

**Effect of Social Media Marketing on Consumer
Based Brand Equity and Word of Mouth: A Case
Study of Eastern Mediterranean University**

Sabira Sagynbekova

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Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

Prof. Dr. Cem Tanova
Acting Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management.

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Tümer
Chair, Department of Business Administration

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management.

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Tümer
Supervisor

Examining Committee

1. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Tümer

2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Melek Şule Aker

3. Asst. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Islamoglu

ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyze the effects of social media communication in terms of user-generated and firm created social media communication on brand equity and word of mouth. The research took place within the scope of Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, TRNC.

A quantitative research method was adopted for the purpose of this research. A substantial number of survey questionnaires were administered and a considerable number of responses were generated which served as data for this research. Also appropriate analysis was carried out to ensure the responses gotten were valid enough for further analysis and drawing conclusions.

The results of the analysis conducted depicted that social media communication (firm-created and user-generated) had significant effects on overall brand equity and word of mouth respectively. However their level of effects on each of the dependent variables differed from each other suggesting other factors also contributed to the effects. It further confirms the research in previous works on the importance of social media communication and its role in building brand equity and generating positive word of mouth.

This study suggested that universities (including organizations) take advantage of the social media by engaging their respective clients online in terms of attending to complaints, providing adequate and necessary information especially through facebook which would in turn build a level of involvement and rapport with students and clients.

Keywords: Social Media Communication, Firm-created Social Media Communication, User-Generated Social Media Communication, Word of Mouth.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı sosyal medya iletişim etkilerini kullanıcı ve firma odaklı medya iletişiminin marka değerine ve ağızdan iletişime etkisini incelemektir. Araştırma Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Gazimağusa'da gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Çalışmada kantitatif araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. 177 kişiden analize değer veri toplanabilmiş ve araştırma kapsam ve amacına yönelik gerekli istatistiksel yöntemler kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma sonuçları sosyal medya iletişiminin (firma taraflı ve kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan) genelde marka değerine ve ağızdan iletişime anlamlı ve önemli bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Sosyal medyanın bileşenlerinin genel marka değeri ve ağızdan iletişime etkisi farklı olduğu gözlenmiş ve çalışmamızda tartışılmıştır. Çalışmamız daha önce yapılan araştırmalardaki bulguları da doğrulamıştır.

Çalışma üniversitelerin sosyal medya avantajlarını kullanmasını ve şikayetleri bu yöntemle çözmesini önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya İletişimi, Firma Tabanlı Sosyal Medya İletişimi, Kullanıcı Tabanlı Sosyal Medya İletişimi, Ağızdan İletişim.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the beautiful island of North Cyprus and also to Eastern Mediterranean University.

Thank God for the opportunity to receive a masters' degree from this wonderful University!

P.S I will always remember the unforgettable happy moments spent in North Cyprus and friends who forever will remain in my heart and in my memories of youthful years.

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I want to express my special gratitude to my family, for their love, patience and support. I thank my father and mother for the kindness and honesty they have bestowed on me. I thank them for providing me with good upbringing and appropriate education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FCSMC	Firm-Created Social Media Communication
UGC	User-Generated Communication
WOM	Word of Mouth
e-WOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
SMC	Social Media Communication
EMU	Eastern Mediterranean University

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

With the rapidly growing rate of transformation the media have become acquainted with over the past years, it suffices to say adequate attention needs to be given to the drivers of such transformation. Over two billion people have access to the internet which accounts to over 32% percent of the population of the world (Internet World Stats, 2013). Furthermore, majority of this population have a Facebook profile (one out of seven) with the others frequently visiting social media sites (Nielsen, 2013). Given this rate of growth in the usage of internet and social media networks, it becomes pertinently important for communication managers to figure out consumer behavior online.

Evidently, consumers are now breaking off from the traditional media routes for seeking information i.e. radios, magazines and television (Faulds & Mangold, 2009) much attention is now being given to social media sites as an information source e.g. Facebook. The traditional one-way communication norm has now been transformed into a multi-dimensional peer-to-peer, two-way communication (Campbell, Pitt, & Berthon, 2008). The platform of social media allows for customers to interact with one another thereby limiting the exclusive right of companies being the only source of communication with the brand (Bernoff & Li, 2011).

Prior to recent years, companies and communication managers were sole sources of brand communication and had full control of information and interaction with consumers. However, with the advent of social web platform, such control is now being modified by consumers gradually, since they can now interact with other consumers of the same brand and have access to information that would mostly otherwise have been controlled by brands or marketing managers.

With this current paradigm shift in the brand communication world, an analytical look of its effects on different fields of business especially the social media phenomenon cannot be overemphasized. Brand communication managers need to comprehensively analyze the effects of these trends on various aspects of their brands to ascertain the profitability of investing resources in enhancing these media and also to understand the dynamic changes in consumer online behavior and how best to address them for maximum satisfaction.

1.2 Research Gap

A major driver to this study is the obvious fact that most researchers have focused on analyzing the effects of social media communication (SMC) on different brand related aspects and word of mouth but there has been very few research conducted on how user-generated and firm-created SMC actually affects perceptions of consumers about a brand and if they actually have a positive or negative effect on word of mouth.

Also few or no studies have researched on how SMC affects brand equity and word of mouth with a focus on the education sector (i.e. Universities) since universities are now employing the use of social media to engage their current and prospective

students. There's an important need to know if these media of brand communication does prove profitable and enhances the perceived brand image of the universities.

