

Proceeding Paper

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Community Membership: A Higher Education Perspective of University Students' Experiences in Kuwait [†]

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Abstract: Consumer identification with brands has received extensive attention in the fields of consumer behavior and psychology. Such consumer-brand identification is conceptualized through the term “brand community”. A brand community is formed when a group of consumers express their interest towards and communicate their identities through a specific brand. The current literature shows that existing research on brand communities appears to be dominantly oriented towards tangible products. Accordingly, this research aims to explore the impact of social media marketing on brand community membership related to an intangible aspect of the self. Contextually, the research seeks to examine the impact of social media marketing of higher education institutions in Kuwait on students' relevant associations. Students are at the core of higher education institutions due to identifying as both consumers and creators of value. A mixed method approach to data collection and analysis will be employed in this research. The findings of this research are expected to provide important implications for theory and practice.

Keywords: identity; brand community; social media; higher education institutions



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1. Objectives

This research aims to explore the impact of social media marketing on brand community membership related to an intangible aspect of the self (i.e., educational service/experience). It specifically intends to develop an understanding of how social media marketing impacts brand community membership and, relatedly, what type of social media content influences brand community membership from a higher education (HE) perspective.

2. Methodology

This research will utilize a mixed-method approach of data collection, consisting of both qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey to investigate the relationship between social media marketing and brand community membership within educational institutions. The online survey will be randomly distributed to private university students in Kuwait through formal approval from the relevant institutions. The face-to-face interviews will follow non-probability and purposive sampling and be conducted based on the participants' ease of access and willingness to participate.

3. Results

This research is a work in progress, and the final results will be available after the data are collected and processed. It is estimated that this research will provide empirical evidence on the association between the different types of content distributed over social

media and individual readiness to join the brand community. The focus of the research is on brand community membership in higher education institutions, and the expected results will be formulated accordingly.

4. Implications

The research offers theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, exploring consumer identities in relation to brands from an intangible perspective advances the knowledge about brand community membership, especially since the existing research is heavily focused on the tangible elements linked to the development of brand communities. Practically, this research benefits several stakeholders. Since the major purpose of private sector academic institutions is to provide a service (i.e., education) in return for benefits (i.e., profits), this research will enable those institutions to better understand their students' responsiveness to social media marketing content and to enhance their association with the university (i.e., brand community). Relatedly, universities provide venues for retail businesses to rent on the campus. Therefore, it would be beneficial for those businesses to understand the students' demands prior to conducting their business operations. Furthermore, this research will provide access to data related to university students' attitudes toward social media marketing content, which will help marketing practitioners to predict future consumption patterns and construct their marketing campaigns accordingly.

5. Originality Value

The popularity of social media platforms has led to their increased importance as tools for marketing communication and consumer-brand mediation [1]. While it is acknowledged that social media is utilized to establish strong customer-brand relationships, the impact of social media content in the brand community literature appears to be largely underexplored [2]. In particular, "the process through which consumers increase the connection between the brand and the self through social media marketing activities has yet to be examined" [3] (p. 2).

6. Contribution

In recent years, higher education institutions have increasingly relied on social media platforms to communicate with their target audience [2]. Despite the observed rise in competition and marketing activities among universities, the impact of marketing activities on students' university choices remains obscured in the extant literature [4]. Therefore, this research contributes to the existing knowledge by addressing the impact of social media marketing on brand community membership for university students in Kuwait.

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