



Brand equity and electronic word of mouth in digital environments

Capital de marca y boca a boca electrónico en entornos digitales

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Submitted: 10-11-2023 | Revised: 18-01-2024 | Accepted: 24-04-2024 | Published: 25-04-2024

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study addressed the role of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in shaping brand value in digital environments. It began with the recognition that interactions on social media and virtual platforms changed consumer perception, credibility, and preference, influencing variables such as brand image, attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and loyalty. Development: international and national findings were analyzed, showing that positive e-WOM had direct and significant effects on brand image, recognition, and purchase intention in different geographical contexts. It was also observed that factors such as trust, sense of belonging, and virtual community enhanced the effectiveness of e-WOM in generating symbolic and commercial value. At the local level, online brand experiences were linked to trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, although the influence of social media on purchasing decisions depended on the type of platform and the user's mode of interaction. Theoretically, the analysis was based on the Information Adoption Model and Social Identity Theory, which explained the persuasive and identity-building processes in digital communities. Conclusions: it was concluded that e-WOM functioned as a strategic determinant of brand value by consolidating reputation, differentiation, and sustained preference. Furthermore, brand value was understood as a multidimensional construct based on loyalty, perceived quality, image, trust, and empathy, the management of which proved key to organizational competitiveness.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth; Brand Value; Loyalty; Social Media; Trust.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el estudio abordó el papel del boca a boca electrónico (e-WOM) en la configuración del valor de marca en entornos digitales. Partió del reconocimiento de que las interacciones en redes sociales y plataformas virtuales modificaron la percepción, la credibilidad y la preferencia de los consumidores, influyendo en variables como la imagen de marca, la actitud hacia la marca, la intención de compra y la lealtad. Desarrollo: se analizaron hallazgos internacionales y nacionales que mostraron que el e-WOM positivo tuvo efectos directos y significativos sobre la imagen de marca, el reconocimiento y la intención de compra en distintos contextos geográficos. También se observó que factores como la confianza, el sentido de pertenencia y la comunidad virtual potenciaron la eficacia del e-WOM para generar valor simbólico y comercial. A nivel local, se registró que las experiencias de marca en línea se vincularon con confianza, satisfacción y lealtad, aunque la influencia de las redes sociales sobre la decisión de compra dependió del tipo de plataforma y del modo de interacción del usuario. Teóricamente, el análisis se apoyó en el Modelo de Adopción de Información y en la Teoría de la Identidad Social, que explicaron los procesos persuasivos y de construcción de identidad en las comunidades digitales. Conclusiones: se concluyó que el e-WOM funcionó como un determinante estratégico del valor de marca, al consolidar reputación, diferenciación y preferencia sostenida. Además, el valor de marca se entendió como un constructo multidimensional sustentado en lealtad, calidad percibida, imagen, confianza y empatía, cuya gestión resultó clave para la competitividad organizacional.

Palabras clave: Boca a Boca Electrónico; Valor de Marca; Lealtad; Redes Sociales; Confianza.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rise of digital technologies has profoundly transformed communication dynamics between consumers and brands, generating a new paradigm in buyer behavior. In this context, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has established itself as a key factor influencing brand perception, image, and value, as well as purchasing decisions. Continuous interaction on social media and digital platforms allows consumers to share experiences, opinions, and recommendations that can strengthen or weaken a brand's market positioning. This phenomenon, framed within the information economy and digital trust, represents a source of interpersonal influence with massive reach and unprecedented dissemination speed.

Various international studies have demonstrated the significant impact of e-WOM on variables such as brand image, attitude toward the brand, loyalty, and purchase intention. Studies conducted in Indonesia, China, and South Korea (1) show that positive e-WOM exerts direct and statistically significant effects on the construction of brand value and on consumer loyalty. Likewise, it has been demonstrated that trust, virtual community, and digital advertising strengthen the relationship between electronic communication and value perception. In addition, research in Iran and Ecuador (2,3) confirms that favorable experiences shared in digital environments increase the credibility and reputation of brands, which in turn enhances their symbolic and commercial capital.

At the national level, studies conducted in Lima (4,5,6,7) show that brand experiences in virtual environments, as well as interactions on social networks, are closely related to users' recognition, valuation, and purchase decision. However, the results also suggest that the magnitude of this effect varies according to the type of social network and the nature of the content shared.

