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How Can Stimuli and Emotions Help Increase Brand Advocacy

ABSTRACT

The current study aims to explore if Information/Content, Interactive Features, and Design-Visual appeal influences consumers emotional states of Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance (PDA), leading to brand advocacy as an outcome. Therefore, our goal is to understand which stimuli of experience exercises more effect on the three emotional states (PDA) and which of these three better influence Brand Advocacy.

Data from 183 users of CGM were analysed through structural equation modelling (SmartPLS2.0) and the findings show that all the aforementioned stimuli influence online PDA. Findings also suggest that all PDA dimensions influence Brand Advocacy.

Keywords: Information/Content, Interactive Features, Design-Visual Appeal, Online Engagement, Brand Advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

In a globalized and competitive world, the brands and firms that holds them seek to find strategies to captivate, retain, and even make their consumers as advocates or brand advocates. In this sense, they try to increase the brand-shift barriers for another brands or firms. This phenomenon occurs both with the brands that have their existence online, as well as offline.

Literature in marketing and management has been proliferating in analysing antecedents of loyalty and brand loyalty, such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, perceived quality. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding background analysis for the propensity for a customer to become a brand advocate.

This study seeks to help bridge this gap by exploring how stimuli and emotions can contribute to enhancing brand advocacy in the online context. Thus, the main aim is to understand which stimuli of the online experience have the most effect on three emotional states (pleasure, arousal, and dominance), as well as these emotional states positively influence consumers to advocate a brand.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To theoretically support our intent, we start from the theoretical model called S-O-R (stimuli-organism-response) framework. This framework has the following underlying assumptions: i) the environmental stimuli experienced through the experiences (in this case online) are internalized by the organisms (the users of the online tools) developing emotions states; ii) emotional states can be categorized into three main ones, pleasure, arousal and the third which also has a cognitive component relating to the sense of capacity and mastery of experience, i.e., the dominance-designated state; iii) the response that is usually translated by intention of behaviour, but that in the present study will be the propensity to advocate the brand (Roschk, Loureiro, & Breitsohl, 2017).

This study considers three online stimuli of experience that can be considered site features that influence client involvement: information/content, interactive features and design/visual appeal. According to Loureiro (2015), there is no standard method for website evaluation, with other authors arguing that "*researchers should choose the most appropriate approach to their research goals, target markets and stakeholders*" (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010: 310). Therefore, this study adopts the three stimuli mentioned, following Loureiro (2015) and considered suitable for consumer-generated media (CGM) of websites such as Booking.com or TripAdvisor.com. These websites provide consumer-generated content, such as online consumer ratings and reviews, which allow consumers to search and identify hotels, restaurants and attractions that best match their interests, influencing their decisions (Fileri, 2015; Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and all the items used to measure the constructs are adapted from previous validated scales (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Han & Mills, 2006; Loureiro, 2015; Pelozo, 2006). We measure all items using a seven-point Likert scale.

A sample pilot sample of 27 consumers was employed to test the content of the items in terms of writing, meaning, and understanding, and few adjustments were made. The questionnaire also includes a sociodemographic section. We distributed 200 questionnaires between forum members that use booking.com to search, select and book hotel rooms and collected a total of 183 complete and usable answers.

The sample comprise 62% of women, with 9.8% of the participants younger than 25 years old, 33.9% between 25 and 34 years old and 33.2% of the respondents aged between 35 and 44 years. Most of the participants (64.5%) have a college degree.

This sample structure has the general demographic characteristics of consumers using online platforms to book travel and hotels: young people (between twenty's and thirty's years-old) and participants with high level of education (Rada, Domínguez-Álvarez, & Dominguez-Alvarez, 2014). In addition, regarding the chosen brand and the demographic profile of the participants, it is important to note that the gender distribution is in accordance with the "Booking.com" physiognomy. In fact, in relation to the general population of the internet, women are over represented on the website "Booking.com" (Booking, 2017).

