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E-tailing & Brand Communication in Facebook: Comparing Germans and Koreans*

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Abstract

Purpose – Marketing has shifted towards communicating tailored messages and brand contents to consumers with the rise of the Internet and smartphones. These technologies and the brand contents provide the e-tailers with opportunities for brand loyalty and online shopping via SNS, especially Facebook. Thus, this study attempts to scrutinize the effects of the characteristics of brand contents on consumers' engagements. As well, Facebook allows global communication, and yet, Eastern and Western people still live under different cultures. Therefore, this study attempts to compare Germans and Koreans on Facebook.

Research design, data, and methodology – 225 survey data were collected from Germany and Korea. The effects of Vividness, Entertainment, Credibility, and Relevance on Engagement in brand contents and the moderating effect of nationality were examined with the hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

Results - Vividness and Entertainment are the most important characteristics to engage consumers in the brand contents regardless of nationality. However, Relevance is more important to Germans while Entertaining and Vividness are to Koreans.

Conclusions - To engage young Facebook users and let them shop online, entertaining and vivid brand contents will be effective. Tailored brand contents are essential for users from different cultures on Facebook.

Keywords: Brand Communication, E-Tailing, Sns Marketing, Customer Engagement, Customer Loyalty.

JEL Classification: C12, L81, M3, M31, O57.

1. Introduction

Mobile media technologies and mobile devices are ever-growing in our lives since they were introduced in the mid-1990s. In 1997, about 215 million people were in the ownership of a mobile communication device worldwide (Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, & Neumann, 2005). People born since 1980 are even characterized by growing up with mobile technologies and in a digital environment (Moreno,

Lafuente, Carreon, & Moreno, 2017). As the usage of mobile devices increases, many marketers realized that it opens a very important marketing channel to deliver their marketing messages and market their product and services. Mobile devices with social network platforms provide marketers and e-tailers with such new advantages as the localization of the consumers and the reachability 24 hours a day (Kenny & Marshall, 2000). As a result, marketers and e-tailers can target their customers more effectively by tailoring their brand contents based on the consumers' location to increase the relevance of the contents, which lead to customer engagement and loyalty. To make consumers open-minded on mobile brand contents requires a high degree of technology acceptance (Jimenez & San-Martin, 2017; Yang, Kim, & Yoo, 2013). The millennium generation is eager to integrate technology into their daily life and use mobile devices to connect with their brands through the internet (Moore, 2012). This study takes steps into the social network world with a focus on Facebook.

Facebook is one of the largest social media platforms worldwide. Marketing has been about reaching customers

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and targeting the right group of customers (Best, 2012, p. 313) and this is why Facebook has become such a crucial player in today's marketing economy. Facebook is one of the online platforms that connect people all over the world with other users, brands, or companies regardless of time or location (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Marketers need to understand how to design their brand communications more effectively to make consumers engage in their messages so that they can develop deeper relationships with consumers in SNS.

Therefore, it is interesting to examine what characteristics of brand contents in Facebook can make consumers engaged in the brands now that potential consumers are ready to get connected to a brand 24 hours and 7 days per week and that technologies of mobile devices support them. Since Facebook operates globally, it is also interesting to investigate if there is any cultural difference in consumers' engagement in the brand contents on Facebook.

Past studies referring to advertising interactivity and vividness (Hansell, 1998; Coyle & Thorson, 2001) are still applicable to mobile brand advertisement literature (Kolsaker & Drakatos, 2009). However, there is a lack of studies focusing on Facebook advertisement. The effectiveness of social media marketing is well-known, but not many researchers have dug into the field of brand communication, especially on Facebook. Furthermore, brand contents in SNS have been more diversified. Not only the advertising per se but also many different types of brand contents are available for SNS users to enjoy and interact. Understanding and utilizing the variety of mobile contents becomes more important for e-tailers and marketers to engage consumers in the brand contents, build up strong relationships with them, and finally make them shop online.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to understand how to design the brand contents to get customers engaged in our brand and to understand if there are any country differences in interacting with the brand contents in Facebook. The study attempts to investigate the relationships between the characteristics of brand contents and customers' engagement for German and Korean users.

2. Literature Review

2.1. E-tailing and Social Media

Social Media refers to the websites and applications where consumers exchange information, experiences, opinions, and perspectives. Its importance continuously grows especially since it ignores geographical and time boundaries between consumers (Weinberg, 2010). It means that the internet becomes a social place for people all over the world without restrictions on time zones and physical locations. According to Li (2010), the movement called

"groundswell" explains consumers are more influenced by the relationships that they have developed and fostered online via technology rather than the technology per se. Social media platforms allow consumers to connect with new people as well as their friends and family.

