

THE ADVOCACY INTENTION OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA REGARDING SMARTPHONE BRANDS

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–Abstract–

The smartphone industry has grown in the last decade and now consists of a variety of vendors, many of whom people are not aware of. There has also been a shift in power from brands such as Nokia, Sony, and Blackberry, to brands such as Apple, Samsung, and Huawei. As such, it has become increasingly important to differentiate brands as technology has become democratised. This paper aims to provide a method for smartphone vendors to differentiate themselves in a crowded and competitive market. The differentiating factor considered is social media, which could be used to reach a high number of individuals to whom could be marketed, and would, ideally, become advocates of the brand. This study hypothesised that reaching a point of brand advocacy relies on four other factors, namely perceived usefulness of social media, anticipated benefits of social media sites, intention to be involved in social media sites, and commitment to social media sites. To test this hypothesis, a sample size of 512 Millennial students were taken from various universities. The data showed that reaching advocacy does indeed rely on the four factors as hypothesised and that, therefore, advocacy among Millennials is a five-factor model whereby perceived usefulness, anticipated benefits and intention to be involved are mediated to advocacy intention through commitment. As such, organisations, especially smartphone brands should focus on the four factors preceding advocacy to enable customers and social media followers to become more prolific in their word of mouth campaigns. Advocacy entails defending the brand, speaking well of the brand, and

trying to convince others to buy the brand. Moreover, where customers become advocates, they are more difficult to persuade to use other brands and forgive brands more easily for their mistakes. This is deemed to be a crucial aspect of the saturated globalised smartphone market.

Key Words: social media, smartphone, advocacy intention, Millennials

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1. INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is seen as the final step in the relationship between the brand and the user, where the individual not only talks about a brand and is not only resistant to the marketing efforts of other brands, but also defends the brand and is likely to forgive a brand for mistakes. However, reaching advocacy is a difficult destination, which takes time, effort, and resources. Moreover, upon reaching advocacy, the brand must still work hard, retain quality, and involve customers. Ultimately, organisations that make the effort, reap the rewards as advocacy increases emotions towards a brand (Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015:74). Individuals interacting with a brand on social media develop an emotional attachment, which in turn leads to word of mouth. Advocacy comes more naturally to the Millennial cohort as they grew up with social media, which gives a voice to everyone. It is therefore important for organisations to make use of this attempt to reach the stage in which this generation wants to advocate the brand (McCarthy, 2017). Social media is a form of electronic communication in which followers create online communities, share information, content, personal messages, and ideas (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Social media marketing is seen as an evolution of relationship marketing, which, in its time, succeeded transactional marketing (Moretti & Tuan, 2013:250). Thus, social media encourages active involvement from consumers. This involvement has taken on a life of its own where we now see communication regarding a brand being more commonplace; individuals discuss, create, share, and consume, all without organisations' input or permission (Peters, 2019; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011:242). Some brands end up with loyal followers who border on the fanatical and tend to vehemently defend and follow certain brands (Iliff, 2018; Reid, 2011). These adamant followers tend to buy more, are willing to keep buying despite price increases and become very vocal in their support of the brand that they love (Bhasin, 2011).

There has been a transition towards the online sphere, to the extent that some even go as far as stating that when organisations are not on social networks, they are not part of cyberspace (Jackson, 2018; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:67). Online marketing has become crucial to many businesses, especially those of smartphone brands as competition has increased dramatically. Jesensky (2013) suggests that smartphones are extremely important in both personal and professional aspects of the individual's daily life. It serves to enhance life and can serve as a minicomputer that keeps us connected, helps run our lives more efficiently, gives us enhanced functionality, and entertains us. The smartphone has been heralded as a new dimension in mobility, which has changed and personalised social interaction forever (Philips, 2014). A formal definition of the smartphone is "a cellular telephone with an integrated computer and other features not originally associated with telephones, such as an operating system, web browsing and the ability to run software applications" (Rouse, 2018). However, many phones exist, each equipped with different capabilities. Therefore, in this context, the smartphone is described as a programmable mobile phone which can send messages, download applications, and utilises Wi-Fi and GPS (Cassavoy, 2018).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Retaining customers is much more profitable than finding new ones and advocacy may prove to be a winning formula where profit is the driving force of the organisation (Parrish, 2015:24). Social media has become a key factor in its impact on marketing communication and has become an indispensable component of marketing strategies. This can be attributed to the increase in the amount of time that individuals spend on social media, as well as the fact that an abundance of communication takes place using social media platforms (Willis, 2017). However, not all brands enjoy loyalty on social media as the online era has led to users quickly switching brands despite having liked a brand previously (Appiah *et al.*, 2017:6). Here, focussing on the Millennial cohort can aid organisations that are prepared to go through the effort of building relationships (Jakubowitz, 2017). In making the effort to market to Millennials with an online site, organisations can also defend themselves against criticism as well as explain why mistakes were made (Yan, 2013). However, finding ways in which to garner a large enough following on social media is difficult and can prove detrimental when not used correctly (Taylor, 2014). Moreover, few smartphone brands enjoy such a ferocious following as Apple, Samsung, and Huawei (Oxborrow, 2018), which

