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# **Exploring the antecedents to the online customer engagement behaviours; sharing, learning & endorsing**

## **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to add to the growing empirical research around customer engagement and examine if motivational drivers mediate the relationship between personality traits and the online customer engagement behaviours (OCEB); sharing, learning and endorsing. The research was undertaken using an online survey with 401 respondents who interacted with brands online using social media sites; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The study provides evidence that the antecedents to online customer engagement behaviour not only interact but that together personality traits and motivational drivers impact specific types of OCEB. These findings help to deepen the understanding of what influences customers to take part in specific OCEBs, and can be used by managers who are seeking to develop programs to strategically influence online customer engagement, to better understand these customers.

**Keywords:** Online Customer Engagement; Social Media; Personality

**Track:** Digital Marketing

# 1 Introduction

Brands have evolved over the years (Hatch and Schultz, 2009) to become facilitators of the customer-brand relationship (McKenna, 1990), where traditionally customers played a passive role and brands were created by the company. However, the rapid growth of the internet and technology (Lee et al., 2012) has empowered customers (Shankar and Malhotra, 2007) and changed the way brands are created and experienced (Gensler et al., 2013). In light of this changing marketing environment, customer engagement (CE) beyond the transaction has become a means for the development and enhancement of customer-brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2011) and of increasing importance to managers and academics.

The aim of this research is to add to the growing empirical research around CE and examine if motivational drivers mediate the relationship between personality traits and the online customer engagement behaviours (OCEB); sharing, learning and endorsing. The research therefore contributes to the literature by indicating that pleasure mediates the relationship between extraversion and endorsing and that negative feelings mediate the relationship between agreeableness and sharing, learning and endorsing. Negative feelings also mediate the relationship between openness to experience and learning and endorsing.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Conceptual framework development

Throughout the conceptual development of CE, customer brand engagement and customer engagement behaviour (CEB) a number of antecedents to CE and CEB have been proposed including; motivational drivers (Van Doorn et al., 2010), customer participation (Vivek et al., 2012), brand trust, brand commitment and customer satisfaction (Hollebeek, 2011) as well as customer based factors including traits and context based factors (Van Doorn et al., 2010). CE is “individual specific” (Hollebeek, 2011, p.787) and understanding the antecedents to it and customer engagement behaviour (CEB) will be useful for classifying and segmenting customers who take part in specific behaviours (Van Doorn et al., 2010). It will also benefit companies that wish to strategically guide CE and CEB for their benefit (Harmeling et al., 2017) including increased purchase behaviours (Calder et al., 2016) and favourable customer experiences (Marbach et al., 2016).

This brief conceptual framework discussion will present those antecedents of focus for this research in terms of customer characteristics and motivational drivers.

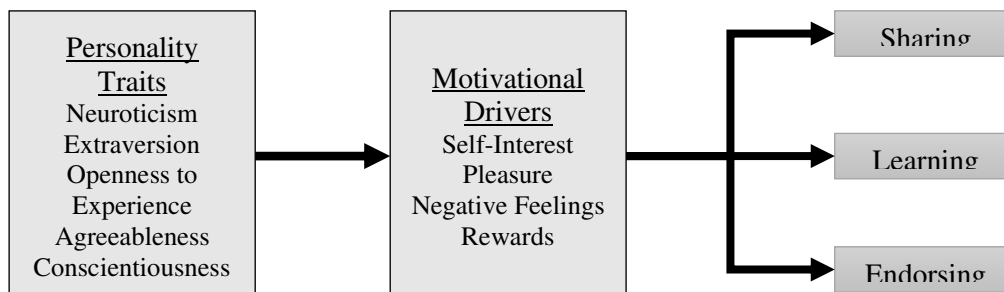


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### 2.1.1 Customer characteristics: personality

Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 257) purported that customers’ individual traits and predispositions would affect the “likelihood and level” of their CE. Often customer

characteristics are examined in the literature using personality traits, which distinguish different individuals and lead to consistencies in their behaviour over time (Baumgartner, 2002). The Five Factor Model (FFM) argues that five traits adequately describe an individual's personality (Baumgartner, 2002) namely; neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Ul Islam et al. (2017) empirically examined the effect of personality traits on CE in an online brand community setting, demonstrating that conscientiousness is negatively related to CE, while all other traits are positively related to CE with extraversion being the strongest driver. Marbach et al. (2016) on the other hand, examined the effect of personality traits on online CE (OCE) through semi structured interviews and determined that; agreeableness is negatively related to OCE, neuroticism is not related to OCE, conscientious individuals rarely take part in OCE, and there is a positive relationship between extraversion and openness to experience and OCE.

