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The Role of Branded Apps in Brand Engagement

주저자

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Keyword

브랜드 인게이지먼트, 앱디자인, 디지털광고
Brand Engagement, Branded Apps, Digital
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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between perceived value of branded applications(apps) and brand engagement. Also, this research investigated how consumer satisfaction with branded apps moderate the relationship between perceived value of apps and brand engagement. The findings of survey show that the utility of apps and the level of confirmed expectation are significant factors in predicting brand engagement. Also the results confirm that consumer satisfaction with branded apps moderates the relationship between perceived value of apps and brand engagement. Important implications of the study are discussed.

논문요약

브랜드 인게이지먼트 강화는 수많은 마케팅 콘텐츠가 난무하는 디지털 시대에 브랜드의 충성고객을 확보하기 위한 중요한 과제이다. 본 연구는 브랜드 인게이지먼트 개념을 보다 정확하게 이해하기 위해 전통적으로 교육학에서 연구되어왔던 인게이지먼트 이론의 3가지 측면(정서적, 인지적, 행동적)살펴보았고 기대일치이론을 통해 브랜드 앱에 대한 기대일치 수준 및 만족도와 브랜드 인게이지먼트의 관계에 대해 논의하였다. 연구 결과에 따르면 앱의 유용성과 앱의 기대일치 수준은 브랜드 인게이지먼트에 긍정적으로 영향을 주었고 앱에 대한 만족도는 앱의 유용한 가치 및 기대일치 수준과 브랜드 인게이지먼트 간의 관계를 조절하였다. 본 연구는 교육학의 전통 인게이지먼트 이론을 적용하여 향후 다양한 브랜드 인게이지먼트 관련 연구를 할 수 있는 학문적 기반을 마련하였다. 또한, 브랜드 앱을 소비자와 커뮤니케이션 목적으로 디자인 할 때 브랜드 앱을 통해 소비자와 정서적으로 소통하고 소비자의 인지양식에 영향을 주고 소비자의 특정 행동에 동기를 부여하기 위한 전략적 기반을 제공한다.

1. Introduction

Why is that people prefer shopping at Target as opposed to one of its competitors? They might go to Target because they enjoy a fun and convenient shopping experience with access to thousands of unique and highly differentiated items in attractive displays. Regardless of the particulars, it is the experience that draws consumers. When people shop, they remember their previous experience at the Target store, and that memory influences their future decisions. This emotional commitment with such a particular brand experience is known as brand engagement.

The term brand engagement refers to “the combination of intellectual connection and emotional commitment, to motivate and direct behavior in line with the core of the brand” (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). There are two important reasons why brand engagement should not be overlooked. One, brand engagement allows marketers to develop more focused and precise communication; and two, brand engagement comes from consumers’ own brand experience creating the true value of the brand. This engagement ultimately affects consumer’s true brand loyalty (Dwivedi, 2015).

The increasing popularity of social media has opened another room for effective digital advertising (Aslam & Karjaluo, 2017). A number of studies in the advertising industry have shown that social media advertising plays an important role in building brand engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2017). One of the most common methods of social media advertising, a branded application(app), has been considered a powerful advertising tool that allows a brand to engage with its consumers (Zhao & Balagué,2015). Branded apps are small programs that users can download onto their desktops, or embed in their blogs or profile pages that import some form of live content (IAB, 2008). Downloaded apps are interactive virtual tools, which provide services like the news, the weather, a dictionary, a map, or sticky notes. A number of companies have assumed that

branded apps have several benefits over other forms of advertising, therefore a growing number of global brands like: Electronic Arts, Viacom, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, Gap, Hewlett-Packard, Hallmark, and Blockbuster, are hoping to build brand engagement through branded apps.

