

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE BRAND TRIBALISM BEHAVIOR ON CONSUMER BRANDS

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ABSTRACT

Social media marketing is a strategic tool applied by many organizations for brand promotion and stakeholder relationship activities. Marketers use social media platforms to target different sets of stakeholders including consumers as the main category. The strategic focus of resulting extended brand engagements with the consumers is a must in today's branding and communication campaigns due to stiff competition and consumer dynamics noticed. Brand tribalism is one of the holistic results a brand could obtain via social media marketing tools. Previous studies investigated the impact of social media marketing on brand tribalism with reference to different product categories, marketing, and consumer groups. Consumer products promoted via social media options are attributed with special attention due to brand competition, consumer engagements, and dynamic natures of brand performances. Accordingly, researchers claim further studies to examine how social media marketing could result in brand-related outcomes in different market and consumer contexts due to many dynamic factors' that impact outcomes. Alongside, this paper followed a comprehensive literature review as the main method to examine social media marketing and its relationships with brand-related outcomes with special attention to brand tribalism behavior. The authors attempted to explain how social media marketing influences brand tribalism whilst mentioning the avenues for mediating paths. Alongside, the paper concludes with future research directions proposing mediating variables and new consumer contexts encouraging new researchers to contribute knowledge and practice perspectives.

Keywords: Brand Tribalism, Consumer Products, Social Media Marketing.

1.0 Background of the Study

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is defined as the practice of promoting products and services and their information on social media platforms aiming to enhance a company's sales and profit performances (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat & Fabeil 2014; Hounhouigan, Ingenbleek, Van der Lans, Van Trijp, & Linnemann 2014). Today, the majority of organizations use SMM as an effective communication tool to build a relationship between the consumer and the brand (Ananda et al., 2016). Therefore, this mode of communication influences the consumer buying behavior of potential customers (Keng et al., 2014). For example, once a customer purchases a product and shares the experience online through an image, video, or a written review, followers of this consumer will thereafter take an interest in the brand. Thus, the companies have an opportunity to understand their customer's needs, wants, and buying patterns (Sharma & Lijuan, 2014). As per Facebook MAU Worldwide 2021 (n.d.) statistics, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have been utilized by 3.51 billion

individuals monthly around the globe during the first quarter of 2021. Additionally, according to Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) research, the use of social media platforms is greatly used by Generation Y'. However, interestingly this is contrary to a study conducted by (Prakash Yadav & Rai, 2017) indicated that Generation Z' consumes more time on social media. The evidence from these studies suggests that the majority of the young (37 years upwards) use social media platforms for entertainment, shopping and education therefore, companies should target such age groups to widen their customer base. Therefore, a successful SMM strategy is observed when a company effectively exposes the brand name using SMM (Yadav & Tripathi, 2016). Moreover, Hassan et al. (2015) and Prakash Yadav and Rai (2017) state that businesses claim to be competitive once implement SMM, since SMM is inexpensive and generates prompt communication with existing and potential customers. In contrast, the study by Chakravarty et al. (2014) indicated that 80% of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) success depends on customer engagement strategies therefore, the SMEs should be using the SMM to drive towards the survival of the business (Dessart et al., 2015; Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). The results of these studies indicate that today many businesses use SMM as a communication and research strategy hence, once used effectively the success of the brand is guaranteed.

The benefit of using SMM is that the customers' existing and future buying behavior can be tracked by using a 'consumer-provided status' update strategy implemented by marketing managers (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014; Forbes, 2013). This contradicts a study conducted by Hausmann (2012) claiming that SMEs' existing employees may not be qualified or experienced to perform SMM as an additional task, therefore this costs training (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). More broadly, research is also needed to determine whether SMEs can afford this cost and another device to implement effective SMM. Moreover, customers can gain knowledge and information from the brand conveniently through SMM thus, enhances brand awareness and loyalty which thereafter, impacts the company's sales, and profits and reduces operating costs (Si, 2015). In contrast, Hausmann (2012) and Dwivedi et al. (2021), concluded that a company requires ample human resources to maintain and upload content daily whilst keeping a record of the brand performance and responding promptly to inquiries. Furthermore, SMM is an inexpensive marketing strategy that enhances opportunities for a company's promotion on sales, collaborations, publicity, and socializing both professionally and personally (Georgescu & Popescu, 2015). In brief, empirical evidence is found claiming further studies to examine the impact of social media on brand-related behaviors including brand tribalism since consumer responses to social media are influenced by many determinants across the markets (Bandara & Dissanayake, 2021; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Rai, 2017; Wilke, 2020).

