Managing Non-Organic Virtual Brand Communities in Social Networking Sites

Zohreh Dehdashti Shahrokh, Department of Management and Accounting, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tehran, Iran
Mohammad Mehdi Poursaeed, Department of Management and Accounting, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

Social networking is creating a type of developed market. They act in opposition to top-down marketing methods and traditional company-based branding. More importantly, they give customers more value for the knowledge and experience exchanged compared to advertising by companies and one-way marketing messages. Businesses must inform themselves and choose strategies to manage their virtual brand communities (VBCs). Without a clear plan and model for brand management in cyberspace, marketing will have little effect. The present study provides a conceptual framework for managing non-organic VBCs. The first part of the model includes factors affecting engagement. The second part reveals the outcomes of engaging at the VBC level and the third part provides the outcomes of engagement at the business level.

Keywords: Brand, Customer Engagement, Social Networking Sites, Virtual Brand Community, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the internet, including developments such as Web 2.0, has created new relationships between organizations and their beneficiaries. Increasing online consumer power has been combined with the growth of consumer communities. In these online communities, consumers form needs and social experience around common interests. By doing this, they enjoy the unparalleled ease and openness of communication to share ideas, advance knowledge, and even test and jointly develop products. These advances in the way people communicate with each other have created opportunities and threats to brand management. Consumers in sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter spend a lot of time sharing experiences about brands in this new communication space. In the environment of social media, content is created by users...
interactively and the power of individuals and communities to influence existing brands or immortalize old brands is increasing.

Communities and consumer networks enable people to better distinguish among brands and help in the creation of new knowledge, abilities, and value extraction from companies. The result of this changing role of consumers is that companies can no longer act independently for long periods. Consumers can now affect most aspects of a company’s activities, including design of products, development, creation of marketing messages, channel control, and, most importantly brand management (Tapscott and Ticol, 2006).

The use of information in the contemporary space of social media networks have led to a new level of information, creativity, and innovation of members, and in total, has added a new dimension to marketing communications and brands that is changing the way companies communicate the brand to their customers. The feature of social media that effects brands is a change in focal point from the company to the consumer as the authors of brand stories in the process of branding.

The development of cyberspace and the emergence of social media and software have forced companies to face new realities about communication. Brands and brand management are key priorities of marketing in most companies. Nevertheless, there is little knowledge or agreement about brand development and brand management in modern interactive markets (Naylor et al., 2012; Cben et al., 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010; Keller, 2009). Without a clear plan and a model for brand management in cyberspace, marketing will not have the desired effect. The present study provides a model for managing virtual brand communities in social networking sites.

Researchers have mostly focused on factors effecting participation in virtual brand communities. The present study presents an outlook on the dimensions of the virtual community that change according to market goals, features, and conditions. There is greater emphasis on the cultural context of Iranian society and consciousness of kind among members of virtual brand communities for acquiring loyalty and brand recommendation. Members have different motivations for joining these communities and loyalty to a brand and recommendations only arise when a sense of belonging is created.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites are placed in the category of software known as Web 2.0. Web 2.0 was first coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2005 as a revolution in web technology. Web 1.0 refers to the distribution of information (Mortimer, 2007) where communication is one-way and read-only. Web users can browse web sites, learn and interact with the web content, or buy, but are not able to modify information. Web 2.0 technology enables users to create and modify content via social networks (Dittrich et al., 2008).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications based on the technical and theoretical foundations of Web 2.0 that makes it possible for users to create and exchange content. The term Web 2.0 does not mean technical promotion of the Internet, but describes how people use the Internet. Web 2.0 is about applications and continually-improved content by collective instruments and not individual creativities; in other words, user generated content is created by the end user and is available to then public (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

These sites have cognitive functions that facilitate the process of product selection. The impact of a peer group buyer on purchasing decisions is not new. Basic models of buyer behavior traditionally showed the impact of a peer group on the final decision of a buyer. Much evidence
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