

Professor Iuliana CETINĂ, PhD
E-mail: cetina.iuliana@gmail.com
The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies
Professor Luigi DUMITRESCU, PhD
E-mail: dumitresculuigi@yahoo.com
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Simona VINEREAN, PhD Student
E-mail: simonavinerean@yahoo.com
The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies

EXPLORING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN AN E-SETTING: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF MARKETING EXECUTIVES

***Abstract.** Nowadays, consumers are active contributors to brands in online settings, and their interactions have cognitive, emotional and behavioral connotations. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to outline and explore the discrepancies between existing academic literature on consumer engagement and practitioners' insights on the concept, in relation to their direct experience. Using a qualitative research of marketing experts, this research explores consumer engagement (CE) in terms of its underlying dimensions and measurement methods. The analysis data was collected via depth-interviews with 17 marketing practitioners from international companies. The results of the analysis present intriguing issues for managers and scholars that provide a more comprehensive perspective of the construct in e-marketing.*

***Keywords:** consumer engagement, qualitative research, qualitative analysis, online marketing, online consumer behavior, online metrics.*

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

Nowadays, marketing metrics and analyses allow the understanding of customers in real-time, by observing what they do online, interacting with them on a one-to-one basis. These changes present significant organizational challenges and opportunities. The most important opportunity is that we all become marketers: the critical moments of interaction, or touch-points, between companies and customers are increasingly broader in different parts of the organization, and therefore customer engagement is now the responsibility of every person in the company. However, there are certain challenges organizations face in today's online business environment, particularly in extending the marketing function to influence the touch-points that it does not directly control.

In this framework, the concept of consumer engagement began to emerge as a topic of great interest to scholars, as well as managers and consultants from various industries. Research suggests that, in interactive and dynamic business environments, consumer engagement is a strategic imperative for generating improved corporate performance, including increased sales, superior competitive advantage, and sustained profitability. Organizations are searching for ways to increase consumer engagement with their brands (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). By adopting a perspective that is focused on customer engagement, consumers no longer appear as passive recipients of products and services; they are now recognized as the recipients of marketing cues (Hollebeek, 2011) and proactive participants in interactive processes that generate value through co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Engaged consumers can also generate references for the product / brand, can co-create their experience and value, and contribute to organizational innovation processes (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Brodie et al., 2011b).

Considering the fact that this marketing concept is not yet fully developed, this research aims to provide a better understanding of it by exploring, through a qualitative research, the findings of interview responses obtained from expert marketers in terms of the dimensions of consumer engagement and methods of measurement in an e-setting.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Consumer Engagement Definitions and Dimensions

Consumer engagement is a subject that is gaining attention from marketing practitioners and academics. Ever since 2001, Gallup started elaborating reports in relation to consumer engagement metrics, emphasizing this concept's importance because it represents the primary driver of key business success (Gallup, 2009). Similarly, the Economist Intelligence Unit developed a report in which it positioned engagement as a strategic way of considering relationships with both customers and stakeholders (EIU, 2007). In the academic literature, two major journals presented special issues on consumer engagement in 2010, namely *Journal of Service Research* and the *Journal of Services Marketing*.

Nonetheless, the origins of consumer engagement are rather blurry. The proactivity of consumers, a characterization that is implied in this construct, can be assumed to both relationship marketing theory and to the service-dominant logic (Gronroos, 1997; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Each of these marketing perspectives view consumers as active participants in brand-related interactions that can lead to co-created experiences. In today's marketing framework, consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing programs and initiatives.

Also, the origin to consumer engagement can be attributed to Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. In accordance to this theory, customers who receive highly regarded benefits from a relationship with a company or brand are predicted to reciprocate in developing positive thoughts, recommendations, attitudes and

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

behaviors toward a marketing object (e.g. a product, service, brand, company or experience) (Pervan, Bove, and Johnson, 2009).

The present studies show that a different perspective is currently developing, as customers can co-create value, they can co-create the competitive strategy, collaborate in the innovation process of companies, and can become endogenous to corporations (Van Doorn et al., 2010). The central concept in this perspective is consumer engagement, defined as a behavioral manifestation of consumers for a company or a brand, which has connotations beyond acquisition (Marketing Science Institute, 2010, p.4). Vivek et al. (2012, p.127) considered that this 'beyond acquisition' syntax requires marketing researchers to examine individuals' interaction with the brand, whether they purchase it or not, and consumers' activities that go beyond the traditional decision-making funnel, in terms of searching and evaluating brand alternatives, and then settling for a particular brand.

Moreover, the process leading to consumer engagement comprises a series of sub-processes that reflect the interactive experience of consumers in online brand communities and co-creation of value between community participants in social media networks. The literature of business practice presents several types of objectives of engagement and brand engagement represents the dominant subject in this regard. For example, business consultants at Gallup Group indicated that consumer engagement prints both "rational loyalty" and "emotional attachment" to a particular brand (Gallup, 2009, Brodie et al., 2011a, 2011b). Engaged customers trust a brand, believe in its integrity, and feel pride and passion for that brand.

