

# Antecedents to Customer Engagement: Moderating Role of Media Richness of Brand Pages

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**How to cite this paper:** Gosain, A., Srivastava, M. and Gupta, D. (2019) Antecedents to Customer Engagement: Moderating Role of Media Richness of Brand Pages. *Theoretical Economics Letters*, 9, 2550-2565. <https://doi.org/10.4236/tel.2019.97161>

**Received:** August 26, 2019

**Accepted:** October 11, 2019

**Published:** October 14, 2019

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## Abstract

A key contributor to a brand's strength is how well its customers are engaged with the brand. With marketers spending huge amounts of money on social media presence of their brands, it becomes vital to assess how well this social media presence in the form of brand pages is able to generate customer engagement. This study explores the characteristics of online brand pages and examines how they impact customer engagement with the brands. We also examine the moderating role of brand pages' media richness in relationship with the characteristics of the brand page and customer engagement. The conceptual model proposed is evaluated using data from 479 survey responses towards 23 brand pages. This study contributes to the literature on customer engagement by proposing a decomposition of its dimensions and studying it in a system of conceptual relationships with its antecedents.

## Keywords

Brand Categories, Social Media Platforms, Customer Engagement, Brand Pages

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## 1. Introduction

A brand page is a profile on a social networking site and enables companies to generate added value for their brands and customers. Companies are realising the potential of social network on the internet and leveraging these for business opportunities. The usage of social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube, Twitter) has grown significantly amongst customers. According to Global Digital Report 2019, 3.484 bn people in the world use social media and there are about 3.256 bn using social media on mobile phones [1]. Corporate correspon-

dence conveyed through social networks is an exponentially developing tool of marketing with consistently expanding number of users. Given the expansion of various types of social media, there is much debate on the level of control and oversight that organizations need to exert on this communication tool especially when corresponding with customers. A large number of organizations have faith in the high potential of these networks as millions of prospects spend hours on this communication tool.

This seems to be reflected in the growing trend among corporate houses to set up social media command centres using digital outreach agencies. Companies like Taj Hotels, Airtel, Hindustan Unilever Limited, Nestle, Sula Vineyards, Marriott, and L'Oreal are amongst those that have invested in such centres with an objective of engaging with consumers online [2].

In India, the adoption of social media over the last few years has been rapid. This has been possible because of the high mobile (particularly smartphone) penetration coupled with low telecom tariffs. A high proportion (92.6%) of total internet subscribers are mobile internet subscribers. Also, by 2030, there will be 1.1 billion internet users in India and 78.8% of total population would be online [3]. The large mobile subscriber base, high data demand and deep smartphone penetration have driven investments in social media, mobile internet and m-commerce.

With marketers spending huge amounts of money on social media presence of their brands, it becomes vital to assess how well this social media presence in the form of brand pages is able to generate customer engagement. Though there has been enough research done in the area of customer engagement [4] [5] [6], however, not much empirical research work has been done on customer engagement in the context of online brand pages.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to explore the characteristics of online brand pages and examine how they impact customer engagement with the brands. The rest of the article has been structured as follows: literature review followed by conceptual framework and hypothesis, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Customer Engagement**

Engagement, as a concept, has received wide attention across disciplines like information systems, business management, marketing and other areas of social sciences [7] [8] [9] [10]. Some of the aspects of customer engagement explored specifically in marketing-related research are with regard to brands [11], organisations and product management [12] and brand communities [13]. Customer engagement has a positive influence on realization of sales and marketing objectives [14] [15]. However, the concept of customer engagement suffers from a lack of consensus on its meaning, dimensions and operationalisation.

A number of studies have explored customer engagement in the context of communities as a psychological state [9] [13] [14] [16] [17] [18]. Patterson *et al.* [12], Bowden [7], and Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, [6] have studied it in the context of customer services. Customer engagement has also been studied in the context of brands and customer relations [15] [19]. Not only has the context differed across studies but also the conceptualizations and the possible antecedents of customer engagement. It may thus be safely concluded that the concept of customer engagement needs more refinement in its definition and its interpretation.

