Customer Advocacy and Brand Management

Abstract

Purpose

In this article, we define and explore the strategic value of customer advocacy through the lens of the brand management literature. We review recent analysis of the value and vulnerabilities of brands and branding in order to understand why customer advocacy is becoming an attractive strategic option for many firms.

Approach

A model of empowered consumer value drivers is constructed to demonstrate how they are becoming an important source of brand value.

Practical Applications

We then introduce a framework for brand management in a customer advocacy context and illustrate it with examples of companies pursuing advocacy-based strategies and practices.

Contribution of the Paper

Finally, we conclude by discussing the opportunities presented to brand management when developing customer advocacy and summarise our contribution.

Keywords: Customer advocacy, Brand Management, Conceptual Paper.

Introduction

As more and more consumers gain access to powerful new media and information tools to compare brands, products and services (Pitt *et al*., 2002; Hagel and Singer, 1999; Wind and Rangaswamy, 2001; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000), organisations in a range of industries are responding by developing advocacy-based strategies and practices (Achrol and Kotler, 1999; Sawhney and Kotler, 2001; Mitchell, 2001; McKenna, 2002; Baker, 2003; Zuboff and Maxmin, 2002; Urban, 2004). As Urban (2004) observes, the strategy behind customer advocacy is simple. By *assisting* consumers to find and execute their optimum solution in a given market, it will be easier for an organisation to earn their long-term trust, purchases and loyalty.

In this article, we discuss customer advocacy with reference to the brand management literature. We construct a model to identify and illustrate the new sources of empowered consumer value and we illustrate them with examples of organisations that are pursuing a customer advocacy-based strategy. Then, we present a framework for brand management in a customer advocacy context. Finally, we discuss the contribution our paper makes to the brand management literature, we present a number of research questions and we describe the managerial implications.

First, we review recent literature that examines the vulnerabilities of brands and brand management to understand why customer advocacy is becoming an attractive strategic option for certain organisations.

The vulnerabilities of brand management

For decades, companies have created brands for use as the centrepiece of their communication efforts with consumers and customers. Using various techniques such as identity and image development, positioning and differentiation, firms have deployed brand management practices to clearly delineate and "push" the benefits of their offer to specific market segments and individual consumers. Today however, informed, connected and active consumers are challenging the company-centric model of brand management (Pitt et al., 2002; Hagel and Singer, 1999; Wind and Rangaswamy, 2001; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000, 2004; Sawhney and Kotler, 2001; Dupuy, 1999; Moynagh and Worsley 2002). Using new computer-mediated technologies such as the internet, email and the mobile phone, consumers are able to acquire more detailed information about brands, products and services to help them make smarter and more personalised choices on their own terms. They can validate a company's marketing and can more easily reject claims or statements based on their own knowledge (Ind and Riondino, 2001).

The rising power of the consumer, particularly online, is compounded by the growth of "thematic consumer communities". Here, individual consumers coalesce around common interests, needs and experiences and by doing so, enjoy an unparalleled ease and openness of communication to share ideas, create knowledge and even experiment with and co-develop products. With no regard for geographic or social barriers, such networked communities are slowly transforming existing markets as well as creating revolutionary new ones. In many respects, they are inverting traditional top-down company-centric branding and marketing approaches (Kozinets, 1999; Rheingold, 2000; Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Importantly, as consumers begin to value more the knowledge and experience of other consumers exchanged in these networks, they value less the one-way marketing messages and controlled brand statements and advertising sent out by firms. Not only do consumer networks enable individuals to better discriminate between brands and their offers, but also they help them to build new knowledge and competencies in seeking out and extracting value from firms.

The net result of the changing role of the consumer is that companies can no longer act independently. Whether designing products, developing processes, creating marketing messages, controlling channels and critically, managing brands, consumers are now able to exercise their influence over almost every part of the firm's activities. Armed with new tools, skills and competencies and sometimes dissatisfied with available choices as well as corporate behaviour (Tapscott and Ticoll, 2004), consumers are seeking to create personalised value on their own terms by interacting with firms.

