Antecedents and consequences of the process of customer engagement through social media: an integrated conceptual framework

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Abstract: Over the last decades, the internet and IT enabled services have risen tremendously in importance. The ways through which people exchange information and how individuals communicate with each other have also changed enormously over the last years. In this regard, social networks have become gradually more central to sharing and spreading information and therefore companies are realising the opportunity of providing information to their customers by establishing social network information services (SNIS). This study is an attempt to formulate the process of customer engagement through social media channels and to find out its relationship with various antecedents and consequences. This study will enhance the understanding of the concept with better conceptual framework and give insights to marketing managers to make their marketing strategies in social media.

Keywords: brand attitude; brand communities; customer engagement; perceived risk; post-purchase behaviour; social media.


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1 Introduction

Over the last decades, the internet and IT services have been risen tremendously in importance. The ways through which people exchange information and how individuals communicate with each other have also been changed enormously over the last years (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). In this regard, social media channels have become gradually more central to sharing and spreading information and therefore companies are realising the opportunity of providing information to their customers by establishing social network information services (SNIS) like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. Social media offers an opportunity for consumers to talk to hundreds or even thousands of other consumers around the world in a cost effective way, and so, the companies are no longer the sole source of brand communication.

According to literature (e.g., Evans and McKee, 2010; Solis, 2010), marketers considered that intrinsically flexible utilities and rich user experience of social media (e.g., Facebook) provide companies a distinctive opportunity to engage with their customers at an unprecedented level. As per the literature (Kane et al., 2009; Brodie et al., 2013), brand communities in social media provide important platform for customers’ engagement behaviours, which is vital for the firms to engage their customers. Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007) also stated that firms host online communities for commercial purposes with the intent to build relationships with customers, get feedback, and strengthen the brand. Communities can discuss and share topics related to their interests about the brand (Sicilia and Palazo, 2008) especially positive ‘word of mouth’ communication among consumers to influence companies’ brands (Devasagayam et al., 2010).

In a consumer engagement survey conducted by EConsultancy (2008), 90% of companies said that online customer engagement is either ‘essential’ or ‘important’ to their organisations. Kirby (2006) suggested that non-transactional behaviours (i.e., commitment, word of mouth, etc.) can be up to 10 times more effective than all other marketing actions carried out by the company. Hence, The Marketing Science Institute considered to research on customer engagement as its one of the foremost research priority for the period 2010–2012 (MSI, 2010). Studies suggested that customer engagement represents a strategic imperative for generating enhanced corporate performance (Kumar and Pansari, 2016), including brand loyalty (De Vries and Carlson, 2014), sales growth (Neff, 2007), superior competitive advantage (Sedley, 2008) and profitability (Voyles, 2007). Dijkmans et al. (2015) also showed that engagement in the airline’s social media activities is positively related to corporate reputation, especially among non-customers.

Furthermore, Van Doorn et al. (2010) underlined the need for the conceptualisation of customer engagement which explicitly incorporates negative forms of customer engagement by unsatisfied customers. Hence, negative forms of customer engagement would also be explored in this study. Bolton (2011) also posed a research question (RQ3) for the future research that “What is the relationship between established constructs and measures used by managers such as brand equity, quality, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, customer value and new constructs and measures that reflect CE?” but no study till date respond for the call on this research question. Hence, this study would attempt to establish the relationship between some of these constructs in the context of social media networks.
2 Foundations/background of engagement

The use of the term ‘engagement’ traced back to the 17th century, when it was used to describe a number of notions, including a moral or legal obligation, tie of duty, betrothal, employment and/or military conflict (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). But in business practice, the initial use of the term ‘engagement’ was traced back to Appelbaum (2001). In the last two decades, the term ‘engagement’ has been used extensively in fields including marketing, psychology, sociology, political science and organisational behaviour, leading to a variety of conceptual approaches that highlighted different aspects of the this concept (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Ilic, 2008). Researchers suggested that engagement represents an individual-specific, motivational and context-dependent variable emerging from two-way interactions between relevant engagement subject(s) and object(s) (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011a; Sprott et al., 2009). Engagement subjects cited in different literature have included students (London et al., 2007), employees (Saks, 2006), customers (Brodie et al., 2011) and nation states (Resnick, 2001). Furthermore, engagement objects have included schools (Norris et al., 2003), other coworkers and employers (Saks, 2006), fellow students (Bryson and Hand, 2007), customers having similar interest and brands (Hollebeek, 2011a). Higgins and Scholer (2009) defined engagement as a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed or engrossed in something (i.e., sustained attention), generating the consequences of a particular attraction or repulsion force. This attraction or repulsion force can be regarded as positive and negative behavioural manifestations suggested by Van Doorn et al. (2010) in the context of marketing.

