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Unlocking the Power of Social Media: Enhancing Customer Engagement in the Apparel Industry

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Abstract

Social media marketing is essential for any brand to be seen in this digital era. But social media marketing is incomplete with the customer's engagement for brands. Customer engagement helps brands to gain more profit and being reputed in market. Customer engagement can be affected by various factors. To find those factors is the primary goal of the current study. Additionally, as it is well-known that there are number of social media platforms that are used by consumer, which platform is best to get high customer engagement is another objective of this study. To achieve these purposes the qualitative method of research is chosen. Different articles that are closely related to study objective was gathered by using purposive sampling technique. The data was analyzed by systemic literature review method. Four themes was generated that helps to answers the two research questions of study. After the data analysis it was concluded that there are three major types of factors that affected customer engagement i-e 1) brand related, 2) Customer related and 3) Content related. As far as the most used social media platform is concerned, Instagram and Facebook are most used platforms. Both of the hypothesis are accepted. Brands should focus on these factors in order to enhance customer engagement in social media platforms.

Keywords: Customer engagement, brand, Content related, Social media, marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) is now a necessity in our everyday lives (Mack et al., 2017). Agencies use such mediums to attract and engage customers to boost and optimize their performance and thrive in the competitive market. Social media is a platform that enables users to create and share content and perceptions that allow them to build a strong and like-minded community. Social media paves the way that allows customers to discover, explore, and share knowledge regarding various products and brands. Consumer engagement is a crucial strategic factor responsible for driving a business. It is now an important aspect when talking about social media, especially in the last few years. The will of each consumer is a determinant of how well they will engage. It is the brand's efforts that attract customers and ensure consumer involvement (Rasool et al., 2020). Fashion brands took their time in accepting and incorporating social media marketing strategies because of the challenges of maintaining and protecting their image. The motive of every fashion brand is to bring the newest trends for their customers, and social media provides them with the evolving market trends. Therefore, social media is all that brands need to form a sustainable connection with their customers online (Mack, 2017). The concept of customer engagement is so diverse and dynamic that even with a

lot of research carried out, a new definition can be seen emerging almost every other day. Each research carried out to explore social media is different from the other because of evolution (Agnihotri, 2020). Even though the literature highly acknowledges customer engagement, there is still room for research regarding the factors that can help brands optimize customer engagement and which platforms they can utilize for such purposes. This research aims to fill these gaps by analyzing factors that can assist brands in capturing maximum customer involvement and which platforms are best suited for this purpose.

Research Objectives

1. To explore factors that enhances customer engagement through social media.
2. To identify social media tools that are effective for customer engagement.

Significance of Study

Customer engagement has become the trend with the onset of social media. It has brought about the need for urgent strategic growth to boost brand performance, leading to increased sales and competitive standing in the market. The justification behind these attributes is that the involved customers play a crucial role in dispersing testimonials for their liked products and services in their social circle (Kaveh et al., 2021). Brands can leverage social computing tools to create online representatives to boost sales from their current and as well as new customers (Agnihotri et al., 2020).

Social media is a multifaceted platform that facilitates fashion brands by allowing them to share trends with users. At present, almost every fashion brand is active on social media and is using it optimally to engage with its followers (Nash, 2019). Because of this research, the brands can easily comprehend factors that are beneficial for ensuring customer involvement. It also helps the brands to better decide which platform would be the best choice for optimal customer engagement as a clothing brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media: It is defined as the set of participatory internet applications that assist content creation and sharing both on the collaborative and individual levels. Social media has multiple and varied platforms, depending on the audience and nature of use. (Auxier et al.,2021).

Customer Engagement: It can be said that customer engagement is the communication between the customer and the brand which can potentially be profitable for the business. It is vital for brand awareness, brand associations, and customer loyalty to the brand (Rasool et al., 2020).

Apparel brands: It is also known as clothing brand which is a diverse field which has multiple segments like designing, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, etc., targeting various audience fragments. Such brands create distinction on the basis of their quality, price point, style, marketing tactics, distribution strategies, market analysis, customer demand, etc (Wang et al.,2020)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Uses and Gratification Theory explains that people use social media to satisfy their desires. The main concept of the theory states that the public consciously selects social media

platforms and then uses them (Leung, 2009). Social media's participatory nature coincides with the fundamental assertions of U&G Theory i.e. media users actively use social media. Social media aims to attract customers (Dolan et al., 2016) which facilitates the act of customer engagement.

