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Providing a framework for examining the impact of social media on maintaining the quality of brand relationships

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Abstract

Brands are strengthening their position in social media environments, so customer expectations are also rising. Therefore, it promotes the development of technology in helping the interaction process. Understanding the ways in which brands can maintain face-to-face characteristics and the quality of intimate relationships has been provided by social media, while meeting customer expectations has become essential amid the growing volume of interactions. In this paper we provide a framework for examining the impact of social media on maintaining the quality of brand relationships. The statistical population of this research includes experts and experts in the field of branding and marketing in chain stores of Shahrivand province of Tehran. The method of data collection in this research is the use of questionnaires as well as the use of library information and referring to the documents in scientific and valid articles and understanding and inferring from this information. The mean test was calculated on the main and specific hypotheses in SPSS22 software and at a confidence level of 0.95. Intervention analysis shows that this feeling related to the brand goes beyond the interaction itself and increases the feeling of loyalty and desire to provide information to the brand. Evidence from this research shows that when customers are aware of the possibility of automating the brand's social media response, these effects may not be sustained. These results provide marketers with theoretical guidance for promoting relationships in social media environments.

Keywords: Brand, marketing, social media, chain stores, brand relationships.

1. Introduction:

Recent advances in information technology have led to the emergence of attractive virtual spaces such as social networks, which are expanding day by day and provide an arena for the promotion of goods and services of manufacturers. With the advancement of Internet technology, companies are using social networking sites to promote and disseminate information about their brand. Social networks have changed traditional marketing communications [1]. Internet users are gradually forming business connections, which in the traditional form were formed by marketers. In most developed countries of the world, social networks are widely used and cover almost all aspects of people's lives, and the organizers of these networks have been able to use these tools in the best way, and the producers of products and services have been able to use the information obtained from these networks [2]. To strengthen brand trust and loyalty in the customer. Social networks offer new ways to communicate with businesses and consumers. Businesses can overcome the geographical constraints of consumers by creating a public space on the Internet where users can interact with each other [3]. Nowadays, brand communities have become very widespread on social media. Among social networks, Facebook has the most users; Recent forecasts, however, suggest that this figure will decline in the near future. Twitter ranks second in social media in terms of number of users; Nevertheless, networks attract the attention of companies that can create brand communities and achieve the highest growth rate among social networks [4]. However, in our country, social networks have not been able to find their desired place in people's lives, and moreover, culture has not been created in this field, and producers of products and services cannot use these networks properly and a lot. Thus, despite the competition between Iranian companies in attracting customers, such companies still do not use the Internet, especially social

networks to attract customers. The reason for this could be the ignorance of the manufacturers of this tool [5]. This issue has become the main problem in building customer trust and loyalty to the brand in social networks. In e-commerce, trust is the most important factor for success. It should be said that according to previous studies, the recommendations of acquaintances and online opinions of consumers (word of mouth) is the most reliable type of advertising in the world and the most important source of information to decide to buy. Nowadays, people consider word of mouth created in virtual social networks as a new communication medium [6].

Because of the popularity and importance of virtual social networks in connecting different people and businesses, some industry experts and researchers encourage businesses to participate in social networks and enjoy its benefits. On the other hand, some people consider brands as uninvited guests on social networks. Social media works for people, not brands. So the question of how to use social media for branding activities is still unresolved. This research also seeks to understand how individual identity and social identity affect brand communities and also how brand communities build trust and loyalty to a brand through brand community subscriptions [7].

2. Theoretical foundations and research background

2.1. Brand community

The brand community includes specialized and non-geographical communities and is an organized group among consumers of a particular brand who have a common desire for a particular brand and are jointly involved in group activities to achieve collective goals. Many companies tend to develop their own brand communities; Because membership in such communities' increases brand preference and also increases word of mouth advertising and creates the maximum opportunity to attract and work closely with highly loyal consumers.

