



Research Paper

Customer Engagement in Social Media Brand Community

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ABSTRACT: Given the growth of social networking sites (SNS), especially Facebook, companies have commenced engaging with customers in this newly emerged digital space. This study investigates the role of brand trust and brand love in enhancing engagement throughout Facebook. The effect of customer engagement on brand loyalty is also examined.

Data was collected using a survey of 400 Syrian fast-food customers. The model is examined by structural equations modeling (SEM). The findings revealed that brand trust and brand love are considered drivers of customer engagement, also brand loyalty is an outcome of customer engagement. Moreover, the finding provides a model which brand managers can follow to build brand loyalty. It will add value in the field of Brand Management.

KEY WORDS: Brand Community, Brand Trust, Brand loyalty, Brand Love, Customer engagement,

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of engagement has gained much attention from many scholars. For instance, many researchers have explored the concept of engagement in sociology, political science, educational psychology, organizational behavior, and, in recent times, in the marketing discipline [1], [2], [3].

The birth of social media has inspired consumers and adjusted the dynamics of traditional marketing by supplying customers with platforms efficient of reaching large audiences and empowering active engagement between organizations and their customers through online two-way communication[4].

With its interactive and viral nature, social media was capable to convert the traditional one-way marketing interaction into two-way communication between firms and consumers[5], as it inspires active engagement and assists in brand community building [6]. This has driven the creation of a new communication paradigm that improved the power of marketing-associated conversations between consumers and organizations regardless of any time or location boundaries [7]. In brief, social media is becoming prevalent as a marketing platform to the extent that Ashley & Tuten[8] considered it a fifth P together with the conventional 4Ps of the marketing mix.

Specifically, Facebook is acquiring the attention of marketers, subsequently, it is the most popular social networking site worldwide with 1.69 billion monthly active users [9]. General Motors employs 30 \$billion annual investment on s creating content for their online community on Facebook [10].

Firms are building their brand communities on Facebook with their distinctive purposes, but universally the communities signify marketing investments of these companies to build a long-lasting relationship with their customers by simplifying communication between the firm and its customers[11], [12].

However, many companies exerting efforts by employing social media for effective marketing communication purposes, especially with maintaining customers engaged [13]. Hence, there is a crucial need for empirical studies revealing the factors encouraging consumers to interact with brands on social media, that factors can be decisive to the success of marketing campaigns, besides explaining why consumers get to engaged with brands on social media, [14], so that effective social media communication strategies are framed by marketers [15].

In order to make these investments increase revenues, marketing managers require a full understanding of positive financial outcomes (such as loyalty) of engaging customers on their brand communities. Even though that the term 'engagement' is broadly used by brand managers when speaking about their aims for members of their online brand communities, that term is not yet adequately investigated by scholars[16]. This is because the

concept of consumer engagement appeared in the area of social media marketing recently to describe relationships that are established among consumers and brands through online communities[17].

Whereas customer engagement has been identified as one of the principal research priorities of the Marketing Science Institute[10], up to now, academic research on this new concept is still evolving, principally in the context of social media[18].

Moreover, customer engagement in the brand community needs deeper attention. In response to this call, the current research aims to empirically investigate some antecedents (brand trust and brand love) and (brand loyalty) as a consequence of customer engagement.

The article is organized as follows. The literature review of the constructs, following by the description of the questionnaire with the members of online brand communities on Facebook. The empirical inspection of the study is presented after that. The final section concludes the article by discussing the implications and limitations of the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section presents the literature related to the constructs of this research.

I. Customer Engagement

The term of customer engagement has become a very hot topic in the marketing literature, and it is a sub-concept within the umbrella term "engagement" [9], [19],[20]. In the study of consumer-brand relations, consumer engagement is considered a hot topic[21],[22]. So et al [23]defined Customer Engagement *as a customers' personal connection to a brand as manifested in cognitive, affective, and behavioral actions a customer's connection to a brand as reflected in cognitive, affective, and behavioral actions outside of the Purchase situation*

Given the importance of this topic, Kotler and Armstrong[24, p. 42] added a special section in the sixteenth edition, for customer engagement in their book "Marketing Principles" that they defined customer engagement marketing as *"making the brand a meaningful part of consumers' conversations and lives by fostering direct and continuous customer involvement in shaping brand conversations, experiences and community"*. Given increased adoption of social media brand communities, the concept 'consumer engagement' has been applied to describe the nature of consumers' interactive activities inside these online communities[25]. Consequently, this has guided the consumer engagement research in the recent few years,[26], [27].