Different authors and researchers approached engagement from different perspectives. Mollen and Wilson (2010, p. 5) discussed engagement in the context of "brand engagement" within specific online contexts and described this concept as "the 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 et al., 2011b). Hollebeek (2011a, p. 6) approached the construct of "customer brand engagement" and defined it as "the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions" (Brodie et al., 2011b). Vivek et al. (2012, p. 4) define "consumer engagement" as "the intensity of an individual's participation and connection with the organization's offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization". Moreover, Bijmolt et al. (2010) distinguish between three general manifestations of customer engagement: WOM, customer co-creation, and complaining behavior; all of which affecting the brand or firm in ways other than purchase.

Literature review of consumer engagement presented three dimensions of this construct: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Firstly, the cognitive dimension of consumer engagement was mentioned in terms of active and sustained cognitive processes (Mollen and Wilson, 2010), attention (Higgins and Scholer, 2009) and immersion in online activities (Hollebeek, 2011a, b). Secondly, the emotional dimension of consumer engagement was cited in terms of enjoyment (Calder et al., 2009), enthusiasm (Vivek et al., 2012) and passion (Hollebeek, 2011b). Thirdly, the behavioral dimension of consumer engagement was reflected through active participation (Vivek et al., 2012), activation (Hollebeek, 2011b) and usage occasions (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Further, the emotional CE dimension is reflected by Calder et al. (2009) intrinsic enjoyment, Vivek et al. (2012) enthusiasm, and Hollebeek (2011b) passion. Moreover, the behavioral dimension of CE is represented by Vivek et al. (2012) participation, Patterson et al. (2006) vigor, and Hollebeek (2011b) activation. In relation to these theoretical developments, this paper will explore further dimensions of consumer engagement and will propose a definition of the construct based on the findings of the qualitative research of expert marketers.

2.2. Consumer Engagement Measurement

Measurement is a major challenge in implementing consumer engagement initiatives and a main reason why offline companies are reluctant in considering this approach. However, the development of technology has proven to be an exceedingly important instrument for creating, maintaining and enhancing consumer engagement. Specifically, there is an increasing number of online companies that offer customer relationship management online software and applications that make the measurement of consumer engagement an easily accomplishable aspect for companies looking to explore the benefits of this concept. Marketing managers are enthusiastic about consumer engagement, however they have difficulty in implementing this construct due to their perceived lack of quantitative metrics. To overcome these perceived challenges, any consumer engagement indicator should be clear and relevant to the business context and outcomes. Firstly, in terms of the metric being clear, it has to be easily understood by everyone from within and outside the company. Secondly, the relevant or specific nature of the metric implies a connection to business performance, goals and outcome. Gallup's (2009) research has shown that many popular metrics — like Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, and Advocacy (including Net Promoter) — do not consistently demonstrate strong links to key business outcomes. Thus, this research aims to provide valuable insights on available consumer engagement metrics and their applicability.

3. Research Hypotheses

The main aim of this research is to determine the dimensions of online consumer engagement and possible measurement methods and thus enhance the

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

academic literature review in online marketing, while providing actionable tactics for organizations. The next step in the preliminary stage of the marketing research process is to set the objectives and the corresponding hypotheses of the research:

Objective 1: To determine the dimensions that can be used to define CE in an e-setting.

Hypothesis 1: The concept will include at least the following dimensions: interaction, co-creation, satisfaction and loyalty, brand recommendations and advocating initiatives in the online environment.

Objective 2: To determine measurement methods of CE in an e-setting.

Hypothesis 2: Consumer engagement metrics can target online performance indexes (clicks, cross-sharing content, views, exposures, etc.) or observation of loyal customers' interactions with the brand.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Context

This study presents a pioneering research on consumer engagement, which has focused mostly on the definition and exploration of this new construct. Thus, we aim to further extend the work of Vivek et al. (2012) and Hollebeek (2011b) by adopting a qualitative research to examine in-depth perspectives of executives in relation to the customer engagement. Therefore, the qualitative research was used for a better understanding of consumer engagement through insights from online marketing practitioners who have had contact with this consumer behavior concept.

4.2. Measurement and Research Instrument

To enhance the understanding of CE in the views of marketing executives, we used the in-depth interviewing technique, as a data collection tool, which consisted of mainly two questions:

1. In your opinion, what is 'consumer engagement'? How would you define it in the context of your company?
2. Does your company measure consumer engagement? Please expand.

Each participant (expert in online marketing) was interviewed in an online setting to explore his/her attitudes on consumer engagement. Through the interviewing technique, we obtained responses from 17 experts in online marketing, among our personal professional network on LinkedIn, information which was obtained during 22 November and 10 December 2013.

4.3. Sample and Data Collection

The data collection implied the following steps. Firstly, we asked our personal professional contacts on LinkedIn if they would like to participate in our research, considering their online marketing experience, and then we asked them to

Iuliana Cetina, Luigi Dumitrescu, Simona Vinerean

suggest other contacts that might help us in our study. Thus, we employed a snowball sampling, as well as a convenience sampling considering the exploration nature of our research. The interviews we conducted via Skype and Google+ Hangout, at a convenient date for the interviewees. In total, we contacted 30 potential responders with consumer engagement experience, particularly in the e-setting, and we obtained 17 interviews that will be further examined, thus indicating a response rate of 56.67%. Sample structure obtained for this research is presented in Table 1.