It is worth noting that as a concept, customer engagement is complex and multidimensional. Most of the researchers have considered it as a multi-dimensional concept in the rainbow spanning the cognitive, emotional, behavioural and even social aspect [7] [16] [20] [21] [22] [23]. For instance, as defined by Hollebeek [21], “customer (brand) engagement is the level of customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions”. Also, Brodie *et al.* [5] defined it as “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand).”

While there has been a lot of work in the area of customer engagement, most of the recent work has been descriptive [6] [8] [9] [24]. We do find some research work of empirical and qualitative nature, where researchers have explored how brands are affected by customer engagement [15] [19] and the effect of brand communities [20] [25].

Chan *et al.* [17] while studying online social media explored the dimensions of customer engagement. They proposed vigour, absorption, and dedication as key aspects or dimensions of customer psychological engagement. This has some parallels with Patterson *et al.* [12], who posited that psychological engagement of a customer is based on the extent of vigour, dedication, absorption and interaction. Newman and Harrison [26] also suggest that engagement is a multidimensional construct.

The present study adopts the dimensions of customer psychological engagement from Patterson’s [12] work in the context of a brand. This provides us the framework of three dimensions of customer engagement. The first of these is vigour which denotes the level of energy of the customer and also his willingness to spend time and effort. The second is absorption, which signifies the extent of a customer being concentrated, happy, and engrossed. The third dimension is dedication, which relates to the degree to which the customer perceives a sense of significance, zeal, motivation, egotism, and challenge towards brands.

### 3. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

The present study recognized three major types of antecedents of customer engagement with reference to brand pages. As Pervan Doorn *et al.* [24], customer engagement is influenced by personality characteristics of customers, company

initiatives, and the context. The present study uses self-expressive behaviour as representing consumer characteristics. Company initiatives denote the efforts made by a firm to improve customer engagement which may use media richness as a moderator and information quality as a predictor. The present study focuses on customer engagement at the level of a consumer. Also, since social interaction is often found on brand pages, this study utilizes social interaction to capture the contextual influence.

### 3.1. Antecedents of Customer Engagement

#### *Informational quality*

The brand page is principally presented as an application of multimedia technology. In order to achieve its purpose, it has to provide some functional value for visitors. Brand pages are quite different in how they present information which may be a function of the product, service, brand philosophy or several other factors. However, without attempting to understand the underlying philosophy or objectives of the brand, we attempt to look at a variable denoting the subjective assessment of the brand page. Wu [27] attempted to codify the information available on a brand page using several parameters. This includes the accuracy of the information, the validity of data, the objectivity amongst others. This is also referred to formally as an informational quality which can be conceptualized as the perceived overall value and excellence of information posted on the brand page. A brand page high on this overall measure will provide a great deal of value for visitors [28]. It can thus be posited that the level of customer engagement will increase with higher levels of information quality. Therefore, we propose:

***H1: Information quality of the brand page positively influences customer engagement with the brand page.***

### 3.2. Social Interaction

Social networking sites were initially mooted as information sharing platforms and have slowly morphed into platforms for social interaction [29]. Interaction on brand pages takes the form of exchanging opinions, reviews and experiences which are related to the brands in question [25]. The provision for customer interaction has become so imperative that today most brand pages elicit opinions from visitors and encourage interaction. This was in line with the argument made by Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban [30] support of users' social interaction is important for brand pages since this, in turn, increases the level of confidence in the brand. An additional advantage of such encouragement is the strengthening of visitors' social identities with the brands. Therefore, we hypothesize that increasing interactivity between customers should increase social identity and ultimately customer engagement.