1.3 Research Questions

Some of the questions raised by this study with the aim of finding relevant answers to them include:

- a.) Does social media marketing communication (Firm-created and User-generated) have any form of effect positively or negatively on consumer based brand equity?
- b.) Do these forms of communication also affect word of mouth positively or negatively in the education sector?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is carried out with the following aims:

- a.) To find out whether social media marketing (user-generated and firm-created) has effect on consumer based brand equity.
- b.) To also find out if social media marketing has positive or negative effect on word of mouth.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study will first and foremost be relevant to social media department managers of the universities and the education sector as a whole as it would help them understand comprehensively the importance of social media and how it helps enhance the perceptions of consumers of the brand. Furthermore, the study would give a clear insight into how SMC can be exploited to gain a competitive advantage in terms of positive word of mouth.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus as the university has a substantial amount of social media presence. Also, the presence of students from various parts of the world in the university with majority of them having made prior contact with the university's social media before arriving the school.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is not without its limitations, one of which is the obvious fact that it was based on a study on just one university which might not be appropriate for generalization. Another limitation was that, the study only focused on Facebook as the social media platform and did not take into consideration other social media platforms that could also be used for empirical analysis.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Marketing

The social media has become an important phenomenon in recent years that it would almost mean corporate suicide if brand managers do not take advantage of the growing trend. According to Brake and Safko (2009), social media could be defined as practices, behaviors and activities among groups of people who meet online to share knowledge, opinions and information with the use of interactive media. They are tools with features of web 2.0 and are used for communication that is, they allow for information sharing, collaborative and participatory tools on the web (Robinson, 2007). Social media gives opportunities for customers and companies to interact with one another (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Since the traditional one-way communication with consumers is becoming more obsolete, managers are obviously now seeing the need to develop and enhance a two-way communication with customers to build interaction and relationship. In other words, social media provides companies with better platforms for fostering communication with customers. An Info-graphics study showed that not less than half of the users of Facebook and Twitter assent to the fact that they are more likely to purchase, recommend or talk about the product of a company they have been engaged with on social media (Jackson, 2011). This gives companies a chance to promote their brands and products, create communities online, provide instant support via the various forms of social networking sites, blogs, forums and many more (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2009; Weinberg, 2009,

Zarella, 2010). Furthermore, consumers through social media can share information with other customers about a brand, product or service and via this, companies are now provided with a cost effective way of boosting recognition of their brands, increasing brand awareness and developing loyalty (Faulds & Mangold, 2009; Gunelius, 2011).

Social media marketing calls for more special attention since it is different from the prior traditional means of marketing. It is more concerned with enhancing connection/relationship with customers as with relationship marketing rather than just being focused on selling (Gordhamer, 2009). Managers now need to be aware of the importance and impact of the advent of social media on the perceptions of customers of their brands since customers are now more sophisticated and are now desiring more quality in services and seeking to have connection with their brands than just purchasing. Companies more importantly have to make themselves accessible and reachable via the various forms of SMC channels available e.g. Twitter, Facebook, forums, blogs and the likes (Gordhamer, 2009).

It has now been established that social media allows customers to interact with tens of thousands of other customers and companies no longer have sole control over brand communication. Consumers generally tend to trust evaluations of other consumers on social media platforms (Nielsen, 2009). Therefore it becomes evident that brand managers should not expect to be total control of brand communication but recognize that consumers also are a source of generating information through the platform of user-generated social media communication (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schafer, 2012).

As a result of these, it is very important to differentiate between user-generated and firm-created social media communication and to measure the effects of these two forms of communication independently.

2.1.1 Firm-Created Social Media Communication

The focus of companies have now been turned towards creating and developing a two-way medium of interaction with consumers (Bernoff & Li, 2011) having understood now that the prior traditional one-way have now become obsolete. With the aid of social media, companies can now explore new ways of engaging and interacting with customers, consequently, firm-created communication form an essential part of the promotion mix elements of the company. The expectation of managers is to ensure that their created social media communication engages their loyal customers and also affect positively the perceptions of consumers about their products, disperse information and also have an opportunity to learn about and from their audience (Brodie, Juric, Ilic, & Hollebeek, 2013).

Firm-created social media communication according to Schvinski & Dabrowski (2015) is a mode of advertising that is fully controlled by the company and regulated by an agenda of marketing strategy. This form of communication has been gaining increase in recent times despite its newness to advertisers (Nielson, 2013). The current viral trend of companies dispersing information through the internet (Bernof & Li, 2011) and also the exploitation of the greater reach capacity to the general public (Keller, 2009) explains why this form of communication has gained popularity among companies and brand managers. Also, having affirmed the fact that consumers have turned away from the traditional means of communication and are now requiring instant access at their own convenience to information, makes it important for companies to create a medium of interaction with customers.

2.1.2 User-generated Communication

Due to the newness of the concept in research, this form of communication has no widely accepted definition however some appropriate definitions have been put forward by different entities. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) defined UGC in a more comprehensive approach by categorizing its definition into three facets i.e. content that is made available over the internet; that exudes a level of creative efforts and established outside the framework of professional practices and routines. It has also been described as any content created by users of a website (Bloom & Cleary, 2011). The Web 2.0 platform and the internet have given consumers and customers alike an avenue to generate and also create content online that does not originate from brand managers.