Recently, several authors point to the tensions, vulnerabilities and the growing crisis of trust in brands arising from the emerging forms of consumer empowerment described above (see for example Macrae, 1999; Mitchell, 1999, 2001; Yan, 2003; Willmott, 2003; Ind, 2003a, 2003b; Tapscott and Ticoll, 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Mitchell (2003) suggests that instead of brands fulfilling their role as trusted beacons of
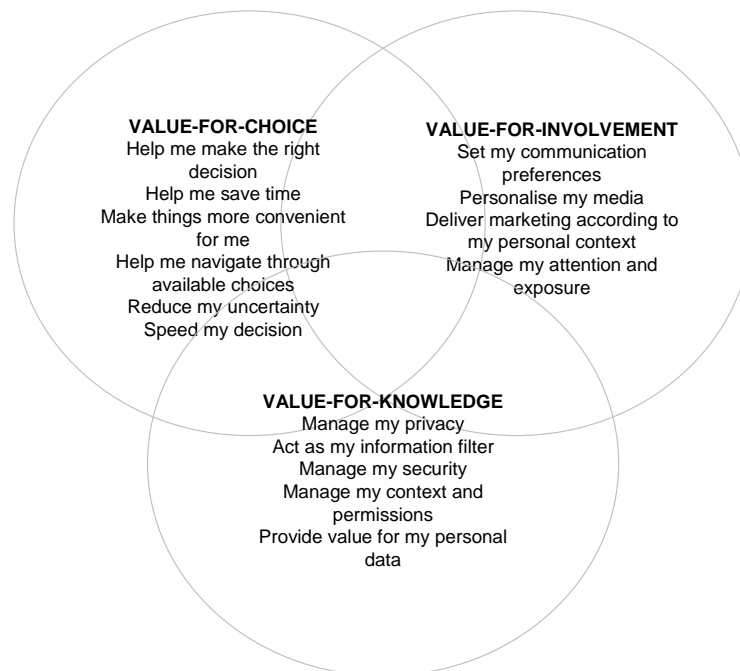
superior customer value, a form of "brand narcissism" sits at the heart of the way most firms create, distribute and exchange value; a "disorder" caused by a combination of the structural, operational and motivational activities that characterise modern brand management. Ind (2003a: p.4) offers a similar view, suggesting that in their primary pursuit of sales, growth and profits, firms can be meretricious and will often try to limit consumer freedom of choice. He argues that such firms offer "seller-centric" brands that operate from the perspective of the brand builder and which undermine the very reason consumers pay for the reassurance of brands: trust. Kitchin (2003) also discusses issues of trust, relationships and brand management and, like Tapscott and Ticoll (2004), identifies a declining trust which customers have in commercial organizations and their brands.

To examine how some firms are responding to the vulnerabilities of brands and brand management through the pursuit of customer advocacy strategy, we first discuss the drivers of empowered consumer value in more detail.

Consumer empowerment and the new indicators of brand value

Together, the rise of active and knowledgeable customers, the growth of online consumer networks and issues of declining trust are challenging the traditional concept of the market as well as established marketing and brand management practices. In Figure 1, we identify the emerging drivers of empowered consumer value. Below, we describe each in turn.

Figure 1 - New drivers of empowered consumer value

VALUE-FOR-CHOICE
Help me make the right decision
Help me save time
Make things more convenient for me
Help me navigate through available choices
Reduce my uncertainty
Speed my decision

VALUE-FOR-INVOLVEMENT
Set my communication preferences
Personalise my media
Deliver marketing according to my personal context
Manage my attention and exposure

VALUE-FOR-KNOWLEDGE
Manage my privacy
Act as my information filter
Manage my security
Manage my context and permissions
Provide value for my personal data

Value-for-choice   Recently, there has been growing concern about the rate of increase in choice, uncertainty, confusion and complexity within markets (Mitchell and Papavassiliou, 1999; Mitchell, 2001; Willmott and Nelson, 2003). As brands, media, products and services proliferate and the volume and depth of information content grows, customer overload can result in stress, frustration and sub-optimal decisions. In short, complexity can impact upon a consumer's ability to make an informed and confident purchasing decision, especially when many individuals report that they now have less time to spend on making such decisions.

