

# Young Customer's Insight on Social Media Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to elucidate the role of social and motivational factors in young customers' engagement in social media. The data were collected from 402 social media users working in multinational corporations of Gurgaon city, using purposive sampling technique. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to analyse the data. Study outcomes indicated that tie-strength is followed by social identity, hedonic motivation and utilitarian motivation and it leads to engagement of young consumers on social media. The study adds value to the marketing literature by elucidating the role of social and motivational factors in triggering young customers' engagement on social media. However, the study is limited to young customers only; investigating how older and younger consumers interact with brands via social media can stimulate theoretical development as well as furnish potentially valuable strategic opportunities to brand managers. Also, scale needs to be tested across various countries to generalise its findings.

**Keywords:** Social Media Engagement, Tie-strength, Social Identity, Hedonic Motivation, Utilitarian Motivation

## INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) usage has seen phenomenal uprise among users - individuals, businesses, government etc. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Besides accomplishing personal gratifications, this platform provides the users' an online 'soapbox' in which they can disseminate personal evaluations related to products and services (Chen et al., 2011). This type of behaviour is particularly prevalent among today's younger generation who is active on social media platforms and whose brand preference is heavily influenced by its friends and peers (Haven, 2007). With growth in social media activity due to peer and friend recommendations, user-generated content, product reviews, feedback etc., concept of customer's engagement in context of social media has also started receiving paramount attention consistently in the marketing literature (Dessart et al., 2015). Social media engagement is used interchangeably with terms like, engagement, brand engagement and online engagement etc in the marketing literature. Customers engage in many kinds of behaviours on social media such as browsing, interacting, information sharing and seeking what empowers them about product and service offers (Schultz and Peltier,

2013) that subsequently affects their level of brand knowledge/awareness. We see predominantly research is focused on customer brand engagement behaviour (Hollebeek, 2011; Higgins and Scholer, 2009), customer engagement in brand value creation process (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Tynan et al., 2010), and factors influencing customer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013, Wirtz et al., 2013; Payne et al., 2009). However, authors such as Mikalef et al. (2013); Brodie et al. (2011); Wirtz et al. (2013) and Doorn et al. (2010) identified that majority of the studies are conceptual and qualitative in nature. And quantitative literature in this regard is still scarce, that too especially on factors contributing to customers' social media engagement. Recently, Dessart et al. (2015) stated that although customer's engagement is of pragmatic relevance, but empirically it is still at developing stage. The growing use of social media by young customers and their consistent interactions with the product and service brands raises an important question - what factors motivate them to get engaged on social media.

Given these concerns, we argue that pivotal challenge today is to understand what factors encourage and motivate young customers' engagement on social media and actions through which an organisation can robustly

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and emotionally engage customers. Hence, examining the reasons of social media users to engage with brands of online virtual environment is the main focus of this paper. The present study specifically examines the influence of four factors - social (tie-strength and social identity) and motivational factors (hedonic and utilitarian), on young customers' social media engagement in Indian context.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows:

Brief synthesis of the extant literature is presented along with hypotheses. Methodology of the empirical study, followed by a presentation of the results is then described. Paper concludes with a summary of the main findings, implications together with limitations and future research.

## BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

### Role of Social Factors

Robustness in consumer associations or communities depends on similarity of characteristics among group members resulting from tie-strength and group identification. Tie-strength is the level of intensity of social relationship consumers have. Generally they have a wide range of relationship ties ranging from strong primary ties - (those with close friends and family members) to weak secondary ties - (those with acquaintances rarely seen to non-existent ties with complete strangers) within their social network (Steffes and Lawrence, 2008). Wang et al. (2012) stated that peer communication through social media depends on tie-strength with peers and identification with the peer group. Customers' interactions with brand community on social media platforms enable consumers to understand the product better, and improve customers' cognitive evaluations of the product. Strong ties and more intimate relationships usually influence customers' browsing and their purchase behaviour (Wang et al., 2012). Therefore, strong tie sources act as motivators for customers for getting engaged in social media. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