The influences of SNS on e-tailers are becoming essential (Enders & Jelassi, 2000). Social Media including Facebook can help people socializing even when they are online shopping, which is convenient but lack of socializing and enjoyment (Dennis, Morgan, Wright, & Jayawardhena, 2010). People can call their friends on the posting where the products of interests are introduced in Facebook, and there they can get some advices from their own friends as well as from the unknown people with their comments on the posting. In addition, the relationships between SNS users and seller developed through SNS enhance the users' willingness to purchase from the seller due to trust and intimacy (Han & Windsor, 2011; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Delayco & Walcutt, 2010).

2.2. Brand Communication in Facebook and its characteristics

The basic idea of brand communication in SNS is to build trust and deeper relationships with customers to develop customer loyalty. It can be done through personal interaction via SNS (Weber & Volz, 2011). E-marketing communication efforts are found significantly related to brand loyalty (Mulatahiri & Ukaj, 2019). As well, the relationships with customers are found to increase the positive word of mouth online (Nguyen, Tran, & Huynh, 2019).

Since a large part of society still have a negative image of advertisement, social media advertisements need to avoid creating too commercial focused advertisements (Felser, 2007). This fact takes an essential part in viral distribution (Weinberg, 2011). E-tailers are getting more and more aware of the importance of customer opinions and their power to influence other consumers (Molenaar, 2012; Park, Chung & Lee, 2019). A consumers' purchase decision making can be influenced by a well and active executed brand communication. Several past studies have pointed out that consumer reviews, ratings, and product videos can be influential towards a purchase decision (Weinberg, 2011). Those product videos or published content by the company are called "Content Marketing" (Weber & Volz, 2011). Companies can create and publish content on Facebook, and it is important to provide content for consumers to create discussion. This way, a company can enhance its brand exposure, awareness, and consumer's engagement, as well as traffic. Consumers in SNS are searching for reviews and opinions, especially from other consumers. Information created by the company is becoming less and less effective for decision making. Content, which consumers interact with and talk about, is most likely also content which they are

going to share with other consumers (Weinberg, 2011). It can be more important to especially younger consumers. Consumers of ages from 14 years and higher already have profiles on at least one of the prominent social media network sites (Busemann & Gscheidle, 2012).

This study investigates mainly young people in their mid-20s, also known as Millennials. The Millennials refer to a generation born between 1980 and 2000 (Lee & Kotler, 2016). The Millennials want interactions with brands on social media (Martin, 2015). In other words, they want to get involved with the brand and its products. Henceforth, this study focuses on the factors which possibly trigger the Millennials their intentions to interact with the brand contents on Facebook. Smith (2011) argues that digital marketing contents involving graphics, among other things, draw attention from the Millennials, and Rahman (2015) suggests that they prefer to have more innovative and interactive contents for new products. Martin (2015) adds that credibility and relevance are nowadays the basis of many purchasing decisions for the Millennials. Therefore, Vividness, Entertainment, Credibility, and Relevance are examined in this study.

2.2.1. Vividness

In the context of marketing, a lot of researchers have discovered that vividness provides brand contents with a convincing effect. Vividly presented contents are much more persuasive and memorable than non-vividly presented contents (Collins, Taylor, Wood, & Thompson, 1988). According to Coyle and Thorson (2001), vividness is viewed as a combination of depth and breadth. Breadth is about diverse use of human senses (smell, taste, touch, sight, and hearing) while depth is about how closely the contents replicates those senses. Therefore, the brand content can enhance its persuasiveness by its inclusion of video, audio, and animation (Coyle & Thorson, 2001).

2.2.2. Entertainment

Consumers are using social network platforms not only for the interpersonal interaction but also for entertainment (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011). Therefore, social network platforms are effective channels for entertaining brand communication contents, which can give consumers a positive impression. Entertainment enhances the influence of social network advertisement four times more than informative messages (Bauer et. al., 2005; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). Companies can utilize on this knowledge by creating entertaining messages and encouraging the consumers to interact with the contents and eventually lead to the creation of an electronic word of mouth (eWOM) effect (Lin & Rauschnabel, 2016). Especially in South Korea, well-developed wireless internet infrastructure encourages the use of smartphones during the commute (Shin, Lee, &

Odom, 2014), which might cause Koreans to look for fun and entertaining contents.