3 Dimensions of customer engagement

Among the existing literature there is lack of consensus regarding the dimensionality of customer engagement. Hollebeek (2011b) proposed the dimensions of consumer brand engagement as ‘immersion’ (cognitive), ‘passion’ (emotional) and ‘activation’ (behavioural). Dessart et al. (2015) also suggests three dimensions of online customer engagement as cognitive, affective and behavioural. However, Vivek et al. (2012) argued that CE is composed of four dimensions: cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social. Mollen and Wilson (2010) characterised the dimensions of customer engagement as dynamic and sustained cognitive processing, instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional congruence). Van Doorn et al. (2010) proposed five dimensions of customer engagement behaviour (CEB) as valence, form or modality, scope, nature of its impact and customer goals. Here, we assume that consumers cognitively learn about the products in social media and then emotionally attached with the social media brand communities, thereby they get the opportunity to show their cocreative nature behaviourally. Hence, in line with Brodie et al. (2011), we have followed three-dimensional perspective and considered the dimensions of customer engagement in social media as cognitive, emotional and behavioural.
4 Defining the process of customer engagement

In the existing literature of marketing, engagement concept appears to follow the “[who subject, e.g., customer engages with what object, e.g., brand]” approach observed in other disciplines (e.g., Handelsman et al., 2005; Hollebeek, 2011a). For some researchers, customer engagement is directly related to the emergence of new media and all the new ways in which customers can interact with firms, including purchase and non-purchase behaviour (Kumar et al., 2010; Libai, 2011) but for other researchers it is defined as a behavioural manifestation towards the brand beyond purchase or beyond transactions (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010; MSI, 2010) excluding purchase behaviour. These behavioural manifestations can be both positive (i.e., sharing positive message, advocating) and negative (i.e., sharing negative message, taking legal action against a firm) (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014).

However, Kumar et al. (2010, p.298) argued that the concept of customer engagement would be incomplete without the inclusion of purchase behaviour of consumer, as, according to them, purchasing from the firm would naturally take place when one envisions the different ways in which a customer can ‘engage’ with the firm. Here, we also assume that purchase decision is an important outcome of customer engagement process and this process remain continues even after the final purchase of the product. This post-purchase engagement (results from satisfaction, delight, dissatisfaction, pain, etc.) is based on perceived expectations with the product which would be discussed later in our conceptual framework. Hence, in line with Kumar et al. (2010), we have also considered the transactional behaviour as the part of the process of customer engagement.

Furthermore, existing literature suggested that the consumer engagement process does not follow an orderly and sequential progression of phases over time (Brodie et al., 2013). Rather, consumer engagement is a interplay, or iteration, of relevant sub-processes (Resnick, 2001) and followed bidirectional two way, iterative nature (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Brodie et al., 2011). Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) also demonstrated that the drivers, manifestations and outcomes of CEB are iterative and cyclical in nature because positive outcomes for each constituent (e.g., satisfaction, trust, commitment, etc.) further motivate the customers for CEB. Hence, we have also considered the process of CE as bidirectional two-way process.

Hence, on the basis of above discussion, we conceptualise the process of customer engagement in social media as, “Bidirectional two way, cognitive, emotional and behavioural manifestations of customers, may be positive or negative, including transactional behaviour”.

5 Research methodology

We have broadly reviewed the published research papers on the topic of customer engagement in the last 15–16 years from 2000 to 2016. However, as we have mentioned earlier that Marketing Science Institute considered to research on customer engagement as its one of the foremost research priority for the period 2010–12 (MSI, 2010), we have focused ourselves on several existing models published in reputed journals such as Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Service Research, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Journal of Product & Brand Management, Journal of Marketing Management, Management
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Decision, Journal of Brand Strategy, Journal of Service Management, Innovation: Management, Policy & Practice, Journal of Interactive Marketing, Management Research Review, after the year 2010. Special issue of Journal of Service Research was also published on the topic of customer engagement in the year 2010 (August 2010; Vol. 13, No. 3). Hence, we have proposed the following conceptual model based on existing literature which is explained as follows.

6 Conceptual framework

To initiate the process of customer engagement, connection with the consumers is a prerequisite for the firms (Sashi, 2012). Social customer relationship management (CRM) strategies would provide the telepresence, which is an essential antecedent for the process of customer engagement as underlined by Mollen and Wilson (2010). Furthermore, conceptual relations between the constructs of the process of customer engagement in social media are shown in Figure 1 and explained as follows.

Figure 1  Conceptual model of the process of customer engagement in social media

6.1 Connection

Connection with the consumers may be established through both traditional offline channels (e.g., salespersons) and digital online channels (e.g., social media). Social media greatly facilitate the connection of firm with a large number of consumers and wide variety of individuals (Sashi, 2012). Bruhn et al. (2012) stated that traditional media such as TV and print campaigns are best suited to increase brand awareness, while corporate weblogs or brand communities on social media are best suited to improve brand image.
Hence, a joint implementation of traditional media and social media communications would provide the optimal marketing mix to influence brand equity (Bruhn et al., 2012) and customer engagement positively. This might be achieved by announcing a competition on social media (e.g., Facebook) through traditional media or by connecting an offline campaign with online social media. Integration of CRM systems with social media technology has given a new way to the concept of CRM that incorporates a two-way network-focused approach to manage the customer relationships. This new way of developing and maintaining customer relationships has recently emerged the term ‘Social CRM’ in marketing (Greenberg, 2010). Social CRM has also been termed as ‘CRM 2.0’ by the scholars (Andzulis et al., 2012; Dutot, 2013). Baird and Parasnis (2011) suggested that “Social CRM is a novel concept that unites social media technology with customer relationship management and functioning as a compelling approach to enhancing customer engagement”.

