

The role of social media marketing on brand equity: a customer-based perspective of mobile service providers in Egypt

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Keywords

Social Media Marketing, Brand Equity, Social Media Practices, Online Communities, Interaction.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the dimensions of Social Media Marketing, which might be influencing Brand Equity of mobile services providers in Egypt from a customer perspective. It also aims at defining the themes, categories and codes of Social Media Marketing. A qualitative analysis had been conducted to investigate such dimensions using NVIVO and results show that Social Media Marketing dimensions of Mobile Service providers in Egypt are: Online Communities, Content Sharing, Interaction, Accessibility and Credibility.

1. Introduction

Due to the continuous and rapid development of information technology, the internet has become an important tool for people to communicate online and continue to receive more services and functions. In addition, owing to the rise of the Web 2.0 model, social network services have become a simple and universal concept in the internet environment (Yang & Lin, 2014).

Therefore, Social networking sites (SNSs) is important and now form a key area of academic research (Constantinides et al., 2013). The explosive growth of users and new platforms, along with increased internet access capabilities offered by mobile devices, affects the behavior and life of people from almost every socio-demographic group around the world. This new medium has dramatically transformed the marketing world and makes social media marketing a significant challenge for the private and public sectors (Belch and Belch, 2014).

Social Media is used in many services, such as mobile network services providers, where customers could interact with the service providers and know about new products and/or services, promotions, offers and several other issues about the providers by interacting online. Attracting prospective customers is a critical success factor for mobile network service providers and marketing can support this activity (Assimakopoulos, et al., 2017). However, the variation in such mobile service providers poses a number of issues and challenges for marketing managers. In their effort to implement a coherent marketing plan that will identify the right segment, providers must develop marketing strategies targeted at the correct customer segment.

Therefore, this research aims at exploring the social media marketing practices which providers have to consider while developing their marketing strategies. The next section will present a review of literature, the third section will provide the methodology that the researcher used for conducting this research. The fourth section will represent the empirical study and findings obtained after analyzing the data collected, while the fifth section represents the last section of the research conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Social media is defined as: "a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated [content]" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media platforms include social

networking tools, with the most popular being Facebook and Twitter, professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, media sharing sites, such as YouTube and Instagram, commerce communities, such as Amazon, discussion forums and blogs (Agarwal and Yiliyasi, 2010). The benefits of social media include facilitating strategy, cost reduction, information collection, database enhancement, service delivery (Barnes, 2010) and expanded geographic reach (Wright et al., 2010). These benefits are facilitated by the following characteristics.

Social media facilitates the creation of content that can be shared internally (employees-to-employees), externally (consumers-to-consumers or other external stakeholders) and across organisational boundaries (consumers-to-organisation). This, however, presents an implementation challenge to organisations with traditional hierarchies and centralised control structure (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media enables a close link and ease of customer movement between alternate digital channels, such as the company website and Facebook. The digital environment allows consumers to move between information search channels, such as a search engine and the website where purchases can be made with greater ease. In terms of implementation, however, integrating consumer processes has organizational ramifications. This is because linking different functions and processes changes both the roles of and relationships between functional areas, such as marketing, advertising, sales and IT. As a result, some organisations will need to change their structure, while others will manage increasing levels of inter-functional complexity as customer inter-facing processes are realigned (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Since the late 1990s, several different types of social media sites have been launched, some continue to exist and witness an epic proportion of growth in terms of the number of users and the quantity or volume of information exchanged, while others have faltered and closed. Failure of many of these sites can be attributed to its inability to garner acceptance and popularity among the target users. According to the most popular social media site, Facebook, the number of active users in 2011 has crossed 800 million. Social media platforms facilitate the collation of new types of information (Brooks et al., 2014). Online communities, such as Dell Idea Storm, enable the capturing of “naturalistic” information expressed in consumers’ own words and, hence, allow further insight to information collected through overt and formal traditional market research. Organic information can be valuable in guiding product innovation and service improvements.