Social media channels have been adopted to engage consumers after the eagerness of marketers with two-way communication capabilities provided by social media platforms[28].and strengthen by rapid growth in brand pages on Facebook for engaging consumers [29]. These pages ease engagement, where consumers can join their preferred brand pages, consumption experiences, and share brand stories within the online communications among consumers about brands, other consumers, and suppliers [28]. This has enabled consumers to turn out to be co-creators and transporter of brand messages, which provides companies an immense opportunity to benefit from free word of mouth [30].

Regarding recent academic interest, it is assumed that consumer engagement research will supply an important improvement in relationship marketing[31],[9].

II. Brand trust

Trust is considered a significant component for the creation of successful relationships [32]. It is widely agreed that one of the fundamental roles of marketing is to create a sense of involvement between consumers and brands, in which brand trust characterizes the base of this bond [33]. Trust can be clarified as the extent to which a consumer believes that a particular brand satisfies customer desire [34].Lee et al[35]viewed brand trust as the customer's willingness to depend on the capability of a brand to perform its function as expected.

Brand trust concept is reflected very principal in the social media context and online brand communities [32], as consumers recognize higher risk while interacting with in an online context [36].

As consumers rely on heavily on social networks in their searching for information and in making buying It is very important for them to feel the trustworthiness of information and updates which find on these networks. Because of the importance of brand trust, some studies assessed its role in directing consumer behavior in the online context. Such as Park and Kim[37]perceived that there is a positive relationship between consumers' trust in brands in the offline context and their perceived trust in online interactions with these brands. These findings underline the vital role offline brand trust plays in leading consumer behavior in online environments.

Given the significance of brand trust, some researchers examined its role in inspiring consumer behavior in the online context. For instance, Hahn and Kim[38]observed that there is a positive relationship between consumers' trust in brands in the offline context and their perceived confidence in online interactions with these brands. These outcomes emphasize the vital role offline brand trust plays in leading consumer behavior in online environments. We argue that the consumers' trust in certain brands that have developed as a result of their previous

interactions with these brands will influence their eagerness to continue their relationships with these brands on social media, Therefore, we hypothesize the following hypotheses:

H1: Brand trust has a positive effect on consumers' engagement.

III. Brand Love

Marketing literature exhibited an huge interest in studying the emotional relationships among consumers and brands[9], [39]. Brand love is one of the most important marketing concepts that attracted the attention of researchers and academics on a wide scale[40], [9].

Kang and Love[41]described it as the level of affection attachment that your customers content on a product brand. Brand love can reinforce the existent bonds between consumers and brands, fortifies the belief in the brand, encourages the relationship, improves trust, and will eventually increase consumer retention [9].Consumers in love with a brand are more keen to repeat purchase and to endorse the brand to other consumers [42]. They will regularly pick the brand over any other and even forgive and minimize a problem if it has happened [43].In the era of social media, consumers can express their interest and emotional connection in specific brands by following them on several social media platforms [12].

Active engagement contains WOM, visiting brand websites, and purchasing brand products [13]. Brand love has a positive influence on active engagement which proposes that brand love leads not only to WOM, as found by Carroll and Ahuvia[44], but also to other brand-related activities [45]. According to this viewpoint, we hypothesis the following:

H2: Brand love has a positive effect on consumers' engagement

IV. Brand loyalty

The concept of brand loyalty has been recognized as a significant construct in the marketing literature for at least four decades [4], and most researchers agree that brand loyalty is one of the most valuable assets in successful companies [46], it supplies many benefits, it produces and achieve the competitive advantage of the organization, increase great market share, captivate new customers, and decreasing marketing costs [47], increasing brand strength against competitors' risks[48], brand loyalty is considered essential for any company that intends to achieve long term satisfactory market and economic performance [49]. These benefits noticeably show the positive effect of brand loyalty can endure on the company. According toMalik and Ahmad[50, p53] proposed a definition that effectually revealed these profits, by asserting that “*brand loyalty can be defined as the customer's unconditional commitment and a strong relationship with the brand, which is not likely to be affected under normal circumstances*”. Shamah et al[51]explain that brand loyalty considers a vital part of the communication and customer-relationship building process, a well-organized communication that a brand has with the consumers is the steppingstone towards creating a strong customer relationship. Also, Grott[52] defined it as “*The consumer's level of commitment to the repurchase of a preferred brand*”.Customer engagement has been perceived as a concept anticipated to produce improved predictive and clarifying power of consumer behaviour outcomes, involving loyalty towards the brand[53], also Naumann and Bowden[54] has defined CE as “a psychological process” that stimulates customer loyalty. More than that a connection pattern that consumers perform with other consumers, companies, and particular brands that is valuable to enhance brand loyalty[55]. Customer engagement is regarded as a possible antecedent to repetitive purchases (behavioural loyalty) motivated by a fervent internal disposition over a certain period [54]. There has been broad literature on customer repeat purchases in the marketing topic as an outcome of satisfaction, involvement, and positive customer experience, customer engagement literature also, researchers have discovered a positive influence of engagement on repeat purchase [56], [57], moreover, it was mentioned that engagement not only play an imperative impact on loyalty intentions but also manifest significantly more variation in loyalty as comparing with traditional patterns involving value, quality, and satisfaction [58, p. 102].

Customer Engagement has been proposed to be a superior predictor of customer loyalty related to traditional relational constructs in interactive environments, where[59]study considered that traditional models such as satisfaction, comfort, and usability are indicators of customer loyalty but include only the cognitive side in making a customer's purchase decisions, while customer engagement is considered the influencing factor in the consumer decision-making and thus provides additional predictive power to the customer's loyalty.

H3: Consumers' engagement has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

III. METHODOLOGY

I. The Model

A research framework was designed to test the above-hypothesized relationships. The model to be tested results from the hypotheses previously are presented in(see figure 1)

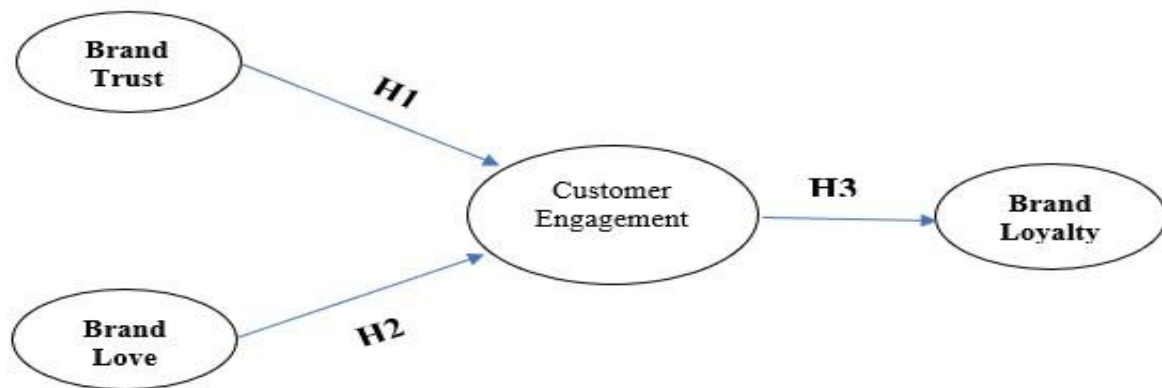


Figure. 1. Conceptual Model

II. Sample’s Definition

In order to test the proposed model, we select a sample of young Syrian - fast-food consumers whose aged between [18-29] years old, 400 participants, The sample comprised of (230) were males which form (57.5%) of the total sample, and (170) females, which formed (42.5%) of the sample., age : [18-22] years of age, 42.5% (N=108), [23-25], 27% (N=107), [26-29] years of age, 24% (N=96), Other ages formed 6.5%, (N=26), Respondents’ occupations are diverse from the student,180 (45 %), employee, 32 (8%), worker-student,148 (37%), self-employed, 30 (10%), and unemployed, 8 (2.5%). Participants in the introductory section were asked questions to identify their relationship with Facebook marketing and the fast-food brand community, where Most participants (71.5%) confirmed that the favorite type of advertisements on Facebook is brand pages for connecting with their brands(see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency Distributions (Demographics) of the Sample