**H1.** Tie-strength significantly influences young customers' SM engagement.

Social identity is the psychological state in which one recognises himself to be 'belonging to a specific group' (Dholakia et al., 2004). Wang et al. (2012) put forth that individuals identify themselves with others

in terms of similarity of interests and goals, traits, attitudes, and behavioural norms of their respective group that further motivates intergroup behaviour. To explain why consumers participate actively in online communities, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) revealed that peer group identification motivates participation in online interactions by enhancing 'we-intentions' that is, individual's commitment to participate in a joint action, and involves explicit or implicit agreement amongst participants to engage in the joint action. With increase of customers' social identity with the brand community and participation in group activities, a greater involvement with the brand occurs promoting their brand knowledge/awareness and brand image (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). Thus, it is hypothesised that:

**H2.** Social-identity significantly influences young customers' SM engagement.

### Role of Motivational Factors

'Motivation' is considered as an antecedent that compels human behaviour to appear. It explains why people behave in certain ways, what energises their behaviour and what directs their subsequent voluntary action (Roberts et al., 2014). Motivation can take any form-utilitarian or hedonic. Hedonic motivation is the search of emotions such as happiness, enjoyment and fantasy during shopping procedure. Under hedonic motivation, trend discovery (keeping up with new trends and browsing new products), socialising (to socialise with friends and brands), adventure (the stimulation felt during the browsing of products) and authority (the feeling of being able to control the medium in a way that suits the shopper's needs) are triggered factors for consumer engagement in social media (Mikalef et al., 2013). Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014) explored entertainment and conversation as hedonic motivation factors that lead customers to engage with a brand on social media. Broadly, Calder et al. (2009) argued that consumers engage in online activities either because of utilitarian nature of the content, or because of the intrinsic enjoyment that is gained from the user's experience. Focusing on two factors, entertainment and trend discovery, it is hypothesised that:

**H3.** Hedonic motivations (entertainment and trend discovery) significantly influence young customers' SM engagement.

Utilitarian motivation is defined as rational and goal oriented (Mikalef et al., 2013). The initiation of the shopping process for utilitarian shoppers is triggered by a need and the benefit that is perceived by the consumer. Utilitarian motivation has been noted repeatedly in literature as the one of the taxonomy of forces that engages consumers in the buying process and in various interactive medias' like social media (To et al., 2007). Mikalef et al. (2013) remarked that utilitarian motivational factors such as convenience, information availability, product selection and customised advertisements affect engagement of consumers in social media. In addition, Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014) explored three more factors among utilitarian motivation driving customers' social media engagement are, brand affiliation, opportunity seeking and investigation. Based on the studies of Mikalef et al. (2013) and Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014), it is hypothesised that:

**H4.** Utilitarian motivations (convenience, information availability, product selection, personalised advertisements and brand affiliation) significantly influence young customers' SM engagement.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Context

To investigate the complex and emergent phenomenon of consumer engagement in social media, this study adopts a social media user-oriented approach and focuses on the young customer as a unit of analysis. To seek diversity in terms of the respondents' profile, the Gurgaon city was specifically chosen as most of the fortune 500 companies are operating in the city, with employees from all across the country. Such diversity is necessary in order to tap into the complexity and multiplicity of social media engagement experiences and gain a deeper understanding of our research focus.

### Generation of Scale Items

The items used to measure social media engagement and its antecedents (tie-strength, social identity, hedonic motivation and utilitarian motivation) were generated from review of relevant literature and discussion with experts in the area of marketing. Four items each of tie-

strength and social identity were extracted from Wang et al. (2012) and Dholakia et al. (2004) respectively. Hedonic motivations (entertainment and trend discovery) were measured by extracting items from the study of Mikalef et al. (2013). In order to understand the utilitarian motivations of the customers' items were generated from Mikalef et al. (2013) and Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014). To measure customers' engagement, fourteen items were extracted from Campbell et al. (2014); Gummerus et al. (2012) and Laroche et al. (2012). On the basis of these sources, an instrument was framed for the collection of requisite data. The extracted scale items were modified as per their applicability in social media. Some items were kept in negative form so as to have internal cross-checking and to ensure the active involvement of respondents while filling the questionnaire. All the items were designed using 5-point Likert scale with 5 as strongly agree and 1 as strongly disagree.