Within this framework, understanding the role of e-WOM in building brand equity is essential for companies seeking to consolidate their digital presence. This study draws on theories such as the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and Social Identity Theory, which explain the persuasive and social mechanisms behind digital communication, as well as complementary approaches for interpreting and integrating brand, experience, and design.

DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

At the international level

Purwianti & Niawati. Indonesia. The findings extended the finding that positive e-WOM produces a direct and significant effect on brand image ($t=3.931$, $p=.000$), as well as on brand attitude ($t=8.188$, $p=.000$). Likewise, brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($t=3.028$, $p=.003$); similarly, brand attitude influences purchase intention ($t=3.460$, $p=.001$). Finally, e-WOM directly and significantly influences purchase intention ($t=8.000$, $p=.000$). Consequently, it was concluded that positive e-WOM significantly influences brand image and brand attitude.

Sun et al. (1) China. The results indicated that positive e-WOM significantly affected both national brands ($\beta=.387$, $p=.000$) and foreign brands ($\beta=.376$, $p=.000$); by contrast, negative e-WOM did not exert a significant effect on brand equity for both national and foreign brands. Therefore, it was concluded that only positive e-WOM achieves a significant impact on brands of national or international origin.

Budiman. South Korea. The findings showed that e-WOM exerts a positive and significant effect on both brand image ($\beta=.222$, $p=.008$) and brand loyalty ($\beta=.284$, $p=.000$). Likewise, the online community has a direct and significant impact on brand image ($\beta=.214$, $p=.013$) and brand loyalty ($\beta=.265$, $p=.000$). In addition, online advertisements positively and significantly influence brand image ($\beta=.193$, $p=.029$) and brand loyalty ($\beta=.325$, $p=.000$). In conclusion, e-WOM significantly impacts brand equity.

Seo et al. South Korea. The results indicated that personality and the informative attributes of social media use significantly influenced e-WOM, while the latter also exerted significant effects on brand knowledge ($\beta=.472$, $CR=5,598$, $p<.01$) but not on brand image; on the other hand, trust influenced brand knowledge ($\beta=.492$, $CR=7,241$, $p<.001$) and brand image ($\beta=.91$, $CR=12,263$, $p<.001$). In conclusion, e-WOM significantly influenced only a single dimension of brand equity: brand knowledge.

Villarroel et al. (3) Ecuador. The findings showed that the e-WOM received significantly influenced brand equity (coefficient=.264, $p=.000$), as well as trust in brand equity (coefficient=.563,

$p=.000$). In conclusion, to the extent that more consumers share their favorable experiences with brands in virtual spaces, the value held by the brand will be optimized.

Farzin et al. (2) Iran. The results showed that variables such as consumer trust, informational influence, sense of belonging, altruism, moral obligation, and knowledge self-efficacy had a significant effect on consumer participation in eWOM. Likewise, eWOM played a role in articulating brand image in consumers' minds and their consequent purchase intention. In conclusion, eWOM affects consumers' valuation of the brand.

At the national level

Ruiz (4). Lima. The findings revealed that online brand experience (sensory and affective) had a greater impact on the model and a stronger association with variables such as trust, E-wom, and satisfaction, while the latter were related to online loyalty. Therefore, it was concluded that the experiences obtained with the brand in the virtual environment influenced E-wom.

García (5). Lima. Among the main results, it was found that WhatsApp is the most widely used social network (41%), followed by Facebook (28%); regarding time spent on social networks, 30.2% remain on them for 2 to 4 hours; however, 51.1% of respondents are occasionally influenced by the social network to make purchases. It was concluded that social networks, despite their use, do not significantly affect purchasing decisions.

Domínguez (6). Lima. The findings made evident that E-wom was significantly related to purchase intention ($r=.786$, $p=.000$) and brand recognition was significantly associated with purchase intention ($r=.813$, $p=.000$). Lastly, E-wom was significantly linked to brand recognition ($r=.851$, $p=.000$). It was concluded that the greater the E-wom, the greater the brand positioning in the individual.

