THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA UPON BRAND IMAGE: THE PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS IN SELECTED FAST FOOD OUTLETS IN KLANG VALLEY – MALAYSIA

By

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that this project is my own effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

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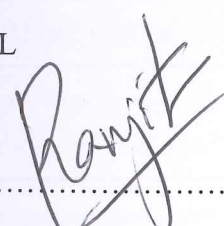IUKL

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ABSTRACT

Building brand loyalty for products and services is becoming more crucial, critical and complex in today's world of business competition. This small scale study discusses customer perceptions of how the social media can influence aspects related to the fast food industry. At the initial stage the study measured customer perceptions of brand loyalty on fast food products using a convenient sample of 111 participants (N=111) drawn randomly at some of the popular fast food outlets in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. In the second stage, qualitative interviews (face –to- face) were conducted with ten percent (10%) of the same participants (N=11; *Double Sampling*) to triangulate the findings. The pre-requisite for the sample selection was that respondents who participated in the study fulfilled one common criteria They were both 'Fast Food Lovers' and at the same time active in 'Social Media Usage'. The results from these mixed method approach matched some of the findings revealed in the past literature. It was found that Social Media does have an influence on the brand images of the fast food industry. People who are active in the Social Media tend to share their ideas and experiences while exerting an inherent influence on customer decision making on fast food choices. The study ends with suggestions and recommendations for future research as how the Social Media can become an effective marketing tool especially for the fast food industry.

KEYWORDS

Brand Loyalty

Securing long term or sustainable profitability is one of the biggest challenges in the business world. Brand loyalty is the repeat purchase of a product(s) or hiring of service(s) by a customer that reflects his or her conscious decision to continuously purchase that product or hire the service concerned in the future. In other words Brand Loyalty is the positive attitude of customers towards a particular brand that makes them repeatedly purchase the brand. To elaborate further, Brand Loyalty sometimes refers to the psychological commitment of customers towards product brands that appeal to them. On the same note it is much more important to note that Brand Loyalty does not only refer to continuous purchase of a particular brand but the mindset of customers that refute to buy or even consider buying any other brands (Michael, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty, 2002).

Fast Food

Fast food brand is defined as restaurants that provide expedited food services, which mostly offer Western pattern diet, established standard operating procedures, and have franchise in multiple states or nation-wide (Askanasy and Nicholson, 2003; Burdette and Whitaker, 2004). A fast food restaurant, also known as a quick service restaurant (QSR) within the industry, is a specific type of restaurant characterized both by its fast food cuisine and by minimal table service. Food served in fast food restaurants typically caters to a "meat-sweet diet" and is offered from a limited menu; is cooked in bulk in advance and kept hot; is finished and packaged to order and is usually available ready to take away, though seating may be provided. Fast food restaurants are typically part of a restaurant chain or franchise operation, which provisions standardized ingredients and/or partially prepared foods and supplies to each restaurant through controlled supply channels.

Social Media

Social media is the interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. According to (Andreas and Michael, 2010) Social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. They introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals.

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Quick service restaurant	QSR
Electronic Customer Relationship management	E-CRM
Kentucky Fried Chicken	KFC
Information and communication technologies	ICTs

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The advent of social media is said to be impacting the internet revolution on corporate brands (Stuart and Jones, 2004; Merrilees and Fry, 2002). According to (Park, Cha, Kim and Jeong, (2012) Social media is becoming a 'major headache' to the corporate world because it has been shown to facilitate the spread of negative news. A point that intervenes the advertising strategies of firms endeavored to strengthen the brand image. More and more firms are looking into the possibilities of utilizing social media as a means of potential advertising strategies. For one thing there is no direct cost involved and the message that spreads via social network speaks for itself as an advertising strategy.

However, there seems a lack of evidence about what actually drives value for on-line matters (Merrilees and Fry, 2002). Understanding the underpinning aspects of the phenomenon is vital for marketers as the favorable brand image of a company may influence consumer loyalty or patronage of consumer decision making. Marketers have utilized various means to maintain the brand loyalty of their customers. Undoubtedly one of the recent means is the use of social media marketing (Erdogmus and Cicek, 2012). Different communication strategies are observed in various social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Orkut.

These powerful media technology not only exert impact upon the audience but create interactive communication that may work as indirect advertising and marketing strategies. Hence, it might be undeniable that social media is becoming the primary arena for high level

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