Brand engagement is likely to require some sort of active interaction with the brand (Buckingham, 2008), and branded apps allow brands to interact with vast variety of consumers. For example, branded apps provide brands with an opportunity to engage consumers through interesting content, unique assets, games, polls, quizzes, or contests. Additionally, branded apps are empowering consumers, and the consumers are the key actor in the advertising communication process. Advertisers or marketers cannot push or control consumers to use their branded apps. Instead, consumers usually select and use branded apps which fit with their interests and/or needs. Brand engagement also requires lasting interaction because it lasts longer and is more enduring (Buckingham, 2008). Therefore, it is important to create branded apps that engage with consumers for a length time.

The utility of branded apps is an important issue because it influences consumers brand evaluation and determines how likely it is that they will engage with that brand. The real value of a branded app is the utility that fosters longevity because utilitarian apps provide useful and relevant content. Although industrial research has emphasized the impact of the usefulness of branded apps on consumers’ intention to engage with brands , there has been no general explanation concerning how the usefulness of branded apps play an important role in building brand engagement. This is particularly important because there has not been solid academic research regarding branded app marketing.

The objective of this research is to assess the impact of the perceived suitability of branded apps on brand engagement. Specifically, we attempted to examine the impact of the use of

branded apps and consumers' confirmed expectation of branded apps on brand engagement, which has received far less attention in academic research. This study also seeks to examine the moderating role of the satisfaction of branded apps on brand engagement.

2. Theoretical constructs and hypotheses

2.1. Brand engagement via branded apps

Branded apps have been one of the most popular social media advertising tools aimed to engage brands with consumers. With the growing popularity of smartphone, apps represent a digital advertising channel because apps appear on personal screens and are seen by numerous users of smartphone. This rapid movement of the apps allows advertisers to boost exposure of their brand to a large number of consumers.

Branded apps have been considered a powerful advertising tool that drives brand engagement, which is a central issue in marketing and advertising practices. Brand engagement refers to the relationship between the promises made by a brand and the degree to which it connects with the needs-driven free will of consumers (Buckingham, 2008). Brand engagement is a construct that primarily comes from understanding the core values of brands, understanding consumers' needs that these values fulfill, and communicating a sequence of promises successfully, properly, and clearly to both the internal and external consumers (Buckingham, 2008). Based on previous definitions, the present study defines brand engagement as an enduring relationship between brand and consumer that is developed by consumers' enduring interest in the brand and the condition of sharing something in common with the brand.

The brand engagement is a very complicated structure. Brand engagement includes how people feel, how people understand, and how people respond to the brand (Buckingham, 2008). Such multi dimensions of engagement have been well developed by education researchers. Previous

research in engagement has generally suggested three dimensions of engagement: emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Emotional engagement encompasses positive or negative feelings or reactions to objects (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The emotional engagement included in this definition duplicates a work on attitudes, which examine feelings toward objects. Cognitive engagement on the idea of investment incorporates thoughtfulness and motivation to apply the effort necessary to understand objects (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Cognitive engagement also contains the learning strategies such as rehearsal, summarizing, and elaboration to remember, organize, and understand the material. Finally, the behavioral engagement draws on the idea of participation, and includes involvement in activities related to the object (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). In addition, the definition of behavioral engagement includes behaviors such as: effort, persistence, attention, and participation. These three dimensions of engagement can provide guidelines for the description and understanding of the way that consumers engage with the brand.

Consistent with the notion of emotional engagement in education research, a deeper emotional connection with the brand is required by brand engagement. Emotional engagement is a strong positive feeling about a brand, which implies brand attitude. In other words, brand liking is an element of the brand engagement. Therefore, this study suggests that the emotional engagement of brand is based on the attitude toward the brand. Consumers should also have cognitive engagement with the brand to build brand engagement. As suggested by learning engagement, cognitive engagement is a motivation to apply the effort necessary to understand and learn about the brand. The present study proposes that cognitive engagement of the brand is the intention to seek more information to understand the brand. Finally, consumers should have the behavioral

engagement with the brand to build brand engagement. As mentioned before, behavioral engagement draws on the idea of active participation in brand activities. Engaged consumers may actively share or recommend the brand to others. Thus, the present study suggests that behavioral engagement is 'intention to share the brand with other people.

