

Effect of generation Y engagement with Facebook brand pages on online sales

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Introduction

Social Network Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, We Chat, LinkedIn, Twitter etc. have become more important in consumers' lives and the use of SNS on regular basis help consumers to contact with numerous numbers of brands and products by "Liking", "Commenting", "Sharing" and so forth. This new trend amid the consumers has made business to understand that if they wish to grasp their prospects and customers, their online existence in SNS is a foundation of their overall marketing strategy. Apart SNSs from the online world is very difficult and for individuals or for business there is no escape from SNSs nowadays (Neti, 2011).

Table 1: Growth of Internet Users in Sri Lanka

<i>Year</i>	<i>Users</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>% Pen</i>	<i>GDP p.c.*</i>
2000	121,500	19,630,230	0.5	N/A
2007	428,000	19,796,874	2.2	US\$ 1,623
2008	771,700	21,128,773	3.7	US\$ 1,972
2009	1,163,500	21,324,791	5.5	US\$ 2,041
2010	1,776,200	21,513,990	8.3	US\$ 1,807
2016	6,087,164	22,235,000	27.4	US\$ 3,800

Source: Internet World Stats Website

**Per Capita GDP in US Dollars, Source: International Monetary Fund*

Social media channels are fast growing in Sri Lanka due to the significant growth of internet usage as shown in Table 1. Among those SNSs, Facebook has the highest number of users that is 3 – 3.5 million users which account nearly 16% of the local population and 41% of them are Millennials (Generation Y) who are aged between 18 – 24 years and 25 - 34 years. Majority of the users (almost 2.8 million) are concentrated in the western province of the country (Digital Marketing Institute, 2016; Ishara, 2015).

Data explains that Facebook user engagement with brand pages are increasing day by day. In Sri Lanka, especially the generation Y people have been addicted to

SNSs and among all SNSs Facebook on the top. People use Facebook daily for many reasons such as stay connected with friends, entertainment, get information about popular stars or brands, play games, share political views, etc.

Simultaneously, there is a significant growth in the Sri Lankan E-Commerce sector. Infrastructures are spreading around the country not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas which increase the number of people who use the internet. Now people have more facilities to access the World Wide Web than before. As a result of this e-commerce sector is becoming more and more strong and developed.

Research Problem

Companies which used traditional offline methods to sell their product or services to customers are now moving to online methods. They also invest in online marketing activities to attract more customers to the business. Additionally, companies try to stay connected with their customer through online services. So they gain advantages from both online and offline businesses nowadays.

As NithinBawankule, Google India Director mentioned on 31st March 2016 Daily News website article that Sri Lanka comes to be one of the rapidly developing online shopping markets in Asia region because country online sales are picking up very fast. He further mentioned that customer sales per year in the country are accounted at 300 billion rupees and 1% of it is from online sales. They anticipate this value to be about 3% in three years' time as there is a 100% growth in Sri Lankan online market every year.

Thus, it is clear that at the same time there is a growth of e-commerce as well as a growth of SNSs usage especially Facebook in Sri Lanka. So the companies functioning in the e-commerce sector has begun to use SNSs as another marketing tool. The popularity of Facebook has made the companies who presence in online business to create Facebook brand pages as one method to stay connected with their audience in Sri Lanka.

With all these trends it is important to study that whether the presence in Facebook really helps a company or not. Does Facebook user really engage with brands? Does this engagement increase the online purchasing? Because if there is no any advantage for a company by using SNSs there is no need to waste their time, money and efforts to be in such SNSs.

Hence, this research is trying to give some new insights to the scholars and marketers how the generation Y engagement with Facebook brand pages can influence online sales.

Although there are academic researches on consumer engagement (CE) there is a lack of academic research on "how the CE directly effect on online sales of the companies and how the brand awareness (BA) will mediate such relationship in Sri Lankan context?" This study will fill this gap in the literature and this will be a guide for future researchers on their studies.

Objectives of the Research

Before managers can more assuredly use social media marketing and branding it is essential for them to study and have knowledge about customers' behaviours with brands on SNSs. Since understanding the market and the consumer needs and wants is the first step of the marketing management process this research will be a guide for marketers.

From the final outcome of the study, companies who use Facebook brand pages to market their products can decide in what ways they can motivate their audience and what type of strategies can be used to be a success in the online market.

