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Hakan GÜMÜŞSOY

Istanbul Aydın University, Institute of Graduate Studies, Department of Business, Business Administration Program, Istanbul / TURKEY

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A REVIEW ON THE MEDIATION ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE EFFECT OF BRAND IMAGE ON E-WOM MARKETING

ABSTRACT

Today, the survival of businesses with increasing competition in the market environment is becoming tougher. Therefore, businesses have tended to make a difference in the product they offer to consumers to achieve their goals and make a profit. In this context, businesses try to create a brand image to ensure that the products they produce are preferred by consumers. Because the primary choice of consumers for a product is the image of that product. The fact that businesses have a positive image contributes to the positive marketing of this brand by consumers in an electronic environment. On the contrary, the bad image of the enterprises will lead to a negative word of mouth marketing. For this reason, it is extremely important for businesses to have a strong brand image in order to turn their word of mouth marketing activities in an electronic environment in their favor. At the same time, if the consumer is not satisfied with the product used, it will change the progression of word-of-mouth marketing in the electronic environment positively or negatively. In this study, it is aimed to explain how customer satisfaction plays the mediating role of in the effect of brand image on electronic word of mouth marketing. For this reason, a detailed literature study has been conducted and statistical data on this subject has been investigated.

Keywords: Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, Electronic Word of Mouth Marketing

MARKA İMAJININ E-WOM PAZARLAMAYA ETKİSİNDE MÜŞTERİ MEMNUNİYETİNİN ARACILIK ROLÜ ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

ÖZET

Günümüzde rekabetin artmasıyla birlikte işletmelerin pazar ortamında varlığını sürdürebilmesi gittikçe zorlaşmaktadır. Dolayısıyla işletmeler hedeflerini gerçekleştirmek ve kazanç sağlamak için tüketicilere sundukları ürün konusunda bir fark yaratma eğilimine girmişlerdir. Bu kapsamda işletmeler, ürettikleri ürünlerin tüketiciler tarafından tercih edilmesini sağlamak amacıyla bir marka imajı yaratmaya çalışırlar. Çünkü, tüketicilerin bir ürünü tercih etmelerinin başında o ürünün sahip olduğu imaj gelmektedir. İşletmelerin olumlu bir imaja sahip olması, tüketicilerin bu markayı elektronik ortamda olumlu bir şekilde pazarlamasına katkı sağlayacaktır. İşletmelerin sahip olduğu kötü imaj ise tam tersine olumsuz bir ağızdan ağıza pazarlamaya neden olacaktır. Bu nedenle işletmelerin elektronik ortamdaki ağızdan ağıza pazarlama faaliyetlerini kendi lehlerine çevirmek amacıyla güçlü bir marka imajına sahip olmaları son derece önemlidir. Aynı zamanda tüketicinin kullandığı üründen memnun kalıp kalmaması da elektronik ortamdaki ağızdan ağıza pazarlamanın seyrini olumlu veya olumsuz bir şekilde değiştirecektir. Bu çalışmada, marka imajının elektronik ağızdan ağıza pazarlamadaki etkisinde müşteri memnuniyetinin aracılık rolünün nasıl olduğunun açıklanması amaçlanmıştır. Bu nedenle ayrıntılı bir literatür çalışması yapılmış ve bu konuyla ilgili istatistiksel veriler araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka İmajı, Müşteri Memnuniyeti, Elektronik Ağızdan Ağıza Pazarlama

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the survival of businesses with increasing competition in the market environment is becoming tougher. Therefore, businesses have tended to make a difference in the product they offer to consumers to achieve their goals and make a profit. In this context, businesses try to create a brand image to ensure that the products they produce are preferred by consumers. Because the image of the product in the customer's choice of purchasing the product is more important for the consumer than the product itself. The fact that businesses have a positive image contributes to the consumer's positively marketing of this

brand in an electronic environment. On the contrary, the bad image of the enterprises will lead to a negative word of mouth marketing (WOM). For this reason, businesses need to have a strong brand image to turn their electronic word of mouth marketing (EWOM) activities in their favour. At the same time, if the consumer is not satisfied with the product used, it will change the progression of word-of-mouth marketing in the electronic environment positively or negatively.

When we look at the researches about WOM, it is seen that consumers care about the opinions of their immediate surroundings and those, who have previously experienced that good or service, rather than the promotional activities of companies, and WOM causes purchasing behaviour as a result (Yavuzyilmaz, 2015: 434).