Whilst it is true that the explosion of choice has occurred with an accompanying demand for differentiated products and services, it should also be remembered that the benefits of greater choice are ultimately dependent upon the continued ease by which customers are able to find the most appropriate solution for their needs in the shortest amount of time. We suggest, therefore, that by devising new approaches to delivering superior *value-for-choice* (helping the consumer to make smarter decisions, reducing their time and effort, assisting them to navigate through available choices and limiting uncertainty and risk), some organisations will be able to better meet the needs of their customers.

Value-for-involvement   Over the last decade, many firms have been trying to build relationships with their customers in the widely-held belief that strong relationships can deliver lifetime loyalty, lower costs and superior profitability (Christopher *et al.*, 1991; Gummesson, 1987; Payne and Holt, 2001). One impact of this has been the changing nature and volume of marketing communications. With falling costs and lower barriers of market entry, many mature economies have witnessed a proliferation of personalised marketing communications, particularly as broadcast media channels become more fragmented, expensive and inefficient for marketers.

Whilst companies have been developing ever more sophisticated systems to target and personalise their marketing to reach the right audience, consumers are placing greater value on the word-of-mouth conversations and recommendations that regularly occur within customer communities. Indeed, more than 90 percent of customers identify word-of-mouth as the best, most reliable and relevant source of ideas and information about products and services (Lowenstein, 2004). This is about the same percentage that finds it the most trustworthy and objective source of information.

In an era where spam, pop-up ads, telemarketing and other types of targeted advertising and marketing communication are increasingly unwelcome, brand management must find new ways to support word-of-mouth and other customer-carried forms of promotion. We call this shift in marketing emphasis, *value-for-involvement.* Again, certain firms recognise that by injecting greater openness, context and relevance into their communications efforts, they are able to better align with the new forms of empowered consumer behaviour.

Value-for-knowledge   Choice and involvement are joined by customer knowledge as the three primary drivers of empowered consumer value. Recent advances in networking and communications technology have diminished the barriers to knowledge creation and

sharing between firms and their customers. As Sawhney and Prandelli (2000) describe, the increasing information intensity of products enhances the incentives for customers to connect and communicate with firms and each other. Customers get timely and reliable information whilst firms get feedback on customer problems, needs and ideas. To capture this value – *value-for-knowledge* - a key challenge for businesses is to increase the information intensity of products and services whilst maintaining a suitable balance between intensity, overload and privacy. For consumers, they need assurance that any knowledge will not be used against them. Equally, they must have a specific motivation for sharing information and knowledge. This can be in the form of awareness that their knowledge has contributed to the firm's success or more frequently, in the form of incentives.

