The effect of telepresence, social presence and involvement on consumer brand engagement: An empirical study of non-profit organizations

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Abstract

Although there are several marketing implications that have been considered in the context of social media marketing, less attention has been paid to the influence of antecedents of consumer brand engagement (telepresence, social presence and involvement) and their consequences for non-profit organizations. Thus, the main purpose of current research is to examine the influence of telepresence, social presence and involvement on consumer brand engagement (CBE) (second-order), which in turn affects electronic word of mouth and willingness to donate. To test the proposed model, this paper used social media platforms. We employed a Facebook page that presents non-profit organizations (brands) using a sample of non-students. We found that telepresence, social presence and involvement positively impact CBE, which in turn impacts electronic word of mouth and willingness to donate. The findings of our research demonstrate how CBE is formed in this particular context and what outcomes are to be expected, with important implications for both marketing theory and practice.

1. Introduction

The notion of engagement has received a lot of attention recently. However, the definition of this construct varies among scholars (Bolton, 2011; Karson and Fisher, 2005; Passikoff et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2010). Within the context of social media platforms, consumer/brand relationships appear significant (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer, 2009; Malthouse and Hofacker, 2010). Therefore, the notion of consumer brand engagement, which is related to consumers’ interactive brand-related dynamics (Brodie et al., 2011), attracted the attention of previous researchers (e.g. Calder et al., 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010).

However, despite previous attempts to conceptualize the notion of engagement, this paper focuses on the notion of consumer brand engagement (CBE), which was developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014) by expanding its antecedent (i.e. involvement) and consequences (brand loyalty) on social media platforms for non-profit organizations. Our efforts come in accordance with the Marketing Science Institute (MSI, 2014), which recommends scholars conduct more research in the area of consumer engagement (CE). With this research we aim particularly to answer the call of MSI (2014, p.4), under the Tier 1 Research Priority of “Understanding Customers and Customer Experience”, which asks, “How does social media and other marketing activities create engagement?” As Islam and Rahman (2016) assert, research on consumer engagement in social network sites is still underexplored and requires deeper investigation.

Therefore, despite the sole attempt of Mollen and Wilson (2010) to link telepresence with CBE for online websites, which was not empirically tested, there is not any study, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, that has examined the impact of social presence in the CBE setting. Therefore, this research has its own contributions. For instance, within the context of social media platforms, (i) there is, still, a belief that CBE is not linked to telepresence and social presence, and (ii) there is also a belief that existing research does not support building CBE (antecedents and their consequences) at non-profit organizations. Therefore, the primary aim of this current research is to fill this gap, within the non-profit context, by investigating the antecedents of CBE and their consequences over the platform of social media applications as well as to provide answers to two main critical questions:

1) Within social media platforms, how do involvement, telepresence

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and social presence impact CBE?

2) Within social media platforms, how does CBE impact word of mouth, and willingness to donate?

This paper is organized as follows. First, we explain the existing literature on CBE, telepresence, social presence and involvement. Second, the theoretical framework for the current study is discussed. Third, the research methodology and results are discussed. Finally, we conclude with theoretical, managerial implications, directions for future research and limitations.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Research model and hypotheses

As presented in Fig. 1, the proposed conceptual model, research hypotheses and associated factors—telepresence, social presence, involvement, consumer brand engagement, electronic word of mouth and willingness to donate—are presented in line with what has been discussed in the prior studies.

2.2. Consumer brand engagement

The notion of engagement has been discussed from diverse academic perspectives (i.e. psychology and organizational behavior) and it has been reflected in the marketing literature recently (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014, 2017; Kunz et al., 2017; Leeflang, 2011; O’Brien et al., 2015). The emerging literature on engagement from marketing literature (e.g., Alalwan et al., 2017a; Avnet and Higgins, 2006a, 2006b; Pham and Avnet, 2009; Schau et al., 2009) posits that engagement is a promising concept, which is expected to enhance the power of consumer behavior outcomes such as brand loyalty.

However, previous studies that have addressed CBE are still limited (e.g. Algesheimer et al., 2005; Brodie et al., 2013; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek, 2011a, 2011b; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Keller, 2013; Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Sprott et al., 2009; Vivek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016). The following describes the development of the notion of CBE in marketing literature. First, within the offline context, Algesheimer et al. (2005), employed the notion of brand community engagement, which centers on the positive impact of identifying brand community intrinsic motivation of consumers to be engaged and involved with community members. The authors posit that brand community engagement is a multidimensional construct comprised of utilitarian, hedonic and social factors. Second, within the online context, Hollebeek (2011a) adopted the notion of CBE and illustrated that the notion of engagement has derived the interest of a good number of researchers in the related area. However, the author posits that this notion is underexplored. Therefore, the author aims to bridge this gap by comparing relevant studies over different disciplines and in marketing. Hollebeek (2011a, p.790) defines CBE as “the level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions”. Furthermore, the author, theoretically, proposed that involvement should be an antecedent for CBE and that relationship quality (i.e. customer satisfaction, commitment and trust) is the main consequence for CBE and vice versa. The author also proposed that relationship quality leads to customer loyalty.

After reviewing the relevant literature on consumer engagement, Hollebeek (2011b, p.555) conducted qualitative research to define CBE. The author integrated three theories to explain the notion of CBE: relationship marketing, service-dominant logic perspectives and social exchange theory. The author defined CBE as “the level of a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions”. The author identified three themes for CBE: immersion, passion and activation.

Sprott et al. (2009, p.92), based on a unidimensional construct (i.e. emotional), center their efforts on developing a scale related to brand engagement in self-concept. The authors define brand engagement based on a set of brands, rather than on a specific one, as “an individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves”. Furthermore, the authors posit that brand engagement impacts brand identification. Phillips and McQuarrie (2010) proposed the notion of advertising engagement and define it as “modes of engagement” as routes to persuasion. The authors measured engagement based on a multidimensional construct: immersive, feel, identify and act. Mollen and Wilson (2010, p.5) centered their effort on measuring brand engagement within the context of websites. The authors define engagement as “the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value”. Furthermore, the authors measured engagement using a multidimensional scale consisting of cognitive, instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional). The authors argued that telepresence is the main antecedent of engagement and that optimal consumer attitude and behavior are the main consequences.

Moreover, marketing researchers have adopted different approaches to conceptualize engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014). For instance, Brodie et al. (2011, p.258) define engagement based on consumer engagement as “a motivational state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand) in focal brand relationships”. Furthermore, Brodie et al. (2011) posit that consumer engagement definition should reflect five themes. The first theme relates to interactive consumer experiences (van Doorn et al., 2010). The second theme reflects the intensity of the motivational state (Nolan et al., 2007). The third theme of engagement reflects wider, active and associative processes (Bowden, 2009). The fourth theme is related to the multidimensional (cognitive, affective and behavioral) aspect of consumer engagement (Patterson et al., 2006). The fifth theme distinguishes the central role of consumer engagement in the process of relational exchange. The authors differentiate between engagement antecedents (e.g. participation and involvement) and
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