In the brand community, consumers are very motivated to exchange, share and discuss ideas and contribute greatly to the promotion of products and services; At the same time, it plays an important role in increasing consumer brand loyalty [8]. The social relationships created in the brand community increase the lifespan of consumer loyalty. The brand community literature focuses on the consumer's relationship with the product, the brand, its interaction with other topics such as product, company and other consumers, key factors in developing loyalty. In the existing literature, these communities are referred to as the ultimate goal of brand loyalty and are considered a powerful tool for marketers to strengthen the relationship between consumers and their products as well as increase brand equity [9]. The brand consumption experience strengthens the consumer's knowledge of the brand. Similarly, through the brand community, we can share the well-known brand of consumers and strengthen the relationship between members of the brand community, expand perception for the brand, its products and the company. In general, brand communities lead to increased emotional commitment to the brand, loyalty to the community and lack of loyalty to competing brands, word of mouth and brand image [10].

The goal of companies in creating a brand community is not just to convince consumers to buy, but also to make consumers loyal to the brand. Companies also find it helpful to join the brand community because of its many practical benefits, including obtaining unique offers and ideas from customers. Brand communities change consumer relationships with the brand through active collaboration to create and share brand-related content, as well as by connecting with partners and other brands. The sustainability of brand communities depends on the exchange relationship between the brand and consumers (members). This exchange relationship, in turn, depends on a wide range of strategic factors such as marketing and consumer behavior. Marketing managers need to make sure

that the brand community has relevant and meaningful content in the consumer's self-concept [11].

Today, the concept of brand society is tied to the media. Brands go beyond geography; Because media transcends geographical constraints, technology has almost eliminated geographical constraints. Social networks play a key role in building relationships between existing and potential customers to create an environment that strengthens the relationship between the customer and the brand and identify ways to enhance that relationship, all without geographical constraints. Therefore, with the advent of new technologies such as the Internet and social networks, it is necessary for businesses and customers to understand the ways to take advantage of technology and the brand community [12].

2.2. Trust in cyberspace

Although trust is important in the real world, it is much more important in cyberspace because trust plays a special role under conditions of change and instability. When there are no traditional laws, policies, criteria, rules and principles, people turn to personal relationships that the quality of these relationships is largely determined by the level of trust [13]. The issue of customer trust underpins the success of e-commerce has gained widespread acceptance; In various studies, distrust is one of the major obstacles to the underdevelopment of e-commerce. However, despite the increasing use of the Internet in Iran, e-commerce and online shopping are less common in the country and people are very welcome to buy products and services online from institutions and organizations that have provided facilities and facilities. Has not been. Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to the spread of e-commerce in Iran is the distrust of the people on the one hand and the unfamiliarity of institutions active in this field with trust-building mechanisms [14].

2.3. Brand loyalty

Nowadays, the concept of loyalty is a complex multidimensional concept. Measuring a single variable (for example, repeat purchases) creates an incomplete approach. Brand loyalty has become an important issue in marketing and consumer research and its importance as a consumer behavior phenomenon has a great impact on the financial performance of the business [15]. Customer loyalty to a brand consists of two steps; In the first stage, when the customer achieves positive experiences and information about the brand, he reaches a cognitive concept. This cognitive concept occurs when the brand's performance compares well with existing standards. In the second stage, when a consumer becomes emotionally involved with the brand, this loyalty becomes an emotional feeling. Loyalty is a reflection of the consumer's desire to buy, repurchase, and recommend the brand to others [16]. Finally, loyalty refers to the repetition of brand purchases. In fact, loyalty is a link between relative attitudes and repetitive shopping patterns. Loyalty is a behavior that occurs over time and is a function of psychological processes. Brand loyalty is a deep commitment to repurchasing and maintaining and preferring a brand continuously in the future, which, despite the efforts of other brand marketers to change behavior, continues to be a repeat purchase of the brand. Brand loyalty is often synonymous with repeat purchases; But brand loyalty goes beyond repetitive buying behavior and means a real commitment to a particular brand [17]. Although most authors focus on repeat purchases to measure loyalty, loyalty is measured by the ratio of purchases assigned to a brand. Customer loyalty is a psychological process and behavioral manifestation. In fact, loyalty is the interaction between attitude and repetition of consumer buying behavior. Brand loyalty has certain marketing benefits such as reduced marketing costs, attracting more new customers and greater business leverage [18]. In addition, brand loyalty is a prerequisite for a company's competitiveness and profitability.