Social media could be considered as innovative applications, platforms or portals in the internet, including a high potential for diverse designs in which the active configuration of contents through the cooperative participation between user and provider, but more importantly, among users, plays a major role in establishing and maintaining their permanent interconnectedness and sharing as the main goals (Wirtz & Göttel, 2016). The emergence of new media has led to a paradigm shift in many companies’ marketing practices from a traditional brand or “product-driven” approach to a contemporary “customer-driven” marketing method (Rust et al., 2011). This shift is due in large part to the pervasive use of new media and the capability of new media technologies to put customers and companies in constant contact. New technology and social media are by nature consumer-driven: unlike traditional media, content generated through these platforms is largely created, maintained, and shared by and among consumers and communities (Bernhardt et al., 2011). These widespread, electronic, multi-directional interactions have not been witnessed previously and give consumers the ability to directly communicate their product needs and feedback to companies that are eager to listen. Moreover, new media are often perceived by consumers as more trustworthy sources of information for products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotional mix. In short, social marketers can now leverage new media to engage large numbers of consumers more deeply and closer to the right place and right time than ever before (Bernhardt et al., 2012).

Marketing and advertising are experiencing a well-documented and revolutionary upheaval in both form and function in light of a rapidly changing communications technology, particularly as

it relates to the emergence of popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube (Scott, 2011). These radical changes are significantly impacting numerous industries, companies, brands, products and consumers (Hanna et al., 2011). TAM has been revised in many studies to fit a particular context of technology being investigated. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was first developed by Davis (1986) so as to figure out the usage behavior of computer technology.

TAM specifically explained the determinants of computer acceptance that are general and capable of explaining user behavior across a broad range of end-user computing technologies and the user population (Davis et al., 1989). Intention is determined by two constructs: individual attitudes toward the behavior and social norms or the belief that specific individuals or a specific group would approve or disprove of the behavior (Rauniar, et al., 2014).

3 Research Methodology

Qualitative data collection techniques have been used in this research through applying the interview form as the data collection method. A qualitative research technique is employed by researcher as they relate to their field of interest. Myers (2013). The qualitative research method was developed in the social sciences to help researchers investigate social and cultural phenomena. Qualitative research includes action research, case study research and grounded theory. The data sources for qualitative research include observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The study followed a semi structured interview method for collecting information from customers of using social media for their mobile networks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis (Flick, 2014) for the purpose of the current research to enable probing questions to be asked in order to maximize data richness (Ashworth, 2008).

Thus, a face-to-face meeting is handled with users of social media who are customers of different mobile networks using open-ended questions which allow for a discussion with the interviewee. The current research discussed the questions in appendix through a designed semi-structured interview directed to customers of mobile networks who are using social media in their marketing practices. This study applied the interview tools as one of the data collection tools for the purpose of the current research. The data analysis had been conducted using NVIVO, as one of the popular software's for qualitative analysis.

For the purpose of qualitative analysis, the content analysis had been applied. Content Analysis is an analytical technique that codes and categorizes qualitative data in order to analyze them quantitatively. Content Analysis has a long history that illustrates its use as an approach spanning qualitative and quantitative methods. There are numerous definitions of Content Analysis, which often draw on an early definition by Berelson (1952:18): 'Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.'. This is an important definition because it includes key concepts that help us to understand this technique and differentiate it from others discussed earlier. These key concepts are 'objective', 'systematic', 'quantitative description' and 'manifest content'. The results are shown in the following section.

4 Results and Findings

This section shows the results of interview analysis, where it was found that most customers are using Face Book as a Social Media platform. Some others are using Instagram and Twitter but still Face Book is the most frequently used one. Also, they express that Face Book is mostly used as it is the most user-friendly tool which is easy to use and become very useful now in communication through messenger and posts. Customers like to interact both ways of publicly and privately, which is easily achieved through Face Book.

