Achieving customer engagement with social media: A qualitative comparative analysis approach

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ABSTRACT

Past research has examined some possible customer engagement antecedents. However, extant studies investigated the impact of these factors on customer engagement in isolation from one another. That is, extant research offers little insights on whether one, all, or combinations of these factors need to be present to positively impact customer engagement. We conduct two studies and employ Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to address the limitations described above and explore what factors must be concomitantly present to achieve a high level of customer engagement. Shedding light on this question can help managers determine how to allocate limited resources to achieve customer engagement.

1. Introduction

Customer engagement has emerged as a concept of increased relevance in recent marketing literature and as a novel approach to capturing customer value and understanding contemporary marketing (Blasco-Arcas, Hernandez-Ortega, & Jimenez-Martinez, 2016; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). It has been linked to a number of positive consequences, such as improved brand image (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016), brand value (France, Merriless, and & Miller, 2016), self-brand connection and brand usage intent (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Further, customer engagement has been considered a "sine qua non" condition for superior firm performance, including profitability (Voyles, 2007) and sales growth (Neff, 2007).

The practical importance of customer engagement is also highlighted by the attention devoted to it by consulting companies, such as the Gallup Group, IAG Research, and Nielsen Media Research (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011). To illustrate, the Gallup study accentuates the benefits of keeping customers engaged, noting that engaged customers account for increases in revenue of 7 to 23%, whereas disengaged customers lead to revenue reductions of 1 to 13% (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Considering the relevance of customer engagement for academia and industry alike, it is of interest to understand the factors that must be present for customers to engage with brands. Prior research suggests that variables such as perceived brand interactivity (France et al.,

2016), brand involvement (Hollebeek et al., 2014), brand trust (Chiu, Huang, & Yen, 2010), brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011), satisfaction with the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010), and commitment (Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould, 2009) are some of the most frequently considered factors that must be present for customers to engage with brands. However, past research has examined the impact of these factors on customer engagement in isolation from one another. That is, extant research offers little insights on whether one, all, or combinations of these factors need to be present to positively impact customer engagement. For example, consider the following scenario in which a customer reports high levels of brand trust and brand loyalty, and exhibits high levels of customer engagement, while another customer reports low levels of brand trust and brand loyalty, and high levels of satisfaction with the brand, yet he also exhibits high levels of customer engagement. Such apparently confounding results would be difficult to explain by traditional research methods. We employ Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to address the limitations described above and explore what factors must be concomitantly present to achieve a high level of customer engagement. Thus, the purpose of this manuscript is to offer a comprehensive and unifying perspective on the body of literature exploring factors that contribute to customer engagement and address the following research question: What are the possible combinations of factors that result in high levels of customer engagement?

Addressing this question is important as it can help firms determine whether they need to emphasize the development of all of these factors

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(i.e., perceived brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment) to ensure a high level of customer engagement, or whether certain combinations of these factors are sufficient to achieve the same outcome. Shedding light on this question can help managers determine how to allocate limited resources to achieve customer engagement.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we review the possible factors that impact customer engagement. Second, we introduce our theoretical arguments. Next, we present our methodology and the results of our two studies. Finally, we conclude by presenting the theoretical and managerial implications of our study along with research limitations and opportunities for further research.

2. Literature review

The phenomenon of customer engagement has received greater interest from both academicians and practitioners in recent years because both categories have recognized that keeping customers engaged is essential for retaining customers and ultimately creating a competitive advantage for the firm (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

To date, the phenomenon of customer engagement has been discussed extensively in the marketing literature (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar & Nayak, 2018; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). However, there is no consensus on its definition in the literature. A number of different definitions have proposed so far. More specifically, Bowden (2009) defines it as "a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand" (p.65). Van Doorn et al. (2010) define it as "a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers" (p. 260). Also, Hollebeek et al. (2014) define it as "a consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions (p. 151). Even though France et al. (2016) adapt the Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualization in their study to test their model of interest, they exclude the behavioral aspect of the construct. They argue that the exclusion of the behavioral dimension is required to measure the engagement state, which consists of consumers' cognitive and affective states (France et al., 2016). Because their research is the first to empirically explore a nomological relationship between customer engagement and brand interactivity, which is a focal construct in the current study, we follow the France et al. (2016) conceptualization. It is important to note that even though no consensus has been yet reached on customer engagement definition, consensus has been reached regarding its importance and contribution to the firm/brand. Additional definitions of the construct are summarized in Table 1.

Because of the aforementioned benefits of customer engagement, companies have been exploring different approaches to increase customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The interactive nature of social media has led companies to perceive social media as an opportunity to enhance customer engagement (Sashi, 2012). Companies can utilize the interactive nature of social media to strengthen their relationships with customers, resulting in a higher level of customer engagement (Wang & Kim, 2017). Research shows that customers engage with firms when firms listen to customers and participate in two-way communication (Shao, Jones, & Grace, 2015). Thus, along with the findings of France et al. (2016), we argue that customer perceived interactivity on social media leads customers to display a higher level of customer engagement. This is because customers can easily recognize whether a firm/brand is interactive or not on social media because of the interactive nature of social media, and thus act accordingly.

