

Consumer Engagement for Brand Building

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ABSTRACT

Market competition is no longer limited to provide functional attributes of the product itself but has been associated with a brand that can create a special image for its users. “People get awareness through media about the brands and they have become brand oriented. The buying process is a combination of mental and physical activities that ends with an actual purchase almost daily. The connection within “what we buy” and “why we buy it” plays a leading role in customer decision making.

Nowadays consumers are so genuinely connected to brands that when they purchase any product (or utilize any service), brands so often influence their final choice. Customer engagement, in recent years, has received substantial attention by marketing practitioners and scholars in accordance with the rise in awareness that customers are the value co-creators rather than value recipients. With the recognition that customer experiences add significant value to the firm, companies seek ways to interact with their customers reciprocally so that the value that both the firm and the customer receive can be maximized. The marketing view has shifted from marketing-to to marketing-with approach; therefore, customer engagement has become an essential constituent of a sound marketing strategy.

An engaged customer is the most valuable asset of any organization. Engaged customers assure a business of sustained and profitable growth. They are the first who will continue to repurchase that brand products, and the most likely to recommend that brand to other people. A Brands goal, therefore, is not just to generate sales, but bring in loyal and engaged customers. So today, leveraging customer contributions is an important source of competitive advantage – whether through advertising, user generated product reviews, customer service FAQs, forums where consumers can socialize with one another and contribute to product development.

This paper examines the concept of brand building, customer engagement, principles and process of customer engagement, how engagement drives business success & recent trends in customer engagement. Through certain corporate examples it is explained that Customer Engagement in India has started to echo the new marketing metrics. Finally it is concluded by the implication of the new marketing practices and its impact on traditional marketing practices in the form of active change in the existing marketing ecosystem.

Keywords: *Brand Image, Customer Engagement, Customer Involvement.*

INTRODUCTION

Branding is a crucial managerial task and consequently a major dimension of marketing theory and practice. Two important aspects of branding are: (1) brands have personalities or human-like characteristics that distinguish them from each other and these personalities are important to consumers; (2) consumers become "engaged" with brands, meaning that they feel special emotional and symbolic connections with certain brands. Traditionally, companies have grown their customer base and revenues through mergers and acquisitions which is an effective strategy to earn profit in long run. On the other side opening of the market has introduced number of companies with wide range and variety of products and services. New opportunities has created tough competition between companies but advantage to the customer for selection of best and commoditized product. In result customer loyalty towards the company has declined and the critical problem of customer retention arises.

Customer engagement is the best measure of current and future performance. An engaged relationship is probably the only guarantee for a return on organization's or clients' objectives. "The key to winning a leading edge is in building customer attachment to you, your company, and its products and services." -- Steve Ma. Reyna Customer engagement (CE) refers to the engagement of customers with one another, with a company or a brand. The initiative for engagement can be either consumer- or company-led. The medium of engagement can be on or offline. Customer Engagement is the emotional connection or attachment that a customer develops during the repeated and ongoing interactions. Engagement accumulates through satisfaction, loyalty, influence, and excitement about the brand. Organizations who engage customers to the point where they are moved to behavioural change do so by creating opportunities for emotional connections through ongoing, consistently positive experiences. When customers are engaged with an organization, they are emotionally connected, passionate about its products and services, as well as aligned with the purpose and direction of the organization. With greater access to information, more sensitivity to price, and less sensitivity to advertising, today's customers are harder to win and keep. The key to acquiring and retaining customers in this environment is to engage them — to participate in an ongoing, two-way conversation with customers that creates:

A deep emotional connection with the brand: Engaged customers have strong positive feelings about a brand ranging from high brand affinity to passionate zeal.

High levels of active participation : Engaged customers don't just feel strongly about a brand, they act on those feelings. These individuals proactively visit stores or Web sites to check out what's new, talk about the brand with family, friends, and colleagues, visit online forums to get advice from professional peers, provide feedback that makes products and services better, and contribute content that helps other people buy, try, or use the company's products more effectively.

A long-term relationship: Engaged customers interact with their favourite or most useful brands regularly. And with each positive interaction, their affinity for the brand is strengthened, making them more likely to return, repurchase, or extend a contract.