Further research on UGC have ratified this convention of creation of content as opposed to the dissemination of content thereby defining its concept similarly to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Shau, Muniz & Albert, 2007; Kozinets, de-Valck, Wilner, & Wojnicki, 2010). However the both terms i.e UGC and eWOM are both distinctive in terms of whether consumers generate the content or they simply conveyed them (Cheong and Morrison, 2008; Fischer, Smith & Yongjian, 2012). In addition, previous research have also posited that consumers have their contribution to the process of creating content for several reasons e.g. yearning to alter public perceptions, self-promotion and core enjoyment (Pitt, Berthon & Campbell, 2008).

UGC is not without its implications for brand managers and marketers in the sense that it can be used to gather ideas and opinions of customers that are engaged and in the same vein reducing the costs of communication as against the traditional media (Dou and Krishnamurthy, 2008). From research, it has also shown that consumers perceive

UGC as trustworthy as the content are generated by fellow consumers, this in turn make this medium more influential than the traditional media (Christodoulides, Bonhomme, & Jevons, 2012). Also, consumers who engage in UGC have tendency to advocate for the brand through spreading opinions about the products and brand to other customers (Bright, Eastin, & Daugherty, 2008).

2.2 Brand Equity

Brand equity remains an integral part of the marketing practice (Ambler & Styles, 1996) and also in the academia because managers tend to achieve a competitive advantage that turns out favorable to them (Sharma, Mittal, & Lassar, 1995). A comprehensive understanding of this key concept and its rate of growth could raise barriers for competition and a catalyst to brand wealth (Lee, Donthu, & Yoo, 2000). Despite the fact that comprehensive research has been done on brand equity, the literature on this concept still remains inconclusive (Chertanoy & Christodoulides, 2010).

Brand equity according to Aaker (1991) can be seen as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or firm’s customers”. Keller (1993) also defined brand equity in terms of the divergent effect of the knowledge of a brand on a response of the customer to the brand communication marketing. In addition, it can be viewed in the perspective of the additional value that a brand name elicits (Ijiri, Han, & Farquhar, 1991). However, Feldwick (1996) addressed the concept in simpler manner by classifying the varying definitions of brand equity into a comprehensive definition i.e. brand valuation (the aggregate value of a brand when recorded in books of accounts); brand strength (the level consumers bond or attached to a brand); brand

image or description (the consumers' perception of the brand). The complexities in defining this concept is what Ambler (2003) refers to as the elephant and the blind men syndrome.

2.3 Brand Equity Measurement

The brand equity measurement has been addressed from two basic point of views viz: financial perception and the consumer-based perspective. The financial perspective which is most times also calfirm-based brand equity (FBBE) is concentrated specifically on what value financially brand equity adds to the firm/company (Simon and Sullivan, 1993). The consumer-based perspective on the other hand deals with the perceptions of consumers about a brand and this perspective has formed a major catalyst to profitability of brands and increase in market share (Chertanoy & Christodoulides, 2010).

A substantial level of research in this field have concentrated on cognitive psychology i.e. forming basis on memory (Keller, 1993; Aaker 1991). In view of this, a number of measurements have been adopted to measure consumer based brand equity for instance, the dimensions developed by Aaker (1991), where he listed a number of components as measurements viz: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary brand assets. These dimensions listed by Aaker portray the brand perceptions of consumers and how they respond to it. However, Keller (1993) further addressed the measurement of this concept in terms of the consumers' knowledge of a brand would affect their response to the brand. In other words, a brand could possibly have a negative or positive value depending on the consumers' reactions (positive or negative) to the marketing communication of products they have previous knowledge of the brand names than to those they did not.

Keller therefore made it evident that the knowledge of a brand remains key to CBBE and divided it in two distinct dimensions i.e. brand image and brand awareness.

Moreover, these dimensions conceptually developed by Aaker and Keller although not operationalized gave rise a number of other methodologies with the aim of operationalizing dimensions for brand equity thereby adopting perplexing statistical procedures (Srinivasan & Park, 1994) which ends up making it somewhat difficult for practicing marketers to comprehend. In order to operationalize CBBE, two approaches to its measurement have to be taken into consideration i.e. direct approach and indirect approach. The direct approaches measure CBBE directly by concentrating on the preferences of consumers (Srinivasan, 1979; Srinivasan & Park, 1994); while the indirect approaches measure via its obvious materialization.

The adopted dimensions for consumer-based brand equity by numerous researchers for measurements are the dimensions conceptually developed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993).

2.3.1 Brand Awareness

This is concerned with how strong the presence of a brand is in the mind of consumers (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Brand awareness is a vital component of the brand equity measurement (Keller, 1993; Aaker 1991). According to Aaker, brand awareness exists in different levels which range from recognition to dominance of the brand which specifies the situation where a consumer can recall only the brand. Furthermore, Percy and Rossiter (1987) defined it as the ability of consumers to recognize and identify the brand. Keller (1993) however, describes it as encompassing both brand recall and recognition. Keller defines brand recall as the tendency of a consumer to recover the brand from the memory.

2.3.2 Brand Associations

According to Keller (1993), brand associations connote what a brand means to the consumers. Various sources are antecedents to brand association, however, organizational associations and brand personality remain two vital types of brand association that have influence or effect on brand equity (Aaker, 1996). Brand personality could be viewed in terms of the different features and traits that a brand possesses from the consumers' point of view (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). It could also be defined as a combination of human features that are linked with the brand (Aaker, 1997). Aaker posited that the link to a brand could get even stronger via experiences or constant exposure to communications.