For existing organisations to begin to capture and unlock more consumer value from the value drivers shown in Figure 1, they must explore how they identify, create, deliver and communicate consumer value more effectively. Next, we look at how customer advocacy can help them achieve this.
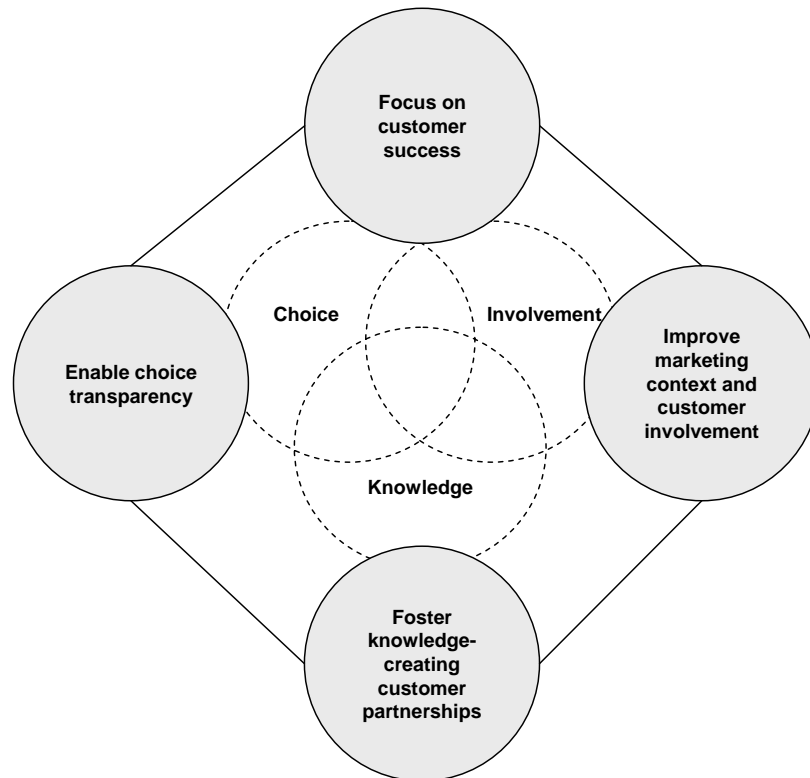
Defining customer advocacy

We define customer advocacy as an advanced form of market-orientation that responds to the new drivers of consumer choice, involvement and knowledge. Customer advocacy aims to build deeper customer relationships by earning new levels of trust and commitment and by developing mutual transparency, dialogue and partnership with customers.

We identify four, interrelated market mechanisms for leveraging customer advocacy (shown in Figure 2). Each can be illustrated by reference to companies that are pursuing strategies for developing customer advocacy:

Focus on customer success   The main intent of organisations pursuing customer advocacy is "customer success". They aim to create more authentic customer relationships by providing expert levels of individual support and guidance. In this respect, advocacy strategy incorporates a customer consultant (Achrol and Kotler, 1999) or trusted advisor role (Sheth, Sisodia and Sharma, 2000); a role that seeks to assist customers make better purchasing decisions and to maximise the value from the product-in-use or service consumption. As higher levels of trust, accountability and transparency build, customer advocacy is a means for organisations to resolve their customer's problems, support their decisions and monitor the performance of their business partner dealings in a business-to-business context.

Figure 2 – Mechanisms of customer advocacy strategy

Cisco Systems, the network solutions technology provider, has been developing customer advocacy for over a decade. Because customer satisfaction has been a core value of the organisation since its inception in 1984, Sandy Lerner, one of the founders of Cisco Systems, created a company specifically to accelerate customer success with Cisco network technology and applications that meet their business needs. Together with their partners, Cisco regards its overall purpose as helping customers improve their productivity, reduce operational costs, and get their applications and services to market as quickly as possible. More recently, with the creation of *Cisco Services*, the company has evolved from a product-based to a solution-based offer. In doing so, the company is responding to their customer's demand for more proactive thought-leadership, increased knowledge transfer, tailored offerings, and consistent quality.

Improve marketing context and customer involvement   Customer advocacy firms seek to incentivise and involve consumers and their customers in their marketing and branding efforts. They support customers with marketing strategies and tactics that help them to proactively and voluntarily convey their experiences to friends, relatives and colleagues. To do this effectively, they must integrate new marketing techniques into the overall customer experience by creating and facilitating communities, environments and contexts for customers to become involved with the brand.   In this way, customer

advocacy-based marketing avoids the overt "push" marketing strategies characterised by most brand and relationship marketing efforts.

