

Chapter 15

Deconstructing the Role of Consumer Engagement Within Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media marketing incorporated in the omnichannel has the ability to build and grow relationships with customers and develop a better understanding of their wants and needs. In order for businesses to capitalize on social media within the omnichannel, and enhance the brand experience, they need to drive consumer brand engagement (CBE). This study aims to consolidate variables from extant literature that would have a significant impact on CBE. These are parasocial interaction, perceived credibility and intent to create content, and analyze three outcomes of brand experiences from increased CBE: brand awareness, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. A survey was administered, and the data was analyzed using multiple and linear regressions, independent sample t-tests, and an ANOVA test. The findings from these tests are that the three motivators significantly affect CBE, some more than others. CBE has positive effects on the three predicted outcomes. This research expands consumer engagement literature and also provides marketers with practical recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer engagement has been depicted as an expedient, cultivated from social media, for creating, building, and enhancing consumer relationships with a firm. Therefore, engagement can be appreciated as a strategic necessity to forge and sustain a competitive advantage, as well as a ‘valuable predictor’ of future business performance, as it is a dominant force that contributes towards sales growth (Brodie

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et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2014). Engagement is also a major factor that influences the progress of retail; consumer brand engagement captures value from the consumers as it results from building quality relationships with the consumer, as well as satisfying consumers' needs (Itani et al., 2022).

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) through omnichannel can also be driven by leveraging social media platforms, contributing towards omnichannel profitability (Manser Payne et al., 2017). In recent years, social media has evolved to be a new "hybrid component" that allows organizations to integrate their marketing communications, and establish strong relationships with their consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media has become one of the most popular platforms visited at the highest frequencies by the majority of people in the world. It also contributes as one of the most influential factors in a consumer's decision-making process- consumers use social media sites more than corporate sites when enquiring about information on the product/company/brand (Nielsen, 2011). The expeditious growth of social media popularity has led to multiple advertisers adopting this media with the intention to "humanize" or "personify" their brands (Wright & Hinson, 2011) in order to build/retain customer relationships. Thus, the integration of consumer interactions on social media proves extremely valuable in enhancing the customer experience in omnichannel retailing, as it inspires customers to want the 'personal experience' (Itani et al., 2022; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). There exist a multitude of studies that have discussed and analyzed different factors that motivate CBE, therefore in our paper we aim to compile an assortment of motivators that best impact CBE within social media and explore its implications on important outcomes, with the intention of developing an effective criterion for future marketers.

This study aims to understand the role of CBE in omnichannel retailing by answering two questions:

- What are the main motivating factors that can be enhanced by marketers to increase the CBE with brands on social media?
- What are the expected outcomes of CBE?

This study contributes to literature by testing a new combination of motivators that positively influence CBE on social media. We further extend the literature by testing our model on a broader range of users (in terms of nationality and age) as well as looking at the CBE of users using multiple social media platforms. Moreover, we fill the gap in the literature by testing CBE's influence on brand equity dimensions. Brand equity is an outcome of engagement because when engaged consumers experience emotional value from the brand, it creates more positive associations for them, which leads to increased brand equity (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2014). With regard to practical implications, these findings could be used as a guide for marketers to target a wider range of customers in an efficient manner leading to outcomes such as customer loyalty, brand equity, and increased sales. By understanding the most important and influential factors, marketers can put forward strategies to leverage social media platforms better, and increase CBE with the brand within omnichannel retail.

The following sections cover the background literature, methodology, results, and implications.

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