

Benefit Clubs as a Tool for Loyalty Marketing. Study of Brazil's Main Insurance Companies

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Abstract: This paper considers Relationship Marketing as a business strategic tool and seeks to verify the existence of Benefit Clubs and their structure offered by the major insurance companies in Brazil, analyzing the presence and formatting of the programs. Through the content analysis methodology, we seek to infer its uses for the strengthening of the positioning of these companies. At the end of the paper we compare the best practices identified. The result of the analysis considers the differential obtained by the employment of programs that seek to create brand value and loyalty.

Key words: benefit clubs; relationship marketing; advertising and marketing

JEL codes: G10, F18

1. Introduction

This paper is part of a broader study about the state of the art, structure and implementation of relationship marketing strategies in the Brazilian national context, as well as the theories delineated by the areas of marketing and advertising communication. It has been developed by the authors in a series of study cycles. Due to the dynamic nature of this sector, there is relative lack of relationship marketing studies in the Brazil, as well as for their strategies and programs. It is needed to develop theoretical and strategic models based on Brazil's political reality, social, economic and technological characteristics, which given its continental dimensions and cultural plurality differs from the context where theories and practices are usually originated from. Reference for the previous studies of the authors about Loyalty Programs of the Brazilian Main Shopping Malls and The Use of Relationship Marketing as a Tool for Customer Retention (Silveira et al., 2016a, 2016b), as well as Trends About the Consumer Behavior Mediated by Digital Devices (Silveira et al., 2017) for scaling of the amplitude of the study is recommended.

The crisis of the Brazilian economy, the intensification of the competition, changes in consumer behavior related to search options for products, prices and stores mediated by digital devices and the need to retain customers, broadens the relationship market strategic dimensions, "Well-managed, relationship programs may increase the frequency of requests and the volume of purchases" (Nielsen, 2017). In Latin America, Brazil is the

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leader in the use of loyalty programs as indicated in the Global Search of Nielsen about loyalty¹.

In the traditional classification of the typology of purchase (frequency x involvement) of studies of consumer behavior, insurance is classified as being purchased with low frequency but generating high involvement (because of the possible negative consequences of a poor choice). In the sphere of the typology of desire for consumption, it lies in an undesirable category: one of which the consumer does not want to think or be remembered (death, loss, damage, etc.). Traditionally the strategic orientation of marketing for the area is to give emphasis in the construction of brand image, positively linking it to the idea of security, and to consider the intangible dimensions of the product and its consumption (effectively only carried out in the event of insurance claim), the general guidance is to employ efforts in the validation process of post-purchase by the consumer, in order to make sure that the right choice has been made.

Given its characteristics, the benefit clubs stand as an ideal relationship tool for the insurance area, by its very nature it can provide benefits that go beyond the monetary discounts, allowing the creation of communities (gregarious nature of clubs) and historically they have served as a strategic alternative of marketing in countries with legislative restrictions on granting advantages to certain groups of consumers.

This article is based on studies about the Brazilian insurance market and the employment of benefit clubs. As such the authors performed a survey of the major insurance companies in the country, evaluated the existence of programs of relationship and the structure of these, seeking to detect the specific model of Relationship Marketing know as Benefit Club. Later, using the methodology of content analysis they sought to infer the connection of the programs with a proposal of positioning² aiming to detect actions that encourage the engagement of the consumers and influence their perception about the value of the brand.

2. Literature Review

The settings for relationships programs are diffuse and sometimes contradictory. In the bibliometric study conducted by Rocha et al. (2013) the diversity (if not divergence) of conceptualizations and operationalization of the construct of loyalty is noticed. Being that it is generally used in relation to brand or product, retail unit or organization, or even in specific contexts when associated to relationship programs. We adopted the definition of McKenna (1999), which affirms that the new paradigm of marketing is based in a relational manner, where the experience through interactivity, connectivity and creativity can strengthen the relationship. Such notes were echoed in the reviews of the 11th Colloquium in Relationship Marketing (Palmer et al., 2013). In her literature review and assessing of the state of the art on the Relationship Marketing in Brazil (Demo et al., 2015; 2011) points to the growth of interest on the research of the subject but considers that is still required the proposition of new paradigms, models and relations between variables in order to subsidize the decision making and the construction of a more consistent theoretical framework. The cycle of studies to which this article belongs endorses this proposal.

