those attributes of a research, which exhibits that outcomes can be replicated. In order to ensure reliability of a research, that has already been conducted, the researcher should conduct the same research, but under different situations. This characteristic also refers to the data that have previously been obtained and studied properly. As far as quantitative researches are concerned, there are no specific ways to secure reliability of the results. Yet, extracting data from authentic and accurate sources and applying appropriate models are alternative ways to ensure the same. In context of this particular research paper, data will be collected from accurate and authentic sources and thereafter, appropriate methodologies and models will be applied in order to assure that the research paper is of higher quality.

9. Ethical Considerations

1. Researchers should make sure that participation is established on voluntary and learned approval.
2. Researchers should be straightforward and honest in their professional and business relationships.
3. Researchers shall be sincere to the theme and reason of data collection.
4. Researchers should maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the gathered information.
5. Rights and well-being of respondents should be respected.
6. It has to be ensured that respondents are not adversely affected by activities associated with the research.
7. Researchers should safeguard the reputation and integrity of the profession (MRS, 2010).

10. Timeframe

The timeframe required for the purpose of conducting this research can be explained through the following Gantt chart:

Months		Month 1					Month 2					Month 3			
Weeks	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4			
Activities															
Research area identification															
Research proposal preparaon and submission															
Secondary data collection															
Primary data collection															
Model application															
Output data analysis															
Draft report preparation															
Final report preparation and submission															

(Source: Author's creation)

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