***H2: The quality of social interaction in the brand page positively influences the customer engagement with the brand page.***

### 3.3. Self-Expressive Behaviour

The Self, as an abstract concept, is partially created by an individual dynamically through consumption [31] [32]. Thompson [33] describes the self as “a symbolic project, which the individual must actively construct out of available symbolic materials, materials which the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity”. Self-concept has been defined as “the relatively stable schemata of oneself that are generalized to the extent that they refer to an individual’s view of him- or herself across different situations” ([34], p. 95). Social media are popular platforms for self-expression, communication and self-promotion. The emergence of what Castells [35] has termed “mass self-communication” as a global system of networked interaction—a system within which platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus<sup>1</sup> and Twitter offer crucial tools to galvanize the expression of online identity.

The personal image or the product user image is “the image formed of a generalized user of the product through advertising” [36]. Brands are consumed not only for their utilitarian purpose but also for the symbolic associations of the brands projected in their image [37]. Prior research suggests that customer’s consumption is directly related to their perception of similarity of the product-user image to their own self-image [36] [38] [39].

The relationship of a person with a brand in terms of the strength and depth has been a subject of study for quite a while now [36]. Several researchers have reported how consumers tend to feel that possessions are an extension of themselves and help define their sense of self [40] [41]. While describing brands, consumers also go so far as to project their own personality characteristics onto them [42].

Goffman [43] argued that individuals tend to sculpt their personalities using the mode of intentional presentation. Sometimes, several of these displays are not intentional but yet become a part of self-expression. In the context of SNSs, while conscious self-promotion is the overt objective of a user, there is also unconscious self-expression. These are designed by the owners of these platforms using sophisticated interface technologies. Attachment to a brand is thus likely to increase in cases where customers project their self on brands. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

***H3: Self-expressive behaviour of the respondent has a positive impact on customer engagement with the brand page.***

### 3.4. Moderating Role of Media Richness

Brand pages on the SNSs are typically very heterogenous in their appearance and content. This is usually a reflection of the brand imagery and the objectives of the brand for the page. Brand pages also vary by the type of media used on the page. This can be differentially measured using the variable of media richness. The media richness theory [44] defines contextual cues in a communication me-

<sup>1</sup>Data for this study was collected well before March 2019 when Google Plus was withdrawn for consumers.

dium as its “richness”. “Richness” in the form of visual cues generally tend to increase the effectiveness of the medium. Daft and Lengel [44] have attempted to study media richness and find that it is a function of several characteristics of the medium. This could be the variety of language, the number of cues and the capacity for prompt feedback amongst others. SNS pages, as used by brands, offer different media types which, in turn, affects media richness of these pages. Brand pages and posts therein can be bare in the form of text or could include audio-visual media. Hence, one could conceptualise a continuum of message richness for these posts on brand pages. At one extreme one could have text-only posts which are leaner media-types and at the other extreme one could have posts containing embedded photos, videos, or URLs. The effectiveness of the medium will also increase with this gradation. Hence, we anticipate that the use of richer media, such as photos, videos, or URLs, is associated with higher customer engagement. Therefore, we argue that the inclusion of richer media types such as photos, videos, or URLs, is associated with higher customer engagement and it is expected that more media rich brand page will show stronger relation with the antecedents of customer engagement.

Studying the moderating effects of media richness on the relationships between the independent and dependent variables will be of theoretical interest [45] [46]. In customer relationships, moderation takes place when the variable M (moderating variable) modifies the relationship between the variables X (independent variable) and Y (dependent variable) [47] by either increasing or decreasing the strength of the relationship. For the purposes of this study, media richness was manipulated at two levels: less and more rich. Based on the above discussion, three further hypotheses can thus be formulated.