As the new trends mentioned above in Sri Lanka and research gaps found in literature this research has set out to study the following objectives.

- 1) To find the Sri Lankan consumers' level of activeness on Facebook brand pages.
- 2) To find out whether the Facebook user interactions with brand pages have an effect on online sales of a company.
- 3) To figure out the stimulus of Facebook user interaction with brand pages on BA.
- 4) To identify whether BA can mediate the relationship between CE with Facebook brand pages and online sales.

Literature review

CE is a very interesting concept which has been broadly examined in different disciplines by scholars such as Bowden (2009), Hollebeek (2011), Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012). As consensus by Clader, Malthouse, & Schaedel (2009) and Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014) for the success of a company's marketing and sales activities CE is vital.

Recently, scholars have begun to pay their attention to online CE. Many scholars such as Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek (2013), Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie

(2014), Clader, Malthouse, & Schaedel (2009) and Tsai & Men (2013) have examined the CE with related to SNSs and brand communities.

Most recent research done by Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski (2016) for measuring customer engagement with brands on SNSs provided three dimensions, namely consumption, contribution, and creation in their study. Through this scale, a business can identify consumer level of social media engagement with brands. Further, the researcher mentioned that the scale proposed to be able to use when examining dependent variables such as brand extension, purchase intention and price premium.

A study on Hong Kong students found that the main purpose to join fan pages was “to receive discounts and promotions” or “to get updates on future products” Cheung & Leung (2016). The same result was obtained from another study “Why do consumers follow or like travel brands in social media? For the discounts, alas” done in the USA and the results were clearly in favour of product-related reasons. Over half of respondents claimed access to discounts and sales as a reason (May 2012).

Further, studies show that exposures to earned and owned social media activities for brands have significant and positive impacts on consumers' likelihood to purchase the brands and also their effects are surprising, suppressive on each other (Xie & Lee, 2015). Most importantly, in the long run, there is a considerable effect on the sales of a company from Facebook advertisements. Especially, by gaining “Likes” for the advertisement on Facebook which means a consumer's click on “Like” it can affect strong long-term sales. Moreover, consumer visit to a Facebook brand page has a strong effect on company short-term sales (Brettel, Reich, Gavilanes, & Flatten, 2015).

But another scholar mentioned that sales figures or intention to purchase a brand cannot be measured by “Likes”. It can be used to decide whether marketing activities such as advertisement or promotion are a success or not. So he suggested that further studies need to be conducted to identify whether such activities liking, sharing, commenting and so forth have an effect on purchase intentions and real purchases (Parsons, Using social media to reach consumers: a content analysis of official Facebook pages, 2013).

A study conducted in Malaysia found that CE, brand exposure and e-WOM affect positively on BA. Scholar stated that among those three factors CE has a greater impact on BA (Shojaee & Azman, 2013). According to Keller (2001), active engagement is one of the essential stages to build brand equity. Since BA is one component of brand equity it was proposed that active CE can influence BA.

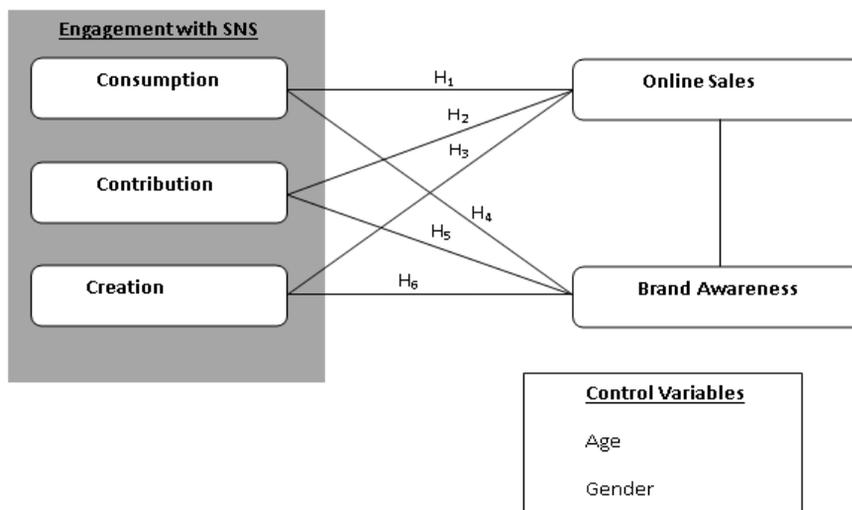
It is probable to purchase brands which have a high level of awareness and therefore it was proposed that BA can mediate the relationship between CE and online sales (Keller, 2001; Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007).