6.2 Telepresence

Mollen and Wilson (2010) defined telepresence as the psychological state of ‘being there’ in a computer-mediated environment, augmented by focused attention. It is characterised by cognitive and sensory arousal, control and immersion (defined as perceiving oneself to be steeped in and interacting with an environment that sustains a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences). Mollen and Wilson (2010) also suggested that telepresence is an antecedent of engagement, however, telepresence might not automatically lead to online engagement and it could even exist independently of telepresence. If the website is not to be relevant for the consumer then engagement would not occur irrespective of its stimulating or immersive experience. Although, compelling and immersive experience associated with telepresence seems to be helpful for building a positive attitude towards a product or firm, but evidence also showed that the experience of telepresence is not of itself enough to induce purchase intention. For example, Suh and Chang (2006) did not find any direct association between telepresence and purchase intention. However, research conducted by Anubha and Jain (2013) for a travel company, suggested that there are three important drivers (e.g., perceived interactivity, perceived information quality and perceived ease of use) in a website to influence customer engagement and purchase intentions in social media environment. Customer engagement in social media would enhance the social media usage intentions of consumer. These social media usage intentions can be defined as the degree to which the user would like to revisit the social networking site (e.g., Lin and Lu, 2000; Heinrichs et al., 2011).

Hence, we propose that these three features (e.g., perceived interactivity, perceived information quality and perceived ease of use) should be embedded as a part of telepresence.

Perceived interactivity: According to Mollen and Wilson (2010), “Perceived interactivity is an experiential phenomenon that occurs when a user interacts with a website or other computer-mediated communication entities. Perceived interactivity is the degree to which the user perceives that the interaction or communication is two way, controllable, and responsive to their actions”. Lee (2005) suggested that perceived interactivity ensures success in online marketing environment. Lee (2005) has also identified user control, responsiveness, personalisation and connectedness as crucial components of perceived interactivity that generates trust and positive behavioural intentions among customers.
Interactivity removes barriers of communication and facilitates human–human interaction (Puhringer and Taylor, 2008). Social interactivity on websites is manifested as communication methods such as live chat, instant messages, e-mails, virtual worlds, social networks, etc. These tools enable the interaction of consumers more frequent and faster among much larger groups of connected consumers in brand communities of the firms (Sashi, 2012) and facilitate social media users to engage in conversations with online brand representatives (Barreda, 2014). When perceived interaction is found to be interested and the outcome of this interaction is seen as meeting needs and expectations of the customers then satisfaction is generated (Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek, 2009).

**Perceived information quality**: It can be defined as the degree to which consumers believe that information available on social media is accurate, complete, relevant and consistent (Heinrichs et al., 2011) and would facilitate their purchase decision-making process (e.g., Robinson et al., 2005; Park and Lee, 2009; Kwon and Wen, 2010). Cao et al. (2005) stated that online customers are attracted to websites if they find that the information presented on the site possess quality and has some relevancy for them. Ou and Sia (2010) also specified that consumers who perceive information quality negatively on a company’s website will lose their trust in the site, which will ultimately lead to low purchase intent.

**Perceived ease of use**: It can be defined as the degree to which the user finds the technology (or social media tool) easy to operate to achieve the desired objective (e.g., Davis, 1989; Lin, 2007). Gloor (2000) related ease of use to website structure, which means making information ready in such a way that can be assessed efficiently and easily. Nielsen and Tahir (2002) suggested ‘three-click’ rule to access the information or features of any website within three clicks, otherwise customers be dissatisfied. Flavián et al. (2006) stated that the degree of perceived ease of use by the consumers influences the degree of trust on the website. Hence, we propose that the degree of ease of use would enhance social media usage intentions.

Proposition 1a, b, c: Perceived interactivity, perceived information quality and perceived ease of use of a social media website have a positive impact on social media usage intentions.

6.3 The process of customer engagement

The process of customer engagement is composed of different levels of engagement depending on the level of engagement of consumers with the brand community in social media. Gallup Consulting (2009) suggested four levels of customer engagement as fully engaged, engaged, disengaged and actively disengaged. Lim et al. (2015) identified three levels of engagement as functional engagement, emotional engagement and communal engagement. Malthouse et al. (2013) suggested two levels of engagement, i.e., lower engagement in which consumers only passively consumed the content and higher engagement in which consumers actively participated in various forms of cocreation, such as writing reviews or creating videos showcasing the product. Many other scholars have also distinguished between active participation, such as posting (Kollock, 1999; Rheingold, 2000; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003, 2004; Wasko and Faraj, 2005) and socialising (Hsieh et al., 2012), as well as passive participation, such as lurking (Brazelton and Gorry, 2003; McKee, 2002; Preece et al., 2004). For example, simply
clicking a ‘like’ button showed lower form of customer engagement while posting a lengthy and thoughtful review about the brand on a website displayed a higher level of engagement.

Active and passive engagement can be represented by the constructs of customer engagement, i.e., customer involvement and customer participation, respectively, because researchers suggested that these two constructs carry out the process of customer engagement (Hollebeek, 2011a; Vivek et al., 2012). To study the process of customer engagement in social media there should be clear distinction between the understanding of the terms ‘customer involvement’ and ‘customer participation’. Mollen and Wilson (2010) suggested that engagement (i.e., by customer participation) goes beyond involvement because an actively engaged consumer is enthusiastically committed to the company both cognitively and affectively through its websites or other communication channels, while an involved consumer is mentally ready to get through the information cognitively but is not necessarily actively making the commitment.

