



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Technological Forecasting & Social Change

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/techfore

Examining online social brand engagement: A social presence theory perspective

Kofi Osei-Frimpong^{a,*}, Graeme McLean^b^a Business School, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, P O Box AH 50, Achimota, Accra, Ghana^b Department of Marketing, University of Strathclyde Business School, 199 Cathedral Street, Glasgow G4 0QU, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Social presence theory
 Social media
 Social brand engagement
 e-WOM
 Firm generated content

ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media has changed how firms engage their brands with consumers in recent times. This triggered a need for this research to further our understanding of the influence of social presence on social brand engagement (SBE) and the moderating effects of firm-generated content and consumer commitment. Employing a quantitative survey design, 738 consumers with prior experience in following or engaging with brands on social media were randomly interviewed using an online questionnaire. While social presence positively influence social brand engagement, this relationship is significantly moderated by firm-generated content and the consumers' level of commitment in engaging with the brand. The findings also indicate that SBE encourages consumers to increase their intention to use the brand as well as engage in electronic word of mouth. Further, this study provides insights into the potential role of SBE and social presence in advancing the broader understanding of brand relationship management, brand engagement and social media research. Our conceptualisation of SBE suggests a need for managers to adopt creative strategies that will arouse consumers' interest and attention to participate in such interactions.

1. Introduction

Recent technological advancements and the buzz surrounding the use of social networking sites by consumers have changed the media landscape and how firms engage with their customers (Felix et al., 2017; Hammedi et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Pagani and Malacarne, 2017). Studies have reported over one billion social media users globally in the last decade (Anderson et al., 2016; Karikari et al., 2017), which have contributed to the transformations observed in information acquisition, online brand engagement, usage, lifestyles and experiences of consumers (Brodie et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2015; Kim, 2016). This socio-technological change enterprise brings to bare how people make sense of themselves, others and the world at large (Veitas and Weinbaum, 2017). It therefore comes as little surprise to see many firms incorporating social media metrics into their marketing communications and customer relationship management activities in the quest of reaching and engaging with customers (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Malthouse et al., 2013). In view of this, it is essential for firms to gain deeper consumer insights on what influence their participation in online brand engagement (Baldus et al., 2015), which has the potential to enhance brand performance through electronic word of mouth and brand usage intent (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The adoption of information technology by firms to engage with customers has been extensively researched (Hajli, 2014), however, these studies have mainly focused on how user-generated content (UGC) influence market outcomes in a number of contexts (e.g., Laroche et al., 2012; Stephen and Galak, 2012; Toubia and Stephen, 2013). Ashley and Tuten (2015) emphasise that despite the increasing interactive use of social media to engage customers, there is a need to zoom out how the creative message aspects of branded social content influence online consumer brand engagement (social brand engagement). Further, the effect of firm-generated content (FGC) on online consumer engagement from the social media perspective has received little attention. To this end, Kumar et al. (2016) call for further research to examine the level of influence of FGC (e.g., informative and transformative) on social brand engagement. They explain FGC as messages posted by firms on their social media platforms, which could lead to social interactions with their customers. In a related study, Hudson et al. (2016) call for a need to further examine the connection between social media interactions and consumer brand relationship. This study therefore, responds to these calls to investigate firm-customer social brand engagement from the social presence theory (SPT) perspective. A new theoretical perspective (i.e., SPT) is introduced to shed light on actors' social media presence and the moderating effects of FGC and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: kosei-frimpong@gimpa.edu.gh (K. Osei-Frimpong), graeme.mclean@strath.ac.uk (G. McLean).

consumer's level of commitment on social brand engagement.

Social presence theory asserts that, the social presence of a medium influences the recipients' understanding of contents generated from senders (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Cui et al., 2013). This in turn enhances the user's feelings in participating in social interactions (Dunlap and Lowenthal, 2009; McLean and Osei-Frimpong, 2017; McLean and Wilson, 2016), which is likely to enhance their participation in online brand engagements generated from the firm. The important role of social presence in social interactions cannot be undermined, and this has often been used to explain user behaviours (Shen et al., 2010). Primarily, social presence demonstrates that online social content is informative and allows users to evaluate content that attracts them to engage in these social interactions (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Herring, 2001). In this vein, social media use is not limited to just sharing content (e.g., pictures), networking with friends and strangers, but also provides avenues to continuously interact with brands and share experiences to deepen consumer-brand relationships (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Muntinga et al., 2011).