2.3.3 Perceived quality

This is another key component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). This is not concerned with the actual quality of the product rather it is based on consumers' evaluation and perception of the product (Zeithaml V., 1988). In other words, it refers to the consumers' perception of the aggregate quality of the product. According to Zeithaml, consumers would be motivated to choosing the brand over competing brands the more they perceive a high quality of the product. It suffices to say that it provides consumers reason to purchase or choose a brand over other brands (Pappu et al., 2005).

2.3.4 Brand Loyalty

The importance of brand loyalty has been distinctly recognized by several practitioners and researchers in marketing (Aaker D., 1996). It is a term or concept that has gained popularity and is well known across various disciplines in the academia and also in the practical world due to its implications (Tabaku & Zerellari, 2015). Although, given that rising number of research and studies carried out on brand loyalty, a general consensus has not been arrived at as to how its measurement should be done. It should

be noted that loyal customers and brand loyalty are very crucial to the future of a business as they have effects on building the business' clientele and also on the company profits (Tabaku et al., 2015; Ozer & Aydin, 2005). The concept of brand loyalty has proven to be very key because research have shown that it costs a business five times more to attract a new customer than maintaining current one.

The context of business has explained brand loyalty as the repetitive purchase of the same brand by customers (Tabaku et al., 2015). It is discovered to be a vital construct of the financial performance of firms in the long run (Reicheld, 1996). Aaker (1996) posited brand loyalty as a premise to the profitability and competitiveness of a firm.

Several scholars and researchers have conceptualized brand loyalty in various forms. However, among the most quoted brand loyalty definitions, the definition postulated by Oliver (1999) still remains outstanding. He stated that, "brand loyalty is a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred brand consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same brand or same brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior". Dick and Basu (1994) have also been given considerable attention in the literature of brand loyalty. They posited loyalty as an encompassing of attitude towards an object, service or brand and repeat patronage. They described different categories of loyalty i.e. latent loyalty, true loyalty, spurious loyalty and no loyalty.

However, the concept of loyalty has been viewed in diverse approaches in terms of definition and measurement (Dawes, Meyer-Waarden, & Driesener, 2015). There have been several arguments by researchers that brand loyalty encompasses both attitudes

(positive) towards the brand and behavioural (positive) tendency to purchase that brand (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Dick and Basu, 1994; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973).

The behavioral view of loyalty have been the premise of majority of the early studies. It portrays loyalty in terms of patronage, the number of times a service or product within a specific category is chosen by a consumer in comparison to the aggregate purchases made by the consumer in that category (Bennet & Rundle-Thiele, 2002). In other words this refers to customer loyalty in terms of repeated purchases and increased expenditure on a particular brand. This further highlights that the consumers who continuously purchase from the same brand or provider are deemed the loyal customers (Tabaku et al., 2015). However, using the basis of behavior as an indicator of loyalty does not suffice to represent or explain accurately the loyalty framework of how loyalty is developed, the antecedents and why customers actually purchase (Dick and Basu, 1994; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Zeithaml et al. 1996).

Several arguments and criticisms have been made against using the behavioral approach alone to measure loyalty (Jones and Taylor, 2007; Dick & Basu, 1994). They stressed the need to view loyalty also from the attitudinal approach, hence the combination of the two approaches. Attitudinal loyalty explains why a product is purchased or a service is patronized. It is concerned more with the psychological dimension of consumers in terms of commitment to a brand. It comprises of the brand commitment and the intention to purchase (Tabaku et al., 2015). It has been conceptualized as an attitude, intention to buy, preference, a desire to recommend to other prospective consumers, a commitment to continually purchase the same brand or service and urging others to do the same (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Reichheld, 2003).

However, despite the increased level of research and studies on loyalty, there exists no general consensus or agreement on its dimensions (Jones and Taylor, 2007).

2.4 Word of Mouth

Buttle, (1998) defines Word of Mouth (WOM) as ‘an oral person-to person communication a communication and receiver who perceives the communicator as non-commercial, regarding a product/service or brand. Several studies (Agag & El-Masry, 2016; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Vázquez-Casielles, Suarez-Alvarez, & del , 2013) have shown that WOM has a very important influence on consumers’ purchase intention and the influence is exceptionally strong when the consumer is contemplating on purchasing a new product or service (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Also, information created by consumers is more likely to be credible than one from sellers because according to Filieri, (2015), credibility and reliability of information is often positively related to the trustworthiness of the source of information. A significant reason why companies consider and analyze WOM is because positive WOM from satisfied customer reduces the cost of attracting and appealing new customers which promotes the company’s overall repute while negative WOM from dissatisfied customer will have opposite effect (East, Mark, & Jenni , 2016).

Since the advent of internet, the influence of WOM has increased via proliferation of online feedback channels which has altered people’s behavior in significant ways. Customers have increasingly began to rely on the opinion posted on these channels to make decisions and a study by Chevalier & Mayzlin, (2006) confirmed that reviews made online have become a very important information source to customers which have begun to substitute and complement other forms of offline WOM and business-

to-customer communication about products and services. This has made customers to be connected in ways that were unavailable and unobtainable before such as blogs, social networking sites, online review communities and recommendation sites (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, & Friege, 2010).