To date, a plethora of studies have explored the factors that drive customer engagement (e.g., France et al., 2016; Kumar & Pansari, 2016;

Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Some of the key drivers of customer engagement include, but are not limited to, perceived brand interactivity (France et al., 2016), brand involvement (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sprott et al., 2009), brand trust (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010), brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009), brand commitment (Brodie et al., 2011), and satisfaction with the brand (e.g., Kumar, Rajan, Gupta, & Dalla Pozza, 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Van Doorn et al., 2010). In the current research, we examine the relationship of these factors with customer engagement in a social media setting. We primarily chose these factors because they are the most frequently explored factors in the context of customer engagement.

Next, we review the literature linking customer engagement to perceived brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment. The first condition that we explore is perceived brand interactivity.

2.1. Perceived brand interactivity

Brand interactivity has been considered an important factor leading to CE (France et al., 2016). Defined as the customer's perception of the brand's disposition and genuine desire for integration with the customer, brand interactivity is considered important to initiating and facilitating CE (France et al., 2016). In fact, brand engagement has been considered 'central' and 'fundamental' to customer-brand engagement (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Customers evaluate two levels of brand interactivity, the brand's technical enabling of interaction and the indication of a genuine aspiration for connectedness.

Qualitative explorations indicate that customers engage with brands perceived to list to what customers are communicating and engage in two-way information exchange (Shao et al., 2015). Brands considered to possess a high level of interactivity are perceived as more willing to develop personalized relationships (Sawhney, Verona, & Prandelli, 2005). Consequently, customers feel encouraged to engage with the brand further strengthening the relationship (Merrilees & Fry, 2003). Empirical evidence further supports this argument (France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

2.2. Brand involvement

Brand involvement has been widely considered to have an important impact on customer-brand engagement (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2014; So, King, & Sparks, 2014; Vivek et al., 2012). Defined as a customer's perceived relevance of a brand based on the customer's needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1994), brand involvement has recognized as a sine qua non condition for engagement as it provokes a psychological commitment to engage with the brand (Bowden, 2009). Although brand involvement has been compared in the literature to customer engagement, the two constructs are discriminately distinct (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). Involvement is typically restricted to a cognitive element, while engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements (Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012).

According to Zaichkowsky (1985, p.32) involvement is "independent of the behavior that results from involvement" as it reflects an object's ability to meet a customer's value based needs. In essence, involvement indicates the level of importance of an object to an individual (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Research shows that the level of involvement indicates the level of decision importance (Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy, & Coote, 2007). Considering the conceptual domain of brand involvement as presented above and the empirical evidence linking the construct to CE (Harrigan et al., 2017; Hollebeek, 2011), we also consider in this study the role that brand involvement plays in the development of CE.

Table 1
Customer Brand Engagement Definitions.

Study	Conceptual/Empirical	Definition
Bowden (2009, p.65)	Conceptual	A psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand.
Van Doorn et al. (2010, P.254)	Conceptual	A customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.
Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260)	Conceptual	A psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that cocreate value. CE plays a central role in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions.
Hollebeek (2011, p. 790)	Conceptual	The level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions'.
Vivek et al. (2012, p.133)	Conceptual	The intensity of an individual's participation and connection with the organizations offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or organization.
Brodie et al. (2013, p. 107)	Empirical	Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.
Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 151)	Empirical	A consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions.
Pansari and Kumar (2017, p. 295)	Conceptual	Mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution
Dessart (2017, p. 377)	Empirical	The state that reflects consumers' positive individual dispositions towards the community and the focal brand as expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations.

2.3. Brand trust

Trust has been recognized as one of the most salient issues when it comes to engaging in relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). Brand trust can be defined as the customer's willingness to rely on the brand's ability to perform its stated functions (Gecti & Zengin, 2013). Trust's behavioral component is derived from the expectations regarding the trustee's behavior. These expectations are described as "trust beliefs" (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011). Three beliefs are most salient in the literature: integrity, benevolence, and competence (Lifen Zhao, Koenig-Lewis, Hanmer-Lloyd, & Ward, 2010).

In buyer-seller relationships, trust is also described as a critical component and the "glue that holds buyer-seller relationships together" (Halaszovich & Nel, 2017, p. 125). Brand trust is necessary for a relationship to progress from a positive transactional orientation towards the brand to brand engagement (Halaszovich & Nel, 2017; Hess & Story, 2005). The role of brand trust is more salient in situations of uncertainty, fear of opportunism, or information asymmetry (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Trust can help lower uncertainty, information uncertainty, and can help customers feel more comfortable with their brand, thus increasing brand engagement (Chiu et al., 2010).

2.4. Brand satisfaction

Both, marketing managers and academicians have paid special attention to customer satisfaction as it is an important indicator of a firm past, current, and future performance (Oliver, 1999). The concept of customer satisfaction is based on the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980). This theory posits that if a consumer's perceived performance exceeds his/her expectations, a positive disconfirmation occurs (the consumer is satisfied). However, if the consumer's expected performance falls short of his/her expectation, a negative disconfirmation happens (the consumer is dissatisfied) (Churchill Jr & Surprenant, 1982).