Table1. Profile of the respondents

Sex	Industry	City, Country	Company	Frequency
F	Consumer goods	Boston, USA	Procter and Gamble	1
		London, UK	Tesco Direct	1
		New York, USA	Starbucks	1
		Seattle, USA	Starbucks	3
	IT	San Francisco, USA	Adobe	1
Total				7
M	Consumer goods	London, UK	Nestle	1
		Paris, France	Coca Cola	1
	IT	Milano, Italia	Facebook	1
		Sydney, Australia	IBM	1
	Marketing agency	Boston, USA	Hubspot	1
		LA, USA	Brand Learning	1
		Milano, Italy	Freelance	1
		New York, USA	Social Media Fire Starter	1
		Orlando, USA	Guerrilla Mk International	1
	San Francisco, USA	Cubeyou.com	1	
Total				10

5. Analysis and Results

For the qualitative data analysis, we employed a series of techniques and methods to provide quantifiable findings of data that are difficult to interpret in an objective manner. These methods of analysis involve text analysis of the notes taken during the interviews, coding of the interview transcripts, keyword search (Vivek et al., 2012), adding of codes based on respondents' answers, quantitative analysis of codes co-occurrence and similarities, cluster analysis, qualitative interpretation of the responses. The analysis enhanced our perspectives of consumer engagement definition and its underlying dimensions, as well as the measurement methods in order to improve online marketing initiatives and activities.

The qualitative primary data of this research is the informational input that was transferred into a database in a text analysis program, namely QDA Miner

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

v.4.0, used for qualitative data analysis for coding text and graphics, annotating, retrieving and analyzing data and coded documents (QDA Miner User’s Manual, 2011, p.5, p.69). The codes are grouped into categories. In this paper, the three categories were determined according to the objective of each corresponding question. The codes were identified based on text analysis. Table2 presents information regarding the categories of codes, the corresponding codes, frequency and percentage of codes, frequency and percentage of cases (the observations of the qualitative research, which shows a total of 17 expert opinions in relation to consumer engagement).

Table 2. Categories and codes for qualitative data analysis

Category		Code	Codes	% Codes	Cases	% Cases
CE dimensions		Loyalty	4	2.60	4	23.50
		Two-Way Long-Term Relationships	14	9.00	14	82.40
		Emotional Connection	7	4.50	6	35.30
		Customer Value	4	2.60	4	23.50
		Profit Maximization	5	3.20	5	29.40
		Co-created Experiences	7	4.50	7	41.20
		Interactions and Active Participation	14	9.00	14	82.40
		Improvement	4	2.60	4	23.50
CE Measurement	Quantitative CE Measurement	Core Online Metrics / Short Term	11	7.10	11	64.70
		Mk Effectiveness / Long-Term	15	9.70	14	82.40
	Qualitative CE Measurement	Comments / Reviews	8	5.20	8	47.10
		Tracking Influencers	6	3.90	6	35.30

In the next sections of the analysis, based on the categories and codes presented in Table 2, we will analyze the qualitative data of the research. Data analysis is based on the observation of co-occurrences and the method of clustering codes, methods that will be discussed for each of the three categories: ‘Consumer engagement definition and dimensions’ and ‘Consumer engagement measurement’. Consumer / customer engagement will be further shortened to CE.

The software used for qualitative data analysis calculated similarities and the index of co-occurrence and provided hierarchical cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling of codes (QDA Miner User’s Manual, 2011). In order to obtain a clustering of codes in text analysis, we used the co-occurrence method for defining the clusters, and the similarities of the resulting clusters’ components are

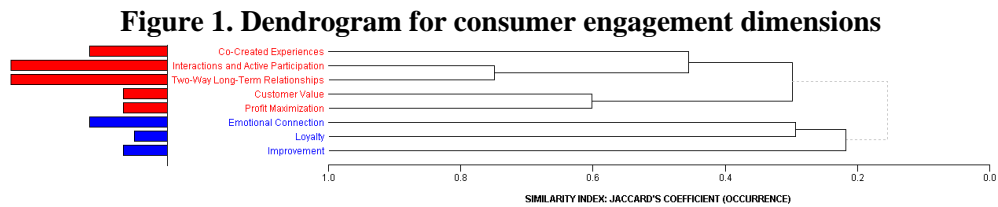
calculated with the Jaccard index. This coefficient is a statistical indicator used to compare the similarity and diversity in datasets and is calculated using the following formula (Stanford.edu, 2014):

$$S_J = \frac{a}{a+b+c}$$

where S_J = Jaccard similarity coefficient,
 a = cases which appear in both sets (Q and D),
 b = number of cases occurring only in the first set (Q), but not in the second set (D),
 c = number of cases occurring only in the second set (D), but not in the first set (Q).

