Guest editorial

Branding in the era of Web 2.0 (and beyond)

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the internet has transformed the way firms communicate with consumers, how consumers communicate with brands and how consumers communicate with one another. The development of social media and other platforms for user-generated content, known as Web 2.0, has created a seismic shift in the relationship between the brand and consumer and, indeed, in the very nature of branding. Gone is the day when the firm controlled brand meaning via "one-to-many" mass media. In its place is a new "many-to-many" paradigm, in which the firm and the consumer are active co-participants in the process of brand management.

Present-day consumers have the ability to share brand experiences with millions of other consumers (Kuksov *et al.*, 2013). No longer are consumers passive listeners, but they are now active collaborators in developing brand narratives (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Thus, the role of the brand manager is not so much creating and managing brands, but rather guiding, steering and co-creating brands along with customers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

This special issue aims to examine the impact of this transformation. The seven articles contained in this issue cover a variety of diverse issues and viewpoints. It is the hope of the editors that these articles not only contribute to the understanding of this new technology-driven brand environment but spur reflection and new research.

Focusing on the digitally savvy millennial generation, Eric Kennedy and Francisco Guzman (co-editor in chief of JPBM) find that if these consumers perceive a brand as being immune to influence, they not only will not engage in co-creation but also will perceive the brand and the outcome of the co-creation effort negatively.

Johann Fuller and Volker Bilgram examine how the co-creation of products in the digital era can enhance the relationship between consumers and the firm. Their results suggest that the impact of enjoyable co-creation experiences on the relationship may be moderated by consumers' personal features such as novelty seeking and dissatisfaction with existing products.

Exploring the phenomenon of "jailbreaking" among Apple iPhone consumers, Michael Lee and Ian Soon find that these customers resist brand efforts to discourage co-creation of value while at the same time remaining loyal to the brand itself. Using qualitative content and thematic analysis, the authors identify motives and themes while integrating disparate theories of consumer behavior.

Also in the context of Apple, Tugba Ozboluk and Yunus Dursun use netnography to explore online brand communities. Specifically, the authors examine the Apple brand community to identify its member types and roles.

Devika Vashisht and S. Pillai Sreejesh focus their examination on consumers' interactions with brands in "advergames" and on how in-game brand placement enhances brand recall and brand attitude. They find a three-way interaction between brand prominence, persuasion knowledge and game involvement.

Oleksandra Pasternak, Cleopatra Veloutsou (co-editor in chief of JPBM) and Anna Morgan-Thomas explore eWOM within social media communications. Their interview-based qualitative study highlights various types of activities, including consuming, commenting, posting and forwarding brand-related information, and examines concerns for self-presentation and privacy as drivers of eWOM.

Using depth interviews, Michelle Renton and Hamish Simmonds provide new insights into the link between tie structures in social media networks and casual use of brands within those networks. Their findings suggest tie strength can affect brand attitudes, choice of social media platforms and casual use of brands in facilitating consumer relationship building.

Together, these diverse yet thematically intertwined studies help marketers and academics understand the roles that social media, eWOM, co-creation, advergaming and online communities play in changing the dynamic of the customer-firm relationship. As these authors demonstrate, Web 2.0 has changed the very the nature of interactions, and brand managers have had to adapt to this new reality and will continue to adapt.

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References

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