

**MEASURING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA:
TOWARDS A MORE QUALITATIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE
APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

In a context of digital economy, the dynamics around social media (SM) are developing and related marketing opportunities growing. Companies' investments in SM are increasing as the number of users at the international level is constantly developing. As one of the main marketing channels today, SM represents a key lever for brands to engage customers and strengthen loyalty through relevant content and campaigns. Thus, one of the main present challenges remain the way of capturing and measuring customer engagement (CE) on SM to better manage it and apprehend the famous return on investment (Moorman 2017). While many studies and reports apprehend and mention CE, academic literature reveals a lack of agreement in conceptualizing this construct which seems to be examined under different dimensions and contextual conditions. In general, the review of the main studies on CE leads to the identification of three approaches: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (e.g., Brodie et al. 2011; Algharabat et al. 2020; Gligor et al. 2019) without a clear consensus. CE dimensionality is closely related to discrepancies in terms of conceptualization. While some authors operationalize CE by focusing on one dimension (i.e., Sprott et al. 2009), other studies foster multidimensional character and rely on the three sides mentioned above (i.e. Dessart 2017; Hollebeek 2014). While research studies keep relying on psychometric scales to measure CE on SM to gather declarative data among customers, practitioners use set of selective metrics capture some specific dynamics. Consequently, the contrast of academic approach with managerial one can lead to revisit CE and reach better matching in the way it is captured and measured.

This study aims therefore at the conception of customer engagement (CE) on social media (SM) by covering three different managerial points of view: companies (multinationals and SMEs), advertising agencies, and research companies. Through 96 in-depth interviews with practitioners belonging to different sectors, this study

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enriches the knowledge on CE providing a more comprehensive framework of this phenomenon. This paper contributes to theoretical level by summarizing and improving the conception of CE. In addition, the adopted approach enriched knowledge about CE and its measurement with apprehension of performance on SM. Moreover, this research sheds light on a critical research and managerial issue related to customer engagement on social media and contingencies of performance measurement. While most studies focused on behavioral and quantitative approaches or indicators of ROI in SM, this article represents an original alternative to initiate a mindset change in the way effectiveness of initiatives on SM are thought and monitored. It is an attempt to foster a more systemic and holistic conception of CE and its related dynamics by looking at more qualitative and comprehensive frameworks in line with the need of a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Keywords: customer engagement, social media, qualitative research

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