Determınants Of Brand Loyalty In Onlıne Communıtıes: A Facebook Evıdence

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Abstract

Social media and especially the social commerce possibility help companies to promoting their brands and products on online social platforms. Today, companies are able to create brand pages on social networking sites and to develop consumer relations using these platforms. The importance given to interactivity and usage of other web activities during past decade has made possible speedy and instant communication among companies, internet users and, therefore, created a network where "online brand communities" took their place. Online brand communities are specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001). Accordingly, building brand loyalty becomes vital for companies to survive in this new platforms and as the brand loyalty is influenced by the self-factor, the social factor, and the primary characteristics of a brand page such as information quality and interactivity. This research investigates the relationship between these four factors and brand loyalty in online environment and fort his purpose the research collected data through an online questionnaire and 976 valid responses were used for analysis. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling showing a positive relationship between brand loyalty and these four key factors. In addition to its noteworthy implications for practitioners, this study provides important theoretical insights into understanding how to build brand loyalty in social media.

Introduction

The internet is a new media that permits and increases participation by facilitating its users to voice their view. This online participation is beneficial for the users but it can become much more interesting and powerful tool for companies if the users generate positive content for

the company, brand or the product. Because, in social networking sites and online brands communities, every individual can perform as a creator of content on social networking sites.

As suggested by Hur et al. (2011) participation of community members is associated with their brand loyalty so the challenge for companies is to encourage participation and to create a fruitful community. The changing role and power of the customer is supported by social media and social commerce (Lee et al., 2011, Nambisan and Baron, 2009). It is an emerging field of research and the researches have to shed light to the factors of customer participation in online communities and try to see the direction in which this area can be further forward.

In this research, our purpose is to understand the factors affecting brand loyalty of consumers following companies' brand pages on social networking sites. In order to do this, the role of four key factors depicted in the related literature; the self factor, the social factor, information quality and interactivity are investigated.

2. Literature Review

Social media enables consumers to share knowledge with other community members about the brands (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Unfortunately, the academic literature on social media does not enable the practitioners clearly on how to use it as a part of their strategy related to communication. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Researchers argue that the user discussions can influence the social media and social commerce activity (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), whereas few other researchers have outlined different strategies to gauge the success of marketing campaign in these environments (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). Accordingly social media has become a popular topic of academic enquiry, with researchers taking on different perspectives such as usage motivations of users (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008), social interactions, usage patterns (Hsu and Lin, 2008) and characteristics of users (Gjoka *et al.*, 2008; Hargittai, 2007). The online and virtual brand communities (Aksoy *et al.*, 2013), online brand culture (Schembri and Latimer, 2016) and anti-brand community behaviours (Dessart *et al.*, 2016) have also been subject to many researches. In the same line of research, few studies have investigated brand loyalty building on social networking sites (e.g., Laroche et al. 2013); where consumer drivers, brand drivers, and social drivers are critical. So, this study considers three categories of factors as the key factors of brand loyalty; the self factor, the social factor, and characteristics of companies' brand pages.

The self concept is important as its related to the comparison made by the user between the company's or brand's image and their own image. When these images match each other consumers are more prone to follow, generate content and have a sustainable, loyal relationship with the brand or company as they feel comfortable within the community. The second factor of brand loyalty is the social factor which implies the degree of an individual to follow the other people's expectations that they think are important (Wang and Chen 2012). Surely, this factor counts when online shopping or IT adoption (Guo and Barnes 2011, Venkatesh et al. 2003). This influence of others can be considered as a social group's common beliefs and behavioral codes that plays a role on individuals' perceptions and behaviors (Lin 2010). The most important characteristics of a brand page on a social platform are the information quality and interactivity offered to the users. The frequency of company's posts and the quality of information in these posts are important. Doll and Torkzadeh (1988), defined information quality as the perception of the information content posted by a

company on its brand page is new,affluent and interesting. Interactivity refers to consumers' perceptions of the interactivity level of a company's brand page (Kuo and Feng 2013). Information quality and interactivity have been identified as significant components of website quality (Chiu et al. 2005; Kim and Park, 2013). Jang et al. (2008) showed that these two factors are critical characteristics of online brand communities that may increase consumers' brand loyalty. So, these factors may have positive effects on brand loyalty in social networking sites brand pages.
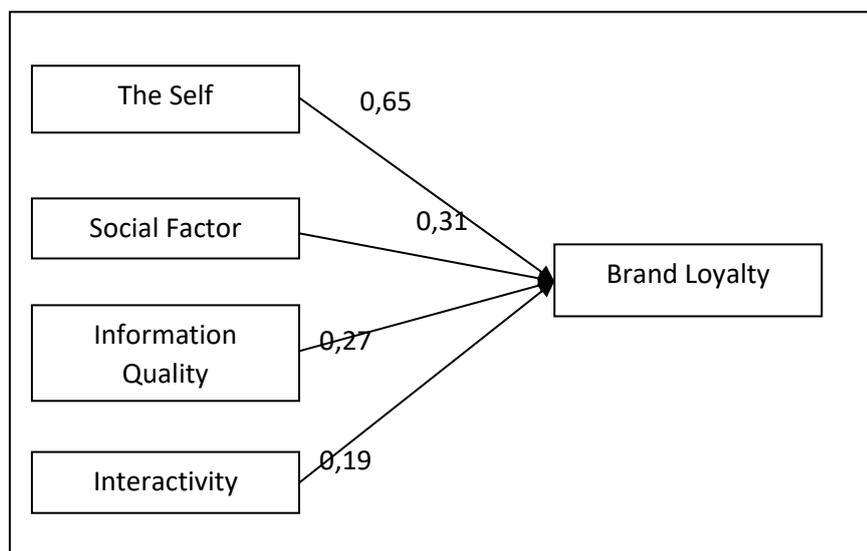

Fig. 1 The research model of the study.