5.1. Consumer Engagement Definition and Dimensions

In light of the first research question that explored various definitions and dimensions of consumer engagement, we followed the co-occurrences of specific codes assigned for this variable, and for clustering, we used the Jaccard index. Thus, two segments were formed and are presented in the dendrogram below (Figure1).



To obtain the dendrogram, QDA Miner uses the hierarchical clustering method based on group averages links to create a matrix of similarities. In figure 1, we can observe the codes of the consumer engagement dimensions on the vertical axis, and the clusters formed at each stage of the grouping procedure on the horizontal axis. The codes that tend to occur together are combined at an early stage, while the codes that are independent of each other or the ones that do not appear together tend to be combined at the end of the clustering process.

The first segment formed for the definition and dimensions of consumer engagement consists of co-created experiences (code noted in 7 of 17 responses), interaction and active participation (code mentioned in 14 of 17 responses), two-way long term relationships, profit maximization, and customer value.

By compiling the responses from the 17 experts in online marketing who work in three industries, the first segment, elaborated for detecting the dimensions of consumer engagement, emphasized the importance of this new concept in a

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

strategic context where the focus should be on creating interactive valuable relationships that can bring contributions to maximize the benefits sought by both parties (consumer and company).

Regarding this segment's codes, both interactions, namely the active participation of consumers, and long-term mutual beneficial relationships appeared in 14 out of 17 total responses, thus denoting their importance in defining consumer engagement in online environments. These elements are extremely important in the current business environment, since, as one respondent noted, today 'profitable' no longer means counting sales at the end of the year. Therefore, consumer engagement involves complex analyses of customers, which are generally applied to maximize long-term customer value and to detect ways to involve consumers in the brand creating system (Male, Italy, Marketing agency). Another respondent from Starbucks, the world-wide famous coffee-shop, mentioned that in their company and global operations consumer engagement implies "building meaningful relationships with customers, while fostering customer loyalty" (Male, USA, Consumer goods company). Other respondents used similar words, such as: friendship, interdependent needs, authentic.

Although the process of building such relationships are two-way, and hopefully for the company it includes a long-term timeframe and profitability as a result of loyalty, usually the company is the one that starts this relationships with the customers it is trying to engage. Further along in the relationship, the consumer may develop different behaviors in his/her relationship with the company.

Field interviews also confirmed that consumer engagement can have different objectives than the purely financial ones: "Consumer engagement is the result of an interaction between a consumer and a company through a variety of marketing initiatives that happen mostly online. The main aim of consumer engagement is to develop a long-standing substantial impact on a behavioral dimension (such as sale or price offer) or on an attitudinal dimension (such as changed attitude, pleasant impression)" (Female, USA, Consumer goods company).

Participants in the research also point out the different outcomes of consumer engagement, particularly individual consumers of brands, may have in an online setting. On one hand, in an e-setting there are actual customers who may display, among other dimensions (cognitive, emotional), direct behavioral outcomes (such as buying a marketing offer) which translate into customer value with profitability connotations for the company. On the other hand, there are consumers of the brand or aspirational consumers who have emotional outcome and are engaged with the company, even though they may not afford to buy the brand. As one interviewee suggested: "Consumers may be engaged with a brand and promote it online even if they are not customers of that brand. And this level of

engagement happens particularly for luxury brands: high-fashion and accessories, luxury resorts or travel destinations, expensive cars, and so on. They love these brands and are engaged with them, but do not contribute to the bottom line of the company. Should these companies include them in their consumer engagement programs and measurement methods?” (Male, USA, Marketing Agency).

The second segment consists of consumer engagement dimensions such as establishing an emotional connection, improving the business and loyalty to delineate the dimensions of engagement of consumers in view of the qualitative research respondents.

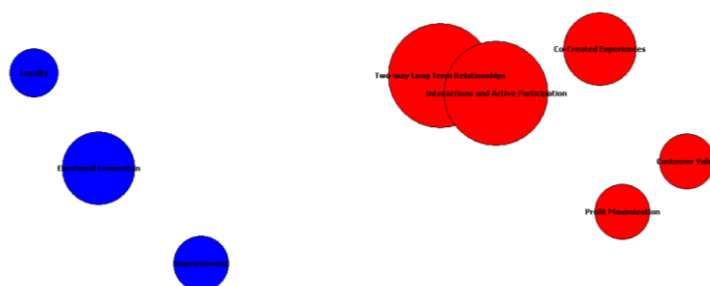
In this second formed segment of CE dimensions, 7 of the 17 respondents mentioned the emotional connection as a necessary element in the formation of this construct, four respondents said that loyalty is a determinant of the concept, while other 4 comments mentioned that consumer engagement leads to improved marketing activities, whether considering the online activities of further developing the digital marketing strategy, or the offline activities of product development. In this sense, the interviewees mentioned the need to provide consumers with ways of improving the activities of a companies, in terms of listening to their suggestions on ways to develop or enhance the product or experience and supporting them.

Another opportunity for companies is tracking consumer loyalty and rewarding the most loyal customers (Male, USA, Brand Learning – Marketing Agency / Platform).