Service has become a regular and usual subject among customers when it comes to WOM communication. It is really difficult to evaluate service prior to purchase Kerin, (2004) and thus perceived as high risk (Murray, 1991; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). In lieu of this, for high-risk product, consumers will engage in WOM (Rogers, 1981) and for services, WOM is used in making comparison among and between service substitutes, to be familiar with service before delivery and consumption and to gain information to reduce the risk involved (Bristol, 1990).

According to (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), social media in recent years have emerged a new amalgam of integrated marketing communication (IMC) that enables organizations to create an effective and strong relationship with their customers and Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010), define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that permit the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Based on Mangold & Faulds’, (2009) research, the social media encompasses a multiplicity of online information-sharing layout such as microblogging sites (Twitter), social networking sites (SNSs) (Facebook, Friendster and MySpace), collaborative websites (Wikipedia) and creativity works-sharing sites (Flickr and YouTube). Of all these social media, social networking sites have continued to receive an increased attention from educators, researchers, policy makers and practitioners (Ellison, 2007; Thelwall, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). With towering social presence and self-

disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), emails have been outpaced by SNS as the most common online activity which has facilitated connection between consumers and others by exchanging thoughts, information and opinion about products, services and brands. With the emergence of internet based media and social media communication, WOM online has been facilitated can called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). eWOM according to Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, & Friege, (2010) is defined as ‘any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet’ and ensues on a wide range of online avenues such as SNS, virtual consumer communities, blogs, consumer review websites and emails (Dwyer, 2007; Hung & Li, 2007).

2.5 Conceptual Model

Given the richness in literature already done on the various concepts and how they are interlinked, this study hereby proposes a model that analyzes the link and effects of these concepts on each other.

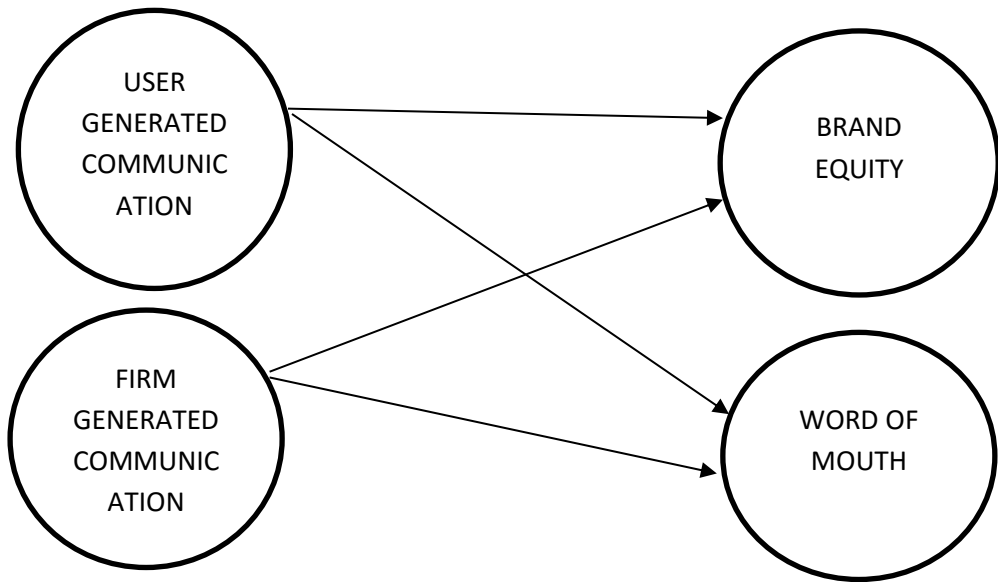


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The aim of this research was to find empirically the effect of social media marketing in terms of User-generated communication and Firm-created communication on overall brand equity and word of mouth using EMU as a case study. The rest of this chapter contains the details on how this study was conducted, the methods of data collection and mode of analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This research employed a quantitative approach using survey questions for data collection. These questionnaires were distributed to students within EMU from various departments and faculties. The university is host to students of various nationalities which serves as a good ground for obtaining data that is spread. The responses gathered were further analyzed by appropriate statistical software.

3.3 Data Collection

Paper-based survey questionnaire copies were administered for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire was separated into two sections: the demographic section which was concerned with the sex, age nationality, department and other important demographic details of the respondents; the second section which consisted of seventeen (17) questions divided into four (4) parts (FCSMC– 4, UGC– 4, Brand equity – 3, Word of mouth – 6). The measurement for the second section of the

questionnaire was based on the Likert scale which ranged from One (strongly disagree) to Seven (Strongly Agree) following the pattern of previous research. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and 177 recovered. The table below shows the original sources for the components used in the survey questionnaire:

Table 1: Components and their original sources

COMPONENT	NO. OF ITEMS	ORIGINAL SOURCE
Firm-generated Communication	4	Schivinski and Dabrowski, (2014)
User-generated Communication	4	Schivinski and Dabrowski, (2014)
Overall Brand Equity	3	Yoo and Donthu, (2001)
Word of Mouth	6	Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron and Marticotte, (2010)

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered were statistically analyzed using the IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). A reliability analysis was carried out for each of the components and overall to measure the consistency and reliability of the scale of measurement. A correlation analysis was also done to measure the significance of correlation between components. Finally a regression analysis to measure the effects of social media communication (User-generated and Firm-created) on both overall brand equity and word of mouth.

