Digital Consumers Have Stronger Brand Relationships New Research From Millward Brown Reveals

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Analysis of the WPP BrandZ brand equity database shows that, on average, digital consumers have a 15 percent stronger relationship with brands

Online sales continue to grow(1) despite the recession, highlighting the significance of the digital consumer.

This is underscored further by new research from Millward Brown, who have analyzed WPPâ€™s BrandZâ„¢ database (the largest repository of brand knowledge in the world) and found that digital consumers have stronger relationships with brands than non-digital consumers.

Digital consumers are defined here as people who have bought from or searched for information about an individual category online.

The report shows that digital consumers generally have strong relationships with more brands.

In addition, some individual brands are disproportionately more appealing to digital consumers, highlighting the importance of understanding these differences within categories.

The research found that this difference among digital consumers was strongest for airline brand relationships, where digital consumers' brand relationships were nearly twice as strong as those of their offline counterparts.

Other key categories where digital consumers had stronger relationships than non-digital consumers included IT hardware and software (48 percent stronger), credit cards (33 percent stronger) and fragrances (29 percent stronger).

Another key finding is that digital consumers are more than twice as likely to be "transmitters" â€“ knowledgeable category consumers who influence others with their opinions.

Digital consumers compared to non-digital are likely to be slightly younger and more affluent on average, and place a higher value on creativity, excitement and having fun.

This information is critical to marketers across the globe who are trying to understand the buying patterns of todayâ€™s digital consumers and leverage opportunities to target this segment.

Peter Walshe, global brand director at Millward Brown said
"It seems that digital consumers are simply more interested in brands. Digital research and purchasing helps develop brand knowledge, which then further reinforces brand interest."

This is a global phenomenon, since digital consumers have stronger relationships in all 24 countries examined by the report; Japan and Taiwan (36 percent stronger) have the highest average digital relationship differences.

As expected, countries with higher web penetration tend to exhibit stronger brand relationships among digital consumers.

However, while Canada has a far higher web penetration than India, both have similar average relationship differences â€” suggesting the relatively low number of digital consumers in India are particularly important to brand owners.

The report highlights that to understand digital consumers more thoroughly, marketers need to evaluate category-specific and country specific definitions.

"Brand and marketing managers need to understand the relationship digital consumers have with their brands as well as how it compares against their key competitors before they can effectively plan their digital marketing strategies," concluded Walshe.

A summary of this report is available to download from the Millward Brown website. This report contains further details on how strength of brand relationship has been determined.

(1) A recent report from IMRG saw a 14 percent growth in online sales over the last year and an average increased spend of Â£10 per visit in April 2009, compared to the same period last year.

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