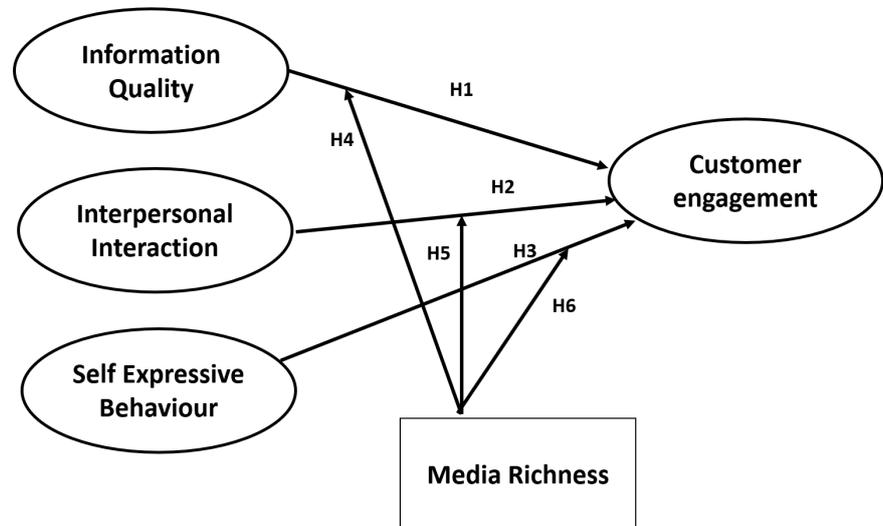
***H4: Media richness will strengthen the positive relationship between information quality of the brand page and customer engagement with the brand page.***

***H5: Media richness will strengthen the positive relationship between interaction quality of the brand page and customer engagement with the brand page.***

***H6: Media richness will strengthen the positive relationship between self-expressive behaviour elicited on the brand page and customer engagement with the brand page.***

All the hypotheses discussed above are visually presented in **Figure 1**.

Data for the analysis was collected using a questionnaire survey. Most of the scales used to measure the constructs in this study are adapted from previous studies in order to ensure content validity. Items measuring customer engagement—vigour, dedication, and absorption were adopted from Cheung *et al.*, [18]. The self-expressive behaviour was measured using a scale developed by Higie and Feick (1989). To study interpersonal interaction and information quality, items from previous studies were adopted [48]. Media richness was measured by using consumer perception about the richness of the brand page in terms of inclusion of media types such as audio-visuals, photos and other links.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

The survey was conducted in three stages for the present study: qualitative field interviews followed by a pilot study and the final study through a questionnaire. 20 exploratory interviews were conducted (8 academicians, 4 industry experts and 8 end consumers) with the intent to clarify the constructs and structure of the study framework. The academicians were selected on the basis of their expertise in the areas of digital marketing and word of mouth marketing. The industry experts were practitioners who were handling roles pertaining to digital marketing. The experts were drawn from the acquaintance pool of the authors. The end-consumer respondents were selected using convenience sampling. The interviews lasted between 40 - 60 minutes. This step was necessary for development of the instrument. The instrument was then checked for its face validity and content validity issues with the help of academic and industry experts. Later, a pilot study was conducted using the instrument with a sample of 154 respondents. The objective of the pilot study was to test the reliability of the scales used to measure different constructs in the instrument. After examining the results from these preliminary respondents, the questionnaire was finally distributed amongst the final sample for the research among students/executives/alumni of an urban university. The sample was diverse with respect to key demographics including computer knowledge. Each item was measured using a six-point Likert agreement scale (with 6 denoting strongly agree and 1 denoting strongly disagree)

Nearly 1500 respondents were contacted and administered a screening questionnaire ascertaining whether they were active on social media and were exposed to brand pages on social media. Around 955 respondents were found eligible and the final questionnaire was distributed amongst them. Only 667 completely filled questionnaires were returned. However final usable sample after the removal of suspicious pattern data, outliers etc. was 479. There were 23 items in the model and thus the sample size of requirements of both 5:1 [49] and 10:1

[50] were met. **Table 1** provides certain descriptive statistics of the sample. Nearly 60% of the respondents were males while 40% were females. A large majority of the respondents were in the age group of 20 - 30 years and a significant majority of respondents (46.56%) had encountered brand pages on Facebook.

