THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Brand Activation in Driving Customer Engagement: Theoretical and Practice Review

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Abstract:

Brand Activation claimed to be a promotional tool use by organizations in order to induce their customers towards the brand. Literature evidence proves brand activation as an experiential learning technique compels customers to retain brand related information within the minds. The inconclusive literature on brand activation provides the platform further to investigate the area of brand activation with customer driven concepts. The review enlighten the avenues of brand activation in advance, customer engagement use as the outcome variable with brand activation as the predictor variable. The study adopted the literature and case review as the methodology. The review identified that brand activation is as a manipulative factor on customer engagement, and customer loyalty is the final result of it.

Keywords: Brand activation, customer engagement, customer experience, action learning

1. Introduction

Customer activation is one of the timely requirement and main purpose, despite whether it's a service or a product. Brand activation provides the platform in order to create a link between the customer and brand which result in a deeper bond between the customer and the brand (Saeed, Zameer, & Ahmad, 2015). Brand has become the vehicle which bring the emotional value propositions towards the customer while work as the symbol of the specific competence which create the organization's competitive advantage (Morel, Preisler, & Nyström, 2002). Since it can make a proposition that, activation conjunct with a brand or an element of the brand which make the customer more physiologically attached towards the brand. Further according Saeed et al., (2015) brand activation by means of creative communication makes customer more attached towards the activated brand itself. Besides, with the technological improvement and advancement of customer digital behavior, most brands compel customers to engage with their respective brands online. Novice organizations to activations use to borrow concepts of creative activations as of competitors and implement accordingly (Gendron, 2017), where it refer as experiential marketing which understand customer behavior and give hands on experience to the customer. Anderson, (1969) reveals that 'action-learning' or 'experiential-learning' techniques result in up to 90% retention with prospects' mind and people learn best when they use perceptual learning styles. Perceptual learning styles are sensory based. The more sensory channels possible in interacting with a resource, the better chance that many can learn from it. Moreover Dale's cone of experience (1946) witness that concrete experience make someone to remember experience based learning in long time (Davis & Summers, 2015).

Figure 1: Dale's Cone of Experience

Source: Adapted from E. Dale, *Audiovisual Methods in Teaching*, 1969, NY: Dryden Press

Brand activation also result in 'action learning' which make customer engage with the brand whilst provisioning a real time experience for the participants' of the activation. There are different modes of activations which can classify based on the customer engagement with the brand. Customers can actively involve with the activation or the customers may be a passive figure at the activation field as only viewers. When all the brand related strategies laid by the organization, brand activation work as the dais which execute the brand strategy in the real market context (Amin, 2013). As per Saeed et al., (2015) Event based brand activation is best suit for FMCG sector, yet certain other school of thoughts believe that event based brand activation is best suit for products or services which customers cannot experience at any other point as automobile, credit cards, mobile devices and etc. (Johnson, 2008) and it gives a vacuity in the field of brand activation in order to study the area further more .

1.1. Purpose of the Study

Customer activation is the main division in retail market, and brands need to follow the activated customers in order to maximize the customer brand relationship, because the goal is to create an active customer (Mckay & Brown, 2016). Further it claim that brand activation is not a theory yet a natural evolution of brand (Morel et al., 2002; Amin, 2013 & Saeed et al., 2015). Brand activation being a novice are for scholars it's yet to explore and establish with practical and theoretical notions (Dissanayake & Gunawardane, 2018). With above notions this paper tries to identify the role of customer engagement and how in driving brands. Further this paper contributes to the existing knowledge of brand activation from the perspectives of customer activation. This also gives a direction on how does brand activation can be use in future research studies.

1.2. Methodology

The paper constructed on the base of previous literature analysis specially journal papers and publications in order to develop empirical base for brand activation and customer engagement, hence it used literature review as the main tool for the research study, further this is a conceptual paper which supports with concepts and applications from the industry. Paper attempt to develop a relationship among brand activation and customer engagement with theoretical and practice perspective.