Today, electronic word of mouth has become an important part of the strategic planning of international companies engaged in e-commerce in various industries. Electronic word of mouth is an increasingly popular electronic marketing tool used in international marketing. It is a business strategy that promotes a product through social networks, and is also known as viral marketing. This strategy has significant benefits particularly in terms of the brand image and the brand awareness of the company. The power of this growing communication tool lies in the fact that consumers quickly spread the word, thus the message soon becomes viral like a virus (Uyan and Hamidi, 2020: 1656-1669).

The success of businesses operating in the online environment is closely related to the fact that consumers provide WOM by creating electronic trust and electronic loyalty (Bozbay, Yaman, & Ozkan, 2016: 273-292). Because people share their positive or negative opinions about their experiences with their environment after shopping. This type of communication, which is a kind of feedback activity, is also a reason for new shopping. This activity, which is improvised by customers and defined as WOM, often takes place outside the control of business managers (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008: 151).

On the other hand, in the studies of Steffes and Burgee (2009) on purchasing preferences of consumers, they found that the experiences of the consumers and the information shared about them on online platforms are more important than the face-to-face information obtained from their environment (Steffes & Burgee, 2009: 56). In such an environment, with the development of technology day by day, our communication method and living spaces are increasingly identified with the virtual environment. Almost all of our communication channels are now formed by our social media accounts. Most of the information we want to obtain is provided from the virtual world. For a product we want to buy, social media accounts, forms, and review pages are checked first if the reviews are positive, that product is purchased.

While customers are also engaged in their purchasing behaviours, they want to end their shopping processes as a satisfied customer with a high level of satisfaction. In this context, they prefer stores that can meet their expectations, increase their satisfaction level and make them feel happy (Fettahlioglu, 2014: 28). This ensures that the prejudices of the customers are broken and customer satisfaction starts before the shopping. Thus, the continuity of the relationship between the business and the customer is provided.

This concept, which is one of the most basic elements for businesses to ensure their sustainability in today's competitive conditions (Parobek, Loučanová, Kalamárová, Šupín, & Štofková, 2015: 494), according to the International Standards Organization (ISO), it can be explained as the difference between the customer's expectation and the performance of the product or service (Sakai, Kawaib, Matsumoto, & Uchida, 2011: 58).

Gaining new customers is easier and lower cost than retaining existing customers (Juran & Mryna, 1998: 14). In this context, when it is considered that the satisfied customer will advertise the brand or business voluntarily without any extra effort, it becomes clear how important it is to create customer satisfaction. On the other hand, it is possible to say that the satisfied customer is the source of the positive WOM or EWOM, while the dissatisfied customer is the marketing source of the negative WOM or EWOM.

The brand is one of the important facts in terms of accelerating the competition between businesses and shaping the purchasing decision of the consumers. In this context, it can be said that in recent years, consumers prefer the brand, not the product. The meaning that businesses attach to the brand, namely

the brand image, can be shown as the main reason why consumers prefer the brand instead of the product (Ozguven & Karatas, 2010: 140).

As a result, the image of the brand is one of the most important factors in determining the purchasing preferences of the customers. Besides, this brand image affects customer satisfaction. This means that if a brand has a strong and good image, it positively affects customer satisfaction. Therefore, it can be thought that the brand image as positive satisfies the customers of the brand and then these customers benefit the business by transferring their satisfaction to others through EWOM.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Image

The term of the brand is used as "marca" in Italian and "brand" in English is originally the term "brandr" in German and is used in the dictionary to distinguish, leave marks with fire, engagement and stamp (Hornby, 2005: 134). It is a concept almost as old as a civilization, for instance, Greek and Mesopotamia. They marked their works (wines, medicine, pots or metals) and gave them names to identify predominantly (Sarkar & Singh, 2005).

The brand is a sign and creates a certain feeling and meaning in the minds of consumers. For this reason, a brand is in a certain shape, name, trademark, logo, or label. The effort of all companies is to improve their brand images and today all products carry a brand. (Said & Wijaya, 2013: 55). A brand might be an environmental attribute that allows a distinctive character of a word, sign, banner, digit, slogan, company or product (İşoraitè, 2018: 121).

