Social Networking - An Influencer of Brand Promotion

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Abstract:
Social Networking concept is new in the current business world however its emergence was started two decades ago when the internet was growing and becoming popular among the population. It has become a global phenomenon for the population as one third of the world population visit social networking sites and blog sites. Social networking sites are also helpful for increasing the web traffic, increasing the customer loyalty and the success of new product launch. Apart from such benefits the businesses are realizing slowly of using social networking sites because it affects the purchase decision making process of consumers which make the difference in the branding and marketing strategies. The paper focuses on the effectiveness of a social network as a tool for brand promotion and also examines the importance and the impact of social network on brand promotion.

Keywords: Brand, Brand Promotion, Social Media, Social Network and Blogging.

1. Introduction

Transforming a brand into a socially responsible leader doesn't happen overnight by simply writing new marketing and advertising strategies. It takes effort to identify a vision that your customers will find credible and aligned with their values. - Simon Mainwaring
The word "brand" derives from the Old Norse "brandr"meaning "to burn" - recalling the practice of producers burning their mark (or brand) onto their products. The oldest generic brand, in continuous use in India since the Vedic period (ca. 1100 B.C.E to 500 B.C.E), is the herbal paste known as Chyawanprash, consumed for its purported health benefits and attributed to a revered rishi (or seer) named Chyawan. This product was developed at Dhosi Hill, an extinct volcano in northern India. The Italians used brands in the form of watermarks on paper in the 13th century. Blind Stamps, hallmarks and silver-makers' marks are all types of brand. Although connected with the history of trademarks and including earlier examples which could be deemed "protobrands"(such as the marketing puns of the "Vesuvinum" wine jars found at Pompeii),Brands in the field of mass- marketing originated in the 19th century with the advent of packaged goods.
Industrialization moved the production of many household items, such as soap, from local communities to centralized factories. When shipping their items, the factories literally brand their logo or insignia on the barrels used, extending the meaning of "brand" to that of a trademark.
Bass & Company, the British brewery, claims their red-triangle brand as the world's first trademark. Tate & Lyle of Lyle's Golden Syrup makes a similar claim, having been recognized by Guinness World Records as Britain's oldest brand, with its green-and-gold packaging having remained almost unchanged since 1885. Another example comes from Antiche Fornaci Giorgi in Italy, which has stamped or carved its bricks (as found in Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City) with the same proto-logo since 1731.
Factories established during the Industrial Revolution introduced mass-produced goods and needed to sell their products to a wider market - to customers previously familiar only with locally-produced goods. It quickly became apparent that a generic package of soap had difficulty competing with familiar, local products. The packaged-goods manufacturers needed to convince the market that the public could place just as much trust in the non-local product. Pears Soap, Campbell soup, Coca-Cola, Juicy Fruit gum, Aunt Jemima, and Quaker Oats were among the first products to be "branded" in an effort to increase the consumer's familiarity with their merits. Many brands of that era, such as Uncle Ben's rice and Kellogg's breakfast cereal furnish illustrations of the problem.
Companies soon adopted slogans, mascots, and jingles that began to appear on radio and early television. By the 1940s, manufacturers began to recognize the way in which consumers were developing relationships with their brands in a social/psychological/anthropological sense.

Manufacturers quickly learned to build their brands' identity and personality such as youthfulness, fun or luxury. This began the practice we now know as "branding" today, where the consumers buy "the brand" instead of the product. This trend continued to the 1980s, and is now quantified in concepts such as brand value and brand equity. Naomi Klein has described this development as "brand equity mania".

Philip Morris purchased Kraft for six times what the company was worth on paper, it was felt that what they really purchased was its brand name, Marlboro Friday: April 2, 1993 – marked by some as the death of the brand – the day Philip Morris declared that they were cutting the price of Marlboro cigarettes by 20% in order to compete with bargain cigarettes. Marlboro cigarettes were noted at the time for their heavy advertising campaigns and well-nuanced brand image. In response to the announcement Wall Street stocks nose-dived for a large number of branded companies: PepsiCo, Tide, Lysol.

Many thought the event signaled the beginning of a trend towards "brand blindness" (Klein 13), questioning the power of "brand value".

The present study is on effectiveness of a social network as a tool and to analyze the importance and impact of social network on brand promotion

2. Objectives
- To study the effectiveness of a social network as a tool.
- To analyze the importance of social network
- To investigate the impact of social network on brand promotion
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3. Literature Review
In the opinion of Philip Kotler Siew Meng Leong, Swee, Hoon Ang, Chin Tiong Tan, a brand is essentially a seller's promise to consistently deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services to the buyers. The best brands convey a warranty of image power conducted a survey by asking consumers how well they know certain brands how they regard them.