2. Theoretical Review on Customer Engagement (CE)

The term 'engagement' is used in a variety of academic disciplines including sociology, political science, psychology, and organizational behavior in the last decade (Resnick 2001; Achterberg et al. 2003 and Saks 2006). Further it can suggest that the conceptual roots of CE may be explained by drawing on theory addressing interactive experience and value co-creation within marketing relationships (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011). Further Brodie et al., (2011) define engagement is as a uni-dimensional concept as such it focused on either emotional or cognitive and behavioral aspect of engagement. The term CE is a concept which appears in marketing and service marketing literature. According Regulatory Engagement Theory (Higgins & Scholer, 2009), a consumer being occupied, fully absorbed or engrossed, which generating a level of attraction to, or repulsion from, a focal engagement object. Accordingly brand activation can be act as the focal engagement objective in order to occupy the consumer state of the mind towards a particular branded service or a product which result in brand engagement. Lush and Vargo (2010) identify particular interactive, co-creative customer experience can be interpreted as the main act of engagement. Moreover Brodie et al., (2011) recognize the central role of CE through extended relationship marketing perspective. In describing CE most of the articles (more than 60%) describe customer engagement from the perspective of Business to Customer (B to C) engagement which is a behavioral aspect of relationship and one third of the articles describe this relationship from Business to Business (B to B) engagement view (Brodie et al., 2011). CE is a concept which goes beyond mere purchasing behavior alone and it creates a long lasting state of the mind about customers it may result in rebuying, cross buying, and this is being a novice area which yet to explore by researchers in the field of marketing (van Doorn et al., 2010). Customer Engagement also encompasses customer co creation. As per Lush and Vargo (2006) that, customer co creation involves the customer participation in creation of the co-offering itself. The customer co creation happens when the customer participate spontaneously or discretionary behavior, that customize the customer to brand experience (van Doorn et al., 2010).

Further Doorn et al., (2010) define Customer Engagement Behavior can be elaborate based on five dimensions as valence, form or modality, scope, nature of its impact, and customer goals. in order to obtain CE there are three different antecedents which impact as customer based antecedents, firm based antecedents and context based antecedents. Dissanayake & Gunawardane, (2018) in Brand Activation review, mentioned brand activation as a firm based antecedent and thus it can conceptualize that Brand Activation as one element which enhances the customer engagement behavior towards a particular brand. Events may result in creating customer to customer engagement while crating brand to customer engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010), Although Gunawardane, Munasinghe, & Dissanayake, (2016) indicates that events being one of the best platforms in order to create brand activations which result in enhancing the customer brand preference. Further CE is a approach to create, build and enhance customer relationship with the brand in order to create a sustainable competitive advantage towards the organization itself hence it enhance the customer satisfaction (Islam & Rahman, 2016). The literature indicate that the CE as a concept which embedded in the Service Dominant (S-D) logic, and it extend to the relationship marketing domain which act as a hybrid conceptualization (Brodie et al., 2011). Further this hybrid conceptualization implicitly or explicitly presume that customer engagement as highly interactive in nature (Hollebeek, 2011). The other school of social behavior theories as social exchange theory, social penetration theory and

social practice theory, utilize social ties and social interaction, have also been utilized to study the concept of Customer Engagement (Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Customer engagement as a concept has not yet properly established and different schools of thoughts as contesting to each other and does have different perspectives. Whereas some authors consider customer engagement as psychological process (Bowden, 2009 & Brodie et al., 2011) while other school of thought consider customer engagement as behavioral process (Angeles Ovied –Garcia et al., 2014, Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014.). As a outcome the customer engagement is the customer readiness of a customer to actively participate and interact with the focal object (brand/organization/community/organizational activity) (Islam & Rahman, 2016), moreover the customer interaction can be either positive or negative. Most of the time customer engagement is having a direct relationship to service marketing based on the S-D Logic and further it indicate a relationship to customer loyalty through relationship marketing. Morgan & Hunt, (1994)'s commitment trust theory postulates that, customer engagement will result in developing commitment and trust which may lead to customer loyalty.

3. Empirical Review on Customer (Object) Focus Brand Activation

Brand Activation give the brand experience which participants of an activation get exposed to the brand and its attributes (Saeed et al., 2015). Further Liembawati et al., (2014) elaborates that experience driven brand activations will result in customer focus experience generation which enhance the customer satisfaction whilst the brand and its products. Renowned brands do brand activations in order to emotionally connect the customer towards the brand and which can come as an in-store activation, event, sponsorships or product sampling. This is a real emotional engagement way in which brands can use to increase customer engagement. When it comes to the evaluation of brand activation there are certain principles need to consider.