Consider the Harley Davidson Owners Group (HOG). By staging regular HOG Club events at which avid Harley motor-cycling enthusiasts share their experiences, buy merchandise and 'live the brand', the marketing of the brand becomes mutually respectful between Harley and the customer. As a further example of 'high context' marketing, General Motors' in-car On*Star service delivers marketing messages linked to a driver's location and context. By conceiving the vehicle as an information device, the car becomes a means for On*Star to be the customer's advocate and to build a more involving customer relationship.

Foster knowledge-creating partnerships   Traditionally, firms have focused on gathering extensive data *about* their customers. They then use the information to segment and personalise their offer and marketing communications. However, customer advocacy firms pursue alternative forms of customer knowledge. They recognise that by facilitating the creation and sharing of knowledge and competencies *held by* their customers (Gibbert, Leibold and Probst, 2002)**,** they are more likely to sense emerging market opportunities (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) and to "unlearn" established assumptions and practices through open-mindedness (Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984), shared vision and an enhanced commitment to customer learning (Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier, 1997).

Firms practicing customer advocacy provide knowledge products for their customers to manage important projects and key purchases. Then, through a continuous process of customer knowledge co-creation and management, firms distribute their knowledge assets to generate mutual value-for-knowledge. Responding to the new consumer value drivers is a process of perpetual learning and requires constant sensitivity and adjustment to the gaps that develop between customer needs, their values and the firm's offer.

By supporting the creation and delivery of customer value, especially *knowledge partnering,* employees in a customer advocacy organisation can develop and apply advanced skills in servicing and resolving customer problems. They can reach outside the organisation to co-create solutions with their partners and customers. They can share knowledge with other team members and partners, enabling specialist and empowered communities of expertise to thrive; communities that can often define the external perception and experience of the brand. Such organisations provide their employees with the freedom to develop relationships with their customers to correct their problems and create knowledge. In fact, the positive impact of employee empowerment on customer relationships and the firm's performance has been empirically validated in a study by Gremler *et al*. (2002).

Alaris Medical Systems, a leader in products for the safe delivery of intravenous medications, is also a pioneer in customer advocacy solutions. Through its two customer advocacy teams based at its San Diego, Ca. headquarters, Alaris actively solicits customer knowledge, turns it into fact-based insights and then applies the learning to

address user issues and needs as well as to prioritise new business opportunities and product/service solutions. One of these teams, Clinical Support, is staffed by full-time professional nurses who provide 24-hour clinical resources for Alaris users. This support includes user feedback, assistance with product performance issues, clinical research help and answers to clinical questions. For Alaris, customer knowledge has been a catalyst for deepening the relationship between the company and its users.

Enable choice transparency   The fourth and final component of customer advocacy concerns the transparency of the firm's offering and its willingness to do what is best for the customer, even if the recommended solution is provided by the competition. This may be seen counter-intuitive to normal laws of market-based competition yet by emphasising positive partnership and support over traditional selling-based relationship strategies, customers are more likely to grant the firm their trust – and tell their friends and colleagues (Urban, 2004).

Choice transparency can be achieved through either online tools such as price comparison services, choice boards and personal decision-making guides or simply through employee recommendations derived from their own or the company's knowledgebase. It may also be provided by other customers in communities operated by the customer advocating company.

Consider U.S. auto insurer Progressive. It has a long tradition of innovation through customer advocacy. One initiative that has been well received is its recent move to offer a price comparison service on its web site. Previously, U.S. consumers' ability to compare rates across insurance companies was both time-consuming and complex. Now, by entering their personal information, driving history, vehicle details and other data on the Progressive web site, the company enables consumers to undertake a simple and direct market comparison of rates from Progressive *and* its competitors.

E*TRADE, an online financial services company, provides a similar tool. Its online mortgage shopping service lets consumers objectively compare E*TRADE's offer with another lender's before applying. E*TRADE delivers on customer advocacy by telling the shopper when its offer isn't as good as the competition's.

The shift to customer advocacy requires brand management to adopt an alternative branding framework founded explicitly on trust and transparency. Together, they help to foster a pervasive culture of customer advocacy, develop greater customer-brand alignment and help build a more dynamic and responsive brand architecture. We now identify and explore the distinctive aspects of this brand framework.