Branded apps provide advertisers with several benefits to build brand engagement. First, apps succeed at gaining ground for brand advertising by allowing companies to boost brand exposure and increase the brand awareness. According to Buckingham (2008), brand awareness is a fundamental stage of brand engagement. Branded apps allow companies to put the brand name on an app. As users download and use the apps, they are automatically exposed to brand names or brand messages. In other words, apps directly deliver brand advertising content to consumers (Fang, 2017). Once an app is downloaded on personal device, the brand name is always visible. Users become aware of the brand name from repetitive and lasting exposure. Secondly, most branded apps use rich media to stimulate consumer interest. Rich media is defined as media that uses multiple forms of information content and information processing (e.g. text, audio, graphics, animation, video, and game) to inform or entertain the users. With rich media, branded apps allow advertisers to create more sophisticated and interactive advertising, which will grab and keep users' attention in branded apps.

Finally, branded apps can be useful devices that bring the brands to consumers' lives because most branded apps promote consumers experience and/or participation. When consumers use the brand app, they are automatically exposed to the brand. As they continue to use the brand app, they are continuously participating in and being exposed to the brand's activities, therefore having more experiences with the brand.

2.2. Determinants of effective branded apps

As mentioned above, fostering consumers to use branded apps ultimately increases consumers' engagement with the brands. Utility is the key element of branded apps that encourages consumers to constantly use branded apps (Zhao & Balagué, 2015). Utilitarian benefits of branded apps are considered the perceived value of apps by providing compelling, useful and relevant content (Parker & Wang, 2016). A common advertising approach used to affect consumer behavior is utilitarian appeals (e.g. Johar & Sirgy, 1991). The importance of the utilitarian value has been studied in advertising research. Many companies use functional apps that provide utilitarian value to users in order to get its brand in front of consumers. Utilitarian benefits refer to functional, instrumental, and practical benefits (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Previous research in branded apps asserted that utilitarian benefits of branded apps significantly lead to brand engagement (Zhao & Balagué, 2015).

Utilitarian value-added apps are aimed to provide services, such as providing information or functionality. For example, these apps include currency converters, clocks, calculators, and branded RSS readers. Google is currently offering various utilitarian apps like maps, documents, calendars, email and, of course, a search engine. Such utility-based apps form the basis of branded app advertising and a more meaningful proposition for advertisers. The utilitarian benefits of a branded app do not necessarily lead to a transaction with the company, but it enables consumers to interact with the brand in a relevant and useful way. In addition, the utilitarian benefits of a branded app can focus on a specific niche and foster consumers to use it much longer (Zhao & Balagué, 2015).

Based on previous research, this study assumes that perceived utilitarian value of branded apps influences brand engagement. This study proposes that as more consumers use and interact with apps, the more consumers will engage with the brand. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: The utility of using apps is positively related to brand engagement.

Even though the apps provide utilities, the usefulness of an app is really determined by the individual user. Thus, investigating the fulfillment of consumers' needs should not be overlooked. In order to make branded apps effective, consumers and their needs or wants should be first identified. Understanding and satisfying consumers' needs are the best ways to develop and deploy brand experience by apps. The importance of meeting consumers' needs has been well developed by expectancy-confirmation theory, which states that a consumer forms an initial expectation of an object prior to experience (Oliver, 1980).

Then, the consumer accepts and experiences that object. Following a period of initial experience, a consumer forms a perception about its performance, determining whether their expectation is confirmed and, evaluating the perceived performance of the object based on such determined confirmation (Oliver, 1980). According to expectancy-disconfirmation theory, consumers' evaluation of experience is mainly based on a comparison between perceived performance and a pre-purchase comparison standard (expectation) (Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010). Expectancy-disconfirmation theory theorizes that expectation influences consumers' evaluation of experience because the expectation level provides the standard around which disconfirmation judgments are made (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

Previous studies agreed that confirmed expectation directly influences consumers' evaluation of experience (e.g., Bhattacharjee, 2001; Oliver, 1980; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010;). Satyman, Alden, & Smith (1992) found that when consumers' perceived performance of a product confirms their pre-trial expectation, they are satisfied with the product experience, and it influences overall product evaluation. Phillips & Noble (2007) proposed that consumers will have more positive attitudes toward the advertisements, when components of the advertisement in the cinema

match with their expected experience. Otherwise, consumers will have negative attitudes toward the advertisement when certain elements of advertisement in the cinema inhibit or lessen their overall experience of movie watching.