Demographic Variable	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-22	108	42.5%
	23-25	107	27%
	26-29	96	24%
	Other	26	6.5%
Gender	Male	230	57.5%
	Female	170	42.5%
City of Residence	Coast	148	37%
	Damascus	122	30.5%
	Aleppo	50	12.5%
	Middle	42	10.5%
	Other cities	38	9.5%
Current Occupation	Student	90	45%
	Worker-Student	74	37%
	Employee	16	8%
	Unemployed	15	5%
	Self-employ	5	7.5%
Monthly Income	Less than 30000 SP.	105	26%
	30000-40000 SP.	200	50%
	40001-50000 SP.	75	19%
	Above 50000 SP.	20	5%
Marital Status	Single	352	88%
	Married	48	12%

III. Measures

The questionnaire was designed as a survey instrument incorporating all constructs of the proposed model to inspect the hypotheses of interest. The questions in the questionnaire are based on a review of the literature and researches (Appendix). The survey questionnaire contains four sections. The first section contained introductory questions presented to encourage participants to approach this research (such as Time Spent on Facebook, Type of preferred Advertisements on Facebook, and Duration of Membership in Fast food Brand Pages), the second section is designed to measure the level of customer engagement [23, p. 710], as well as questions dealing with items of brand trust [60] and brand love[61], following the third section, consists

questions assess the level of brand loyalty (So et al., 2016a, p. 68), the last section is designed to obtain sample characterization (gender, age, education..... etc.). All the items that were adopted for measuring the study construct used a 5-point Likert scale, starting from (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘Strongly Agree’.

IV. Analysis of Result

The responses were analyzed using structural equation modeling via AMOS 24 software. To test the reliability and validity of constructs, conformity factor analysis (CFA) was performed. Items with weak factor loadings (less than 0.5) were dropped out. Cronbach’s a for all the constructs was greater than indicative acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$). Greater than recommended cutoff values of composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.5) were obtained [63] as shown in **intabel 4**. Besides assessing the discriminate validity, Fornell and Larcker [64] criterion, that square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlation between constructs, also maximum shared squared variance (MSV), also average shared squared variance (ASV), should be less than AVE [65]. **Table 4** shows the values of the square root of the AVE were all greater than the inter-construct correlations, MSV and ASV were less than AVE, indicating good discriminate validity

Table 2. The results of the testing model fit

Index	Test value	Acceptable value
$X^2 / (df)$	2.547	< 5.00
RMSEA	0.000	0.05 to 0.08
GFI	0.978	> 0.90
AGFI	0.951	> 0.80
CFI	1.000	> 0.95
NFI	0.991	> 0.95
IFI	1.007	> 0.95
RFI	0.973	> 0.95
TLI	1.023	> 0.95

Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis – CFA

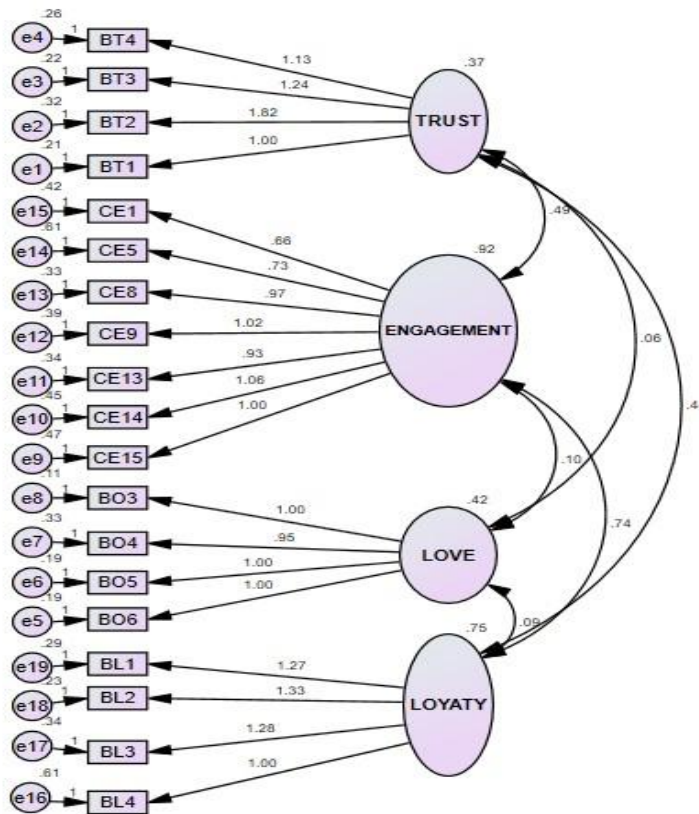


Table 3. Results of factor loadings

Variable	Items	Loading	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Brand Trust	BT1	0.799	0.805	0.901	0.695
	BT2	0.888			
	BT3	0.846			
	BT4	0.799			
Brand Love	BO6	0.827	0.848	0.894	0.678
	BO5	0.831			
	BO4	0.733			
	BO3	0.895			
Customer Engagement	CE15	0.814	0.945	0.923	0.633
	CE14	0.835			
	CE13	0.837			
	CE9	0.842			
	CE8	0.851			
	CE5	0.666			
	CE1	0.70			
Brand Loyalty	BL4	.742	0.970	0.922	0.748
	BL3	.886			
	BL2	.924			
	BL1	.896			

Table 4. Measurements, Reliabilities, and Correlations

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ENGAGEMENT	TRUST	LOVE	LOYALTY
ENGAGEMENT	0.923	0.632	0.091	0.931	0.795			
TRUST	0.901	0.695	0.208	0.907	0.302	0.834		
LOVE	0.893	0.678	0.028	0.906	0.167	0.163	0.824	
LOYALTY	0.922	0.748	0.208	0.937	0.224	0.456	0.154	0.865

V. Results of the structural model

The results of the structural analysis, the path coefficients, and the t values of the relationships studied are shown in Table 5, the model displays a good fit on all indices[66] (CMIN $\chi^2=2.547$, $p<.05$, $df=126$, GFI= 0.978, AGFI= 0.951, CFI=1.000, NFI= 0.991, TLI=0.90, CFI=0.92, and RMSEA=0.000). Regarding the hypothesis's tests, as shown in table 2, all the hypothesized relationships are supported in the estimated structural model, brand trust has significant positive effects on customer engagement (b = 0.38, t-value = 8.460), also brand love has effective significant positive effects on customer engagement (b = 0.11, t-value = 2.431), Furthermore, customer engagement has positive effects on brand loyalty (b = 0.34, t-value = 7.162), Consequently, H1, H2, and H3 in Table 5 are supported.

Table 5. Hypotheses-testing results

Hypothesized Path	Results	Path estimates	T. values	Significance p
H1 Brand trust -----> Engagement	Supported	0.38***	8.460	0.000 (Significant)
H2 Brand Love -----> Engagement	Supported	0.11*	2.431	0.015(Significant)
H3 Engagement ----->Brand Loyalty	Supported	0.34***	7.162	0.000 (Significant)

Note: Significance levels

* p<0.05

** p<0.01

*** p<0.001

IV. CONCLUSION

Social networking sites have deeply changed the methods of communication by firms and brands worldwide. Customers are not just passive message receivers. Facebook is one of the best common social media networking sites on which various brands have created their communities (brand pages or fan pages). Companies are creating their brand communities on Facebook with their own unique aims, but universally the

brand communities are marketing investments of these companies to develop a long-lasting relationship with their customers by simplifying communication between the company and customers [12]. However, many firms struggle with using social media for effective marketing communication functions, especially with keeping customers engaged [10]. Consequently, there is a significant need for empirical researches revealing the factors motivating consumers to interact with brands on social media so that effective social media communication strategies are framed by marketers [14].

