THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS IN DEVELOPING BRAND LOYALTY

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Abstract : *Social media is a rapidly growing tool, which is quickly becoming the favored pastime of the new generation. Social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, are allowing young adults to express their ideas, wants, and opinions to millions of people currently using the same media. This new form of media presents an opportunity that many organizations are starting to realize and capitalize on. This research seeks to investigate how the antecedents of brand loyalty are affected by social media tools, specifically within the context of the millennial generation. This research will review the existing literature on brand loyalty and its primary antecedents.*

Keywords : *Social Media, Brand Images, Satisfaction, Brand Qaulity, Brand Personality*

Introduction

Social media is a rapidly growing tool, which is quickly becoming the favored pastime of the new generation. Social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, are allowing young adults to express their ideas, wants, and opinions to millions of people currently using the same media. In the five or six years since its existence, social media has grown rapidly, and has been studied and analyzed by researchers worldwide (Wright et al., 2010). This new form of media presents an opportunity that many organizations are starting to realize and capitalize on.

Social media has yet to emerge from the early stages of its development to become the new leader in brand loyalty materialization and growth. (Hennig-Thureau et al., 2010). However, the potential for marketing through social media is evident in that it can create conversations among people and interact with a consumer on a more personal level than traditional media sources such as print or television (Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010). Due to the newness of the concept of social media there has not been extensive research on the interrelated topics of brand loyalty and social media, and the extent that brand loyalty can be developed through social media. However, the subject of brand loyalty has gone through extensive academic research and debate, and it has long been on the vanguard of a marketer's plan. Seth Godin (1999) in his book Permission Marketing writes that interruption marketing, such as T.V. and magazine ads, is being ignored because of a surplus of information. Instead, marketers have begun to move towards permission marketing that can build a relationship with a customer. This kind of marketing is tailor made for social media because of its free and easy access, as well as it's potential for interactivity between consumers and organizations.

This research seeks to investigate how the antecedents of brand loyalty are affected by social media tools, specifically within the context of the millennial generation. This research will review the existing literature on brand loyalty and its primary antecedents, and in the next phase will conduct a survey targeting university going students in Canada.

Research on social media in all forms is becoming necessary due to the changing landscape of marketing, which is pulling away from traditional advertising forms and moving towards more proactive and interactive forms of building brand loyalty. As the use of social media and the Internet in general increases in popularity, there is a parallel need for information on how social media can be effectively used to display a brand and also what aspects of a brand are affected by the use of social media.

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Literature review

2.1 Social Media

Social media tools consist of some of the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, foursquare, blogs, forums, and Resource Description Framework Site Summaries (Commonly known as RSS feeds.) along with many more (Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010; Culnan et al., 2010). These are just a few of the platforms that fall under the overarching title of social media tools. "Social media is an on-line environment established for the purpose of mass collaboration" (Bradley, 2010). This definition fittingly comes from a blog by Anthony Bradley, but it does more justice than many of the other definitions. Any type of social media does have one purpose, which is to gather and share ideas. Bradley also outlines six core principles of social media. The most important principles are: participation, collectiveness, and independence (Bradley, 2010). These are the factors that should be taken into consideration while examining social media. When speaking of social media tools, consideration will be given to the major platforms of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs.

2.2 Brands in Social Media

Recent articles related to social media are critical of other forms of media such as T.V. and magazines, indicating that they are gradually declining (Edelman, 2010). With the decline of traditional media, a growth of new form of media, especially social media platforms such as online videos and search engine marketing have emerged. As David Edelman states in "Digital marketing's new vocabulary," there is a shift away from paid media, such as television and magazine advertisements, towards earned media, such as fan videos for products or electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) (Edelman, 2010). This shift was also mentioned one decade back by Seth Godin (1999) in his book Permission Marketing in which he calls for a shift away from interruption advertising (paid media) towards permission marketing (earned media) in which the consumer actually gives permission to receive information about a brand or a product.