HYPOTHESIS

Social media and Customer engagement

With the onset of global advancement, industries have reformulated their marketing strategies to survive in the competitive market. Businesses have realized the need to not rely on traditional forms of marketing channels and have molded themselves to use social media to interact with consumers, boost their products and services, and naturalize brand loyalty. It has become easier for brands to reach their target audience globally via a sole post, implying how marketing has turned into a multifaceted and collaborative means (Cartwright et al., 2021). SMM is carried out via different social networking platforms that allow users to interact with others having the same interests as them. Popular social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. encourage brand engagement. It is easy for businesses to have real-time interaction with their audience, gather immediate feedback, and facilitate customer support. Thus, businesses have transformed into content curators and community enablers (Shearer et al., 2021).

With technological advancement, researchers have studied various aspects of customer engagement, like in the educational sector various institutes public policies, and brands (Arora et al., 2021). In the field of marketing, most written research carried out on customer engagement can be seen in practitioner journals where it is explained practically rather than just in theory. While reviewing the existing literature on customer engagement, a major portion can be seen revolving around SM (Wang and Lee, 2020). SM is a source of ample opportunities and allows brands to engage with customers. Brands can know about opinions about their products or services through the likes and comments on their social media pages (Wang and Lee, 2020). The positive reviews under the brand's posts determine the future mindset of the customer with the brand (Wang and Kim, 2017).

Customer engagement on social media platforms can potentially affect product advancement and social media strategies. Previous research shows that customer engagement has a positive impact on brand-customer relationships and brand loyalty (Wang and Lee, 2020), contentment resulting in increased sales and enhanced business growth (Vinerean and Opreana, 2021),

H1: *Social media and customer engagement is positively related to each other*

Factors effecting customer engagement

Literature is full of one-dimensional and multi-dimensional descriptions and definitions of customer engagement. A few studies have used the unidimensional approach to customer engagement and emphasized the developmental elements of the concept. But, multiple researchers implied that customer engagement is inclusive of dimensions like perceptual, affection, and behavioral (Brodie et al., 2011). CE's definition is a blend of perceptual aspects (e.g. showing interest in the activities carried out in a company), behavioral aspects (engagement in the company's recreational activities), and emotional elements (affiliation regarding a company's activities) (Pinto et al., 2020). In the

literature, there are various factors discussed under this dimension that affect customer engagement. For instance, content's vividness (Coyle and Thorson, 2021), Interaction (Fortin et al., 2015), and Description (Shapiro et al., 2020), Entertainment (Hsiao et al., 2021), Novelty (Wu et al., 2021).

H2: *Factors have positively related to customer engagement.*

Social media platforms and customer engagement

With the ascending of social media platforms, brands now have easy access to a diverse audience that they can easily communicate with. The social media platforms allow businesses to interact with the audience and create brand awareness, loyalty, and trust (Agnihotri, 2020). By taking advantage of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc. the entities can engage with the customers at a unique level which the customers might have never experienced before (Zollo et al., 2020).

Facebook allows users to show interest in a certain situation, before participation, by introducing the "like" button, posting reviews or queries in the comment section of the post, and sharing it with fellows. Such courses of action denote better interest actions, as they help cover activities that can potentially produce customer engagement. These kind of actions are strong actions that represent interest of customer and it also shows the high interest level of customer using social media platforms (de silva et al., 2020).

H3: *Social media platforms are positively related to customer engagement.*

The current study uses the interpretivism philosophy. This philosophy is based on the concept that reality is subjective. The experience of one person differs from other. This study is based on factors that can enhance customer engagement, the opinion of these factors can be different for different researcher.

Research Approach: For this study, researchers used inductive approach. In this approach the theories is developed with the help of observation of collected data. As in this study the research question has answered once the data has been collected and analyzed.

Research Strategy: Qualitative research strategy has been used to fulfill the objective of study. It included collection of non-numerical data commonly texts and content used in well-reputed articles. This strategy usually helps in getting better idea about the specific problem and then generate solution for problem (Aspers et al., 2021).

Time Horizon: This study uses cross-sectional approach because the data has been collected and analyzed at same time.

