



Influence of Social Media on Brand the perception among Consumers.

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Abstract: The erosion of brand authenticity and the increasing influence of empowered consumers on brand communications are two opposing tendencies that have plagued brand management in recent years. Traditional marketing communications are changing as a result of social media. The way customers shape traditional brand communications is changing over time. Previously, brand and marketing managers controlled and managed these messages. Whether this phenomenon has diminished marketers' authority over brand management has been brought up by social media platforms' quick rise in popularity in recent years. Understanding how consumer-generated online material affects brands in the social media age, as well as how company-created communication affects consumer views of those brands, is crucial. The past ten years have seen a significant upheaval in the media due to the increasing significance of social media platforms. According to recent figures, more than two billion four hundred thousand individuals, or 34% of the world's population, have access to the Internet. Additionally, one in seven individuals worldwide have a Facebook profile, and almost four of five Internet users browse social media websites. Communication managers must understand online customer behaviour given the global increase in Internet and social media users. With time, consumers are moving away from traditional media like television, radio, and periodicals and towards social media sites for informational purposes. With the introduction of social media, traditional one-way communication gave way to multifaceted, two-way, peer-to-peer communication. Social media platforms provide consumers with the chance to engage with other consumers, creating a situation where businesses are no longer the exclusive means of communicating about their brands. In our advanced technological age, traditional marketing communications are evolving with time due to the Social Web. Consumers are now gradually shaping brand messages, which were previously planned and overseen by brand marketing professionals. To comprehend the impact of social media on brands and brand management, academics have been concentrating on the field of social media communication for several years. They have studied pertinent subjects including electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM). However, little is known about how user-generated and firm-created social media communication affects consumer behaviour and brand perceptions, despite the rise in empirical studies on the subject of social media. This is fundamentally important because the firm controls one type of communication. However, the other is not under the company's authority. Our goal is to close this gap by examining how social media communication provided by the company affects purchase intention (PI), brand equity (BE), and brand attitude (BA).

Since user-generated and firm-created social media communication differ in their social media strategy, there is a second gap in the empirical research that has been found thus far. This gap concerns the examination of the effects of these two types of communication concerning industry-specific differences. Although social media communication has received a lot of attention in the literature up to this point, no study has distinguished between how social media communication affects brand equity and brand attitude while accounting for variations between industries. The necessity to do so is reported in this study.

A key component of brand equity is customer brand perception, which makes it a vital component of practically any marketing plan. Analysing the growing effect on a consumer's perception of a brand would be made simpler by having a better understanding of the fundamental cognitive principles. The concept of brand perception is broad and encompasses a multitude of associated study components, including brand knowledge and memory structures. According to research, social media branding can directly improve a company's perceived equity and image (Ng & Houston).

Key Words: Media, brand, literature, Social Web.

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, brand management has been challenged by two opposite tendencies i.e. the loss of brand authenticity and the growing effect of empowered consumers on brand communications. The Social Web is altering traditional marketing communications. Traditional brand communications that were formerly controlled and managed by brand and marketing managers are gradually being moulded by consumers. The rapid growth in the attractiveness of social media platforms in recent years has raised the question of whether this phenomenon has reduced marketers' control of brand management. During the age of social media knowledge of both the influence of firm-created communication on consumer perceptions of brands and the influence of consumer online content creation on brands is important. Media have experienced a huge transformation over the past decade with the growing importance of social media sites. Recent statistics designate that the number of people accessing the Internet exceeds two billion four hundred thousand, i.e. 34% of the world's population. Moreover, one out of every seven people in the world has a Facebook profile and nearly four in five Internet users visit social media sites. With the growing number of Internet and social media users worldwide, communication managers must apprehend online consumer behaviour. Consumers with time are using social media sites much more to search for information and turning away from traditional media, such as television, radio, and magazines. The advent of social media has transmuted traditional one-way communication into multi-dimensional, two-way, peer-to-peer communication. Social media platforms offer an opportunity for customers to interact with other consumers; thus, leading to an environment where companies are no longer the sole source of brand communication. The Social Web is changing traditional marketing communications with time in this world of high technology. Traditionally brand communications were organized and

managed by brand marketing managers but now it is gradually being shaped by consumers. For several years, scholars have been focusing on the field of social media communication as an attempt to understand the social media effects on brands and brand management by studying relevant topics such as electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM). Yet, despite the increase in empirical research into the topic of social media, there is still little understanding of how firm-created and user-generated social media communication influences consumer perceptions of brands and consumer behaviour. This is of fundamental importance as one form of communication is controlled by the company. But on the other hand, the other is independent of the firm's control. To address this gap, we aim to investigate the effects of firm-created social media communication on brand equity (BE), brand attitude (BA) and purchase intention (PI).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Although research exists in the area of online communications, not all of this work is easily transferable to the social media space. For instance, within the literature, there are conflicting ideas regarding the definition of social media. We adopt the definition by Kaplan and Heinlein, who proposed that social media describes “internet-based applications that help consumers share opinions, insight, experiences, and perspective. According to these authors, social media can include collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Research has focused on areas such as user segmentation and participation, motivations for the adoption of social media, electronic world-of-mouth and online brand community. Social media have been acclaimed for having dramatic influences on every stage of the consumer decision-making process as well as influencing general opinions and attitude formation. Mangold and Faulds discuss the impact of the interaction among consumers of social media on the development and execution of IMC strategies, suggesting a new communication paradigm be developed. Keller supports this notion with his discussion of effective brand building through IMC and the customer-based brand equity model.