2.2.3. Credibility

Advertising credibility is a significant part of web advertising (Brackett & Carr, 2001). According to McKenzie and Lutz (1989), brand communication content is a combination of truthfulness and believability, which a consumer perceives about the content. The credibility of the contents can be influenced by many different factors such as the advertiser or the advertising company in itself. Therefore, it can be said that high credibility leads to higher interaction.

To increase the credibility of brand content, not only social categories such as profession or expertise but also labels can shape an individual's initial perceptions (Ashfort, 1995; Humphrey, 1997; Nass, Reeves, & Leshner, 1996). There was an experiment where the same contents in three TV channels were shown and evaluated. The only difference was the names of TV channels, but people evaluate the three TVs differently (Nass et al., 1996).

2.2.4. Relevance

Previous studies regarding social media marketing have numerous times pointed out that it is essential for companies to communicate directly with consumers. Especially when it comes to advertisements, they should relate consumers to them based on their interests and make sure that consumers are engaging in their contents in SNS (Eck & Eichmeier, 2014). The advertised content should be tailored accordingly to potential customers. With relevant advertisements, companies can attract consumers' attention.

2.3. Consumers' Engagement

Consumers are looking for like-minded people to interact and share not only their interests but also their experiences with products, services or even companies (Molenaar, 2012). Facebook prepared different social buttons for its users so that consumers can share and interact with their friends and even with a brand. It is 'light' version of engagement that Facebook provide since it is just one click away to express "I like the contents" or "I want to share it with my friends" (Hille & Bakker, 2013). A more elaborated way to interact with Facebook contents is using a comment feature. Unlike Likes and Shares, a comment feature makes consumers directly express their feelings more detailed by typing them in. In addition to the fact that Likes, Shares, and comments stand for the main functions for interaction on Facebook, the numbers of Likes and Shares are viewed as metrics to determine the popularity of published contents. With these buttons, Facebook has two advantages over other platforms: user-friendly and visible in a safe place (Hille & Bakker,

2013). The buttons are easy to use and therefore user-friendly. As well, by clicking the buttons, users know that those contents are shown and shared with those people they chose.

2.4. Nationality

The cultural aspects of countries are very important in understanding consumers' behaviors (Hofstede, 1980). Groups of people act and respond to the environment under the influences of the interactions of common characteristics.

Hofstede (2011) provided a framework to explain cross-cultural differences with five dimensions, which are power distance, masculinity, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation.

Koreans and Germans are found different in the dimensions of power distance, masculinity, and individualism (Alden, Wayne, & Lee, 1993; Li, 2010) According to Hofstede (2011), power distance refers to "the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable." Masculinity refers to "the extent to which the dominant values in society are assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things, and not caring for others and the quality of life." Individualism refers to "the extent to which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family."

Korean culture is characterized by high collectivism, high power distance, and middle masculinity, while German culture is regarded as more individualistic centric, lower power distance, and high masculinity (Alden et al., 1993; Li, 2010).

German and Korean cultures are shaped by distinctive differences. Therefore it is expected to find differences between Koreans and Germans. Even though the levels of power distance are different in two countries, the "friend" relationships in Facebook are assumed to be similar. Therefore Germans in the culture of high masculinity are expected to interact with credibility and relevance while Koreans in the culture of middle masculinity and high collectivism are expected to interact with vividness and entertainment.

3. Hypothesis and Research model

Based on extant literature review were formulated hypothesis and developed the conceptual model presented in the Figure 1. The relationships among vividness, Entertainment, credibility, relevance of brand communication contents and consumers interaction such as likes, shares, comments are examined.

H1: Vividness will have a positive effect on interaction((a) comments, (b) likes, (c) shares)

H2: Entertainment will have a positive effect on interaction((a) comments, (b) likes, (c) shares)

H3: Credibility will have a positive effect on interaction((a) comments, (b) likes, (c) shares)

H4: Relevance will have a positive effect on interaction((a) comments, (b) likes, (c) shares)

Besides the direct effects among variables, the moderating effect of nationality is also tested.

H5a: For German users, the effect of vividness on interaction (comment, like and share) will be lower than for Korean users.

H5b: For German users, the effect of entertainment on interaction (comment, like and share) will be lower than for Korean users.

H5c: For German users, the effect of credibility on interaction (comment, like and share) will be higher than for Korean users.

H5d: For German users, the effect of relevance on interaction (comment, like and share) will be higher than for Korean users.