Relationship marketing fits into the broader theoretical design covered by Marketing, the assumptions in this article are based on the principles of marketing (Kotler, Armstrong, 2014) the administration of marketing (Kotler

¹ Latin America has declared: greater low rate of participation in loyalty programs of research. Less than half of the respondents online in Latin America (44%) say they belong to one or more loyalty programs. The participation is higher in Brazil (53%) and lowest in Argentina (32%), Mexico (32%) and India (33%) (Nielsen, 2017, p. 28).

² Positioning understood as: promote (a product, service, or business) within a particular sector of a market, or as the fulfillment of that sector's specific requirements.

& Keller, 2014), the concept of marketing focused on the creation of value (Churchill & Peter, 2013), the concept of marketing channels (Coughlan et al., 2012), marketing services (Lovelock et al., 2011) and the management of brand (Keller & Machado, 2008). On the Brazilian perspective, the analyzes of mobile marketing (Casas, 2009), marketing management (Oliveira, 2012) and the management of the marketing mix (Urdan, 2013) are also considered.

The basic premise of the relationship programs, that purchasing behaviors and consumption can be stimulated by positive reinforcement and incentive is supported by abundant literature on consumer behavior. We highlight the model of the learning process of the consumer (Solomon, 2016), the concept of influencing consumer behavior (Peter & Olson, 2009), the dimension of intercultural strategies for consumption (Kanuk Schiffman, 2009; Mowen & Minor, 2008), the theories of the shaping of opinion and remembrance (Blackwell et al., 2005), and the model of purchase based on relationship (Sheth et al., 2001). In the Brazilian consumer behavior context the authors highlight the studies about consumer relations/influence on the internet (Giglio, 2010), the concept of natural economy (Camargo, 2010), the economic psychology (Ferreira, 2008), consumer society (Schweriner, 2006) the scheme of consumer satisfaction (Samara & Morsch, 2005), the psychological aspects of consumption (Gade, 2006), and the comparative studies of consumption (Karsaklian, 2004). Specifically, in relation to the concept of loyalty that is underlying the relationship marketing the authors refers to Peppers (2004).

2.1 Benefit Clubs

The conceptual umbrella of Relationship Marketing covers wide range of tools, such as CRM and loyalty programs, among those tools is also the benefit clubs. According with Butcher (2016) they are one of the few marketing trends that do not come from the United States, it has a German origin, motivated by two major factors: a) the behavioral trend (the Germans love clubs, on average belonging to at least three clubs), which makes it natural to appropriation of the mechanical of such clubs for incentive programs, and b) a legislative dimension, until the middle of 2001 the German legislation imposed restrictions on the provision of discounts and other commercial incentives for specific groups of customers³. These factors have forced the benefit clubs to structure themselves in non-financial benefits, causing the German marketing to create a new type of loyalty program that was not solely based on direct transactional relationships such as discounts or cash back, but also that create value and loyalty. In other words, the programs were forced to offer value without being based on discounts, which led to the creation of benefit clubs.

The main characteristics of the benefit clubs is that they are “sponsored” by an institution (which need not necessarily be for profit) and aim to create opportunities to regularly communicate with the costumers. The benefit clubs are a tool used as a motivator for purchase, customer retention, customer relationships and loyalty, where by offering discounts and promotions exclusive to the club members, it is expected to strengthen the bond between the parties, which are key elements in the insurance market.

