

The Effectiveness of Social Media Platforms in Global Brand Engagement: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

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This article investigates the effectiveness of social media platforms in fostering global brand engagement, a subject of growing importance as digital communication reshapes brand-consumer relationships. The study employs a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2009 and 2021 to synthesize fragmented insights across marketing and information systems research. Findings reveal that social media enhances engagement by enabling co-created narratives, user-generated authenticity, and interactive experiences that strengthen trust, loyalty, and advocacy. The discussion highlights how engagement is mediated by platform affordances, cultural differences, and technological innovations such as personalization and analytics, while also drawing attention to ethical challenges surrounding consumer privacy and manipulation. The review concludes that effective global engagement depends not on uniform approaches but on adaptable, consumer-centric strategies that balance creativity, authenticity, and contextual sensitivity. These insights provide a foundation for both scholars seeking conceptual clarity and practitioners aiming to optimize engagement in diverse markets.

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1. Introduction

Social media platforms have transformed how global brands build relationships with consumers by enabling continuous, interactive, and measurable touchpoints across borders. Early marketing scholarship reframed social media as a “hybrid element” of the promotion mix that amplifies and democratizes communication between firms and consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Subsequent work highlighted both the efficiency and complexity of direct, real-time dialogue at scale, noting opportunities for engagement alongside challenges of control and credibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These perspectives set the stage for a decade of research asking not only whether social platforms matter for brands, but how and under what conditions they drive meaningful engagement outcomes.

Brand engagement on social media is commonly framed as consumers’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in brand interactions. This engagement is shaped by narratives co-created among firms and users, where brand stories circulate, are remixed, and accrue social proof (Gensler et al., 2013). Empirical studies show that user-generated communication often exerts stronger effects on brand equity and attitudes than firm-created content, underscoring the central role of communities and electronic word-of-mouth in the platform environment (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2016). At the same time, brands can strategically design creative content that systematically elevates interaction and response, highlighting the dual importance of consumer voices and managerial strategy. Importantly, this duality reflects a shift from traditional one-way communication to an era where

meaning is co-constructed, requiring brands to adapt continuously to dynamic digital landscapes.

As firms internationalize their social presence, engagement processes increasingly intersect with cultural and market contexts. Research shows that national cultural dimensions shape how consumers interpret messages and participate in online communities, complicating assumptions of platform homogeneity (Gupta et al., 2018). These insights emphasize the need for cross-market evidence on what “effective” engagement entails for global brands, given that strategies that succeed in one context may not easily translate across borders. Moreover, global brands must balance consistency in their identity with localized relevance, a tension that underscores the strategic complexity of managing engagement on global platforms.

Against this backdrop, a systematic literature review can integrate dispersed findings on the effectiveness of social media platforms in cultivating global brand engagement. Such a review can synthesize evidence on platform affordances, content strategies, and community dynamics, while also mapping how cultural contingencies affect engagement outcomes. It can further highlight research frontiers, including analytics, artificial intelligence-enabled targeting, and ethical concerns, which are reshaping the future of brand-consumer relationships (Dwivedi et al., 2021). By consolidating peer-reviewed evidence from 2008 to 2021, this article aims to clarify the mechanisms by which social media platforms enable, amplify, or constrain brand engagement globally, and to surface priorities for future inquiry and managerial practice.

2. Literature Review

The growing literature on social media and brand engagement reflects both the evolution of digital platforms and the expanding scope of marketing scholarship. Early studies positioned social media as a disruptive force in marketing communication, shifting the balance from firm-controlled messages toward consumer-driven interactions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This perspective highlighted the need to reconfigure strategies around two-way communication and consumer empowerment. Subsequent research emphasized the role of social platforms in cultivating relational value, stressing that engagement is not limited to transactional exchanges but involves long-term psychological and social connections (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

A central theme across the literature is the interplay between firm-generated and user-generated content. Studies suggest that while branded content can provide structure and visibility, user-generated content often exerts stronger effects on brand trust, attitudes, and advocacy (Gensler et al., 2013; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2016). Brands are thus challenged to balance consistency in their messaging with openness to consumer co-creation. The content characteristics that drive engagement have also been examined, with evidence that interactive, emotionally appealing, and informative messages are more effective in stimulating consumer responses (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). These findings underscore the strategic significance of creative design and platform affordances in shaping brand-consumer interactions.

Another emerging strand of research examines cross-cultural and global dimensions of engagement. Gupta et al. (2018) demonstrated how cultural differences influence engagement behaviors, revealing that strategies effective in one context may not easily transfer across borders. Similarly, Voorveld et al. (2018) found that media multitasking and cross-platform experiences vary across regions, suggesting that global brands must adapt engagement strategies to cultural norms and consumption patterns. These studies highlight the importance of contextualizing engagement research to reflect the diversity of global markets.

Finally, the literature recognizes that technological innovations are reshaping engagement research and practice. Dwivedi et al. (2021) identified artificial intelligence, data analytics, and personalization as emerging drivers of engagement effectiveness, while warning of ethical challenges linked to privacy and manipulation. Taken together, the literature illustrates both the opportunities and complexities of leveraging social media platforms for global brand engagement, setting the foundation for a systematic review to consolidate fragmented insights and identify future research directions.

