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Offline and Online Branding

Abstract

Market today is not about product but about values and ideas. Brand image and all actions engaged in branding process can become key factor of market success. Internet has had a revolutionary impact on customer habits, and created a new marketing communication channels. Today, there are many ways and channels to reach the customer- both offline (traditional) i.a.: News Papers, Magazines and TV advertisement, and online- such as Web Sites, Social Media, Personal Blogs, etc.

The aim of the article was to investigate the impact of the social media usage on the brand evaluation. Authors decided on quasi experiment as research method which was carried by questionnaire. The major finding is that using ANOVA, authors didn't find the impact between the information about the usage of social media in marketing communication and the brand image.

Key words: branding, online, offline, brand image, branding strategy

Introduction

Well design brand strategy is an operative way to improve companies' position on increasingly competitive market. To understand branding process, it is important to understand brand meaning. A brand is the concept or image of a specific product or/and service that consumers can connect with, by identifying the name, logo, slogan, or design of the company who owns the brand. Branding is when that specific concept (an idea or image) is recognizable by costumers, identified with a certain service or product, and specially

marked in costumers minds – even when there are many other companies offering the same service or product.

Therefore it is important for marketers to understand that branding is not about getting target market to choose their brand over the competition, but it is about getting prospects to see the brand as the only one that provides a solution to their problem. (Lake, 2015).

Branding as an effective marketing strategy tool, has been used with frequent success in the past. Today, branding is experiencing a new popularity resulting from new, innovative applications. Although there have been instances where branding has been less than successful, marketers are beginning to find the appropriate applications in a given setting (Rooney, 1995).

With the growing realization that brands are one of a firm's most valuable intangible assets, branding has emerged as a top management priority in the last decade. Given its highly competitive nature, branding can be especially important in the retailing industry to influence customer perceptions and drive store choice and loyalty (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004).

Today, Business Dictionary defines branding as a process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme. Branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers.

Obviously, the branding business is based on psychology. A brand is much more than just a trademark, and the trademark's role in a brand is to persuade, not just to give information. (Sutter 2008). The main goal of a brand and its' philosophy is to select and contain many characteristics of a product and/or service under one name or sign. That's why brand designers are putting a lot of effort in order to influence consumers' emotions and create brand awareness.

Four levels of intensity of brand awareness can be defined: being unaware of brand' existence, recognition, remembering and conscious priority (spontaneous memory). The factors favouring high brand awareness in consumer's mind include: intensive and long-term communication, long-lasting presence on the market, long-term consistency in promotional message connected with the brand (appropriate associations). Messages which build the position of recognised brands most often contain balanced elements of both rational and emotional content, for example: McDonald's – the rational reason involves the special food, the benefit connected with emotions – family fun; Kodak – rational reason: spectacular colour, benefit: picturesque memories (Smalec, 2009).

Brand awareness remains fundamental to consumer life as the interaction initiation point to the brands (Osman and Subhani, 2010). A certain amount of brand awareness, depending on the business model, is necessary to drive sales and gain the traction in new markets. One of the more interesting aspects of branding is calibrating the amount of differentiation desirable in a brand strategy. Brand can become, moreover, a catalyst for bringing about change, a focal point for employees as well as customers. (Rubin, 2005).

Market today is not about product but about values, so it is not a surprise, that the studies have shown, that product choices depend more heavily on "brand image" than on the products' attributes (Anand and Shachar, 2000). Facing this issue is very important in order to learn more about branding phenomenon.

Market reality, transformed by the Internet revolution has led to the multiplication means and forms of conducting marketing communications. Currently, companies and organizations not only lead the traditional marketing communication, which today is called the communication offline, but also create the online-through sites, or funpage in social media (Mróz-Gorgoń, Całka 2015).

Internet advertising presented the promise of a more powerful form of media advertising and has become a new channel of building brand image - e-image in the process of e-branding.

Internet advertising provides for interactivity in advertising, permits much more information to be made available to interested potential customers, and also enables more specific and sophisticated discrimination and segmentation of advertising audiences. The historical record shows that the growth of radio and television has not significantly changed real advertising spending per media person-hour (Galbi, 2001).

Acenture Interactive's Acquity Group's "2015 Next Generation of Commerce Study", surveyed more than 2,000 U.S. consumers on their habits and preferences surrounding digital engagement, content, shopping, and services (Acquity Group, 2015). The report provides an in-depth look into user behavior by demographics. The results of the study has shown, that while the use of newspapers and magazines as a primary physical medium of current events has been steadily declining, the respect that the public has for the traditional format remains high. Average rankings place Facebook the highest on the trust scale, followed by print newspapers, email and TV (Table 1.)