means that smaller brands must work much harder to differentiate themselves. As such, through social media, there can be differentiation, however, the crux is to use it correctly to achieve success (Abeysekera, 2017:18).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived usefulness forms part of the technology acceptance model in which perceived usefulness is seen as the extent to which an individual believes “something” will help them perform a task better (Thominathan & Ramayah, 2015:78). Perceived usefulness, known as extrinsic motivation, is linked to motivation to use information technology, where extrinsic motivation is seen as taking an action that will provide value to the individual (Liaw & Huang, 2013:16; Lin & Lu, 2011:1153). The technology acceptance model uses perceived usefulness in conjunction with ease of use, to gauge behavioural intention (Elkaseh, Wong & Fung, 2016:192). Perceived usefulness is an important factor in the technology sphere, as it is the subjective view that an individual has regarding whether technology will make their life easier. Thus, it is important for brands to know that the technology they adopt, such as social media, is useful to the individual using it (Bugembe, 2010:16). There are several key factors that influence whether something is useful. How fast it is, how time-saving it is, how much effort it can save, how much costs it can reduce and how useful it is, overall (Renny *et al.*, 2013:215). In addressing the usefulness of smartphones, one merely has to look at Millennials, who are a generation who cannot live without smartphones (Lyons, 2016). The Millennial cohort is shown to be one of the most influenced generations, and are in constant contact with peers, and showcase their lives to the world (Stein, 2013). They have a close relationship with social networks (Nanji, 2017) and access social media daily, for a variety of reasons (Tingley, 2015:1).

Consumers weigh the effects of their behaviour in terms of anticipated benefits. Thus, they would commit to behaviour when the benefits outweigh the costs (Laux, 2000:425). It is important for brands to keep this in mind, and thus focus on providing experiences over simply providing products. These experiences are increasingly important as information technology permeates every facet of life, brands are becoming larger and more important, in some circumstances, and communication and entertainment have become a focus in many aspects of life (Clark, 2015; Schmitt, 1999:54-55). As such, there are several benefits that the

consumer wants to see in using social media, such as promotions, they want to be heard, they want assistance, and they want to be on the forefront of knowing what a company is doing. These are important factors and should be used by brands to further their relationship with customers, by having them feel as though they are a part of something (Tsimonies & Dimitriadis, 2014:334-335). The benefits which an individual want or feels they should have, are highly subjective, however, and are not static nor dichotomous. Therefore, an individual may want a certain benefit today, but may doubt benefits the next day, or doubt future benefits. However, where social media is concerned, it may pay to simply ask individuals what they want from the brand and from their social media pages, and simply apply it in order of importance (Meekma, 2017). The Millennial cohort may show loyalty to one brand and have no interest in another. Where smartphones are concerned, the Millennial cohort is very brand loyal (Smith, 2015), however, regarding private or brand labels, they prefer benefits and value, over a specific brand (Pasquarelli, 2017). In some instances, it helps to create a need, which then also creates a benefit, where the Millennial cohort may not have noticed it before (Gibson, 2015).

Intention to be involved signifies the state which the consumer wants to attain (Patel, 2017). It is an important variable to be aware of as it can show the positive or negative behaviours of consumers towards a brand (Bush, Martin, & Bush., 2004:110). Thus, the behaviour is the outcome of the input from the organisation, which shows whether communication with consumers was successful (Lin & Lu, 2011:1152-1153). As such, where the organisation has been successful in their communication, the consumer's attitude may lead to positive behaviours, such as purchases or actual usage (Rauniar, Rawski, Yang, & Johnson, 2014:8). However, it is important to note that the outcome or behaviour of the consumer is contingent on several factors. These factors include consumer traits, characteristics of products or services, situational factors, previous experience, and the trust the consumer has in the organisation (Weisberg *et al.*, 2011:83).

Commitment has become a crucial component in business relationships, where the relationship is based on the long term, and where there is a lasting intention to maintain the relationship. Commitment is often used in conjunction with trust and satisfaction to gauge relationship quality (Walter, Muller, Helfert & Ritter, 2003:160).