Strong brand in the market competition is the main goal of many organizations because it allows the creation of a wide range of benefits to organizations including reduced risk, greater profits, cooperation with other parties as well as the opportunity for brand extension (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2004; Assael, 2004; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Brand also considered contributing to maintain the competitiveness of the existence of offers given because the brand is usually associated with a particular image that can create certain associations in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1997). Creation of unique brands that became the starting point for the creation of marketing characteristics that can strengthen the brand image of the organization (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ghodeswar, 2008; Srivastava, Fahey and Christensen, 2001; Pujadi 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

BRAND MANAGEMENT

Branding is important for both companies and consumers, but for different, complementary reasons. Firms use brands because, according to Kotler (2000, p. 408), brands facilitate order processing and tracking, give legal protection to unique product features, make product extensions easy, and target different markets. Moreover, managers develop brands and brand strategies to accomplish five related goals: (1) to distinguish their product from competitors and prevent it from being a commodity, (2) to give the product an image or personality, (3) to give the brand an identity, (4) to bolster the company's image and reputation, and (5) to facilitate relationships with consumers that lead to long term value. When these goals are accomplished successfully and consumers see brands as similar to themselves (Malar et al., 2011) brands accumulate equity. Brand equity can be thought of as the marketing and financial value of a brand to the company arising from consumer awareness, their loyalty,

quality perceptions, and other associations (Aaker, 1991, p. 17; Ferrell & Hartline, 2005, p. 177). Equity in turn leads to long run profitability and consumer advocacy of the brand to others.

Consumers contribute to the success of brand strategy and brand equity because brands are important to them. (1), consumers use brands to distinguish a company's offering from those of other companies; (2) this information allows them to make efficient judgments of quality, suitability, value and can prompt quick purchase; (3) consumers use brands to create and display self-image and identity; (4) consumers can interact with the brand and even co-create it; (5) consumers form relationships with the brand and consequently the company that they find satisfying; (6) brand help consumers establish and maintain social relationships (see Haugtvedt, Herr, & Kardes, 2008; Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011; Walker, 2009). At the heart of the process by which managers create brand strategies and consumers participate in them, yielding a brand identity, brand equity, long term relationships, and perhaps brand advocacy, is the interaction of the brand's personality and the consumer's engagement with it (Goldsmith, 2011).

CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT

According to the Kim point of view involvement is a crucial variable in the studies of marketing, social psychology and consumer's behaviour (Kim, 2003). In fact, it is over 30 years that the concept of involvement has been studied meticulously in marketing fields (Broderick, 2007). Consumer involvement can elevate the concept of product's effectiveness (Brown & Eisenhard, 1995). Consumer involvement is originated from social psychology which is an interpretation of ego-involvement that points to the relationship between a person, target or subject. This concept is a base for understanding involvement in terms of consumer's behaviour (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Lin & Chen, 2006).

High-involvement buying contrasts with low-involvement, low cost purchases. When people are parting with substantial sums of money to buy a TV, a car or a vacation, they do not take the decision lightly. These are high-involvement decisions for most consumers. Before making them, we actively hunt down information, talk with friends and generally find out all we can about our prospective purchase (Sutherland, 2008).

In the level of function consumer involvement is number or amount of the communications between the stimuli subject and the consumers' responses; and it encompasses the thoughts which come into individuals mind during showing or while they have exposure to the media and advertisement. In this case, a portion of the advertisement content links to an object of individual's life and the connection occurs. For instance, a person who intends to buy a new refrigerator (high involvement), encounter advertising about it in the newspaper or at television, possibly scrutinizes promoted information (central approach).

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Customer engagement in the marketing literature is a rather new phenomenon which has recently received considerable attention. The underlying rationale of this increased attention is the discovery of the indirect impact that engaged customers have on firm performance (Bijmolt et al., 2010). Brodie et al. (2011) proposes that engaged customers have a key role in enhanced corporate performance by providing word-of-mouth about the products, services, and/or brands to others, involving in new product/service development, and co-creating experience and value. Van Doorn et al. (2011) emphasize that customer engagement explains the behaviours that go beyond transactions and purchase. Traditionally, the firm's main focus was the transactional relationships which create immediate cash flows. Moreover, in the classical view, the customer was seen as a passive recipient of value created by companies (Deshpande, 1983). The focus of marketing shifted from the product-centric to a customer-centric view more than a decade ago (Day 1999; Webster 1992) with the relationship marketing approach. However, the transaction-centered view which sees customers as the value recipients has not changed until recently. In recent years, the domain of relationship marketing has been broadened (Vivek, 2009), with the perspective shifting from _marketing-to to marketing-with approach. The latter is symbolized by the service dominant logic (S-D logic) which claims that the value is always co-created with the collaboration of the consumers, in contrast with the goods-dominant logic (G-D logic) of traditional view where consumers are

provided with the value created by the firms (Lusch, 2007). Schau et al. (2009) also emphasize this revolution in marketing thought and agree with the argument by Lusch and Vargo (2006) that —concretion will ultimately induce firms to collaborate with customers to concrete the entire marketing program.