Table 1. Most trusted advertising channels (at the end of the manuscript)

According to the study research, younger generations are more likely to trust social channels than their older counterparts. Twenty-nine percent of college-aged consumers (ages 18-22) and 32 percent of Millennials (ages 23-30) rank Facebook No. 1, while only 16 percent of Baby Boomers (ages 52-68) do the same. Older consumers are more likely to trust traditional media.

Overall, 23 percent of consumers say they are influenced by content in news outlets, such as print and online media, when it is written by a brand. Brands looking to target audiences

across platforms will need to pay attention to where content is most trusted in order to reach their audience most effectively. While social media is gaining ground, TV and print media advertising still own the market as key influencers that drive new customers (Acquity Group, 2015). This results of studies indicate the need for further research of different marketing communication channels and forms including the use of multidisciplinary study (i.e.: eye tracking tests).

Literature Review

Since its formal introduction in the 1950s, the notion of brand image has become commonplace in consumer behavior research. Numerous studies of brand image have been reported, the phrase has been widely used in a variety of technical and casual applications, and practitioners and academics alike have embraced the concept as the embodiment of the abstract reality that people buy products or brands for something other than their physical attributes and functions (Dobni and Zinkhan 1990).

Many researchers focused their attention on the cause of brand image and brand performance (Bass and Talarzyk, 1972; Bird, Channon and Ehrenberg 1970; Bullmore, 1984; Levy and Glick, 1973; Stone, Dunphy and Bernstein, 1966; Swartz, 1983, Anand and Shachar, 2000; Schroeder, 2007; Smalec, 2009). Another field of study contains psychological aspects of the brand image and brand awareness issues (Boivin, 1986; Dolich, 1969; Friedmann and Lessig, 1987; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Osman and Subhani, 2010).

Past research has also shown a correlation between measures of brand equity and stock price and correlation between branding and shareholder value creation (Madden et al., 2002).

Branding is the subject of many studies- as a theoretical background (Rooney, 1995; Eppler, and Will, 2001; Sutter, 2008) and in specific markets perspective (Chen and Green,

2009; Fleisher, 2006; Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Chernatony, Harris and Christodoulides 2004).

Still there are very few publications on online and offline branding (Alwi and Silva, 2007). This work is a continuation of a previous paper made by the authors.

According to the literature review and the research gap, authors constructed 4 hypothesis tested in this research. The variables are key attributes and behavioural aspects when taking into consideration branding.

The information about using the online channels for brand's communication:

H1: influences positively on the brand quality perception

H2: influences positively on the higher price perception

H3: influences positively on the declaration of recommendation

H4: influences positively on the purchase declaration

Figure 1. Research model (at the end of the manuscript)

The following section presents the method used to investigate four hypothesis mentioned above.

Method

Authors used an quasi experiment to explore whether there is an impact of the information about using social media on brand image. First the authors collected questionnaires from control group. Secondly, the respondents were split into control group and the experimental group.

Authors distributed 120 questionnaires over a period of 7 days in 2015. Likert five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to collect responses. Respondents were given the description of fashion brand. The description in control group contained information about brand category, target and discriminant. The description in experimental group was enriched for the information about the usage of social media in communication with the client. 120 questionnaires were complete. 53 respondents were in control group and 67 in experimental group. There were 76 women and 44 men. More than 67% of the group were young people at the age of 20-24. Almost 18% of the respondents were at the age of 25-34, 12% were between 35-44, almost 2% were at the age 45-54 and less than 1% were below 19.

Table 2. Demographics of the sample (at the end of the manuscript)

Findings

The results presented in Table 3 show that neither the perception of quality nor higher price were significantly affected by the information about the usage of social media in the communication with the client (p>0,05). The respondents in experimental group did not evaluate the brand as better quality or more expensive than respondents in control group. The same result is visible in the declaration of recommendation and declaration of purchase (p>0,05). Respondents in experimental group didn't show the higher desire to recommend the brand or to purchase the products.

Table 3. ANOVA Test results (at the end of the manuscript)

This suggests that the information about the usage of social media does not influence the perception of brand or the behaviour declaration. Therefore, none of the hypothesis were supported by the experiment results.

Table 4. Findings (at the end of the manuscript)

Discussion

What studies have shown, the importance of Internet and social media is increasing with time. Besides the users themselves the strengths of social media (in particular the marketing ones) are also used by other important parties such as companies promoting their products, or non-profit organizations. That is why social media and above all its main leader Facebook are increasingly used at schools and universities (Kozel, et al., 2012).