## 4. Analysis and Results

We used covariance-based (CB) SEM (AMOS). First, a psychometric assessment of the measurement model was conducted. Thereafter, the structural model was evaluated. This sequence of analysis provides confidence that the structural relationships being evaluated are reflected in the measurements deployed and have desired psychometric properties [51].

### 4.1. Measurement Model

Customer engagement emerged as a second-order construct. In the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), customer engagement emerged as a three-factor second-order reflective construct. The second order was considered as the CFA showed high correlations between the four constructs. The results clearly support that customer engagement is explained through the three dimensions viz., vigour, dedication, and absorption. The fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 3.65$ , GFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.074, NFI = 0.884, CFI = 0.82) suggest that the model with the three latent variables represents a good fit to the data. Thus, customer engagement was a holistic construct encompassing the four sub-constructs. The other three constructs were first-order reflective constructs.

### 4.2. Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Test of convergent validity was conducted to assess the extent to which the scale

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the sample.

	Category	Number of Users (Percentage)
Gender	Female	193 (40.29%)
	Male	286 (59.71%)
Age	<20	15 (3.13%)
	21 - 25	281 (58.66%)
	26 - 30	170 (35.49%)
	30>	13 (2.71%)
Social Media Platform chosen	Facebook	223 (46.56%)
	Google Plus	57 (11.90%)
	LinkedIn	52 (10.86%)
	Twitter	147 (30.69%)
More rich media	Number of Brand pages (12)	234
Less rich media	Number of brand pages (11)	245

items were theoretically related. Convergent validity assessment involved three criteria, 1) at least 0.70 composite reliability, 2) at least 0.50 average variance extracted [52], and 3) greater than 0.50 item loadings on their expected factor and less than 0.40 on other factors [53].

**Table 2** shows that all convergent validity criteria were met, *i.e.*, CR values ranged from 0.79 to 0.87, average variance extracted values ranged from 0.52 to 0.57, and item loadings were higher than 0.60.

**Table 2.** AVE, CR and other statistics.

			Standardised Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P	AVE	CR
<b>Information quality</b>							0.56	0.79
I find the information in the page to be valuable	IQ1	INFOQ	0.73					
I think this page is a valuable source of information	IQ2	INFOQ	0.87	0.09	9.92	0.001		
There is unique information value on this page	IQ3	INFOQ	0.62	0.09	9.90	0.001		
<b>Interpersonal interaction</b>							0.52	0.81
Other members are very responsive to my post	INTP1	INTP	0.84					
On the brand page I can help others	INTP2	INTP	0.68	0.08	13.01	0.001		
On this brand page I can share my ideas with other users	INTP3	INTP	0.60	0.08	11.88	0.001		
On the brand page I am able to interact with like mind people	INTP4	INTP	0.73	0.08	13.45	0.001		
<b>Self-Expressive Behaviour</b>							0.53	0.87
Portrays an image of me to others	SIC1	SELF	0.87					
Part of my self-image	SIC2	SELF	0.67	0.10	11.70	0.001		
Tells others about me	SIC3	SELF	0.61	0.10	11.12	0.001		
Others use to judge me	SIC4	SELF	0.75	0.09	10.28	0.001		
Form of self-expression	SIC5	SELF	0.72	0.13	12.26	0.001		
Creates a certain image	SIC6	SELF	0.71	0.09	9.85	0.001		
<b>Dedication</b>							0.52	0.81
I am enthusiastic about the brand	DED1	DED	0.71			0.001		
the brand inspires me	DED2	DED	0.62	0.07	12.16	0.001		
I found the brand full of meaning and purpose	DED3	DED	0.82	0.08	11.48	0.001		
I am interested in the brand	DED4	DED	0.71	0.07	12.06	0.001		
<b>Absorption</b>							0.53	0.82
Time flies when I am on the brand page	ABS1	ABS	0.70					
The brand page was so absorbing that I forgot about everything else	ABS2	ABS	0.79	0.12	5.75	0.001		
I am rarely distracted when I am on the brand page	ABS3	ABS	0.68	0.13	6.71	0.001		
<b>Vigour</b>							0.57	0.80
I can continue on the brand page for very long periods at a time	VIG1	VIG	0.87			0.001		
I feel vigorous when on the brand page	VIG2	VIG	0.72	0.10	9.15	0.001		
I devote a lot of energy to the brand	VIG3	VIG	0.67	0.11	9.15	0.001		