According to Cop and Bekmezci (2005); brand; It has some features that guarantee that product providers always provide their customers with certain features, service and quality. These features are as follows (Pir, 2018: 3410):

- Qualification: Brand products are placed in their advertisements to evoke some features.
- Benefit: Customers buy functional and emotional benefits of products rather than their qualities.
- Value: The value of a brand is determined by the things customers remember about that brand.
- Personality: The relationship between the image that customers perceive emotionally about the brand and the real image of the brand gives the brand's personality.

The concept of brand and branding has been one of the most debated subjects in marketing discipline (Moore & Reid, 2008). The reason for the increase in brand interpretation and brand management is the deficiency of common understanding of brand complexity. Therefore, understanding the nature of the brand has become essential to create a brand in general and to reveal, develop and protect the business (Kalafat, 2019: 14).

Today, the brand is one of the main elements which drives the purchase of many products and services that provide functionally similar benefits in the market. Consumers are more concerned with what brand image and brand personality mean to them than to the functional benefits of the brand. The brand is not only a concept consisting of a logo or an emblem, but it is also an association in the mind of the consumer (Ozupek & Diker, 2013: 101)

The terms of brand and branding are getting stronger day by day and companies have critical duties. Primarily, building a brand is one of the channels that should not be forgotten to reach the consumer. The brand is usually an abstract expression that exists to consolidate logos and slogans and is as equally valuable as a marketing communication tool (Demirag, 2019: 16-18).

Brand image is the expression of the general feelings and feelings of the consumer about the brand and is the key driver of the brand value that affects consumer behaviour. The purpose of the marketing strategies of the companies is to create an image in the memories of the consumers by affecting the perception and attitude of the consumer towards the brand. By creating a brand image, increases in sales, market share and brand value are aimed (Zhang, 2015: 58-62).

In the current competitive business environment, the brand image of a firm is as significant as the products or services supplied. According to most of the business organizations, a brand image is a strong

asset to them make accomplished. A confidential and well-known brand identity offers customers to feel the confidence to use the products supplied by the brand. For this reason, powerful organizations always create an influential brand by working hard and show it in a coherent and obvious way (Neupane, 2015: 9-26).

It can be said that firm with an image that positively impacts their customers will make more profitable sales in the future and will last longer. Besides, customers who are under the positive influence of the brand image will positively convey the brand image to their surroundings. This action is called the word of mouth marketing (WOM). According to some researches, this method, which has much more impact than advertising, is also quite cheaper than advertising but has a large effect (0.73) on the purchasing desire of the customers (Ugur, 2017: 339). Consumers, who are satisfied or not, not only convey the image to their surroundings and also convey it in electronic environments. Thus, all people may see their comments. In this context, the electronic word of mouth marketing (EWOM) is realized.

2.2. Electronic Word of Mouth Marketing

Consumers attach more importance to the information they receive from their environment than the information brands provide them. For this reason, WOM, one of the oldest marketing methods in which people communicate with each other to strengthen the image of the business, has reached today without losing its importance. In this context, it is an indicator of marketing success that consumers share their experiences with the products with their friends and families in a positive way (Yozgat & Deniz, 2011: 47).

In today's competitive business environment electronic word-of-mouth is an important marketing instrument. E-wom marketing accelerates international trade transactions. In addition, E-wom marketing encourages consumers to take action as a result of the message about the brand, goods or services, and pass it on to other potential customers. Hence, the purpose of E-wom marketing is two-fold: the first one is consumption, and the second is forwarding behaviour (Hamidi and Uyan, 2020: 252).

According to the research related to WOM, Consumers who have experienced the product or service before and their views and comments about them are more effective than companies' efforts to persuade them, and WOM drives consumers to buy products (Kurtoglu & Sonmez, 2016: 1127-1138). According to the research of Uyan and Hamidi (2020), it is important for e-commerce executives to ensure that messages sent through electronic word of mouth are informative, entertaining, and free of irritation. It is also important for the company to work on its credibility.

WOM, which is a consumer-oriented marketing tool, is very effective in the decision of the consumer to purchase products or services by reaching information and creating alternatives (Ramsunder, 2011). Throughout the process of products and services, WOM is one of the conventional information sources which is used (Peppard & Butler, 1998). WOM is one of the most effective sources for consumers and an interpersonal way of communication-related to products and services. Researchers and practitioners have been aware of the impact of WOM on consumers' decision making for a while (Lee & Youn, 2009: 473-499).