The results of the report "Polish children on the Internet. Risks and safety - Part 2. Partial research report EU Kids Online II trials among children aged 9-16 years and their parents" (Kirwill, 2011), explicitly prove the increasing role of the internet in creating consumer awareness. A manifestation of the deepening of this trend include statement in the group studied children aged 9-16 years, symptoms of Internet addiction, which has observed at each other from 18% to 38% of study participants (depending on what the symptom was considered).

Despite business forecasts calling attention to the importance of online communication, many companies and organizations still uses only the traditional forms, not using the power of the Internet, or pays no attention to the conduct of marketing communication in the online form (Mróz-Gorgoń and Całka, 2015). As the next generation of consumers become this generation's primary purchasing audience, brands will need to demonstrate engagement strategies that align with expectations in a fast-paced, online world that still has a personal touch. Partnerships with third parties and new technologies will help allow brands a renewed focus on consumer engagement strategies that encompass both native advertising and social

strategies and tie together expectations for fast and consistent delivery (Acquity Group, 2015).

Limitations and Further Research

According to the fact, that the research was a quasi experiment, there are a number of limitations that further research should take into consideration. First of all, a questionnaire was distributed among students whose responses might differ from the whole population of e-consumers. Moreover, the tested brand was not the real brand present on the market. It was described as the brand X. The category of the brand could also affect on the respondents perspective. The tested brand was defined as fashion brand. Further research should make effort to explore the changes in responses within different categories.

Moreover, the experiment should be repeated on bigger sample and include the time impact between control group and experimental one. The responses could be different if the survey were conducted with the bigger pause between two surveys.

Finally researchers should aim to exclude the declarativeness of the responses. In this study, respondents were asked only about their opinion. The behaviour declaration does not necessarily have to reflect the actual behaviour of the consumers.

Managerial Implications

The test results lead to the conclusion that it is not important whether the brand uses social media to communicate with their clients or not. This could indicate lower cost for advertisement for the companies or change of the communication channels.

On the other hand, the decision about resignation of social media can be harmful for the brand image in future. The client's expectations are changing and the new generation of clients are becoming more and more important in the business relations. Which is why companies should investigate their consumer's perspective constantly and respond to their needs.

Ultimately, this study identified only some aspects of brand management in online reality. The authors suggest further research. The experiment needs to be repeated on greater sample and eliminate the limitations current in this study.