In addition, customers like to keep interacting together but they have the option to block and report spam at any time, which is observed as easy to happen and secure through Face Book. They can probe this to the level of 90% of the events they face through Face Book relative to very low

percentages given to other platforms. So, customers can use other platforms but they cannot rely on them and ignore Face Book usage. Thus, they use different platforms concurrently with Face Book. Besides, customers mentioned that they can use social media in sharing contents online, interacting together whether in the private form or in the public form. They add that Social Media is an easy way of accessing information and it is in the meantime a credible way. The following figure shows the main themes extracted from the interviews for social media practices.

Figure 1: Social Media Themes

The online communities were determined as customers trust the strategy of some Social Media Platform. They are excited with being engaged to Social Media, especially that it is managed with the expected level of administration. Figure 2 shows the main categories found in the interviews referring to good online communities for Social Media, especially Face Book. Therefore, the main categories of online communities were shown to be Strategy, Engagement, and Administration.

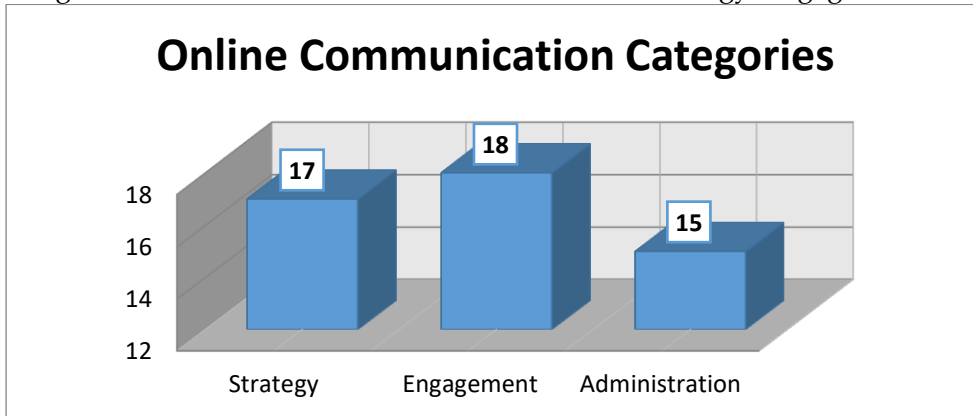


Figure 2: Online Communities Main Categories

The content sharing was the second theme determined as customers like the appearance of the contents, as well as being able to restrict people they have as members on the same platform. They like sharing through hyperlinks and private exchange. Figure 3 shows the main categories found in the interviews referring to good content sharing for Social Media,

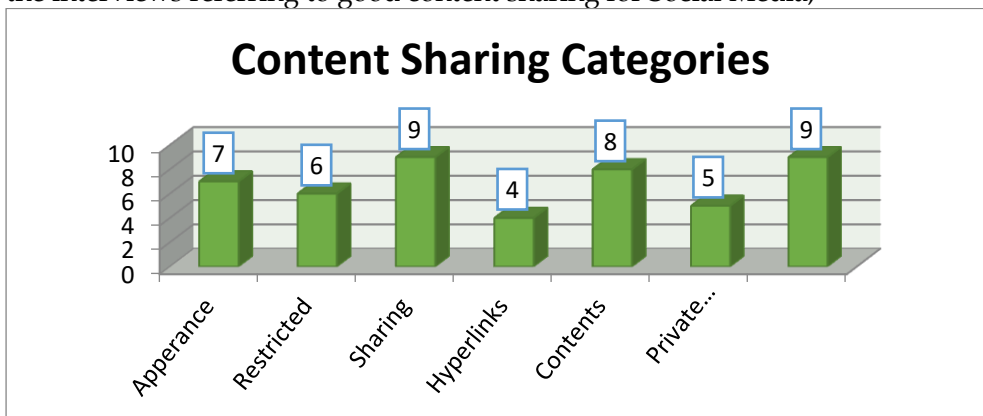


Figure 3: Content Sharing Main Categories

Interaction was the third theme determined as customers like the responsiveness, data shared, group exchange of information and being enjoying the contents shared. Figure 4 shows the main categories found in the interviews referring to good interaction for Social Media platform.