### Pilot Testing

Two pilot tests were conducted for finalising scale items. In first pilot test, a detailed list of items related to social media engagement and its antecedents (social identity, tie-strength, hedonic and utilitarian motivation) were discussed with ten experts (five academic experts and five frequent social media users) to determine the relevancy and quality of items. On the basis of expert suggestions few items were modified. In the second pilot test, a survey was conducted to collect data from conveniently selected 100 social media users. On the basis of customers' responses questionnaire was refined again. During this process, two items of social media engagement construct were clubbed and three were deleted due to their repetitiveness. This whole process resulted in 54 variables out of which 07 pertained to demographic profile, 10 pertained to general information and remaining 37 items were covering social media engagement and its antecedents.

### Data Collection

Young customers' falling in the age group of 20 to 35 years (Gen Y) were contacted from multinational corporations in Gurgaon using purposive sampling method. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to employees having at least 2-3 years of experience in accessing social media

sites. A total of 402 respondents submitted the usable response.

### Sample Characteristics

Out of the total respondents, 69% were men and 31% were women. Majority of the young consumers (71%) were 20-30 years old having professional qualification (52%). This also depicts that survey was conducted on a population of young consumers who were very open and literate to information technology and more likely to get engaged in social media in order to share or get information or to purchase a product. About 84% respondents were earning below Indian Rs 10 lakh annually and remaining 16% were earning Rs 10-20 lakh. The results also indicated popular social media websites to be Facebook, with

91% of users maintaining an active account, followed by Youtube (39%) and Twitter (26%).

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Descriptive Statistics

Prior to analysis of data, negatively worded items were reversed and normality condition was satisfied before the application of parametric tests. Following this, 18 outliers were determined to remove the extreme responses. All the skewness and kurtosis values were examined and were found to be within threshold criteria depicting the normal distribution of the data (Table 1). The final usable sample size arrived was 384. CFA was performed on all the constructs- social media engagement and its antecedents, to assess and validate the models of the constructs.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

| <i>Constructs</i>       | <i>Mean</i> |            | <i>Standard Deviation</i> |            | <i>Skewness</i> |            | <i>Kurtosis</i> |            |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|                         | <i>Min</i>  | <i>Max</i> | <i>Min</i>                | <i>Max</i> | <i>Min</i>      | <i>Max</i> | <i>Min</i>      | <i>Max</i> |
| Social Media Engagement | 3.57        | 3.96       | .613                      | .945       | -.469           | -.728      | .016            | 1.535      |
| Social Identity         | 3.61        | 3.85       | .773                      | .913       | -1.025          | -.650      | .768            | 1.552      |
| Tie-strength            | 3.55        | 3.83       | .702                      | .928       | -1.114          | -.993      | .821            | 1.150      |
| Hedonic Motivation      | 3.88        | 4.20       | .570                      | .758       | -1.017          | .788       | .699            | 1.715      |
| Utilitarian Motivation  | 3.83        | 4.21       | .548                      | .796       | -1.188          | .041       | -.099           | 2.547      |

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was performed on all constructs - social media engagement, tie-strength, social identity, hedonic motivation and utilitarian motivation to assess and validate the measurement of factors included in the respective models of the constructs. Model fit was informed by the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), where values approaching 0.9 are indicative of a good model fit (Hair et al., 2010). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was also investigated, with an appropriate model fit indicated by value below 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010). All the items under each factor of the models got confirmed except one item of social media engagement that is, "motivated to participate in the SM community to support other members." which was found to be insignificant ( $p=0.715$ ). CFA models of all the constructs are found to be robust fit (Table 2).

The reliability of all the constructs has been evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores. The constructs are considered adequate when the Cronbach's alpha scores are above the minimum recommended value of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010) and composite reliability scores are above the recommended cut-off of 0.7 (Malhotra and Dash, 2010). As shown in Table 3, the composite reliability scores and Cronbach's alpha values were above threshold limit. Thus the model can be considered as reliable.

Further, the four constructs were also tested for convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is supported if average variance extracted (AVE) estimates for each underlying construct exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity is shown when the shared variance between any two constructs is less than the square root of the AVE by the items measuring the construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981a, b). Table 3 shows evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity among the constructs.