Furthermore, customer engagement in the marketing literature extends the topic from behaviour to the psychological aspects of the construct. While, the studies on virtual brand communities and the industrial customer engagement measurement methods primarily focus on behaviours, such as calculating the member's participation rates on the brand page, the academic marketing literature emphasizes the richness of the construct that goes beyond behaviours.

PRINCIPLES OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Follow the 7 principles, and your customers will always follow you: -

Principle 1 - Be eager to serve: Being eager to serve your customer is more about perception than anything else. When the customer walks into your business, is the staff just mulling around or do they appear to be ready to serve? The same applies for service provided over the phone. Does the phone ring 10 times before it gets answered or is there a standard for it to be answered within three rings? This principle is about being prompt in every sense of the word. The customer should not have to wait ever. If they do, it is your responsibility to apologize for the delay. At the very least, when waiting is inevitable, be sure to acknowledge those customers who are waiting even if it's not their turn. A simple gesture like a smile or eye contact should suffice.

Principle 2 - Be welcoming: Many companies and service professionals rightfully note that this is the first step of service. No matter what anyone says, true service does not begin without a warm welcome or greeting. The purpose of this principle is to let your customers know that not only are you ready to be of service, but that you are happy they chose your business instead of your competitor's. After receiving your welcome, the customers should instantly feel they made the right choice to patronize your business. They should be excited after the initial greeting because you want them to believe that the rest of the service experience will be one hundred times better than the welcome.

Principle 3 - Create an inclusive atmosphere: Creating an inclusive atmosphere means involving all parties. In this case, being inclusive is about the service provider creating a relationship that transcends the static nature of a one-way experience in favour of dynamic two-way experience. It is the difference between taking my food order and inquiring about my favourite types of food so the server can suggest the right dishes. It is the difference between selling me a house, and getting to know my preferences and me so you can find the "right" house. To be inclusive means to involve the customer in the service they are receiving. The customer is more than just the recipient of the service; they can be an important part of how the service is delivered. Challenge yourself and your team to find out your customers' preferences, then act on them, and share them.

Principle 4 - Create a total experience: Creating a total experience begins with having the right people in the right roles. It means that the greeter must be the person with the most welcoming personality on the team and have the biggest smile. It also means that every person the customer comes in contact with should not only like other people, but they should be happy and excited to be of service. Perhaps the biggest thing to remember about creating the total experience is that the experience is comprised of many touchpoints. Touchpoints may vary from answering the phone, to escorting a customer down the hallway; the point is that the overall experience is built on individual touchpoints.

Principle 5 - Turn customers into ambassadors: Turning customers into ambassadors is about fostering loyalty. Successful businesses don't measure their success by the amount of new customers they get, they measure success by the amount of business they receive from their existing customers. This is sometimes referred to as organic growth. You want your business to be the first choice when existing and potential customers want to purchase a particular product or service. It doesn't matter if your business is selling rooms, food & beverage, ad space or even hospital beds. Your customers need to know that you look forward to serving them again in the future.

Principle 6 - Offer a gracious goodbye: Offering a gracious goodbye is an extremely important principle, yet it can be very easy to bypass. Some service providers feel that after they have given the customer what they paid for, then service is done. Not so. Everything has a beginning and an end. Service is no exception. The purpose of the gracious goodbye is to thank the customer for their patronage. The customer did not have to patronize your business. Every customer should be reassured that their decision to spend their money with you was greatly appreciated.