Hence, Mollen and Wilson (2010) indicated that engagement (i.e., customer participation) is more dynamic while involvement is more passive. Morris and Martin (2000) suggested that ‘involvement’ expressed psychological identification and emotional ties for a particular brand, i.e., a complex expression of consumer attitude for a particular brand which reflects the positive affirmation of consumer about the priority of one brand over other brands. However, the term ‘customer participation’ has a broader concept than ‘involvement’ because it has also included consumer’s experience as well as interactive relationship between a brand and a consumer (Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Zailskaitė-Jakste and Kuvykaite, 2012). These constructs can be explained as follows:

**Customer involvement**: Involvement is the level of interest or importance of an object to an individual, or the centrality of an object to an individuals’ ego structure (Duy, 1969). Involvement is identified by the researchers as an important antecedent for the process of customer engagement (Hollebeek, 2011a; Vivek et al., 2012) and it can be defined as consumers’ level of interest and personal relevance with a focal object/decision in terms of their basic values, goals and self-concept (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Mittal, 1995). Thomson et al. (2005) defined it as “a state of mental readiness that typically influences the allocation of cognitive resources to consume an object, decision, or action”. Involvement consists of cognitive as well as emotional components (Petty et al., 1983; Vaughn, 1986; Mittal and Lee, 1989; Laaksonen, 1994).

High levels of involvement with a brand stimulates positive word of mouth expressed through feelings and behavioural responses about the brand and it can be seen as the relevance of the brand to the customer (Dichter, 1966; Quester and Lim, 2003). Bruhn et al. (2012) suggested that positive feelings and comments of highly involved consumers are more likely to be formulated as abstract statements which refer to the brand’s desirability and attractiveness, i.e., brand’s hedonic image; and less likely refer to specific product characteristics, i.e., functional image. Ghosh et al. (2013) proposed that relationship of social media positive word of mouth (PWOM) and negative word of mouth (NWOM) with perceived risk, brand attitude and purchase intention of the consumer will be positively moderated by involvement level of the consumer.

**Customer participation**: Customer participation can be defined as a degree to which the customer is involved in developing the product or delivering the service (Dabholkar, 1990) and it engages the customer in a two-way interactive situation that is mutually
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beneficial to the firm as well as customer. Customers can play two distinct roles: information providers or codevelopers (Lengnick-Hall, 1996). High levels of customer participation as an information provider in the new product development process are commonly seen in business-to-business, while the business-to-consumer sector has taken the lead in codeveloping products/services (Bughin et al., 2008) through internet and social media sites to involve customers in several aspects of the new product development process. This interaction would produce higher levels of enthusiasm and ultimately greater engagement with the entity (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Marketing Science Institute also supported their idea as it argued, “The brand engages prospects and customers by identifying itself with their common interests” (MSI, 2006). Therefore, Vivek et al. (2012) proposed that customer participation is positively associated with the intensity of his or her focus of engagement.

These constructs of customer engagement can be further divided into the sub-processes of customer engagement depending on the engagement level of consumer with the firm.

6.4 Sub-processes of customer engagement

Larivière et al. (2013) suggested that customer’s contributions in social media can be active (uploading information online), passive (reading information online), interactive (responding to earlier contributions) or aggregated (‘like’ the most popular searches, top tweets, trending topics, etc.). According to Li and Owyang (2010), there are five stages of consumer engagement in social media as watching, sharing, commenting, producing and curating. Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) identified four types of CEBs as augmenting, codeveloping, influencing and mobilising. Brodie et al. (2013) also suggested sub-processes of customer engagement in online community as learning, sharing, advocating, socialising and codeveloping. After review of literature of several existing models published in reputed journals as mentioned earlier, we categorised seven sub-processes of customer engagement as follows:

Learning: Learning characterises the vicarious acquisition of cognitive competencies that consumers apply to purchase and consumption decision making (Brodie et al., 2013). It consists of various contributions of customers such as knowledge, skills, labour and time, to directly add to the focal firm’s offering beyond that which is fundamental to the transaction (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Hence, consumers only watch and use the social media content to take the appropriate decisions (Li and Owyang, 2010). So, we characterise this phase of engagement as the cognitive dimension of customer engagement.

Socialising: Socialising denotes two-way, non-functional interactions through which consumers acquire and/or develop attitudes, norms and/or community language (Longmore, 1998; Brodie et al., 2013). In this phase, consumers respond to the content of other people, actively participate and give personal opinions (Li and Owyang, 2010). So, we characterise this phase of engagement as the emotional dimension of customer engagement.

Sharing: It denotes sharing of personal relevant information, knowledge and experiences through the process of active contributions to the co-creation of knowledge with friends or other people in the online community (Li and Owyang, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013).
It consists of various contributions of customers such as knowledge, experience and time to affect and influence other actors’ perceptions, preferences or knowledge regarding the focal firm (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). So, this phase reflects the behavioural dimension of customer engagement.