In his study Ribeiro et al. (1999) already pointed to the importance of the image of a company in the process of purchasing decision, especially in the insurance market. At the occasion of his study only one Brazilian company had begun a relationship marketing program through use of its database. Almost two decades later, the reality is quite different, being that of companies which owns 60% of the market share of insurance in Brazil all

³ In principle, it was illegal to give discount for someone that belong to a given group or for having given characteristics (e.g.: owning a car of Brand X, being a member of a loyalty program or be a frequent client), if the discount was given to a customer, it should be given to all, the only permitted discount was 3% on purchases in cash (which should also be given to all).

practice some type of relationship initiative.

On an empirical analysis on the insurance market in India Srivastava et al. (2016) considers that successful relationship marketing programs are those who understand the consumers in their attitudinal, behavioral and cognitive dimensions; stressing the importance of communication planning focused on value proposition.

In a study conducted by insurance startups (Ansari & Riasi, 2016) through a survey of neural networks, it was found that satisfaction and perceived value are direct precedents of consumer loyalty and that consumer satisfaction has greater impact on loyalty than the perceived value. In the case of the startups — that demand a fast growth speed of the customer base — it leads the strategic focus of marketing to consumer satisfaction. However, this proposition presents a challenge in the insurance market, because of its characteristics, until an accident occurs, the consumer has no way to evaluate the service, even if the “consumption” of the service has occurred (end of the insurance period). In cases like this consumer usually performs its assessment of the service via brand image, contact points and other relational elements that the company provides (benefit clubs for example).

Even in the case when an accident occurs, the consumer notifies the insurance and the end result is considered unsatisfactory, the relation between relationship and loyalty has shown to be effective. In the study about gender as an influencer in the consumer loyalty for insurance Taylor (2016) found that for both genders desire to stay loyal to an insurance company after a bad accident is somehow related to subjective social norms, which are created through relationship programs. This conclusion is consistent with the notes of the Global Insurance Outlook 2015, about the need for insurance companies to use more technology (including social media) and analytics to support strategic decisions and marketing tactics. These elements are in line with Gummesson (2010), who says that organizations consider more and more the social networks in their strategies and adopt a more direct relationship with more specific segmentations, maxing higher returns on customer loyalty and creating greater return in the brand visibility, which lead to the creation of the concept of Social Relationship Management (SRM).

The recessive scenario in Latin America is pointed out in the Global Insurance Review 2016 as going in the opposite direction of the world market for insurance. The same study points to the growth of non-life insurance policies, in particular the cyber insurance, this perspective puts more pressure on the demand for more customized and strategically oriented insurance solutions, demanding thus integrated programs of marketing and data analysis.

3. Methodology

In order to create the conceptual framework so we can understand the actions developed by the Brazilian benefit clubs our survey has been delimited by the size of the insurance companies operating in Brazil. Using as reference the 2016 insurance companies rank published by the Union of Insurance Brokers in The State of Sao Paulo⁴, we determined a minimum cutout of 1% of market share, then proceeded with a systematic search of the insurers verifying if these companies offered benefit clubs. Subsequently carried out an analysis of their offerings and their interface channels with the users⁵.

⁴ Available online at: <http://www.ratingdeseguros.com.br/pdfs/rankbra1216.pdf>.

Table 1 2016 Rank of Brazil's Insurance Companies

Rank	Company	Share (%)	Program
1	Bradesco Seguros	24,73	Clube de Vantagens
2	Sulamérica	12,18	Sul América Mais
3	BB Mapfre	11,57	Clube de Benefícios Mapfre
4	Porto Seguro	9,99	Clube Porto
5	Zurich	5,31	Undetected
6	Caixa Seguros	4,09	Undetected
7	Itaú Seguros	3,46	Undetected
8	Tokio Marine	3,01	Undetected
9	HDI	2,52	Undetected
10	Allianz	2,39	Undetected
11	Sompo Seguros	2,32	Clube de Benefícios Sompo
12	Liberty Seguros	2,08	Clube Liberty

Source: Rank das seguradoras 2016. Sindicato dos corretores de seguro de São Paulo – SINCOR-SP.