Social media advertising literature is very limited, with most research to date focusing broadly on online or interactive advertising. Of relevance to this study, interactive advertising research has addressed motivations, perceived interactivity, and advertising outcomes, gender differences and interactivity, consumer attitudes towards interactive advertising within online and mobile contexts, and the relationship between online engagement and advertising effectiveness. Social media research by Hoy and Milne focused on gender differences in privacy beliefs, Kelly, Kerr and Drennan studied the teenage perspective, and Nielsen and Facebook published a report based on the effectiveness of Facebook as a form of media. Lastly, an interesting study by Zeng et al, focused specifically on social factors relating to user perceptions and responses to advertising via social networks, finding that responses to advertising in this context depended on perceptions of advertising relevance and value, as well as being influenced by social identity and group norms. Given the significant potential for growth of the online advertising industry in Australia, these types of issues pose considerable challenges and demand for further research in the area of advertising perceptions, relevance and value. With limited empirical research in this area, there is a need for research to further explore social media advertising and ways in which social media plays a part in the broader marketing communication mix.

METHOD:

Three product categories were chosen to examine the influence of brand communication on consumer responses. The product categories were non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and mobile network operators. This selection was based on the differences in the extent to which they manage social media proactively. The product categories are familiar and well-known to Polish social media users. For each category, the respondent indicated a brand that he or she has liked on Facebook. After using the option, the internet users automatically start to receive content created by both the administrator of the brand page and other users who have liked the same page. As a result, we assume that consumers have been exposed to social media communication from both companies and users of brands that they have liked on Facebook.

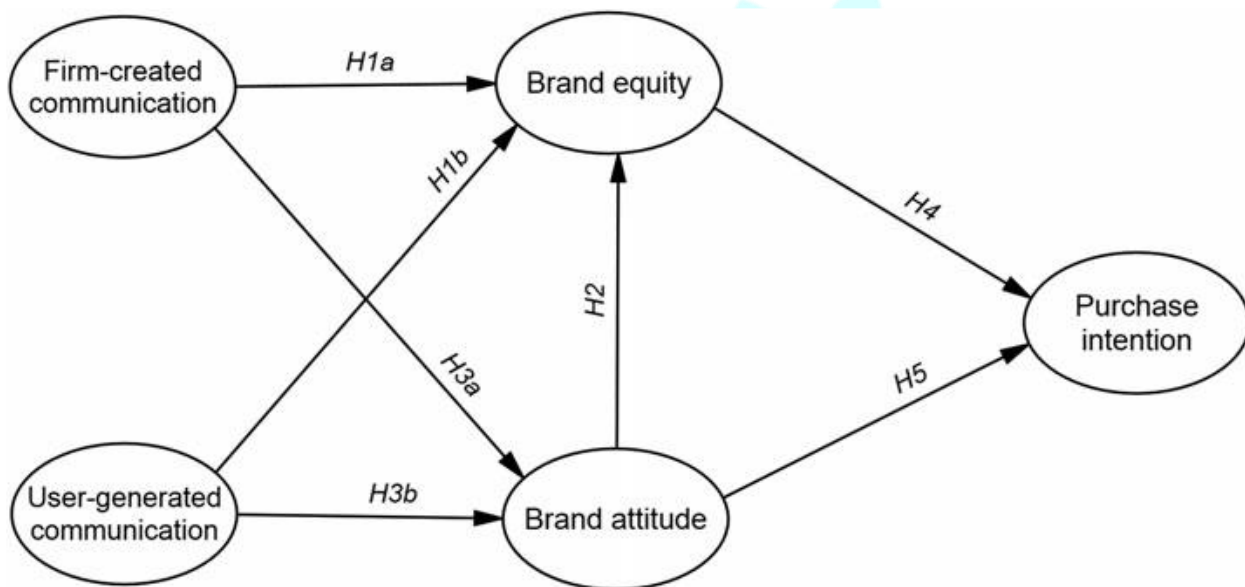


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework.

Both companies and users from brands that they have ‘Liked’ on Facebook. A link to the questionnaire was available on Facebook for four weeks from 5 March 2013 to 4 April 2013. Every seven days, the link was posted on several brand fan pages inviting respondents to take part in the survey. This procedure was repeated five times. The choice of brand pages was based on the following criteria: (a) the brand should belong to one of the three product categories listed in the study; (b) the frequency of firm-created content on the page should exceed two posts a week; (c) the firm-created content should be perceived by respondents as advertising and generate brand benefits; (d) Facebook users should actively participate in the brand page contributing with UGC; and (e) the brand page should have a minimum reach of 500 subscriptions. The invitation to the survey consisted of a small text informing about the topic of the study and suggesting that respondents send the link to their Facebook friends who shared an interest in the same brand fan page. A total of 60 brands were analysed across the three product categories. This represents an extensive set of consumer products and provides research generalizability. After clicking on the survey’s link, the respondent was redirected to the questionnaire and had access to an introductory text and three screening questions. The explanatory text described the general objectives of the study and distinguished between both

firm-created and user-generated social media communication. Examples of both forms of social media communication were also given. The screening questions were used to ensure that the respondents had perceived a specific brand on Facebook and were, therefore, eligible to participate in the study.