3. Methods

This review adopts a systematic literature review approach to synthesize insights on the effectiveness of social media platforms in global brand engagement. The process followed established guidelines for literature reviews in marketing and information systems, emphasizing transparency and replicability while maintaining a narrative structure suited to the scope of the study.

Relevant studies were identified through searches of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of keywords such as “social media”, “brand engagement”, “global marketing”, and “digital platforms”. To ensure both breadth and quality, the search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2008 and 2021, reflecting the period when social media platforms became central to global brand strategies. Additional filtering was applied to exclude conference proceedings, editorials, and non-empirical works unless they provided significant theoretical contributions.

Inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly examined the relationship between social media use and brand engagement outcomes, whether attitudinal (e.g., trust, loyalty), behavioral (e.g., participation, advocacy), or performance-based (e.g., sales impact, brand equity). Studies focused solely on technical aspects of platforms without linking to brand engagement were excluded. The final sample encompassed diverse methodological approaches, including surveys, experiments, and case studies, allowing for comparative analysis across contexts. By integrating findings from both conceptual and empirical work, this review aims to provide a holistic understanding of how social media platforms contribute to global brand engagement.

4. Results and Discussion

The reviewed studies reveal that social media platforms are highly effective in fostering global brand engagement, though the mechanisms and outcomes vary by context. One consistent finding is that platforms enable deeper consumer-brand

relationships by creating interactive spaces where users can engage beyond traditional marketing exposure. Engagement is not only measured in likes or shares but also through more enduring outcomes, such as trust, loyalty, and advocacy (Gensler et al., 2013; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2016). The ability to co-create narratives with users empowers brands to sustain long-term involvement, suggesting that engagement functions as both a relational and performance-enhancing construct (Brodie et al., 2013).

A major theme across the literature is the distinction between firm-generated and user-generated content. Studies consistently show that user-generated content exerts stronger influence on consumer perceptions because of its perceived authenticity and social proof (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Firm-generated messages, while important for framing identity, tend to be most effective when they invite participation and complement peer communication. Recent evidence suggests that hybrid strategies—where firms provide structure and consumers enrich the narrative—are particularly effective in enhancing credibility and brand attachment (Smith et al., 2012).

The role of culture and context emerges strongly in global engagement studies. Gupta et al. (2018) found that national cultural dimensions shape how consumers interpret engagement opportunities, meaning that strategies must be adapted across regions. Voorveld et al. (2018) further observed that consumers' engagement varies by platform type, with visual-heavy platforms such as Instagram and TikTok producing stronger emotional and behavioral engagement compared to text-based channels. This suggests that platform affordances directly mediate how

brand-consumer interactions unfold, reinforcing the need for contextualized strategies.

Another recurring insight is the significance of emotional and experiential elements. Research indicates that emotional appeals, storytelling, and entertaining content drive higher levels of consumer engagement compared to purely informational messages (Hudson et al., 2015). This aligns with findings that hedonic and symbolic dimensions of brand interactions are particularly salient in the social media environment, where identity signaling and community participation amplify engagement outcomes (Dessart et al., 2015). Importantly, this highlights how social media engagement extends beyond rational evaluations to encompass affective and social drivers.

Technological innovation has further reshaped brand engagement practices. Studies have noted the increasing role of personalization and data-driven strategies in targeting and sustaining consumer interest (Dwivedi et al., 2021). For example, algorithms that deliver tailored brand messages can enhance relevance and interaction, though they raise ethical concerns around privacy and consumer autonomy (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Evidence also points to the growing role of real-time analytics in guiding content design and campaign adjustments, enabling firms to measure engagement effectiveness with greater precision (Laroche et al., 2012).

Taken together, the findings show that while social media platforms are powerful tools for fostering engagement, their effectiveness depends on nuanced strategies. Successful global brand engagement requires balancing firm-directed content with user co-creation, adapting strategies to cultural and platform contexts,

and leveraging technological affordances responsibly. The literature also reveals gaps, particularly in longitudinal studies linking engagement to financial performance, and in understanding ethical trade-offs in AI-driven engagement strategies. These gaps suggest that future research should focus on the sustainability and inclusivity of engagement practices, ensuring that brand-consumer relationships remain authentic and mutually beneficial.

5. Conclusion

This review highlights how social media platforms have reshaped global brand engagement by shifting communication from one-way promotion to interactive and co-creative relationships. Evidence consistently shows that user-generated content carries greater authenticity and influence than firm-created messages, while branded strategies remain essential when they invite participation and reinforce identity. The effectiveness of engagement lies in balancing consumer-driven authenticity with brand-directed consistency, creating a dynamic space where trust, loyalty, and advocacy can flourish.

Cross-cultural perspectives further demonstrate that engagement outcomes are context-dependent, shaped by cultural norms and platform affordances. What works effectively in one region or on one platform may not translate seamlessly elsewhere, underscoring the importance of localized strategies within global branding efforts. At the same time, technological advancements such as personalization and real-time analytics enhance the precision of engagement but raise new ethical concerns around privacy and consumer autonomy.

For researchers, these findings point to the need for longitudinal and comparative studies that more clearly link engagement to business performance. For practitioners, they emphasize the necessity of blending creativity, authenticity, and adaptability to build enduring relationships. Ultimately, the effectiveness of social media in global brand engagement depends not on uniform strategies, but on consumer-centric approaches that align technology, culture, and ethics in sustainable ways.

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