**Table 2: CFA Results**

| <i>Factors</i>                                                                      | <i>Latent Construct/Dimensions</i>                                                    | <i>CR</i> | <i>SRW</i> | <i>Model Fit Indices</i>                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social Media Engagement                                                             |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |
| Social media engagement                                                             | Like to talk and learn about products on SM.                                          | 3.362     | .673       | RMSEA= .051, CMIN/DF= 1.992, TLI= .966, CFI= .977, GFI= .975 |
|                                                                                     | Interested in receiving communication from companies via SM.                          | 3.271     | .561       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Follow regular updates of products on SM.                                             | 3.449     | .808       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Like to browse for extracting information.                                            | 3.455     | .845       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Share my opinions about product/service with others on SM.                            | 2.114     | .244       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | SM community is useful for gathering information.                                     | 3.435     | .749       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Motivated to participate in SM community to reach personal goals.                     | 3.009     | .200       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Motivated to participate in SM community because I feel better afterwards.            | Ref       | .208       |                                                              |
| Tie-strength                                                                        |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |
| Tie-strength                                                                        | If peers planned something, think of it as something “we” would do.                   | 5.229     | .359       | RMSEA= .016, CMIN/DF= 1.094, TLI= .907, CFI= .982, GFI= .987 |
|                                                                                     | See myself as part of peer group on SM.                                               | 7.298     | .659       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Strongly affiliated with others on SM.                                                | 7.232     | .585       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Interaction on SM through message exchange                                            | Ref       | .622       |                                                              |
| Social-identity                                                                     |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |
| Social-identity                                                                     | My identity is similar to other members of the community.                             | 3.678     | .574       | RMSEA= .072, CMIN/DF= 5.855, TLI=.778 , CFI= .926, GFI= .985 |
|                                                                                     | Sense of strong belongingness to SM community                                         | 3.666     | .641       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | SM community’s identity is reflection of my self-image.                               | 3.604     | .491       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | SMS helps to form arm relationship with others.                                       | Ref       | .262       |                                                              |
| Hedonic motivation                                                                  |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |
| Entertainment                                                                       | Contributes in spending relaxing time.                                                | 2.763     | .533       | RMSEA= .045, CMIN/DF= 1.782, TLI= .936, CFI= .966, GFI= .988 |
|                                                                                     | SM entertains and stimulates my mind.                                                 | 2.785     | .694       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Offers enjoyment                                                                      | 2.689     | .427       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Browsing products through SM is stimulating and adventurous.                          | Ref       | .181       |                                                              |
| Trend Discovery                                                                     | Great platform to share information with others regarding products.                   | 3.925     | .561       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Reviews shared by people on SM, help in decision making                               | Ref       | .330       |                                                              |
| Utilitarian motivation                                                              |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |
| Convenience                                                                         | Convenient medium to discuss and browse a product.                                    | 4.510     | .367       | RMSEA= .059, CMIN/DF= 2.345, TLI= .806, CFI= .849, GFI= .943 |
|                                                                                     | Convenient tool to transmit complaints and suggestions.                               | 4.524     | .571       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Getting into contact with companies is easy through SM because it is simple and free. | Ref       | .595       |                                                              |
| Product Selection                                                                   | SM helps to find more products than I am familiar with.                               | 7.637     | .586       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | I can find wide selection of products on one platform through SM                      | Ref       | .629       |                                                              |
| Information Availability                                                            | SM provides quick access to large volume of information related to product/service.   | 4.247     | .381       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | SM enhances knowledge about latest trends.                                            | 4.609     | .454       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | SM helps in making better decisions.                                                  | Ref       | .475       |                                                              |
| Personalised Advertisements                                                         | Presented with the advertisements which are compatible to my liking.                  | 4.276     | .861       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Products presented on SNS are customised to my needs.                                 | Ref       | .476       |                                                              |
| Brand Affiliation                                                                   | Follow products similar to my lifestyle.                                              | 4.501     | .594       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Follow the brand on SM to purchase often.                                             | Ref       | .556       |                                                              |
| Opportunity Seeking                                                                 | Getting informed about discounts and offers through SM.                               | 5.417     | .551       |                                                              |
|                                                                                     | Helps in getting information about new offerings.                                     | Ref       | .537       |                                                              |
| <i>Note: CR: Critical Ratio. SRW: Standard Regression Weight. SM: Social Media.</i> |                                                                                       |           |            |                                                              |