Several interviewees brought up the idea of emotional connection as a dimension of online activities, particularly because there are certain aspects that have to be overcome in order for a brand or marketing object to be relevant to a consumer in an online setting, compared to an offline one. Thus, marketing experts emphasized the ideas such as ‘emotional impression’, ‘consumer impact’, ‘trust’, and ‘mutual respect’. Due to the nature of the Internet, consumers have a much more power of choice and decision, since the customer can choose how, when, where they want to interact with brands for which they feel loyalty. In this context, the development of positive experiences with emotional connotation will become the differentiator between brands that are resilient on an ever-evolving market.

Figure 2 presents a concept map of the proximity values calculated for all the included items (codes or cases) using multidimensional scaling. Colors are used to represent whether a code belongs to segment one or two, namely, red is used for segment 1 and blue for segment 2 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Concept map for consumer engagement dimensions



The elements of segment 1 with the highest rates of occurrence in this qualitative research, namely ‘interaction and active participation’ and ‘two-way long-term relationships’, appear superimposed on the conceptual map and are relatively independent from the other codes of segment 1. The three codes of segment 2, appear relatively independent from each other.

The similarity matrix is a matrix of scores representing the similarity of a number of data points. Each element of the similarity matrix contains a measure of similarity between two codes of the analysis. The similarity matrix is closely related to the co-occurrences matrix and follows this formula (QDA, 2011):

where
$$S_{ij} = \frac{C_{ij}}{\sqrt{C_i \cdot C_j}}$$
 = co-occurrence between two codes, i.e. the number of expressions that contain both codes, together

$$C_i$$
 = the occurrence, or frequency, of each code

Table3. Similarity matrix of CE dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Co-created Experiences	1							
2.Emotional Connection	0.083	1						
3. Improvement	0.222	0.250	1					
4. Interactions and Active Participation	0.500	0.333	0.200	1				
5. Loyalty	0.222	0.250	0.143	0.125	1			
6. Profit Maximization	0.222	0.111	0.143	0.286	0.000	1		
7. Two-Way Long Term Relationships	0.400	0.333	0.200	0.750	0.286	0.286	1	
8. Customer Value	0.375	0.000	0.143	0.286	0.143	0.600	0.286	1

Table 3 shows which relationships are considered important by the respondents in defining and establishing the dimensions that concur to consumer engagement. The highest score (0.750) was recorded between codes studying the interaction and active participation of consumers in relation to the bivalent relationship with the prospect of perpetuity. The same score of 0.333 was obtained for these two variables (interaction and active participation of consumers and long-term relationships in both directions) in parallel with the emotional connection of consumers, as an additional dimension, identified as necessary in developing online consumer engagement.

An important score was identified for the similarities between ‘customers value’ and ‘profit maximization’ (0.600). Therefore, the respondents still consider acquisition and customer retention activities extremely important in determining in the online environment, since these activities meet the requirement of profitability of companies.

The variable that studied ‘co-creation experiences’ recorded significant amounts of similarity both with the necessary interactivity of engagement (0.500), and with the developing of mutually beneficial long term relationships between the company and its clients (0.400).

Table 4 presents the co-occurrences for the dimensions observed for the definition of consumer engagement. When the distances of the research codes and cases are based on the co-occurrences of events, table4 displays detailed information such as how many times the codes of the analysis appear with a certain selected code (in this case, we selected the ‘co-creation experiences’ as the main code) and how many times each code in the analysis occurs in the absence the main selected code (QDA Miner, 2011, p. 176). Table 4 also presents how many times the main target code occurs in the absence of the other paired code (displayed in the ‘Is Absent’ column of Table 4).

**Table 4. Co-occurrence of codes for CE dimensions
(Target code: Co-Created Experiences)**

Keyword	Co-Occurs	Do Not	Is Absent	Jaccard Coefficient	Relationship Intensity
Interactions and Active Participation	7	7	0	0.500
Two-Way Long Term Relationships	6	8	1	0.400
Customer Value	3	1	4	0.375
Profit Maximization	2	2	5	0.222

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

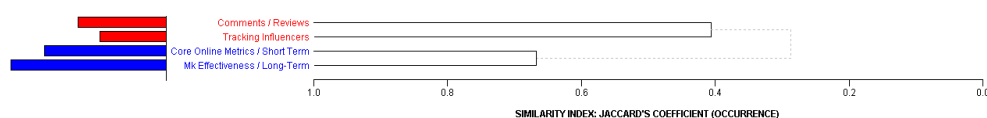
Loyalty	2	2	5	0.222	••••••••
Improvement	2	2	5	0.222	••••••••
Emotional Connection	1	5	6	0.083	••••

In table 4, we can see on the first row that of the table the relationship with the strongest intensity that studied how the code for ‘Interactions and Active participation’ co-occurs seven times with ‘Co-created Experiences’, and another seven times without this selected code. Moreover, ‘Co-created Experiences’ is so closely related to the target code that never appears without it in the responses of the online marketing experts for this research, thus emphasizing the connection of this two variables. Similarly, the ‘Emotional Connection’ variable appears only once with ‘Co-created Experiences’ and five times without this code. Additionally, ‘Co-created Experiences’ appears without any mention of the emotional connotation for consumer a number of six times.