Return on Investment	What are the ways and means which you can earn the cost of activation, is it measurable (no need always to be in financial terms) and how to collect information.	(Amin, 2013)(Marist, Yuliati, & Najib, 2014)
Long-term Potential	Does the brand is having any possibility to earn the ROI in long run.	(Attri & Road, 2013)(Alberts, 2009)
Uniqueness	Does the brand activation is having a unique VP (Value proposition) which customers can remember.	(Amin, 2013)(Saeed et al., 2015)
Brand relevance	Does the brand activation strategy relevant to the brand itself.	(Amin, 2013)(Marist et al., 2014)
Expertise	Does the brand activation strategy go with the company's overall strategy.	(Attri & Road, 2013.)(Morel et al., 2002)
Integration	Is that brand activation integrated with the overall marketing channels of the organization.	(Liembawati et al., 2014)
Customer reach	How many customers does the brand activation reach (province wise / city wise or internationally).	(Attri & Road, 2013.)(Mckay & Brown, 2016)
Amplification	Is it easy to make changes to the overall activation strategy when required.	(Gendron, 2017)

Table 1: Principles of Brand Activation

Brand Activation is not a theory yet it's a natural evolution of the brands and which resulted as a fact of accumulated activities (Morel et al., 2002). Activations used as new ways of approaching the target market thus brand activation can be focuses on existing and new customers both. Where existing customers improve their brand trust and new customers may experience the newness of the product or the service. Olympic committee with the Coca Cola executed a Virtual Olympic torch rally activation which is one of the new approach to the traditional torch rally and it helped Coca Cola in order to connect the brand with the Olympic audience by giving the customer engagement towards the brand Coke (Choi, 2008). Further Choi, (2008) believe that internet also can be a well stated mean for building customer brand relationship. Where brands can in implement online brand activations being most of the customers are online rather offline despite their busy work schedules and family lifestyle. Brand activation help to activate the customer and which leads to having a real-time attachment towards the brand itself and it help the customer to deal properly with their 'D-Zone' (Decision Zone) (Saeed et al., 2015; Mckay & Brown, 2016). Brand which go with brand activations experiencing a zone of change and flexibility being activation need to change according to the market changes of the customers (Gendron, 2017) because organizations who see persons with individual values can be effectively target through brand activation rather mass of manipulated customers (Amin, 2013). Though some scholars argue that, it to be an effective brand activation, the respective brand need to popular with the target customers, in that instance it arises the dilemma of does brand activation actually a brand awareness creator or a brand awareness enhancer. A brand can be activated in different range of situations ranging on four avenues as product and services, employees, identity and communication (Morel et al., 2002). Yet one of the biggest issue that the brand activation is having at moment is to measuring the impact of brand activation (Dissanayake & Gunawardane, 2018) which need more scholarly evaluations and scaling the concept of brand

activation. Events can be used as a platform to execute the brand activation and event itself is not a mean of brand activation where in certain instances laymen reflect brand activation synonyms with event marketing. Accordingly there are brands as *Lifebuoy*, *Volkswagen*, *Vodafone* and *Reckitt Benkisers's Detol* having a strong bottom line brand activations in order to activate the customers (Attri & Road, n.d., 2013) which is a strong tool always with practical aspect in order to actively engage with the customers and moreover to make customers engage among themselves (C to C) in order to develop a positive word of mouth regarding the brand. Brand Activation can be identified as an action learning mechanism which customers get the hands-on experience about the product or the service and which enhance the customer engagement with it. Since action learning retain with the customers mind (Davis & Summers, 2015) more than a simple brand communication.

4. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This paper attempted to study the connection between brand activation and consumer engagement with the help of dales' cone of experience. Which cone of experience identify that the experience learning will help to retain action oriented engagement (Anderson, 1969). Brand activation being a model to activate the customer rather than activate the brand itself (Mckay & Brown, 2016) which help to engage the customer with the brand itself. The usual methods of brand communications is probably a one-way communication mechanism. Yet activation driven customer engagement always act as two way communication mechanism which is more effective. Brand Activations not only supported and effective through offline platforms like events, exhibitions, sports activations, however online activation might effective with the high online literacy of customers. It's good to identify the impact of brand activation in online environment and its impact on customer engagement, which is Online Brand Activation in near future which will be an industry strike in Marketing Communication field. Further Online Brand Activations will be more cost effective when it compares to off-line activations and it will be easy to trace the participants of the activations and measure the outcome since there is no means of measuring the impact of brand activation when it comes to academic field (Dissanayake & Gunawardane, 2018). Service and other Industries (e.g. Insurance, Mobile Telecommunication, Banks, FMCG, Beverages) tend to measure the impact of brand activations with reference to the no of sales units and there is no any such method to identify the direct impact of brand activation on their long-term brand performance improvement as in brand loyalty, brand trust and customer commitment.

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