Commitment and loyalty are correlated in that both look at re-patronisation of a

product or service in a repetitive manner (Sahin *et al.*, 2011:1291). Furthermore, committed customers see the relationship they have with the brand as beneficial, and the termination thereof yields lower benefits than maintaining it. However, to achieve the commitment sought by a brand, a certain level of trust must be achieved and maintained (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2003:232). Commitment is further precipitated by satisfaction with a brand, and certain psychological factors, such as identification, are also required to achieve commitment (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinalui, 2010:358).

The Millennial cohort's behaviours are varied in scope but have been shown to be affected by celebrities, for example. Sports celebrities are shown to be able to shift brand loyalties, as well as influence word of mouth by Millennial individuals (Bush *et al.*, 2004:113). Furthermore, electronic word of mouth, online communities, and online advertisement prove to be effective to drive intention through social media platforms, where the Millennial cohort is concerned (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2014:176). There is a strong correlation between the Millennial cohort's brand loyalty, their satisfaction and their relationship intention, which shows that their intentions are, as shown before, more nuanced, and should be investigated thoroughly to build a stable model regarding their wants and needs (Mostert, Petzer, & Weideman, 2016:28). In order to motivate the Millennial cohort towards intention and finally behaviour, a brand must make a connection, must have its own unique and genuine personality, and must form part of a lifestyle (Nahai, 2013).

In general, the Millennial cohort appears to be less committed than previous generations, because they tend to believe in wider possibilities (Berry, 2018). Moreover, it is a generation that has more choice than ever before, which creates an even more difficult paradigm in which switching is simply easy (Moore, 2017). Thus, to reach this commitment takes hard work from organisations, where they must first build trust, and then ensure to involve the Millennial cohort customers in their programmes. When the Millennial cohort feels involved, they feel a part of something and are more likely to be committed (Nusair *et al.*, 2013:20).

4. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

4.1. Research design

This study made use of descriptive research with a single, cross-sectional design. The target population selected was full-time students of the Millennial cohort, from ages 18–24. These students had to be registered at one of South Africa’s HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) during the extent of the data gathering. As such, the sampling frame consisted of the 26 registered South African HEIs, from which a judgement sample of three HEI campuses, located in Gauteng, was selected. The judgement sample included a traditional university, a comprehensive university, and a university of technology.

For the sampling method, the study made use of non-probability, convenience sampling. The study aimed for a total of 600 questionnaires based on similar studies (Kim & Ko, 2012:1483) as well as to provide adequate data for structural equation modelling (Wolf, 2013:914; 918). A questionnaire was used in which a 6-point Likert scale was adopted with the Likert items strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Lecturers handed out the questionnaires to willing respondents. After cleaning, a total of 512 questionnaires were deemed usable. The questionnaire had three sections namely Section A for demographics, Section B for moderators, and Section C for the main empirical research of the study. The five variables used were perceived usefulness (Rauniar *et al.*, 2014), anticipated benefits (Ashley *et al.*, 2011), intention to be involved (Rauniar *et al.*, 2014; Ashley *et al.*, 2011), commitment (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2013), and advocacy intention (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2014; Lee, Hsu, Chen, & Huang, 2010).

4.2. Data analysis and results

A factor analysis was conducted to ensure that all items fit into the correct factors. Each item fit as expected into the five factors and yielded a KMO (Kaiser-Meyer Olkin) = 0.899, Chi-Square = 7216.166, df = 351 and $p < 0.000$. Next, skewness and kurtosis were measured along with Cronbach’s alpha, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Skewness, kurtosis, Cronbach's alpha

Factor	<i>n</i>	Items scale	in	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha
PU	512	3		4.616	-0.848	0.699	0.870
AB	512	3		4.893	-0.903	1.152	0.713
ITBI	512	4		4.822	-0.963	0.966	0.871
C	512	4		4.746	-1.047	1.522	0.871
AI	512	6		5.072	-0.716	0.456	0.851

As shown in Table 1, the minimum mean value for the various factors was 4.616 and both skewness and kurtosis fell within the -2 to 2 acceptable range (IS, 2010; Chan, 2003:282). Next, the Cronbach's alpha for each factor showed a value of $\alpha > 0.7$, which indicated that the internal consistency reliability of the constructs was acceptable (George & Mallery, 2016:240). A correlation analysis was conducted next to assess the validity of the study. Table 2 shows the findings of the correlation analysis.