DISCUSSION:

Consumer brand perception is an essential element of brand equity, which makes it a crucial part of nearly any marketing strategy. By being able to understand the concepts and psychological elements that are involved in how social media can impact brand perception and brand attitude, we can utilize and optimize the underlying cognitive mechanisms more efficiently, and increase, modify, and leverage the perception of a brand in the eyes of the consumer.

The topic of brand perception itself is extensive and contains a vast amount of related research and elements such as brand knowledge, memory structures, associations, involvement, suggestiveness, typicality, attachment, congruence and many more.

Research has found that social media branding can have a direct positive impact on perceived brand equity and brand image. However, there seems to be an informational gap when it comes to better, more condensed sources of information with a more specific focus on the context of social media in combination with brand perception. In recent years, such information has become increasingly important due to the massive transformation that has taken place in the global markets. It represents a research gap that offers a remaining demand for empirical data which the thesis aims to contribute towards and support.

Today, the average consumer and people in general, tend to spend an extensive part of their time on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. Not only is this applying to leisure and entertainment activities, but it also includes the execution of consumption-related actions. We see social media as an increasingly frequent replacement for more traditional media, which is reinforced by the fact that an increasing number of consumers are migrating away from traditional media formats such as radio, television, and magazines. The result of this migration is so impactful that it led to the outcome of social media being rated as a more trustworthy information source than traditional media by the consumer.

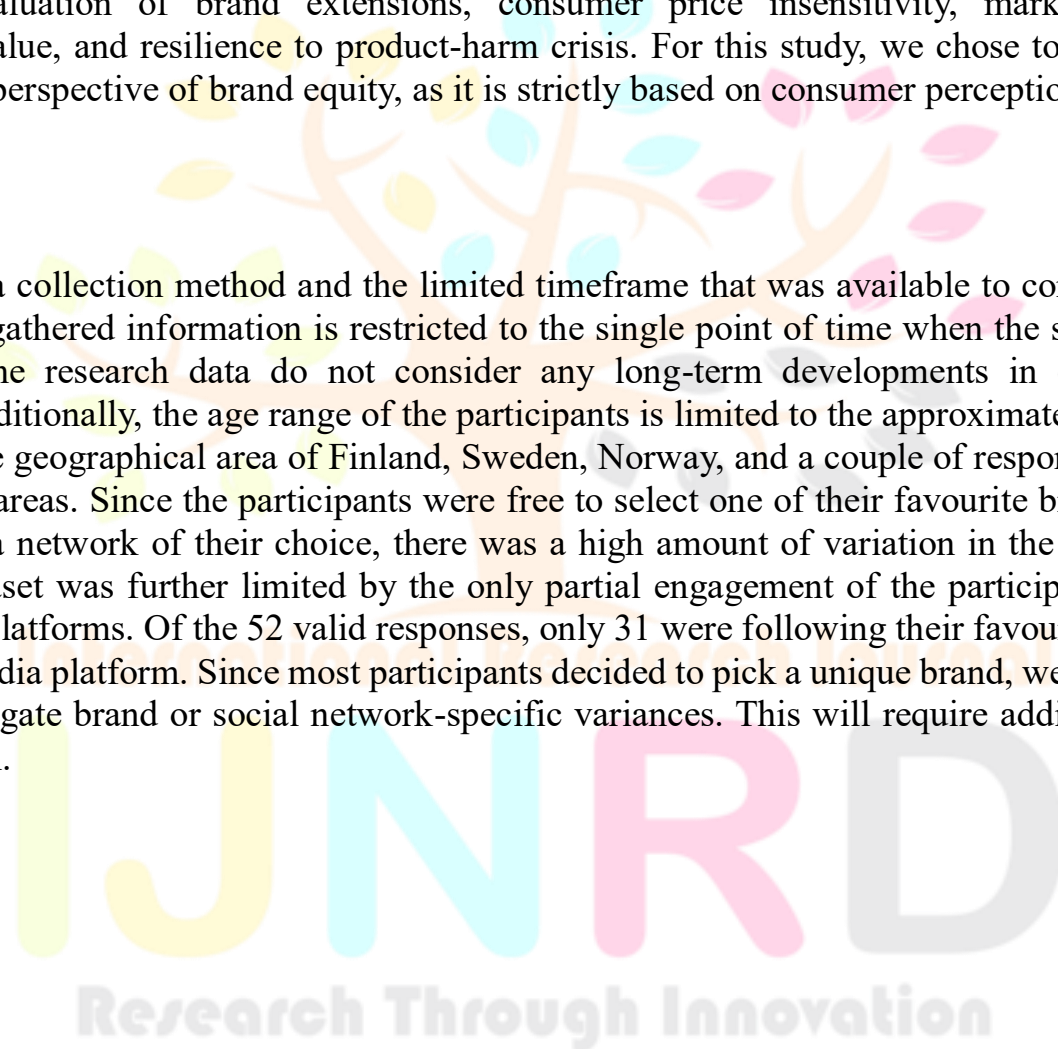
ANALYSIS:

The conception of brand equity is a key marketing asset that can produce a relationship that differentiates the bonds between a firm and its public and that nurtures long-term buying behaviour. The understanding of brand equity and its growth raises competitive barriers and drives brand wealth. Although extensive research has been dedicated to the field of brand equity, the literature on this subject is fragmented and inconclusive. Thus far, the measurement of brand equity has been approached from two major perspectives in the literature. Some researchers have focused on the financial perception of brand equity, whereas other scholars have emphasized the customer-based perspective. Therefore, the dominant stream of research has been grounded in cognitive psychology, focusing on memory structure. According to Aaker,

brand equity can be defined as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers. An alternative concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) was developed by Keller, who defined 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand'. Keller emphasized that brand equity should be captured and understood in terms of brand awareness and in the strength, favourability and uniqueness of brand associations that consumers hold in memory. Thus, CBBE can be understood as a concept that predicts that consumers will react more favourably to a branded product than to an unbranded product in the same category. For companies, influencing brand equity is a key objective that is achieved through strengthening the consumer's associations and feelings toward brands and products. Previous research recognized the positive influence of brand equity on consumer preference and purchase intention, consumer perception of product quality, consumer evaluation of brand extensions, consumer price insensitivity, market share, shareholder value, and resilience to product-harm crisis. For this study, we chose to focus on the cognitive perspective of brand equity, as it is strictly based on consumer perceptions.

FINDINGS :

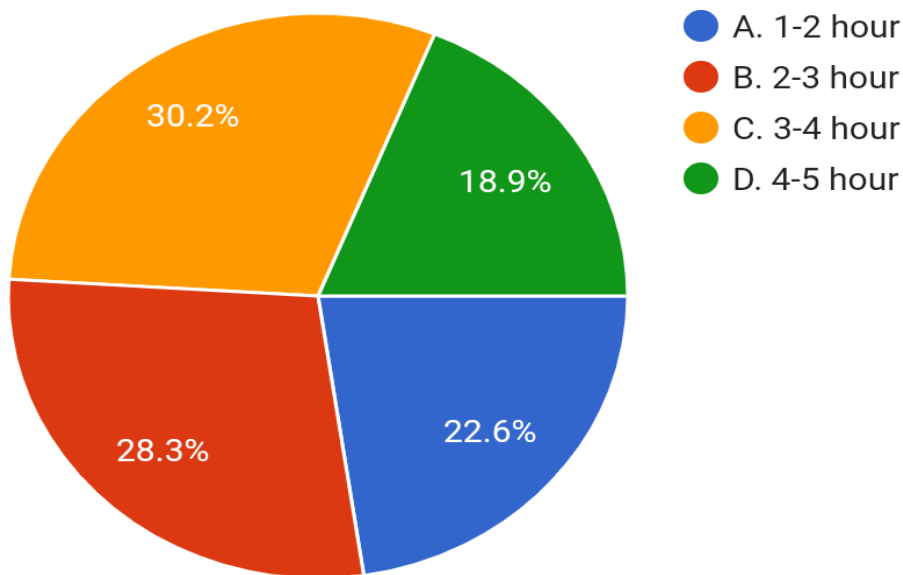
Due to the data collection method and the limited timeframe that was available to conduct our research, the gathered information is restricted to the single point of time when the study was conducted. The research data do not consider any long-term developments in consumer responses. Additionally, the age range of the participants is limited to the approximate range of 20-30 with the geographical area of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and a couple of responses from outside those areas. Since the participants were free to select one of their favourite brands and a social media network of their choice, there was a high amount of variation in the collected data. The dataset was further limited by the only partial engagement of the participants with social media platforms. Of the 52 valid responses, only 31 were following their favourite brand on a social media platform. Since most participants decided to pick a unique brand, we were not able to investigate brand or social network-specific variances. This will require additional in-depth research.



RESULT:

1. How much time are you active on social media?

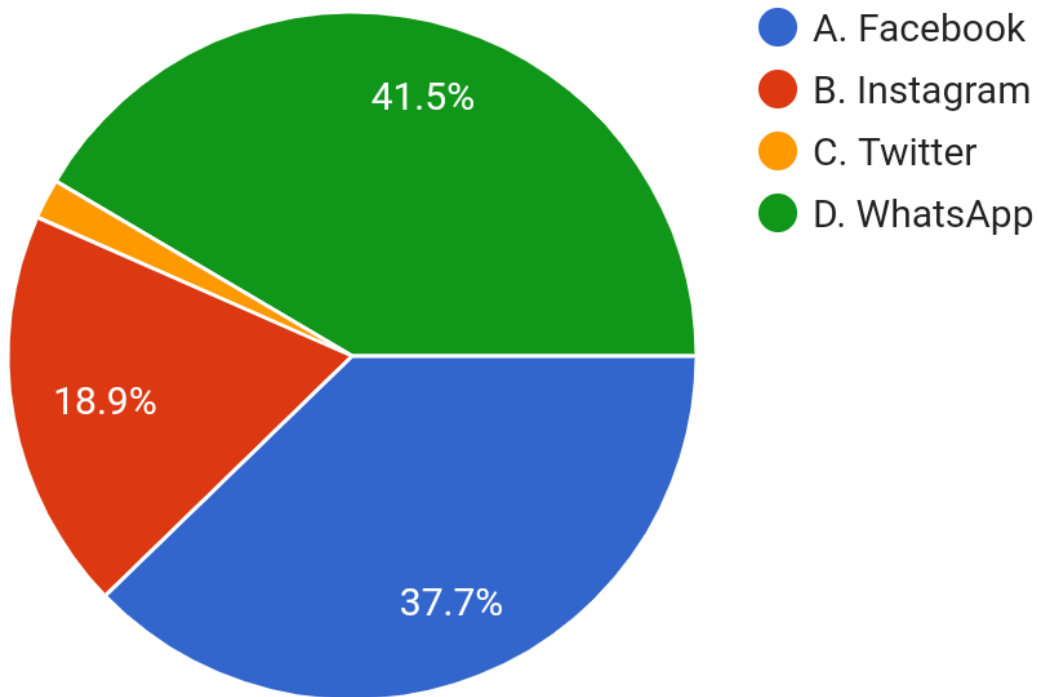
53 responses

**Evaluation:**

The above pie chart provides us with statistics on how much people are active on social media within some specific time range. The four colours represent the four different time ranges across which social media is used by various people of different age groups. The green colour represents the time range of 4 to 5 hours selected by 18.9%. The blue colour represents the 22.6 % of people who surf social media for a time range of 1 to 2 hours. On the other hand, the colour section represents the 28.3 % of people who are present on social media for 2 to 3 hours and finally, the orange section represents the 30.2% of people who are active on social media for a time range of 3 to 4 hours.

2. Which social media you use the most?

53 responses

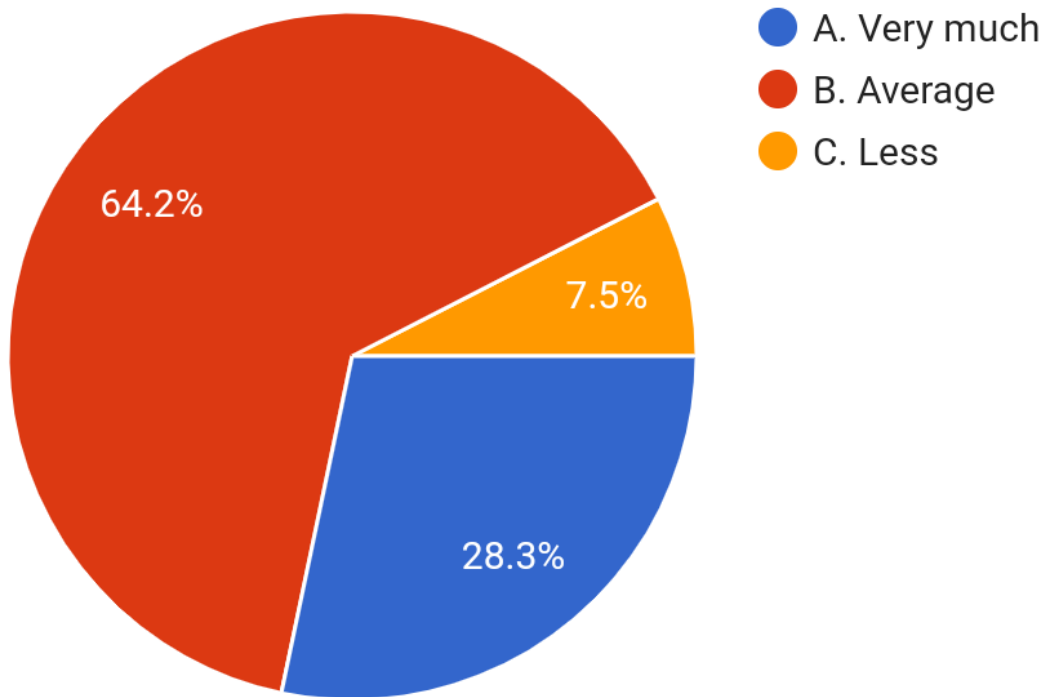


Evaluation:

The evidence from the above pie chart shows that the maximum number of people who use WhatsApp which counts to 41.5% represented by green colour. The second app which is used by 37.7% of people as a social media is Facebook represented by a blue colour. The next app which is used by 18.9% of people as a social media app is represented by red colour and the least used app as a social media is Twitter.