Through the literature, review author has identified that there can be an effect from CE which will measure with three dimensions introduced by Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski (2016) to increase the number of purchases by consumers which will be the online sales and this relationship can be mediated by the BA.

Methodology

Measures

Measurement items for each level in CE were adopted from Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski (2016) and items for BA were adopted from Yoo & Donthu (2001). A five-point Likert scale was provided, from 1 – always, to 5 – not at all. For the last item that was considered under BA, reversed scoring was used when analyzing. Measurement item for online sales was adopted from Cheung, Shen, Lee, & Chan, (2015) which was one item scale.



Data Collecting and Testing Methods

The questionnaire was distributed online and the researcher was able to collect 195 complete datasets for the study. Among them 52.8% were male and 47.2% were female. Also, 41.5% were aged between 18-25 years and 58.5% were aged between 26-34 years.

SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 21.0 were used and the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used for hypothesis testing. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify a clean pattern matrix and to check adequacy,

convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability of each latent variables. Then Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted according to the result of EFA. Model fit, validity and reliability was checked for the measurement model. After checking the multivariate assumptions structural model was built including all independent, dependent and control variables. Hypotheses were tested at this stage to identify direct effects and the mediation.

Results and Discussions

Exploratory Factor Analysis

For EFA maximum likelihood factoring method was used as the same method will be used in AMOS for CFA and structural model tests. For the final four-factor model several items were removed to get a clean pattern matrix and a good model.

From the EFA clean pattern matrix was found and the final model satisfied all adequacy, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability requirements.

Measurement Model

From the model found in EFA, CFA was conducted in AMOS. To make the model better, a measurement model was finalized with little modifications according to the modification indices. All standardized regression weights were greater than 0.7 and correlations were less than 0.8. Model fit for the final measurement model was as follows.

<u>Model Fit</u>		Table 2: Reliability and Validity Measures of each Factor							
Chi-square	= 152.747								
Degrees of freedom	= 93								
Probability level	= .000								
CMIN/DF	= 1.642								
CFI	= 0.975								
TLI	= 0.967								
SRMR	= 0.0485								
RMSEA	= 0.058								
PCLOSE	= 0.217								
			CR	AVE	MSV	BA	Creation	Contribution	Consumption
		BA	0.904	0.702	0.387	0.838			
		Creation	0.917	0.689	0.572	0.170	0.830		
		Contribution	0.929	0.813	0.572	0.245	0.756	0.902	
		Consumption	0.846	0.580	0.387	0.622	0.430	0.444	0.762

From Table 2 it is clear that the AVE values are greater than 0.5 which is the evidence for convergent validity; MSV values are less than AVE and the square

root of AVE values are greater than inter-factor correlations which are the evidence for discriminant validity; and the CR values are greater than 0.7 which confirm the reliability.

To evaluate common method bias (CMB) issue Harman's single-factor analysis was used. From the EFA it was found that four-factor model explains 70.995% of the variance. Meanwhile, outcomes also suggested that total variance explained by the single factor is lower than 50%, signifying that there is no CMB issue.

Since all the requirements were satisfied by the measurement model factor scores were imputed to use in the structural model.

Structural Model

Multivariate assumptions were checked under two areas outliers/influential and multicollinearity.

Cook's Distance was used for identifying outliers/influential and two records were removed from the total data set as they had abnormal values compared to the other records. VIF values were less than 3 and Tolerance values were greater than 0.1 which supported for no multicollinearity.

Satisfying these two conditions, it can be concluded that the model meets the requirements of the multivariate assumptions

CE and Online Sales

H1: The consumption level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on online sales

H2: The contribution level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on online sales

H3: The creation level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on online sales

Only the consumption level has significant direct effect while contribution and creation have no direct effect on online sales. So, considering the different dimensions of the CE has given a deep view of the considered relationship in this study.

