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Literature Review on Conceptualisation of Online Consumer Engagement

Summary

The purpose of the current study is to develop a literature review on "online consumer engagement" (OCE). Articles from 2006 to 2016 published in the marketing journals and other related journals have been reviewed to summarise the OCE concept. Although there is not an agreed definition and conceptualisation of OCE, this study classified the concept as either behavioural or psychological within the dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural type. The objects of OCE also were grouped as engagement with a brand, online brand community, and multiple engagement objects to address the importance of interactive nature of "customer engagement" (CE), which allows customers to engage with multiple objects at the same time. Finally, this study provides the most updated review on the OCE concept in the context of online engagement.

Key words: online consumer engagement, conceptualisation, dimensions of engagement.

JEL codes: M31, M37

Introduction

Marketing has evolved within a complex and rapidly evolving ecosystem, which includes moving away from face-to-face to direct marketing via the web and digital opportunities. This evolved ecosystem enables marketers to tap into a direct source of information about consumers and engage with them on an individual and universal scale at the same time (Stone 2014).

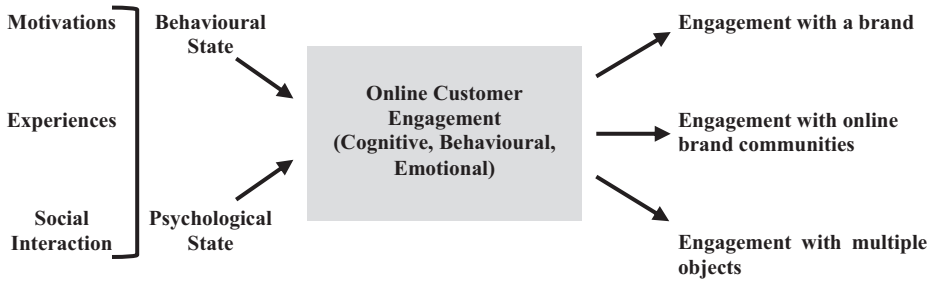
The engagement concept also has been recognised by scholars and explored extensively in the academic literature in the recent years. Furthermore, the Marketing Science Institute identified the online and mobile consumer engagement (CE) with brands/firms concept as the primary research areas for 2014-2016 and 2016-2018 (Marketing Science Institute 2014, p. 4; Marketing Science Institute 2016, p. 9).

In response to this, the *Journal of Marketing Management* has published a special issue on engagement concept that involves seven papers and two commentaries. In this issue, the study of Maslowska et al. (2016) have reviewed the definitions and components of engage-

ment by focusing on antecedents and consequences to propose a new CE model. Although there are various attempts to define and conceptualise CE, there is no agreed definition or conceptualisation of CE in the literature (Calder et al. 2015; Dessart et al. 2016; Hollebeek et al. 2016; Schivinski et al. 2016). Building on previous research on engagement, this study mostly focuses on reviewing the conceptualisation of online consumer engagement (OCE) literature – as the confusion on OCE literature could be explained by either due to lack of agreement on the various dimensions or levels of engagement.

Therefore, this paper provides a systematic review of the literature on OCE conceptualisation, and concludes with some directions for further research. The main purpose of this study is to review and synthesise the differences in the existing literature on OCE, which is derived from the following research question: 'How should online engagement be defined and conceptualised?' Although the consumer engagement concept has gained popularity, only a few article used the terms 'CE', 'consumer engagement' or 'brand engagement' before 2005 (Brodie et al. 2011). Therefore, CE could be seen as a relatively new concept in marketing (Hollebeek et al. 2014; Brodie et al. 2011).

Figure 1
A conceptual framework



Source: own elaboration.

The articles from 2006 to 2016 in the marketing journals and other related journals have been reviewed to summarize the online OCE concept[1]. In literature authors alternate between CE and OCE terminology, especially when writing about online communities or consumers' behaviour on the Internet. Examining and synthesising the literature on this topic would be beneficial to deeply understand the concept and its critical points that create confusion on the definition and conceptualisation of customer engagement.

[1] Within the academic literature, very few academic articles used the terms "online consumer engagement", "online customer engagement" and/or "online brand engagement" prior to 2009 (10 non scientific papers) – EBSCO (Accessed 24 Feb. 2017). Since 2009 are being increasingly used in scientific articles: 1 paper adopting one or more of these terms were identified in 2009, 1 in 2010, 4 articles and conference papers in 2011, 5 articles in 2012, 7 articles in 2013, 19 articles and conference papers in 2014, 20 articles, conference papers or dissertations in 2015 and 21 articles and conference papers in 2016.

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The following conceptual framework has been developed for this study to summarise the systematic literature review (Figure 1). This conceptual framework presents the components of OCE concept that have been largely discussed in the current literature.

Dimensions of online customer engagement

In the marketing literature, various authors have examined the definition of CE. These different attempts have created confusion about its proper definition. As some of them see the engagement as a psychological state[2] (e.g., Patterson et al. 2006; Higgins and Scholer 2009; Bowden 2009; Calder et al. 2009; Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011a) others see it as a behavioural state (e.g., van Doorn et al. 2010; Kumar et al. 2010; Bijmolt et al. 2010; Verhoef et al. 2010; Schivinski et al. 2016).