Consequently, previous studies have supported that confirmed expectation influences overall evaluation of products or services and brands. Previous research on apps also suggested that relevance with consumers' needs is the key strategy of branded apps (Zhao & Balagué, 2015). Based on previous research, this study assumes that the confirmed expectation influences satisfaction with app experience and brand engagement. According to Zhao & Balagué (2015), consumers should find value in, and such apps are the best apps that consumers want to interact with and share. Once the value of the branded apps is meet consumers' needs, consumers interact with the apps several times a week. Therefore, the brand will keep consumers engaged by updating its content frequently, or providing a service for daily or hourly use (Zhao & Balagué, 2015).

H2: The level of confirmed expectation of apps is positively related to the brand engagement.

2.3. Moderating role of satisfaction

Research in consumer behavior has generally considered "satisfaction with products" as a determinant of whether a consumer has a favorable attitude toward the brand (e.g. Bhattacharjee, 2010; Oliver, 1980). In addition, Bhattacharjee (2010) viewed "satisfaction" as the key to building and retaining loyalty base of long-term consumers.

Particularly, repurchase or continued use of products and services has been considered the most dominant behavioral outcomes of satisfaction. Oliver (1980) showed the positive impacts of satisfaction on future purchase intention and post-purchase attitude. Ekinci, Dawes, & Massey (2008) also confirmed that repurchase intention is the most powerful outcome of consumer satisfaction. In the usage of technology research, it was supported that

satisfaction positively influences consumer's usage continuance intention (Bhattacharjee, 2010).

Previous research has shown the positive effects of satisfaction on brand engagement. Active interactions between consumers and brands are critical to brand engagement. Branded apps are important tools that enable consumers to interact with brands. In order to encourage consumers to interact with brand through using a branded app, consumers should be satisfied with their experience with the app. Thus, identifying factors that affect consumers' satisfaction with branded apps should not be overlooked.

Consistent with the previous research, this study supposes that a satisfaction with a branded app may influence brand engagement. This study defines satisfaction as a transient affect of app experience. This study proposes that consumers will be more engaged with the brand when they are satisfied with the branded app experience.

In particular, the effects of confirmed expectations on brand engagement may be moderated by stronger satisfaction with branded app experiences and the effects of the perceived value of the app on brand engagement may be moderated by stronger satisfaction with the branded app experience.

H3: Satisfaction with the branded app will moderate the relationship between the perceived value of the apps and brand engagement.

H4: Satisfaction with the branded app will moderate the relationship between the level of confirmed expectation and brand engagement.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

One hundred undergraduate students (33 male and 69 female) at a major Midwestern university participated in this study. Subjects' age ranged from 18 to 37 years, with an average age of 22 years. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to their participation in the survey.

3.2. Stimuli construction

The objective was to construct more realistic stimuli while retaining the level of control that is needed to test the hypotheses. To accomplish this objective, the pretest was conducted. For the pretest, we chose two, real branded apps: the National Geographic app and the UNIQLOCK app. The National Geographic app provides news services, while the UNIQLOCK app provides music video. We asked 30 participants to use these two branded apps and answer a questionnaire that measured hedonic and utilitarian value.

On the basis of the pretest responses, we defined National Geographic news app as a utilitarian app, and we defined UNIQLOCK music video app as a hedonic app. As a utilitarian app, the Daily News app from the National Geographic provides breaking news and daily discoveries including pictures of animals, ancient wonders, space, the environment, and other weird and wonderful topics. As a hedonic app, the UNIQLOCK app is the fusion of a clock which functions as a blog utility, time signaling music, and dance performance videos with the UNIQLO clothing.

