Influence of integration on interactivity in social media luxury brand communities

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ABSTRACT

Luxury brand marketers have recently turned their attention to customer-driven social media communities devoted to their brands. The key concepts of integration and interactivity provide the theoretical foundation to investigate social media luxury brand communities (LBCs). Data were collected from 252 luxury brand Facebook fan page members in South Korea. The study examines the effects of: (1) LBC integration on interaction as a process; (2) interaction as a process on perceived interactivity of LBCs; and (3) integration and interactivity on attitudes, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. The findings confirm: positive effects of LBC integration on interaction as a process and positive effects of interaction as a process on perceived interactivity of LBCs. The results also confirm the effects of interactivity on brand attitude, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. It is the first to offer a theoretical framework to analyze social media LBCs using the key concepts of integration and interactivity.

1. Introduction

Luxury fashion brand marketers and advertisers have recently turned their attention to luxury consumers in social media communities devoted to their brands (Ko & Megehee, 2012). Consumers are drawn to luxury brands for more than just the acquisition of materialistic or superficial possessions. They may also be drawn by perceptions of profound value, exceptional craftsmanship, and identification with a particular country (Keller, 2009; Miller & Mills, 2012; Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Luxury consumption is therefore multidimensional and embraces financial (e.g., exclusivity), functional (e.g., product excellence), individual (e.g., personal enjoyment), and social value (e.g., prestige and status) components (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2013; Miller & Mills, 2012). As a result, luxury brand managers recognize that complex and psychological motivations drive consumers to purchase their items.

The consumer perception that a product is luxurious depends on subjective consumer experiences, individual needs, and product categories (Ko, 2011). Currently, luxury brand images have expanded to include brand heritage, quality, artistic value, and customer relationships (Kim & Ko, 2012). In an effort to communicate these images more effectively with customers, luxury fashion brands, in particular, are expanding their use of social media communities (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Since Cartier established the first online luxury brand community on MySpace (Goldie, 2005), other luxury brands such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Prada, have created many online and social media communities devoted to their brands. If luxury brand managers want to successfully manage their brand communities in the face of an ever-changing social media environment, they need to understand how to effectively communicate deeper values around their luxury brands through their brand communities (Chi, 2012; Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2017; Jung & Kim, 2016; Lewis, Brown, & Billings, 2017; Porter & Donsu, 2008).

In general, brand communities are specialized, non-geographically bound, and based on a social relationship among the brand users (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) who share both particular and common devotion to the brand. Social brand communities, where members have a relationship in the social media context, can create trustworthy experiences for customers, inspire interactivity, improve brand attitudes, augment brand loyalty, and increase purchase behaviors (Chelladurai, 2016; Gu & Kim, 2016; Kim, Ko, & Kim, 2015; Kim & Leng, 2017; Porter & Donsu, 2008; Sabah, 2017; Yu, Cho, & Johnson, 2017).

This study uses the key concepts of integration and interactivity to provide a theoretical foundation to investigate luxury brand communities (LBCs) on social media. The study examines: (1) the effects of LBC integration on interaction as a process; (2) the effects of interaction as a process on perceived interactivity of LBCs; and (3) the effects of integration and interactivity on attitudes, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions.

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intentions. It also discusses the implications for luxury brand management academia as well as practitioners.

2. Theoretical framework of luxury brand communities

To enhance their brands, create customer relationships, and increase sales, luxury brands need to develop more unique brand identities, and through those, offer exclusive brand relationships. Luxury brand communities are inherently oriented toward acquiring new and refined experiences (Freire, 2014), and boosting brand relationships (Haghtvedt & Patrick, 2009).

Since most luxury brands try to appeal to customers through their symbolic and emotional aspects, brands that create positive associations for luxury consumers, in terms of fun, fantasy, refinement, and entertainment, are essential for this specific brand category (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Every luxury brand product needs outperforming qualities to succeed in its market that are then implicitly or explicitly communicated in the brand community to consumers. Thus, a luxury brand can take full advantage of brand communities to create distinctive brand relationships. Existing research convincingly implies that luxury brand communities are critical and the multi-faceted experiences they create can enhance relationships with customers.