When the existing studies are looked, it is seen that WOM's level of reliability and empathy appears to be higher than what is offered to customers when analyzed the resources from the commercial websites of companies (Sancoko, Setiawan, & Troena, 2019: 22-29). WOM is more effective than the knowledge that firms produce to raise attention and awareness in promoting a new product, shaping ideas and behaviour. The effect of WOM communication on cost and credibility is higher than traditional communication sources (Ozaslan & Uygur, 2014).

The new platforms that emerged with the birth and development of the internet, which changed the marketing communication of companies with the consumer, caused them to move to different channels. With these changes, companies can communicate directly with their customers and transfer information about their products and services without wasting time. Also, they have created online channels with the infrastructure provided by Web 2.0 technology and started to communicate with consumers. In this case, companies that want to participate in the competition started using these channels (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006).

Today, WOM is a communication channel in which both product specialists and customers, who use it services or purchase products and express their positive or negative opinions with their messages. Since the golden age of modern media, many customers have been sending and receiving their messages over the internet. Thus, WOM became a channel where opinions about the purchased products or services were reached. With Web 2.0, consumers are shared with ideas and information about products and services through chat boards, websites, web blogs and many social media platforms. It is understood that advancing internet technology provides the transition from traditional WOM to EWOM (Lerrthairakul & Panjakajornsak, 2014: 142).

WOM and EWOM, which means that consumers share information about the marketed product among each other, have a serious impact on consumer behaviour (Kocak, 2017: 26). WOM affects people's judgments about products (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). Besides, when the results of the studies on WOM and EWOM are examined, it is seen that they affect many actions (consumer awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, tendencies) (Buttle, 1998: 242).

Businesses and organizations related to reputation management consider EWOM more and more important day by day (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). In this context, the primary aim for most of the service companies is providing customer satisfaction. Because having higher customer satisfaction and customer retention and lower marketing expenses lead to improved profits is provided by having positive word-of-mouth (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Some studies show that there is a positive connection between the difference in customer satisfaction and the difference in price tolerance but a negative connection between the level of them (Anderson, 1996).

Since the EWOM takes place in the internet environment, some data related to internet usage should be examined. In this context, current statistical data on the internet and social media usage on Digital 2020 Global Overview Report is as follows (URL-1):

- Today, the number of internet users has exceeded 4.5 billion (at least 60% of the total population of the world), 3.8 billion of this number (almost half of the total population of the world) are using it on social media. When the latest trends are examined, it is predicted that the number of social media users will exceed half of the world population by the end of this year.
- Average daily internet usage time per person is 6 hours and 43 minutes. Last year, it was 6 hours 40 minutes (less 3 minutes than this year). This means that a total internet user has connected to the internet for more than 100 days per year.
- When these data are analyzed on country basis; While people between the ages of 16-64 in the Philippines spend an average of 4 hours a day on social media, the people in Japan spend only 45 minutes.
- It shows that Facebook is still the most popular social media platform. When the statements of the company are examined, it is seen that the monthly active users exceed 2.5 billion and this number is getting even more.
- When the GlobalWebIndex reports are examined in general, it is understood that internet users make searches to discover new brands and products with search engines rather than television advertisements. Advertisements on television are the second place, WOM recommendation is in the third place, and social media platforms are in fourth place in this respect.

These data show us how effective social media platforms and EWOM can be on customer preferences. For example, while positive EWOM is considered to result from satisfactory experiences, negative EWOM is considered to be the result of many unsatisfied needs. Negative information can have more impact and spread quickly. EWOM might cause a significant impact on brands, especially the negative EWOM might cause a significant impact on brands as serious problems (Peneva, 2015: 14-15). For example; at the beginning of 2018, Jenner shared just a brief message about 18 words with her followers.



Figure 1. Jenner's Comment on Social Media **Source:** URL-2

Due to this sharing, this company, which is open to the public, lost billions of dollars in value in a short time (Fornell, Morgeson, Hult & Vanamburg, 2020:99).

In this context, negative EWOM is considered to spread more rapidly than positive EWOM. EWOM may cause the products of brands that fail to achieve their satisfaction from the market. This shows the power of EWOM (Sen, 2013: 21).