3.5 Hypothesis of the Study

According to Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000), brand communication do have positive effects on brand equity inasmuch as the delivered message provokes or stimulates a reaction of customers towards the product that is satisfactory when compared to other similar product brand. The communication perception of the consumer also positively affects the consumer's awareness of that brand (Schoenmueller, Shafer & Bruhn, 2012). Prior studies have also shown that brand equity is leveraged by brand communication via increasing the likelihood that the brand will be integrated into the consideration set of consumer thereby, aiding in the process of choosing a brand and the choice of forming a habit (Yoo, Lee and Donthu, 2000). In addition, Jaworski, Park, and MacInnis, (1986), asserted that FCSM should be viewed by consumers or individuals as a way of advertising and also a means of spurring brand perception and awareness.

Since researchers have been able to discover a positive relationship between brand equity and advertising within the framework of advertising expenditures (Donthu, Ruble & Cobb-Walgren 1995). Based upon the concept of advertising and brand communication, it could be assumed that FCSMC would affect brand equity positively hence the formulated hypothesis of this study:

H1a: Firm-created communication (FCSMC) has effect on brand equity

Furthermore, based on the fact that UGC is not guided or regulated by any company control or market intervention (Jevon and Christodoulides 2011) and that its importance and relevance is shown in the level of engagement or involvement it fosters with the brand (Bonhomme, Christodoulides and Jevon 2012), it suffices to assume

that UGC would have some level of effect on brand equity. Besides, Christodoulides et al. (2012) showed empirical evidence that UGC creation influences the involvement of consumers with UGC thereby having a positive effect on brand equity. Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that:

H1b: User-generated communication (UGC) has an effect on brand equity.

In addition, based on previous research conducted that shows relationship between advertising and word of mouth and how advertising affects word of mouth positively or negatively (Jones, Aiken and Boush 2009). Also, relationship has been established between online social network with word of mouth (Brown, Broderick and Lee 2007). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

H2a: Firm-created social media communication has an effect on word of mouth

H2b: User-generated social media communication has an effect on word of mouth

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive

The data used in this research were collected from students within EMU. Majority of the respondents who disclosed their nationality were Nigerians forming to 22% of the total sample population. The nationalities ranged from Arabs to Zimbabweans forming a total of 30 nationalities that were recorded as respondents. The table below shows in details the distribution of nationalities:

Table 2: Frequency of Nationalities

NATIONALITIES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Arab	1	.6
Azerbaijani	4	2.3
Cameroonian	1	.6
Chinese	2	1.1
Cypriot	1	.6
Egyptian	2	1.1
German	1	.6
Iranian	6	3.4
Iraqi	2	1.1
Jordanian	2	1.1
Kazakh	3	1.7
Kurdish	1	.6
Kyrgyz	5	2.8
Libyan	3	1.7
Nigerian	39	22.0
Palestinian	6	3.4
Russian	1	.6
Swazi	1	.6
Syrian	3	1.7

Tajik	6	3.4
Tatar	1	.6
TRNC	7	4.0
Turkish	17	9.6
Turkmen	2	1.1
Ukrainian	1	.6
Uzbek	1	.6
Yemeni	2	1.1
Zambian	1	.6
Zimbabwean	4	2.3
Uzbek	1	.6
Yemeni	2	1.1
Zambian	1	.6
Missing	51	28.8
TOTAL	177	100.0

Furthermore, most of the respondents were undergraduates forming over 89% of the respondents and the rest split between masters and doctorate students. Nearly Ninety five percent were singles and majority of the respondents were from the business administration department. Below is also table showing the various statistical frequencies:

Table 3: Frequency distribution of respondents' level of study

EDUCATION LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Bachelors	157	89.2
Masters	11	6.3
Doctorate	8	4.5
Missing	1	
TOTAL	177	100.0

Table 4: Frequency distribution of respondents' marital status

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Single	165	94.8
Married	7	4.0
Divorced	2	1.1
Missing	3	
TOTAL	177	100.0

Table 5: Frequency distribution of respondents' departments

DEPARTMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Architecture	1	.6
Arts and Sciences	1	.6
Banking and Finance	21	11.9
Business Administration	44	24.9
Computing Technology	1	.6
Economics	7	4.0
Finance	1	.6
HRM	5	2.8
Information Technology	14	7.9
International Finance	3	1.7
International Relations	29	16.4
Intl Trade and Business	8	4.5
Law	1	.6
Marketing	3	1.7
Marketing Management	1	.6
Mathematics	1	.6
MIS	8	4.5
Molecular Biology and Gen	2	1.1
Pharmacy	5	2.8
Physiology	2	1.1
Physiotherapy	1	.6
Psychology	4	2.3
Missing	14	7.9
TOTAL	177	100.0

Table 6: Frequency distribution of respondents' gender

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Male	113	64.6
Female	62	35.4
Missing	2	
TOTAL	177	100.0

Table 7: Frequency distribution of respondents' age

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
18-27	160	90.9
28-37	14	8.0
38-47	2	1.1
Missing	1	
TOTAL	177	100.0

4.2 Reliability

A reliability analysis was done to measure the dependability and reliability of the scale used for measurement of the different variables in the study. This was done for each of the factors and then an overall analysis was conducted. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 8: Reliability Analysis results

Components	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Firm-Created Communication	0.866	4
User-generated Communication	0.874	4
Overall Brand Equity	0.852	3

Word of Mouth	0.700	6
OVERALL	0.899	17

As shown in the table above, all of the components have Cronbach's alpha co-efficient greater than 0.7 which is generally acceptable as a measure for reliability (Steiner, 2003).

