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Museums Brand Equity and Social Media. 
Looking into Current Research Insights and Future Research Propositions

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Abstract. Extensive research has repeatedly acknowledged the link between traditional and digital marketing communication tools and branding performance. Particularly, both within For Profit Organizations (henceforth, FPOs) and Non Profit Organizations (henceforth NPOs), social media as the milestone of digital era have rebut the foundations of corporate and personal communication through the emergence of new participatory communication terms, such as "prod-user" and "co-creation". Consequently, a growing research trend has emerged towards e-commerce tools and social media impact on destination branding, as well. Simultaneously, thanks to its multidimensional benefits both at communicational, educational and promotional level, social media is emerging as an essential feature on the branding of the new museum era. To date, within NPOs sector few studies have investigated the effect of social media on brand equity. Moreover, far too little attention has been paid to the link between social media and museums' brand equity. Based on the systematic qualitative critical review methodology, this paper attempts to identify the basic trends and research status by 2018. Drawing on a review of 78 papers that are the result of a systematic desk research, this study categorizes and presents, for the first time, the effects of social media use on museums’ brand components. The study offers new and valuable insights into multidisciplinary research interests of research and industry community relating to communication and marketing, NPOs, tourism and museums context.

Keywords: Social Media, Museums, Brand Equity, NPOs, Cultural Tourism.

1 Introduction

Traditional and digital marketing communication tools have a pivotal role in branding process [1-8]. Thus, scholars have recently delved into social media impact on branding within FPOs or tourism destination marketing sector [9-14]. In the meantime, social media is becoming a prominent and essential tool on the branding of the new museum era, given its multidimensional benefits both at communicational, educational and promotional level [15]. However, given the infant stage few studies have examined the link between social media and brand equity [2, 7,15-19]. Still, there is a scarcity within NPOs sector [15, 19-20]. Upon the call within FPOs and NPOs sector [15,
the infant stage of research on the use of social media within museums [15] and on the relationship between social media impact and NPOs’ brand equity [19], this consequent paper examines the role of social media within museums’ brand equity. Based on literature review analysis, the study explores (RQ1) the link between social media use and museums’ customer-based museum brand equity (CBBE), (RQ2) the link between social media use the museum visitors’ engagement, (RQ3) the link between social media and museum visitors’ satisfaction.

2 Literature Review

Undoubtedly, marketing communication tools are central to brand equity theory of FPOs and NPOs organizations [4,19-20, 23-27]. Particularly, the rise of social media has totally transformed museums’ communication given its multidimensional effects [15, 17-18]. Vassiliadis and Belenioti [15] identified 3 major ways in which social media affect museums; enhancement of museum experience, museums’ communication, museums’ learning process and boost of visitors’ engagement. However, museums still lag into dialogical communication and don’t extol the full potential of social media [15, 24-25, 28-33]. Recently, while there has been an interest in museum branding [19, 39,41,42] still research on brand equity and NPOs - along with museums’ customer-based brand equity remains in its infancy. As Belenioti and Vassiliadis note in 2017 in their review “… similarly, to FPOs context, again, the impact of social media on NPOs’ brand equity is understudied […] most scholars in the field have merely focused on the frequency, reason and way of social media use […] while other studies highlight common challenges that NPOs have to overcome, such as the lack of social media integration at a strategic and tactical level or the lack of dialogic communication” [19]:155. They also concluded that “harnessing the FPOs theory into NPOS, they social media use is expected to increase brand equity, that in turns increases brand loyalty and intention to repurchase” [19]:157.

3 Findings - Theoretical Underpinnings

In all the studies reviewed here, social media appears as a key term of branding. So far, the recent and scarce bibliography is classified into social media and branding, social media and FPOs brand equity, social media and museums, social media and NPOs. There is also a positive link between social media and brand equity both in FPOs and in different types of NPOs according to the table below.

| Table 1. Classification of studies on social media and FPOs'/ NPOs' BE by 2018 |
|---|---|
| Findings | Authors |
| SM boost FPOs BE | Bruhn et al.,2012 2];Kim and Ko, 2012 [71]; Kuvykaite and Piligrimiene, 2014 [77]; Kananukul, et al., 2015 [40] ; Pham and Gammoh, 2015 [47]; Kavisekera Satheeka and Abeysekera Nalin |
Findings also reveal a positive link between social media use and museums’ CCBE. To Vassiliadis and Belenioti [15], social media boost dialogue, real time communication, visitors ‘engagement and enhance museum experience. To Fletcher & Lee [31], social media increase brand engagement, brand recognition or crowd fundraising. Moreover, Chung, Marcketti and Fiore [78] identified three major outputs: boost of awareness, comprehension and engagement. Similarly, to Dudareva [57] social media increase brand awareness and engagement. With respect to the second question, again the review confirms the association between social media and brand engagement at FPOs, NPOs and museums’ context [72-77]. Within FPOs’ context, social media facilitate customer brand interactions and thus engagement [59-60]. Moreover, user engagement influence brand loyalty both directly and indirectly [61]. Similarly, [62] showed that social media build brand engagement, brand trust and brand loyalty. Within NPOs [19, 63], again social media build engagement and foster brand bonding from music festivals [54-56, 64], food festivals [20] to different types of healthcare NPOs, such as OB/GYN [52], organ donation NPOs or NPOs with public health messages campaigns [65-67]. Moreover, there is a link between social media use and brand engagement within museums, as well [15,19, 30-31, 34, 68-70]. Finally, regarding the third question, bibliography reveals a positive link between social media and museums visitors’ satisfaction; they create satisfaction and the intention to revisit [58]. All in all, the recent literature confirms a positive link between social media use and brand equity, museum goers’ engagement and visitors’ satisfaction. As this part of this research study is the first part of an ongoing research, further work needs to assess the adaptation of the results in different cultural and behavioral circumstances.

References


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