Social Media and Brand Attitude: An Empirical Study on Social Media Campaigns of Corporate Brands in Nepal

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Abstract—*The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the social media campaigns and the formation of brand attitude of the corporate brands of Nepal. Social media campaigns are gradually gaining grounds among the practitioners and researchers. For this study, 384 respondents were selected using convenience sampling technique and the self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data. The findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between the social media and formation of positive brand attitude. This study contributes to the understanding of the moderating role of social media towards the formation of positive brand attitude.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media phenomenon

Social media is quite a new trend, still little research is available. Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) explained the importance of social media platforms and offered several strategies of managing this phenomenon. These strategies, rather advisory in nature, lack empirical support and thus, leave room for future research. Social media has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form relationships for personal, political and business use. Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content or consumer-generated media. Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. It has become apparent to that the Internet is an inherently social medium. That will not change, as people will always want to engage with one another online, and social media will be there in one form or another to accommodate this need.

The aforementioned fact makes social media an interesting field for investigation. They also prove its significant managerial relevance and academic interest through the lack of many previous findings. As Larry Weber 2009 in his book "Marketing to the social web" says: "Social media is a new strategy that has the capacity of changing public opinion – every hour, minute, even a second. And why not changing customers brand attitude? Social media advertising has the capability of building a strong brand (Briggs and Hollis, 1997). Studies on social media advertising and online advertising in general have shown that consumers' attitude toward social media advertising (ASMAD) is an essential determinant of its effectiveness (Lietal., 2002; Chuetal., 2013).

Modern consumers have grown sophisticated and discerning as a result of being exposed to a myriad of information through various marketing media. In particular, the social media phenomenon has played a large role in how consumers think, act and behave towards brands. Facebook, which is the world's most popular social networking site (SNS), was reported to have 1.44 billion active monthly users at the end of March 2015 (Facebook 2015). This constitutes a large group of consumers who may be reached through non-traditional marketing media. Ulusu (2010:2956) suggests that in countries where the use of social media is emerging and growing (such as in Nepal), further research is crucial in order to understand social networking and consumer behavior. Scholars argue that the social media are replacing traditional media in many ways, creating a new marketplace and a new tool for marketers (Akar & Topcu 2011; Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schafer 2012; Mangold & Faulds 2009). Social media have changed the way organizations interact with their consumers. Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005:31) assert that online brand communities have gained increased interest from researchers as it is a way for marketers to break through the cluttered marketing environment. Researchers argue that the potential influence of these communities on consumers' attitudes, behavior and intentions should be investigated.

In this study, few corporate brands of Nepal which have conducted active social media promotional campaigns in Facebook are selected. Ace Travels, Merojob.com and Hamrobazar.com are one of the few corporate brands of Nepal able to create a positive brand attitude through social media campaigns. Ace Travels can be taken as pioneer corporate brand to start promotion through social media since its establishment in 2009 A.D. which have started its marketing campaign aggressively through almost all media but social

media was not used by any other brand to that extent during that time. Other two above mentioned brands like Merojob.com is related to Human Resource management which provides HR solutions to various companies by recruiting and hiring employees for them and Hamrobazar.com is the most common online shopping store of Nepal. Hamrobazar.com provides a platform or a place to its consumers by allowing space in their website so that they can buy and sell their products as needed. The latter two brands were chosen because in Nepal HR firms and online shopping stores are such sectors which are highly involved in the use of social media for marketing purpose. We can see a lot of advertisements of HR companies in the Facebook in Nepal. HR companies possess the huge amount of database of the potential customers especially those from the graduate colleges. Similarly, online shopping portals are the emerging brands in the social media which chose Facebook as an effective tool for digital marketing in Nepal.

Problem Statement

All the companies are established with a goal to earn profit and in order to achieve that goal it is very important for a company to create a positive brand attitude which may lead to attain profitable results in the market among the customers as well as competitors. The analysis of social media and the effectiveness of social media platforms on customers' attitude toward brands will provide efficient and helpful insights for companies. These include trying to predict their future sales and behavior towards consumers and respectively toward competitors, and therefore improving their marketing communications and optimizing the advertising and persuading campaigns with tools that don't necessarily require the investment of a lot of money.