1.1 Purpose of the Study and Methodology

The SMM and brand community-related studies claim new investigations to review and confirm the significance of how SMM influences online brand community behaviors. Research gaps are found rationalizing the importance of investigating the role of SMM in the online brand community to figure out how it contributes to brand building activities. Some studies explain the importance of examining the SMM with online brand community-related responses to find the significance of different aspects and contents of SMM. Examining the effect of social medial marketing on consumer brands should be given social attention due to

its larger penetration and consumer dynamics compared to other product forms (Bandara & Dissanayake, 2021; Sierra et al., 2016; Wielki, 2020). Alongside, this paper also intends to review how empirical studies have discussed and explained the role of SMM in developing online brand tribalism behavior. Accordingly, the authors followed a comprehensive literature review as the main source of the data collection option. The Paper was structured as a review paper by explaining the empirical evidence and connecting it to claims for future research directions. It used research journal articles published in recognized journals as the main source of the insights to build a proper discussion.

2.0 ONLINE BRAND TRIBALISM BEHAVIOR

Brand tribalism is the purchase decisions made by a group of individuals willingly based on similar beliefs about a particular brand thus, these individuals are not only the brand's consumers but also their promoters and believers (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011; Sierra et al., 2016). Furthermore, these groups are formed by the experience gained by the brand's product and service which then forms an interaction and sense of belonging in a community or group (Ruane & Wallace, 2015; Veloutsou, 2007). In contrast, the study by Tuominen (2011) states that employees and consumers unconsciously belong to brand tribes through the repurchase of a product and word-of-mouth. Thus, 92% of customers globally trust word-of-mouth recommendations through a tribe rather than the advertising made by the brand (Bandara & Dissanayake, 2021; Wielki, 2020). More broadly, research is also needed to determine the accuracy of the brand tribe's WOM and the actual performance of the brand's product or service. Further, a brand does not have to produce the best service or product yet and maintain engagement with its tribe to result in positive outcomes. Despite prior evidence, if a brand fails to identify and build a rapport with its tribes, competitors could create a new value for the tribe (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Further research might explore the factors on how a brand should build a relationship with its tribes. The online applications for developing brand tribalism behavior is a strategic approach that needs a comprehensive approach in designing and executing brand development strategy in an online format (Bandara & Dissanayake, 2021).

According to Hamilton and Hewer (2010), there are eight concepts of online brand tribalism also known as e-tribes, they are; communication through the internet (electronic), and members of the tribe adapting to the new practices, values, and languages of the community thus called (enculturing). Additionally, there is a high emotional connection between e-tribe members (emotive), tribe members should be productive and creative to be (expressive), and they also gain satisfaction from the power they hold as a tribe (empower). Furthermore, there is an emotional relationship between the brand and the tribe (evangelical), they work independently (emergent) and collaboration or (entanglement) between brand and tribe. Therefore, due to these concepts, tribes naturally build relationships and collaborations with their preferred brand hence, producing their strategies and beliefs (Cova & White, 2010). On the contrary, these strategies and beliefs may collide with the brands' which can negatively impact the brands' value. Considerably more work will need to be done to determine how the tribes' values could negatively impact the brands.

A substantial online brand tribe possesses effective engagement, and information and is unlikely to shift brands thus, online brand tribes may be sponsored by brands while others are maintained with no management from the brand (Choi & Ahluwalia, 2013). In contrast,

Wielki (2020) claims that there is a necessary expenditure to sponsor a tribe however, this strategy has given many opportunities to brands' sales and profit growth. Additionally, brand loyalty is built as one brand tribe does not communicate with another tribe. However, these findings contradict the study by Goulding et al. (2013) as they examined that brand tribes are considered to be playful and tend to leave the brand after a short time. Future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of whether brand tribes a loyalty to the brand they are collaborating with and what drives this loyalty.

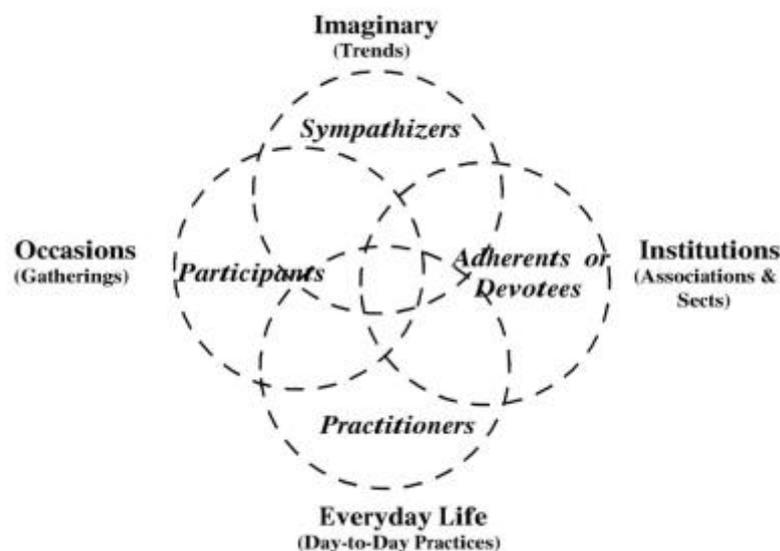


Figure 1 - A Member of a tribe's role (Olivier et al., 2020).

