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# A higher-order model of consumer brand engagement and its impact on loyalty intentions



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## ABSTRACT

Consumer brand engagement is increasingly gaining popularity among practitioners and academics as a prominent consumer-brand relationship construct. The emergent literature on consumer brand engagement, largely conceptual, offers various definitions of the construct, though without much consensus. We offer a novel higher-order model of consumer brand engagement that we derive from organizational psychology. We adapt the concept of employee engagement and examine its factorial validity in a consumer-brand relationship context, defining consumer brand engagement as consumers' positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. We develop and empirically test a three-dimensional model of brand engagement, outlining relevant antecedents and outcomes. More importantly, we assess the managerial utility of consumer brand engagement by examining its impact on consumer loyalty intentions. We additionally compare the explanatory capability of brand engagement relative to traditional consumer judgments of value, quality and satisfaction. A survey of 408 mobile phone consumers from India provided data for empirical testing. The results support the three-dimensional factor structure of consumer brand engagement. Brand engagement not only exerts a significant impact on loyalty intentions, but also explains significantly more variation in the outcome in addition to the variation explained jointly by value, quality and satisfaction. Theoretically, we offer a holistic multi-dimensional measure of consumer brand engagement, and examine key nomological relationships. Managerially, we demonstrate the explanatory capability of brand engagement in explaining consumer loyalty intentions, offering a useful tool in the relationship-building repertoire of managers.

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## 1. Introduction

The consumer-brand relationship paradigm has generated substantial academic interest in understanding various forms of consumers' relational behaviors with brands. Consumer brand engagement has emerged as a prominent construct in recent years and is increasingly gaining currency among practitioners and academics, mainly due to its potential to affect consumer behavior (Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010). A survey of 124 Chief Marketing Officers revealed that developing brand engagement among consumers figured among top marketing priorities (Burt, 2013). Similarly, academic interest on the concept has accelerated (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012). However, much remains to be understood about the construct. The nature of consumer brand engagement per se remains contentious. For instance, it is debatable whether consumer brand engagement is largely behavioral (van Doorn et al., 2010) or has additional

emotional and cognitive aspects (Hollebeek, 2011). Additionally, the nomological network of the construct is embryonic and largely conceptual (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012), thus creating opportunities to empirically examine key relationships that have theoretical and managerial implications.

We offer two contributions to the emergent literature on consumer brand engagement. First, we empirically examine the factorial validity of a second-order model of consumer brand engagement that is novel to the domain of consumer-brand relationships. We derive our conceptualization of consumer brand engagement from the domain of organizational psychology (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Sonnentag, 2003), conceiving consumer brand engagement as consumers' positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind that is characterized by *vigor*, *dedication* and *absorption*. In the context of consumer-brand relationships, *vigor* denotes high levels of energy and mental resilience when interacting with a brand, and the consumer willingness and the ability to invest effort in such interactions (Schaufeli et al., 2002). *Dedication* refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration,

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pride and challenge (Schaufeli et al., 2002). *Absorption* refers to the sense of being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in brand interactions and in which time passes quickly (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Each of the dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption correspond to behavioral, emotional and cognitive aspects (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). In this paper we propose and test empirically a holistic measure of consumer brand engagement for use in ongoing research.

Our second contribution relates to assessing the managerial value of consumer brand engagement. The managerial value of the concept lies in its potential ability to explain desired marketing outcomes, such as, consumer loyalty intentions towards a brand. Traditionally, consumer loyalty intentions have been driven largely by consumer judgments of perceived value, perceived quality and overall satisfaction (e.g., Cronin et al., 2000; Yang and Patterson, 2004). In order to have managerial appeal (i.e., practical utility), consumer brand engagement must explain consumer loyalty intentions after having controlled for the effects of these three key judgments. Hence, our second objective is to empirically investigate the influence of consumer brand engagement on consumer loyalty intentions. The results will inform managers of the potential utility of consumer brand engagement and further the theoretical understanding of the nomological network of the construct, positioning consumer loyalty intentions as an outcome. Moreover, we empirically examine whether consumer brand engagement explains variation in loyalty intentions that is above and beyond the amount of explanation attained jointly by perceived value, perceived quality and consumer satisfaction. Therefore, the results will inform practitioners about the potency of consumer brand engagement as a concept for attaining consumer loyalty *relative to* the traditional antecedents. Next, we discuss our adapted higher-order conceptualization of consumer brand engagement, and offer hypotheses pertaining to the nature of the construct as well as its selected antecedents and consequences.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Nature of consumer brand engagement