RESULTS

A structural equation model approach using PLS is used to test the proposed model. The PLS is based on an iterative combination of principal component analysis and regression. It intends to explain the variance of the constructs in the model. In terms of analytical advantages, PLS was considered an effective analytical tool to test interactions reducing Type II errors (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003).

The PLS approach is analysed in two steps: first, the measurement model and then the structural model. In this study, all items show item loading equal to or greater than 0.747 and therefore were accepted. All constructs prove acceptable composite reliability with values above 0.7. The measurements show adequate convergent validity, since the AVE values are higher than 0.5. Finally, the measures also prove discriminant validity through the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) and analysis of the cross-loading matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement model

Construct	LV Mean	Item loading	AVE	Composite reliability	CA
Information\content	5.6	0.807		0.944	0.920
At 'Booking.com' I have the full information at hand		0.919			
'Booking.com' provides in-depth information		0.915			
'Booking.com' gives me enough information, so I can identify what I want to the same degree as if I was in personal contact with someone from a tour operator		0.861			
'Booking.com' is a very good source of information.		0.899			
Interactive features	4.4		0.857	0.968	0.958
'Booking.com' presents links or contact information to hotel\accommodation at the destination		0.836			
'Booking.com' presents links or contact information to local attractions		0.942			

'Booking.com' presents links or contact information to local restaurants		0.963			
'Booking.com' presents links or contact information on events and festival reservations		0.932			
'Booking.com' presents maps of major attractions		0.951			
Design-visual appeal	4.8		0.893	0.977	0.970
'Booking.com' webpage looks attractive		0.956			
'Booking.com' webpage looks organized		0.945			
'Booking.com' webpage uses multimedia features properly		0.933			
'Booking.com' webpage uses colours properly		0.944			
'Booking.com' webpage uses fonts properly		0.946			
Pleasure	4.6		0.951	0.975	0.948
While using 'Booking.com' how often have you experienced happy?		0.975			
While using 'Booking.com' how often have you experienced pleasure?		0.975			
Arousal	4.6		0.939	0.979	0.967
While using 'Booking.com' how often have you felt active?		0.955			
While using 'Booking.com' how often have you felt excited?		0.973			
While using 'Booking.com' how often you experienced stimulated?		0.978			
Dominance	4.9		0.905	0.966	0.947
How often you felt in control over your visiting experience at 'Booking.com'?		0.925			
How often you felt in autonomous during your visiting experience at 'Booking.com'?		0.973			
How often you felt free during your visiting experience at 'Booking.com'?		0.955			
Brand Advocacy	5.5		0.647	0.844	0.725
I would like to try new services introduced by 'Booking.com'		0.835			
I talk favourably about 'Booking.com' to friends and family		0.908			
If the 'Booking.com' did something I didn't like, I would be willing to give it another chance		0.747			

Note: AVE-Average Variance Extracted; CA-Cronbach's Alpha
Source: Own elaboration

Regarding discriminant validity was used the criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which argue that the square root of AVE should be higher than the correlation between the two constructs in the model. In this research, all latent variables met that criterion, demonstrating discriminant validity (Table 2). The second criterion for discriminant validity is that no item should load more highly on another construct than it does on the construct it intends to measure. If we examine the matrix loadings and cross-loadings (gathered from PLS software) it reveals that all items passed the second criterion for discriminant validity (Table 2).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
AVE ^{1/2}	0.945	0.898	0.925	0.975	0.969	0.951	0.801
1. Design-visual appeal	1.000						
2. Information\content	0.566	1.000					

3. Interactive features	0.689	0.472	1.000				
4. Pleasure	0.664	0.512	0.571	1.000			
5. Arousal	0.724	0.524	0.588	0.739	1.000		
6. Dominance	0.714	0.505	0.601	0.705	0.774	1.000	
7. Brand advocacy	0.560	0.717	0.377	0.496	0.552	0.520	1.000

Source: Own Elaboration

This study employed a nonparametric approach known as Bootstrap to estimate the path coefficients. All path coefficients are considered significant at significance levels of 0.001, 0.01 or 0.05. The predictive validity measures R^2 and Q^2 were also analysed. All values of Q^2 are positive, so that the relationships in the model have predictive relevance. The model also shows a good level of predictive power (R^2), since the modelled constructs explain 33.4% of the variance in brand advocacy, 48.6% of the variance in pleasure, 55.5% of the variance in arousal and 54.3% of the variance in dominance (Table 3).