Torres (7). Lima. The results showed that E-wom on social networks is directly and significantly related to the score given by users to the brand, as well as the latter with the sentiment developed by the brand. In conclusion, E-wom on social media platforms is linked to brand valuation.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Variable 1. E-wom

Definition

E-wom is conceptualized as a process of oral or written communication between a sender and an individual or group of receivers, regardless of whether they are integrated into the same social system, for the purpose of informally sharing and acquiring information regarding a brand or product, as well as an experience related to its use; however, unlike WOM, it is distinguished by the fact that the source of the message may be known or anonymous for both the sender and the receiver. Furthermore, it does not occur in a strictly synchronized and bidirectional manner.

Importance

Certainly, E-wom has a broad presence in brand promotional strategies because consumers, whether potential, recent, or long-standing, frequently use digital platforms, particularly social networks that constitute virtual scenarios where information regarding their perception or assessment, whether favorable or unfavorable, about a given brand is disseminated, and can affect other users' decision-making regarding it. Moreover, attending to E-wom entails that commercial companies maintain a closer connection with consumers.(8)

Theory

Information Adoption Model (IAM)

The aforementioned theoretical model is based on two preceding theoretical proposals, namely the elaboration likelihood model and the technology acceptance model; it provides a perspective that enables understanding of the persuasive functions of the data to which individuals are exposed in a virtual environment, affecting their decision-making. Thus, it states that the persuasive effect is achieved through two routes: central and peripheral.

The core point of communication is subject to the central route, whereas the peripheral route does not have a direct relationship with the basis of the message. On the other hand, the information adoption model comprises four aspects: argument quality (central route), source cre-

dibility (peripheral route), functionality and information incorporation (peripheral route), and overall effectiveness.

Social identity theory

Complementary to the previous perspective, the aforementioned theory postulates that consumers tend to establish their identity based on the degree of belonging achieved with the posts made by members of their closest circle of friends, developing a series of emotional responses that correspond to that level of social adherence. Thus, presence in virtual media would obey a need to forge personal identity, increasing their confidence and sharing an experience about the products purchased. Therefore, it is formulated that when users generate identification on the digital platform, they are more likely to have a more satisfactory purchase experience.(9)

Evaluation of the variable

E-WOM will be examined through an operationalization composed of four dimensions: E-Wom motivation, E-Wom consultation intention, E-Wom volume, and E-Wom adoption; these are detailed below:

- E-Wom Motivation: Refers to the perceived incentive, tangible or intangible, involved in receiving stimuli concerning word of mouth in digital spaces, conditioning a behavioral predisposition with respect to a specific brand.
- Convenience: It concerns the identification of advantages associated with the brand that could be obtained insofar as loyalty to it is achieved through behaviors such as purchasing its products.
- Risk: Regarding the other element of the equation where benefits are included, it is the probability that the brand fails to meet the user's expectations when purchasing its products.
- Social: It refers to social stimuli that produce a persuasive effect on users through virtual spaces where various contents, such as written and visual, among others, are communicated.
- Intention to consult E-Wom: This concerns a favorable attitude toward the idea of resorting to virtual sources where users share content about electronic word-of-mouth related to a specific brand, because it could contribute to defining the decision of the potential consumer.
- Social media consultations: This involves reviewing posts disseminated on digital platforms where a community provides its perceptions regarding the brand and may obtain feedback that confirms or refutes its stance.(10)
- Online opinion queries on search engines: This concerns the review of subjective information provided by each user and appearing on web pages in order to obtain brand references.
- 1. E-Wom Volume: An indicator concerning the proportion of content according to certain properties and contrasting with a reference group in electronic word-of-mouth sources.
- User recommendations and criticisms: This is defined as the set of approving reviews about the brand or, conversely, the opinions that entail dissatisfaction with the brand.
- Review of the number of opinions: This consists of exposing the user to a specific number of perceptions in formats of a different nature regarding the brand in question.
- Review of comments and ratings of boutiques: This is conceptualized as the perception of the opinions expressed on the virtual platform with respect to the appraisal of stores dedicated to clothing sales.
- E-Wom Adoption: Refers to the degree of user alignment with respect to the contents detected about eWOM regarding a given brand on virtual platforms, such that those selected are the ones who orient their future response most toward the brand.
- Acceptance of suggestions from online opinions: This refers to the level of approval and appropriation of certain recommendations provided by internet users about the brand, connoting agreement with their messages.(11)
- Purchases by recommendation: This consists of the acquisition of products and/or the provision of services to the extent that a degree of trust is developed in the opinions obtained in the virtual environment.(12)

Variable 2. Brand Value

Definition

Brand value is conceptualized as an asset, recognized in accounting terms as a resource controlled by a company, with the expectation of obtaining an economic benefit through its direct

association with the usefulness of the good or service, and is conferred by consumers who have acquired it and have developed an approving experience to the extent that their needs have been satisfied. For this reason, brand value can also be conceived as the capacity of a brand to fulfill commercial objectives, granting emotional value to consumers, rational value to its commercial clients, and serving as evidence of its operational efficiency.