Sampling Design: The target *population* of the study are the articles available in the literature. For the researcher it is not possible to study the whole population. That's why researcher choose specific group to collect data from and draw a conclusion generally (Lakens et al., 2022). The *sample* from all the literature are the articles related to customer engagement, platforms of social media, factors of customer engagement, mainly targeting the brands. 13 articles are taken as sample for the analysis of data. For this research, the *purposive sampling technique* has been used. This study has collected the most relevant articles for the data analysis.

Data Analysis Technique: As this study is qualitative in nature. In qualitative study, the analysis techniques are mostly content analysis, narrative and discourse, thematic and grounded theory analysis. The thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze data. In this technique, the data is properly studied and then same patterns and themes are generated (Mezmir et al.,

DATA ANALYSIS

For the data analysis, a systematic literature review was used. This method aims to evaluate all the literature related to the topic in order to conclude the answers to the research questions (Shaffril et al., 2021). The most related and recent articles were collected from Google scholars. There were two different research questions: one was related to the factors that affect customer engagement, and the other was to find out the most effective platforms for brands to increase customer engagement. The summary tables are as follows.

Brand-related factors

Customer engagement is multi-dimensional concept and it is affected by various factors. Some of those factors are directly related to how brands make efforts to get their engagement rate high. From the table no 1, there are articles in literature which shows factors of brand actions or customer perception that can affect customer engagement. Brand quality, ease in usage of page or website are the factors highlighted by Gorton et al (2020). One of the major factor that helps in customer to get engage with brands it's the brand-customer relation (Wibowo et al.,2023). Some of the other factors like brand love, brand attitude, brand dominance, brand image, brand familiarity and brand identification are also discussed in literature (Bozkurt et al.,2020).

Social media platforms

In the literature various types of social media platforms are mentioned that help brands to make customer engaged. For brands Facebook and Instagram are most discussed platforms (Mintel, 2023; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Huang, 2020; Shen, 2023; Natiqa et al., 2021; Yaqub et al.,2022). Platforms like YouTube, Pinterest and twitter is also highlighted (Shen, 2023). LinkedIn is comparatively more professional platform on which brand can interact and handle its own business page (Fahad, 2020). Most of the brands prefer use their own web page to deal and build customer relation (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

Customer-related factors

The other kind of factors that affect customer engagement are factors that are related to the customer's own behavior and his own perceptions. There are a variety of customer-related factors mentioned in the literature. Bayraktar et al. (2020) mentioned brand satisfaction and the perceived image of the brand are factors that affect customer engagement. Customer affection, cognitive processing and activation are factors discussed by Brodie et al. (2019). Customer experience and intention to interact are major factors affecting customer engagement (Wibowo et al., 2023; Xia et al., 2021). The love for a customer's brand is also highlighted as a factor affecting engagement levels (Gorton et al.,2020).

Table No 1:

Factors affecting customer engagement

Article Name	Author Name	Article Year	Factors Affecting Customer Engagement
Identification Of The Factors Affecting Customer Engagement In Online Brand Communities: A Pilot Study	Pelin Bayraktar and Sevgi Özkan Yıldırım	2020	Brand satisfaction, social interaction ties, trust, Reciprocity, perceived brand image.
Consumer Brand Engagement in Social Media: Conceptualization, Scale Development and Validation	Linda D. Hollebeek, Mark S. Glynn and Roderick J. Brodie	2019	Cognitive processing, affection, and activation
Customers' motivation to engage with luxury brands on social media	Saleh Bazi, Raffaele Filieri and, Matthew Gorton	2020	Brand news, post quality, celebrity endorsement, brand love, entertaining content, perceived quality, ease of technology
Understanding consumers' social media engagement behaviour: An examination of the moderation effect of social media context	Dongmei Cao, Maureen Meadows, Donna Wong, Senmao Xia	2021	Consumer Behavioral Intention, Media richness, content trustworthiness
The role of perceived firm social media interactivity in facilitating customer engagement behaviors	Siddik Bozkurt, David Marius Gligor and Barry J. Babin	2020	Perceived social media interactivity, brand love, brand attitude, brand dominance, brand image, brand familiarity and brand identification.
Customer Behavior as an Outcome of Social Media Marketing: The Role of Social Media Marketing Activity and CustomerExperience	Ardy Wibowo, Shih-Chih Chen, Uraiporn Wiangin, Yin Ma, and Athapol Ruangkanjanases	2023	Customer experience, brand-customer relationship

Content-related factors

Content that is post by brand also plays great role in customer engagement. Factors related to content are revealed in literature. Brand news, post quality, celebrity endorsement and entertainment are factors affects customer engagement (Gorton et al.,2020). The content that is posted are either trustworthy or not is another factor that enhance customer engagement. How much the information is provide by brands known as brand richness can also affect customer engagement (Xia et al., 2021).