### 4.3. Structural Model

For the SEM model, we used AMOS20 to test whether the empirical data conformed to the proposed model. The model included 23 items describing 6 latent constructs: interpersonal interaction, information quality, self-expressive behaviour, customer engagement and its three dimensions, *viz.*, vigour, dedication, and absorption. We examined the model fit of our research model, as shown in **Table 3**. The criteria used in the SEM were as suggested by Hair *et al.* [51]. Although the value of GFI (0.87) was slightly less than the recommended value (0.90), all other fit indices were acceptable. Thus, the results indicated adequate model fit between our research model and the empirical data.

To test the significance of each hypothesized path in the research model, AMOS reports raw and standardized estimates for all specified paths, as well as standard errors and test statistics for each path. The result of the structural equation model is shown in **Figure 2**. All the relationships were supported in the model. 71% variance in customer engagement was explained by the model. The results indicate that information quality has a significant positive relationship with customer engagement. Interpersonal interaction has a significant and positive relationship with customer engagement and self-expressive behaviour also has a positive relationship with customer engagement.

### 4.4. Moderation Effects

Media richness was then included as part of the model to test for moderation. The sample was split into two to compare the coefficients of each pair respectively. The significance of the moderating effects was found by calculating T-value for cross-multiple of the moderator and dependent variables [54] [55]. **Table 4** has results for the comparison of path coefficients. The path coefficients from interpersonal interaction and self-expressive behaviour to customer engagement are significantly higher for more rich media brand pages as compared

**Table 3.** Results of hypotheses test and fit indices.

			(a)				
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R	P	Label
H1	Customer engagement	Information quality	0.193	0.038	5.094	0.001	S*
H2	Customer engagement	Interpersonal interaction	0.224	0.039	5.736	0.001	S
H3	Customer engagement	Self-expressive behaviour	0.774	0.093	8.354	0.001	S

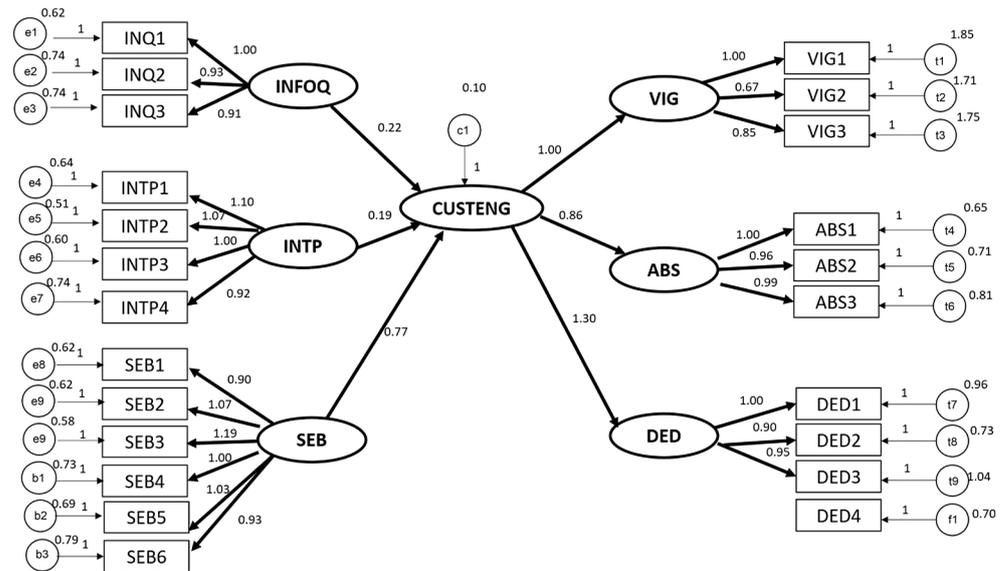
\*S—Supported, NS—Not Supported.