Cocreating: Cocreating behaviour “involves the (customer) participation in the creation of the core offering itself. It can occur through shared inventiveness, codesign or shared production of related goods” (Lusch and Vargo, 2006). Cocreating behaviour can also be referred as coproducing and codeveloping behaviour by different authors. Brodie et al. (2013) defined the codeveloping behaviour as “a process where consumers contribute to organisations and/or organisational performance by assisting in the development of new products, services, brands or brand meanings”. It consists of various resources of customers such as knowledge, skills and time, to facilitate the development of focal firm’s offering (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Consumers produce and disseminate the social content for their self-expression in online community (Li and Owyang, 2010) and it is also referred to the degree to which the customer is involved in producing the offering for themselves (e.g., Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). It can be characterised as the behavioural dimension of customer engagement.

Advocating: Consumers who are highly active in communities, they become advocates of the brand, moderate the content and then seek response from other consumers (Li and Owyang, 2010). Advocating is an expression of consumers, who actively recommend specific brands, products/services, organisations and/or ways of using products or brands (Brodie et al., 2013). It consists of various contributions of customers such as relationships and time to mobilise other stakeholders’ actions towards the focal firm (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). This sub-process also reflects the behavioural dimension of customer engagement.

Criticising: Consumers who purchase the product but feel dissatisfied, then they share their bad experience through negative word of mouth in online communities. So, criticising can be referred to the degree to which the customer is involved in spreading the negative word of mouth about the product, brand or the firm. It shows the disengagement of the customer with firm and reflects the behavioural dimension of customer engagement.

Reviling: When appropriate step is not being taken by the management or the administrator of the brand community about the negative feelings of dissatisfied customer, then customer feel harassed, and may become reviling in nature. When two or more people with similar feelings meet, they build anti-brand communities against the firm, for example, ‘Apple Sucks’, ‘Anti Samsung’, ‘Anti Walmart’ and ‘Anti-Starbucks’ are anti-brand communities on Facebook. This shows the higher level of disengagement, and in extreme circumstances, these groups of people may go for legal action against the firm. This sub-process also reflects the behavioural dimension of customer engagement.

We have categorised ‘learning’ and ‘socialising’ under the construct of ‘customer involvement’ because it reflects passive engagement with cognitive and emotional dimensions. On the other hand, customer participation reflects active engagement with behavioural dimension, so, we have categorised ‘sharing’, ‘cocreating’ and ‘advocating’ under the construct of ‘customer participation’.
7 Relationship between constructs of customer engagement and post-purchase behaviour

7.1 Impact of word of mouth on perceived risk

Word of mouth is traditionally defined as face to face communication between consumers regarding any product, brand or service between consumers (Arndt, 1967). However, in case of online social media channels, social media messages, comments, reviews, feedbacks in the form of sharing, cocreating and advocating can be considered as word of mouth (WOM) communication. In case of e-commerce transactions, consumer’s risk perception before purchase is found to be impacted by WOM communication (Ha, 2002). Word of mouth spread the information in the form of peer communication, sharing and posting reviews in social networks about products and services helped the marketers to generate the interest for the product and subsequently enhance the possibility of its purchase (Gupta, 2013). Ghosh et al. (2013) suggested that perceived risk of consumer would go down when consumer reads a PWOM message on a social media website and would go up for NWOM message.

Proposition 2a: Positive word of mouth (i.e., sharing, cocreating and advocating) is negatively associated with perceived risk of the consumer.

Proposition 2b: Negative word of mouth (i.e., criticising and reviling) is positively associated with perceived risk of the consumer.

7.2 Impact of webcare initiatives

Customers who had a bad experience with the firm may share negative feelings in online community, seek legal or regulatory avenues for relief, and it may lead to long-lasting changes in an industry (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Therefore, Goel and Chiplukar (2013) suggested that there is a need to segregate and prioritise the actions to prevent severe damage to sales and brand arising out of negative tweets and comments spread on social media. The organisations need to actively engage with the customers, address their issues, and more importantly at the right time. It is difficult to earn a client but it is even more difficult to get it back once lost to a competitor. Hence, some companies have started so-called ‘Webcare’ initiatives to track and respond harmful feedback (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). These reactions such as refunds/apologies/replacements and the process (e.g., in person, or in writing) would be critical in deterring negative engagement. So, negative forms of CEB require externally visible reactions from a firm because such reactions, if properly managed, can turn negative CEB into positive CEB (Voorhees et al., 2006).

Proposition 3: Webcare initiatives in social media have a positive impact on brand attitude.

7.3 Perceived risk

According to literature, perceived risk is conceptualised as “the nature and amount of risk perceived by a consumer in contemplating a particular purchase decision” (Cox and Rich, 1964). Different factors that lead to perceived risk are uncertainty of purchase goals,
availability of multiple alternatives and possible adverse effects of purchase decision (Cox, 1967; Dowling and Staelin, 1994; Kim et al., 2008). Ghosh et al. (2013) proposed that relationship between social media PWOM and NWOM and brand attitude of the consumer will be mediated by perceived risk.

Proposition 4: Perceived risk is negatively associated with brand attitude in social media.