Customer advocacy: A framework for brand management

Figure 3 depicts a brand management framework for organisations wishing to implement and develop customer advocacy. It shows the interplay between this framework, the drivers of empowered consumer value (Figure 1) and the market mechanisms that

characterise customer advocacy (Figure 2). The framework is explained below in the context of how customer value is created, delivered and sustained by a customer advocacy brand.

Figure 3 - Brand management framework for customer advocacy
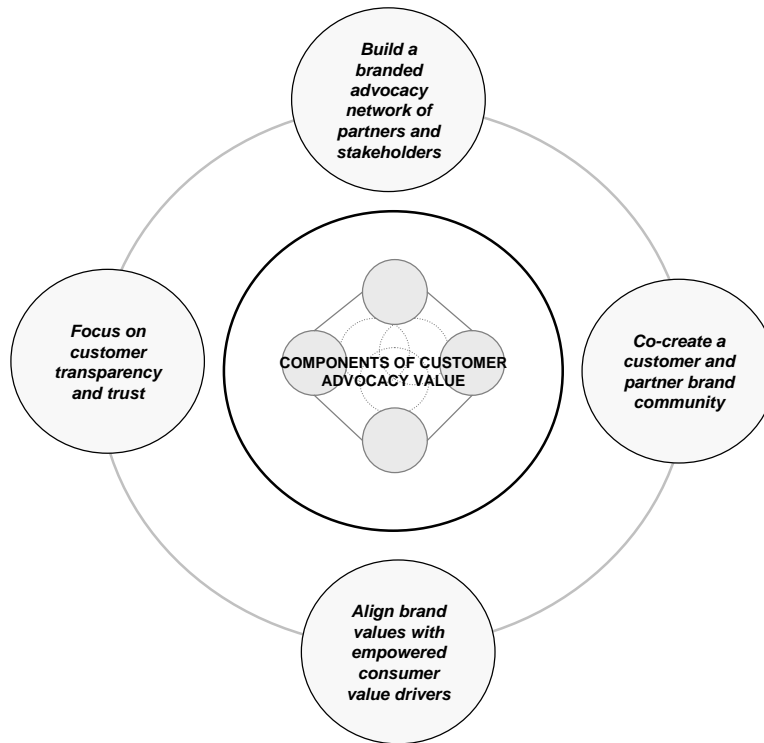
Build a branded advocacy network of partners and stakeholders   Brands with strong customer advocacy will need to create authentic relationships across multiple stakeholders, not just customers. They must regard their partners and employees as valid and trusted co-creators of brand value. This perspective demands high levels of transparency in their procedures for corporate governance, communications and behaviours. A customer advocacy brand can therefore consist of a value network of multiple online and offline partner brands. Their offering departs from tradition where sellers compete to offer part-solutions to meet consumer need sets. Rather, customer advocacy networks are formed of clusters of partners whose participation is enabled by network forms of brand collaboration and value-exchange. Therefore, traditional market structures separated by hierarchical product or service categories are realigned to the broader context of customer need. For example, Cisco not only supplies the network technology for its customers, but also organises its network of partners to provide the support necessary to ensure that customers get the most from their networks. This allows Cisco to build more integrated, contextual relationships with its customers *and* their network partners. Uniquely, Cisco stages annual customer advocacy awards for those partners whose performance and behaviour is most aligned with Cisco's advocacy principles.