5.2. Consumer Engagement Measurement

To understand the methods of consumer engagement measurement, namely the metrics which are used by the companies that appear in this research, we addressed once again the method of hierarchical clustering based on the average of the connections to create groups from the matrix of similarities. Figure 3 displays on the vertical axis the codes of the measurement methods used to establish online consumer engagement, and on the horizontal axis the clusters formed at each stage of the grouping technique. The codes that tend to occur together are combined at an early stage, while the codes that are rather independent from each other or do not appear together tend to be combined at the end of the clustering process. The resulting two segments are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Dendrogram for consumer engagement measurement



The first emerged segment to study the measurement methods of consumer engagement identifies qualitative metrics, such as the monitoring of comments or reviews and influencers or fans.

By compiling the responses from the 17 marketing experts, in the first segment consists of the qualitative approach to measuring consumer engagement. Tracking influencers appeared in 6 responses (considering the total of 17

observations) and represents a long-term metric, which can be used to monitor the capitalization of the brand and the influential or target customers in order to observe how they interact with the marketing object in the online environment. A CEO of a marketing agency mentioned that for their contracting companies they develop this qualitative approach to CE measurement by analyzing comments, posts, and messages of advocates (Male, USA). In support of this idea, a female executive from a consumer goods company asserted this practice through the monitoring a small group of influencers and observing how they interact with their brand. This measurement technique is preferred to mass-market practices, such as email campaign, for instance.

Monitoring the comments and reviews of a brand's audience in an e-setting represents another qualitative way of assessment and evaluation of consumer engagement, and this code is present in 8 expert responses in this research. From this perspective, companies observe how consumers support their brand in the online environment, through 'listening' tools and online consumer feedback analysis (Female, USA, Consumer goods company).

The second segment consists of quantitative methods used for measuring consumer engagement, that capture both the long-term (by estimating marketing effectiveness) and short-term perspective (by measuring basic online metrics).

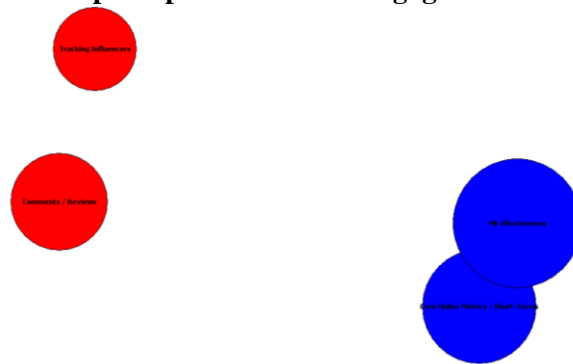
In segment 2, the long-term quantitative indicator mentioned by respondents takes the form of marketing effectiveness, as this code has 14 appearances (out of a total of 17 observations). The forms of measuring the effectiveness of online marketing activities consist of listening tools, evaluating customer lifetime value, multivariate A/B testing, control groups, segmentation of marketing tactics to address e-customers in a tailored manner, customer relationship management, requests for offers, downloads, tracking the customer journey. A digital marketer from a marketing platform from Italy mentioned that they measure how many consumers fill out an online form and then those specific consumers are monitored in a CRM software with an ID of the campaign. Quarterly, the company measures the number of campaign contacts with the number of actual clients.

The second quantitative indicator captures short-term basic online metrics and is mentioned in 11 observations of the analysis. Basic analytical online metrics can be evaluated in terms of total audience for blog or social media posts, number of fans / followers/ likes / +1s / supporters/ advocates, traffic on main site, product requests, sharing, comments, tweets, cross-sharing of content, clicks, click rate, video views, visit duration, visit frequency (direct traffic to the website – via a URL or bookmark – or indirect traffic), percentage of returning visitors, when was the last visit, depth of the visit (% of site visited), sales growth. One respondent from an online marketing agency said that he develops campaigns targeting Twitter and assigns a campaign code that is captured via a single application form on the landing page of the campaign for a better monitoring of short-term consumer engagement (Male, Australia, IT company).

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

Again, we developed a concept map using multidimensional scaling (Figure 4). Colors are used to represent the codes' membership for each segment: red for segment 1, and blue for segment 2. Thus, the two codes associated with segment 1, namely consumer comments and tracking influencers, are relatively independent from each other, because they do not appear together on the chart. Items in segment 2 show an approximation of the codes that study the short and long term metrics of consumer engagement.

Figure 4. Concept map for consumer engagement measurement



Again, we developed the co-occurrence table (Table5) for consumer engagement measurement, and we evaluated each element of each of the two segments (of quantitative and qualitative metrics) in relation to the other elements. This table reflects the distance between a target code and the other object on an axis, more specifically, for segment 2 (the qualitative measurement of CE) we targeted consumer comments, and for segment 1 (the quantitative measurement of CE) we targeted the basic online metrics, to establish the short-term quantifiable perspective of consumer engagement. In (Table 5), we can observe the most intense relationship between long-term marketing effectiveness and short-term basic online metrics, as they co-appear together on ten occasions. The latter code appears only one time without the long-term indicator of consumer engagement. The relationship between these two quantitative indicators of CE has the highest Jaccard coefficient of 0.667.