According to Dessart et al. (2016), differences on the dimensionality of CE and different engagement foci (single versus multiple) create confusion in the literature concerns conceptualisation of the CE. Therefore, this study groups conceptualisation studies according to tripartite (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) dimensionality as the literature largely adopts this dimensionality approach (Brodie et al. 2011; Calder et al. 2009; Hollebeek 2011a; 2011b; Hollebeek et al. 2014; 2016) under the categories of different engagement objects which are 'engagement with a brand', 'engagement with an online brand community' and 'engagement with multiple objects'.

Despite the dominance of multidimensionality of the engagement concept (Hollebeek et al. 2016), some authors examined CE as a unidimensional concept that focuses on mostly behavioural aspects. Some authors focused on the social media engagement behaviours such as liking and commenting (Kabadayi and Price 2014; Tsai and Men 2013; Oviedo-García et al. 2014), consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related content (Schivinski et al. 2016), as well as online brand community engagement behaviours (Lee et al. 2011; Gummerus et al. 2012).

In a related study trying to conceptualise CE in terms of behavioural actions, Maslowska et al. (2016) developed a model which involves all different touch-points such as website and social media, and many objects (e.g., brand, firm, companies). Despite the importance of the behavioural dimension, the other dimensions (e.g., cognitive, emotional) and factors (e.g. motivations, social interaction) had not been considered in the study of Maslowska et al. (2016).

In addition to the unidimensional concept that focuses on behaviours, Sprott et al. (2009) focus on the emotional dimension of CE and develop a theory of brand engagement in self-concept, which represents an individual characteristic reflecting one's tendency to integrate brands into their self-concept. This study has gained critics because it does not consider

[2] Hollebeek (2011, p. 6) defines "customer engagement" as "the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions". Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 253) views "customer engagement behaviors" as "the customers' behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers."

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the interactive nature of CE and focus only psychological components (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek et al. 2014).

Unlike previous studies, which embody unidimensional approach, the study of Brodie et al. (2011) acknowledge the existence of emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of engagement. The conceptualisation from Brodie et al. (2011) draws on the studies of Patterson et al. (2006), Vivek et al. (2012), Hollebeek (2011a), and Mollen and Wilson (2010). In addition to marketing literature, they also analysed the social science/management literature and the business practice to propose the tripartite dimensionality for CE (Brodie et al. 2013). Similarly, Calder et al. (2009), Vivek et al. (2012), and So et al. (2016) extend the three-dimensional model by recognising explicitly social connection and interactions of individuals. Furthermore, Kumar and Pansari (2016) illustrate the importance of customer purchase engagement, incentivized referrals, social media influence, customer feedback, and customer knowledge on CE.

Besides these three dimensions, to conceptualize the CE, authors have also examined the motivational basis of the construct. For instance, Hollebeek (2011a, p. 790) claims that engagement is "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind". Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) stated that CE is "resulting from motivational drivers". Wirtz et al. (2013, p. 229) address this issue by conceptualising CE as "consumer's intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members". Moreover, Baldus et al. (2015) proposed a conceptualisation of consumer engagement with an online brand community that is based on eleven motivations to interact rather than the interaction itself.

The large body literature has accepted the tripartite dimensionality. However, it is important to notice the social dimension of CE in literature advocated by Calder et al. (2009), Mersey at al. (2010) and Vivek et al. (2012). The social dimension was also suggested to be further examined to develop a more applicable conceptualisation for OCE (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Similarly, conceptual studies have also shown different attitudes towards the objects of engagement.

Objects of online customer engagement concept

CE objects represent the different actors, which consumers can engage simultaneously (Brodie et al. 2011, Vivek et al. 2012, De Vries et al. 2014). In this study, the objects of OCE concept are categorised and examined in terms of engagement with a brand, engagement with an online brand community, and engagement with multiple objects.

The object of engagement with a brand via web pages is examined by various authors (Calder et al. 2009; Mollen and Wilson 2010; Mersey et al. 2010). Calder et al. (2009) and Mersey et al. (2010) used experiences to examine the CE with a brand via web pages. In a separate endeavour, Mollen and Wilson (2010) have examined this type of engagement object by focusing on the constructs of interactivity, flow and involvement. These studies had

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been found inadequate to conceptualise CE as they only focus on experiences and cognitive dimension (Brodie et al., 2011).

After 2010, studies, which focus on engagement with an online brand community, have gained popularity among the scholars (e.g., Lee et al. 2011; Gummerus et al. 2012; Kuo and Feng 2013; Wirtz et al. 2013; Brodie et al. 2013; Chan et al. 2014; Hammedi et al. 2015; Baldus et al. 2015; Fernandes and Remelhe 2016; Nguyena et al. 2015; Marbach et al. 2016). This popularity could be explained by the dynamic and interactive nature of virtual brand communities on social media as they support multi-way communications between consumers and brands, and among consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Wirtz et al. 2013).