Likewise, brand value is defined from a more psychological perspective, being categorized as an added value provided to a product, which can be accessed through cognitions, language, and observable consumer behavior. Thus, this value can be created with the purpose of leveraging benefit, maximizing revenues, and minimizing costs in favor of the business entity, representing a convenient strategic role, considering the impact on sales and on consumer perception.

Importance

The inclusion of brand equity in the design of a marketing proposal is particularly relevant because it contributes to consumer preference for the products offered, despite the existence of other similar alternatives in the market, thereby achieving effective brand differentiation. The growing attention to brand equity is explained by the results it generates, since it promotes consumer loyalty; however, such effects are brought about when consumers perceive that their preference for the brand involves more benefits than costs, which, commercially, translates into optimal performance of the company associated with the brand.

Theories

Theory of the Level of Interpretation

The theoretical stance referred to indicates that information processing takes place at an individual level, considering the distance between the person and the stimuli, from which it follows that distant stimuli tend to be linked to a greater interpretive load than those classified as closer, with a more concrete level of interpretation predominating. In other words, distal stimuli are more susceptible to mental construction since they cannot be experienced directly. Thus, mental representations of distant events are relatively more abstract, congruent, and highly ordered.

Likewise, a classification composed of three types of distance was devised: social, spatial, and temporal. Social distances refer to the distance established between individuals; spatial distance, on the other hand, relates to the conceptualization of certain events or places; while, finally, temporal distance concerns an evaluation developed by taking memories into account. Therefore, components such as brand passion, local brand identity, and brand legitimacy are linked to the social, spatial, and temporal attributes of distance, respectively (13).

Theory of the Integration of Brand, Experience, and Design

The theoretical perspective indicated emerges from the need to create a value proposition that does not respond solely to companies' interpretation of the offered product, but is complemented by the perception held by the consumer, who has used the good and, therefore, possesses an experience with it, fostering meaning relative to the brand. By virtue of the foregoing, the theoretical construction supports the development of products linked to an attractive user experience and to the success achieved from these aspects, being able to generate positive and continuous feedback that promotes the development of the brand and the company.

Furthermore, the theoretical foundation is directed toward brand consolidation, considering specific objectives to elicit effective brand recognition and the sensations arising from experience in accordance with the perspective of the company and the user in order to provide solidity, such that a greater value of integration is achieved. The described task would not be simple, and attempts may fail because corporate decisions could not reduce the discrepancy between the company's opinion and the consumer's view regarding the brand, entailing that, in practice, a systematic approach be undertaken, incorporating it into technological innovation.

Evaluation of the variable

The value of the brands will be examined based on an operationalization consisting of five dimensions, namely, loyalty, quality, image, trust, and empathy, each containing its respective indicators. The dimensions and indicators of the variable are described below:

- **Loyalty:** This refers to a particular attitude and behavior, coupled with a commitment to repurchase or patronize a specific product consistently in the face of future contexts and marke-

ting efforts that could produce a variation in consumer behavior.(14)

