A Systematic Review of Anti-Brand Website Literature: What We Know and What We Need To Know

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Abstract

The emergence of Web 1.0 began an evolution in electronic communication. This platform resulted in a unidirectional communication flow (e.g. firm to consumer) that featured firms generating messages for public consumption. Web 1.0 gave rise to Web 2.0 and 3.0 platforms that facilitate bi-directional communication between firms and the public. This new method has resulted in an increase in consumer empowerment to create and disseminate marketing messages of their own (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). Third party stakeholders are disseminating electronic word-of-mouth communications about companies through the use of video, reviews, forums, microblogs and multiple other channels (Gil-Or, 2010). One important and rapidly growing outlet for these uncontrolled marketing communications is the anti-brand website (Bailey, 2004). Anti-brand websites provide a convenient and highly viewable platform for consumers, current and former employees, vendors and other parties interested in the targeted firm and/or brand, to share information as well as their opinions about a company's products or services. Anti-brand websites are rapidly growing in quantity, scope, breadth, and perhaps influence. Large corporations are taking notice and are reported to be responding in a generally ad hoc fashion (Wolrich, 2005).

The purpose of this research is to assess the current body of knowledge concerning anti-brand websites via a systematic review of the literature. Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009) stated that the available scholarly literature specifically studying anti-brand sites was limited. Understandably, academic literature is lagging behind these swiftly expanding uncontrolled marketing communication platforms. However, based on the reported growth of anti-brand websites, we expected that the volume of scholarly research had increased since Krishnamurthy and Kucuk's 2009 work. By how much and to what extent is the focus of this research. By systematically examining published scholarly work over a 10 year period (2004 through 2014), we will provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of anti-brand website research. As recommended by Webster and Watson (2002), a concept-driven methodology rather than an author-driven methodology was used. This concept-driven methodology seemed appropriate

because of the relative recency of the anti-brand website phenomenon. In using this methodology, we were able to cast a wider net that would help us discover relevant research from scholars that may have only published one or two studies in the area of interest. An extensive list of search terms were used including, 'anti-brand,' 'anti-brand website,' 'consumer grudge holding,' 'corporate hate sites' and 'internet brand opposition.' We began the study by collecting over 125 articles, dissertations, and theses related to the keywords from Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, ABI Inform Complete Proquest, and JSTOR. Eliminating manuscripts and articles not specifically dealing with anti-brand websites, or not current enough to be included in this review, resulted in 34 scholarly works to be examined and analyzed.

Global risk specialists mi2g® have reported that anti-brand websites have exploded across the internet in recent years (http://goo.gl/qikF2x). What we know and don't know about their impact on brands, firms, and consumers is important for scholars and practitioners alike. Scholars will find this review useful in developing current and future research streams. Additionally, marketing managers can use the information provided as they determine how best to tactically and strategically address websites negatively directed at their brands and firms. In the past, companies have reacted to these sites with monitoring and even preemptively buying domain names to prevent others from using them. For example, the discount travel company, Priceline.com, acquired Pricelinesucks.com before they even began their online operation (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Understanding what these anti-brand websites are, how they come to be, and how they might be impacting firms, brands, and customers will allow managers to develop plans and strategies to address this growing phenomenon.

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: The current research conducted a systematic review of published scholarly work, between 2004 and 2014, that studied the growing phenomenon of anti-brand websites. For academics, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of anti-brand website research and provides suggestions for future research. Additionally, practitioners will find this review useful as they develop tactics and strategies to address this fast growing area of electronic word of mouth.

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