Therefore, brand loyalty is one of the ways to measure customer satisfaction with the performance of products or services of companies. Customer loyalty to the brand indicates consumer satisfaction with the quality and price of the brand's products and services [19]. Brand loyalty is an attitude that refers to repetitive purchases, willingness to pay premiums or willingness to pay more to get the brand, positive and favorable word of mouth about the brand. Brand loyalty and perceived value are key factors that shape the benefits of business in fierce global competition and strategically strengthen the value chain and differentiate the product. Perceived value is critical to brand loyalty; Because it represents the overall evaluation of people of a brand based on a psychological perception of what they have received and what they have given [20]. An effective way to increase perceived value and brand loyalty in consumers has been to improve social factors such as social identity, social validation, and improve personal traits such as consumer innovation and consumer effectiveness [21].

2.4. Individual identity and social identity with the brand

Brand identity is the psychological condition of understanding the brand, feelings or value that the consumer attaches to belonging to the brand. The most important and unique characteristics of the brand are reflected in the brand identity. Basically, the brand identity is what the brand is trying to show that it should have a permanent and long-term nature [22]. The internal characteristics of the organization such as mission, ethics, values, goals and culture are reflected in the brand identity. Brand identity reflects the meaning of the brand, the purpose and the image of the brand. In sum, brand identity is created and transmitted to the consumer through management activities. Brand identity is usually based on specific and enduring characteristics that managers want to develop [23]. If people perceive that the brand has characteristics that are related

to their personality traits, they consider the brand as their representative in society. Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that brand planners and designers want to create. These associations are what the brand implies and the promise it makes to customers. In fact, the essence of branding is that companies strive to create brands with strong, desirable and unique associations [24]. The key point in the success of marketing strategies is understanding and paying special attention to the development of brand identity. Brand identity is a key element of branding, and the core of any successful brand is understanding how to create and develop a brand identity [25]. The importance of brand identity can be expressed in such a way that when consumers pay a lot of attention to brand quality and competitors can easily copy and imitate product features, creating a strong brand identity to create brand equity is very important and valuable. Therefore, identifying the dimensions of brand identity, in the position of factors of development and differentiation of influential brand in markets, is important.

H1a: Individual identity has a positive effect on brand society.

H1b: Social identity has a positive effect on brand society.

2.5. The effects of social network based on brand society on community subscriptions

Society has been a hot topic among social scientists and philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After reviewing social studies, some researchers have defined three main common components in society, these three components are common awareness, common customs and traditions, and moral responsibility or obligations to society [26]. Awareness is an important factor in society and a common inner feeling among members of society. This awareness is a kind of thinking and way of thinking and goes beyond a common attitude or common perceptions and shows a different social sense from other members of

society. Common customs and traditions are the factor that unites the members of a community and reflects the vital social processes that members of the community bring and maintain [27]. Etiquettes and traditions are a symbolic form of communication that according to the satisfaction of community members from experiences, through repetition over time become a systematic way and play an important role in building community identity. Social commitment is the sense of duty or social commitment in the position of a whole as well as to the members of that society [28]. Ethical responsibilities have two main functions and functions in society, which are of great importance. First, supporting the survival of society by reasoning and recognizing what is right and wrong in society, which leads to the integration and preservation of members of society. According to the presented contents, **H2a**, **H2b** and **H2c** hypotheses are presented as follows:

H2: The brand community in social media has a positive and significant effect on (a) shared awareness among community members, (b) shared customs and traditions, and (c) moral responsibilities.