Social media also focuses on word of mouth (WOM), which is important because of being the basis of organizational benefits of social media interaction, generating brand loyalty. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) state that E-WOM is driven by consumers wanting to move away from information sent directly from the marketer towards information received from fellow consumers. Increasingly, consumers see this sort of information as trustworthy since it is considered to be unbiased. E-WOM directly impacts the perceived brand image of a product as positive messages that are spread through reviews or forum conversations. This can influence interested consumers, who, if subsequently pleased, will provide more positive reviews and help to build a positively perceived brand image (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

E- WOM is the primary way in which social media conveys messages about brands. It is a necessary component to examine when considering the effect of social media on brand loyalty, since WOM will be very important. WOM goes beyond the messages that are being spread, and there is literature on the implications of the way these messages are spread. In the article "Unlocking the elusive potential of social networks," author Michael Zeisser emphasizes not only the importance of WOM in developing a brand online, but also the ways that WOM is spread. If it is spread through social media than it has likely spread through micro blogging, which can be a tweet or Facebook status update. Each of these short blogs expresses an emotion. They often express someone's joy or displeasure with a new product or experience with a certain brand. Zeisser also emphasizes that WOM through social media is a new form of media, equivalent to that of old media. With this in mind, tried content practices can be applied to WOM through social media. The way to harness positive WOM spreaders is to make the originator of a positive WOM seem important in their own context (Zeisser, 2010). The author states that recognition by peers is a powerful motivator and will cause others to strive to feel the importance that is bestowed when they adhere to the positive WOM microblog, or product review.

2.3 Brand Experience

Brakus et al. (2009) have proposed four main measures of brand experience: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. These are the main components of the brand experience that they define as: "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments." This develops four main measures of brand experience: sensory experiences, affectionate experiences, intellectual experiences, and behavioral responses. These four main levels of brand experience are reactions that will be made with regards to brand-related stimuli. They are not necessarily linked to emotion, as that is only one aspect (affectionate experience) that Brakus observes. While these reactions to stimuli may not create an emotional connection, they could create a

sensation, cognition, or behavioral response. The author emphasizes that the points of brand experience are through "a brand's design and identity." By this he means logos, mascots, advertisements, websites, or anything that is congruent with the current identity of the brand. This means that all of the stimuli that create brand experiences are accessible through social media tools, what remains to be answered is the extent to which social media tools truly influence brand experience.

Morrison's (2007) perspective on brand experience, emphasizes that in order to create a strong brand connection one must have some sort of emotional experience. With this in mind, brand experience goes beyond how one thinks of a brand and the sensations and cognitions that it produces, and moves into how a brand makes one feel and the emotions that are uncovered. Morrison (2007) argues that emotion is what tips the scales when a decision is deadlocked between two things. This underlines that strong brand experience will lead to choosing one brand over another more than once, thereby leading to a level of brand loyalty. As mentioned previously, emotion is one of the four measures of brand experience that were outlined by Brakus et al. (2009). Morrison (2007), however, argues that emotion is the true decider when it comes to associating with a brand. She explains that an emotional brand experience will lead from "I like Doughnuts" to "I like to eat Krispy cream Doughnuts" (Morrsion, 2007). This jump shows how an emotional brand experience can lead directly to brand loyalty after a connection has been strongly formed. When looking at brand experience in a social media context, the brand needs to "be able to ignite emotions in the social media user to create a connection, the major difference is that within social media it will either be the communication between consumers that ignites this emotion, or on a lesser note the brand image in the form of a logo or slogan" (Jae Wook et al., 2008).

With these sources in mind, it is important that the experience with a brand creates an emotional response but it cannot be limited to that. Brand loyalty may also form out of a cognitive response or a behavioral reaction.

2.4 Perceived Brand Image

Perera et al. (2009) connect brand image to identity, stating: "identity is a dimension of the brand, which must distinguish it over time, confirming its promises and defining the associations that it aims to obtain from customers." They defined brand image/identity as: "specifies, clearly and objectively, the forces, the values and the vision of the brand, and makes it an important tool for internal and external communication."

Simplifying this notion, brand image is how the customer can relate to a brand with regards to the values and focus of the organization extended through the brand.