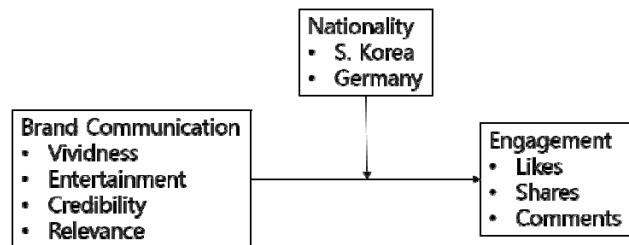


Figure 1: Research Model

4. Methodology

4.1. Data Collection and Measurement Items

Total of 225 data was collected from students living in South Korea and Germany. The sample consisted of 122 Korean respondents and 103 German respondents. Among them, 114 respondents are female while 111 are male. The most frequently used smartphones were the Apple iPhone X (N=34) and Samsung Galaxy S9 (N=32), and most often encountered ads are for technology related products and services (N=53) and for fitness related products and services (N=52).

As shown in Table 1, measurement items were borrowed and modified from the previous studies. Items for vividness was from Collins et al. (1988), entertainment from Taylor et al. (2011), credibility from Soh, Reid, and King (2013), and relevance from Dens and Pelsmacker (2010). Validity and reliability of the measurement items were examined. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicates the sufficiently large

correlations between the variables (sig. $p < 0.001$), and Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables are over .775.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the dependent variables of Intention to comment, Intention to like, and Intention to share and the independent variables of Vividness, Entertainment, Credibility, and Relevance, with the moderating effect of Nationality. There are three analyses conducted as follows: (1) hierarchical multiple regression analysis with Comments as a dependent variable, (2) hierarchical multiple regression analysis with Likes as a dependent variable, and (3) hierarchical multiple regression analysis with Shares as a dependent variable. The analysis results are summarized in Table 2.

4.2.1. Analysis Results for Comments (RM1 & 2)

RM1 includes the simple regression between the proposed predictors and the dependent variable (a) Comments, followed by RM2, which is a hierarchical regression result with the moderating effect of Nationality. The Model Summary shows that the regression model is significant ($F = 31.859$, $p < .000$) with an adjusted R^2 value of .355. Vividness ($t = 2.100$, $p = .036$) and Entertainment ($t = 2.100$, $p = .036$) are positively significant on Comment. With the introduction of the moderating variable, Nationality, it is apparent that for

Germans, the effect of Vividness is lower (standardized coefficient = -0.357 , $p = .009$) and the effect of Relevance (0.372 , $p = .001$) on Comments is higher. When the moderating variable introduced, the R^2 is significantly increased ($\Delta R^2 = .073$, $p = .000$).

4.2.2. Analysis Results for Likes (RM3 & 4)

For Regression Model 2 (RM3), a significant regression equation exists ($F = 65.152$, $p < .000$), with an adjusted R^2 of .534. It is found that all four predictors have significant positive relationships with the dependent variable, "Likes". In RM 4, the moderating effect of Nationality was found significant with Entertainment (-0.451 , $p = .004$) and Relevance ($.539$, $p = .000$). However, interaction with Entertainment was negative, while with Relevance was positive. When the moderating variable introduced, the R^2 is significantly increased ($\Delta R^2 = .070$, $p = .000$).

4.2.3. Analysis Results for Shares (RM5 & 6)

For Regression Model 3 (RM5) with Shares as a dependent variable, the adjusted R^2 value of 0.497 and a significant regression model ($F = 56.152$, $p < .000$) was found. Vividness and Entertainment found significant on Shares with $p = .000$. In RM 6, the moderating effect of Nationality was examined and found no significant. Along with the results above, the increase of R^2 is not significant when the moderating variable entered.

Table 1: Factor and Reliability analysis result

Variable	Item	Source	component	component	component	component	
Relevance	REL1	The advertised product category means a lot to me	Dens and Pelsmacker (2010)	.914			
	REL2	The advertised product category is a significant part of my life		.856			
	REL3	The advertised product category interests me		.856			
	REL4	The advertised product is relevant to me		.717			
Credibility	CRE1	Information conveyed in this ad is accurate	Soh et al. (2013)		.980		
	CRE2	Information conveyed in this ad is honest			.880		
	CRE3	Information conveyed in this ad is truthful			.913		
Vividness	V1	The ad I see is very vivid.	Collins et al. (1988)			.928	
	V2	The ad I see is colorful.				.892	
	V3	The ad I see is acoustically pleasing.				.780	
Entertainment	ENT1	The ad I see is fun to watch	Taylor et al. (2011)				.841
	ENT2	The ad I see is fun to read					.812
	ENT3	The ad I see is interesting					.677
Eigen Value			3.454	2.943	2.651	2.070	
% of Variance			57.572	58.859	53.012	68.995	
KMO			.819	.659	.706	.692	
Bartlett's			673.020	1797.78	467.908	182.660	
Cronbach's Alpha			.883	.960	.822	.775	