Principle 7 - Earn your customers' confidence reap the rewards: The rewards here are not just repeat business and referrals. Rewards know that you have made a positive impact on someone's day. You should be confident that the service that you and your team provided made a difference in how that customer views your industry. You are not just doing a job; you are representing your team, your company, and your industry. Like any relationship, earning your customer's confidence is about building trust, and trust is built on doing what you say you will do every time. So commit to fully engaging every customer you have. Use your team huddles and department meetings to engage your team in a meaningful dialogue about the importance of engagement. As customers become more savvy shoppers, simply competing based on fancy equipment or "bells and whistles" won't suffice. Today's customers want to feel like you value and appreciate their patronage, or they will simply go somewhere else.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

“People improve when they have no other model but themselves to copy after”. The process includes engaging the customer during the following phases:

- Lead Qualification
- Selling the Solution
- Implementing the Solution
- Maintaining the Account

This roadmap includes all aspects of a customer engagement: from the players and activities involved to the relationships that need to be developed

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The study has been carried out keeping in mind the following objectives:

1. To study what branding and customer engagement activities companies are doing and how it drives their business to success.
2. To study the recent trends in customer engagement activity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Secondary data is being collected through various sources such as magazines, journals, newspaper and websites.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

1. Only four companies are considered.
2. The study is restricted only to branding and customer engagement activities.

PRESENT STUDY (DATA ANALYSIS)

Customer Engagement Practices

The smartest companies changed their approach on marketing vastly. Their focus is now on personalized interactions, delighting their audience, and understanding customers' unique challenges to make their lives better. This has brought about 'New Rules of Customer Engagement'.

In the cases below, these top brands really raise the bar for their competitors. Although their primary source for inspiration isn't social media, the brands' stories went viral and set an example for how 'content is so great that it can only be shared by others'.

1. Coca-Cola's 'Moment of Positivity' in Consumers' Lives

Coca-Cola came up with the perfect way for a brand to be 'on the way, not in the way' of people's lives. Coca-Cola always goes beyond their core product and finds a way to engage with their customers and tap into emotions to set them apart. Denmark, the happiest country in the world whose flag also happens to share the colours of the classic Coca Cola logo, was the perfect setting to feature their newest episode in the notorious 'Share Happiness' campaign. The brand decided to make an interactive airport ad that dispenses flags because it's a common Danish tradition to greet arriving travellers by waving to them. The engaging gesture is the ideal way to bring a moment of positivity into people's lives and connect to them.

Coca Cola - Be personal Campaign

When companies start dealing with large volumes, consumers can start to seem much less like people and much more like numbers, but this is the last thing we, as customers, want to feel like.

The Coca Cola 'Share a Coke' campaign where they printed the most popular British names on bottles across the country, was a marketing triumph, with 150 million personalised cokes sold in 2014 alone. What this proves is how successfully companies can engage customers if they feel that something really relates to them, or to the people they love. Something as seemingly small as using someone's name (whether that be on an email or a bottle of coke), shows that the brand is interacting with you directly, and that you're more to them than just a number or a statistic. A little personalisation goes a long way - using someone's name seems like a pretty simple idea, but it appeals to everyone. After all, it's the one thing we all have!

2. Dove's Brilliant Audience Insight

The Dove beauty brand is renowned for its controversial and 'out of the box' conversations about beauty and the impact it has on society. Dove truly understands what women are all about and encourages them to be less critical of their appearances by acknowledging their true beauty.

Dove's Real Beauty Sketches is the most viral ad of all time and, therefore, needs no further explanation why it's the perfect example of content that is so meaningful everyone wants to share it. Dove really dug deep this time! The self-esteem boosting message resonated with an amazingly huge audience.

Dove - Build a relationship with your customers

Dove's real beauty campaign featuring women of all shapes and sizes started in 2006 as an attempt to change the way people perceive the idea of beauty. And in the following ten years, it's been hailed as one of the most successful ad campaigns of all time.

Jennifer Bremner, a Unilever brand director, comments on the success of it suggesting, "We believe that conversation leads to brand love, and brand love leads to brand loyalty" and this idea of creating love around a brand in order to engage customers shouldn't be underestimated. Throughout the campaign, interactive ads led over 1.5 million people to Dove's website, demonstrating that by allowing customers to get involved, you can massively increase customer engagement.

The Dove campaign stood out for all the right reasons:

It made a huge corporation look like it really did understand the wants and needs of the average woman buying their products.