## Measurement Validation and Reliability

**Table 3: Reliability and Validity**

| <i>Constructs</i> | <i><math>\alpha</math> Value</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> | <i>SME</i> | <i>TS</i> | <i>SI</i> | <i>HM</i> | <i>UM</i> | <i>BE</i> | <i>Trust</i> |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| SME               | .680                             | .936      | .583       | .763*      |           |           |           |           |           |              |
| TS                | .659                             | .733      | .456       | .266       | .675*     |           |           |           |           |              |
| SI                | .635                             | .674      | .445       | .239       | .492      | .667*     |           |           |           |              |
| HM                | .610                             | .802      | .473       | .337       | .358      | .193      | .687*     |           |           |              |
| UM                | .710                             | .936      | .524       | .251       | .356      | .234      | .379      | .723*     |           |              |

*Note: CR-Composite Reliability, AVE- Average Variance Extracted, \*Values in the diagonal of correlation matrix are the square root of AVE*

## Hypotheses Testing

We used structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the hypotheses formulated, as it is considered to be one of the most significant techniques to understand multiple relationships.

The SEM model fitness indices that are,  $X^2/df = 2.41$ , GFI = .90, AGFI = .86, NFI = .70, CFI = .78, and RMSEA = .061, reflected good model fit. The results indicated that all the four factors that is, tie-strength ( $\beta = .84$ ), social identity ( $\beta = .81$ ), hedonic motivation ( $\beta = .80$ ) and utilitarian motivation ( $\beta = .63$ ) found to be significantly and positively influencing social media engagement. Hence, all the hypotheses are accepted in the study.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study provides significant theoretical and managerial importance for getting customers engaged on various social media platforms.

The study is undertaken to understand the role of social (tie-strength and social identity) and motivational factors (hedonic and utilitarian motivation) in driving young customers' engagement on social media. The results indicated a very strong impact of tie-strength followed by social identity in influencing young customers' on social media engagement. To develop strong ties with customers who share similar interests, firms should sponsor online communities on influential social media websites (e.g., facebook, youtube) and offer customers' the ability to exchange product information and experiences that will effectively generate brand interest among users. Specifically, companies can choose appropriate users to recommend a specific product to their friends. In doing so,

it is hoped that these users' enhance their friends' browsing and purchase intentions. For example, companies can give their new product to the target customers' strong-tie friends and ask them to recommend the product to their friends. In this way, the company can help customers' to evaluate the product and create interest among potential users.

Regarding motivational factors, study findings revealed that customers' level of engagement is influenced by certain hedonic and utilitarian motivation factors, prior being a stronger motivator than the latter. Among hedonic motivation factors, trend discovery ( $\beta = .66$ ) followed by entertainment ( $\beta = .60$ ) impacts customer's intention to become engaged on SM. The findings suggest that marketers need to provide users with latest trends and fashions regarding their products. Companies should also give some entertaining content (e.g. lottery games) while advertising the product in order to drag the customers' attention.

Further, with respect to utilitarian motivation factors, opportunity seeking ( $\beta = .66$ ) followed by product selection ( $\beta = .62$ ), personalised advertisements ( $\beta = .47$ ), information availability ( $\beta = .46$ ), brand affiliation ( $\beta = .46$ ) and convenience ( $\beta = .42$ ) are found to be important contributors that derive young customers' involvement on social media. Marketers should regularly inform the customers about various opportunities with regarding new offerings, discounts and promotions available. Besides they should also come up with attractive advertisements having eye-catching phrases. It is also revealed some of the companies have their social media accounts but they do not update them on time, thus it is required that all companies must not only have their accounts on various social media platforms but also make

efforts to continuously renew them so that customers can conveniently access and browse the relevant information. Additionally, by identifying what antecedents affect the browsing of products on such sites, business executives can focus on them without placing unnecessary emphasis on aspects that are proven to be less important.

## LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the main limitations of the current study is that it examines social media as a whole. It may be beneficial to examine how different types of social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes. Furthermore, our research is limited only to young customers. Although, social media use is largely prevalent among young customers, investigating how older and younger consumers interact with brands via social media can stimulate further theoretical development as well as furnish potentially valuable strategic opportunities to brand managers. Due to the strategic implications of customers interactions on social media related to brands, future research needs to examine specifically, the antecedents and consequences of social media engagement. Further research in this field is required in different countries to produce a stronger validation and generalisation of the findings. The scale needs to be tested across various countries to generalise its findings.

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