
Online Brand Communities : Literature Review

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Abstract

Today's era is the era of technology. The cutthroat competition key factor influencing the companies to look for novel methods of business promotion is the. It is the technological explosion that had lead to the conversion of physical market (Shops etc) to the virtual market (Online Portals etc). Online brand communities are the most popular method for promoting and expanding the business. This paper focuses on the characteristics of online brand communities and presents a literature review over it.

Keyword: Brands, Online brand communities, Factors influencing

Introduction

Now – a – days the task of creating brand has become very challenging due to the increased competition in the market. The importance of relationship between the brand culture and identity has increased due to the major changes in the marketing strategies and consumer behavior. Brand community refers to the development of relationship between a specific brand and the consumers and also the relationships between the consumers. Some authors have identified that using brand communities a better relationship can be maintained. With the advent of Internet technologies, the brand communities have crossed the geographical boundaries].

The virtual brand communities are the most efficient tool for marketing. The reason behind it is that it makes it easy to study the behavior of the customer, needs and interests []. Moreover the social networking sites are also greatly helping in the development of online brand communities.

What is an online brand community?

Wikipedia defines brand community as “ a community formed on the basis of attachment to a product or marque.”

The term "brand community" was first presented by Albert Muniz Jr. and Thomas C. O'Guinn in a 1995 paper for the Association for Consumer Research Annual Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In a 2001 article titled "Brand community", published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (SSCI), they defined the concept as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social

relations among admirers of a brand." This 2001 paper has been acknowledged by Thomson Scientific & Healthcare to be one of the most cited papers in the field of economics and business

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), a brand community is described as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." The authors 4 postulate three key characteristics of a brand community: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility.

Marc Resnick (2001) defines community as "an opportunity for customers to interact with each other to achieve their needs." Although the communities are usually maintained by customers, they can be subtly encouraged and sponsored by companies. The two major company goals for these communities are building brand image and maximizing contact with customers. Communities also provide "non-intrusive touch points through which information about customer demographics, preferences, and lifestyles can be directly observed."

A brand community has three main characteristics:

- (1) shared consciousness (i.e. a strong connection to the brand and one another as well as demarcation from users of other brand);
- (2) common rituals and traditions (i.e. vital social processes around shared product experiences that create and represent the meaning of the community within and beyond the community); and
- (3) a sense of moral responsibility for the group (i.e. a sense of duty to the community as a whole and to its members). Formation of and identification with the brand community occur through discussions of consumption activities and brand meanings (Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe 2008).

Literature Review

The aim of this paper is to understand the effect of four factors related to consumer initiated online brand communities namely, quality information, community engagement, community commitment and membership continuance intention on the purchase of consumers who engage themselves in communication over such communities and help brands identify major factors on which they can focus on so that such online brand communities can have a positive impact on consumers purchase intention and brand loyalty.

Members of online brand communities can easily share consumption experiences and interact with each other, and consequently can influence the brand choices and loyalty of other community members (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013)

According to Jang et al. (2008) ,The OBC's initiated by consumers can impact other consumers in terms of information, disadvantages, advantages and experiences of products without bothering about affecting other consumers' attitude and behavior toward that particular products.

Online brand communities, often established by admirers of a specific brand or the company itself (Park and Cho, 2012) also serve as important platforms where millions of consumers worldwide are connected and exchange ideas, opinions, and information.

Zhou et al.(2012) studied the role of brand community identification on enhancing brand community commitment and brand identification

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