Within the world of brand image, brand identity is seen as almost the same thing. They are two parts of the same entity, as described by Ghodeswar (2008): brand image is the associations that a consumer already makes with a brand, and identity is the inspirational side of the entity and is the way in which the organization wants the brand to be perceived (Ghodeswar, 2008). It is the thing that differentiates each brand from one another, and it is what makes each consumer associate with the brand. According to Ghodeswar (2008), brand image is created through four different steps, which are outlined in his PCDL model. PCDL is an acronym for the steps outlined in the model: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging the brand equity. Through a series of case studies it was found that in order to have a strong brand identity there must be a "consistent self reinforcing brand image" (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Jevons and Gabbot (2005) studied the effects of brand identity created by the manager as compared to brand image as seen by the consumer. This is an important aspect of perceived brand image. If there is any difference in the identity built by the manager and the meaning that the consumer draws from the brand, then there can be no association with the brand. It will be unlikely that there will be any sort of connection between the two.

2.5 Brand Personality

Brand personality is the set of human characteristics given to a brand (Maehle 2011). Five major brand personality dimensions were first laid out by J.L. Aaker (1997). These dimensions are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Each of these dimensions has different sub-groups that accompany them. Sincerity is split into four parts: down to earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. Excitement is divided into daring, spirited, imaginative, and modern. Competence is composed of reliable, intelligence, successful, and sophistication (which encompasses upper class and charming) (Maehle, 2011). Brand personality, therefore, is not only distinctly defined but also split into distinct categories.

Mulyanegara et al. (2007) studied whether an

individual's personality characteristics are projected onto brands to form brand personalities. They did not find results supporting their hypothesis and concluded that brand personality is a tool that can be used to target certain people, but it is not something that will necessarily draw in people of the same personality type. This means that when a brand has an honest personality trait, not everyone that is honest will be pulled towards this brand, although there are a variety of people who find honesty to be an endearing trait or one that they admire (Mulyanegara et al., 2007).

Another study by Yongjun Sung et al. (2010) examined how the construct of brand personality developed by Aaker (1997) can be used by managers to promote brand trust. Brand personality is practical for a marketer because it is a way for the brand to become differentiated in highly competitive markets (Yongjun Sung et al., 2010). Sung et al. also argue that consumers "tend to select a certain brand they like, often because they feel that the brand they choose appears to be consistent with their self-images and personalities." This means that when accentuating a brand personality it is important to keep in mind the target market, since there is a need to keep the brand personality congruent with the personality of the consumer in order for there to be a meaningful connection.

2.6 Brand Trust

Alam et al. (2010) define brand trust as "the trust a consumer has in a specific brand." This is a simplified definition, but serves the purpose of defining brand trust in this theoretical model. The study by Alam et al. (2010) seeks to find the antecedent of brand trust online in Malaysia. These antecedents are security and privacy, perceived risk, WOM, online experience, quality information, and brand reputation. The authors also argue that brand trust leads to an increase in loyalty towards a certain brand, and a tendency to spend more money and share information about that brand. (Alam et al., 2010) The study found that the two highest factors that affected online brand trust were perceived risk and WOM. Perceived risk had a negative correlation to brand trust, but had a very strong connection. WOM had a strong positive correlation, but it was not as strong as perceived risk. This means that when dealing with a certain brand online, there is a high level of perceived risk, which works against the brand. However, if others have spoken positively about that brand, there is a greater chance for an interaction between brand and consumer.

Hong-Youl Ha (2004) identifies and confirms many of the same precedents for brand trust online. The author's antecedents of brand trust are security, privacy, brand name, WOM, experience, and information. They found that in order to create an effective sense of security and privacy and to be a comforting brand, there needs to be a high level of both on- and offline advertising that promotes these key aspects together with positive WOM. This creates familiarity, which leads to a higher sense of security and, eventually, trust. WOM works towards brand trust much like it does towards brand loyalty. Positive WOM has a strong correlation with brand trust and spreads very quickly online but negative WOM can lead to complaining and can significantly hurt trust (Ha, 2004).

2.7 Brand Quality

According to Trott (2011), perceived quality "is the opinion which the customer forms about the ability of the product or brand to fulfill his or her expectations." Perceived quality has to do with the consumer perception about whether a brand fulfills its function. The dimensions of perceived product quality, as outlined by Trott (2011) are reliability, serviceability, durability, style, and design. If each of these components maintains a level of consistency, the consumer will form a sense of comfort and, ultimately, loyalty towards the brand.

