

## **Towards creating an effective customer brand engagement through social media marketing: A model proposal.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The use of Social media platforms, changed the way both companies and customers behave. Marketers, nowadays, are keen to get customers to engage no matter what the price is. In the age of social media Engaging online with the brand is proven to lead to purchase intention and brand loyalty. The article is a theoretical review that presents a proposal of a conceptual framework dedicated to the analysis of the topic of Social media marketing elements and customer brand engagement and the outcomes of this relationship which is merely based on relying on secondary sources of recent data.*

**KEY WORD:** *Social media Marketing, Customer Brand Engagement, Purchase Intention, Brand Loyalty*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social media platforms gained a huge theoretical attention (Vuori, V. 2011), and made a lot of ink flow in the last decade. Given the increasing use of social media by companies, in their marketing and advertising strategy (Parsons, A. L, 2011) and in order to communicate with customers. Moreover, Social media has become a significant tool in setting up connections between companies and customers (Jaakonmäki, R. et al. 2017). Plus, it is clear that in the last decade brands, big companies and organizations slanted towards the use of social Media, to convey their strong existence and to build a friendly relationship with customers (Saravanakumar, M et al. 2012). Therefore, companies also use social media platforms in order interact and engage with Consumers (Gómez, M. et al, 2019; So et al., 2014).

Social media provides companies with the possibility to interact with online Brand communities, that influence and sway customer's behavior, and allows companies to upgrade an online relationship with their customers (Willis, M. et al. 2019). Plus, it gives customers the ability to participate actively and engages with the brand (AIT LAMKADEM, S, et Al. 2020). A Brand community refers to the "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz, A. M. et al. 2001). These communities have attracted considerable research and practitioner attention, mainly due to their increased use and acceptance by both customers and companies (Brodie et al., 2013). These communities are so important to companies because of the embedded association in the consumption context surrounding a product (Laroche, M., et al. 2012). Ironically, a brand-based community is not destined to serve companies, but to serve people in it. This way it helps people meet their needs and also build loyalty but, not only by driving sales transactions (Fournier, S., et al. 2009).

Obviously, the aim of businesses in the era of social media is to get customers to engage. Moreover, various studies have been conducted in order to identify the inherent drivers of customer's engagement (e.g. Fehrer, J. A, et al. 2018 ; Chiang, C. T, et al. 2017 ; Hollebeek, L. D, et al. 2016 ; De Vries, N. J, et al. 2014 ; Hammedi, W, et al. 2015). Currently, thanks to social media advances, customers can effortlessly, connect, exchange and share information among each other (Carvalho, A et al. 2018; Gambetti et al. 2015; Sashi 2012). Customers have become a major factor in influencing marketing outcomes (Carvalho, A et al. 2018). Thus, costumers are now providers of information and recommendations for other consumers (Ouiddad, S et al. 2017) and consequently they influence each other's purchase decision.

This research fits into the Moroccan context, given the increasing interest of companies in social media marketing. And Since there is a lack of literature about this subject in the Moroccan context, we are willing, through this paper, to present a model that will help analyze the influence of social medial marketing -through its elements- on the customer brand engagement and the outcomes of the relation between these concepts.

And to do so we formulated the following research questions:

Question 1: What are the components of social media Marketing?

Question 2: What is the relationship between social media marketing elements and customer brand engagement?

Question 3: What are the dimensions of customer brand engagement?

Question 4: What are the Behavioral outcomes of customer brand engagement in the digital era?

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

In this paper we are aiming to propose a conceptual framework that depicts how social media marketing elements influence the Customer brand Engagement (CBE) and what are the potential outcomes of this influence. We will first start with reviewing critically the related literature in order to detect the research gap and also develop the theoretical model where social media marketing is the driver of CBE.

## **1.3 Research Methodology**

The article is a theoretical review that presents a proposal of a conceptual framework dedicated to the analysis of the topic of Social media marketing elements and customer brand engagement and the outcomes of this relationship which is merely based on relying on secondary sources of recent data.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

### **1. Social-media marketing**

(Tuten, T. L. 2020) defined social media marketing as the use of social media technology, to create, communicate, deliver and exchange a valuable offering with stakeholders. Social media, nowadays, are a very powerful marketing tool (Gupta, H. et al. 2017; Rugova, B. et al. 2016; Gould, D. J. et al 2016; Kaur, S. 2016) that changed the way customers behave on daily basis (Pjero, E. et al. 2015; Vinerean, S. et al. 2013), thus, marketers also changed their ways of communication, for example, integrating customers more and more in the process of decision making (co-creation).

