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WHAT TAKES CONSUMERS TO DEVELOP BRAND ADVOCACY ON FACEBOOK

Case
Study

Keywords

*Brand advocacy,
Brand trust,
Brand tribalism
Brand attitude
Negative word-of-mouth*

JEL Classification

M31

Abstract

The role that social media is playing nowadays makes users' spreading electronic word-of-mouth much more easier. The present research aimed to determine the influence of brand attitude on brand advocacy. Previous research has shown that product performance, altruism (concern for helping others) and need for social interactions are major antecedents of eWOM communication. A self-administrated questionnaire with a visual stimulus was used to collect data from 108 Romanian Facebook users. The results indicate that brand trust and brand tribalism are important antecedents of brand attitude. Online brand advocacy depends on the trust the consumers have on that brand and the status of members of their brand tribe, thus the ambassadors would promote the brand from their own initiative. Believing that a certain brand can help consumers improve their status in the community or society is a powerful factor that motivates online users to become brand advocates.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has led more and more people to communicate with others via Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other online channels (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). According to Miller and Lammas (2010), social media facilitates *word-of-mouth* (WOM), which is an informal advice passed between consumers, usually interactive, swift, and lacking in commercial bias, having a powerful influence on consumer behavior (East et al., 2008). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) identified four main motives why people express online opinions: social benefits (*altruists*), economic incentives (*self-interested helpers*), concern for others (*consumer advocates*), and extraversion/self-enhancement (*multiple-motive consumers*).

Stauss (2000) defines *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM) as "the positive or negative statement made by a potential, actual or former customer about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions on the Internet", thus having an important influence of consumers' product evaluation. Prospective customers read online reviews from other customers (eWOM) to learn more about a product before making a purchase (Doh and Hwang, 2009). Chen and Xie (2008) argued that online consumer review can be a new element of communication mix and work as free sales assistants to help consumers identify the products they need. When a high-involvement product is promoted, gossipers are more willing to participate in eWOM (Okazaki et al., 2013).

Negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) has to do with product denigration, unpleasant experiences and private complaining (Anderson, 1998). Similar results have been obtained by Zoghلامي et al. (2016), who showed that NWOM can make customers boycott brands, products and companies. Ruane and Wallace (2015) found that loyalty and WOM are likelier among consumers who use self-expressive brands since they are more individualistic people and aim to positively differentiate themselves from others through their purchasing. King et al. (2014) summarized the antecedents of eWOM and the consequences for both sender and receiver of these messages (see Table 1).

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Brand trust

Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) have shown that brand reputation emerges as an important antecedent of trust and perceived ease of use of an online brand. Trust influences customers' intentions to engage in online experiences (Eastlic et al., 2006),

since consumers form stronger relationships with brands that they trust and feel satisfied with (Veloutsou, 2007). Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003) determined that trust is important for marketers to consider to because trust influences positive word of mouth. Online users write openly about values, meanings, and feelings and also deem the postings of other consumers more trustworthy than those of the marketing professionals (Kulmala et al., 2013).

Brand tribalism

Strong brand relationships have been characterized as tribes (Cova and Cova, 2002) and considered to have greater value to a marketer than those with a weak sense of community (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001). A study on brand relationship from Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) suggested that brand tribalism is more important than brand reputation in the formation of relationships. Engaging in WOM within a group environment also serves to strengthen membership of the brand tribe (Ruane and Wallace, 2015).

According to Muniz and O'guinn (2001), a brand community is based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand, representing a form of consumer agency, an important information resource for consumers, and provide wider social benefits to its members. A key component of brand tribes is that they are organically and willingly formed through individual identification with a brand, being influenced by factors such as perceived brand authenticity, experiences felt through interaction with the brand and a collective sense of belonging within a group (Tuominen, 2011). Badrinayanan et al. (2014) stated that the antecedents of brand tribalism are challenge and telepresence (which, after Sheridan (1992, p. 120), is the "sense of being physically present with virtual object(s) at the remote teleoperator site"), cognitive and affective involvement, and commitment, while intent to purchase, recruitment of others, and WOM are consequences of brand tribalism.

Ruane and Wallace (2015) noted the term "brand tribalism" refers to the existence of "micro-groups" formed by members who share emotions, ideals, and visions within a specific sub-culture, signaling their belongingness to their group through symbolic gestures, like consuming certain brands. Consumer tribes are defined as "people who are devoted to a particular brand" (Arnould et al., 2004 as cited in Taute and Sierra, 2014).