7.4 Brand attitude

Brand attitude can be defined as “a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular brand with some degree of favour and/or disfavour” (Petty et al., 1983; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). It can also be defined as an individual’s beliefs and subjective evaluations about the product or brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981). Hollebeek and Chen (2014) suggested that brand attitude is a consequence of brand engagement, and positively valenced brand engagement is expected to generate favourable attitudes for the brands, and vice versa. According to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), attitude constitutes a multiplicative combination of brand-based associations of attributes and benefits; hence it is supposed that that brand attitude is influenced by brand awareness and brand image. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention. Ghosh et al. (2013) proposed that relationship between perceived risk and purchase intention of the consumer will be mediated by brand attitude. Empirical study conducted by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) confirmed that user-generated and firm-generated social media communication had a positive influence on brand attitude. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) also confirmed that brand attitude have a positive influence on purchase intention.

Proposition 5: Brand attitude is positively associated with purchase intentions of consumer.

7.5 Purchase intention

Miniard et al. (1983) stated that the behavioural intention to purchase is a psychological variable which is an intervening variable between attitude and actual behaviour. Online purchase intention can be defined as consumers’ intention to purchase goods and services in an electronic or technology-based shopping environment (e.g., Van der Heijden, 2003; Sin et al., 2012). According to the expectancy-disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980), customers compare pre-purchase expectation with the actual experience of product or service. If perceived performance fails expectation, dissatisfaction or outrage will occur. If perceived service quality exceeds expectation, then positive responses such as satisfaction or delight will occur. Berman (2005) also proposed four stages to measure post-purchase customer responses: outrage/pain, dissatisfaction, satisfaction and delight. As customer emotions move from negative to positive, customer loyalty is expected to ascend. Therefore, as compared to satisfaction, delight stresses the state of emotional attachment and may be more strongly associated with customer loyalty, positive word of mouth and repeat purchase intent, as suggested by Torres and Kline (2006). Hence, delight exceeds satisfaction. In the case of satisfaction and delight, customer would spread PWOM in the form of sharing, cocreating and advocating. Satisfaction or delight would develop the trust first and then all other constructs such as commitment, loyalty
and word of mouth succeeding the trust because Hur et al. (2011) suggested if positive brand community trust developed then it has been observed to influence the brand community commitment, which further have positive impact on brand loyalty. Habibi et al. (2014) also found that customer–brand, customer–product, and customer–company relationships in social media positively influence the brand trust. Since satisfaction is just seen as meeting the needs and expectations of consumer, it lacks the emotional component and develops cognitive trust. On the other hand, delight provides the pleasurable experience with the product, brand or firm with emotional component, so, it develops the affective trust. However, when customer feels dissatisfaction or pain, then he or she would spread NWOM in the form of criticising and reviling in social media.

Proposition 6: Dissatisfied/outraged consumers spread negative word of mouth in social media in the form of criticising and reviling.

7.6 Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be defined as customer’s overall evaluation of the performance of an offered product or service (Gustafsson et al., 2005; Johnson and Fornell, 1991). Consumer satisfaction is likewise positively influence by customers’ affective responses such as their enjoyment, excitement and pleasure of using the service (Lynch et al., 2001; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001), and these may be experienced due to customer engagement. Satisfaction is generated when customers perceive that customer–company interaction is being of interest and the outcome of this interaction is seen as meeting needs and expectations (Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek, 2009).

Research studies (Grönroos, 2000; Gustafsson et al., 2005) identified that there is a strong correlation between customer satisfaction and retention. Customer satisfaction also leads to stronger commitment to the firm or retailer (Bettencourt, 1997) and satisfaction with previous purchase experiences plays an important role in determining future purchase behaviours (Jones and Suh, 2000). Various other researchers also agreed that high levels of satisfaction leads to increased customer loyalty, commitment, purchase intention, positive word of mouth (PWOM), market share and profit (Heskett et al., 1994; Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Keiningham and Vavra, 2001; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Allen and Wilburn, 2002; Oyewole, 2002; Reichheld, 2003; Bowden, 2009; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2013).

Proposition 7: Satisfaction would develop cognitive trust in consumers mind.

7.7 Customer delight

Oliver et al. (1997) proposed that delight is a function of surprisingly high positive disconfirmation, arousal and positive affect. Patterson (1997) proposed that customer delight is where the experience of consumers goes beyond the level of satisfaction and it also involves pleasurable experience. Kumar et al. (2001) proposed that customer delight is composed of the emotions of joy, thrill and exhilaration. Finn (2005) also defined customer delight as an emotional response outcomes from surprising and positive levels of performance. Various other studies (e.g., Oliver et al., 1997; Crotts and Magnini, 2011; Bowden and Dagger, 2011) suggested that surprise is an important antecedent for delight
to occur. Hence, customers feel delight due to emotional arousal by the surprising and pleasurable experience with the product, brand or the firm.

Delight accelerates the development of affective commitment, assists in attracting new customers to experience a new product (which is recommended by delighted customers’ word of mouth), and encourage the behaviour of repeat purchase and retention by new customers who were delighted by the product experience (Bowden, 2009). Hence, due to affective commitment with the firm, delighted consumers become advocates for the brand. Since, affective commitment is positively related to word of mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2001), delighted customers share their delight to other consumers in their social networks and spread the positive word of mouth about their experiences with the product, brand, or company (Sashi, 2012).

Proposition 8: Delight would develop affective trust in consumers mind.