2.3. Customer Satisfaction

A customer is somebody internal or external who purchases regularly some commercial product from a seller. An external customer is somebody who just buys or may buy the products while internal customers are not normally a customer, they are a member of the company as workers (Nagel & Cilliers, 1990). Satisfaction is an opinion about whether a product or service is satisfactory or inadequate. Customer satisfaction has been of great importance for marketing research for the last 20 years. Studies about customer satisfaction in the mid-1960s are early research. Surprisingly, according to one of the early studies on customer satisfaction and service quality, customer satisfaction is influenced by perceived service quality, expectations and overall shopping experience. On the other hand, the perspective of the results has shown that customers satisfaction gives them repurchase behaviour and also helps maintain and develop the business. In parallel, the perspective of the dissatisfaction is about addressing customer complaints and regaining service to reduce customer dissatisfaction (Mahmoud, 2019: 14). Customer satisfaction directly influences on the major sources of the stream of future income for most companies. The firms expect that the new index is a significant complement to traditional measures of economic performance, and offers available data for the companies, shareholders and investors, government regulators, and buyers. Expectedly, the exertion of the measurement of customer satisfaction proceeds on the national border and all the world (Fornell, 1992). According to a study, customer satisfaction has an impact on the increases of future cash flow and the decrease in variability. Both of these positive effects are statistically remarkable and managerially relevant (Gruca & Rego, 2005). In this context, customer satisfaction is a measure that reveals what the brand's products and services are to make customers happy. The results of ratings and surveys can help to decide how to increase customer satisfaction by improving products and services (URL-3). Customer satisfaction level affects on the repetition of the sales transaction of the company.

Companies have to repeat their transactions to exist in the market, but customers only experience many products one time. Companies must make sure that the customer with a large number of options is satisfied. Otherwise, the customer does not choose the company again, so the market value of the firm decreases. As an example, firms with high customer satisfaction for more than 15 years have had equity funds with good returns, according to ACSI data. The stocks of these companies earned more than 5 times (518%) over 14 years (from March 2000 to March 2014). This earning rate is well above the market. For example, the S&P 500's value increase in the same period is only 31% (Fornell et al., 2020):

The line graph of these data is given in Figure 2 below (American Customer Satisfaction Index data and methods) (URL-4). This shows that the return of every investment made for customer satisfaction is higher than the investment.

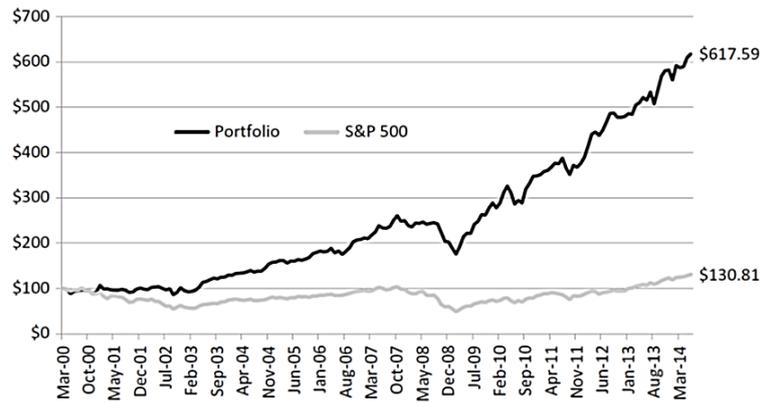


Figure 2. Customer Satisfaction Portfolio Versus the S&P 500 (April 2000-June 2014) **Source:** URL-4

3. CONCLUSION

Considering the results of the research, it is understood that brands should primarily have a positive image since they greatly affect consumer preferences. Because if a customer thinks that the brand has a positive image, it shows that the customers are satisfied with the brand or get the feeling that they will be satisfied if they purchase the product. As a result, it is understood that while the satisfied customer exhibits a behaviour towards repurchase, even the customer, who has not yet preferred this brand, will also tend to buy the product of this brand.

Moreover, brands with a positive image have customers who promote their brands on some social platforms (such as Twitter, Instagram) without expecting anything in return. This means that a brand that allocates a high budget for advertising can make more profit by reducing the cost of advertising. This means that brand image has a major impact on electronic word of mouth marketing (EWOM).

In general, it is understood that a positive brand image first ensures that customers have a positive opinion about that brand, as a result, customers will be satisfied with their experiences about the brand, and finally, these customers will advertise the brand in many environments (especially electronic environments like social media).

In short, brand image, customer satisfaction and EWOM are interdependent and important issues. While the brand image can directly or indirectly affect EWOM, it can also affect EWOM by providing customer satisfaction.

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