Tsai and Men (2017, p. 3) explain “social media communication is not only interactive but also participatory, collaborative, personal, and simultaneously communal”, which provides an avenue for firms to engage with customers and build “meaningful relationships”. Consequently, social media serves as a powerful tool to mediate the firm-consumer brand engagement practices. For the purposes of this work, we adopt Brodie et al.'s (2013, p. 107) working definition of consumer engagement as “a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community”. It is also worth noting that consumer brand engagement and brand relationship practices require some level of commitment on the part of the consumer (Hudson et al., 2016). Taking into account the multidimensionality of the brand engagement construct (including psychological, social and behavioural), it is imperative on the part of the firm to capture the strategic intent of social brand engagement and enhance customer relationship, brand knowledge, brand usage intent, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Abrantes et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016).

Thus, the objectives of this study are three-fold. First, the study examines the influence of social presence on social brand engagement. Second, to examine the moderating role of firm-generated content and consumer commitment on social brand engagement. Finally, to establish the relative effects of social brand engagement on brand usage intent and e-WOM. This study makes a number of significant contributions to the body of literature on social media and interactive marketing. First, we make a significant contribution to the literature on social presence, social brand engagement (SBE) and firm generated content (FGC), and shed light on the application of social presence theory to understand social brand engagement and its consequences. Second, this study contributes to the social media literature by establishing the moderating impact of FGC on social brand engagement and how this integrates with UGC to influence e-WOM and brand usage intent of consumers. Third, this study provides new perspectives into the conceptual understanding of brand engagement and contends that commitment on the part of the consumer moderates social brand engagement practices. Finally, the findings provide insights into the potential role of SBE and social presence in advancing the broader understanding of brand relationship management, brand engagement and social media research.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: first, we provide a review of the theory related to social presence, consumer brand engagement and firm generated content leading to model and hypotheses development. Next, we describe the research methodology and discuss the statistical results. Finally, the findings are presented, followed with discussion and implications for the theory and practice, and conclude with limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Social presence theory

Social media networks are social-virtual environments where individuals and groups communicate and share experiences. The social presence theory (SPT) evolved from the use of telecommunications and outlines how individuals engage in the use of social media as they see it as a form, behavior, or sensory experience that projects some form of intelligence and social acceptance (Tu, 2000). Tracing its roots in the “social psychological theories of interpersonal communication and symbolic interactionism”, the theory has been applied in the “context of mediated communication” (Cui et al., 2013, p. 662), which is also extended to social media research to explain the social presence concept (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Nowak, 2013). Social presence, originally used to assess how social context affects media choice, is defined as “degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (Short et al., 1976, p. 65). This suggests social presence bridges the perceived distance and projects some level of closeness between participants, which also depends on the media information richness (Cui et al., 2013). The social presence projects the feeling that one has some level of access or insight into the other's intentional, cognitive, or affective states (Biocca and Nowak, 2001; Nowak, 2013).

Although, social presence theory embodies social interactions, it is not a general theory of social cognition, rather it is a theory that sheds light on how technology could affect, distort, and enhance certain aspects of social cognition (Biocca and Harms, 2002). On this premise, Short et al. (1976) highlight two concepts associated with social presence to include: concept of “intimacy;” and concept of “immediacy”. While “intimacy is a function of eye contact, proximity, topic of conversation ... immediacy is the psychological distance between communicator and recipient” which is “generated verbally and non-verbally” (Tu, 2000, p. 28). This suggests that social presence contributes to the level of intimacy as a result of the social interactions, which allows consumers to convey immediacy or non-immediacy nonverbally (physical proximity, pictures, and facial expression) as well as verbally (Gunawardena, 1995).

Social presence has also been used to study user behaviours in social-virtual environments (Shen et al., 2010; Shen and Khalifa, 2008). Accordingly, Biocca and Harms (2002) conceptualise social presence into three levels that include; the perceptual level of awareness of co-presence with others, social presence typified by the subjective judgement which elaborates the psycho-behavioural accessibility of others, and the mutual social presence or the inter-subjective social presence that illuminates the dynamic interactions between participants. This conceptualisation aligns well with Short et al.'s (1976) unidimensional consideration of social presence as a subjective quality of the medium, which is determined by the perceptions of the social participants. While the subjective quality of the medium makes interactions more social and salient, this increases social presence on the part of the customer (Nowak, 2013), which is likely to enhance their brand engagement practices on social media.

2.2. Consumer brand engagement via social media

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) has generated an increased attention in both practice and research in recent times. Various authors have defined brand engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 154) conceptualise consumer brand engagement as “a consumer's positively valence cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions”. This definition is eclipsed in Brodie et al.'s (2013) definition of consumer engagement in which case, they

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7255606>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7255606>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)