Co-create a customer and partner brand community   Many authors argue that to respond to the challenge of online consumer networks and the active customer, brand management must discover new ways to co-create brands with consumers (see for example Ind, 2003; Locke et al., 2000; de Chernatony, 2001; Flood, 2000; Mitchell, 2001, 2003; Wipperfurth, 2005; Kitchin 2003; King, 1991). They suggest that brand management must find new communication mechanisms to enable multiple forms of dialogue, collaboration and interaction between firms, customers and other stakeholders in order to co-create brand value and meaning. As de Chernatony (2001: 191) writes:

> "The classical branding model is based on a tightly controlled approach and, particularly, for product-based brands, assumes consumers to be passive recipients of value. To thrive on the internet, a looser form of brand control is needed, welcoming the active participation of consumers"

The idea that brands can be co-created by the firm and the customer through interaction has received most scholarly attention through studies of brand community in a social construction context (for a review see McAlexander et al., 2002).   Although several brand academics have grappled conceptually and empirically with the idea of a brand community, there is apparently limited consensus on an agreeable definition. One characterisation given by Muniz and O'Guinan (2001: 412) defines a brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among users of a brand. Brand communities are participants in the brand's larger social construction and play a vital role in the brand's ultimate legacy". McAlexander et al. (2002) extend this definition by suggesting that although social relationships between customers are an important binding condition, other "entities and relationships weave through the fabric of the community". The dynamic nature of brand community is characterised they argue, by multiple additional dimensions including a community's boundaries, geographic concentration, social context, temporality and whether it is imaginary or real in the mind of the consumer.

Examples of successful co-created brand communities are epitomised by brands such as Harley Davidson, where the focus is on the social experience of ownership and consumption, not just the product, the brand image or its positioning. For example, the famous Harley Davidson HOG club events provide opportunities for customers to enjoy anticipated but unrealised product benefits, to share experiences with other customers, to meet with the (sometimes faceless) executives behind the brand and to learn more about the brand's heritage and values. Critically, in such a community, customers are able to contribute their knowledge of how they use the brand. In this way, the community provides opportunites for brand management to create new value with customers, learn about products and how they are consumed and validate new market offerings.

Align brand values with empowered consumer value drivers   Customer advocacy brands display values that are aligned with the organisation's ability to meet the three new drivers of consumer value – choice, involvement and knowledge. In doing so, customer, brand and partner value-exchanges are turned into valuable assets through advanced customer knowledge and network management capabilities. The core asset of

customer (and partner) knowledge enables brand management to continually generate problem-solving solutions, to constructively challenge accepted and established practices, and to sense and respond to new opportunities with customers and partners. By creating broader insights into customer needs and requirements, brand management can help partners to increase the context and relevance of their products to individual customers This knowledge fuels the capability of the extended firm to provide advice and to become its customers' advocate.

Focus on customer transparency and trust   Developing a brand for customer advocacy requires a shift in managerial attitudes towards customers as they become co-creators of value. To begin this strategic shift, brand management must assess whether there exists necessary levels of customer trust and reputation in their existing brand. They must also weigh up the potential negative effects of distributing the ownership of its accrued brand trust across a network of advocacy partners. In fact, for brand management, this risk of brand exposure and loss of control represents the greatest barrier to the adoption of a customer advocacy

For firms choosing to adopt customer advocacy, an important benefit is the opportunity to develop deep levels of customer commitment leading to greater levels of relationship value, loyalty and trust. By focusing on overcoming customer's perceived risk, particularly in situations they may not have previously experienced, studies show that greater brand trust can be earned and new product/service extensions achieved more easily (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001). It is possible, therefore, that brands defined by clear principles of dialogue, support and advocacy might realise a more authentic means of building long-term, mutual dependency and customer loyalty.

Summary and contribution

The Cisco, Harley-Davidson, Alaris, Progressive and E*TRADE examples all illustrate how through careful brand management, customer advocacy is capable of unlocking new consumer value. They each understand that there are mutual benefits to be realised by improving on consumer choice, involvement, knowledge and access to marketing whilst providing new forms of community, context and customer relationships. For example, although it sometimes loses out to its lower-priced competitors, Progressive's customers often remain loyal simply because the service reinforces their trust in the brand; this is underwritten by its brand values of openness, transparency and "maverick" change aimed at constantly finding ways to do things better, faster and cheaper for its 12 million customers.