2.8 Satisfaction

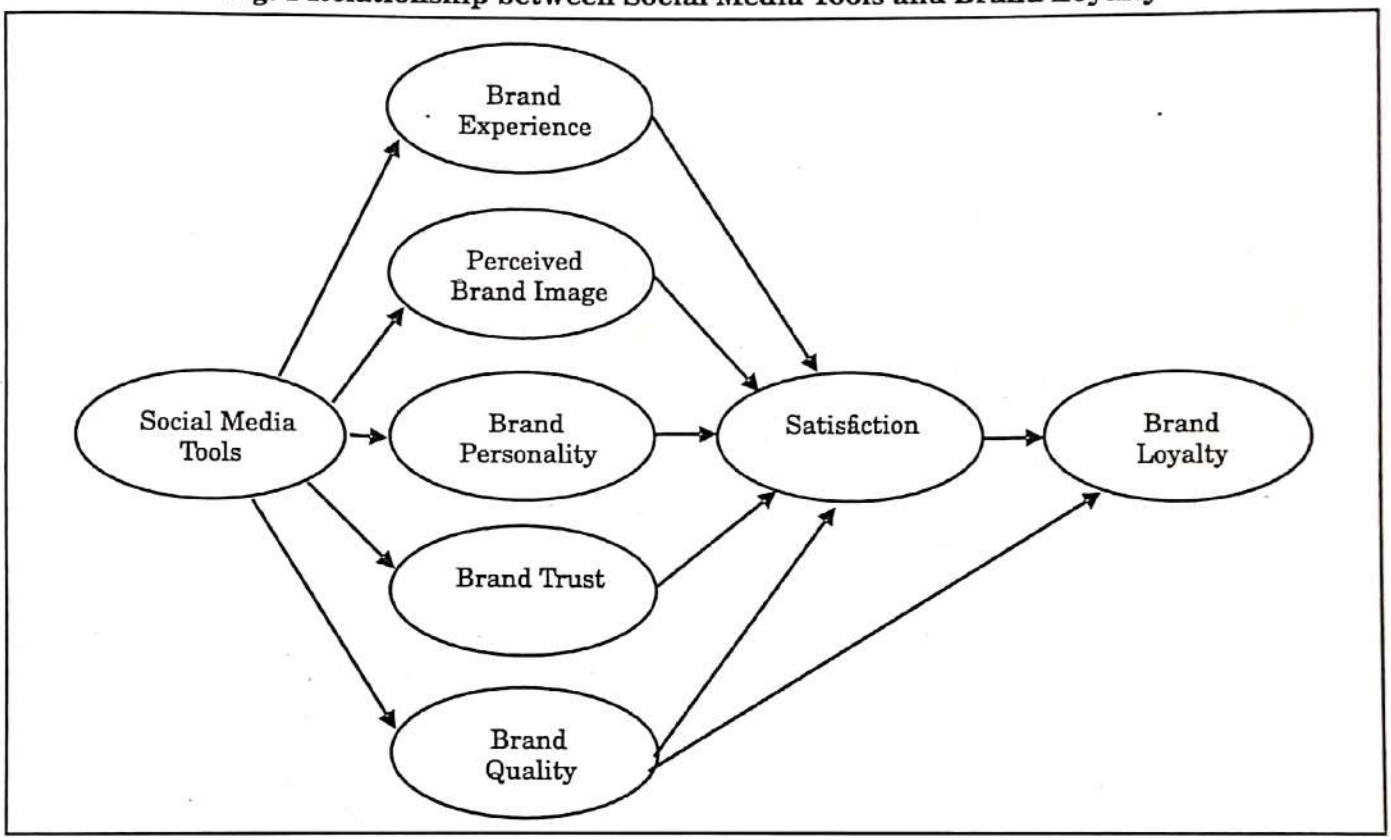
The literature indicates that satisfaction is the closest thing to brand loyalty (Da Silva et al., 2008). In order for consumers to become attached and loyal to a brand, it is necessary that they are positively satisfied with the brand. According to Da Silva (2008), loyalty can be seen in two ways. It is either seen as a cognitive process in which the expectation of the consumer is met which results in satisfaction or it is viewed as a pleasurable level of consumption-based fulfillment. This means that a more recurring form of satisfaction based on previous experiences occurs, bringing a level of comfort when enjoying a favored product. Kuenzel (2008) considers satisfaction as more of an element of identification. He opines that "the more satisfied a person is with an organization's offerings, the greater the identification." This means, however, that the consumer would have to have a level of experience with the brand to begin with, before a level of satisfaction could be developed. This is different from the earlier view of satisfaction, which is earned over time rather than gained from a feeling during an interaction with a brand. However, both iterations of brand satisfaction are linked to loyalty, and that satisfaction is necessary to develop brand loyalty (Da sila, 2008; Kuenzal, 2008). Ha