Table 5. Co-occurrence of codes for CE measurement

Target Code	Keyword	Co-Occurs	Do Not	Is Absent	Jaccard Coefficient	Relationship Intensity
Core Online Metrics	Marketing Effectiveness	10	4	1	0.667
Comments/ Reviews	Tracking Influencers	4	2	4	0.400

We also compiled the Similarity matrix for the codes established for consumer engagement measurement (Table 6). Table 6 presents which relationships are the most important by the experts interviewed for this research, in order to establish the best measures to evaluate and control consumer engagement. Thus, the highest score (0.667) was recorded for the codes of segment 2, which studied the short and long term quantitative indicators. An important score identified for the elements of segment 1, which studied the qualitative measures of consumer engagement, was for the relationship between ‘Influencers’ and ‘Comments / reviews’ (0.400).

Table 6. Similarity matrix of CE measurement

	Comments/ Reviews	Marketing Effectiveness	Core Online Metrics	Tracking Influencers
Comments/ Reviews	1.000			
Marketing Effectiveness	0.375	1.000		
Core Online Metrics	0.357	0.667	1.000	
Tracking Influencers	0.400	0.250	0.133	1.000

6. Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The study approaches two fundamental perspectives, managerial and methodological, that relate to the consumer engagement construct in the academic and professional literature. This research was aimed at an enhancing of marketing literature in terms of providing a comprehensive understanding of consumer engagement. The theoretical contributions represent the result of a qualitative research conducted among marketing executives who implement this construct in an online setting. Also, this research provides future enquiries, which are required to expand theoretical contributions.

This research has provided new insights into the underlying nature of consumer engagement. Further, the paper has sought to solidify the conceptual frameworks proposed by previous researchers. In the literature review of this concept, we can observe different authors who present CE as a construct that encompasses all three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. In this sense, this study provides further support of their theoretical developments and providing insights from practitioners who concur to this holistic perspective of consumer engagement.

Exploring Consumer Engagement in an E-setting: A Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

As a theoretical contribution of the study, we propose the following definition of consumer engagement, meant to enhance the development of this construct in an online environment. Therefore:

Consumer engagement represents the active participation in mutual beneficial relationships that can lead to co-created experiences between companies and consumers, especially in an e-setting. In a broader view, CE implies establishing an emotional connection with each interaction or touch-point that enhances the brand, provides improvement opportunities and/or has positive impact on the profitability of an organization, by emphasizing customer loyalty and value.

Our conceptualization of consumer engagement contributes to this marketing literature area by stressing the importance of understanding consumer behavior in terms of interactions and emotional connections with the marketing object, whether they are buying or not even considering buying the brand. Through the literature review and exploratory qualitative research, this study proposes the following findings:

- CE should be regarded as a tri-dimensional construct, in terms of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral manifestations of consumers;
- Active participation represents the keystone in CE because it presents with future enhancement (brand awareness from actual, potential and aspirational consumers) and improvement opportunities of the marketing object (in relation to marketing tactics and product ideas);
- Personalized experiences that reflect an understanding of consumer needs, wants, and previous contact with the company will be the main differentiator in an online setting;
- The intangibility of the Internet should be surpassed by emphasizing emotional aspects that lead to trust and a longer relationship with an organization.

These findings present valuable and relevant insights and perspectives for marketing scholars and executives. Specifically, enhanced scholarly understanding of consumer engagement is useful and necessary in the context of predicting and explaining focal consumer behavior outcomes (Bowden, 2009) in e-settings.

6.2. Implications for Managers

Nowadays, technology is the number one accelerator of any business. Consequently, organizations are facing a double dilemma. Traditionally, in most industries, the rivalry between companies leads to increasing prices and quality levels. However, as consumers have more choices than ever, their decision making process increases in complexity, by including a series of other variables. This change does not occur only in business-to-consumer industries, but it also happens in business-to-business frameworks.

Consumer engagement is changing marketing. Marketers no longer have the sole job of selling products or services, their job now implies creating an active and passionate basis of online consumers around the brand. In the context of today's business environment setting, customer engagement is suggested to generate improved organizational performance, including sales growth, competitive advantage and superior profitability (Hollebeek, 2011).

The participating organizations in this research have placed customer engagement at the basis of their growth strategy in order to win in highly competitive markets. The expert marketers who participated in this study understand a simple fact: organizations that focus on engaging their customers outperform those that do not. As a tangible discovery of this study of interviews with executives in a variety of fields, embracing technology can lead to an authentic relationship with customer (B2B or B2C) by learning from each interaction with the customer. Consumers teach companies what they need and what they do not get from a particular company, probably much more than what companies are trying to teach consumers about using their products or their advantages from purchasing. By acknowledging this benefit, online marketing strategy can be transformed and can lead to impressive results.

