Chapter 4

Engaging Consumers via Twitter: Three Successful Communicative Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The interactive nature of social networking sites contributes to reinforce engagement between consumers and brands in terms of co-creation of shared values. According to Hollebeek (2011), consumer-brand engagement (CBE) implies cognitive, emotional, behavioral factors, which connect a brand with its followers. This chapter will show three successful Twitter strategies from three different brands, using a methodological approach focusing on the relational conditions that turn a brand into an engaging player on Twitter. Interviews with brand communication managers and followers were conducted. Moreover, initiatives were explored through the stream of tweets produced around the brands; pragmatic, semantic, syntactic and structural features of tweets were considered. Results show that, while the three initiatives considered here lean on a cognitive-based CBE, a full engagement in the/a brand’s world is needed to build a long-lasting and successful relationship between brand and consumer, in order to co-construct a future shared reality.

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BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW CHALLENGE

In its 2010–2012 Research Priorities, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) called for a better understanding of engagement. Within the broader priority area of “Understanding Customer Experience and Behavior,” the MSI identifies “customer engagement” (CE) as a key research area contributing to enhanced academic insight into consumer behavior in complex, interactive and/or co-creative environments (MSI, 2010).

Since then the concept has evolved among practitioners as well as academics (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). Practitioners look at CE from the perspective of the organization and define it as activities facilitating “repeated interactions that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in a brand” (Sedley, 2010). On the other hand, academics look at consumer-brand engagement as the “intensity of customer participation with both representatives of the organization and with other customers in a collaborative knowledge exchange process” (Wagner & Majchrzak, 2007). Furthermore, a recent conceptualization of consumer-brand engagement (CBE) in marketing practices segments customers according to their transactional relationship with a brand (Bowden, 2009).

CBE can further be defined as the “intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate” (Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2012). It implies cognitive, emotional, behavioral (Hollebeek, 2011) and social factors which connects a brand with its community.

As it is evident from the references above, there is no clear agreement between practitioners and academics as to whether the concept of engagement involves consumers or customers, which are traditionally considered different players in the marketing field, even if the underlying construal of brand engagement is the same: consumers consume a good/service, customers make purchases of a good/service. On Social Media (SM), this distinction is quite difficult to assert, because there is no good or service to consume or purchase in the traditional sense: people can interact online with “just” a brand, and it is not possible to distinguish with certainty if a person interacting with a brand online was, is or will be a consumer or a customer. In this chapter, CBE can be considered both consumer engagement or customer engagement, as people can be consumer, customers or neither, but always interacting with a brand, and therefore stakeholders for the brand.

Thanks to Social Media (generally defined as all the services supporting the Web 2.0, i.e. social network sites, blogs, etc.), consumers are increasingly active participants in interactive processes and almost immediate (potentially even real-time) communication with brands (Prahalad, & Ramaswamy, 2004). These tools enable and facilitate new and extended forms of interactive consumer experiences, which may contribute to the development of customer and/or consumer engagement with specific brands (Brodie et al., 2013). Social network sites (SNS) in particular, such as Facebook and Twitter, which allow direct link between social players thanks to the “friending” or “following” mechanisms, play a huge role in building and maintaining relationships between consumers and brands. However, the nature of relationships on these platforms and their effect on consumers’ behavior remain nebulous to date (De Valck, Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2009) and the study of brand strategies on SNS remains a complicated task (Graffigna & Riva, in press), as the dynamic, ubiquitous, and often real-time interaction enabled by SM technologies significantly changes the landscape for brand management. A deep understanding of this change is critical since it may affect a brand’s performance substantially (Gensler, Völknerb, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013).
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