Brand attitude

Usually, consumers compare products before choosing, tending to switch the attitude that was previously formed due to comparison results. So people may respond to information about a product by changing their feelings (attitude and satisfaction), their thinking (cognitions) and their intention (East et al., 2016).

Brand advocacy

For Fullerton (2005), satisfaction with the brand is positively related to advocacy intentions for the brand. When a consumer becomes connected to a brand, this connection can lead to advocacy for the brand, one of the outcomes resulting from this form of customer loyalty being the act of spreading positive word-of-mouth about the brand (Gremler, 1995; Anderson, 1998). Rageh Ismail and Spinelli (2012) linked brand love, brand personality and brand image to word-of-mouth (WOM) as an outcome of the relationship with a brand - a desire of the recommend it to friends and relatives. This is consistent with Lovett et al. findings (2013) that consumers spread WOM for brands as a result of three drivers: social (expressing uniqueness, self-enhancement, desire to socialize), emotional (share, express or ease emotional arousal), and functional (need to obtain and tendency to provide information).

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Research aim

Since 1964 and until today, *Rom* brand become part of the Romanian history. In 2011, PR McCann Erickson agency created the American Rom advertising campaign, showing a rebrand which implied changing the packaging from the Romanian flag to the American. The ad caused huge controversy and mass media coverage, eventually everything proved to be just a hoax.

The aim of the present study was to investigate if posting negative news related to brand product would arouse adverse emotions to Facebook users, making them spread NWOM, possibly switching their buying intentions and damaging the brand image. The purpose of the research was to determine to what extent this positive attitude predicts the brand advocacy, i.e. the subjects' willingness to like the ROM brand Facebook posts about to spread the word about this brand in the social networks. Our hypothesis was that brand advocacy is significantly influenced by the brand attitude.

Based on the above literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Brand tribalism relates positively to consumers' attitude towards the brand.

H2: Brand trust will have a direct positive effect on consumers' attitude towards the brand.

H3: Consumers' attitude towards the brand has a significant influence on brand advocacy.

The model that we have elaborated in order to test these hypotheses can be seen in Figure 1.

Procedure and participants

In the preliminary research (Chiosa & Anastasiei, 2017), we created three negative stimuli (as Facebook posts), and asked the participants to

evaluate them. The first stimulus sought to offend the Romanian people, using an ironic tone ("Romanians are lazy"). The second one was designed to offend the consumer by introducing a new packaging for a minority (Roma - "Romani have their chocolate, too"). In the Romanian society, where minorities are often discriminated against and rejected, associating the ROM chocolate with the Roma minority can be offensive for many people. Finally, the third stimulus described a case of food poisoning caused by an ingredient contained by the chocolate.

The results indicated that the third message had the highest emotional impact, so it was retained for the study. Subsequently, a fake Facebook post for the 'ROM authentic' page was created, containing the status "*We apologize for any inconvenience! The lot in question was withdrawn. Thank you for understanding!*" and the link from an article, having as title "*42 children from Bucharest were hospitalized because of a substance contained by Rom chocolate*". The poster article link (seemingly posted online on *adevarul.ro*, the website of a prominent Romanian newspaper) mentioned that "*too much sorbitol, contained in the Rom chocolate bars, can cause hives, rhinitis, asthma, retinopathy, cataracts and peripheral neuropathy, swelling of the lips, Porphyria and even anaphylactic shock.*"

We also wanted to find if seeing other people reactions, made through comments, would influence users to hate the brand, thus spreading negative WOM and switching their intentions to purchase. In order to do that, the stimulus was showing the Facebook post incident *with* ten comments from users (see Figure 2). A self-administrated questionnaire with a visual stimulus was used to collect data from Romanian Facebook users (convenience sample).

Measures

We measured four variables before the exposure to the stimulus (*brand advocacy, brand tribalism, brand trust, brand attitude*). All the variables were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The scales used in details can be found in Table 2.

The analyses used the following procedures: the exploratory factor analysis (executed with the IBM SPSS package), the confirmatory factor analysis and the path analysis (performed using the AMOS software).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Most of the subjects in our sample (60.2%) were aged between 18 and 26 years, while 37% were aged between 26 and 48 years. The average respondent age is 28.5 years and the median age is 25 years.

The items that compose each scale (construct) were aggregated by average. For each construct, the mean, standard error and 95% confidence interval were computed. For the four constructs measured before the exposure to the stimulus, these statistics can be found in Table 3.

All the constructs show high average scores, especially brand attitude (4.65) and brand trust (4.59). For the brand tribalism the average is a bit lower (3.61). Hence most of the respondents consider that ROM is a good, trustworthy brand and, to some extent, a brand that correspond to their image and their way to see life.