The concept of engagement has been investigated in the domains of organizational psychology for some time. Increasingly in recent years the concept has been investigated in the consumer behavior domain. Academically, consumer brand engagement has been defined variously as “the level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790); “the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate” (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 127); and “a customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254). Practitioners have defined engagement as “turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context” (Creamer, 2006) and “the emotional attachment that customers have with a brand” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 20). Some commonalities are evident in these definitions. Aspects like “participation in”, “connection with”, “a multifaceted state of mind” (comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements) as well as context-specificity seem to be central to the construct of consumer brand engagement. Despite these early developments, experts agree that the concept is yet to be fully developed (Schultz, 2013; Vivek et al., 2012) and have called for more profound knowledge and understanding of the concept (Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010). Our

present study is an attempt to add to the emergent body of knowledge in the area.

As discussed in Section 1, we draw our conceptualization of consumer brand engagement from the domain of organizational psychology (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Sonnentag, 2003). We therefore define consumer brand engagement as consumers’ positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind that is characterized by *vigor*, *dedication* and *absorption*. We derive our conceptualization of consumer brand engagement from organizational psychology for two main reasons. Firstly, the organizational psychology measure of engagement effectively captures *individual behavior*, whereby engagement is regarded as a trait aspect (Sonnentag, 2003) and a motivational construct (Salanova et al., 2005). This means that engagement will likely vary between individuals. The “subject” of engagement in organizational psychology as well as marketing literatures is “individuals” – *employees* in the former and *consumers* in the later. Therefore, a trait- and motivational-based measure of individual behavior is likely to perform well in a different setting involving individual behavior. In our present case the setting is consumer behavior. Secondly, the definition of engagement in organizational psychology is *holistic*, capturing multiple facets of individual engagement – cognitive (absorption), emotional (dedication) and behavioral (vigor) – under a single framework. This holistic view of engagement has been validated over time in the organizational psychology literature. The emergent marketing literature on engagement is beginning to elucidate a holistic nature of brand engagement, though a concrete dimensionality of the construct is yet to be firmly established. Thus, a well-validated measure of engagement will potentially contribute to a better understanding of consumer engagement.

Given the newness of consumer brand engagement, it is important to conceptualize the level of abstraction at which the construct operates. We conceive consumer brand engagement as an individual-level construct which is supported by the early work on the nature of the construct (Hollebeek, 2011). Related to the level of abstraction, is the issue of specificity of the construct. In other words, the “subject” of engagement is the individual consumer and the “object” is a *specific* brand (Hollebeek, 2011). The consumer-brand relationship paradigm has spawned new constructs that tend to capture consumer relational behaviors with specific brands. For example the construct of brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) reflects consumers’ passionate emotional attachment with specific brands. Likewise, supported by previous work (Goldsmith, 2012), our conceptualization of consumer brand engagement seeks to measure consumer (the “subject”) engagement with a specific brand (the “object”). Lastly, consumer brand engagement denotes an *interaction* between consumers and brands. Following Fournier (1998), it is increasingly recognized that brands and consumers interact as partners in various ways. Similarly, consumer brand engagement incorporates the interactive (dyadic) element whereby the consumers may willingly invest effort in maintaining a degree of interaction (i.e., demonstrate vigor) with a brand, be happily engrossed in such interactions (i.e., demonstrate absorption) and feel enthusiastic and inspired in doing so (i.e., demonstrate dedication). Early research into the consumer brand engagement clearly acknowledges such interactive aspect of the construct (Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012).

Our definition of consumer brand engagement above outlines the multi-dimensional nature of the construct. Given that we offer a higher-order conceptualization of consumer brand engagement, it is important to acknowledge how we conceive each of the dimensions as measuring the higher-order construct. We conceive consumer brand engagement as measured reflectively by the three first-order dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption. This type of measurement model is referred to as a reflective first-order

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