

## CONSUMER-BRAND ENGAGEMENT THROUGH WEBSITE STIMULI

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### ABSTRACT

#### RESEARCH AIMS

Previous studies concerning consumer engagement have been dedicated to conceptualize the construct and proposing scales to measure it (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Bolton 2011; Bijmolt et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek et al. 2014). Yet, further research has been suggested in those studies regarding antecedents and outcomes of online consumer engagement. The following questions remain open: what drives consumers to be online engaged? And what are the outcomes of being online engaged? The aim of the current research is to contribute to the fulfillment of this gap in the literature, analyzing which dimensions of online stimuli with websites exercise more effect on online engagement and which of this dimensions' most influence brand advocacy.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Previous research attempt to consider and suggest several factors, such as customer involvement (e.g., Hollebeek et al. 2014), employee engagement in offline context (e.g., Pansari & Kumar 2016), or even customer purchase process, incentivized referrals, social influence and knowledge sharing, as related to customer engagement. Brodie et al. (2011) also consider that customer engagement occurs by interactive and co-creative customer experience with the focal agent. Therefore, the stimuli of the experience using websites to search for information and purchase the products may be a driver to customer engagement.

The current research aims to consider three stimuli of online experience influencing the customer engagement: information/content, interactive features, and design-visual appeal. According to Loureiro (2015), there is no standard method of evaluating websites and (Law et al. 2010, p.310) advance that 'researchers do, and should, choose the most appropriate approach for their research objectives, target markets, and stakeholders.' In this sense, this research is adopting the previously mentioned three stimuli following Loureiro (2015) and Han & Mills (2006), which are considered appropriate for measuring stimuli of online experience as antecedents of online consumer engagement.

Customer engagement has also been associated with consumer-brand connection and brand usage intention - the willingness to use again - (Hollebeek et al. 2014), or firm performance (Pansari & Kumar

2016), improved consumers' contributions to collaborative product development process or co-creation experiences or even brand referrals(e.g., Bijmolt et al. 2010; Sawhney et al. 2005). In this sense, we suggest that when customers are engaged to an online supplier brand, not only will be self-connected to the website and wish to use it again but will also recommend it to others customers' and excuse it if anything went wrong (brand advocacy).

## **HYPOTHESES**

Several studies have pointed out that comprehensiveness, uniqueness, accuracy, and entertainment value, as well as the timeliness of information/content, will increase customers' shopping experience (Aladwani & Palvia 2002; Kaynama & Black 2000). Therefore, the Information/Content dimension can be defined as the extent to which a user thinks that information/contents are useful, updated, and reliable (Park et al. 2007). Thereby:

H1: Information/content has a positive relationship with online engagement, that is, Cognitive processing (H1a), Affection(H1b) and Activation (H1c).

Interactive features of a website refer to items that generate a responsive behavior from online consumers such as sending inquiring emails or searching and planning through the website. These items allow consumers to engage in a certain manner to the website after a design-visual appeal has captured their attention and information/content have increased their interest in (Han & Mills 2006). In this sense, we propose:

H2: Interactive features has a positive relationship with online engagement, that is, Cognitive processing (H2a), Affection(H2b) and Activation (H2c).

An important test for online suppliers concerns about deciding the style and visual interest of the website in a way that it will enhance consumers' flow process and consider the online consumers' experience as well as goal-directed behaviors. Therefore, the design-visual appeal dimension refers to the proper use of color, graphics, image, and animations, that is, the organization and presentation of a website (Park et al. 2007). Thereby:

H3: Design-visual appeal has a positive relationship with online engagement, that is, Cognitive processing (H3a), Affection(H3b) and Activation (H3c).

As describe in the literature, brand advocacy can be perceived as the extent to which person actively recommend or support, relative to other brands, a specific brand within a product category to other customers (Badrinarayanan & Laverie 2013), as well as the consumers' behaviour intending to try new

products of the brand, spreading favourable word-of-mouth and being resilient to negative information (Pai et al. 2013). Therefore, we propose:

H4: The cognitive processing dimension of online engagement has a positive relationship with brand advocacy

H5: The affection dimension of online engagement has a positive relationship with brand advocacy

H6: The activation dimension of online engagement has a positive relationship with brand advocacy

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The current research intends to understand if the online consumer's experience creates stimuli that could generate online consumer engagement. It's our aim to find a causal relationship between stimulus and mentioned online engagement dimensions, e.g., to measure the relation between Interactive features and Cognitive processing or between Affection of engagement and Information\content. From what we can see so far, Information\content presents a very significant stimulus on cognitive processing and Information\content, and Design-visual appeal seems to have a significant effect on Activation. However, Interactive features need deeper understand concerning its effect on Activation. About the relationship between online engagement and brand advocacy, it is expected to understand and analyze which dimension (Cognitive processing, Affection, and Activation) most influence brand advocacy, as well as to recognize the influence of each one and its respective significance.

*Keywords: Information/Content, Interactive Features, Design-Visual Appeal, Online Engagement, Brand Advocacy.*

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