

Research Paper (Mixed)

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Presenting the model of customer participation with brands in social media with emphasis on cultural differences

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Abstract

The aim of the current research is to present a model of customer participation with brands in social networks with an emphasis on cultural differences. The research method is applicable in terms of purpose, mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of execution method, exploratory in terms of nature, and descriptive and survey type in terms of information gathering and analysis method. The statistical population in the qualitative part includes 10 experts from the scientific community and academic specialists and experts of the top 500 companies in Iran based on the ranking of the Industrial Management Organization, who were selected purposefully; and in the quantitative part, it includes the managers of the top 500 companies in Iran based on the ranking of the industrial management organization, and the statistical sample will be selected from among the companies that have active accounts in social networks and considered as the statistical population; and based on Cochran's formula, 217 people were selected as a sample by random sampling method. Data analysis in the qualitative section is based on the content analysis method; and in the quantitative section, SPSS and PLS software are used. The results of the qualitative part show that this research includes 14 dimensions and 30 components, and the results of the quantitative part show that the dimensions and components of customer engagement with brands have an impact on social networks with an emphasis on cultural differences. Also, the results show a strong and very good fit of the model.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Organizations, with the intense competition in the markets and the understanding of the importance of keeping customers for organizations and at the same time as the customer orientation movement peaked, were gradually pushed to create and maintain long-term relationships with customers. Also, the emergence of new technologies such as information technology has had tremendous effects on various dimensions of the organization and has caused the emergence of an issue such as customer participation (Hosseini, 2020). Customer participation is a tool that can be used with the aim of helping organizations to establish interaction and retain customers. Using electronic customer participation and benefiting from its results can help to improve the quality level of the provided services more effectively, and subsequently, increase customer loyalty, trust and satisfaction (Mohammadi & Sohrabi, 2017). The brand includes instructions that lead to the desired perceiving of brand by the customer's mind and belief. It is important to note that the definition of the brand position and the mental image of the brand are completely different. The brand is an important thing in the development and promotion of the brand in the target market, because it will increase interest in the brand, more willingness to buy in the target market, and also increase brand loyalty (Koch & Gyrd-Jones, 2019). Brand is considered a promise and commitment from the organization to stakeholders, and a symbol that is presented to identify and differentiate products from competitors' products (Mirzaei et al, 2019). Culture, as a basis for determining values, is one of the most important factors affecting management. The nature of decision-making is also rooted in culture. Ignoring this role will result in lack of internal coherence and external compliance. In large organizations around the world, it is different who makes the decision, when the decision is made, and to what extent the decision is made in a rational way; therefore, when discussing individual methods in decision-making, the issue of culture should not be neglected (Shi'ezadeh et al, 2017).

Based on this, the current research is looking for an answer to this question: What is the pattern of customer participation with brands in social networks, considering cultural differences?

Theoretical Framework

Customer involvement

Customer participation is a key link to several measures of company success, including increasing revenue and customer loyalty and profitability. Significant links has been found between customer participation and business success (Taghiabadi et al, 2023).

Brand

Brand is a factor to create differentiation. It is not easy to make this distinction. In the past, quality was considered an advantage and distinction, but today, quality is a matter of course. Many similar products with different brands do the same thing for the consumer; therefore, the consumer looks for signs among a multitude of brands to encourage him to choose. This distinguishing sign is not functional features; rather, it is emotional and symbolic features, and brand personality can create such a distinction (Rasouli & Bayat, 2020).

Social Networks

Social networks are Internet-based communication and collaborative channels that have been widely used since 2005 for different purposes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Cultural differences

Culture can cause the formation and emergence of appropriate or inappropriate performance (Kasemsap, 2013). It determines how to perceive, think and react appropriately to internal and external environments (Shao, 2019). Culture in the last decade has been widely used in various research fields and has been recognized as one of the important factors guiding strategy formulation and implementation (Kavala et al, 2020).

Lopez et al, (2021) investigated the role of online brand community on customer relationship with the brand. The results showed that participation through the online brand community directly has a positive and significant effect on community participation and the desire to create cooperation with the brand name and positive word of mouth, and also has a positive indirect effect on brand loyalty. These results show that interaction through establishing online communities based on customer participation has a positive effect on product sales through online platforms.

Khademi et al, (2021) in their study investigated the cooperation in branding through the cooperative motivation of customers in digital media. The results of the research showed that customer participation motivation in social networking sites has a positive and significant effect on customer participation in brand communities, customer participation on brand trust and brand loyalty. Meanwhile, brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty, and brand trust and loyalty also have a positive and significant effect on brand co-creation. Finally, brand trust moderates the relationship between customer involvement and brand loyalty.

Research methodology

The research method is applicable in terms of purpose, mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of execution method, exploratory in terms of nature, and descriptive and survey type in terms of information gathering and analysis method. The statistical population in the qualitative part includes 10 experts from the scientific community and academic specialists and experts of the top 500 companies in Iran based on the ranking of the Industrial Management Organization, who were selected purposefully; and in the quantitative part, it includes the managers of the top 500 companies in Iran based on the ranking of the industrial management organization, and the statistical sample will be selected from among the companies that have active accounts in social networks and considered as the statistical population; and based on Cochran's formula, 217 people were selected as a sample by random sampling method

Research findings

Data analysis in the qualitative section is based on the content analysis method, and in the quantitative section, SPSS and PLS software are used. The results of the qualitative part show that this research includes 14 dimensions and 30 components, and the results of the quantitative part show that the dimensions and components of customer engagement with brands have an impact on social networks with an emphasis on cultural differences. Also, the results show a strong and very good fit of the model.

Conclusion

The current research has been done with the aim of providing a model of customer participation with brands in social networks with an emphasis on cultural differences. The results of this research are in agreement with the results of Savadkoohi Qudjanki & Zarbakhsh Bahri (2022), Yazdani Kachuei et al, (2022), Lopez et al, (2021), Khademi et al, (2021),

Nasrollahi et al, (2020), Mashhadizadeh & Saedi (2020), and Li et al, (2020). Lopez et al, (2021) showed that participation through online brand community directly has a positive and significant effect on community participation and the desire to create cooperation with the brand and positive word of mouth, as well as a positive indirect effect on brand loyalty. These results show that interaction through establishing online communities based on customer participation has a positive effect on product sales through online platforms.

According to the results of the research, the following suggestions are presented:

It is suggested that in order to have a successful branding, you must constantly create positive experiences for your customers because branding is the result of fulfilling your promises; the result of gaining customers' trust that your brand will do its best to fulfill what they want or expect from you. This trust leads to your brand being chosen again by them. It is suggested to choose a diversified product development strategy because it is a combination of existing products and existing brands, in which case some product characteristics such as color, taste, shape, size and packaging will change. Even the components of the product may change slightly.