Social Media Marketing refers, as explained, to utilizing internet, particularly social networking websites, for marketing (Prasad, P. et al. 2019) and it is now an essential component of 21st-century business (Felix, R. et al. 2017). These powerful tools are used by small businesses to improve their business impact (Felix, R. et al. 2017), and it helps also to boost big companies (Chattopadhyay, A. 2019).

Social media are now seen as a more reliable wellspring of information when compared to corporate communication and commercials (Voramontri, D. et al. 2019; Martín-Consuegra, D. et al. 2018). Moreover, social media sites are considered as a source of information to customers, by helping them decide when to buy or learn more about new products or brands in time and place they desire (Powers, T. et al., 2012). In addition, they are now a crucial element that defines and influences customers decision (Mumi, A. (2020); Naylor et al., 2012; Phang, Zhang, & Sutanto, 2013). Plus, customers in the era of social media lean toward distrusting mainstream media (Constantinides, E. 2014). This shows how influential these platforms can be and the opportunities they can offer. In what follows we will dissect the social media marketing and discuss its elements in order to define their influence on customer brand engagement.

As stated by (Kim, A. J., et al. 2010), Social Media has mainly 5 elements, Entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness and Electronic word of mouth.

**Entertainment** is the ability to meet individual needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic or emotional enjoyment (Harshini, C. S 2015). As a social media marketing dimension, entertainment is a key element so customers evolve with a brand. Moreover, when brands publish on social media posts with an entertaining content and creates buzz among online consumers, they will interact with the brand, which in turn helps to find brand awareness, establish image and use leverage (Kujur, F., et al. 2016). In addition, entertainment has a positive influence on customer purchase intention (Harun, A., et al. 2019; Kim, A. J., et al. 2010). According to (Moslehpour, M., et al. 2020), improving the level of entertainment in social media helps companies engage more with customers. The long the period a company can keep a customer online, the more it can earn their trust and increase their interests to company's products and services (Moslehpour, M., et al. 2020). Plus, entertaining content is more likely to influence the customer response (Zhang et al. 2016). Justifies hypothesis H1-a:

*H1-a: Entertainment is related to customer brand engagement.*

**Customization** refers, as stated by (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b; Godey et al., 2016), to the degree of tailoring services, messages and marketing effort in order to satisfy the customer. In social media marketing, customization is essentially based on making contact and communicate with a single individual, this feature differentiates it from conventional media (Seo, E. J., et al. 2018). In addition to the fact that companies use customization in order to communicate the distinctiveness and uniqueness of their brands (Martin, K., et al. 2010). Referring to (Bellman et al. 2011), providing a Customized content helps creating brand engagement, and

conversely to (Cheung, M. L., et al. 2018) that states that Customized content is not effective in building Customer brand engagement. Grounding hypothesis H1-b:

*H1-b: Customization is related to customer brand engagement.*

**Interaction** is a push to the expansion that knows the social media today (Taprial, V., et al. 2012). According to (John, S., et al. 2018) this term is evaluated based on user's reading, posting and commenting, including images, videos and reviews (Aluri, Slevitch, & Larzelere, 2015, as cited by John, S., et al. 2018). Social interaction is the extent to which users connect with other users, express their social identity, and communicate interpersonally using the website (Papacharissi & Rubin 2000, as cited by Choi, E. K, et al. 2016). Social media today, is the free space that allows people to interact and exchange between each other. Interaction is considered as an important element that social media offered brands, especially when it comes to creating user-generated content (Wang, Y, et al. 2019; Yadav, M., et al. 2018; Torres, P., et al. 2018), relationship marketing (Abeza, G., et al. 2013) and more it allows to measure the effectiveness of using social media (Achen, R. M. 2017). Moreover, Interaction is fundamental for customer brand engagement (Vivek, 2009). Also, interaction is a behavioral element of customer engagement (Harrigan, P., et al. 2017). According to (Luarn, P., et al. 2015) Interactivity, conjointly with the type of content and its vividness influences customer engagement in term of likes, comments and shares. Plus, interactive content on social-media platforms reinforces consumer-brand interaction (Cheung, M. L., et al. 2020c), and inspires audiences to share their own experiences with their network (Soares, J. 2019). Justifies hypothesis H1-c:

*H1-c: Interaction is related to customer brand engagement.*

**Trendiness** refers to the act of providing the latest information about products or services (Bruno et al., 2016; Naaman et al., 2011). Plus, trendiness reflects the ability of social media platforms to outspread new information (trends) through four elements: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration (Muntinga et al. 2011 as cited by Algharabat, R. S. 2017). Henceforth, it is no coincidence that marketers try to attract the attention of customer constantly by updating brand accounts on social media (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b), since sharing news about the latest products, and other information related to the brand helps building a powerful positive customer brand knowledge (Kim, A. J., et al. 2010). Additionally, social media avails the most updated and trendy information (Khan, Z. et al. 2019) and it drives the customer's attention towards the brand image and the brand (Onyancha, O. B. 2015). This social media element is known as the most influential component of social media marketing (Seo, E. J., et al. 2018; Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020a). Finally, Trendiness is correlated with customer brand engagement (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b), grounding Hypothesis H1-d:

*H1-d: Trendiness is related to customer brand engagement.*

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) refers to any positive or negative comments on a product or brand by potential or actual costumers in an online environment (Monfared, A. R. K., et al. 2021), it's is defined as informal communication between senders and receivers about brands, products, organizations or services for non-commercial aims (Jean 2001 as cited by Tsai, F. M., et al 2020). Also, word of mouth refers to the interpersonal transfer of information that helps in customer decision making (Rahmadini, Y., et al. 2018). It is a key element to marketing decision making (Canbolat, Z. N, et al 2020) and considered to be more convincing because the information provider does not benefit from anything related to the consumer's purchase decision (Hamdani, N. A., et al. 2018). Electronic word-of-mouth therefore appears to be a powerful source of information for consumers looking to compare hosting offers (Ouiddad, S, et al. 2013). This social media element is either positive or negative, in the first case it helps building consumers' positive perceptions towards brands and reinforces their purchase intention (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b; East, R., et al. 2016; Wang, X. 2011). In the other hand negative word of mouth leads lower consumer beliefs about firm quality (Joshi, Y., et al. 2012), lower perceived quality (Ho, C. H., et al. 2010), reduction in demand (Sweeney, A. 2014), to brand hate (Wu, J., 2018) and to the dilution of brand image (Mai, R, et al 2012). Plus, the findings of (Srivastava, M., et al. 2020) shows that Electronic word of mouth affects significantly and positively customer brand engagement. Justifies H1-e:

*H1-e: Electronic word of mouth is related to customer brand engagement.*

## **2. Customer brand engagement and Social media marketing**

Customer brand engagement (CBE) refers to the psychological state generated by the positive interaction between consumers and the brand, including customer experience and the co-creation experience between both actors (YU, J. Y, et al. 2018). According to (Hollebeek, L. D, et al. 2014) This concept is the definition of customer's relationship to the brand that appears through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses externally to the purchasing activity. According to (Halaszovich, T., et al. 2017), this last definition is believed to have an interactive dimension, considered between the customer and the central object which is the brand in our case. Conversely to the one-way interaction definition given by the majority of researches (Dessart et al., 2015). CBE is considered to have an influence on behavioral intentions (Vivek, S. D., et al., 2012).

Along with (Kircova, Ī., et al. 2018), customer brand engagement varies according to multiple factors such as age, education level, income level, the frequency of social media use and the time spent on these medias. Customer brand engagement also has a positive influence on purchase intention (Weerasinghe, K. 2019; Kircova, Ī., et al. 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). Plus, CBE influences the brand experience (Khan, I., et al. 2016;) relationship quality (trust, commitment and satisfaction) (Nysveen, H., et al. 2014) and facilitate the establishment of strong emotional attachment relationships and increase brand loyalty (Yuniari, W., et al. 2020).