Table 2: Correlation matrix

Factor	PU	AB	ITBI	CI	AI
PU	1				
AB	0.262**	1			
ITBI	0.389**	0.396**	1		
C	0.315**	0.354**	0.407**	1	
AI	0.236**	0.326**	0.394**	0.559**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis shown in Table 2 shows that there was movement in the expected direction for each of the factors in relation to one another. As each factor shows significance in the expected direction, nomological validity was assumed.

The measurement model of the data was run and yielded the results showed in the next table, which shows the AVE (Average Variance Extracted), CR (Composite Reliability), AVE squared, correlations, as well as the model fit. In the table below PU = Perceived Usefulness; AB = Anticipated Benefits; ITBI = Intention To Be Involved; C = Commitment; AI = Advocacy Intention.

Table 3: Validity and reliability of the measurement model

Average variance extracted and composite reliability				Correlation coefficient					
Factor	CR	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}	PU	AB	ITBI	C	AI	
PU	0.748	0.500	0.707	PU	1				
AB	0.749	0.500	0.707	AB	0.312	1			
ITBI	0.797	0.500	0.707	ITBI	0.405	0.479	1		
C	0.800	0.500	0.707	C	0.350	0.424	0.452	1	
AI	0.811	0.500	0.707	AI	0.268	0.399	0.424	0.648	1
IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR					
0.945	0.934	0.944	0.059	0.045					

Table 3 shows a CR > 0.700 for each factor, which suggests that composite reliability is present. Next, as CR values exceed 0.700 and AVE equals 0.500 in each factor, convergent validity can also be assumed. As can be seen in the correlation coefficient, compared to the squared AVE, all correlation values were below the 0.707 point of the squared AVE, which suggests discriminant validity. Lastly, all model fit indices showed sufficient weights, which suggest a proper model fit is also present. Thus, it can be assumed that AI among Millennials is a five-factor model where PU, AB, ITBI, C, and AI are viable factors in the model. Based on the viability of the measurement model, a conceptual model is hypothesised to show the interaction between the factors. The following model shown here in Figure 1 shows the conceptual model proposed by this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual model (PU = Perceived Usefulness; AB = Anticipated Benefits; ITBI = Intention To Be Involved; C = Commitment; AI = Advocacy Intention)

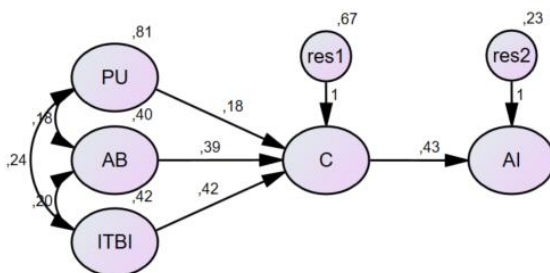


Figure 1 shows the five variables applicable to the conceptual model. Perceived usefulness, anticipated benefits and intention to be involved are independent

variables which are mediated to the dependent variable by commitment. The dependent variable is advocacy intention. The conceptual model yielded the following results as seen in Table 4, which shows the significance of the paths, the path estimates, as well as the regression weights. This model was also substantiated by assessing model fit, which yielded the following results.

Table 4: Path estimates, SE, *p*, regression weights

	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	Reg weight	
PU → C	0.175	0.054	0.001	0.162	
AB → C	0.393	0.098	***	0.255	
ITBI → C	0.424	0.088	***	0.281	
C → AI	0.433	0.040	***	0.661	
IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	
0.942	0.932	0.942	0.060	0.055	

Table 4 shows that each of the paths was significant and yielded positive movement. Thus, showing that the independent variables PU, AB, and ITBI are mediated by C to AI. Table 4 indicators show that all parameters fulfil model fit requirements. Therefore, it can be concluded that the conceptual model is viable. As such, the discussion for the study follows.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to measure the route towards advocacy intention for Millennials. Thus, what could smartphone companies do to enhance the advocacy intention of Millennials in regard to the social media pages of smartphone brands? A relatively high mean was found in the case of each variable, the lowest being perceived usefulness (mean = 4.616), indicating that there were positive attitudes regarding each of the variables. Therefore, Millennials found social media useful and anticipated several benefits to making use of social media pages of smartphone companies. Moreover, they had the intention of being involved in social media pages, which shows that Millennials prefer to be involved on social media pages. Next, they showed a positive attitude towards commitment, which showed that Millennials want to be committed to a brand and to its social media pages. They want to embrace that page and make the brand their own. Lastly, they showed the most positive attitude towards advocacy intention (mean = 5.072), which indicates that Millennials are open to being verbal about their preferences and would involve and motivate others to take part and become involved as well. This shows the importance of involving Millennials and the importance of

delivering on promises. Organisations should make use of the fact that Millennials are willing to spend time on brands and are willing to motivate others towards using a brand. Moreover, as millennials are willing to defend brands and brand pages, organisations should offer useful sites that have benefits that are worth making an effort for.