Model Fit

Table 3: Results of the Effect of CE on Online Sales Analysis

Chi-square	= 2.237					
Degrees of freedom	= 2					
Probability level	= 0.327					
CMIN/DF	= 1.118					
CFI	= 0.999					
TLI	= 0.993					
SRMR	=0.0179					
RMSEA	= 0.025					
PCLOSE	= 0.484					
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
		OS <--- Consumption	.468	.127	3.700	***
		OS <--- Contribution	-.126	.133	-.943	.346
		OS <--- Creation	.139	.155	.894	.371
		OS <--- Income	.090	.047	1.912	.056

Consumption level is the first stage where the consumer gets to know about the brand's sales promotions, new arrivals, competitions, and discounts etc. Consuming does not take any extra efforts like contribution and creation. Once a customer logs in to Facebook most recent posts from friends, brand pages, and social groups etc. are visible on the News Feed. Therefore, without searching any information the Facebook user can see brand contents on his News Feed when he scrolls up and down. He can see posts about sales promotions, new arrivals, competitions, and discounts, etc. which can affect his mind to buy the product.

The study reveals that Facebook users consume more than contribution and creating contents for brands. This means that, Facebook users are highly engaged in activities like reading posts, watching pictures or graphics, following brands, etc. rather than commenting on those posts or sharing those posts. So, high consumption of brand-related content will give more and more information to the customer and therefore high consumption will also affect the customer to decide whether he needs to buy the product or not.

In a website article about online display advertising, it was mentioned that combined search and display ad campaigns get 22% conversions than search only campaigns and therefore display advertising helps to increase sales of the company. When consumer see an advertisement which means in related to current study when consumer consume brand-related content it can increase the sales of the company (Thiagarajan, 2015).

Moreover, a study conducted in the UK with 364 respondents examined that for the purchase intention of a customer and for their purchasing behaviour there is a slight effect from Facebook (Kodjamanis & Angelopoulos, 2013). Yang (2012) also stated that Facebook had a favourable influence on purchase intentions among 256 Taiwan respondents.

Parsons (2013) stated a completely different opinion that sales figures or the intention to purchase a brand cannot be measured by "Likes". It can be used to decide whether marketing activities such as advertisement or promotion are a

success or not. But Brettel, Reich, Gavilanes, & Flatten (2015) stated that most importantly, in the long run, there is a considerable effect on the sales of a company from Facebook advertisements. Especially, by gaining "Likes" for the advertisement on Facebook which means a consumer's click on "Like" it can affect strong long-term sales. Moreover, consumer visit to a Facebook brand page has a strong effect on company short-term sales.

CE and BA

H4: The consumption level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on the BA

H5: The contribution level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on the BA

H6: The creation level of brand-related content on Facebook has a direct effect on the BA

Model Fit

Table 4: Results of the Effect of CE on BA Analysis

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	
Chi-square	= 1.306					
Degrees of freedom	= 1					
Probability level	= 0.253	BA <--- Consumption	.964	.069	14.041	***
CMIN/DF	= 1.306	BA <--- Contribution	.091	.072	1.266	.206
CFI	= 0.999	BA <--- Creation	-.301	.086	-3.498	***
TLI	= 0.987	BA <--- Gender	.162	.084	1.935	.053
SRMR	= 0.0086	BA <--- Age	.070	.084	.834	.404
RMSEA	= 0.040					
PCLOSE	= 0.360					

The study results suggested that consumption level and creation level have a significant direct effect on BA while contribution level has no significant direct effect. According to Keller (2001), active engagement is one of the essential stages to build BA which is one dimension of brand equity in his study. So in-depth view, the current study suggests that only the consumption level and creation level have a direct effect on BA.

So, why contribution has no direct effect? It is easy to understand that if a consumer comes to the contribution level it means that he or she already consumed the brand content. For example, if a Facebook user sees a post on his News Feed about a new brand introduced by a company it is a consumption level engagement and it means now he is aware of the new brand. If he thinks a new brand is useful for his friends he may share the post as a contribution level engagement so that his friends will see the post too. Therefore, consumption affects that user to be aware of the new

brand rather than a contribution which is a direct effect that supports the research finding.

When considering the creation level engagement, the consumer may come to this level when he or she starts using the brand and start liking or disliking the brand. Customers have the ability to show their experience with the brand on Facebook whether it is good or bad by posting pictures, videos or writing reviews. Results suggest that this creation level of engagement has a negative effect on BA which is not even supported by the prior studies.

If I think practically, BA must be increased when consumer highly engages with the brand. There are many factors that can affect BA. For example, as Shojaee& Azman (2013) explained brand exposure and e-WOM also effect on BA. But, in this study, only the CE selected as the independent variable for the model.