On the other hand, the brand advocacy level is small on average (2.81). Therefore, even though people do not violently hate the brand ROM, they are not very willing to give it Facebook likes and positive recommendations either.

Measurement model

Before building our structural model (presented in Figure 1) we have performed an exploratory and a confirmatory factor analysis in order to test and refine our measurement model.

The goal of the exploratory factor analysis, executed with the IBM SPSS statistics software, was to identify and eliminate the variables that had poor loadings on their factors and those that presented important cross-loadings (i.e. that loaded on two or more factors). As a result of this analysis we have removed four variables that composed the brand trust factor, four variables that composed the brand tribalism factor and one variable that belonged to the brand advocacy factor. The final EFA model had a very good sample adequacy (KMO=0.881) and the Bartlett's sphericity test is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). In conclusion, our model fits the data satisfactorily.

In order to validate this model further we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using the IBM Amos program. The cutoff values we have used to assess the goodness-of-fit for the CFA model were: for the χ^2/df ratio – between 1 and 5, for the comparative fit index (CFI) – 0.900, for the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) – 0.900, for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) – 0.08. Our measurement model resulted to be valid, given that all the indicators fell within the cutoff limits: $\chi^2/df=1.667$, CFI=0.961, TLI=0.949, RMSEA=0.079.

The summary data for the confirmatory factor analysis (path coefficients, t values, standard errors, Cronbach's alphas and average variance explained) can be inspected in Table 4.

All the path coefficients are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (the t values are greater than 1.96), which means that the latent factors explain very well their corresponding observed items. Moreover, all the latent factors have a very good internal consistency (the Cronbach alpha values are higher than 0.800). Our measurement

model only has one issue: the small AVE value of the brand advocacy (under 0.500), which indicates a low convergent validity for this factor. However, since the path loadings are significant and the internal consistency is good, we decided to retain this factor for the causal model regardless.

Structural model

To test our causal model, a path analysis was performed with the IBM Amos software. The goodness-of-fit indicators for this model were very good: $\chi^2/df=0.996$, CFI=0.999, TLI=0.998, RMSEA=0.001. The path loadings (coefficients) are presented in Table 5.

As one could see, the hypotheses concerning the relationship between the variables are verified – all the coefficients are statistically significant. In consequence (see Figure 3), if people trust the brand and identify with it, chances are they will develop a positive attitude towards it. That positive attitude will translate into a high brand advocacy, i.e. an inclination to like and recommend products on Facebook. We will examine these results in more detail in the next section.

CONCLUSIONS

We have identified in this paper the factors that determine consumers to become brand advocates (or, in other words, brand ambassadors). The most important factor is the positive attitude towards the brand, which is influenced by the trust consumers have in brand and by the consciousness that they belong to a group of people that share the same feelings about the brand. People cannot develop a positive attitude towards a brand without trusting it and identifying with it. The path coefficient for trust is greater than the coefficient for tribalism ($B=0.608$ and $B=0.295$, respectively), indicating that trust has a stronger influence on attitude. Therefore, the most important condition for getting a favorable brand attitude is to be convinced that the brand has its consumers' interest at heart: it offers good products that would not endanger the customers in any way and is sincere when communicating with the customers. There is a significant connection between trust and tribalism (the Pearson correlation coefficient for these two latent variables is 0.7171). In conclusion, customers who trust the brand will also feel bound to it and consider that the brand fits their lifestyle.

Furthermore, the belief that using that brand can help them improve their status in the community or society is a powerful factor that motivates users to become brand advocates. The results indicated that consumers with a positive brand attitude will be inclined to spread messages about the brand, to recommend it in the social network. In other words, the positive word-of-mouth is mainly provided by

the people who like the brand, which is not surprising at all. However, the path coefficient it is not as high as one would expect ($B=0.243$). So the influence of brand attitude on brand advocacy, though significant, is not particularly strong. Many consumers who do like and trust the ROM brand may not talk about it online. Uncovering the hidden causes of this result is beyond the aim of this study. However, a possible explanation is that brand advocacy could be strongly influenced by some other factors, like customer's personality traits (for example, extroverted people are more willing to talk about their favorite brands than shy and reserved people) and customer's engagement on Facebook (users who spend a lot of time online and interact frequently with their friends are more willing to talk about brands they like and recommend them to other users).