A tribe member should be sympathizers who are interested in a particular realm yet, have limited knowledge and understanding of it. A member should be a representative by existing virtually, physically, and socially thus called participants. Moreover, a member should be a devotee who has a deeply emotional and knowledgeable connection. Further, a member should be a practitioner as they are professionally or unprofessionally involved with a brand yet, not interested in making a profit (Olivier et al., 2020). More research is required on how successful a member of a tribe actively maintains his or her role.

2.1 Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Online Brand Tribalism Behavior

The use of social media positively affects brand tribalism since information and relationship between the tribe and the brand is shared conveniently online (Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017). For example, a brand that is formed using social media platforms builds strong relationships with its customers which results in the formation of an online tribe consisting of a group of followers. This can be classified as a promotion strategy used by the brand using SMM (Gašpar, 2016; López et al., 2017). Social media users call members of a brand tribe, influencers. By using this relationship between the online brand tribe and SMM, brands can communicate unique, productive, and strong messages to build a long-term relationship between their followers and the brand. Therefore, the "Total Customer Engagement Value" framework developed by Kumar et al. (2010) indicates that the connection between the

customer purchase, referral, and influence are linked to the brand tribes and SMM. On the contrary, Sashittal and Jassawalla (2020) state that these influencers use the brands' products to gain a large follower base, especially on platforms such as Instagram thus, called Instagram Bloggers who consider themselves independent entrepreneurs. This research will serve as a base for future studies as it forms a gap of trust between the brand and the influencer using SMM is questionable since several tribes' main objective is to enhance their name instead of the brand itself. Furthermore, brand tribes use SMM to provide recommendations and reviews of the brand they consume which in turn enhances attraction towards themselves. On the other hand, the influencers' SMM content delivery should be controlled to draw the attention of the right target group (Ryu & Han, 2021). A future study investigating how brands monitor and control what their tribe posts on their own platform would be very interesting

As per Harridge-March and Quinton's (2009) research, an expectation of different stages of customers is gained when tribes influence through positive word-of-mouth (Sashi, 2012). As seen below in the social networking contributor ladder introduced by Harridge-March and Quinton (2009) an online brand tribe can stand at any level. This present study, however, makes several noteworthy contributions to the brand and its tribe using SMM e-word-of-mouth.



Figure 2 - Social networking contributor ladder (Harridge-March & Quinton, 2009)

This ladder is similar to the traditional customer loyalty ladder, however, identifies the influencers and communicates effectively using SMM to influence other levels of the ladder. Firstly, a “Lurker” has just been introduced to social media however does not want to be engaged in a tribe as they are starting to be familiarized with the use of social media platforms (Bowen & Ozuem, 2015). Secondly, a “Newby or Tourist” is newly introduced to posting comments yet, is not committed to a tribe. However, a “Mingler” participates actively

through posts and spreads irregular WOM through social media. Fourthly, a “Devotee” is enthusiastic and contributes to SMM regularly thus, builds followers and an emotional bond with the brand. An “Insider” judges a brand thus, starts to review the brand's performance through SMM (Harridge-March & Quinton, 2009). Next, “Celebrities” are established profiles who devote their effort, energy, and time to SMM, and lastly, an “Evangelist” is an influencer who builds an emotional connection with the brand and its followers through their daily posts and WOM. This builds a competitive advantage for the brand and their profile is considered to be loyal to the brand. Therefore, brands should target Evangelists for effective marketing. This can only be measured if the customer mentions that they were aware of the brand through the influencer they have been following hence, forming an online brand tribe relationship between the brand, the tribe, and the consumer (Pempek et al., 2009). What is now needed is a study involving the guarantee on how a brand can measure the impact a tribe has on its followers' buying decision-making.

3.0 MEDIATING FACTORS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ONLINE BRAND TRIBALISM BEHAVIOR

Many factors contribute to the connection between SMM and online brand tribalism behavior such as; social self-expression, meeting expectations of the society, trust from society, and financial benefits.