S.A Sherlekar viewed promotion as a process of marketing communication to inform, persuade, remind and influence consumers or users in favor of your product or service. Promotion has three specific purposes. It communicates marketing information to the consumers, users and resellers. Promotion persuades and convinces the buyer and influences his/her behavior to take the desired action. Promotion has been defined as "the coordinated self- initiated efforts to establish channels of information and persuasion to facilitate or faster the sale of goods or services, or the acceptance of ideas or points of view".

Brand plays an important role in marketing strategy, we can say that a product is something that is made in factory but a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied but a successful brand is unique and achieves its own brand personality (Dr.R.L.Varshney and Dr.S.L.Gupta).

4. Brand & Brand Promotion
Brand means a mark (symbol or sign) or design or some combination of these used to identify the products of one seller and to differentiate them from competitive products. A registered brand is known as trade mark.

Brand promotion is that element of marketing mix which is designed to inform, remind, persuade and influence the customers so that they purchase the brands of the advertiser company. Brand promotion is applied and persuasive communication used for informing and reminding the customers of the company's brands. It is primarily the responsibility of the manufacturer though wholesalers and retailers may also undertake it.

5. Social Networking – "As an Influencer of Brand Promotion"
"Social media will help you build up loyalty of your current customers to the point that they will willingly, and for free, tell others about you."

5.1. Social Media
It is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It differs from traditional or industrial media in many ways including quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence.

5.2. Definition
Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 , and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

5.3. Importance
It provides a window to marketers to not only present products/services to customers but also to listen to customer grievances and suggestions. It makes it easy for maintenance to identify various peer groups or influencers among various groups, who in turn can become brand evangelist and help in organic growth of a brand. The other benefits of media promotion are :

5.3.1. It's The Most Cost-Effective Online Advertising.
The current most popular social media platforms being used for business are free: Twitter.com, Facebook.com
and LinkedIn.com. And this is "relationship" marketing to targeted markets."Free" is definitely more cost-effective than spending money on online advertising techniques such as Pay per Click or banner ads.

5.3.2. Global Reach With Social Media.
The world is now a global marketplace. Many of the most popular social media platforms have this global reach, and we can see this clearly illustrated on Twitter. At any time of day or night you can see real-time "tweets" from people in Japan, England, the U.S., India and many other countries.

5.3.3. Attract Targeted Groups Of People As Potential Clients/Customers For Your Brand.
Social media enables you to join groups of people with the same interests and goals. On LinkedIn and Facebook you can join groups as varied as Children's Book Writers to e-Marketing. If we choose groups to join based on particular brand, we'll be putting our self in front of the exact groups of people we want to reach as potential clients/customers. This can pay off in increased sales for us.

5.3.4. Social Media Is Used To Form Own Community.
Once we are active on social media platforms and have people who are followers (Twitter), friends (Facebook) and/or connections (LinkedIn), we can start our own groups of highly targeted interests.

5.3.5. Social Media Helps To Find Cross-Promotional Partners.
Amazingly in the world of social media, people who would be considered competitors in the off-line world are teaming up to provide products and services to their combined clients/customers. And these clients/customers are very responsive to these cross-promotions often called joint ventures especially when introduced to a second expert by a first expert they already know, like and trust. You and your cross-promotion partner can each get access to the other person's "list" the names of interested clients/customers collected at a website and thus you've greatly expanded your potential client/customer pool.

5.3.6. Update Of Your Activities With A Few Keystrokes.
Updates on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn take seconds and have announced to the followers, friends and connections what we are doing or what we are offering or what we are speaking on.
And there are even online applications that allow to update your status across several of your social media accounts at one time (Ping.fm is one of these applications). So keeping in front of your potential clients/customers is as easy as 1-2-3.
Once you become active yourself on social media platforms, you'll find many more reasons to promote your brand, book or business on social media in order to attract targeted potential clients/customers.

5.4. Social Media as a tool for Brand Promotion
This is the age of consumer's satisfaction not about selling but more about interacting there is a lot to learn from customers using social media one can identify customers, listen to their feedback and use them to improve and innovate on products or services. It can also be used to increase customer's loyalty through customer support services and hence improve customer retention. Social media gives businesses on small budgets the ability to find out what people are saying about them and others in their industry, without paying large sums on market research, one of the benefits of asocial media strategy is the fact the available tools can customize for their particular needs.

5.5. Arguments for Social media as a tool for Brand Promotion

5.5.1. Size
Facebook has over 250 million users globally. On an average, 70-100 tweets happen by the second. An average user on Facebook has 120 friends. This is the kind of enormity Social networking sites espouse and with this comes the license to communicate powerfully. But when such large numbers are involved, there is a danger of something going wrong and when it does, it happens in a big way. An expert should be hired to do what is best for business.