In order to make this study have a variance, two types of branded apps including National Geographic app and UNIQLOCK app were used as the stimuli of this study.

3.3. Data collection procedure

An online survey was conducted with 100 respondents. Participants were greeted and asked to fill out a consent form. Then they were randomly assigned stimuli. The first screen of a survey contained instructions that upon completion of the web sites viewing, they will be asked to report their opinions and thoughts. The instructions were necessary to compel subjects to pay close attention to test materials and actively engage in brand information processing.

After reading the instructions, subjects were directed to a branded app where they were allowed to take as much time as necessary to

experience and evaluate the app. After using the branded app, subjects were asked to complete the survey inquiring about the independent variables and the dependent variables of the study.

3.4. Measures

The independent variables were the perceived value of the app and the confirmation / disconfirmation of the pre-trial expectation. The perceived value of the app ($\alpha = .92$) was measured on twelve-item seven point scales (e.g., this app is: functional, helpful, necessity for me, practical, effective, and I rely on this app to fulfill my basic needs).

Expectancy confirmation was the second independent variable of this study. On a seven-point scale, participants indicated the extent to how close did the app come to their expectation (1= "very much better than expected," and 7=" very much poorer than expected") (Tse & Wilton, 1988). Satisfaction ($\alpha = .80$) was measured using a three-item, seven-point semantic differential scale anchored by: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, and favorable/unfavorable (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989). Cognitive engagement ($\alpha = .95$) was measured with three, seven-point scales (e.g., "How likely/possible/probable is it that you would consider seeking more information about National Geographic?" ; "very unlikely/very likely, impossible/possible, improbable/probable"). Behavioral engagement ($\alpha = .95$) was measured with three, seven-point scales (e.g., "How likely/possible/probable is it that you would consider sharing National Geographic with others?" ; "very unlikely/very likely, impossible/possible, improbable/probable"). This scale was drawn from the study of Machleit & Wilson (1988).

[Table 1] Measures

Name of Scale	Items	α
Perceived value of the app	Functional Helpful Necessity for me Practical Effective I rely on this app to fulfill my basic needs	.92
Satisfaction	Very satisfied Very pleased Very contented Absolutely delighted	.80
Emotional brand engagement	Good Pleasant Favorable	.96
Cognitive brand engagement	How likely/possible/probable is it that you would consider seeking more information about National Geographic?	.95
Behavioral brand engagement	How likely/possible/probable is it that you would consider sharing National Geographic with others?	.95

4. Results

4.1. Hypothesis testing

A simple linear regression was calculated predicting subjects' brand engagement based on their perceived value of the branded app. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 98) = 24.997, p < .01$). The regression equation indicated that perceived value positively influenced brand engagement ($\beta = .45, p < .01$). Therefore, H1 was supported.

A simple linear regression was calculated predicting subjects' brand engagement based on their confirmed expectation of the branded app. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 98) = 33.563, p < .01$). The regression equation indicated that confirmed expectation positively influenced brand engagement ($\beta = .51, p < .05$). Therefore, H2 was supported.

4.2. Moderating role of satisfaction

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict subjects' brand engagement based on perceived value and satisfaction with the branded app experience. A significant regression equation was found ($F(3,96) = 31.409, p < .01$). The regression equation indicated that the effects of perceived value on brand engagement was moderated by satisfaction ($\beta = -.52, p < .01$). Therefore, H3 was supported.

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict subjects' brand engagement based on confirmed expectation and satisfaction with the branded app experience. A significant regression equation was found ($F(3,96) = 17.203, p < .01$). The regression equation indicated that the effects of perceived value on brand engagement was moderated by satisfaction ($\beta = -.79, p < .05$). Therefore, H4 was supported.

5. Discussions

The results of the present study illustrated that the utility of branded apps positively affect the brand engagement. Even though practical research has shown the significant effects of the utility and functionality of branded apps on brand engagement (Blum, 2008), they have not been supported by the empirical study. The present study supports that consumers' perceived utility of branded app transferred to the brand evaluation. As indicated by the results of this study, consumers' perceived utilitarian value of the branded app leads to positive attitude toward the brand. When consumers perceive the use of a branded app to provide utilitarian value, they are more likely to learn about the brand and share the brand with others.