To investigate luxury brand communities, this study employs the key concepts of integration and interactivity to offer a conceptual underpinning to investigate social media LBCs. Table 1 details the previous studies on this topic that use the concepts of integration and interactivity. Stewart and Pavlou (2002) highlighted that to undertake a comprehensive consumer behavior study in an interactive context, researchers must consider the structural context of the interaction. At the same time, many researchers differentiate brand community in the social media context (Zaglia, 2013). Thus, the concepts of integration and interactivity are useful here to study the context of the interactions in social media LBCs. Capturing insights and building a conceptual foundation for LBCs considering interactions in the social media context would be important to academics and practitioners.

2.1. Integration of LBCs

Brand community integration is a multicomponent concept that includes customer relationships with brands, products, companies, and other customers (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). When the brand community is well integrated, socially aggregated members share both customer–brand relationships (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967) and customer–customer brand relationships (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Customer-centric models of brand community extend the customer–customer brand model and conceptualize brand–community integration as one that includes significantly loyal relationships with brands (Holt, 1995; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), products, companies, and other customers (McAlexander et al., 2002). At the same time, brand community integration is positively related to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, purchase behavior, and repurchase intent (McAlexander et al., 2002). Table 1 also details the current research in terms of brand community integration concepts that reflect relationships with brands, products, companies, and other customers.

Regarding online or social brand-community integration, Tambях (1996) used the term “net communitas” to define how internet users seek a sense of community, engagement, and dependence when they join online communities. Consequently, they tend to create strong bonds with each other (Rheingold, 1993). In this study, LBC integration refers to customer-centric relationships (McAlexander et al., 2002) with brands, products, companies, and other customers. The integration of customer-centric relationships generates a sense of unity among group members (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and entails adjustment to group norms, feelings of social acceptance, and peer approval (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007).

2.2. Interactivity of LBCs

This LBC research focuses on interactivity in social media LBCs in the context of interactive marketing communications embedded in this social media environment. Interactivity is a multifaceted concept that has a long academic history. In fact, the concept of interactivity has been studied in terms of three research streams: functional features, actions and/or processes, and perceptions of interactivity over time (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991; Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Kim, Spielmann, & McMillan, 2012; Liu & Shrum, 2002). Research on interactivity as a function focuses on illuminating manifest features of interactivity (Okazaki, 2005). The second stream of research focuses on interactive processes, or the real actions that go into making something interactive. Among the processes seen as interactive is the exchange of information and user responsiveness (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991; Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Liu & Shrum, 2002).

The third research stream focuses on what individuals perceive as interactive (Day, 1998; Kim et al., 2012). Timeliness and engagement also become important from the perspective of perceived interactivity. Perceived interactivity, in turn, corresponds to three correlated but distinct dimensions: control, two-way communication, and time (Kim et al., 2012). As the concentration here is on social media LBCs in the context of interactive marketing communications, this research specifically examines interaction as a process and perceived interactivity in the continuum of the multifaceted interactivity research streams.

2.3. Relationships between integration and interaction as a process of LBCs

The extent of the integration in the relationship will determine how the members interpret communications and how they behave; integration, thus, determines interaction based on members’ goals (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002). Integration leads to interaction as a process (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2013; Koh & Kim, 2004; Stewart & Pavlou, 2002), including sharing, advocating, socializing, and participating, which then determines whether the community will be sustainable and successful (Casaló et al., 2013; Koh & Kim, 2004). Members who have ongoing relationships with each other are more involved with the community and ensure strong community interaction (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

This type of group interaction influences how members respond and act within the group (Casaló et al., 2013). If members feel that they belong to the group, they will act in accordance with collective norms (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2005). In the integration of customer-centric relationships, members who feel positively and strongly connected to the brands, products, companies, and other customers will usually actively participate in the group activities (Casaló et al., 2013).

Interaction as a process means that members reproduce, share, diffuse, and advocate their collective meanings and values (Kim et al., 2012). Group members ensure interaction as a process within a community by sharing information and experiences; advocating brands, products, and companies; socializing with other members; and, participating in group activities (Casaló et al., 2013; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Thus, strong integration in the LBC and actual interaction will be positively related in the social media context. Consequently, this research suggests the following hypothesis:

H1. LBC integration will positively affect the interaction as a process.

2.4. Relationships between interaction as a process and perceived interactivity of LBCs

As previously discussed, many studies have identified multiple interactivity facets including interactivity as a process and interactivity perceptions (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991; Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Liu & Shrum, 2002). Interactivity as a process includes user control, responsiveness, and the exchange of information (Chan & Li, 2010; Kim...
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