ABSTRACT
As economic challenges and pressures for businesses mount, marketing teams are faced with major decisions. While widespread consumer anxiety results in dwindling businesses, marketing budget allocations are hit by cutbacks and marketers face the challenge of better market performance in a restrained economy. Investments and organizational objectives have been reframed. While retention of market share appears the biggest thought, equally important is to continue to build the product or service’s customer base and avoid losing brand value during constrained times. The need is to reorganize brand portfolios, rethink spending approaches, generate more fine-grained customer insights, overhaul pricing and segment management and restructure sales, service, and channel strategies. Better brand positioning and appropriate use of technological tools enables shrinking the budgets for marketing resource allocation. In this context, brand positioning gains importance as a strategic marketing function. It further becomes vital for organizations to recognize the consumer as a significant dimension in evaluating and positioning organizational brands. This can be achieved through adoption of appropriate brand management strategies. In this paper, the authors explore the use of organizational blogs for increasing consumer brand knowledge. Blogging is shaping into a useful organizational tool for brand propagation and interaction with consumers with several corporates having effectively launched Corporate Blogs, thereby shaping consumer perception, by adding to consumer knowledge about organizations, brands and products. In this paper the researcher analyses the improvement in Consumer brand knowledge by exposure of the consumer to a corporate blog. A simulated lab environment is created where a set of consumers are exposed to a brand blog for a period of ten minutes. The variation in levels of consumer brand knowledge is calculated. Future scope of work is outlined in measuring the variation in consumer sentiment pertaining to a brand before and after increase in a consumer’s knowledge pertaining to a brand. Subsequently Brand knowledge maps will be developed to measure the results empirically. In the era of consumer empowerment, the average consumer is faced with numerous product and brand choices. In a fiercely competitive environment, organizations who want to retain their consumers and increase consumer-brand loyalty need to focus on increasing the consumer’s knowledge about the brand.

Keywords: Consumer Brand Knowledge, Consumer Brand Sentiment, Corporate Blogs, Customer Centricity, Digital Consumer

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INTRODUCTION

The dictionary meaning of a blog is a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and links. As millions of people use blogs as personal diaries on the internet, they are emerging as collaborative spaces that can be put to multiple uses and have emerged as the latest mode of computer mediated communication (Herring, 1993). This concept has found widespread acceptance in the corporate world with the emergence of ‘corporate’ or ‘organizational’ blogs. These are people who blog in an official or semi-official capacity at a company, or are so affiliated with the company where they work that even though they are not officially spokespeople for the company, they are clearly affiliated and endorsed explicitly or implicitly by the company. Also termed as a hybrid of the personal blog (Smudde, 2005), they are increasingly being explored by public relations practitioners and feature the insights, assessments, commentary, and other discourse devoted to a single company. Organizational blogs seem to appear at the intersection of personal reflection and professional communication. They have evolved from both online and offline modes of communication and have characteristics of both personal and professional communication (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Posts in blogs are tagged with keywords, allowing for content categorization and also for gaining access to the content through tagging as a theme based classification system. Linking is also an important part of the blogging activity as it deepens the conversational nature of the blogosphere and its sense of immediacy (Anderson, 2007). An effective blog fosters community and conversation, drives traffic to the product website, and serves as a medium for interaction with consumers thereby shaping consumer perception, eliciting responses, and through a two way thought exchange process, aids in fostering a connection with the consumers. Blogs have a comparative advantage of speedy publication—they have a first mover advantage in socially constructing interpretive frames for current events (Kolari, et al., 2007). Blogs are no longer a subculture of the Internet; they have become a mainstream information resource. They further provide a tremendous opportunity for forward-thinking companies and management to have a significant positive impact on their public perception. People who read organizational blogs perceive an organization’s relational maintenance strategies as higher than those who read traditional web content only, thereby making a blog a useful tool for creating and maintaining value laden relationships with current and potential customers. Launching a corporate brand blog is representative of an organizational desire to share information and engage in a conversation. This is especially true when the blog allows visitors to post their own comments. The informality of communication helps companies build trust, converse with people and even manage public perception by posting suitable responses. The ability of a blog to induce consumer participation by making consumers comment on the