2.6. Ways of interacting with society

Community members can be empowered in a variety of ways to increase their interaction with the brand community. These practices include highlighting and documenting important events in the brand community [29]. The concept of interaction goes beyond social participation. Interaction is a process of working together with related partners who share common goals and interests; However, some researchers believe that the Internet, a global website, and a new technology are increasingly separating people from meaningful relationships, and that people are spending more time online [30-33]; But others reject the idea, saying that online communication has the potential to speed up social networking, especially for people who use the Internet community to explore the

benefits and data collection. Therefore, it is believed that communities on social networks will have the capacity to interact faster. Therefore, **H3a**, **H3b** and **H3c** hypotheses are presented as follows:

H3: Methods of interaction with society have a positive and significant effect on (a) shared awareness among members of society, (b) shared customs and traditions, and (c) moral responsibilities.

2.7. Using the brand

Brand usage methods are related to a user's desire to help other users by providing newer and more advanced ways to use the brand. These practices include providing information from one member to another, with the goal of personalizing the product to better suit their needs [34-37]. These practices are also related to a user's feelings about helping other relatively new members of the brand community. Ways to use the brand include training to personalize, to commodify. All these activities lead to more use of the brand. Social media strengthens the convenience of sharing information and resources of these activities by establishing communication between the devotees of the brand and other members and creating them. In view of the above, the hypotheses **H4a**, **H4b** and **H4c** are as follows:

H4: The use of the brand has a positive and significant effect on (a) common awareness among members of society (b) common customs and traditions and (c) moral responsibilities.

2.8. Trust and brand loyalty

According to researchers, brand society One of the main functions in a brand society is to create customer loyalty to the brand. However, despite the qualitative evidence, it is not yet clear how the process of loyalty in brand societies occurs [38]. Many researchers consider the power of the Internet as a

social structure in building and increasing trust and brand loyalty. It is argued that the brand community on social media increases brand loyalty by increasing brand trust [39-41]. As social media capabilities increase, brand trust and then brand loyalty increase; Therefore, trust in the brand plays a mediating role. Trust in the brand means the willingness of consumers to rely on the brand's ability to perform. Trust reduces information uncertainty and asymmetry, and consumers will feel good about the brand [42-45]. In the writings of researchers, repetition of interactions and long-term relationships have been introduced as key factors in building brand trust. Ways of interacting with the community and using the brand increase the level of interaction between consumers and the product, brand, consumers and other marketers who are all elements of the brand community. Based on these topics, **H5** and **H6** hypotheses are proposed:

H5: How you interact with the community has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

H6: Brand use has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

Much research has been done on the positive effect of trust on loyalty in the online and offline fields. Brand trust is one of the main branches of brand loyalty. Hypothesis **H7** is therefore presented as follows:

H7: Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

3. Research Method:

Statistical population: The statistical population of this research includes experts and experts in the field of branding and marketing in chain stores of Shahrivand province of Tehran.

The sample size formulas and procedures used for categorical data are very similar, but some variations do exist. Since the data are qualitatively and the number of statistical community is unlimited, so the sample size calculation formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 p_0 (1-p_0)}{\epsilon^2} \quad (1)$$

In this study, researcher has set the alpha level a priori at .05, plans to use a proportional variable, has set the level of acceptable error at 5%, and has estimated the standard deviation of the scale as .5. Cochran’s sample size formula for categorical data and an example of its use is presented here along with explanations as to how these decisions were made.

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16 \quad (2)$$

Where $Z_{\alpha/2}$ = value for selected alpha level of .025 in each tail = 1.96.

(The alpha level of .05 indicates the level of risk the researcher is willing to take that true margin of error may exceed the acceptable margin of error).

Where $p(q)$ = estimate of variance = .25.

(Maximum possible proportion (.5) * 1 - Maximum possible proportion (.5) produces maximum possible sample size).

