

RELATIONAL BENEFITS AND COSTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND PAGES

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Purpose: Attracted by the rapid penetration of social media into society, firms are increasingly using them to offer interactive services to their customers, and to create or enhance their relationships with them. As the number of consumers who join brand pages on social media platforms raises, it brings to the front a new question: What relational benefits and costs arise from customer interactions with brands in social media? Thus, this study is an attempt to identify what benefits and costs users perceive from their participation in social media brand pages.

Methodology: A qualitative study approach was employed for this study. Data were collected from 4 focus groups consisting of 32 social media users who are members of popular brand pages on Facebook and Twitter, providing preliminary evidence about the perceived benefits and costs arising from customers' participation in social media brand pages.

Findings: Results indicate that users perceive social benefits, information benefits, time & effort benefits, economic and personal treatment benefits. Overload, loss of privacy, and annoyance are users' perceived costs when interact with social media brand pages.

Research limitations: Given the qualitative nature of the study and the emerging field of research about social media, findings should be considered as preliminary and exploratory. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with more social media users will provide a more comprehensive view of the topic.

Practical implications: The study identifies several opportunities for company managers, suggesting practices for effective social media handling towards the enhancement of perceived relational benefits and the shrinkage of perceived relational costs.

Originality: Considering the rapid development of social media and their penetration in business marketing actions, this study is an exploratory step towards the understanding of relational benefits and costs together in an e-context.