(b)						
Fit indices	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI
Recommended value	<3	<0.08	>0.90	>0.80	>0.90	>0.90
Value in this study	2.73	0.065	0.87	0.81	0.91	0.92

**Table 4.** Results of moderating effects.

		More rich media			Less rich media			CR for comparison (t)	Hypothesis
		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.		
customer engagement	Interpersonal interaction	0.226	0.077	2.93**	0.015	0.041	0.362	2.413	S
customer engagement	Information quality	2.386	0.185	12.89**	3.029	0.284	10.67**	1.896	NS
customer engagement	self-expressive behaviour	2.443	0.191	12.82**	1.461	0.325	4.49**	2.01	S

\*\* for  $p \leq 0.01$  and \* for  $p \leq 0.05$ ; S: Supported, PS: Partially Supported, NS: Not Supported.



**Figure 2.** Structural equation model.

to less rich media. However, media richness showed no impact on the relationship between information quality and customer engagement. This indicated that if the brand page is less media rich then interaction quality has insignificant impact on customer engagement. Thus, more media rich brand pages are important to engage customers. Firms need to create media rich interface to engage customers. Similarly, customers exhibiting self-expressive behaviour are more inclined to brand pages that are media rich.

### 5. Discussion

The extant empirical studies on brand engagement have analysed customer engagement as an outcome of one of different variables, such as, organizational offerings or activities [10], a brand [8] [11] [15] [56], the brand community members [13] [19] [25] [57]. This is consistent with other empirical work in the area of brand engagement [5] [58].

This study demonstrates that customer engagement is not embedded in just a

linear consumer-brand continuum. Customer engagement resides in a network of dynamic and complex interactions which include the customer himself, other individuals, the brand and the firm. These findings reinforce customer engagement as being a multi-dimensional construct. Hence, the findings are in line with previous research by Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, *et al.* [5] and Hollebeek *et al.* [15]. The findings also revalidate the three-dimension framework of customer engagement proposed by Cheung *et al.* [18].

The study findings also bring to light the importance of media rich brand pages demonstrating that media rich brand pages are more likely to have higher brand engagement with customers, thus, highlighting the need for innovative and engaging brand page interface.

The study findings are in line with customer engagement framework proposed by Wirtz *et al.* [59] on precursors of brand community engagement as being brand related, and of social and functional character. High brand community engagement leads to benefits to the community and the brand itself, more so in positively impacting community participation and behaviours [60].

## 6. Conclusions

The intent of this study was to offer a refinement of the concept of customer engagement with online brand pages. As discussed earlier, despite the abundant literature in the area of customer engagement [8] [59] [61], there is a lacuna of studies when it comes to exploring customer engagement in the context of social media brand pages. The study, therefore, contributes to the extant literature on customer engagement in two ways. First, it explores in depth the dimensionality of customer engagement in the context of social media brand pages. This area so far has received little empirical attention. Second, the study furthers our understanding on the role of media richness and its relationship with customer engagement and its antecedents. The latter findings are interesting since media rich brand pages seem to foster greater customer engagement. Brands could consider having an index for media richness and vary this based on the objectives for the brand. There is an obvious trade-off here since media rich content while being more effective in increasing engagement is also likely to be more expensive. Brands can thus take a conscious decision on the level of media richness required on their page.

The study has some limitations. The design of the study does not factor in the differences across social media platforms. It would be interesting to do a comparative analysis of such platform in terms of impact of the antecedents to customer engagement. Another interesting area of exploration would be the differences in engagement for different categories of brands. We do not find many empirical insights on how the brand categories themselves impact customer engagement.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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