Limitations further research and managerial implications

The limitations of this study reside in the fact that it was conducted on Romanian subjects only, and it aimed at a particular type of brand. Future studies may try to cover a bigger population of consumers, from different countries, and focus on other types of product brands, as well as services. The most important direction for further research is to discover extrinsic factors that motivate people to spread word-of-mouth about brands in the social networks, beyond the variables discussed in this paper. One way to do that would be to define sub-groups of consumers according to their personality types, brand engagement, Facebook engagement etc. and test our model on these sub-groups separately in order to ascertain the relationships between our variable in each group.

Social media allow people to gather and be part of online communities, where they can talk about products and services, either recommend them or tell people to avoid them. These word-of-mouth conversations are spread much faster than before, being accessible to a much larger audience. A positive perceived brand image will lead to positive recommendations in the online networks, even if there is no kind of reward for these recommendations. The managerial implications suggest that communication with consumers on Facebook (and other social networks) should play a crucial role. That means more than listen to the users and talk to them – the brand managers should create veritable online communities of brand fans, nurture the “community spirit”, make them proud to be brand enthusiasts and encourage them to spread the word about the brand. Furthermore, the brand management should aim to address each customer depending on their lifestyle. A psychographic segmentation would help relate the brand features and benefits to the customers' personal values – this

way, the brand would become each customer's personal brand.

Note

This research was independent from Kandia Dulce company.

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ANNEXES

Table No. 1
eWOM antecedents and consequences

	Antecedents of eWOM	Consequences to the eWOM
Sender	Self-Enhancement Consumer psychographics Product/Retailer performance Altruism/Concern for others Need for social interaction	Enhanced product learning Impression management Social capital and reputation
Receiver	Search/Evaluation efforts Risk reduction Social assurance Leisure activity	Product ROI Willingness-to-pay Trust and loyalty

Source: Adaptation after King et al., 2014: 169.

Table No. 2
Scales and items

Variables	Items	Author(s)
Brand tribalism	ROM is right for me. ROM fits my image. ROM is related to the way I perceive life. Wherever I go, ROM is present. I know of many people who use ROM. I know that people feel good about ROM.	Veloutsou and Moutinko (2009)
Brand trust	I think that ROM usually fulfils the commitments it assumes. I think that the information offered by ROM is sincere and honest. ROM does not make false statements. I think that the design and commercial offer of ROM take into account the desires and needs of its users. I think that ROM takes into account the repercussions that their actions could have on the consumer. I think that the advice and recommendations given on ROM are made in search of mutual benefit. I think that ROM is concerned with the present and future interests of its users. I think that ROM would not do anything intentional that would prejudice the user. I think that ROM has the necessary abilities to make good chocolate bars. I think that ROM has sufficient experience in the marketing of the products and services that it offers. I think that ROM has the necessary resources to successfully carry out its activities.	Flavián and Guinaliu (2006)
Attitude	I like the idea of purchasing ROM chocolate bars. I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is an intelligent idea.	Taylor and Todd (1995)

	<p>I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is a good idea.</p> <p>I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is a pleasant experience.</p> <p>I want to take vengeance upon ROM.</p> <p>My contributions help me to shake off frustration about bad companies.</p> <p>I like to get anger off my chest.</p>	
Brand advocacy	<p>I "Like" posts of ROM in order to talk up the brand to my friends.</p> <p>I "Like" posts of ROM as it enhances my Facebook profile.</p> <p>I "Like" posts of ROM in order to spread the good word about this brand.</p> <p>I give ROM a lot of positive word of mouth online.</p> <p>I recommend ROM to friends and family on Facebook.</p> <p>I would like to try new products introduced under ROM.</p> <p>If the maker of ROM brand did something I didn't like, I would be willing to give it another chance.</p> <p>I will probably not buy ROM in the future.</p> <p>I will definitely not purchase again ROM in the future.</p>	Wallace et al. (2014)

Table No. 3
Summary statistics

Construct	Mean	Std. error	Confidence interval (95%)
Brand advocacy	2.81	0.14	2.51 – 3.10
Brand tribalism	3.61	0.15	3.31 – 3.91
Brand trust	4.59	0.15	4.29 – 4.90
Brand attitude	4.65	0.16	4.31 – 4.98

Table No. 4
Summary indicators of the measurement model

Constructs and items	Loading	CR (t-value)	SE	α	AVE
Brand trust	-	-	-	0.971	0.641
ROM does not make false statements.	1.000	-	-	-	-
I think that ROM usually fulfils the commitments it assumes.	0.889	12.959	0.069	-	-
I think that the information offered by ROM is sincere and honest.	0.948	21.237	0.045	-	-
I think that the design and commercial offer of ROM take into account the desires and needs of its users.	0.958	19.961	0.056	-	-
I think that ROM takes into account the repercussions that their actions could have on the consumer.	0.961	17.132	0.056	-	-
I think that the advice and recommendations given on ROM are made in search of mutual benefit.	1.009	18.410	0.055	-	-