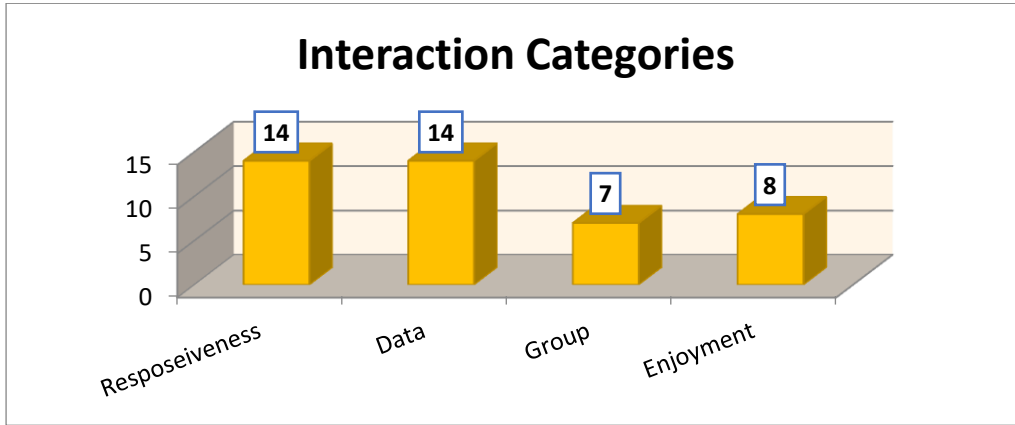


Figure 4: Interaction Main Categories

Accessibility was the fourth theme determined as customers like the easiness of access, its usefulness, convenient contents and its availability. Figure 5 shows the main categories found in the interviews referring to good Accessibility for Social Media platform.

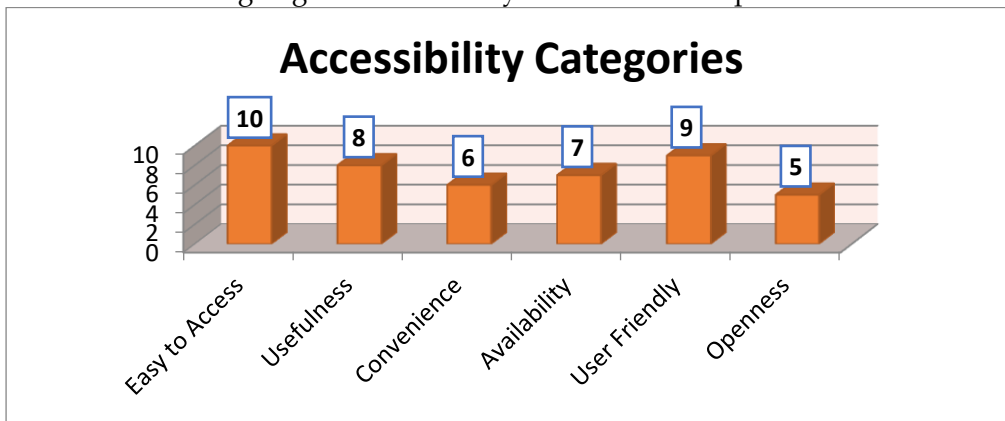


Figure 5: Accessibility Main Categories

Finally, Credibility was the fifth theme determined as customers trust the platform they are using and feeling it is reliable and they can report spam if they face any problems. Figure 5 shows the main categories found in the interviews referring to good Credibility for Social Media platform.