3. Hypotheses

The users of a brand page are motivated to identify themselves and show their self using brands page, accordingly, the self concept makes these consumers more loyal. So, it can argued that the self concept has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

H1: The self concept has a positive impact on brand loyalty

The social factor mostly related to social approval and and social value received from others, plays an important role in consumer's approach to a brand (Moliner et al., 2007). Thus, they are more prone to be loyal towards the brand. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: The social factor has a positive impact on brand loyalty

The brand page users or followers look for high quality information, regularly updated and beneficial for them. As they become frequent users of the page and start to interact with other users only if they find a benefit in this activity (Porter and Donthu 2008). Their interactivity level depends on this benefit and instant communication possibility and accordingly the interactivity affects the brand loyalty. The communication between the company and user and between users supports the brand loyalty (Kuo and Feng, 2013).

So, it can be argued that:

H3: Information quality on a brand page has a positive impact on brand loyalty

H4: Interactivity has a positive impact on brand loyalty

4. The Research

The target population of the study is active members of brand communities Facebook brand pages. For brand specification top three communication companies brand pages and communities are selected. Online questionnaires rolled out through social networking website, Facebook. We send questionnaire to 1200 brand communities members out of which 224 started filling the questionnaire but didn't complete it. After screening the usable questionnaire we got 976 valid responses. The level of sample size recommended in the literature for structural equation models is supporting our sample size because of similar complexity (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012) and therefore its considered acceptable.

First section is related to demographic characteristic of respondent followed by second section related to items of constructs. Some items were adapted from relevant literature content and were altered according to the needs of our study according to the pre-test realized with 38 individuals. The scales of each item ranges from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. For the self factor the scales from Escalas and Bettman (2003) and Ha and Im (2012), for the social factor Wang and Chen (2012) scale, fort he information quality and interactivity Jang et al. (2008) and finally for the brand loyalty Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Jang et al. (2008) scales are adapted and used in the online questionnaire.

5. Results

Before the structural equation modeling, the reliability, validity of measurement scales of model was evaluated. The reliability of scales was measured through Cronbach's alpha. For all constructs its value ranges from 0.71 to 0.83 thus confirming reliability of individual construct scale. Then the confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) are run to measure the validity as well as to ensure individual model constructs adequately fit to the data (Iacobucci 2010; Steenkamp and Trijp, 1991) and showed that the model was fit.

The path coefficients and the explanatory power of the constructs are examined in the model. Using the bootstrapping procedure and concerning the significance of all paths it's found that self-factor (b = 0.650, p < 0.001), social factor (b = 0.310, p < 0.01), information quality (b = 0.270, p < 0.001), and interactivity (b = 0.190, p < 0.001) positively influenced relationship quality, indicating that all hypotheses were supported. The variance explained in brand loyalty was 71.6%.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The aim pof this research was to investigate what drives consumers to build brand loyalty as they follow companies' brand pages on social networking sites. Our findings showed that brand loyalty is primarily determined by the self factor strengthened by the social factor and companies' brand pages information quality and interactivity. So, consumers have to identify an excellent match between their self and the brand image; feed their social side in a information rich and interactive online environment.

This research extends prior research on social networking sites brand pages effectiveness and impact by examining consumers' brand loyalty. The research also supports the previous studies explaining how to promote consumers' social commerce intentions (Liang et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2014) and purchase intentions on social networking sites (Kim and Park 2013, Wang and Chang 2013). All of three key factors suggested in this research have significant effects in the model, which provides important insights into how to strengthen consumers

brand loyalty. Moreover, the self factor has the strongest impact confirming the works of Pentina et al. 2013, and Zhang and Bloemer 2008 suggesting that consumers tend to be loyal towards the brands fitting their self image. However, the point that the self concept is so powerful is not in line with Jang et al. 2008 who showed that technological factors play more important roles in social networking sites.

According to these results, companies have to try to establish brand pages on social networking sites that matches their target markets self concept and frequently post adequate messages, photos or videos. The Companies should also rise their level of information and interactivity in their brand pages as this is the most recognized way to develop brand loyalty among consumers. Because, these two characteristics are the main characteristics that a brand can offer in a social networking site to show them the benefits of following a brand page.

Moreover by doing these improvements companies can have successful brand communities allowing consumers to interact, post reviews, earn rewards, receive and contribute updated and credible information regarding their brands. Online brand communities also offer an opportunity for marketers to induce customer engagement that strengthens brand loyalty. The findings point out that information quality and interactivity do play a role in the engagement of online brand communities. So, companies are suggested to provide appropriate, reliable and timely information, start talking subjects and encourage consumers to interact with the brand and other customers; let them ask questions and share opinions. However, practitioners should intermittently monitor, filter and remove content that is from biased or unreliable sources to ensure the quality in information flow. Consumers must also have the opportunity to rate the helpfulness of information and highlight helpful posts. Companies should also raise the interactivity and raise rewards for consumers to incite engagement in online brand communities. They can also implement customized functions for particular members by creating and directing favored topics identified by tracking down member activities in order to attract and retain consumers. Lastly, companies should acknowledge consumer contributions in their community and should incite this by making their total number of posts and contribution history visible to others, different ranks such as top contributor or platinum, gold contributor could be announced to the whole community. These practices can help developing strong consumer engagement in the online brand communities and enhance brand loyalty.

Concerning the limitations of the study, the generalizability of the findings, can be enhanced in future research by collecting data on other social networking sites. Moreover, other technical characteristics besides information quality and interactivity can be added as a factor to measure the possible effects in a brand page.

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