It created a relationship between Dove and their customers by challenging conventional thinking

It considered the emotion of Dove customers

Be relatable, use advertising to bridge the gap between you and your customers and consider customer emotion in everything you do

3. Cadbury: Thanks a Million Campaign

Cadbury is one of the most famous chocolate brands worldwide. It is also a brand that knows how to find new and fun ways to interact with consumers and Social Media was just the right tool to take the user engagement with the brand to the next level and differentiate itself in a highly competitive industry. Shifting from Traditional Media to Social Media, Cadbury ran campaigns on Facebook and Google+ in order to build up awareness and engagement with its fans. It's most famous and successful campaign was the one through which the brand celebrated reaching the milestone of one million fans on its UK Facebook page. In order to grab the attention of its fans: they built piece by piece a giant Facebook 'Like' thumb out of thousands of Cadbury Dairy Milk tablets, to say "thank you" to the community, combining in this way a gesture that Facebook fans understood, with their favourite chocolate brand. The "Thanks a Million" campaign was developed by the agency Hypernaked and was a good example of a clear goal, reached in a very engaging and original way, key aspects for any successful social media campaign. Through the positive and grateful "Thanks a Million" theme, the fans were encouraged to engage with the brand and celebrate together the 1M fans milestone on Cadbury's UK Facebook page.

The campaign started with teaser ads to build up awareness and expectation for the live event. Then, the build of the giant "Like" thumb was broadcasted during a two day live stream on the Cadbury Dairy Milk Facebook page. During the live event, the Cadbury team was also responding to comments made by fans, creating in this way more dynamism and engagement with the community.

What was truly magic in this campaign was the way Cadbury knew how to put the community at the heart of the activity during the build, giving them ownership and control over the idea. During the build, fans could have their own piece of chocolate added to the sculpture, and were invited to cheer on the workers, send messages of support on the live Facebook wall that was also projected inside the studio and choose to reward them with cups of tea and cake. To complete the construction, one of the biggest fans from the Cadbury Dairy Milk Facebook community was asked to come along and place the final chocolate piece to complete the giant thumb.

4. HUL: ‘SwachhAadat, Swachh Bharat’ programme in India

To Promote Good Health and Hygiene Practices. ‘Haath, Munhaur Bum’ campaign aims to drive behavior change along with customer engagement. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) announced the launch of ‘SwachhAadat, Swachh Bharat’ programme in line with Government of India’s Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) to promote good health and hygiene practices. Given the scale of challenges that India faces in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), this programme is an effort to help India realise the goals of Clean India Mission by 2019.

This is a first-of-its-kind multi-brand behaviour change programme synergising the efforts of HUL’s leading brands Lifebuoy, Domex and Pureit. The SwachhAadat, Swachh Bharat programme has two key thrusts: An onground behavior change model and a mass media campaign to drive engagement and awareness.

HOW ENGAGEMENT DRIVES BUSINESS SUCCESS

Improved customer loyalty reduces the cost of doing business. For example, when a company is able to gain the trust of its customers, it is also more able to create a preference for its products and services. When customers are presented with a wide range of similar loan products, they’re likely to choose the loan offered by an institution that they are familiar with and with which they’ve had a history of positive and satisfying interactions. The most secure route to achieving long-term profitability is to accelerate customer on boarding, increase online usage, and improve retention with more secure, personalized, and engaging interactions. By increasing loyalty, firms can actually decrease the sales and marketing effort of selling new features and product lines. With an engagement solution already in place, financial services companies can:

Improve customer acquisition and retention by delivering more personalized and interactive Service Grow sales by providing tailored recommendations quickly and easily

Improve cross-channel integration by automating processes across touch points

Improve process efficiency by eliminating errors and manual workarounds

Ease compliance requirements through automated structured processes and information Control and assurance

Increase the productivity of indirect channels by delivering self-service applications that are Intuitive and easy to use

Create the perception of higher “switching costs” for the customer

Conclusions:

Companies can drive business value through customer engagement by understanding that:

An empowered customer is an engaged customer. Giving customers a voice, letting them be involved, interact, influence, and build intimacy in new and different ways is the central theme of engagement. Engaging the customer through a cohesive customer experience can empower the customer to be a brand and product promoter, and influence the marketplace in ways not possible with traditional marketing.

Engagement must drive business results. Although the promise of engagement is enticing, it involves commitment from organizations to invest time and effort up front in identifying the right engagement metrics to track, focusing on the four I's (involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence). Ultimately, what will matter is the ability to tie engagement metrics to financial metrics in order to demonstrate tangible business results. Discussions of engagement should use the language of business (improved efficiency, increased effectiveness) to maintain and grow funding for engagement efforts.

Customer engagement can give exceptional business if marketers make themselves ready to face the transformation of marketing landscape to design and implement new marketing skills & strategies, redefining products, services and creative customer dialogue as its evidently seen in the above cases.

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