The results support all the set hypotheses, that indicate a positive significant relationship between brand trust and customer engagement in Facebook brand pages ($\beta=0.38$). The findings indicate a positive impact of consumers' perception of brand trust on their level of engagement in Facebook brand pages, when consumers trust brands, they are eager to maintain their relationships with them by becoming members of their brand pages on Facebook. In other words, if consumers trust a brand, they can count on its Facebook brand page. That can be attributed to their belief in the effectiveness of the information about the brand on the brand page. Moreover, consumers can obtain guidance and help from other experienced consumers with the brand. Also, Brand love has a positive effect on consumers' engagement in online brand communities' Facebook brand pages. The findings show a positive influence of brand love in social media brand communities (Facebook brand pages) on the enhancing of engagement with brands. Consumers who develop high levels of emotional connections towards these brands are emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged on these brand pages.

Furthermore, customer engagement has a positive effect in developing and building brand loyalty in Facebook brand pages ($\beta=0.34$). Brand loyalty is often produced from an emotional attachment towards brands more consumers are emotionally and behaviorally engaged in these brand pages, the more loyal they are to these brands, where personal words and recommendations of trusted friends tend to be more credible than those coming from commercial sources, thus, recommendations from friends have the most prevailing influence on consumers. Furthermore, Consumers' engagement with a certain brand can be a key determinant in their commitment to that brand.

This study provides empirical evidence to the underlying influence of brand trust and brand love undeniably play a crucial role in motivating customers to engage in online brand communities, and may these factors can be critical to the success of marketing campaigns, This study additionally contributes to the marketing literature by empirically validating Brand loyalty as an outcome of customer engagement.

This study proposes companies should develop content that delivers accurate, relevant, and timely updates to customers; makes them visit their brand communities eagerly; and inspires them to get involved so as to get engaged. This may build trust among customers and may encourage them to be advocates of the company by spreading the word of- mouth, thereby contributing significantly to the company's success. The findings offer brand managers some useful insights for creating emotional bonds by providing various functional, hedonic, and monetary content or benefits on their brand pages these benefits act as motivators for consumers to revisit these brand pages, also managers in charge should post a steady stream of updates about their brands, other relevant products, and allied events. Informative posts can contain a variety of content such as information about products, prices, and brand locations.

Research Limitations and Future research

First, the current study was limited to customer engagement on Facebook; there is further need to examine this model across other social media channels that customers use to get engaged with a brand/company, in addition, there is may longitudinal effects of consumers' behaviors, wheremay differ towards brands and the factors that affect on their engagement over time. Future research may adopt to collect longitudinal data ways to investigate the influence of brand trust and love in encouraging engagement, this will allow tracking customer behavior and its change over time or not, and on the other hand, assess the extent of the impact of the membership period term on engagement levels and positive attitudes towards the brand. This study targeted only a specific age category of young consumers. An undefined category age sample could be adopted to study a diverse age group of customers.

Appendix

Variable Items

Construct	Items
Customer engagement	1) I am passionate about this brand page. 2) I like to learn more about this brand page. 3) I concentrate a lot on this brand page. 4) I like learning more about this brand page. 5) In general, I like to get involved in this brand page discussions. 6) I am someone who likes actively participating in this brand page discussions. 7) In general, I enjoy exchanging ideas with other people on this brand page
Brand Trust	1) I feel quite confident that my fast-food brand will always try to treat me fairly 2) My fast-food brand has been franked in dealing with me

	3) My fast-food brand would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving its clients 4) My fast-food brand is trustworthy
Brand Love	1) This fast-food brand makes me very happy. 2) This fast-food brand is pure delight. 3) I am passionate about this fast-food brand. 4) This fast-food brand is totally awesome.
Brand Loyalty	1) This is the only brand of fast food that I will buy. 2) I intend to keep staying with this brand 3) I am committed to this brand. 4) I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.

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