

RESEARCH PAPER

A theoretical perspective on consumer brand engagement

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ABSTRACT

Consumer brand engagement has a major impact on the output and the revenues of a company. Consumer engagement refers to a psychological state which is directed towards an engagement object. The engagement object can be of various types such as a product or a service brand, organisation, organisational entities etc. This paper presents a theoretical perspective of consumer brand engagement and its dimensions. Descriptive research design has been used to study the construct consumer brand engagement through secondary data. The research highlights consumer brand engagement as a context-dependent and multi-dimensional concept comprising affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions. The positively valanced consumer engagement cause favourable affective, behavioural and cognitive brand related activities which led to increase in positive word-of-mouth and brand usage whereas negatively valanced consumer engagement cause brand-denial, rejection and negative word-of-mouth. Positively valanced consumer engagement can open myriad opportunities for the marketers whereas the negatively valanced consumer engagement can be detrimental for the brand. The paper also attempts to highlight the challenges in consumer brand engagement.

KEY WORDS : Consumer brand engagement, Dimensions, Multidimensional construct, Valanced

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Consumer engagement refers to firm's endeavors to build a sustainable relationship with consumers through interactions to retain its loyal consumers. It incites the consumers to visit product websites, download its pages and recommend it to friends. Brodie *et al.* (2011) define CE as a "highly

context-dependent psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with focal object *i.e.* a brand, service or organization". Consumer engagement is gaining attraction in marketing literature. In the traditional marketing consumers were not involved in the process value creation but in the modern marketing consumers play a significant role in the value creation process. Positively engaged consumers would be more likely to co-create value for the company through active participation, providing feedback and information dissemination (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). The positively valanced consumer engagement cause favourable affective, behavioural and cognitive brand

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related activities which led to increase in positive word-of-mouth and brand usage whereas negatively valanced consumer engagement cause brand-denial, rejection and negative word-of-mouth. Positively valanced consumer engagement can open myriad opportunities for the marketers whereas the negatively valanced consumer engagement can be detrimental for the brand. This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore the nature and dimensions of consumer brand engagement for conceptual clarity.
- To identify the challenges faced by consumers in brand engagement.

Consumer brand engagement: Conceptualisation:

The construct consumer brand engagement has been discussed in this section to describe its meaning both conceptually and empirically. Different researchers have described consumer brand engagement in their ways on

the basis of dimensionality. Brodie *et al.* (2011) defined it as a psychological state whereas Bowden (2009) defined it as psychological process. Various definitions by researchers are given in Table 1. Multiple approaches have been found in literature. These approaches are broadly classified in two categories (Brodie *et al.*, 2011).

Uni-dimensional:

The focus was on one dimension from among affective, behavioural and cognitive.

Multi-dimensional:

The focus was on more than one dimension from among affective, behavioural and cognitive.

Dimensions of consumer brand engagement:

Consumer brand engagement is a multidimensional construct comprises affective, behavioural and cognitive

Table 1: Consumer engagement: Definitions				
Approach	Authors	Concept	Engagement object	Construct definition
Uni-dimensional	Algesheimer <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Community engagement	Brand community	Consumer’s intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with other community members
	Sprott <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Engagement	Brand	An individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves
	Parent <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Willingness to participate	Brand	Consumer Engagement with brands on social media through action such as content creation
	Gummerus <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Consumer engagement	Community	Customer’s behavioral manifestations towards a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational and drivers such as WOM activity etc.
Multi-dimensional	Cadler <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Consumer engagement	Website	Consumer Engagement with a website is set of experiences where experiences refers to the role played by site in consumer’s daily life
	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Online engagement	Brand	Cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value.
	Brodie <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Consumer engagement	Brand community	Consumer Engagement is a psychological that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object in a focal service relationship.
	Vivek <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Customer engagement		The intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate.

Source: Researcher’s preparation

dimensions (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Affective engagement refers to the summation of feelings experienced by the subject (*i.e.* consumer) with the engagement object such as a product brand or service brand, an organization or organizational entities. Cognitive dimension consists of a collection of mental states which a consumer experience with the engagement object. The behavioural dimension is the manifestations of behaviour post purchase, resulting from the motivational drivers. Consumer engagement acts as a medium for creating brand awareness, brand building and fostering customer resonance.