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results (Standardized coefficients)

Variable	Regression1		Regression2		Regression3	
	RM1	RM2	RM3	RM4	RM5	RM6
Variable	Comments	Moderating_Comments	Likes	Moderating_Likes	Shares	Moderating_Shares
(Constant)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vividness	.378***(.000)	.556***(.000)	.239***(.000)	.251***(.002)	.500***(.000)	.558***(.000)
Entertainment	.282***(.000)	.278***(.009)	.417***(.000)	.562***(.000)	.212***(.002)	.255***(.010)
Credibility	.018	-.027	.188***(.001)	.172***(.015)	.110*(.055)	.081
Relevance	.021	-.042	.107***(.023)	-.040	.017	-.035
Vivid*Nationality		-.357***(.009)		-.079		-.142
Enterta*Nationality		-.059		-.451***(.004)		-.164
Credib*Nationality		.196		.076		.079
Relev*Nationality		.372***(.001)		.539***(.000)		.204*(.051)
R ²	.367	.440	.542	.612	.506	.521
adjusted R ²	.355	.419	.534	.598	.497	.504
F	31.850***	21.215***	65.152***	42.587***	56.408***	29.425***
Sig	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ΔR^2	.073		.070		.015	
ΔF	7.067		9.708		1.712	
<i>P</i>	.000***		.000***		.147	

Note 1: *** and ** indicate that the coefficient is significant at the levels of 1% and 5%. The *p*-value is in parentheses.

Note 2: Nationality 0 = S. Korea, 1 = Germany

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of Vividness, Entertainment, Credibility, and Relevance on consumers' engagement such as Likes, Shares, and Comments. Hypotheses 1 and 2 are found accepted and can be interpreted that Vividness and Entertainment are the factors that will increase a consumer's engagement in the brand communication contents in Facebook. The results of Credibility show one significant relationship for Hypothesis 3(b). It can be viewed that consumers' Likes with brand communication contents can be increased by designing the contents to be more credible, but Comments and Shares are not related to the credibility of the contents. Relevance is only found significant with Likes in Hypothesis 4(b).

With the comparison of Germans and Koreans, Koreans have more Comments on Vivid contents than Germans do (H5a – Comments) and have more Likes on Entertaining contents than Germans do (H5b – Likes). On the other hand, Germans have more Comments and Likes on Relevant contents than Koreans do (H5d – Comments, Likes).

It seems that Facebook users in their 20's are most likely to click the Likes button when they found the contents vivid, entertaining, relevant, and credible. However, relevance is not enough for them to click either Share or Comments, while relevance and credibility are not enough factors for Comments. That means, vivid and entertaining features are very important for young Facebook users in both Korea and Germany.

In addition, the findings suggest that on Facebook, Germans and Koreans are different. First of all, Koreans are likely to engage in vivid contents for comments and entertaining contents for likes more than Germans. Second, Germans are likely to engage in more relevant contents for both likes and comments than Koreans.

The results give you further insight into how companies and e-tailers can leverage their contents. In order to make viral marketing for brand awareness and preference, they need to have more Likes. Therefore entertaining contents seem more effective for Koreans while relevant contents seem working for Germans. On the other hand, when consumers' comments are important, vivid feature should be highlighted for Koreans while relevant feature is still important for Germans.

Unlike the hypotheses, Credibility was not found important features of brand contents on Facebook for Comments and Shares. It indicates that credibility seems not the feature that the Millennials enjoy and consume from the contents on Facebook. If marketers want to make their brand contents shared and get commented on Facebook, vivid and entertaining features are more important. For both Germans and Koreans, Credibility itself is not enough for Shares or Comments. As well, Germans and Koreans have the same patterns for Shares. Only vivid and entertaining contents are going to be shared. It is different from Likes or Comments. It can be explained that Shares is viewed as a little bit stronger signal to let friends know about certain content than Likes, therefore, it seems important for them to share something interesting to bot themselves and their friends.

This study had shortcomings. Shares and Comments may have been confusing to the respondents because commenting friends' names can be seen as either shares or comment. Therefore, in the future study, the comments and shares should be carefully measured.

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