Information sources of customers have a significant influence on their attitude and behavioral intentions. Social media is now one of the most important information sources of customers. The purpose of current study is to investigate the impact of social media campaign on customers' attitude towards the corporate brands of Nepal like Ace Travels, Hamrobazar.com and Merojob.com which are one of the most active brands participating in the social media marketing in Nepal. We can consider social media as a social phenomenon as most of the population in Nepal is involved in social media like any other society. The target population for this research included the customers of three above mentioned brands who regularly monitor the social media i.e. Facebook.

As we have seen the aggressive marketing campaigns by the aforementioned brands in social media we need to measure its effectiveness. We must identify whether or not these aggressive campaigns are fruitful to the company's growth. As growth means the brand equity a company owns and brand equity can be gained through the positive brand attitude developed by the customers. We must find out the effectiveness of social media campaigns of various brands upon developing positive brand attitude so that it may help to

provide an important and necessary direction to the upcoming companies.

Using a self-administrated questionnaire and employing convenience-sampling method, 400 respondents were asked to fill out the survey questionnaire. All the respondents are Facebook users and aware of the aforementioned brands.

Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant relationship between brand awareness and brand attitude.

H0: There is no significant relationship between brand association and brand attitude.

H0: There is no significant relationship between social media usage and brand attitude.

H0: There is no significant relationship between social media knowledge and brand attitude.

H0: There is no significant relationship between social media monitoring and brand attitude.
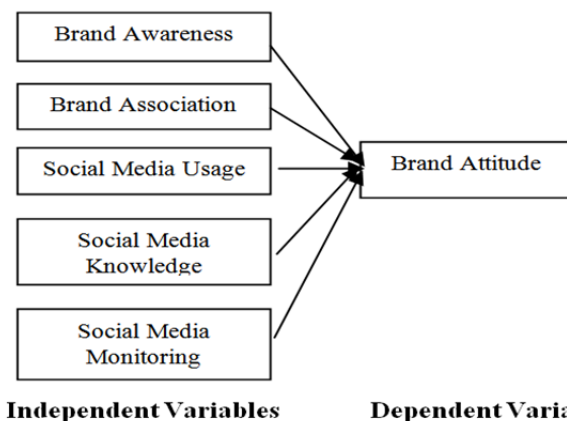

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) explain in details social media's essence, meaning and origin. One informal definition for social media is the following : "Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content which encompasses ''media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers"(Blackshaw, 2006). Postman (2008) defines the term as "the most current form of content of Web-based applications, which can be considered almost as a revolution, which has been created with participatory communication, community-building, knowledge creation and sharing." Social Networking Sites follow the content communities in the review of social media

types. Through these kinds of sites people connect while exchanging personal information, photos, videos and even instant messages. People can also invite friends to have access to this information. Facebook and Twitter are considered to be the most popular social networking sites. Companies nowadays switch to Facebook in their efforts to bond with the customer (Kaplan, 2009). Twitter is a free social network and micro blogging service that allows people to read and exchange text based posts that are up to 140 characters. These posts are called "tweets".

Social media is a phenomenon that is predicted to actively merge in peoples' life and companies' marketing communications (Carlsson, 2010). Part of these predictions are already realized as many companies integrated social media within their marketing strategy and it is becoming an essential tool for spreading information and conducting a dialogue with the customers. Social media turn out to be the most reliable and promising method of reaching new customers (Weber, 2009). In this paper, the focus is on a certain type of social media i.e. Facebook, part of the social networking group. It's social network, which constantly gain popularity not only in the personal, everyday communication but also in the business environment. Facebook is a social networking website, launched in the beginning of 2004 and now that according to the most recent statistics, it had 1.65 billion monthly active users as of the first quarter of 2016. It's a site that requires a registration before usage. People can create personal profile and exchange any kinds of information with other users that they added earlier as friends. The friendship confirms the possibility for both sides to monitor the activity of the other side. Users can create profiles with photos, lists of personal interests, contact information, and other personal information. People can communicate with friends and other users through private or public messages and a chat feature. They can also create and join interest groups and "like pages" (called "fan pages" until April 19, 2010), some of which are maintained by organizations as a means of advertising.