Where ϵ = acceptable margin of error for proportion being estimated = .1

4. Analysis of information

SPSS software was used for statistical analysis and one-sample t-test was used to analyze the statistical hypotheses. We used SPSS 22 to analyze the data. In following the results of test hypotheses are offered:

Testing Hypothesis H1. Individual and Social identity has a positive effect on brand society.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table. 1. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H1	385	6.8443	1.01973	.17362

Table. 2. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H1	16.844	384	.000	1.4721	1.09443	1.6832

Testing Hypothesis H2. The brand community in social media has a positive and significant effect on (a) shared awareness among community members, (b) shared customs and traditions, and (c) moral responsibilities.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table 3. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H2	385	6.8426	1.0964	.17031

Table 4. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H2	16.8443	384	.000	1.6843	1.6385	2.0591

Testing Hypothesis H3. Methods of interaction with society have a positive and significant effect on (a) shared awareness among members of society, (b) shared customs and traditions, and (c) moral responsibilities.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table 5. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H3	385	6.7392	1.0793	.19831

Table 6. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H3	15.0946	384	.000	1.7931	1.0588	1.7692

Testing Hypothesis H4. The use of the brand has a positive and significant effect on (a) common awareness among members of society (b) common customs and traditions and (c) moral responsibilities.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table. 7. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H4	385	6.7593	1.0658	.19643

Table. 8. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H4	17.7443	384	.000	1.9653	1.6883	1.9752

Testing Hypothesis H5. How you interact with the community has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table. 9. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H5	385	6.2250	1.01915	.10191

Table. 10. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H5	12.020	384	.000	1.22500	1.0228	1.4272

Testing Hypothesis H6. Brand use has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table. 11. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H6	385	6.8078	1.09900	.10990

Table. 12. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H6	16.449	384	.000	1.80780	1.5897	2.0259

Testing Hypothesis H7. Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

The results of SPSS are shown below:

Table. 13. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
H7	385	6.9327	1.10384	.11093

Table. 14. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
H7	16.738	384	.000	1.93045	1.6829	2.10293

Conclusion:

The results show that individual and social identity affect brand communities in social networks and then brand communities in social networks have a significant effect on brand community commonalities (shared awareness, common rituals and traditions and social commitment) and this effect causes social interaction. And it is the use of the brand that results in the formation of consumer trust in the brand and ultimately leads to brand loyalty.

- If people believe that the brand is a reflection of their personality and that product or brand helps them to achieve their desired personality, and also if people come to the conclusion that through this brand they can have a desirable identity of themselves to others. Show that their desire to join

brand communities is increasing. Therefore, brands should try to identify the desired personality and identity of consumers to design their brand tailored to them in order to lead consumers to join the brand community they have created on social media such as Instagram.

- If the brand can benefit people who are members of the brand's community and encourage members to share their product experiences, as well as focus on people 's affiliations, connections and commonalities such as social traditions and religious ceremonies, achieves many successes such as increasing member engagement.
- Members of the brand community should share useful tips for better use of products or brands and pass on their successful or unsuccessful experiences of product customization to individuals, as well as promote activities that help build community; Because this action increases people's trust in each other and ultimately increases brand trust.
- To improve the customer relationship with the product, brand and company, you should try to raise the awareness of the brand community, for which advertising can be used; The brand community should also work more actively on social media and provide relevant information to customers.
- Considering the effect of customer-product relationship on brand trust, by improving the quality and accessibility and reasonable price of the product, the customer-product relationship can be improved and the brand can be considered a reliable brand that can promote brand trust; Because one of the ways to increase people's trust in the product or brand is to meet their expectations and create a kind of inner satisfaction.
- Due to the effect of customer relationship with the company on brand trust, it is possible to improve the customer relationship with the company

by promoting installment sales, timely delivery, after-sales service, which promotes brand trust.

- Due to the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty, by improving the quality of the product and empowering the product to perform the functions it expresses, exchanging returned goods, warranty and creating brand reputation among the public, brand trust and loyalty can be increased.

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