7.8 Trust

Trust can be defined as “Consumer-perceived security and reliability in brand interactions, and the belief that the brand acts in the consumer’s best interests” (Rotter, 1967; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Moorman et al. (1993) defined trust as “willingness to rely on the other party in whom one has confidence”. Morgan and Hunt (1994) described it as “confidence in the other party’s reliability and integrity”. Wang and Emurian (2005) stated that “trust is an abstract concept and is often used interchangeably with related concepts such as credibility, reliability, or confidence”. So, relationship cannot be either enduring or intimate without trust.

According to literature, trust is composed of the elements of ‘ability’, ‘benevolence’ and ‘integrity’ (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998; Gefen and Straub, 2004), and it can be assimilated into cognitive and affective dimensions (Bhattacherjee, 2002; Gefen, 2002; Brengman and Karimov, 2012). Similarly, Kharouf and Sekhon (2008) proposed that the consumer’s trust in an organisation may be at low level (i.e., calculative or cognitive) or at high level (i.e., affective). The low level determinants are consistency and competence (economic view) whereas the high level determinants (emotional dimension) are integrity, benevolence, value alignment and communication. Researchers included ‘ability’ and ‘integrity’ to cognitive trust and ‘benevolence’ to affective trust (McAllister, 1995; Komiak and Benbasat, 2006; Pavlou and Dimoka, 2006; Dabholkar et al., 2009; Brengman and Karimov, 2012).

Cognitive trust: Cognitive can be defined as consumer’s rational expectation that a brand or firm would have the necessary attributes to be relied upon (Komiak and Benbasat, 2004) and it developed from a pattern of careful rational thinking (Morrow et al., 2004). Hence, cognitive trust reflected the customer’s confidence that a brand or firm is honest, accurate and dependable, and keeps promises (Dabholkar et al., 2009). It generates ‘ability’ and ‘integrity’ for the firm among the consumers.

Ability: Bhattacherjee (2002) suggested that online consumer’s perception about firm’s ‘ability’ is based on two related beliefs about firm’s competence to perform the intended behaviour and its access to the necessary knowledge to perform the behaviour appropriately. In the context of online retailer, beliefs about the ability of retailer may increase the intentions of consumer to purchase from the website (Gefen and Straub, 2004; Schlosser et al., 2006).
Integrity: Integrity can be defined as “the buyer’s belief that a seller is competent and reliable and will fulfil the transaction’s contractual requirements” (Pavlou and Dimoka, 2006).

Affective trust: Affective trust is the belief that the brand or firm has genuine concern for the customer’s welfare, and is caring and supportive for the customer (Dabholkar et al., 2009) and developed from one’s instincts, intuition or feelings concerning whether an individual, group or organisation is trustworthy (Morrow et al., 2004). It generates ‘benevolence’ for the firm among the consumers. It can be defined as “the buyer’s belief that a seller has beneficial motives, is genuinely concerned about the buyer’s interests, and will act in a goodwill manner beyond short-term profit expectations” (Pavlou and Dimoka, 2006). Customers become advocates for the seller only when they trust sellers, although, trust alone may not be sufficient to turn the exchange into a long-term relationship (Sashi, 2012). Positive brand community trust has been observed to impact the brand community commitment positively, which has further positive impact on brand loyalty (Hur et al., 2011).

Proposition 9a: Cognitive trust is positively associated with calculative commitment.

Proposition 9b: Affective trust is positively associated with affective commitment.

7.9 Brand commitment

Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined the term ‘commitment’ “as an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely”. Brand commitment can also be defined as a psychological disposition which implies a positive attitude towards the brand and a willingness to maintain a valued relationship with it (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Hence, commitment leads to long-term relationships between customer and seller. Brand commitment implies an attitudinal facet whereas and brand loyalty implies a behavioural dimension (Warrington and Shim, 2000). As per the literature (e.g., Gustafsson et al., 2005; Bowden, 2009) there are two types of commitment: calculative and affective.

Calculative commitment: When a customer to ‘stick’ with a brand due to switching costs or lack of other suitable brands then it results in calculative commitment and so, it has a positive effect on retention (Gustafsson et al., 2005). De Ruyter et al. (1998) interpreted calculative commitment as the way in which customer is forced to remain loyal against his or her desire. Sashi (2012) suggested that calculative commitment to brand may results in customer loyalty.

Affective commitment: Affective commitment is an emotional bond between brand and the consumer that “captures the trust and reciprocity in a relationship” (Gustafsson et al., 2005). Affective commitment reflected a consumer’s sense of belonging and involvement with a service provider akin to emotional bonding (Rhoades et al., 2001; Fullerton, 2005). Affective commitment is the result of customer delight (Bowden, 2009), and due to affective commitment with the firm, customers become advocates for a product, brand, or company, and spread the positive word of mouth.
Brand commitment may lead to brand loyalty that may in turn provide advantages such as greater resistance to competitors’ marketing actions, positive word of mouth effects or reduced marketing costs (Dick and Basu, 1994). Sashi (2012) suggested that affective as well as calculative commitment would result in customer engagement and presence of both calculative and affective commitment would result in long-term relationship with strong emotional bonds.

**Proposition 10a:** Calculative commitment is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty.

**Proposition 10b:** Affective commitment is positively associated with behavioural loyalty.

### 7.10 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty can be defined as a feeling of attachment to a certain set of brands and companies. Companies whose consumers are strongly loyal can gain important competitive advantages in marketing, such as reduced corporate marketing and transactional costs, increased cross-selling rate, a greater positive word of mouth effect and reduced cost of failure (Kotler et al., 1999). Aaker (1991) defined brand loyalty as a situation which reflects how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change, either in price or in product features.