4.3 Factor Analysis

This analysis was carried out in order to ascertain whether the items used for measurement of the components were consistent with the components. The analysis proved that the items were consistent with what they measured. All of the items loaded in 4 components with values greater than 0.5. Furthermore, a table was generated to show to what extent the items measure the factors.

Table 9: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.284	42.847	42.847	4.380	25.764	25.764
2	1.907	11.217	54.064	3.091	18.184	43.948
3	1.700	10.001	64.065	2.831	16.655	60.603
4	1.088	6.401	70.467	1.677	9.864	70.467

From the table above, it is clear that component 1 to 4 covered over 70% of the factors measured with factor 1 being the highest at 7.28 covering over 42%. Furthermore, an analysis was conducted to measure the adequacy of the sample selected. This was done following the KMO Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 10: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.860
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1729.884
	df	136
	Sig.	.000

The results showed that the sample was adequate enough for the research with a value way above 0.5 i.e. 0.860. Also it showed that the sample was significant based on the Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 11: Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
The level of the university's social media communication meets my expectation	.839			
I am satisfied with the university's social media	.808			
The university's social media communications are very attractive	.757			
The university's social media communications perform well when compared with that of other universities in TRNC	.739			
I am satisfied with the content generated on social media by other students/staff about the university	.696			
The level of content generated on social media by other students/staff	.634			

about the university meets my expectation				
The content generated by other students/staff is very attractive	.631			
The content generated on social media sites by other students/staff about this university performs well when compared with other universities in TRNC	.559			
I speak of this university to many individuals		.813		
I speak of this university's good sides		.806		
I recommend this university		.796		
I speak of this university much more frequently than about any other university in TRNC		.752		
Even if another university has the same feature as EMU in TRNC, I would prefer to go to EMU			.835	
It makes sense to go to EMU instead of another university in TRNC, even if they are the same			.810	
If there is another university as good as EMU in TRNC, I prefer to go to EMU			.773	
I have spoken unflatteringly of this university to others				.891
I mostly say negative things of this university to others				.838
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. ^a				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

As seen in the table above, all of the factors loaded above 0.5 with factor 1 and 3 representing components used in measuring social media communication and overall brand equity respectively. However, factor 2 represented the components used in measuring Word of mouth (positive) while factor 4 represented the components used in measuring word of mouth (negative).

4.4 Regression Analysis

For the main purpose of the study a regression analysis was carried out to find out the effects of social media communication i.e. firm-created communication and user-generated communication on brand equity and word-of-mouth. The hypotheses of this study stated that social media communication has effect on brand equity and word of mouth. It was further broken into two i.e. firm-created social media communication and user-generated communication. The tables below show the results of the analysis.

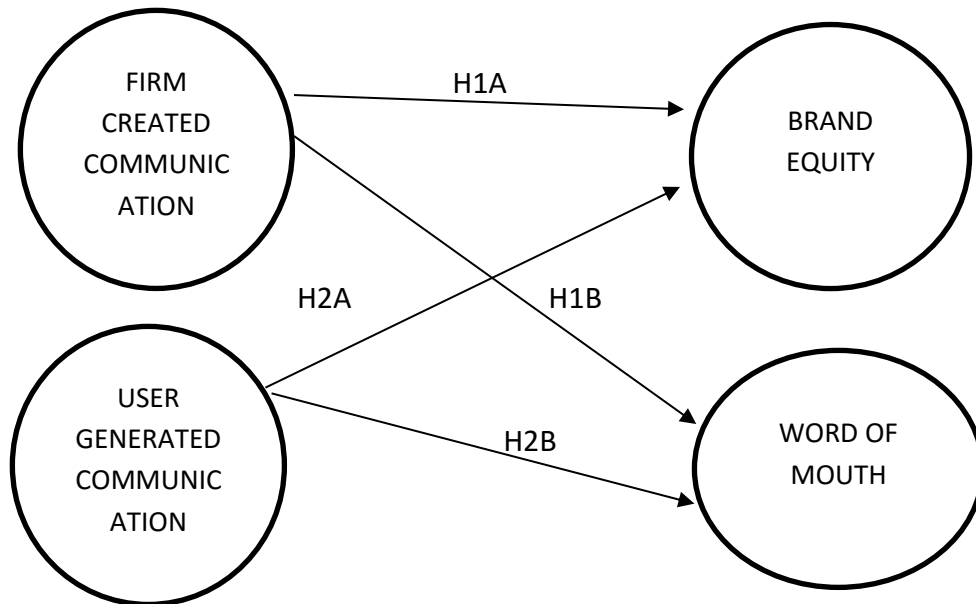


Figure 2: Conceptual Model

Table 12: Firm-created communication has effect on Brand equity

MODEL	R SQUARE	STANDARD COEFFICIENTS (BETA)	SIG.
Firm-Created Communication	0.168	0.410	0.000

Table 13: Firm-created communication has effect on Word of Mouth

MODEL	R SQUARE	STANDARD COEFFICIENTS (BETA)	SIG.
Firm-Created Communication	0.154	0.392	0.000

The tables above show that firm-created communication indeed has significant effects on brand equity and also word of mouth. Therefore hypotheses H1a and H2a is accepted based on the results of the analysis. However, from the R-squared results, it is clear that firm-created communication only has a 16.8% level of effect on brand

equity and 15.4% on word of mouth. These are somewhat low and implies that there are other several factors which contribute to brand equity and word of mouth, firm-created communication is only one of them. Furthermore, this could also be a reflection of the distrust consumers have for firm-created communication.

