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## Analyzing Consumer Engagement Programs from the Perspective of a Qualitative Research of Marketing Executives

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### Abstract

Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of developing long lasting relationships with mutual benefits for companies and their customers. In the Internet-context, consumers can co-create experiences and personal value through engagement in activities that involve interactivity and networking with companies in the online environment. In this technology-driven framework, consumer engagement programs can offer a valuable opportunities for companies that are active in an online setting. The present research implies a qualitative study conducted using interviews with marketing executives with experience in the online environment and will focus on consumer engagement programs and initiatives that are employed by companies that operate in the online environment. Thus, this study provides substantial insights in terms of online marketing tactics for consumer engagement.

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### 1. Introduction

After more than a decade exploring marketing concepts such as “mass personalization” and “one client market”, the technological development has finally caught up with marketing literature. The organizational options spectrum is broader than ever and companies are struggling to determine the appropriate role of marketing for their company.

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There are certain challenges organizations face in today's online business environment. In many companies, the marketing function is the best one to orchestrate customer engagement throughout the organization. To do this, the function must be extended in a position to influence the touch-points that it does not directly control. The organizational options spectrum is broader than ever and companies are struggling to determine the appropriate role of marketing for their company.

In this respect, consumer engagement has proven to be a valuable asset. Moreover, this concept has become the topic of great interest to managers and consultants from various industries and companies throughout the world as evidenced by the large number of academic articles, books, blog posts, forums discussion, and workshops generated by a general search for terms that compose and explain this construct.

The fragmentation of the media has led to reduced customer loyalty, at least in the short term, because there are too many options for consumers. Also, the initiation of a relationship is difficult because the emphasis has to be on instant relevancy, credibility and trust to show customers that the experience will be useful for them and their efforts will be compensated despite the multitude of competing offers.

Online media allows customer experience to be truly immersive, captivating, interactive, memorable, and highly measurable, an aspect that proved to be rather elusive through traditional media channels.

In a society that is increasingly based on networks where customers can easily interact with other customers and firms through social networks and other new media, the non-transactional behavior of a customer tends to become more important in the near future and requires marketing research and understanding.

Therefore, the promising concept of "consumer engagement" is expected to provide contributions that extend beyond those made by traditional constructs, including consumer involvement and satisfaction, in explaining and predicting focused results of consumer behavior (Brodie and Hollebeek, 2011).

## 2. Defining Consumer Engagement

To form a valuable definition of consumer engagement (CE) and to appropriately establish its underlying dimensions, both academics and marketing practitioners have provided insight in various research.

For instance, from the perspective of business practitioners, Gallup's (2009) cross-industry research shows that fully engaged customers buy more, stay with a company longer, and are more profitable than average customers. Similarly, the Economist Intelligence Unit, in collaboration with Abode, developed a report in 2007 in which it positioned engagement as a strategic way of considering relationships with both customers and stakeholders (EIU, 2007), thus broadening the practices associated with this construct and presenting a process that evolves over time.

Moreover, Forrester Consulting (2008) examined a survey of 200 business decision makers in companies across the world and presented a definition of customer engagement as "creating deep connections with customers that drive purchase decisions, interaction, and participation over time."

Also, in terms of exploring this concept from an academic point of view, many studies have provided the foundation and direction for customer engagement. The foundation of this construct can be viewed in social exchange theory. In this theory, a company provides consumers with certain favors with the main motivation of future outcomes and returns (customer loyalty and profitability). Again, this cost/reward perspective corresponds to the interactive nature of customer engagement (Hollebeek, 2011a, b). Also, other researchers have attributed this concept to relationship marketing theory and service-dominant logic because it relates to the establishment of a long term mutual beneficial relationship in which consumers can co-create their marketing experiences.

Indeed, in the Internet-context, consumers can co-create experiences and personal value through engagement in activities that involve interactivity and networking with companies in the online environment.

The present study on this new concept, rooted in online interactive marketing and relationship marketing for services offered on the Internet, shows the multidimensional, complex and dynamic nature of customer engagement that can occur at different levels of intensity over time, reflecting distinct states of engagement and involvement of consumers with brands or companies in an online setting. Essential for discussing brand communities is the use of terms such as 'to engage' and 'engagement' to describe the nature of specific participant interactions and / or interactive experiences (Brodie et. al, 2011).

Moreover, researchers have furthered these semantics and developed different definitions. For instance, Wirtz et al. (2013) examined customer engagement in online brand communities (OBC) and proposed that "individuals who

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