### 2.1.2 Motivational drivers

Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis conducted on a list of proposed motivational drivers derived from academic research, self-interest, pleasure, negative feelings and rewards were determined to be the motivational drivers of interest. Individuals take part in OCEB as a result of; self-interest – provide help to others in order to be positively perceived socially, pleasure – take part for the intrinsic fun of it (Nuttavuthisit, 2010), negative feelings – share negative experiences to reduce discontent (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) or rewards – customers expect financial compensation based on the effort they make (Füller, 2010).

### 2.1.3 Research gap and question

Van Doorn et al. (2010) stated that CEBs occur as a result of motivational drivers. As previously discussed, Ul Islam et al. (2017) and Marbach et al. (2016) examined the effect of personality traits on OCE, but as stated by Ul Islam et al. (2017, p. 520) “personality does not function alone in controlling customers' behaviour.” The former statement implies that more factors influence customers' behaviour and corresponds with the assertion by Van Doorn et al. (2010) that, to thoroughly understand CEB and the customers who take part in these behaviours, research should identify its antecedents, how they interact and how these antecedents impact specific types of CEB. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap in knowledge and deepen the understanding of the antecedents to OCEB by answering the research question: do the proposed motivational drivers to OCEB mediate the relationship between personality traits, and the OCEBs; sharing, learning and endorsing?

## 3 Methodology

In order to answer the research question, this study adopted a correlational quantitative research design. Online surveys were deemed an appropriate method of collection as it ensured that participants met one requirement of the sample as outlined by Sue and Ritter (2012): that participants had access to the technology required to take part in OCEB. The instrument was developed using Qualtrics survey development software and included appropriate scales for measurement namely; personality trait scales developed by Donnellan et al. (2006), scales developed for the motivational drivers based on the CFA conducted, and the scales developed by Dessart et al. (2016) which operationalised OCEB through three sub-dimensions; sharing – the act of providing content or other resources to the engagement partner and others, learning – the act of seeking content or other resources from the engagement partner and endorsing – the act of sanctioning the engagement partner. These scales were preceded by specific questions to ensure that participants met other necessary

criteria; being over 18, that they interacted with non-charitable brands online and, their interaction occurred through social media sites; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The online survey was pre-tested by the research team and the online survey administration division of Qualtrics was used for the final distribution of the survey. Invitations were sent to the Qualtrics UK nationwide database of adults and on removal of incomplete responses the final sample collected totalled 401 individuals. Of these participants 38% were male, 62% were female, 24% aged 18-24, 26% aged 25-34, 20% each aged 35-54 and 55-64 and 10% aged 65 and over. Participants also indicated what social media site they used for interaction with the brand of focus for the survey, and 79% used Facebook, while 13% and 8% used Twitter and Instagram respectively.

## 4 Results

The relationships between each independent variable - the personality traits and the dependent variables - sharing, learning and endorsing were examined using the Pearson product-moment coefficient which is used to determine the direction and size of linear relationships (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). It was determined that there were only significant, positive relationships between extraversion and sharing, learning and endorsing with  $r$  scores of 0.185, 0.119 and 0.183 respectively. All other personality traits reported no significant relationships with the OCEBs with  $r$  scores ranging from -0.70 to 0.40.

Mediated path analysis was then used to answer the specific research question, do the proposed motivational drivers mediate the relationship between personality traits, and the OCEBs; sharing, learning and endorsing? This technique was chosen as it allows users to test the effect that intervening or mediating variables such as motivation have on relationships (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013) simultaneously. It was first necessary to examine the overall model fit of the entire path analysis and according to Hair et al. (2014) this is assessed through the examination of chi-square, degrees of freedom as well as at least one absolute fit index and incremental fit index. The following results were obtained; chi square – 76.39, degrees of freedom – 33, normed chi square – 2.32 and CFI – 0.98, indicating the model fit is adequate.

- To continue the analysis, the unstandardised estimates of the paths from all independent variables to proposed mediators and paths from all proposed mediators to dependent variables depicted in the model (Figure 1) were then examined. Finally, Sobel's test statistics were used as evidence to empirically confirm mediation and the results obtained indicated that; first, extraversion has a significant indirect effect on endorsing (0.031) through pleasure, that is extraversion has a positive effect on pleasure which in turn has a positive effect on endorsing. Secondly, agreeableness has significant indirect effects on sharing (0.026), learning (0.001) and endorsing (0.015) through negative feelings, that is agreeableness has a negative effect on negative feelings which in turn has positive effects on sharing and learning but a negative effect on endorsing. Finally, openness to experience has significant indirect effects on learning (0.021) and endorsing (0.049) through negative feelings that is,
  - openness to experience has a negative effect on negative feelings which in turn has a positive effect on learning and a negative effect on endorsing.