3. How brand conscious are you?

53 responses

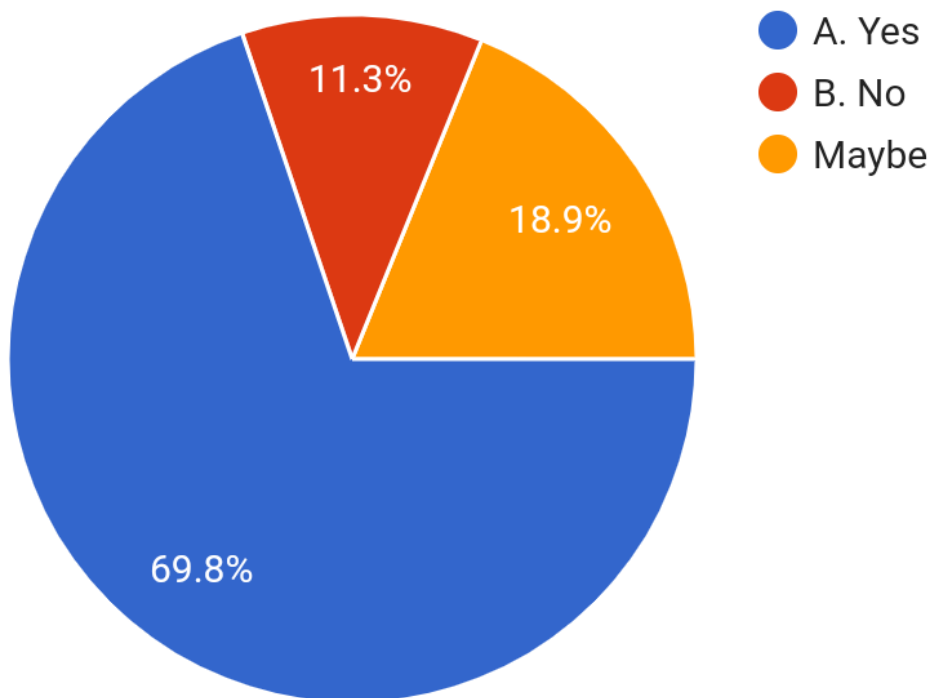


Evaluation:

The above pie chart provides us with information about how brand-conscious are we. The red colour section with 64.2% of people are highly brand conscious. The blue colour represents 28.3% of people who are averagely brand conscious while the orange colour represents 7.5% of people who are least brand conscious.

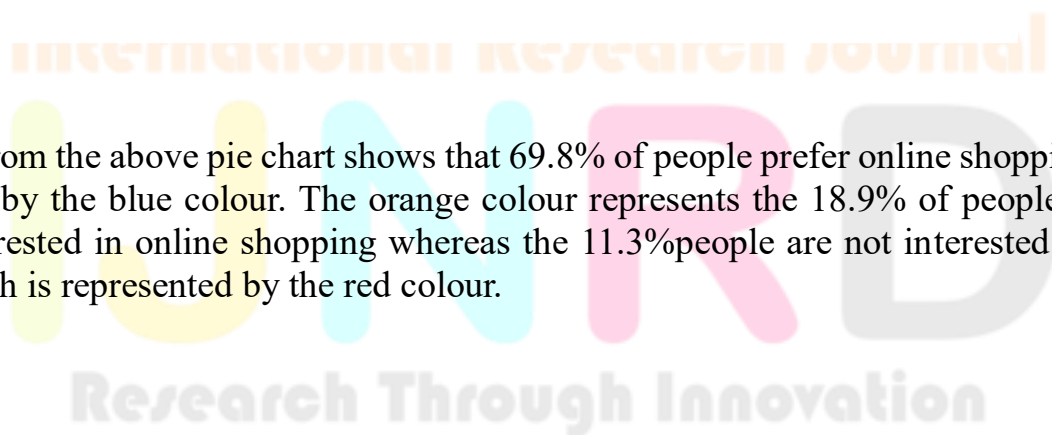
4. Do you prefer online shopping?

53 responses



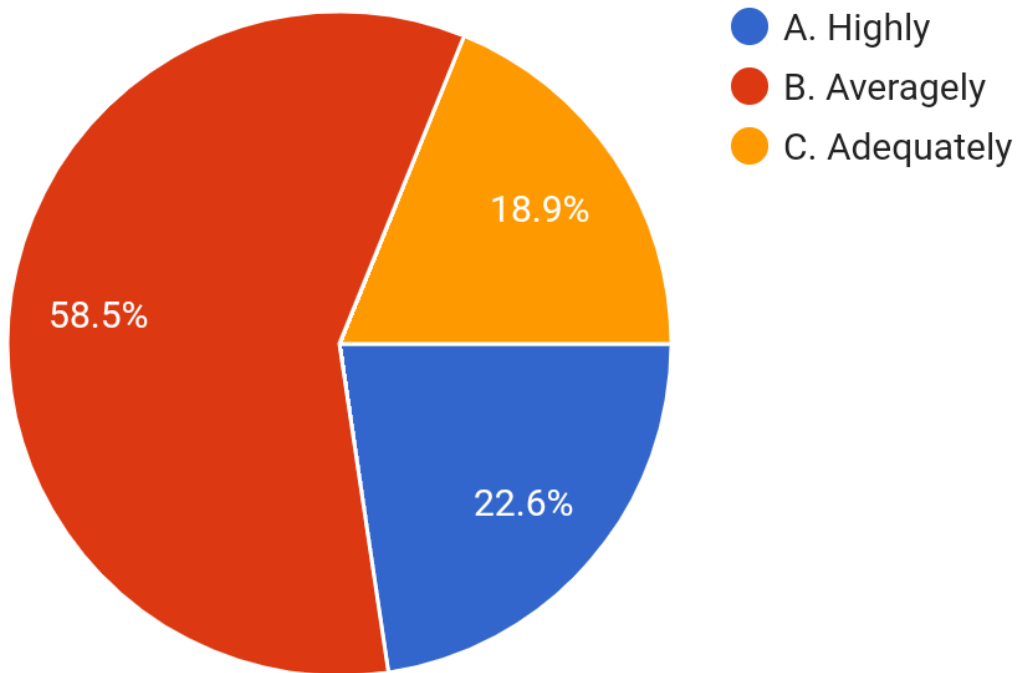
Evaluation:

The evidence from the above pie chart shows that 69.8% of people prefer online shopping which is represented by the blue colour. The orange colour represents the 18.9% of people who are averagely interested in online shopping whereas the 11.3% people are not interested in online shopping which is represented by the red colour.



5. How does social media influence your online shopping?

53 responses

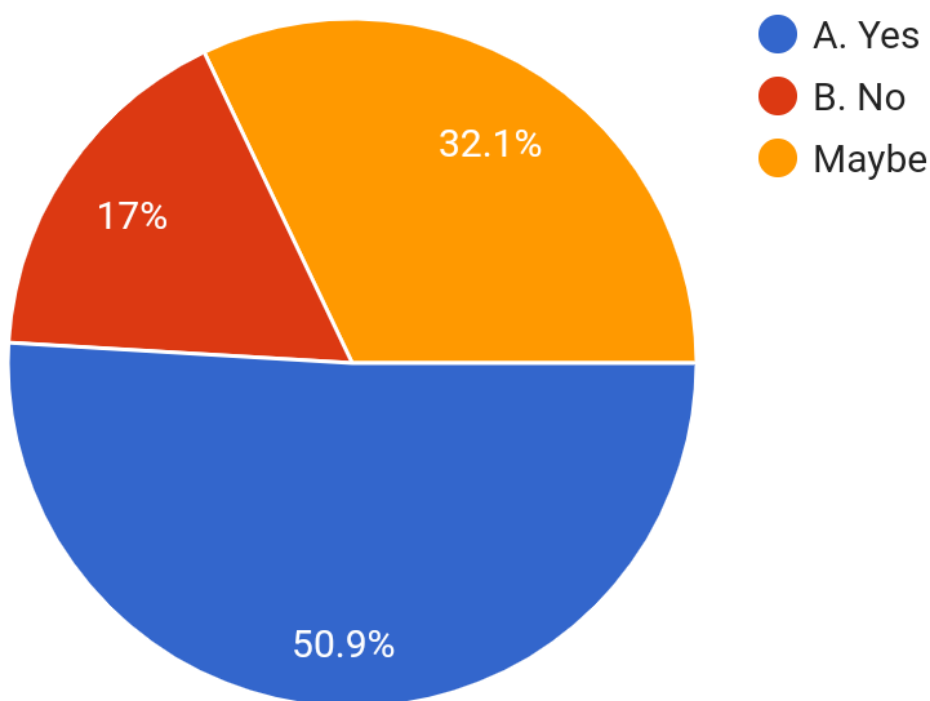


Evaluation:

The above pie chart represents how social media influences the customer's preference for online shopping. According to 58.5% of people, their interest in online shopping is averagely influenced by social media, represented by the red color. Whereas 22.6% of people say that their interest in online shopping is highly influenced by social networking sites, represented by the blue color. The other 18.9% of people say that they are very adequately influenced by social networking sites for online shopping, represented by the orange color.

6. Does social Networking site affect users trust?

53 responses



Evaluation:

The above pie chart represents how social networking sites affect users. 50.9% of people say that social networking sites affect users' trust represented by blue colour. At the same time, 32.1% of people say that social networking sites averagely affect users' trust. And the rest 17% say that social networking sites do not affect users' trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

If we consider the industry comparison in more detail, we can see that the χ^2 difference test reveals that there are both similarities and differences in the effect sizes. The results demonstrate that, irrespective of the industry under analysis, firm-created and user-generated content influence brand equity and the consumer's attitude towards brands in a similar way. However, the results show that brand attitude has a stronger effect on brand equity for the non-alcoholic beverages