Attitudes are of significant importance as they outline peoples' overall perceptions about the world and also have an influence on their future behavior (Crano, 2008). They can be anything from sexual behavior to love for chocolate. Attitudes can elicit affective, behavioral or cognitive responses. That means some people are guided more by their emotions, others by their beliefs and the last ones are much straight forward; have more tendency to act. It's possible for different attitudes to consist of entirely cognitive or entirely affective or behavioral responses. It's not always compulsory for all three components to be present (Bohner, 2002). The three phenomena - social media in general, social media marketing and branding draw the plot line of this paper.

Social media have been applauded for revolutionizing life for the consumer (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009; Mangold and Faulds, 2009), having dramatic influences on every stage of the consumer decision-making process including information acquisition, brand awareness, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation, as well as influencing general opinions and attitude formation (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). In spite of this, there is no empirical research to date which explores the relationships between social media participation and engagement and these influences on behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, a brief review of Keller (2001) on consumer-based brand equity suggests that the concepts of brand awareness (brand salience), word of mouth referral, purchase intention and satisfaction with social media tools are all worthy indicators, or building blocks, towards consumer-based brand equity

The rich history of research on brand attitude strength raises questions about the need for a construct such as brand association. Does association with the brand provide value beyond measures of brand attitude strength? The answer to this question is elusive because research to date has not verified how brand attachment and brand attitude strength differ conceptually or empirically. Besides that the major question is what role social media plays for all these aspects as social media has been aggressively used by the marketers now a days. Brand association and brand attitude strength share several similarities. Both are psychological constructs that reference a brand. Both involve assessments of "strength" (i.e., of the bond or the attitude). Both assume that high levels of their respective constructs are based on substantial processing regarding the brand. Both have implications for marketing relevant consumption behaviors, such as brand purchase, repeat purchase, and willingness to recommend a brand.

Customer engagement encompasses actions that transcend transactional behaviors stemming from motivational forces (Van Doorn et al. 2010:254). Consumers engage in behaviors such as recommendations, helping other consumers, writing reviews, joining an online discussion, commenting on posts, searching for information and participating in competitions or online surveys (Gummerus et al. 2012:857; Wirtz et al. 2013:229). It represents an inherently relational approach towards the organization. Theoretically speaking, Brodie et al. (2011:253) suggest that customer engagement finds its conceptual basis in the relationship marketing paradigm as it focuses on '... interactive experience and value co-creation in marketing relationships.' Vargo (2009:375) supports the relational view by arguing that the service-dominant (SD) logic is appropriate to conceptualize organizational-consumer relationships owing to the interactive and reciprocal value co-creation that occurs. Consumer behavior is, therefore, focused on the interactive, co-creating experiences with other consumers or stakeholders (Brodie et al. 2013:106). Engagement can manifest itself in purchase behavior as well as non-purchase behavior, such as commenting on or liking posts (Gummerus et al. 2012:858). This essentially stimulates online word-of-mouth communication and can have a big impact on peers. A customer can engage with the brand and contribute value without purchasing, by giving positive news

and opinions which have the potential to influence other users of the brand community (Kumar et al. 2010:298).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to the way the study is designed, that is, the method used to carry out a research. In Descriptive survey, research is the investigation in which quantitative data is collected and analyzed in order to describe the specific phenomenon in its current trends, current events and linkages between different factors at the current time. Descriptive survey research design was chosen because it enables the researcher to generalize the findings to a larger population.

Description of Sample

The population of the study was the customers who have positive brand attitude towards the brand generated or associated through involvement in social media in Nepal. There were 384 respondents all over this research involved in the activities related to the brand and social media.

Instrumentation

Several instrument types provide data collection in quantitative research. Instrument types included in this study is standard questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents through Facebook and e-mails. The purpose of the study was properly defined to every respondent on the questionnaire page so that the respondents would understand why this research was being done. Furthermore the questionnaire was divided mainly into two parts. The first part contains demographic profile which is collected for statistical use, to prepare respondents' profile. The next part contains the questions which were used to measure dependent and independent variables. Primary data was obtained through self-administered questionnaires with closed questions.