These relationships are shown in Figure 2, where solid arrows indicate direct relationships and dashed lines indicate indirect relationships.

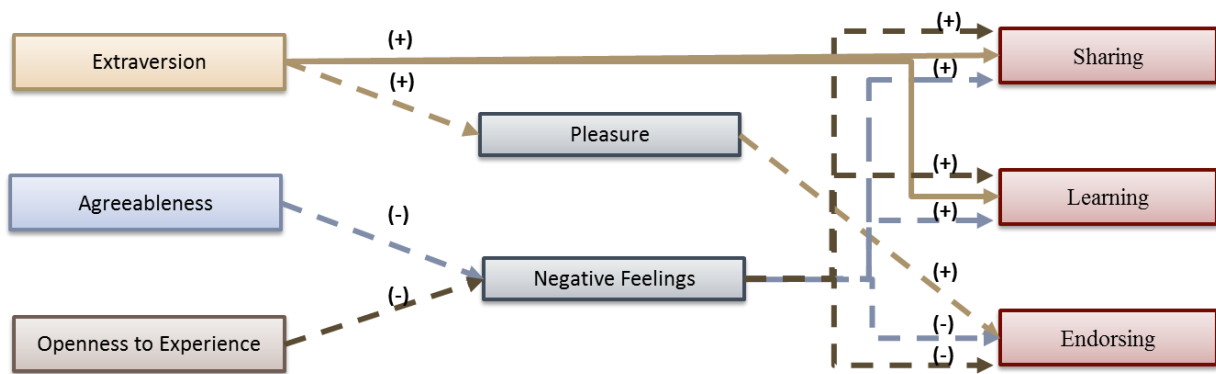


Figure 2: Relationship Framework

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

This study has demonstrated the role that motivational drivers play in the relationship between personality traits and OCEBs, sharing, learning and endorsing. Similar to Ul Islam et al. (2017) and Marbach et al. (2016) where extraversion was determined to have a strong positive relationship with CE, this study indicated that extraversion had a significant, positive direct relationship with the specific OCEBs, sharing and learning as it was the only personality trait to perform in this way. This study adds to their findings by also indicating that when pleasure is present to act as a motivational driver then extraverted persons are more likely to take part in endorsing behaviours online.

As it relates to negative feelings, the study has demonstrated that agreeable individuals have fewer negative feelings, but when they encounter negative feelings as they are more likely to take part in sharing and learning behaviours online. Similarly, individuals who are open to experience have fewer negative feelings but when they do encounter negative feelings they are more likely to take part in learning behaviours online, and less likely to take part in endorsing behaviours online. The study therefore provides evidence that the antecedents to CEB not only interact but that together personality traits and motivational drivers impact specific types of OCEB. Interestingly, Marbach et al. (2016) stated from their research that openness to experience had a positive relationship with OCE, while this study indicates that a motivational driver, negative feelings, needs to be present for open individuals to take part in these specific OCEB.

The negative relationship that these personality traits have with online endorsing behaviours could be simply explained as endorsing behaviours are focused on providing positive support to the company and experiencing negative feelings is opposed to this. This result could also indicate to companies and brands, the need for appropriate responses to the venting of negative feelings as they seek to reconcile with the customers. Particularly as these customers are taking part in learning behaviours to obtain answers to questions or resources from the company not only taking part in sharing their discontent with others.

Unlike Ul Islam et al. (2017) but similar to Marbach et al. (2016) no significant relationship was found between neuroticism and conscientiousness and CEB. The differences in the results obtained in this study as compared to the previous studies may be as a result of the previous research examining the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of CE, rather than specifically focusing on behavioural aspect of CE while the similarities could be based on the fact that extraverted individuals tend to be more sociable and prone to experience positive feelings (Costa and McCrae, 1992) and thus more likely to engage and be influenced by pleasure online.

Theoretically, this research develops and empirically tests a model which improves current understanding of the antecedents to OCEB. The research addresses a gap in the current CE and CEB literature which relates to how personality traits and motivational drivers interact as antecedents to specific OCEB; sharing, learning and endorsing. These findings help to deepen the understanding of what influences customers to take part in specific OCEBs, and can be used by managers to better understand customers engaging beyond the purchase transaction as they seek to develop programs to strategically influence this behaviour online. More specifically, this data could be used by managers to assist with developing segments of customers.

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