3.1 Social self-expression

Online tribes or influencers enhance their social self-expression, values, and identity through the brands they represent (Belk, 2013). For example, when a member of a tribe consumes a product or service of a brand and posts a picture, video, or review on social media, this reflects on the influencer's image (Chernev et al., 2011; Doster, 2013). Therefore, Pagani et al. (2011) and Wilcox and Stephen (2013) mention that tribes are comfortable with expressing themselves through brands as it builds up their confidence and their name. Hence, a brand tribe builds a symbol for themselves by expressing their self-identity through SMM this, therefore is known to be the main reason for an online brand tribe involvement (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). In contrast, an influencer should be vigilant on their review content as it reflects the influencer's self-image. Future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of the circumstances an online brand tribe could face if irrational actions took place using SMM.

3.2 Meeting expectations of the society

An individual seeks opinions from their peers when purchasing a brand that an influencer has posted on social media thus, this relationship and image with online brand tribes and SMM are being developed (Kinley et al., 2010). In contrast, the study by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) has indicated that the relationship between a brand and the tribe can be maintained through continuous purchase and consumption. A brand tribe's objective is to meet the expectations of society and promote themselves to the groups they wish to belong to through SMM (Chernev et al., 2011). These results were contradicted by the experiments of Kinley et al. (2010) and Raies et al. (2015) who consider tribes to feel obligated to continue with a brand as there is fear of loss of self-identity from their peers and the general public. More

broadly, research is also needed to determine if a tribe can shift to another brand without experiencing loss.

3.3 Trust from society

Online brand tribes are considered to be trustworthy as their opinions and reviews are valued since the influencer has consumed the brand (Hatfield, 2018). Additionally, this builds the success and fame of the influencer on social media platforms as consumers prefer truthful SMM (Hall & Caton, 2017). On the contrary, an influencer who is not truthful could harm their name and reduces the chances to join their desired future brand tribe (Anker, 2016). Furthermore, (Langner et al., 2013) state that a follower's purchase decision depends on the influencer's review thus, an influencer should share their true opinion. However, if an influencer's truth on a brand consumption of a paid collaboration is negative, this could affect the relationship between the brand and tribe (Khan et al., 2015). Further research might investigate how an online brand maintains its truth of consumption and its relationship with the brand.

3.4 Financial benefits

SMM can benefit an online brand tribe financially through paid or earned media. Evangelists are being given free or discounted products by the brands they promote on their platform whilst some tribes earn through SMM as gratitude for promoting the brand name, thus called earned media (Hatfield, 2018). Paid media is the record of engagement (comments, likes, and shares) that an influencer receives from posting a picture, video, or review on their social media platform (Lakmal et al., 2019). Additionally, it is known that online brand tribes are paid more if they share the content of the brand on more than one SMM platform. An online brand tribe improves the brand name using their talents and exposure to their followers and the public thus, are rewarded financially by the brand with an average of \$18 per influencer as the word-of-mouth from the influencer has enhanced the brand's sales and profits (Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2020). However, since social media is freely used by individuals there can also be fraud actions of fake social media profiles and accounts that may use SMM towards brands. As per (Ryu & Han, 2021) research, out of financial rewards of \$744 million towards tribes, \$102 million were spent unknowingly on fake accounts in the year 2018. In contrast, Lakmal et al. (2019) state that influencers who are not sponsored can be trusted as paying influencers is a form of paid media. Therefore, De Veirman et al. (2017) suggest that a brand should research the influencer's account, on what they post, their content, communication, and reviews rather than their number of followers before collaborating. This research has brought up many questions which need further investigation. Further work needs to be done to establish whether all online brand tribes can be trusted and what actions can the brand perform to identify who needs to be paid, sponsored, or rewarded with discounted goods.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Social media marketing covers a wider spectrum interna of contents, creativity, sources, and media mix. The strategic impact made by social media needs to be carefully managed since it connects to a larger audience and a diversified set of stakeholders. The strategic approach to direct a social media campaign for a suitable target audience is a must featured with a clear message and consistency. The outcomes like creating band tribes for a brand that is promoted

via online platforms are much needed in the digital business world since it has been a must to go with digital options in line with the consumer dynamics and market behaviors. This paper explains how different authors have viewed and argued the social media applications in building brand-related outcomes including brand tribalism as one of the key aspects within. The direct relationships between social media and brand tribalism behavior have been reviewed whilst proposing indirect paths mention the mediating forces that would reshape the impact of social media on brand tribalism. Authors suggest future research works to examine how social media marketing could result in positive brand tribalism behaviors whilst investigating mediating effects as mentioned in the article. Additionally, we propose to investigate the impact of generational effect, consumer innovativeness, and brand experience when investigating the role of social media marketing on brand tribalism behavior. Future research works may also examine how social media marketing influences the marketing and brand outcomes when firms apply both offline and online channels for communication and distribution activities since such Omni marketing strategies need to be investigated with special attention.

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