(2005) suggests that there is no real definition of satisfaction. Satisfaction is subjective to each person, but requires experience with a brand and is the driver of both positive and negative WOM.

Conceptual Framework

Brand loyalty is affected by many different antecedents and can never be viewed on its own as it is a product of many different factors. This paper strives to view the effects of social media tools on each of these factors, and illustrate how it ultimately generates brand loyalty. By fully understanding these antecedents in their own light it is then possible to see how social media is able to affect them. With the ability of social media to connect people effortlessly to the brands that they choose, many of these factors come into play. The framework shown in Fig. 1 depicts the most important factors of brand loyalty and mapping the effects of social media on them.

Fig. 1 Relationship between Social Media Tools and Brand Loyalty



3.1 Brand Experience

Brand experience, as defined by Brakus et al. (2009), has four distinct measures: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. These measures are important to examine from a social media perspective. In order for brand experience to develop through social media, the measures need to be attainable. What this means is that through any of the social media tools, an interaction should have the desired effect on the consumer. A brand image that receives online interaction from a consumer needs to be able to elicit sensory, affectionate, intellectual, and behavioral responses. Since social media has the ability to create groups and communities, many of the experiences of a group will come with that. As users of social media get closer to the brand they begin to communicate with the brand. This communication will ultimately lead to whether or not they will feel or think differently because of this interaction.

Proposition:

Social media will have a direct and profound influence on brand experience. With the ability of a brand to impart ideas, thoughts, and perceived images congruent with its own image, it is possible and even easier to illicit sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral feelings from consumers.

3.2 Perceived Brand Image

Perceived brand image is synonymous with brand identity, defined as the core values with which a consumer relates to the brand. It is important to explore the extent to which a consumer is able to relate to a brand using social media. Brand image is one of the key differentiating variables inherent in a brand. Therefore, it is important to explore whether brand image can be properly developed through social media tools. If interaction with a brand on social media allows the consumer to relate through

common beliefs or values, then it will be possible to develop brand image through social media, ultimately affecting brand loyalty. Twitter is a good example of how a consumer-perceived image can be affected by social media. Perceived brand image is the ability for the brand to resonate with the core values of a consumer; through twitter a brand is able to easily share a core value every ten seconds if desired. This ability to quickly and effectively share core values and beliefs means that a consumer does not have to wait for a TV commercial to discover the core values of the brand; they are relayed to them much quicker and more directly through 140 character micro blogs.

Proposition:

Perceived brand image will be strongly affected by social media tools, because of the quickness, potency, and directness of each message sent to the consumer.

3.3 Brand Personality

There are five major brand personality dimensions to which consumers relate. These dimensions are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. In order for brand personality to factor into affecting brand loyalty, the consumer needs to relate to at least one of these personality traits. The consumer does not need to share the desirable trait in order to relate well to the trait. If the consumer is able to interact and relate to a brand's specific personality through social media, satisfaction will increase and, ultimately, brand loyalty will also increase. A good example of relating to a brand personality is the viral Old Spice commercials. In these commercials there is an attractive male character talking to female viewers about how much better their man could smell. The product is barely mentioned. However, this character is a personification of the Old Spice brand. Men see him as an ideal ladies man, whereas women see Old Spice transforming their partner into a similar type of man – rugged, charming, etc. Through social media such as Facebook and YouTube it is possible to view this characterization of Old Spice and relate to the characteristics of the man, which can create a connection between the consumer and the brand.