Yet these are not isolated examples. Recent research demonstrates that customer advocacy can have a positive impact on a firm's performance. In 2003, Forrester Research asked 6,000 US consumers to assess the customer advocacy of their financial providers. They discovered that the brands with the best advocacy scores share a number of common characteristics, such as being customer-owned (e.g. USAA, State Farm, and the credit unions), and that high scores strongly correlate with higher satisfaction, greater cross-sell potential and deeper customer relationships.

To date, although acknowledging the need for new skills and capabilities, the brand management literature does not yet adequately define or empirically identify the nature or scope of the competency changes necessary to develop successful customer advocacy brands. There is little empirical evidence to help our understanding of customer need, participation and behaviour in customer advocacy brand context. More research is necessary to validate our proposition that new customer and firm benefits can be realised by existing brands by harnessing customer advocacy. In summary, there are several research questions for future study:

1.   What are the new brand development competencies for creating customer advocacy brands and how are they developed?
2.   What are the new customer competencies and how can the firm "help" customers develop them?
3.   How do firms let go of their brand control mindset to create advocacy value with customers? What are the motivational and cognitive barriers?
4.   What are the implications for traditional marketing approaches?
5.   In what market contexts are advocacy approaches most / least relevant?
6.   Are there different styles of customer advocacy for different market contexts?

Managerial implications

Today, the ability of company-created and managed brands and advertising to communicate a consistent corporate or product image is steadily declining in effectiveness and relevance. As traditional mass media is overtaken by word-of-mouth and peer review dialogue as the primary driver of consumer attitude and brand choice, consumers are more able to challenge a company's brand promise as well as seek out alternatives (Urban, 2004).

Building customer advocacy is one response to the vulnerabilities of brands and branding in the face of rising consumer empowerment. It creates new opportunities for brand-customer dialogue, knowledge creation, and, critically, provides a new context in which the interests of a corporation and those of its customers can be more closely aligned. Whether customer advocacy will gradually replace traditional forms of market exchange remains to be seen. Although most customers may now possess greater knowledge about brands and the relative value of their products, some are more interested, motivated, and prepared to engage in such relationships than others. Also, many companies face competitive situations, operating conditions or customer characteristics that preclude customer advocacy. Therefore, its introduction in any industry sector is likely to be gradual and over the long-term, as the examples described in this article show.

Nevertheless, we argue that customer advocacy-based brands represent one effective means for firms to achieve better alignment with the empowered consumer. To become a successful customer advocacy brand however, brand management must first acknowledge the rising forces of customer empowerment and then find new approaches to align the actions of the organisation with the needs of its customers. At the heart of this shift in

brand management is the need for a greater understanding of customer attitudes, the role of shared knowledge, values, relationships and their perceptions of value. This means that the traditional tenets of product, service and brand value (quality, reliability, experience, image, problem-solving capability) must be augmented by further benefits derived from the new drivers of consumer value.

Creating a successful customer advocacy brand requires a different set of brand management competencies. It requires managers to develop and harness the competencies of customers as well as their own. It demands new communication infrastructures to enable managers to "listen in" and participate in market and customer conversations (some global brands are already experimenting in this regard. Microsoft, Sony and Apple have all recently set-up company weblogs to share in dialogue with their customers). Also, it demands that brand management "let-go" of traditional notions of brand ownership, protection and control. It requires firms to rethink the nature of customer value and the role of the market. Critically, it hinges on the willingness and desire of customers to engage with the firm across multiple points of interaction and combined with their ability to extract some form of personalised value.

Throughout this article, we have discussed customer advocacy in the context of the vulnerabilities of brands and changing drivers of consumer value. We have identified a number of organisations that are experimenting with trust-based, customer advocacy business models and we have used these for contextualising a framework for brand management. For managers, our analysis will help them to evaluate how their organisation might benefit from either developing customer advocacy or by participating in a customer advocacy network. In either case, they may discover valuable opportunities to unlock the new drivers of empowered consumer value.

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