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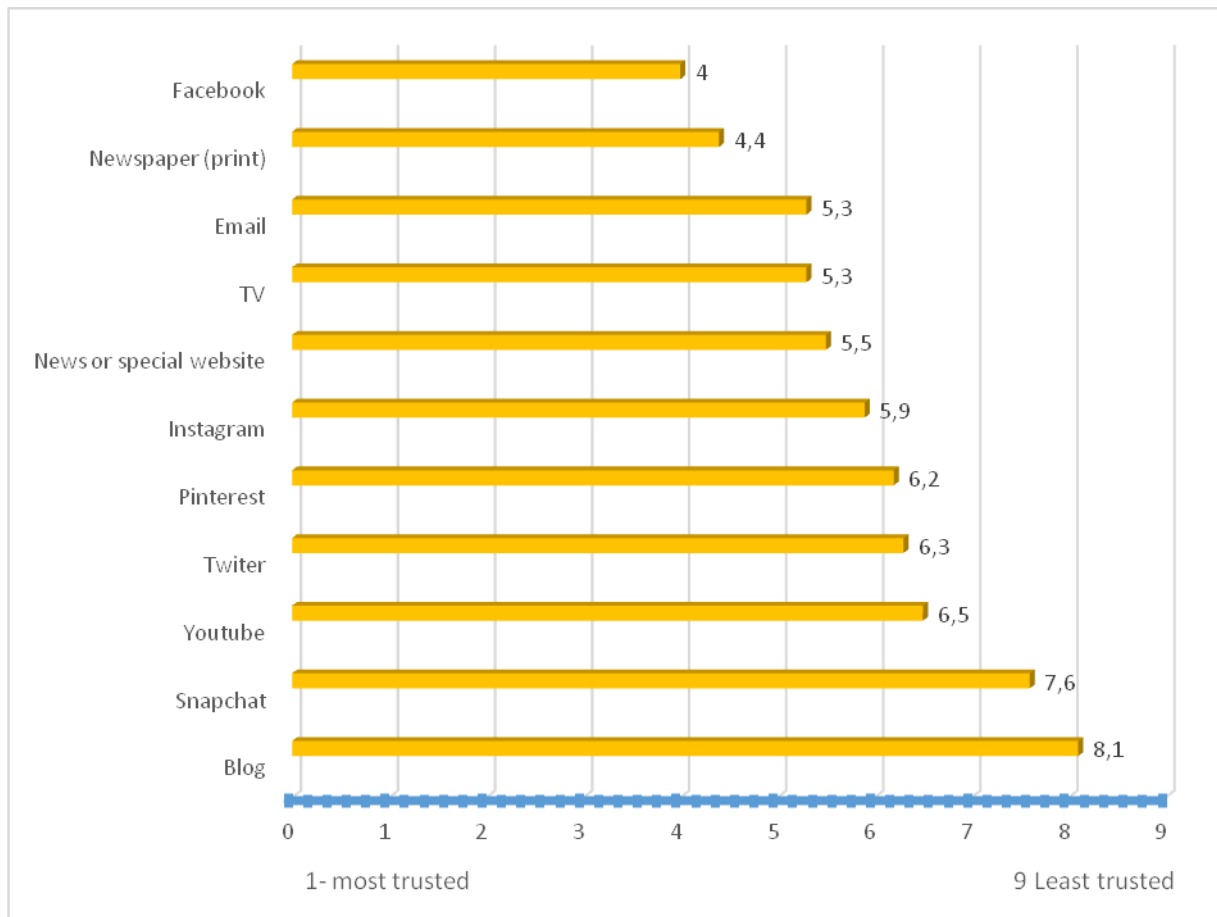
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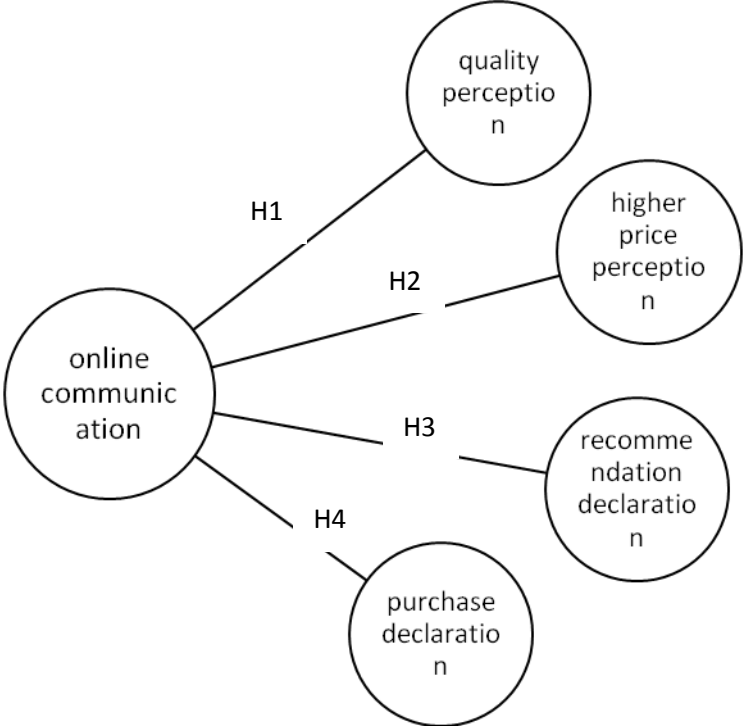
Tables

Table 1. Most trusted advertising channels

Based on: Acquity Group, (2015), The Next Generation of Commerce, (accessed September 11, 2015)

Figure 1. Research model

Based on: own study

Table 2. Demographics of the sample

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	44	36,6
Female	76	63,3
Age (years)		
Below 19	1	0,8
20-24	81	67,5
25-34	21	17,5
35-44	15	12,5
45 and above	2	1,6

Based on: own study

Table 3. ANOVA Test results

Hypothesis	avg K	avg E	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p-value*	*Test F*
H1	4.13	4.25	0.437961	1	0.437961	0.639897	0.425355	3.921478
H2	3.89	3.72	0.858972	1	0.858972	1.317498	0.253363	3.921478
H3	3.32	3.55	1.585666	1	1.585666	3.112545	0.080279	3.921478
H4	3.36	3.55	1.110823	1	1.110823	2.230878	0.137946	3.921478

Based on: own study

Table 3. Findings

H	Variables	Influence
H1	Quality perception	No
H2	Higher price perception	No
H3	Recommendation declaration	No
H4	Purchase declaration	No

Based on: own study