4. Description and Analysis of Programs

As proposed by Pinheiro e Gullo (2015) the Integrated Marketing Communication aims to integrate the efforts undertaken by different sectors of marketing in order to optimize investments, create synergy between actions and connect the media more appropriately. As such the authors of this paper are more focused on evaluating the contribution of the benefit clubs to a broader strategic design that its financial effectiveness, so they might be able to infer the strategic use of those programs on a broader marketing strategy of the insurance companies.

The authors made an analysis based on three axis. The first is called Positioning and aims to evaluate if the benefits clubs proposal and design have synergy with the strategic marketing design, receiving one of the following classifications: Consistent, Neutral, Inconsistent. The second axis is called Engagement and seeks to assess if the program mechanics (contact, redemption, activation) is organized in such a way as to encourage the engagement of the user in social media⁶ being classified as: Effective, Neutral or Ineffective. Finally, the Brand axis sought to consider whether the portfolio of offerings of the benefit club contributes to a brand value perception by its beneficiary. The theoretical assumption is that, given the widespread use of this kind of tool on the part of competition, the mere accumulation of offerings is no longer perceived as a differential by the consumer, which tends to see as value offerings that are aligned with his interests of consumption (captured through digital tools) or to a specific proposal of value (as for example: exclusivity or prestige), in this context, the possible classifications are: Positive, Negative and Neutral.

Therefore each club was scrutinized on its advertisings pages, rules of the program and communication with the users, and after classified on the proposed axis of analysis.

4.1 Clube de Vantagens. Bradesco Seguros

Named as “Clube de Vantagens” the program presents itself as a showcase of offers and exclusive benefits

⁵ The first four companies detain 58.74% of market share.

⁶ It is not being evaluated the effectiveness of these actions in terms of engagement (quantitative), only if the benefit club stimulates their consumers to engage with social media channels.

for Bradesco Seguros customers, offering discounts on online stores and shopping centers throughout the country. The enrollment happens through the possession of some of Bradesco's insurance product of the following groups: private pension, life, auto, home, health, dental, capitalization and credit card. It does not work with transactional rewards points mechanics or membership levels.

It segments its offerings in: automotive, pharmaceutical, food, health and wellness, travel and tourism, leisure and culture, services and conveniences, partners and products. Its main platform of offerings and the user interface are through the website. It connects with members through social media such as: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as direct communication via email.

In relation to the positioning, the presented offer by the club is consistent with the institutional proposal "Bradesco Seguros – Com Você Sempre"⁷ ("Bradesco Insurance — Always With You") and with the advertising campaign published in 2017 "A vida é cheia de previstos"⁸ ("Life is is predictable") created by AlmapBBDO. The integration of the benefits club with Bradesco's social media appear to be successful in the proposal of generating engagement with the public. The search engine for offerings is well organized, dynamic and easy to use. The authors concluded that the contribution of the program to build brand image is thus positive.

4.2 Sul América Mais. Sul América Seguros

Named as "Sul América Mais"⁹ the program presents itself as a "discounts and benefits page to be obtained by its partners". There're no details about the requirements for enrollment, implying that this is offered to all members. It does not work with reward points.

The offers are categorized by the insurance owned: auto, home, health, dental, or life, which has access to distinct categories of discounts. For an example, the auto insurance gives you access to more discount categories than the life insurance (discounts on pharmacies only). It relates to its customers via Facebook and Twitter and by an exclusive channel service.

Regarding the positioning, institutionally the insurance company has been working with the concept "Sul América Auto, A vida é imprevisível e, acredite. Isso é muito bom"¹⁰ ("Sul America Auto, Life is unpredictable and believe it this is really good!") the advertising campaign published in 2017 "Tá com seguro auto compacto? Tá com tudo"¹¹ ("If you have the auto compact insurance you have everything") was created by Gray Brazil advertising agency. The authors have not found relationship (conceptual or aesthetic whatsoever) between the club and the brand positioning actions.

In regards with the commitment Sul America insurance has performed consistent actions, highlighting its partnership with Waze "City Watch" which was nominee to Cannes Lion in 2017¹², but it does not dialogue with the benefit club (the proposal of our analysis), and then the engagement is considered not effective. Their offering search engine is inefficient and the website in general is difficult to use. It is concluded that the structuring of the program contributes negatively to the construction of the brand image.

