

Consumer Engagement in Online Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

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Consumer engagement has become a pivotal construct in online marketing, reflecting how customers interact, co-create, and establish relationships with brands in digital environments. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) of publications from 2011 to 2021 to synthesize definitions, antecedents, outcomes, and measurement approaches of consumer engagement. Engagement is consistently conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Key antecedents include content quality, interactivity, personalization, and community participation, while barriers such as privacy concerns and digital fatigue limit engagement potential. Outcomes highlight engagement as a strategic asset, fostering brand loyalty, advocacy, and business performance, though measurement remains fragmented with varied approaches that create inconsistencies across studies. The review underscores the need for a standardized framework and future research into emerging contexts such as influencer marketing, live-stream commerce, and AI-driven personalization, offering both theoretical clarity and practical guidance for sustaining consumer engagement in a dynamic digital landscape.

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1. Introduction

Consumer engagement has emerged as a critical construct in online marketing, reflecting how customers interact, co-create, and build relationships with brands in digital environments. It is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional state encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, which are expressed through activities such as likes, shares, comments, and online reviews (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). In practice, this means that engagement goes beyond simple transactional exchanges and includes deeper levels of involvement where consumers actively participate in shaping brand narratives, sharing personal experiences, and influencing other potential customers. The rise of social media, mobile applications, and e-commerce platforms has further intensified this process, making engagement not only a measure of interaction but also a key driver of trust and long-term relationships. As consumers increasingly spend time in digital spaces, understanding engagement becomes central to analyzing customer experience and the creation of value in marketing (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Prior research highlights that content quality, interactivity, and personalization play crucial roles in driving engagement, while privacy concerns and excessive targeting may hinder it (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). This suggests that engagement is highly dependent on the balance between relevance and respect for consumer autonomy. On the one hand, engaging content stimulates participation and emotional connection, while on the other hand, intrusive practices can generate resistance and reduce willingness to interact with brands. Furthermore, engagement is also strongly linked to brand equity, loyalty, and advocacy, making it an important

strategic outcome for firms (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Customers who are engaged are more likely to recommend products, provide feedback, and maintain lasting relationships with companies, thereby creating long-term competitive advantages. Despite its significance, measuring engagement remains a challenge, as studies employ varying indicators, from self-reports to digital trace data, creating inconsistency across research and limiting the comparability of findings (Dessart et al., 2016).

Given its growing importance and conceptual complexity, a systematic literature review is needed to consolidate existing definitions, identify key antecedents and outcomes, and provide a clearer framework for understanding consumer engagement in online marketing. Such a review will help synthesize fragmented findings across studies, highlight the conditions under which engagement delivers optimal outcomes, and outline gaps that remain unexplored. Moreover, by mapping the evolution of engagement research across different digital platforms, it becomes possible to understand how engagement has transformed alongside technological advancements and shifting consumer behavior. Ultimately, a comprehensive review offers both theoretical clarity and practical guidance for marketers seeking to design strategies that not only attract attention but also cultivate meaningful, sustained consumer involvement.

2. Literatur Review

Consumer engagement has increasingly been recognized as a cornerstone of online marketing research, reflecting how customers create value through interactive

and participatory behaviors in digital environments (Barger et al., 2016). This concept goes beyond traditional transactional exchanges by emphasizing the depth of relationships that consumers build with brands. Engagement involves activities such as liking, sharing, commenting, and reviewing, but it also includes more subtle aspects such as emotional resonance, trust formation, and the co-creation of brand narratives. In this sense, engagement is not only about attention but also encompasses emotional and behavioral involvement, shaping how consumers connect with brands across platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and mobile applications (Harrigan et al., 2017). These interactions allow consumers to play an active role in shaping their own experiences, which in turn influences how they perceive and evaluate a brand.

Recent studies highlight that engagement is driven by content quality, interactivity, and personalized experiences, which motivate consumers to invest time and effort in online interactions (Dolan et al., 2019). Engaging content that is informative, entertaining, and interactive encourages consumers to stay connected with brands for longer periods, while personalization ensures that the information they receive feels relevant to their individual needs. Nevertheless, challenges such as privacy concerns, information overload, and digital fatigue remain barriers that can reduce willingness to participate, underscoring the importance of balancing personalization with transparency. If not managed carefully, these barriers can undermine trust and diminish the effectiveness of marketing strategies. Beyond antecedents, engagement has been shown to contribute significantly to outcomes like brand loyalty, advocacy, and long-term relationship building, making it a key

predictor of sustainable business performance (Thakur, 2018). Engaged consumers are more likely to recommend products, provide feedback, and remain loyal to a brand even in highly competitive markets.

Despite its growing importance, measuring engagement remains fragmented, with researchers using varied indicators such as survey-based scales, platform metrics, and behavioral analytics. While self-reported measures capture perceptions and feelings, platform data such as clicks, shares, or viewing time provide behavioral evidence, and hybrid approaches attempt to combine both perspectives. This diversity has created inconsistencies across studies, limiting the ability to compare findings and slowing the development of a unified theoretical foundation. This lack of standardization highlights the need for further synthesis to develop a consistent framework that links consumer engagement more clearly to marketing outcomes (Calder et al., 2016). Establishing such a framework would not only clarify how engagement should be measured but also help practitioners identify which forms of engagement are most valuable for achieving long-term strategic goals.

3. Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine consumer engagement in online marketing within the period 2011–2021. The SLR method was selected because it enables the synthesis of existing research findings, identification of conceptual patterns, and evaluation of methodological approaches across diverse studies. By applying a systematic procedure, the review ensured transparency, replicability, and reduced bias in the selection and analysis of studies.

The research process began with the formulation of guiding questions, focusing on three main aspects: (1) how consumer engagement has been conceptualized in online marketing, (2) the antecedents and outcomes of consumer engagement, and (3) the methods used to measure engagement. Based on these guiding questions, a review protocol was developed to establish inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or book chapters published between 2011 and 2021, written in English, and directly related to consumer engagement in online or digital marketing contexts. Articles were excluded if they were editorials, dissertations, non-academic reports, or studies outside the specified timeframe.

The data collection process involved searching across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as “consumer engagement”, “online marketing”, “digital engagement”, “social media engagement”, and “brand engagement”. Boolean operators and truncations were employed to refine the search results and ensure relevant studies were captured. An initial pool of articles was screened by title and abstract, followed by a full-text review to confirm eligibility based on the established criteria.

The selected studies were then subjected to a systematic coding process. Each article was analyzed for its research objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, measurement of engagement, and findings. Data were categorized into themes such as antecedents of engagement, engagement behaviors, measurement approaches, and marketing outcomes. A thematic synthesis approach was used to integrate

findings, allowing the identification of common patterns, contradictions, and emerging trends in consumer engagement research.

Finally, quality assessment was conducted to ensure the rigor of the included studies. Criteria such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of methodology, transparency of data collection, and robustness of analysis were considered. The outcomes of this review provide a consolidated understanding of consumer engagement in online marketing, highlight gaps in current knowledge, and offer directions for future research in the digital era.

4. Results and Discussion

The review of studies published between 2011 and 2021 shows that consumer engagement in online marketing is consistently described as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, but with growing emphasis on the role of digital platforms in shaping consumer–brand interactions (Islam & Rahman, 2017). Social media continues to dominate engagement research, yet new contexts such as e-commerce, mobile applications, and live-streaming commerce are increasingly examined, reflecting the dynamic nature of consumer behavior in the digital era (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020).

Antecedents of consumer engagement identified in the literature include content quality, interactivity, and personalization. High-quality and interactive content motivates consumers to devote more time and effort in their online interactions, while personalization enhances the sense of relevance and connection with the brand (Dolan et al., 2019). At the same time, challenges such as privacy

concerns and digital fatigue create barriers that can reduce consumer willingness to participate, showing that engagement is strongly dependent on balancing personalization with transparency (Harrigan et al., 2018).

The outcomes of engagement extend far beyond immediate behaviors such as likes or comments. Studies demonstrate that engagement fosters brand loyalty, advocacy, and long-term relationship building, which in turn contribute to sustainable business performance and customer equity (Rather, 2019). Engaged consumers are more likely to recommend brands, provide constructive feedback, and remain loyal even in competitive markets (Islam et al., 2019). These findings reinforce the idea that engagement is both a relational and strategic asset that strengthens competitive advantage.

In terms of measurement, the reviewed studies show ongoing inconsistencies. While self-report surveys capture psychological dimensions of engagement, digital trace data such as clicks, shares, and viewing time provide evidence of behavioral participation. Hybrid approaches that combine both are increasingly adopted, but the lack of standardization continues to hinder cross-study comparability (Calder et al., 2016). This indicates the need for a more unified framework that can consistently link engagement indicators to marketing outcomes across different digital platforms.

Taken together, the findings highlight that consumer engagement is not simply an outcome of exposure to online marketing, but rather a process shaped by platform affordances, content strategies, and consumer perceptions. While its benefits for loyalty, advocacy, and equity are well-documented, engagement strategies must also account for risks related to privacy and over-targeting. Future

research should therefore refine measurement approaches and explore emerging contexts such as influencer marketing, AI-driven personalization, and live-stream commerce, which represent both opportunities and challenges for sustaining consumer engagement in the digital landscape.

5. Conclusion

This review highlights that consumer engagement is a multidimensional construct that plays a central role in online marketing, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The findings confirm that engagement is shaped by content quality, interactivity, and personalization, but its effectiveness depends on maintaining transparency and trust to overcome challenges such as privacy concerns and digital fatigue. Engagement is not only an immediate behavioral response but also a relational process that drives loyalty, advocacy, and long-term business performance, making it a strategic asset for firms in competitive digital markets.

The analysis also shows that while engagement contributes significantly to brand equity and customer value, measurement approaches remain fragmented, limiting comparability across studies. Developing a standardized framework to capture both psychological and behavioral aspects of engagement is therefore essential. Furthermore, as digital platforms continue to evolve, future research should focus on emerging contexts such as influencer marketing, live-stream commerce, and AI-driven personalization to better understand how consumer engagement can be fostered and sustained.

In conclusion, consumer engagement is both a theoretical and practical priority in online marketing. By consolidating existing findings, this review provides clarity on the antecedents, outcomes, and measurement challenges of engagement, offering valuable insights for scholars and actionable guidance for practitioners seeking to design strategies that build stronger, more enduring consumer–brand relationships.

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