Data Analysis Plan

The Linear regression model below was used to determine the relative importance of each independent variable in relationship marketing. The model is as follows:

$Y= \alpha + \beta 1BAw + \beta 2BAs + \beta 3SMU + \beta 4SMK + \beta 5SMM + e$

Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out with the guidance of the research objectives. The results are mainly presented in the form of demographic information of the study respondents, analysis of descriptive statistics and regression results that test the relationship between social media dimensions and their effect on brand attitude formation.

Descriptive statistics were applied in the description of basic features of data in the study. They were used to provide simple summaries about variables and their measures. Descriptive statistics form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis

of data. The descriptive statistics of each of the variables in this study are presented below.

The number of the respondents that took part in the survey was 400, but only 384 of them fully completed all the questions and gave answers even to the most complicated ones. All of the respondents were Facebook users, from which we had female (n=141) and male (n=243). The oldest respondent was at the age of 57 and the youngest at the age of 16. The respondents regularly monitor the aforementioned three brands regularly on Facebook and are in regular touch with the products of these brands.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Awareness	384	1.33	2.83	1.7708	.37414
Brand Association	384	1.17	3.00	2.0560	.41053
Social Media Usage	384	1.17	3.00	2.0000	.40448
Social Media Knowledge	384	1.17	3.17	2.0469	.41617
Social Media Monitoring	384	1.17	3.17	1.9896	.43105
Brand Attitude	384	1.47	2.69	1.9879	.31279
Valid N	384				

Inferential Analysis

Inferential statistics is used to make inferences about a population from information taken from a small sample of that population. Table 2 provides the summary of the regression model applied in this study. The coefficient of determination explains the extent to which changes in dependent variable can be explained by the change in the independent variables or the percentage of the variation in the dependent variable (Brand Attitude) that is explained by all the five independent variables (Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Social Media Usage, Social Media Knowledge and Social Media Monitoring).

Regression Analysis

Table 2 shows that, when the Brand Awareness (BAw) increases by 1, the Brand Attitude (BA) increases by 0.231. Also, the Brand Attitude increases by 0.245 when the Social Media Usage (SMU) increases by 1. The Brand Attitude increases by 0.168 when the Social Media Knowledge (SMK) increases by 1. The Brand Attitude increases by 0.316 when the Social Media Monitoring (SMM) increases by 1.

Table 2 Regression analysis of Social Media Dimensions on Brand Attitude

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.794	.194		4.091	.000
Baw	.231	.064	.276	3.637	.000

BAs	.005	.058	.007	.088	.930
SMU	.245	.066	.317	3.695	.000
SMK	.168	.069	.224	2.436	.016
SMM	.316	.061	.436	5.170	.000

a. Dependent Variable: BA

As per the result, since corresponding p-value of Brand Association is more than 0.05, hypothesis 2 is not accepted. This means that there is no significant impact of Brand Association on Brand Attitude. But hypotheses 1, 3, 4 and 5 are accepted because the corresponding p-values of Brand Awareness, Social Media Usage, Social Media Knowledge and Social Media Monitoring are less than 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant impact of Brand Awareness, Social Media Usage, Social Media Knowledge and Social Media Monitoring on Brand Attitude.

4. CONCLUSION

The study has considered the Facebook users who are involved in social media activities in Nepal. The study includes five independent variables. From the results, it is concluded that the various dimensions of social media such as Brand Awareness, Social Media Usage, Social Media Knowledge and Social Media Monitoring have significant impact on Brand Attitude. Among all the above independent variables Social Media Monitoring shows the most significant impact upon the Brand Attitude. There is no significant impact of Brand Association on brand attitude as the p-value of brand association is more than 0.05. The study shows that three corporate brands have developed a positive brand attitude through the various dimensions of social media marketing. It shows that consumers have generated positive attitude towards the brand because of the social media campaigns done by the above mentioned brands in Nepal. The above three brands were taken from the different sectors and specially those sectors which are showing great involvement in social media campaigns and the emerging ones. So, this study can be done on other specific sectors as well which may be different from the aforementioned sectors. Furthermore, still brands cannot rely totally on social media campaigns as the corporate brand value as gained since its establishment also plays an important role in the formation of positive brand attitude. Future researchers may pursue research on other product types in the market which are actively involved in social media campaigns as this study cannot generalize the overall concept of social media campaigns in other sectors as well. This is not likely to affect the findings in any way as the participants were regular social media users.

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