I think that ROM is concerned with the present and future interests of its users.	0.981	16.678	0.059	-	-
Brand tribalism	-	-	-	0.927	0.635
ROM fits my image.	1.000	-	-	-	-
ROM is related to the way I perceive life.	0.931	13.290	0.070	-	-
Brand attitude	-	-	-	0.953	0.604
I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is an intelligent idea.	1.000	-	-	-	-
I like the idea of purchasing ROM chocolate bars.	0.996	25.611	0.039	-	-
I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is a good idea.	0.949	20.009	0.047	-	-
I think that purchasing ROM chocolate bars is a pleasant experience.	0.739	12.112	0.061	-	-
Brand advocacy	-	-	-	0.860	0.367
I "Like" posts of ROM in order to spread the good word about this brand.	1.000	-	-	-	-
I "Like" posts of ROM as it enhances my Facebook profile.	0.540	6.559	0.082	-	-
I "Like" posts of ROM in order to talk up the brand to my friends.	1.080	6.281	0.172	-	-
I recommend ROM to friends and family on Facebook.	1.334	7.025	0.190	-	-
I would like to try new products introduced under ROM.	0.976	6.345	0.154	-	-
If the maker of ROM brand did something I didn't like, I would be willing to give it another chance.	1.019	6.361	0.160	-	-

Table No. 5
Path loadings for the causal model

Hypothesis	Path	Loading	P
H1	Brand tribalism → Brand attitude	0.295	<0.001
H2	Brand trust → Brand attitude	0.608	<0.001
H3	Brand attitude → Brand advocacy	0.243	<0.001

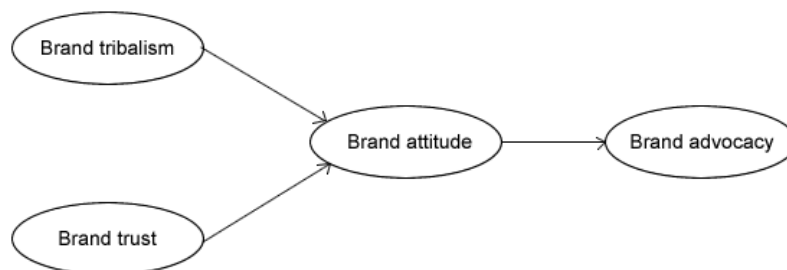


Figure No.1 Conceptual model of brand advocacy



- Comment 1: Those who made the mistake have to pay quickly!!!
 Comment 2: Poor baby ...
 Comment 3: God forbid! These poor little children are not guilty of anything!
 Comment 4: Parents need to sue the company! Absolutely!!
 Comment 5: Sorry?? They are only sorry? What nerve! That's all they can do, after they put children in hospital??
 Comment 6: Oh! Among those children is my little nephew ... such a big pain!
 Comment 7: God forbid something like this! One can put children's lives in danger for a chocolate? :(
 Comment 8: Let them pay, motherfuckers! Haven't they checked what kind of ingredients are putting in?!
 Comment 9: You've lost your mind!! One can't even eat chocolate? What does Consumer Protection do, is it sleeping?
 Comment 10: I think that ROM is one of those organizations that aim to reduce population through toxic ingredients ... Shame on you! I will never buy from you again!

Figure No.2 Facebook post with comments from users

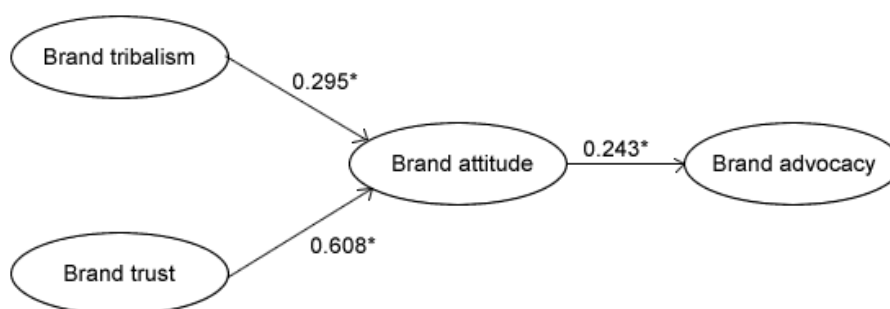


Figure No.3 Structural model of brand advocacy