5.5.2. Transparency
No cheat code involved. No black hat techniques allowed. Everything that happens in the social networking landscape is fool proof. Companies cannot fake authenticity in an attempt to get more people involved. Members can choose to associate with the company or opt out. Opinions made on social networking platforms are taken seriously and the more authoritative the companies get, more seriously they are taken.

5.5.3. Boost website traffic
Social media is probably the fastest and easiest means of redirecting traffic to company's website. By simply placing their website URL in their profile, the company can have all their profile visitors check out their website and a percentage of traffic is sure to get converted in course of time. This is the virtual way of "word-of mouth".

5.5.4. Branding
Social media is a smart way to build brands. Social media platforms are known to be one of the most powerful and fast means of branding. Some of the big brands like Coke, Ford, Dell, IBM, Burger King are some of the well known brands have powerfully used social media platforms to endorse themselves. Social media stands as a major chance because of wide users and cost of advertising is still less as compared to traditional marketing. The spread of social media limit less due to its virtual nature and higher number of sub centers for various social media networks like face book, twitter, flicker, my space, google plus, you tube etc.
By using social media peer or influencers group can be easily located and identified. Through the influencers others can be easily guided and convinced to go for a particular brand or to select.
By using interactive web tools like video, applications, games and photos etc. consumers can be provoked to interact more on social media networks.
Increases customers loyalty where the consumers have greater control over the content published on social media sometimes it may also back fire in negative manner.

5.6. Arguments against Social Media as a Tool for Brand Promotion

5.6.1. Social Media Builds the Wrong Habits in Marketers
With social media, quantity of followers often matters more than quality of followers. Likes start to matter as much as (and sometimes more than) buys. Marketers focus less on creating emotional language and more on comments and interactions.
Ironically, social media actually decreases how much a company talks to its customers because they think a Facebook or Twitter exchange takes the place of a real, personal conversation. On the phone, you can ask a customer what they think and feel about your product or company. You can hear their emotion and choose to dig deeper, or move to another topic. When it comes down to it, a series of 15-minute phone calls with customers — to really understand what they think, say, and feel — simply cannot be matched by social media activity.
This is partly because social media marketing is so difficult to measure. It's why one Forrester analyst said that "Facebook was getting worse, rather than better, at helping marketers succeed." Here's another problem. Half of Americans think Facebook is a passing fad, according to an Associated Press-CNBC poll. Also, 34% of Facebook users spend less time on the site than they did a year ago. Eighty percent say they have never bought a product or service as a result of an advertisement or comment on Facebook. And just 12% would feel safe making a purchase through the site.

5.6.2. Social Networks are struggling
In the last few months, Facebook has lost market capitalization valued at significantly more than the current value of Yahoo, AOL, Zynga, Yelp, Pandora, OpenTable, Groupon, LinkedIn, and Angie's List combined. Internet entities come and go, and if you want your business to last longer than that, then don't rely on social media as the major focus of your marketing effort.

5.6.3. Social Media Leads to Neglected Messaging
Companies are no longer perfecting what they are saying before blasting it via social media. The best way to develop powerful language is to understand the emotion that makes your customers act. (Logic makes your customers think, but emotion makes them buy.) Social media, which is supposed to shine a light on customer tendencies, is actually creating a dearth of effective language. People feel like they have to constantly communicate when their business is invested in social media. So they communicate low-quality, ineffective messages.

5.6.4. Number of More Effective Platforms
More effective platforms include direct communication to a good list of customers, relationship-based public relations, your company website, and your evangelists.
Be on social media. But just remember it's merely one of your many available platforms for marketing, and approximately in the middle of the pack in terms of effectiveness, Leverage it, so long as it's complimented by a variety of other, more effective platforms.

6. Conclusion
The study of social media and its role in brand promotion clearly indicated the reasons, advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites by people. Internet has now become an integral part of people's lives. Having the accurate mix of creativity and frequency, social sited ads are more efficient and effective medium for the businesses when compared to the other medias. Though it is a costly one still the advertisers can very well target the customers by capturing the minds and turning the ordinary customers into life time customers.

India currently has 71 million internet users. Today it has reached all over the world. The sharing and interaction is hugely influenced on internet is by virtue of various technological applications. There is no escaping social media these days, either for individuals or for businesses. Today it is impossible to separate social media from online world even it is taking place in homes, small businesses and corporate board rooms and extending its reach into the nonprofit education and health sectors. Blogging can have very positive effect on your company branding and growth.

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