Building and maintaining brand loyalty are one of the central themes for market research from long time. Marketers have utilized various means to maintain brand loyalty of their consumers. Brand loyalty can be conceptualized as the final dimension of Consumer

Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, symbolizing the consumer’s ultimate relationship and level of identification with a brand (Keller, 2018). CBBE model describes how to take Competitive advantage how to create intense relationship with customers. Brands become irresistible and irreplaceable and win the loyalty of the consumers when they gain exclusive, positive and prominent meaning in the minds of a large number of consumers, brand loyalty, in return, brings sales revenues, market share, profitability to the firms and help them grow or at least maintain themselves in the marketplace (Keller, 2018; Aaker, 1991 and Kapferer, 1997).

Challenges in consumer brand engagement:

With the invention of various types of media platforms, it has become challenging for the marketers to keep their customers engaged across all the platforms.

Table 2 : Dimensions of consumer brand engagement			
Approach	Dimensional aspect	Authors	Dimensionality/Sub-dimensions
Uni- dimensional	Affective	Heath (2007)	Emotional content
	Behavioural	Algesheimer <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Motivation to participate
		Van Doom <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Valance Modality Scope Nature Consumer goals
Multi-dimensional	Affective, behavioural and cognitive	Gummerus <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Absorption
		Patterson <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Dedication Interaction Vigour
		Bowden (2009)	Physical Cognitive Emotion
		Calder <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Stimulation and inspiration Social facilitation Temporal Self esteem and civic mindedness Intrinsic enjoyment Utilitarian Participation and socializing Community
	Affective and cognitive	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Cognitive processing Utility and relevance Experiential value

Source: Researcher’s preparation

Consumers are bombarded with voluminous information so, it becomes really important for the marketers to retain their customers and keep them engaged.

Increasingly distracted consumers:

Distraction is ubiquitous. Customers are surrounded by voluminous information from multi-channels. Marketers are using number of channels to reach their consumers. An average consumer is exposed to upto 10,000 brand messages a day (AMA, 2017). Customers are distracted by messages. Consumers' brain is not able to process all the information and selectively pay attention to few. This cluttered information causes frustration among consumers. In such scenario, the consumers give very less attention to any particular brand. The average person's attention span is only eight seconds (Microsoft, 2015). Consumers' attention is fragmented across different screens so; the task to grab consumers' attention becomes tougher. Firms have to entice consumers within seconds. Thus, grabbing attention becomes very important before the consumers actually buy the product.

Increased consumer expectations:

The cut throat competition among firms has increased expectations of consumers. According to a report published by sprout social 84 per cent consumers expect response from firms within 24 hours after posting message on social media whereas 72 per cent of twitter complainants want response within an hour. Every day new firms are coming up with the same product that has been offered by their competitors. If one firm is not able to meet the desired expectations, there is a high probability that consumers will switch to another brand. One firm's loss can become others' gain. The main reason for brand switching is not getting "value for money".

Types of users:

Media users are categorized as active and passive users. Active users are engaged on various platforms by actively participating in conversations, commenting and sharing information etc. They show the behavioural dimension of engagement, as their brand engagement can be tracked easily. Passive users are those who read the information but do not communicate. Marketers generally forget passive users when while considering consumer engagement. Both positive and negative conversations take place on social media. Many

consumers vent out their frustration towards a brand on social media which can lead to negative consumer engagement (Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2016). Passive consumers will also associate themselves with the brand negatively after reading the conversations after reading those negative conversations. Thus, the behaviour of consumers on social media can have both positive and negative implications for the organization. It becomes important for the marketers to have an eye on both types of conversations and negative discussions are to be dealt on priority basis.

Conclusion:

Engagement has been conceptualized in different ways by various researchers. There are two approaches in literature: Unidimensional and multidimensional. The dimensionality is based on the perspective of consumer engagement. After reviewing the literature it is found that consumer brand engagement is best revealed as multidimensional construct. Majority of researchers identified affective, behavioural and cognitive as its sub-dimensions. At first the consumer becomes familiar with the engagement object which evokes positive or negative associations. Finally these associations led to active engagement of consumers with the engagement object *i.e.* brand, service and organisational entities. There are certain challenges in consumer brand engagement like distracted consumers, increased consumers' expectations and types of users.

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