industry than on either the clothing or mobile network operator industry. This can be explained in terms of the degree of consumer involvement in the form of social media advertising used by the industries (Chauhan and Pillai 2013). The most common social media advertising strategy used by the brands of the non-alcoholic beverages industry was to elicit UGC and build positive brand associations. As an example, one can point out the numerous Internet users who declare their preference for brands like Coca-Cola on their Facebook profile (e.g. “I love Coca-Cola” or “Coca-Cola is the best!”). The clothing and mobile network operator industries, on the other hand, adopted a different approach to their social media advertising strategy. Their focus was to inform consumers (e.g. provide information about new products and trends) and to generate sales promotions (e.g. coupons and discounts). Finally, we investigated brand purchase intention to assess the differences in the behavioral influences of social media communication on brand equity and brand attitude in the three industries. As expected, both brand equity and brand attitude positively influenced the brand purchase intentions of consumers for the three industries. However, our findings showed that the relationship between brand equity and purchase intention, and between brand attitude and purchase intention for the non-alcoholic beverages industry differs from the other two industries. In the non-alcoholic beverages industry, brand attitude was the strongest determinant of purchase intention. This is attributed to the social media communication strategy used, as evidenced by the fact that for the clothing and mobile network operator industries brand equity and brand attitude had an equal effect on the consumers’ brand purchase intention. This indicates that the behavioral outcomes of social media communication are not only driven by industry characteristics (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer 2012) but also by the type of social media advertising.

We are utilizing secondary data for the formation of our hypothesis, which is reflected in the design of the primary data collection through an online survey. The primary data acquisition is built on a descriptive research design. The data analysis is done through the questionnaire which was filled by 53 people of various age groups which shows in the form of a graphical representation which shows the effects and the ways by which social media influences the consumer perception of brands.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY:

Possibly one of the most popular trends in the area of online marketing and branding in recent years is the growth of social media and its popularity among consumers. Social media have introduced new channels of brand communication, as evidenced by the application of online brand engagement on social networking sites. Companies such as Starbucks, Coca-Cola and Guinness are highly attuned to consumers’ preferences and tastes since experience is at the core of their products. It is not a coincidence that social media were rapidly integrated into their marketing agenda. Just like advertisers in the social media environment, academics are beginning to explore and understand the key mechanisms and processes that guide the operations of social media advertising. This effect is noticeable in that UGC was found to positively affect both brand equity and brand attitude. Moreover, this finding is also highlighted by the confirmation that firm-created communication positively influenced only brand attitude. Marketers should induce consumers to participate in social media campaigns by providing relevant content and information and listening and participating in the UGC process by

responding. Some of the many benefits of this interaction include nurturing brand loyalty and reducing service costs through peer-to-peer solutions for product problems. It is necessary to underline the fact that brand pages on Facebook are unregulated communities. Inevitably, consumers will engage in conversations and they are at their most sincere and open when they are talking to other people about their product opinions and brand experiences. Even brands that have high CBBE are targets for negative WOM and undesirable content from Internet users. Negative content, which may be based on fact or malicious intent, is a potential threat that may reflect on the consumer's overall perception of brands. Dissatisfied consumers may use social networking sites to review products and make public complaints to the company. However, negative information emerging in these environments can be strategically managed and converted into an opportunity for brand building. Managers can use various methods to influence and shape undesired consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the company's mission and performance goals. Given the fact that firm-created social media communication is fully controlled and administrated by companies, it was expected that it would influence brand equity. However, our results showed that firm-created social media communication does not affect the consumers' perceptions of brand value. Even though they do not confirm the postulated hypothesis, our findings are of great practical importance for marketers. They advise that social media campaigns should not be used as a substitute for traditional advertising, but rather be treated as an element of the company's marketing communication strategy. Moreover, firms should design their social media content to influence the consumer's attitude toward brands, since the quality and credibility of their message is an important factor which affects the individual's behaviour after being exposed to it. Firm-created social media communication does not directly affect brand equity, but indirectly influences consumer perceptions of value based on brand attitude. According to these findings, marketing managers should focus on building positive brand associations and on exploring brand characteristics that influence the consumer's attitude toward the brand. For example, brands such as Harley-Davidson and Converse All Stars 'Chuck Taylor' should strengthen brand associations such as freedom, passion, assertiveness and originality, whereas brands such as Apple and Starbucks should focus on associations such as innovation, originality, outgoingness and interactivity. Such practices are strongly recommended because, as the behavioural outcomes in our research suggest, the effect of brand attitude is almost twice as strong as the effect of brand equity on consumer purchasing decisions. However, to achieve better results, communication managers should support user-generated communication by marketing action programs while maintaining an active profile of social media advertising. Another important contribution of this article is the juxtaposition concerning the effects of social media communication on brand equity, brand attitude and brand purchase intention in different industries. The results demonstrate that irrespective of the industry under analysis, firm-created content and UGC influence brand equity and the consumer's attitude toward brands in a similar way. However, the results show that brand attitude has a stronger effect on brand equity for the non-alcoholic beverages industry than on either the clothing or mobile network operator industry. This can be explained in terms of the degree of consumer involvement with the form of social media advertising used by the industries. The most common social media advertising strategy used by the brands of the non-alcoholic beverages industry was to elicit UGC and build positive brand associations. As an example, one can point out the numerous Internet users who declare their preference for brands like Coca-Cola on their Facebook profile (e.g. 'I love Coca-Cola' or 'Coca-Cola is the best!'). However, our findings showed that the relationship between

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