Oliver (1997) defined loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred product or service in the future”. Keller (2003) defined brand loyalty under the term ‘brand resonance’ which refers to the nature of customer-brand relationship and the extent to which customers feel that they are ‘in sync’ with the brand. Researchers proposed multidimensional concept of loyalty by adding an attitudinal component to a behavioural loyalty concept (Javalgi and Moberg, 1997; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Behavioural perspective is based on the amount of purchases for a particular brand, while attitudinal perspective incorporates consumer preferences and dispositions towards brands (Javalgi and Moberg, 1997). Hence, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty can be considered as the components of loyalty.

McAlexander et al. (2002) considered that loyalty is the major reason for the participation in brand community participation. Since, attitudinal loyalty is a proactive and voluntary loyalty reflected by the customers who feel a strong connection to the firm and a high degree of engagement, McEwen and Fleming (2003) acknowledged that such customers contribute more significantly towards improving business performance in comparison to that of less engaged customers.

Holland and Baker (2001) emphasised that brand loyalty towards the brand leads to cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions from the customer who is represented by repeated patronage as well as favourable attitudes towards the brand, both of which are connected to an increase in revenue. However, loyal customers lack an emotional bond with the seller, so, they may not recommend the brand regularly despite their long-term relationship with the brand, but they only recommend the brand when there is opportunity to do it on a purely rational basis (Sashi, 2012). However, firms can encourage the loyal customers to play the role of advocates for the brand by developing affective commitment in them (Sashi, 2012). Hence, here, we have considered that attitudinal loyalty would lead to cognitive reaction (i.e., learning) as well as affective reaction (i.e., socialising) by the consumers. On the other hand, behavioural loyalty would lead to
behavioural reactions (i.e., sharing, cocreating, advocating) by the consumers. In this way, it would launch the two way, iterative process of customer engagement.

**Proposition 11a:** Attitudinal loyalty is positively associated with cognitive and affective reactions of the consumers (i.e., learning and socialising).

**Proposition 11b:** Behavioural loyalty is positively associated with behavioural reactions of the consumers (i.e., sharing, cocreating and advocating).

8 Conclusions and discussion

This study highlights the importance of the concept of customer engagement in social media networks facilitating relationships of various antecedents and consequences. It also highlights the different ways through which customer can engage with the firms through social media from beginning till the final purchase and even post purchase of the product.

8.1 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes important addition to current literature on customer engagement as it suggests the conceptual framework integrating all the antecedents and consequences of its process in social media networks. Previous studies were mostly based on offline customer engagement or customer engagement through traditional media. Mollen and Wilson (2010) suggested that telepresence is an antecedent of engagement but did not suggest its components but this study proposes three components as perceived interactivity, perceived information quality and perceived ease of use. Previous studies suggested only four sub-processes of engagement (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014) or five sub-processes (Brodie et al., 2013; Li and Owyang, 2010) but did not include the sub-processes of disengagement. This study highlights the seven sub-processes of engagement and disengagement which are exhaustively explored. Existing literature suggests that customer engagement is a cyclic process but there is no study which systematically shows its elements in a cyclic process. This study integrates all the components systematically in a cyclic process. Moreover existing studies (Kumar et al., 2010) suggested customer engagement includes transactional behaviour but no study shows the relationship between the customer engagement and post-purchase behaviour. This study highlights the relationship of engagement with post-purchase satisfaction, delight, dissatisfaction, etc.

8.2 Managerial implications

In addition to theoretical contributions, this study also draws a number of managerial implications. First, by providing a CE conceptualisation in social media, this framework provides managers with an enhanced understanding of the emerging ‘engagement’ concept and may help in the formulation and design of focused strategies and tactics of customer engagement in social media. Our study demonstrates that firms should give their consumers the opportunity to build brand communities in social networks and encourage them to codevelop and coproduce the content and give recommendations for the modification of their products they want. This study also highlights of negative
engagement or disengagement in the form of negative word of mouth and suggests practitioners to take the preventive action to curb it and make it positive for the firm by webcare initiatives and to improve customer lifetime value. As this study gives valuable insights on how engagement leads to satisfaction, trust, commitment and loyalty, thus generating valuable inputs to managers for strategic decision making regarding their brand portfolios in social media.

8.3 Further research

We have developed an integrated model of antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in social media. Qualitative analysis and empirical research is now needed for ontological adequacy of propositions. Researchers may wish to examine to what degree engagement and social media usage can be moderated by factors such as perceived interactivity, perceived information quality and perceived ease of use. Researchers may also wish to investigate whether the correlation between the seven sub-processes with customer engagement values, i.e., CRV, CIV, CKV and CLV (Kumar et al., 2010), perceived value and negative value (Larivière et al., 2013). Furthermore, research can also be conducted to determine the relationship of these seven sub-processes with the dimensions of brand equity (Aaker, 1991) as negative word of mouth may influence negative brand equity (Berry, 2000) and corporate even need to rename their brands to erase the negative brand equity (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006).

References


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Antecedents and consequences of the process of customer engagement


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