Proposition:

Social media, in the whole new context of brand personality, will have a strong effect on individual abilities to relate to the human characteristics of a brand.

3.4 Brand Trust

There are a series of dimensions that affect brand trust. As with many of the antecedents of brand loyalty, a key for success is that at least some of these factors be compatible with the social media format. These dimensions are security, privacy, brand name, WOM, experience, and information. In order for these dimensions to be satisfied through social media there should be some interaction as well as a high level of exposure to the brand. If interaction though social media can provide enough information, consumers may develop a trusting relationship with certain online brands. This will only affect brands with which consumers do not already have a level of trust.

Proposition

There is a positive association between social media and brand trust.

3.5 Brand Quality

Brand quality is defined as the ability of the product to fulfill the expectations of the consumer. In the social media context, this is an important concept to develop, because brand quality directly affects both satisfaction and brand loyalty. Several dimensions of a brand need to be successfully developed through social media for brand quality to have an effect on brand loyalty. These dimensions are reliability, serviceability, durability, style, and design. Interaction with some of these dimensions (reliability, serviceability, and durability) requires hands-on experience and further information. Style and brand design are important factors to consider for developing the perception of brand quality through social media tools. The perception of brand quality is much harder to develop through an online presence, but once it has been developed it can be exploited.

Proposition:

Brand quality will not have a strong association with brand loyalty, as it is too closely linked to the physical use of a product. However, there will still be a positive association due to the effects of WOM on brand quality.

3.6 Satisfaction

All of the antecedents of brand loyalty directly affect satisfaction before they indirectly affect brand loyalty. Therefore, it is essential to gauge the ability of satisfaction to be developed through all of the dimensions previously discussed. Satisfaction is the most important variable because if it cannot be developed, then brand loyalty cannot subsequently be developed. Satisfaction is a variable that is dependant on many of the other factors, therefore if social media has a profound effect on the majority of

those factors, then satisfaction will be positively affected.

Proposition:

Due to the previous predictions that there will be a generally strong association between social media and the antecedents of brand loyalty, satisfaction will have strong association with brand loyalty.

Conclusion

Social Media has the ability to become the premier tool for developing a brand's loyalty amongst millennial consumers. In order for that to happen there needs to be a greater understanding of how social media can positively or negatively affect a brand. In this case how social media has an effect on brand loyalty. The review of literature shows that all of the pieces are in place for social media to have a strong positive association with most of the antecedents of brand loyalty.

Social media's strong ability to initiate conversations between consumers and brands coupled with its ability to transfer information easily from one source to another, create the basis for its ability to influence brand loyalty. WOM from one consumer to another has a strong affect on brand trust and perceived brand image, while the ease of expressing oneself on facebook or twitter facilitates development of brand personality.

Finally, the level of brand loyalty that is developed online through social media will be seen through satisfaction. If social media positively affects all of the various factors then we will see a positive correlation between the factors and satisfaction. Satisfaction is important because it is the main factor that generates brand loyalty and a positive emotional response when thinking of a particular brand.

The proposition that social media can have a profound effect on brand loyalty has numerous implications for managers; it could change the way in which a brand is unveiled to a market. It could signal a transfer from traditional media advertising to conversational marketing seen in social media. Social media is already an avenue to market a product or service, and its popularity calls for further exploration of its usefulness in marketing. This second phase of this study will empirically investigate whether brand loyalty can be successfully developed through social media. If it can, the implications to managers will be immense. The practical implication of this study for managers is that it will outline the possibility of developing a brand's standing with consumers through social media. It will identify the aspects of brand loyalty to which millennial generation relate most closely. Further, it will allow future social media campaigns that intend to increase brand loyalty to use the most effective methods. This study will be particularly helpful to small- or medium-sized businesses looking to expand their marketing campaigns into the realm of social media. It will enable them to begin to create brand loyalty before their product or service had been used extensively.

In conclusion social media tools will have a positive correlation with: brand experience, perceived brand image, brand personality and brand trust. They will have less of an impact on brand quality. These positive correlations will affect satisfaction in a positive way ultimately leading to brand loyalty through social media tools.

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