- Online purchase: It refers to a commercial transaction in which a product is exchanged for a monetary amount through different payment methods from a virtual platform.(15)
- Recommendation: It refers to a favorable view of the brand by the user, entailing that they advise people, whether or not members of their close social circle, to purchase products related to the brand.
- Special and valuable attention: It refers to the personalized approach to the client carried out by hired personnel in order to offer a satisfactory response to users regarding their queries, complaints, or requests.
- Quality: It refers to compliance with defined standards regarding the properties of the product, which may relate to the materials used, the manufacturing process, investment, its presentation, among others, resulting in its use meeting consumers' expectations.(16)
- Compliance with deadlines: A commercial interaction involves a mutual agreement in which both parties accept the terms and conditions regarding the stipulated time at which each stage of the transaction will be carried out until its completion.(17)
- Fast attention: It refers to the response latency of customer service channels to requests from consumers, who are interested in purchasing a specific product.(18)
- Ease of purchase: It refers to the conditions that expedite and simplify the purchasing process, including product selection, payment method, response delay, etc., reducing the time invested in the transaction.
- Trained personnel: It refers to workers who provide their services to the business entity and possess the required competency profile for the execution of assigned activities in order to achieve their planned objectives.
- Personalized attention: It refers to the approach to the client that adjusts to their behavior and needs, such that they are satisfied with the service since they experience the feeling of being heard and considered by the company.(19)
- Image: It refers to the holistic perception constructed by the consumer through direct and/or indirect contact with the brand, connoting the brand's position for the customer according to its reputation.(20)
- Constant social media activity: This refers to the continuous interaction carried out by brand representatives on virtual platforms, where a social connection is established with users, posting publications, reacting to internet users' messages, etc.
- Resolves their purchase need: It refers to the adequacy of the service to the requirements and expectations of consumers who are inclined to purchase the product offered by the brand (21).
- Trust: It refers to the level of security perceived by the consumer since their demands are addressed promptly and effectively, fostering their loyalty to the brand insofar as an emotional bond is generated.(22)
- Brand trajectory: It refers to the timeline of permanence corresponding to the brand, which supports its image and confers consistency to the consumer's position, facilitating commitment.
- Differentiation: It is conceptualized as the estimation of unique attributes that distinguish the brand from others that appear in the market and that sell products intended to satisfy similar needs.(23)
- Brand familiarity: It is understood as an attitude of reliability toward the brand that is justified by the body of knowledge acquired about it, evidencing a predisposition to establish contact with what it represents.(24)
- Trust: It is conceived as the perception of security that is sustained by the brand's response to consumers' demands and expectations, such that the relationship with the brand is strengthened (25).
- Empathy: It refers to a social competence that involves validating consumers' behaviors, seeking to understand their position and needs (26).
- Friendliness: It pertains to the cordial and affable attention that elicits a positive impression on the consumer because they demonstrate readiness and patience with their requests (27,28).
- Respect: It refers to the acceptance of a regulation that regulates social interactions in accordance with consumer rights (29).

CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical and empirical analysis developed allows the conclusion that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) constitutes a central determinant in shaping brand equity in digital environments. International evidence consistently indicates that positive e-WOM not only directly influences brand image and attitude but also strengthens purchase intention and consumer loyalty. This effect is observed in diverse geographic and cultural contexts (Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America), suggesting that the phenomenon is cross-cutting and not limited to a specific type of market. In particular, the dissemination of favorable perceptions and experiences on digital platforms is shown to increase credibility, recognition, and preference for certain brands, thus consolidating their symbolic and commercial capital. At the same time, it is noted that negative e-WOM does not always have the same explanatory power, which reinforces the strategic relevance of stimulating, monitoring, and managing positive e-WOM.

At the national level, the findings indicate that brand experiences in virtual environments are linked with variables such as trust, satisfaction, recognition, and, finally, loyalty. e-WOM does not operate in isolation but rather is integrated into a network of perceptions that includes the quality of digital contact, the intensity of interaction on social media, and the capacity of brands to sustain close ties with consumers. However, it is observed that the impact of social media use on the purchase decision is not necessarily uniform: it depends on the type of platform and the user's mode of participation. This indicates that it is not enough to "be on social media"; rather, how meaning is constructed within them matters.

Theoretically, the results support models that explain the persuasive influence of online information (Information Adoption Model) and the role of social identification in digital communities (Social Identity Theory). Users do not merely consume information: they negotiate identity, belonging, and emotional validation in these spaces. This reinforces the idea that brand value is no longer limited to functional product attributes but incorporates symbolic and relational dimensions, such as trust, familiarity, empathy, and narrative coherence. Therefore, brand value should be understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates loyalty, perceived quality, image, trust, and empathy.

It is concluded that brands that promote satisfactory experiences, generate significant interactions, and sustain reliable and humanized communication in digital environments manage not only to position themselves better but also to stabilize loyalty relationships sustained over time. Consequently, the strategic management of e-WOM and brand equity ceases to be a tactical complement to marketing and becomes a structural axis of competitiveness.

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FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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