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Table No 2:

Social media platforms

Article Name	Author Name	Article Year	Platforms used by customers for engagement purposes
Analyses of social media engagement	Oral	2023	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest
The role of perceived firm social media interactivity in facilitating customer engagement behaviors	Siddik Bozkurt, David Marius Gligor and Barry J. Babin	2020	Facebook, Instagram and brand webpage
Understanding How People Select Social Networking Services: Media Trait, Social Influences and Situational Factors	Shiu-Li Huang	2020	Facebook and Instagram, LinkedIn
Platform or Content Strategy? Exploring Engagement with Brand Posts on Different Social Media Platforms	Zheng Shen	2023	Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
The Effect of Instagram on Customer Relationship, Customer Equity and Purchase Intention Towards Luxury Fashion Brands	Dewidya Natiqa, Nurrani Kusumawati, Fitri Aprilianty	2021	Instagram
Search Online and Purchase Offline: The Role of Instagram Marketing, Consumer Behavior and Webrooming in Building Brand Loyalty	Rana Muhammad Shahid Yaqub, Syed Farhan Gillani, Muhammad Murad, Noor Sehar Ali	2022	Instagram

CONCLUSION

Determination of study was to examine factors that can affect the customer engagement through social media. The other objective of the study was to find the most used platforms by customers. To attain this purpose the study selected brands of apparel industry because this particular industry makes the most out of social media marketing. While collecting articles these factors were closely considered. In the data analysis, four themes were created. First three themes are related to factors that affect customer engagement. From the analysis, it was concluded that there are three major types of factors i.e. 1) Brand related, 2) Customer related and 3) Content related. Brand related factors are those factors that are directly associated and can be controlled by brands for example brand quality, brand attitude, love generated by brand in customer's mind, brand image, brand identification etc.

All of these factors can contribute to customer engagement. The second theme is associated with the factors that are purely related to customer like brand satisfaction, cognitive processing, customer affection, customer experience etc. These factors can affect customer engagement from the side of customer. But brand can influence these factors as well if they put efforts for example customer experience can be elevated by different practices. Theme three is about the factors that are connected to content the brand posts on social media platforms. The content is one of the major variables when it comes to customer engagement.

Factors like post quality, brand news, trustworthy content etc are discussed in literature. Keeping all of these factors in mind the hypothesis 1 of the study is accepted that certain

factors can impact the customer engagement on social media. Theme 4 is about social media platforms which answers the second research question of study i-e the platforms that are used by consumer for engagement. The analysis shows Facebook and Instagram are the most used platforms by customers. Thus the hypothesis 2 of the study is also accepted. By using these platform strategically brands can engage high number of customers.

THEORETICAL & PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Firstly, this study adds the literature in the context of customer engagement in apparel brands sector. This study highlights the factors that are closely related to apparel industry which adds value in the literature. The results of the study shows that there are certain factors that affect customer engagement. It means that those factors are basically the need of consumer. Thus this study validates the Uses and Gratification in practical terms which adds value of theory theoretically. This study helps brands to practically apply these factors and enhance their customer engagement via social media. Current research also focused on social media platforms that are used the most by the customers. So, the brands can also put more efforts on platform that and enhance their customer engagement.

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since there was limited time, the research had to employ the cross-sectional method. The study leaves room for future research whereby the researcher can conduct it using the longitudinal method. The sample size chosen for this particular research is composed of 13 articles due to time constrain, which can be increased for future research. It should be noted that the results might show variance while working with a larger sample size. This study primarily focuses on the data gathered related to apparel brands. It is suggested that future researcher should study on other industry as well. This study did not specially focus on the three dimensions of customer engagement. It is recommended that future study should focus on dimensions of customer engagement while discussing factors that affect customer engagement. Current study is qualitative type of study, these factors can also be researched in quantitative method to examine the effect of factors or platforms on customer engagement.

DECLARATIONS

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Consent to Participate: Yes

Consent for publication and Ethical approval: Because this study does not include human or animal data, ethical approval is not required for publication. All authors have given their consent.

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