Building Consumption Skills Through Teenage Empowerment: a Powerful and Invisible Determinant of Customer Relationships

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Consumer empowerment digitizes word of mouth, arguably the most powerful and invisible determinant of customer relationships. Individuals in today’s young consumers can create collective voices that can rival the reach of commercial organizations, which have been accustomed to controlling information about their reputations, offerings and performances. In order to develop a better understanding of young consumers empowerment, who represent the most highly sought after market segment for researchers and marketing practitioners in France, it is important to explore teens’ competencies as consumers. Indeed, empowered young consumers can make enterprises more competitive because in many cases they are better qualified to help other young consumers to have better experiences than company employees are. This qualitative research explores the consumption skills of teenage consumers using the new technologies. By examining how teens aged 11-15 define a competent consumer and how they perceive themselves as competent consumers, we should be better able to understand the consumption behaviours they exhibit, the purchase decision they make and the limitations they feel they must overcome to become fully competent consumers. For many companies, empowering young customers to communicate the message will become a vital part of both brand value and customer relationships management (CRM).

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Social networking and Web 2.0 enable young people to connect and collaborate easily and productively, online tools and spaces allow them to create collective knowledge about any consumption subject. The Internet and the mobile phone have become a central force that fuels the rhythm of teenage daily life. Among other things, there has been significant growth over the past five years in the number of teens who play games on the Internet, get news, check-in and shop online. In addition, the changing media landscape has become a battleground for the adolescents’ share of voice. The ‘YouTube’ generation uses many forms of media simultaneously and average over six hours a day using the various forms (Hempel and Lehman 2005). Consequently, authors argue that today’s teenagers are more competent than their parents in dealing with media and digital products (McDonell 1994; Tapscott 1998) as their consumption learning is mostly made by practising social and entertainment activities via digital equipments and media which enable them to develop consumption skills. However, modern-day adolescents are competent or vulnerable consumers, depending on their age, gender, family, social background, consumption experience and other influences on their daily lives (Tuft 2003). In order to develop a better understanding of young consumers’ empowerment, who represent the most highly sought for researchers and marketing practitioners, it is important to explore teens’ competencies as consumers of media and new technologies. By examining how teens aged 11-15 define a competent consumer and how they perceive themselves as competent consumers within their own normative framework of new technologies’ usages, we should be better able to understand the consumption behaviours they exhibit, the purchase decision they make and the limitations they feel they must overcome to become fully competent consumers. In order to examine these issues, the exploratory research was the best means for getting at these unspoken cultural and social patterns that shape consumer behaviour. The main thrust of this research involved 20 French schoolchildren aged 11-15 both boys and girls for 6 months (from January to June). This study was delimited to the schoolchildren population enrolled at Sainte Marthe Chavagnes elementary school in the city of Angoulême (south west of France).

The key findings for this study illustrated the behaviours associated with competent consumers and areas for improvement as competent consumers. Moreover, the study showed that teenagers are not mere followers of marketing strategies and they develop consumption skills in relationship to their experience, their peers and media which are more often associated with their consumption learning. We believe that nowadays teenagers are active participants and producers of their cultural consumption processes and that state of things can also be seen in the consumption of entertainment electronic technologies. In answering the question of competencies and savvy teens, our investigation gives evidence about the process of skills’ construction within the consumption of digital product by the schoolchildren aged 11-15. Hence, teenagers’ perception of the competence that they must have to be able to consume lies first and foremost on skills associated with preventive behaviours.

Being responsible consumer also means having the ability to resist to marketers influences. In order to do so, getting information, evaluating and comparing the options, looking for the best price-quality ratio and the awareness about the environment’ protection are one of the characteristics of a competent and responsible consumer. The present exploratory research seems to confirm that the mother and specifically the father remain the most influential consumer learning agent, in addition of peers, media, Internet, learning through trial and error, observation and the virtual peers via blogs. Therefore, the consumption skills emerge within the teens’ experience of the purchase and the use of new technologies within their entertainment activities (playing video games) as well as their social activities (chatting on the Internet). Therefore, for companies understanding individuals’ experiences remains the foundation for innovation and empowering young customers to communicate the message will become a vital part of both brand value and customer relationships management (CRM).

REFERENCES