6.3. Limitations and Future Directions of Research

Our study, of course, presents certain shortcomings that can be regarded as future options of research in consumer engagement. The results are preliminary, and, thus a further investigation is necessary, both by extending the qualitative study and by using these findings in a quantitative research. Doing so, will enable executives to use this construct to its full potential and scholars to examine it and propose scales in order to test applicability across contexts (Vivek et al, 2012). Moreover, empirical research addressing the nature of CE interrelationships with other concepts is also required (Hollebeek, 2011b), which may involve econometric and structural equation modeling (Brodie et al., 2011).

Further, a limitation of this study can be considered the fact that the published articles of consumer engagement were not included in the text mining software, to provide a more comprehensive view, both in terms of interpreting insights on engagement from scholars and practitioners. Another limitation of the study is the relatively small sample of the qualitative research. However, the sample consists of valuable online marketers from B2B and B2C well-recognized international companies. This research leaves further questions that need answers, for instance how does different intensity levels of CE impact marketing performance? How can companies manage different levels of engagement among existing customers and aspirational consumers of the brand?

REFERENCES

- [1] **Bijmolt, T., Leeflang, P., Block, F., Eisenbeiss, M., Hardie, B., Lemmens, A. and Saffert, P. (2010)**, *Analytics for Customer Engagement*. *Journal of Service Research*, 13 (3), 341—356;
- [2] **Blau, P. (1964)**, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: Wiley;
- [3] **Bowden, J. (2009)**, *The process of Customer Engagement: A Conceptual Framework*. *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 17 (1), 63—74;
- [4] **Brodie, R., Ilic, A., Juric, B., Hollebeek, L. (2011a)**, *Consumer Engagement in a Virtual Brand Community*. *Journal of Business Research*, 14(3), 252-271;
- [5] **Brodie, R., Hollebeek, L., Juric, B., Ilic, A. (2011b)**, *Customer Engagement Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research*. *Journal of Service Research*, 14 (3), pp. 252—271;
- [6] **Cetina, I., Orzan, G. (2006)**, *Possibilities of Implementing a Service Quality Information System; Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, ASE Publishing, Issues 1-2, 169-177;
- [7] **Economist Intelligence Unit (2007)**, *Beyond Loyalty: Meeting the Challenge of CE*. [pdf] Available online at: <http://www.adobe.com/engagement/pdfs/partI.pdf> ;
- [8] **Gallup (2009)**, *Customer Engagement: What's Your Engagement Ratio?* Available online at: <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/157187/customer-engagement-core-strategy.aspx> ;
- [9] **Gronroos, C. (1997)**, *Value-driven Relational Marketing: From Products to Resources and Competencies*. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13, 407—419;
- [10] **Higgins, E.T., Scholer, A.A. (2009)**, *Engaging the Consumer: The Science and Art of the Value Creation Process*. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 19 (2), 100-114;
- [11] **Hollebeek, L.D. (2011a)**, *Demystifying Customer Brand Engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus*. *Journal of Marketing Management* 27 (7–8), 785–807;
- [12] **Hollebeek, L.D. (2011b)**, *Exploring Customer Brand Engagement: Definition & themes*. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 19 (7), 555–573;
- [13] **Lusch, R.F., Vargo, S.L., Tanniru, M. (2010)**, *Service, Value Networks and Learning*; *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(1), 19–31;
- [14] **Marketing Science Institute, (2010)**, *2010-2012 Research priorities*. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute, Available online at: <http://www.msi.org/research/index.cfm?id=271>;

-
- [15] Mollen, A., Wilson, H., (2010), *Engagement, Telepresence and Interactivity in Online Consumer Experience. Reconciling scholastic and managerial perspectives*. *Journal of Business Research* 63 (9–10), 919–925;
- [16] Pervan, S.J., Bove, L.L., Johnson, L.W. (2009), *Reciprocity as a Key Stabilizing Norm of Interpersonal Marketing Relationships: Scale Development and Validation*. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 38, 60–70;
- [17] Pham, M. T., Avnet, T. (2009), *Rethinking Regulatory Engagement Theory*. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19 (2), 115–123;
- [18] Prahalad, C.K., Ramaswamy, V. (2004). *Co-creation of Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation* ; *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14;
- [19] Ruxanda, G. (2009), *Supervised Pattern Recognition with Potential Functions Method*; *Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, No.1. ASE Publishing, , Bucharest, 43-61;
- [20] QDA Miner Qualitative Data Analysis Software - User's Guide. (2011). [e-book] Montreal, Canada: Provalis Research. Available online at: <http://www.provalisresearch.com/Documents/QDAMiner32.pdf>
- [21] Stanford.edu. (2014), *Jaccard coefficient*. [online] Available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~maureenh/quals/html/ml/node68.html>
- [22] Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K.E., Mittal, V., Nab, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., Verhoef, P.C., (2010), *Customer Engagement Behavior: Theoretical Foundations and Research Directions*. *Journal of Service Research* 13 (3), 253–266;
- [23] Vargo, S.L., Lusch, R.F. (2008), *Service-dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution*. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 36 (1), 1–10;
- [24] Vivek, S., Beatty, S., Morgan, R. (2012), *Customer Engagement: Exploring Customer Relationships beyond Purchase*. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 20 (2), 122-146.