All variables showed sufficient and significant correlation towards one another, which indicates the importance of upholding each aspect of the variables as diminishing one variable would lead to the diminishment of other variables. The model as per Figure 1 shows that the first parts to advocacy intention are perceived usefulness, anticipated benefits, and intention to be involved. Perceived usefulness is important as it shows that individuals should consider social media to be important and useful in their everyday lives. Thus, targeting those to whom social media hold no importance may prove futile. However, like Facebook, for example, now has 2.38 billion monthly active users (Zephoria, 2019), there appears to be no shortage of individuals making use of social media. Moreover, Millennials are some of the most prolific social media users (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Next, there should be certain benefits to making use of a brand's social media pages. The study showed competitions and special offers as especially important. However, respondents also indicated benefits as a general term, thus indicating that benefits were important, though it would then be the onus of the organisations or smartphone brand to find out which benefits are sought from them specifically.

Intention to be involved showed that there were several reasons why Millennials make use of social media pages, beyond benefits. These were that they wanted to communicate with the brand, connect, network, and keep track of the brand. Therefore, communicating with followers, posting news, and answering questions will motivate those who are positive about the brand to transition towards committing to the brand. Moreover, they indicated that they would feel a sense of duty towards the brand and invest time and energy to support the social media pages of the brands they care for. When all these factors have been successfully managed, Millennials could become advocates for the brand, which would have them defend the brand, talk about it in person and online, and motivate others to use the brand. This is the ideal state for a customer to be in, for brands.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Organisations who want to focus on social media as an important aspect for their marketing efforts, especially smartphone brands, must reach out to those who are already on social media. This would focus on individuals who see social media as useful and would concentrate the organisation's marketing effort on social media sites that are frequented by many. Larger organisations may be able to afford using many social media pages; however, this is not the case for smaller organisations, and they may see benefit from starting with Facebook, as it has many frequent users. Next, there should be visible benefits to those who make use of social media pages of brands. Competitions and special offers are but two options, however, brands can offer news, support, content, among other features. Furthermore, when brands make use of social media pages, their followers can help others, mitigating the need for high numbers of social media officers. Commitment is the first focus of the model; therefore, when the other variables are achieved, commitment becomes the first goal. Millennials showed that they were willing to put in the effort for the social media pages of brands, which is a crucial aspect to make use of. Lastly, advocacy intention could be achieved when the other aspects of the model are achieved. Advocacy is the golden standard for loyalty and provides followers who are eager to help the brand grow and achieve at little to no cost. These individuals should be fostered and cared for as they will help others towards advocacy as well.

Practically, this means that businesses, large or small, should have a social media presence, preferably on Facebook and others, where viable. Businesses should then ensure that they ask their growing community what it is they want from the social media page/s. After this information has been collected, the business can then work towards providing what the individual wants. Ideally, this will include content, news, competitions, communication, and online help. When this part has proved successful and a formula has been achieved for motivating individuals towards commitment, satisfying the social media site's audience can then lead to advocacy intention. When this advocacy intention has been reached, the business can focus on enabling those advocates to talk to, motivate, and convince others of the social media sites and products/services of the business.

This study shows the path smartphone brands can take to foster a sense of advocacy intention in Millennials. The sample size of 512 shows a representative

view which provided a successful model to be used. Perceived usefulness, anticipated benefits, intention to be involved, commitment, and advocacy intention, as a five-factor model shows that it is a robust tool that can be used by any smartphone brand and can possibly be adapted to other organisations who wish to improve their social media marketing efforts. This study showed that Millennials have positive attitudes towards social media, want benefits when making use of social media sites, are willing to be committed to brands and their social media pages, and are willing advocates. With the democratisation of technology as well as the proliferation of smartphone brands; it is important to find a differentiating factor to both reach potential customers, but also to convince them of using the brand. This study showcases a route that smartphone brands can take to reach this differentiating factor.

This study had various shortcomings in that it focussed on Gauteng and only made use of university students. Moreover, a non-probability convenience sampling method was used to save time. Future studies may use the data gleaned from this study and use it in a comparative study in other provinces or internationally. Moreover, other studies may focus on Generation Z, who follow Millennials (Generation Y), to gain knowledge regarding the next important generation, but also to compare the generations. Lastly, should this study be conducted on both Generation Z and X, the researcher may be able to find a trend in the data to base future inferences on.

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