Table 14: User-generated communication has effect on brand equity

MODEL	R SQUARE	STANDARD COEFFICIENTS (BETA)	SIG.
User-generated Communication	0.334	0.578	0.000

Table 15: User-generated communication has effect on word of mouth

MODEL	R SQUARE	STANDARD COEFFICIENTS (BETA)	SIG.
User-generated Communication	0.321	0.567	0.000

Also, the results for the analysis on the effects of user-generated communication on brand equity and word of mouth showed significance. In other words, UGC does have significant effects on brand equity and word of mouth. However, the r-squared results also show that the level of effect were somewhat low also i.e. 33.4% and 32.1% respectively. This also implies that there other factors apart from UGC that affect brand equity and word of mouth. Additionally, given that the R-squared value is twice as high as that of firm-created communication, it could be a reflection of the fact that consumers tend to trust information not generated by firms but by other consumers.

Table 16: Hypotheses Testing Results

HYPOTHESES	RESULT
H1a	Accept
H1b	Accept
H2a	Accept
H2b	Accept

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Findings and Summary

This research was carried out to find out the effects of social media communication i.e. firm-created communication and user-generated communication on brand equity and word of mouth. For the purpose of this, hypotheses were developed, surveys were distributed and analysis were conducted with appropriate statistical software.

The results of the finding clearly showed that social media communication in terms of user-generated and firm-created communication indeed does have effects on brand equity and word of mouth although in different levels but significant.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this research imply firstly that, the university's constant social media communication i.e. firm-created communication to a certain extent improves the brand equity of the university from the perception of students and also affecting how the university is spoken of to others in terms of word of mouth.

Secondly, the contents and information provided by students and staff of EMU on social media to a reasonable extent also affects the brand equity of the university and how it is perceived from the outside. It also affects what is said about the university i.e. positive or negative.

5.3 Recommendations

Since it has been established that social media communication whether firm-created or user-generated does have effect on brand equity and word of mouth. It is highly recommended that universities endeavor to engage students actively on their various social media platforms especially Facebook being one of the major form of communication this study concentrated on by attending to complaints of students online, providing necessary information to students via these media and most importantly building a rapport with the school community via social media. Having the understanding that this communication influences the perceptions of students of the university's brand equity and most likely prospective students also via word of mouth, adequate promotion and advertising campaigns could be improved and disseminated via this platform.

Also, since it also affects word of mouth i.e. what is being said about the university to prospective students or staff, it would be highly recommended that more positive information that would help boost the school image positively should be communicated via the social media platform such as latest accreditations, awards received, recognition of member of staff with excellent achievements, students relationship etc.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

This study was limited to Eastern Mediterranean University in North Cyprus alone, other universities within the country were not taken into consideration, and hence it becomes difficult to generalize the results found in this research. Additionally, the sample for this study were only students within the university, members of staff were not included neither were prospective students. This implies that results from this study were only from the perspective of current students of the university.

It is recommended that future research is carried out taking other universities within the country into consideration thereby expanding the scope of the research. Also, members of staff and prospective students could also be included in the research in order to get a richer and more in-depth study to draw a concrete conclusion.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY

Thank you for making out time to take this survey. The survey is carried out by a student of the department of marketing for academic research purpose only. I fully assure you that all of the answers you provide in this survey will be kept confidential. The survey data will be reported in a summary fashion only and will not identify any individual person.

I.) DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE










Please tick the right box and fill the blank

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age: 18-27 28-37 38-47 48-57 58-67
68+
3. Nationality:
4. Level of study: Bachelors Masters Doctorate
5. Marital status: Single Married Divorced
6. Department:

II.) In the following statements, your responses are needed in order to measure to some extent the effects of social media marketing on consumer based brand equity and word of mouth for Eastern Mediterranean University. For each statement, please use the scale:

- 1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Disagree somewhat 4) Neutral 5) Agree Somewhat 6) Agree 7) Strongly Agree

ITEM		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Firm Created Social Media Communication	☹			☺			☺
FC1	I am satisfied with the university's social media							
FC2	The level of the university's social media communication meets my expectation							
FC3	The university's social media communications are very attractive							
FC4	This university's social media communications performs well when compared with other social media communications of other universities in TRNC							

	User-Generated Social Media Communication							
UG 1	I am satisfied with the content generated on social media by other students/staff about the university							
UG2	The level of content generated on social media by other students/staff about the university meets my expectations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
UG3	The content generated by other students/staff is very attractive							
UG4	The content generated on social media sites by other students/staff about this university performs well, when compared with other universities in TRNC							
	Overall Brand Equity							
OBE1	It makes sense to go to EMU instead of another university in TRNC, even if they are the same							
OBE2	Even if another university has the same feature as EMU in TRNC, I would prefer to go to EMU							
OBE3	If there is another university as good as EMU in TRNC, I prefer to go to EMU							
	Word of Mouth							
WOM1	I speak of this university much more frequently than about any other university in TRNC							
WOM2	I speak of this university to many individuals							
WOM3	I recommend this university							
WOM4	I speak of this university's good sides							
WOM5	I mostly say negative things of this university to others							
WOM6	I have spoken unflatteringly of this university to others							

Your responses are for research purposes only. They will be kept confidential and reported as aggregate data only.