

Abstract

Hazem Rashid

Consumer Engagement in Social Media Based Brand Communities: A Study of Facebook and Fast-food in Egypt

This research project was conducted in response to several calls by marketing scholars and practitioners for a better understanding of the concept of consumer engagement in general and social media based brand communities in particular. The term 'consumer engagement' has grown in importance in recent years to describe consumers' interactive experiences with brands. The popularity of that term was boosted by the rapid penetration of social networking sites which facilitated engagement of consumers through online brand communities embedded in it. This thesis investigates consumer engagement in Facebook brand pages. These pages are considered a form of online brand communities that are created by many companies for marketing purposes. Fast food brand pages in Egypt were used as a context for conducting this research study, where they are extensively used for targeting young consumers. With the purpose of identifying the factors that enhance consumer engagement in these online communities, this study examined consumers' relationships with brands that initiated these communities as well as consumers' brand love as well as brand equity dimensions and outcomes. Brand love is an important marketing concept that has been appearing in academic publications recently to describe consumers' emotional connections with brands. It is becoming widely accepted that consumers' emotions towards brands, are a key determinant for their consumption behavior. A mixed method research design incorporating focus groups and online surveys was used to collect data in the current study. The data collection was conducted by drawing a sample from young consumers whose ages are between 18 and 29, and who are active members of official fast food brand pages on Facebook in Egypt. The first phase of this study adopted a series of qualitative focus group discussions with the aim of exploring the nature and dimensionality of consumer engagement from the perspective of young Egyptian consumers. Also, it was useful in exploring the benefits these consumers seek by their engagement in online communities. The second phase was conducted through an online survey that was posted on Facebook brand pages of the fast food chains in Egypt. The aim of the quantitative phase was to test a conceptual framework for the antecedents and outcomes of consumer engagement in social media based brand communities. This framework was developed from an extensive literature review as well as the qualitative discussions. The findings indicated that consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept that consists of emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions, as well as several sub-dimensions. Also, three factors related to consumers' relationships with brands (brand identification, satisfaction and trust) and four factors related to consumers' perceptions inside the brand communities (critical mass functional, hedonic and monetary benefits) were identified as antecedents of consumer engagement. Moreover, the study proved the positive effect of consumer engagement on the development of brand love. Furthermore, it indicated a positive influence of brand love on brand equity dimensions and outcomes. The current study contributes theoretically by enhancing our understanding of the concept of consumer engagement, particularly in the context of social media based brand communities in Egypt. More importantly, the inclusion of brand love is expected to contribute to the body of consumer-brand relationships literature. Also, this thesis contributes by providing a measurement scale for consumer engagement in the context of social media. On the other hand, the study provides some practical implications, where it provides some useful guidelines for companies to follow when advertising to young consumers on Facebook brand pages.