Also, most of the studies do not consider BA as one separate factor. It includes one component when studying brand equity. So it comes up with several factors like brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand image and brand association. Total factors consider the brand equity in many studies. But due to the complexity of the model and time limitation, only the BA factor was considered in this study. Not including such factors in the current model is a major drawback of the study and that may influence for the negative results.

Another reason for getting a negative relationship may be the drop of one item from the selected scale. Although there were five items adapted from literature one item was dropped when doing EFA to get a good model fit. Therefore, removing one item may affect the final outcome of the study.

Mediation Effect

H7: The direct effect of consumption level on online sales is mediated by BA

H8: The direct effect of contribution level on online sales is mediated by BA

H9: The direct effect of creation level on online sales is mediated by BA

Model Fit	
Chi-square	= 3.504
Degrees of freedom	= 3
Probability level	= 0.320
CMIN/DF	= 1.168
CFI	= 0.996
TLI	= 0.991
SRMR	= 0.0174
RMSEA	= 0.030
PCLOSE	= 0.514

Table 5: Results of the Effect of CE on BA Analysis

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
BA <--- Consumption	.964	.069	14.041	***
OS <--- Consumption	.435	.178	2.447	.014
OS <--- BA	.035	.132	.264	.792

Through the empirical evidence, this study suggested testing the mediation effect of BA on customer engagement – online sales relationship. Findings of this study proved that there is no such mediation effect to examine.

Tsai & Men (2013) found that remuneration was the primary reason for using brands' Facebook pages, as users often expected to gain some forms of economic incentives. The second most prominent reason was to seek information about product/brand/company-related information. Apart from those reasons consumers appreciated the entertainment value of a brand page as a place where they could escape their daily routines or relax, pass time, and experience aesthetic enjoyment.

Since there are more reasons why consumers engage in Facebook brand pages; those reasons may dominant on consumer's behaviour than the BA when making a decision. For example, if the consumer motivation for consuming brand pages is pursuing economic incentive BA may not influence the consumer. In such a situation it can be assumed that consumer neglect the awareness of a brand and so that BA may not act as a mediator.

Additionally, the hypotheses of this study were built depending on foreign literature as there is a lack of local studies. So it can be also assumed that the above outcomes can differ when considering developed countries and developing countries because of the different conditions in each country in terms of technology, economy, consumer behaviours, etc.

Conclusions

Findings for the four main research objectives can be concluded as follow.

Consumption level has a direct influence on online sales. Finding gives interesting insight that "Liking", commenting or sharing brand-related content and posting brand related contents by the consumer himself does not directly affect the sales growth of the company. Therefore, instead of trying to increase engagement with

brand pages as a whole considering the levels of engagement and focus on those levels will be more beneficial to an organization.

- Generation Y consumers highly consume brand-related content on Facebook than contributing or creating. It can be concluded that the customer has a lower level of activeness with Facebook brand pages because consume is the lowest activeness.
- Consumption level has a direct effect on BA. When a Facebook user uses his account it is possible to see posts about brands. It will make the user be aware of the brand. But the finding suggested that creation level has a negative effect on BA which has no support from literature. Practically it seems impossible and the reason for this result may be dropping some factors effect on BA.
- The study suggested no mediation effect. Which means that when buying something online Facebook user does not consider about BA. The Internet offers consumers to find more options that economically beneficial for them. So they may tend to rely on economic incentives rather than looking for known brands. Because results also show that Facebook users do not spend money on expensive items. As the price they pay is very low they may not buy well-known products online. Rather they may buy online to get discounts even from a brand page they don't know just to get the advantage of the purchasing.

Recommendations

If managers can monitor the consumption level engagement of their consumers and pay careful attention that this level of engagement maintains at a relatively high level they can increase company sales. There is an option that posts can be boost by paying. It is one option that can do to make company advertisements visible frequently. If the company has no enough budgets for such activity another option can be posting the same post again and again. So, these methods will help companies to increase the consumption of the posts by its audience.

Also, companies can increase their sales by targeting highly consuming users as they tend to buy more.

It was also found that only 10% and 54% of the models explain the online sales and BA with respectively. This indicates that there should be more variables that have an effect on online sales and BA. If the managers can study and identify what are those missing factors they may take the full advantage of these findings.

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