Table 3. Structural results

Path	Standardized coefficient direct effect	Standard Error	t-value	Test-result	
Information\content → Pleasure	0.178***	0.039	4.555	H1a: supported	H1: fully supported
Information\content → Arousal	0.151***	0.036	4.149	H1b: supported	
Information\content → Dominance	0.125**	0.045	2.788	H1c: supported	H2: fully supported
Interactive features → Pleasure	0.188***	0.048	3.953	H2a: supported	
Interactive features → Arousal	0.147**	0.050	2.947	H2b: supported	
Interactive features → Dominance	0.189***	0.046	4.087	H2c: supported	H3: fully supported
Design-visual appeal → Pleasure	0.434***	0.051	8.471	H3a: supported	
Design-visual appeal → Arousal	0.538***	0.054	10.044	H3b: supported	
Design-visual appeal → Dominance	0.514***	0.052	9.939	H3c: supported	H4: supported
Pleasure → Brand advocacy	0.140**	0.052	2.702	H5: supported	
Arousal → Brand advocacy	0.306***	0.092	3.340	H6: supported	
Dominance → Brand advocacy	0.185*	0.094	1.967		
	R^2 Pleasure	0.486		Q^2 Pleasure	0.299
	R^2 Arousal	0.555		Q^2 Arousal	0.513
	R^2 Dominance	0.543		Q^2 Dominance	0.490
	R^2 Brand advocacy	0.334		Q^2 Brand advocacy	0.200

Note: ns-not significant; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Own elaboration

The analysis of the mediating effect of pleasure, activation and dominance between stimuli and brand advocacy reveals that: i) pleasure (VAF-variance accounted for = 12.2%), arousal (VAF = 17.4%) and dominance = 19.9%) do not have a mediating effect on the relation information/content → brand advocacy; ii) pleasure (VAF = 63.1%) and arousal (VAF = 79.0%) partially mediate the relation between interactive features → brand advocacy, but dominance does

not (VAF = 7.4%); iii) pleasure (VAF = 26.0%), arousal (VAF = 28.3%), and dominance (VAF = 31.2%) partially mediate the relation between design/visual appeal → brand advocacy.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results allow us to conclude, once again, the relevance of this PLS approach in applications of an exploratory research in marketing and management. Although the model has a good validity, we realize that online atmospheric stimuli have a more effective power in explaining emotional states than in the variability of brand advocacy. Emotional states did not fully mediate the established relationships between stimuli and brand advocacy. Although other studies are needed to understand this phenomenon, this was a first attempt to understand how the S-O-R framework could be extended to incorporate the construct of brand advocacy.

The sensation of pleasure and arousal felt by consumers when using booking.com are effective to enhance the willingness to advocate in favour of the brand. Although statistically significant, the more cognitive component of PDA seems to be less effective in influencing users to try new services and to forgive if something goes wrong (brand advocacy).

The findings allow us to suggest that managers of this kind of websites to be more creative in the services they provide. They should be emotional appealing to captivate users and lead them to advocate positively and forgive. An appropriate gamification incorporation could help in such process.

Finally, the study support once more the S-O-R model (Roschk et al., 2017). The dimensions of website quality (Loureiro, 2015) also demonstrate to be appropriate to the current situation.

In future, we suggest test other emotions and analyse how them could or not enhance brand advocacy. We may regard emotions such as: delight, fear, or angry.

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