4.3 Clube de Benefícios Mapfre. BB Mapfre.

There is no official presentation of the benefit club, it is identified only as "Clube de Benefícios Mapfre" in their advertisements their proposal is to give: "access to better products and services with special discounts". It

⁷ "Bradesco Security — Always with you", translated by the authors.

⁸ "Life is full of foreseen situations", translated by the authors.

⁹ "Sul America Plus", translated by the authors.

¹⁰ "Sul America Auto, life is unpredictable and, believe me. This is very good", translated by the authors.

¹¹ "Dou you have Auto Compacto insurance? Your have everything!", translated by the authors.

¹² Available at: <http://www.revistacobertura.com.br/2017/06/27/sulamerica-marca-presenca-no-canneslions-2017>.

chooses to present their benefits by segmenting them into: Events, Monthly Promotions and Benefit Club (this being divided in leisure and culture, health and well-being, shopping, vehicles and motorcycles, home). The single channel for brand relationship with the members is the program is the webpage itself.

In terms of communication strategy, the insurance company has opted for being more focused on channels actions, in the expense of advertising campaigns, such as the incentive campaign for insurance brokers “Mapfre DNA”¹³ and sports marketing.

In regard of their brand positioning it presents itself as “uma nova maneira de fazer seguros: muito mais humana”¹⁴, (“A new way to make insurance, much more humane”) their communication actions propose to provide a service to society seeking to stimulate conversation. In this sense the drawing of the benefit club is consistent with the proposal.

In relation to the engagement the social media brand presence is manifested in channels such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, however, there weren't detected actions that integrate the benefit club with these platforms, due to that their efforts are being classified as Neutral. The website search engine of offerings is well organized, dynamic and easy to use, however there weren't detected offerings designed in accordance with the user profile, and thus this was classified as Neutral.

4.4 Clube Porto, Porto Seguros

The “Clube Porto” presents itself with the motto: “more culture, leisure and discounts” offering discounts and exclusive promotions to employees and Porto Seguros's customers, through free sign up. It offers a list of products and services targeted at: shopping, culture and education, leisure and entertainment, health and well-being, automotive services, facilities and services. It relates to the members of the program through its own web portal and also via Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google and Instagram.

Its institutional positioning is “Insurance that goes far beyond your car” and the advertising campaign published in 2017 is “Resolva tudo sem sair do sofa”¹⁵ (“Resolve everything without leaving your couch.”) created by Mood/TBWA. In this context the presented offers made by the club are consistent. However, given the strong institutional character of their social media actions their generated engagement is low, and the benefit club actions, in this sense, ineffective. Referring to the brand axis their website search engine of offerings is agile, has a pleasant context and a modern page layout, the offers are categorized by region or benefit and for doing so its contributions are evaluated as positive.

4.5 Clube de Benefícios Sampo, Sampo Seguros

Formerly structured as “Clube de Benefícios Yasuda Marítima”, the insurance company was acquired by Sampo Insurance. Due the merging and acquisition process the benefit club is “temporarily out of the air”.

The extinguished “Clube de benefícios Yasuda Marítima” proposed its benefits and advantages offers to all insured persons in the network. Categorized its offerings to include: sporting, courses, electronics and home appliances, entertainment, parking, hotels, rental cars, furniture, mechanical workshops, optic, tires, shops restaurants and automotive services. Digitally interacting with members via the channel itself.

Given the merge and acquisition processes and the absence of more information about the club the authors chose not to evaluate it in the present study.

¹³ Available online at: <http://www.revistaapolice.com.br/2017/07/seguradora-lanca-campanha-para-corretores>.

¹⁴ “A new way of doing insurance: much more human”, translated by the authors.

¹⁵ “Solve everything without leaving the sofa”, translated by the authors.