Previous studies on customer brand engagement and social media elements, have linked the concept either to brand knowledge, or brand image. (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b) findings shown that EWOM and trendiness as social media components, are the key drivers in strengthening customer brand engagement, which drives brand awareness and brand image. Conferring to (Barger, V. A, et al. 2013), antecedents and consequences of brand engagement can be viewed via social media metrics and indicators similarly to expressions of agreement, ratings, comments, and shares, given the interactive and co-creative nature of these medias. (Barger et al. 2016), prescribed that companies should pay attention to content in social media, so as to urge customers to engage with posts and consequently reinforce customer brand engagement.

The customer brand engagement is treated in many investigations as multidimensional, containing three principal angles: Cognitive processing (CP), Affection (AF), and Activation (AC) (Algharabat, R., et al. 2020; Cheung, M.L, et al. 2020d; Halaszovich, T., et al. 2017; Leckie, C., et al. 2016; Khan, I., et al. 2016; Hollebeek, L. D, et al. 2014). In our study we will consider these dimensions as well.

CBE comprises three distinct dimensions. The first dimension, "cognitive processing" refers to "a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek L. D, et al. 2014) also it represents the way customers process their thoughts related to the brand while interacting with it. This dimension alludes to the cognitive aspect of CBE, and can be characterized as brand-related thoughts handling and assessment, in addition that it is essential to assisting customers in their satisfaction evaluation (Halaszovich, T., et al. 2017).

The subsequent dimension is about the emotional aspect of CBE which is "Affection". It is composed by positive and compelling feelings experienced by purchasers when utilizing a brand (Long-Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012 as cited by Prentice, C., et al. 2019), as the primary element driving consumer engagement (Lima, V. M., et al. 2019), is defined as a consumer's sensation of peace, love, and friendliness to a brand (Indrabrata, A., et al. 2020) and as the definition shows, it is solely related with positive emotions.

Thirdly, "Activation" represents the third dimension of CBE and it indicates the consumers' readiness to invest energy and time on interacting with their focal brand (Leckie et al., 2016; Hollebeek, L. D., et al. 2011). It represents the behavioral actions related to the brand (Hollebeek, L. D., et al. 2011). Along with (Halaszovich, T., et al. 2017), higher levels of activation are more likely to extent customers WOM behavior on social media platforms.

## **3. Customer brand engagement, purchase intention and brand loyalty**

With the propagation of e-commerce and digital businesses, as an alternative to drive sales, knowing the drivers of online purchase intention is an important aspect, for both academicians and practitioners. Online purchase intention as defined by (Meskaran, F., et al. 2013) "a situation where a consumer is willing and intends to make online transactions". Obviously, literature provides strong evidence for the positive impact of online brands engagement on purchase intentions (Hollebeek, L. D., et al. 2014). Customer brand engagement is an influential element in swaying positively purchase intention (Altschwager, T., et al. 2014), plus, it has been adopted in recent literature that effectively customer brand engagement increases purchase intention (Bowden, J. L. H. 2009; Hollebeek, L. D., et al. 2011). In addition to the fact that it has been found that it is crucial to generate purchase intention (Mohr, L. A, et al. 2005 As cited in Ahn, J, et al. 2018).

Researches on customer brand engagement shown that f CBE to other concepts, but CBE appears to positively affect brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011a, 2011b) and customers who participate and engage with brand actions will be satisfied and loyal (Hollebeek, 2011b). Moreover, (Apenes Solem, B. A. 2016) assumed that customers who enter the state of active engagement, participate willingly in brand activities to increase brand satisfaction and loyalty. Based on these findings we hypothesize that promoting consumers'

online brand engagement can promote consumers' online purchase intentions and increase their loyalty to the brand. Grounding Hypothesis H2 and H3:

H2: Customer brand engagement has a positive impact on purchase intention

H3: Customer brand engagement has a positive impact on Brand loyalty

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

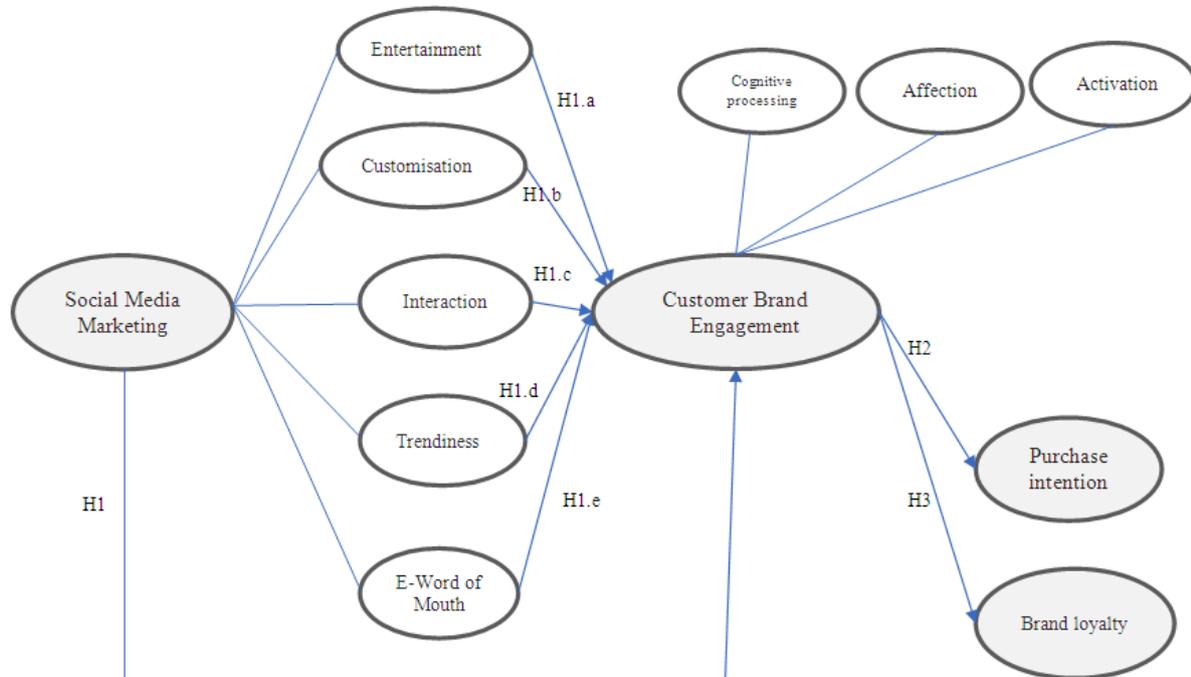


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The appearance of social media has presented new channels of brand communication and the utilization of online apparatuses to draw an engagement with customers. In fact, organizations are effectively utilizing these web-based media to build a friendly relationship with their customers (Saravanakumar, M et al. 2012).

In this research, the findings as shown in the proposed conceptual framework, were essentially social media Marketing centered, through its five components stated by (Kim, A. J. et al. 2012). Social media marketing is, thus, considered as a driver to customer brand engagement. The relationship was examined in the foreign literature such in the works of (Cheung, M. L, et al. 2020b). Hence, customer brand engagement is analyzed as a second order construct containing namely: Cognitive processing, Affection and Activation as first order dimensions (Algharabat, R., et al. 2020; Cheung, M.L, et al. 2020d; Halaszovich, T., et al. 2017; Leckie, C., et al. 2016; Khan, I., et al. 2016; Hollebeek, L. D, et al. 2014).

Hypothetically, we assume that the influence arising from the relationship between social media marketing elements and customer brand engagement is driving to purchase intention (Weerasinghe, K. 2019; Kircova, I., et al. 2018; Vivek et al., 2012) and brand loyalty (Yuniari, W., et al. 2020). Believing that the antecedents or the outcomes of the customer brand engagement cannot be limited nor ignored, given the definition preset by (YU, J. Y, et al. 2018) who defined this concept as a psychological state generated by the positive interaction between consumers and the brand, including customer experience and the co-creation experience between both actors, we believe that there must be more to this relationship, and it cannot be limited to the engagement itself but there are more things, that are particular to every context, that we should try to discover.

Finally, this paper is a proposal of the conceptual framework that we are willing to examine in further researches. First, we wish to examine if this model fits in the Moroccan context and the African countries around sharing similar characteristics with the local population in order to verify its pertinence. Second, we will analyze the subject from an ethical perspective and see how the ethical perception of customers about the marketing practices may influence the relationship between brands and customers.

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