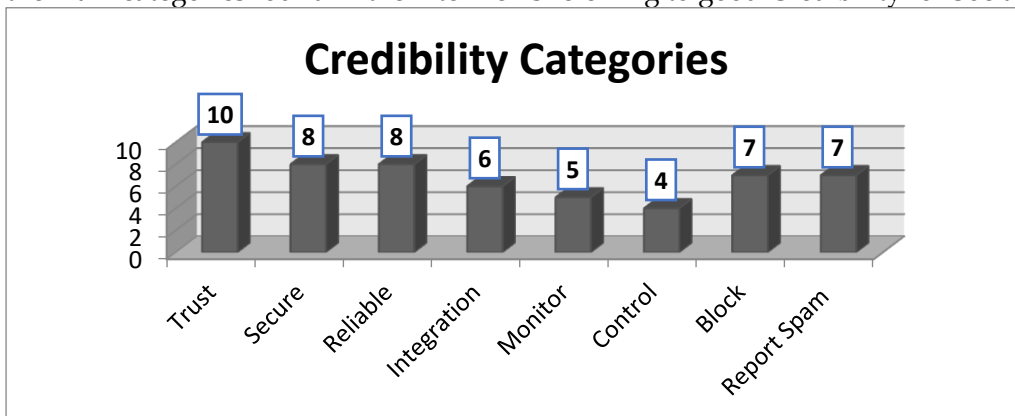


Figure 6: Credibility Main Categories

5 Conclusion

This paper makes an innovative and substantive contribution to the literature, as it is the first paper to highlight that social media marketing practices are relevant conceptual model for

developing research propositions and guidelines for future researchers in the specific context of Brand Equity. The main findings include the Social Media marketing practices as: Online Communities, Interaction, sharing of Contents, Accessibility and Credibility.

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Appendix: Interview

Good Morning Dear;

My name is Hana ElAydi; a postgraduate student in the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AAST).

I highly appreciate your participation and support regarding my research, discussing the impact of Social Media Marketing practices on Brand Equity of Mobile Network. This interview is part of the data collection process of my research for the purpose of data analysis and evaluating the impact of social media practices on mobile networks.

Social media is

Social media have different types, like;



Platform is meant to be -----.

Mobile networks are -----.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to respond to my interview questions below. First of all, I would like you to tell the relative group for you regarding the profile characteristics mentioned.

Would you tell me your age group?

- Below 20 yrs 20- below 30 yrs 30-below 40 yrs
 40-below 50 yrs 50 yrs and above

Could you tell me your income level?

- Less than 3000 3,000 to 5,000 5,000 to 10,000 More than 10,000

What about your background?

- High School Undergraduate Postgraduate
 Others Please Specify -----

<p>Social Media</p>	<p>Do you use Social Media? If so, From where have you heard about social media? What do you know about it? How frequently do you use it? Which type of platform(s) do you actually use? What social media platform do you use more? Why? What do you think of it? Please evaluate its quality. Would you describe your experience with social media? Do you think of relying on other social media platform? Why? Do you recommend it to others? Why? Whom if any? Have you seen advertisements on social media before? If so, was it for mobile networks? Do you like social media marketing advertisements? Why?</p>
<p>Social Media Marketing Practices</p>	<p>What could be social media practices? Which activities do you like most in social media? Why? Do you think you are able to interact and share contents you like through social media? Probe on scale from 1 to 10 ----- Do you think it is easy to access information about mobile networks through social media? How? Probe on scale from 1 to 10 ----- Do you think that social media are credible? How? Probe on scale from 1 to 10 ----- Do different reviews on social media affect your choice of mobile network services? Why? Please explain</p>
<p>Social Media Marketing Practices and Demographics</p>	<p>What could be the reasons beyond your preference regarding different social media practices? Gender? Probe from 1 to 10 ----- Age group? Probe from 1 to 10 ----- Education level? Probe from 1 to 10 ----- Income level? Probe from 1 to 10 -----</p>

Social Media Practices and Brand Equity Dimensions	Do social media practices influence your information about mobile networks? How? Do social media practices change your mind regarding mobile networks quality? How? Do social media practices let you more loyal to a certain mobile network than another? How?
Social Media Marketing Dimensions	What do you think of the information posted by mobile networks accounts on social media? Are they trustworthy? What content do you expect to share from mobile networks on social media? Do you think that better accessibility of social media might influence your preference regarding mobile networks?
Exit Questions	What practices were you expecting from social media and you did not find? Imagine you are entering a new social media platform, what would you like to find? Do you have any further comments you like to add regarding social media marketing practices and their impact on mobile network equity?