4.6 Clube Liberty, Liberty Seguros.

Named as “Portal de vantagens”¹⁶ specially made for the user, it proposes to list discounts and benefits in online shops and partners establishments. Open to all customers of Liberty Seguros, it doesn’t work with redemption points or payment. They segment their offerings in: automotive, travel and leisure, culture and entertainment, shopping, playground, amenities, education and seasonal.

Related to their positioning Liberty has worked with the concept “With Liberty insurance you have freedom to enjoy your time on what matters”, the advertising campaign published in 2017 was “Take your car out of your worries”. It was not detected beneficial club integrations with the design of institutional communication, this being classified as Neutral. The Insurance Company relate with their audience through social media via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google and Instagram and with the members of the club by its own website and e-mail. However, given the highly institutional character of its contents in digital media, the program is not effective in relation to engagement generation. Their offerings search engine is organized and allows segmentation by benefit and region, however the indiscriminate nature of the portfolio of offerings just to mitigate the potential benefits for the brand, so it is being considered to be Neutral.

Table 2 Synoptic Table

Program	Company	Positioning	Engagement	Brand
Clube de Vantagens	Bradesco Seguros	Consistent	Effective	Positive
Sul América Mais	Sul América Seguros	Neutral	Ineffective	Negative
Clube de Benefícios Mapfre	BB Mapfre	Consistent	Neutral	Neutral
Clube Porto	Porto Seguros	Consistent	Ineffective	Positive
Clube de Benefícios Sampo	Sampo Seguros	-	-	-
Clube Liberty	Liberty Seguros	Neutral	Ineffective	Neutral

Source: Made by the authors.

6. Notes and Conclusions

Considering that just two decades ago only one of the Brazilian Insurance Company considered the use of relationship marketing, and that today all the Companies which hold more than 50% of the market share practice some form of relationship initiative, the consolidation of this practice as a marketing tool is evident.

However, the authors of this paper question the effective use of marketing relationship programs as a tool, when poorly designed and deployed programs tend to be a “burden” for the company, in addition to the difficulty of verifying the efficacy of such programs, there is a great risk of incongruence with the offered value proposition desired by the marketing, since the consumer tends to consider the benefits as part of the service offered and not as differential, however, when used properly, it tends not only to generate a differential in the perception of the brand and perceived value, but to also have a real effect on loyalty.

The present study has shown that there is a broader comprehension by the insurance companies of the mechanical aspects of this tool (how to create, manage and disseminate programs), but a relative ignorance of their strategic uses. In the context of Integrated Marketing Communication almost all fail to generate a better perception on the part of consumers, this failure is not intrinsic to the programs, but a result of how they are designed and offered. In this context, the study shows that a coherent selection of benefits linked with the value

proposition of the company and the customization of the user's profiles of can generate more positive results, and as so should be the focus of the companies.

This conclusion is worrisome because the insurance sector as a whole has gone through restructuring (as pointed out in the theoretical foundation this is a global trend), and that the strategic decisions of insurance companies should be more based on analytics, especially if considered the international scenario, which points to the growth of non-life and cyber insurances and puts a demand for more customized and strategically oriented insurance solutions.

The perceived inability of existing programs to generate engagement, value for brand and to be in congruence with the positioning of the insurance companies, is probably symptomatic of an inability to understand their current consumers with more accurate databases. Loyalty programs are becoming more technological and custom tailored. It is imperative that the insurance market, and other markets that require the use of such strategies, understand this.

Considering that the 10 largest Brazilian insurance companies account for 80% of the market share, and that the remaining 20% are diluted among a huge number of small companies, the strategic use of relationship programs can result in effective and definitive competitive advantage against competitors.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on the authors presentation at the National Congress of Communicational Studies promoted by the Pontific Catholic University of Minas – CONEC, made on the second semester of 2017. Both authors are scholars and teachers on the Advertising area. They are also the founders of the Planners Group, a consulting service for advertising and marketing agencies on the planning area. The 3 years cycle of studies to witch this paper is part was sponsored by Planners Group.

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¹⁶ Advantage Portal.

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