To capture the interactive nature of engagement, authors have examined the engagement with brand and online brand communities at the same time (e.g., Dessart et al. 2016). The multiple engagement object approach has been supported by various authors (e.g., Gambetti et al. 2010, Brodie et al. 2011, Vivek et al. 2012). For example, Dessart et al. (2015) have attempted to conceptualise CE by considering the multidimensionality and multiplicity of different engagement objects, which are engagement with the brand and engagement with the online brand community. Similar to the previous study, Maslowska et al. (2016) also consider the various objects, including the brand, customers, and other actors in their model. However, the authors only focus on behavioural dimension of engagement, and do not consider the emotional and cognitive dimensions.

Although examining CE with online brand communities provides valuable insights to conceptualise CE, only a few studies have embodied multiple objects approach. To develop a conceptualisation for OCE, further studies should acknowledge the multiplicity of engagement objects.

Conclusions

The current literature review on OCE has shown that there is not an agreement on the definition and conceptualisation of CE. This study has identified two streams of research with regard to the definition of OCE: the first stream derives from the psychological component, and the secondary stream derives from the behavioural component. However, it is notable from the literature review that the large body of literature agrees with the Brodie et al. (2011) three dimensions of CE (behavioural, emotional, cognitive). In addition to these three dimensions, experiences, social interaction and motivations are also recognised by scholars to conceptualise the OCE. Different levels of engagement with various actors (brand, consumers, and other stakeholders) have created diversity among the views of scholars for the conceptualisation of CE. The existing literature mainly emphasizes on examining the OCE concept with a single object (e.g., engagement with a brand) rather than examining multiple engagement objects (e.g., engagement with a brand, consumers, and among consumers). Finally, the recent studies have acknowledged that consumers could create relationships with brands, other individual consumers, and brand communities at the same time due to the interactive nature of engagement.

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Further empirical research should be conducted to understand the relationships between engagement objects and subjects as the large body literature has focused on engagement with a brand or online brand community. Focusing on only one object while conceptualising the CE may not possibly provide a strong framework due to the complex nature of engagement. Besides, this current literature review on the OCE concept has identified that the existing studies have mostly embodied the quantitative research approach. Therefore, further studies could challenge the data collected through quantitative research by embodying qualitative research methods.

As with any piece of research, this study faces some limitations, including those related to the scope and the depth of the study. Firstly, this study has focused on the OCE concept. However, online and offline contexts of engagement have started to emerge (Hollebeek et al. 2016). Therefore, further studies should research the interfaces between online and offline contexts to conceptualise CE.

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Konceptualizacja zaangażowania konsumenta *on-line* – przegląd literatury

Streszczenie

Celem opracowanego przeglądu literatury jest zrozumienie znaczenia pojęcia „zaangażowania *on-line* konsumenta" (OCE). Analizie poddano artykuły opublikowane m.in. w marketingowych czasopismach naukowych w latach 2006-2016. W badanych tekstach autorzy nie są zgodni co do definicji i konceptualizacji OCE. Na podstawie literatury dokonano podziału tych definicji na dwie grupy – behawioralne i psychologiczne. Prócz tego wyodrębniono trzy wymiary OCE – kognitywny, emocjonalny i behawioralny. Definicje OCE pogrupowano również według typu. Wyodrębniono zaangażowanie: wobec marki, wobec społeczności *on-line* związanej z marką oraz wobec wielu obiektów. Z punktu widzenia przyszłych badań, szczególnie istotna jest skłonność do jednoczesnego angażowania się klientów w Internecie względem wielu obiektów. Przedstawiona analiza stanowi najnowszy przegląd koncepcji zaangażowania *on-line* konsumentów.

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Słowa kluczowe: zaangażowanie *on-line* konsumenta, konceptualizacja, wymiary zaangażowania.

Kody JEL: M31, M37

Концептуализация онлайн-вовлеченности потребителя – обзор литературы

Резюме

Цель разработанного обзора литературы – понять значение термина «онлайн-вовлеченность потребителя» (англ. OCE). Анализ охватил собой статьи, опубликованные, в частности, в маркетинговых научных журналах в 2006-2016 гг. В обследованных текстах у авторов нет согласия насчет определения и концептуализации OCE. На основе литературы провели распределение этих определений по двум группам: бихевиоральные и психологические. Кроме того, выделили три измерения OCE: когнитивное, эмоциональное и бихевиоральное. Определения OCE группировали также по типу. Выделили вовлеченность по отношению к марке, онлайн-сообщности, связанной с маркой, и по отношению ко многим объектам. С точки зрения будущих исследований особенно существенной является склонность к одновременной вовлеченности клиентов в интернете по отношению ко многим объектам. Представленный анализ – новейший обзор концепций онлайн-вовлеченности потребителей.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-вовлеченность потребителя, концептуализация, измерения вовлеченности.

Коды JEL: M31, M37

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