The results of the present study show that consumers are more likely to engage with a brand when the brand app meets their expectation. Zhao & Balagué(2015), suggested that the best apps are those that consumers want to interact with and share. Therefore, branded apps should provide a service fit for

consumers' use. In addition, confirmed expectation has been shown to enhance the positive evaluation of product experience. Confirming consumer's expectation to product experience is valuable because it generates more positive attitude and behaviors toward brand (Oliver, 1980), and positive evaluation of technology (Bhattacharjee, 2001) than do product experiences that disconfirm consumer's expectation.

The present study also supports that consumers' confirmed expectation of branded app leads to positive attitudes toward the brand. Furthermore, this study suggests that consumers' confirmed expectation of the branded app influenced their intention to seek more information about the brand and to share the brand with others.

Great impacts of satisfaction with products or services on brand evaluations have been shown by previous literature (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Yet little research has focused on the effects of satisfaction with branded app experience on brand engagement. Few industrial studies suggested that the importance of a consumer's satisfaction with a branded app in determining a branded app's effectiveness. Zhao & Balagué(2015), suggested that brand apps work begins with identifying consumers and their needs or wants. The findings of this study support the moderating role of consumer satisfaction with app experience for the effects of perceived value and confirmed expectation on the formation of brand engagement.

The results of the current study provide insightful implications to both researchers and marketers. From the advertising research perspective, the results suggest that consumer response to social media advertising is similar in some ways to a traditional advertising. Brand associations are influenced when a brand is connected with a sponsoring event through sponsorship activities. The pre-existing associations held in consumers' memories regarding an event become linked in memory with the sponsoring brand. Essentially, the celebrity or event image is transferred to the

brand (Keller, 1993; Poon & Prendergast, 2006). The results of the present study are consistent with this argument. When a brand becomes liked with a utilitarian value of a app through branded app advertising, brand association is created. Consumers' perceived utilitarian value of a branded app consequently becomes linked in memory to the brand.

From a practical perspective, brand managers should be cognizant of the impacts of an app's utility when deciding upon the allocation of app advertising dollars. As a social media, social networks have been one of the most significant platforms that allow brands to interact with consumers. A lot of companies are struggling with their branded apps on social networks that let consumers create messages and virally share that message with others (Zhao & Balagué, 2015). Companies seeking to enhance brand engagement might find the way to make consumers interact with the branded apps. Our results suggest that brand engagement goals may be accomplished through branded apps. However, potential consumers' interest may be inconsistent with utility of branded app. This implies that before providing a branded app, marketers would be advised to take a proactive role in measuring their target consumers' needs and wants for consistency with their own app offerings. Even though companies assert that the branded app is effective to build brand engagement, the evidence in the literature is not enough. This research provides new insights into this issue, illustrating that perceived value of branded apps and confirmed expectation directly affects brand engagement. The research findings suggest that companies should pursue the goal of not only satisfying but also understanding consumers' needs. In addition, improving utilitarian branded apps will further achieve brand engagement.

Similar to all research, this study does have its limitations. The sample of college students might attenuate the ability to generalize these finding to the population as a whole. The second limitation is in the area of sampling bias due to the subjects of this study voluntarily participated

in the study. Finally, the sample of this study was from the U.S. This might weaken the generalize-ability of theses finding to other countries.

One interesting issue related to the value of a branded app is that of conflicting values among multiple functions of branded apps as several firms provide branded apps with multiple services (Fang, 2017). It may be insightful to consider the effect to a consumer's brand evaluation when a branded app provides several services with conflicting values. For example, an interesting future research question could address which value of branded app is primarily transferred to brand evaluation when a branded app provides several services. Also, it might be investigated how the fit between brand image and perceived value of branded apps influence the impact of branded apps on brand.

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