Customer satisfaction is considered one of the most important

factors that must be present for brand engagement to occur (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Kumar et al., 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Van Doorn et al., 2010). To illustrate, research indicates that the mere act of filling out a customer satisfaction survey can lead customers further engaging with the brand (Borle, Dholakia, Singh, & Westbrook, 2007). Previous studies also support this link, thus prompting the consideration of satisfaction when determining the factors that impact brand engagement (Kumar et al., 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010).

2.5. Brand commitment

Customer commitment has been established as one of the central concepts in the relationship-marketing paradigm (Dwyer et al., 1987). Defined an attitude that reflects the desire to maintain a valued relationship (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992), customer commitment has also been recognized as an important driver of brand engagement. Although a degree of confusion does exist in the literature due to the distinction between attitudinal and behavioral commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), most conceptualizations of the construct consider commitment to be a unidimensional concept (e.g., Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002; Sharma & Patterson, 2000), primarily within consumer behavior research (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004).

Several studies have linked commitment to brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Dessart, 2017). Brand commitment is derived from customers' emotional or psychological attachment to and preference for a brand (Dessart, 2017). Thus, stronger brand commitment can motivate customers to engage with the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Generally, customers with higher levels of brand commitment are more inclined to engage in brand communities, to learn about the brand or share their knowledge and experiences about the brand with others (Schau et al., 2009).

2.6. Brand loyalty

Loyalty is the final factor considered in this study. Brand loyalty

does possess an attitudinal element (Dick & Basu, 1994), however, loyalty is typically examined in behavioral terms (Bowden, 2009). A comprehensive definition of loyalty, which combines the two approaches (i.e., behavioral and attitudinal) is offered by Jacoby and Kyner (1973, p.2) who define it as the "(1) biased (i.e., non-random) (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase) (3) expressed over time (4) by some decision-making units (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands and is (6) a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes."

Relationship research highlights the importance of examining loyalty when trying to understand the process of customer brand engagement (Bowden, 2009). As Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260) indicate, "CE plays a central role in a nomological network governing relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes." As such, we also evaluate in this study whether loyalty is a factor that must be present for brand engagement to occur.

2.7. Propositions formulation

According to complexity theory, "relationships between variables can be non-linear, with abrupt switches occurring, so the same 'cause' can, in specific circumstances, produce different effects" (Urry, 2005, p. 4). This implies that, for example, the relationship between brand engagement and other variables might not always be linear and in the same direction. Specifically, according to complexity theory X might have a positive impact on Y when Z is present, X might have a negative impact on Y when V is present, and X might not significantly impact Y when W is present. Further, it is important to specify that complexity theory acknowledges that causality can be too complex, fluid, and dynamic to capture, so rather than stating that 'X leads to Y', a more accurate portrayal of the relationship would be to state that 'X occurs in the presence of Y'.

Various studies have examined different factors that impact brand engagement, considered these factors in isolation and investigated how they individually impact brand engagement. We investigate these elements together and seek to uncover the various combinations of these factors (i.e., recipes) that lead to brand engagement. However, according to complexity theory, different components in a 'recipe' can positively or negatively impact the outcome variable depending on the presence or absence of other elements in the recipe (Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Woodside, 2015; Kraus, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Schüssler, 2018). As Urry (2005, p.4) argues when presenting the tenets of complexity theory, "If a system passes a particular threshold with minor changes in the controlling variables, switches occur such that a liquid turns into a gas, a large number of apathetic people suddenly tip into a forceful movement change (Gladwell, 2002). Such tipping points give rise to unexpected structures and events". Similarly, for example, a very high level of brand loyalty could mitigate low levels of brand interactivity or brand involvement and lead to high customer brand engagement despite low levels of the other two factors. Thus, we investigate the following:

Proposition 1. Brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment can contribute positively or negatively to brand engagement, depending on the presence or absence of either one of these factors.

Complexity theory further posits that any single element can be necessary, but not necessarily sufficient to predict the outcome variable. That is, any element needs to be combined with other elements (Wu, Yeh, & Woodside, 2014). Thus, we empirically investigate the following:

Proposition 2. Either one of brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment, can be necessary but insufficient for high brand engagement to occur.

In addition, complexity theory indicates that multiple paths or different combinations of elements can lead to the same outcome (Russo, Confente, Gligor, & Autry, 2016; Woodside, 2015). In essence, different 'recipes' can exist for brand engagement. Thus, we examine the following:

Proposition 3. Distinct combinations of brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment are equifinal in leading to high brand engagement.

3. Methodology

In study 1, we conducted an online survey to measures the constructs of interests. We started asking participants "think about a brand or firm that you interacted with using social media" and "keep these interactions in mind while answering the survey questions." a filtering mechanism at the beginning of the survey. We chose the social media context to test the propositions because of the interactive nature of social media which provides an opportunity to enhance customer engagement (Sashi, 2012). Also, the direction of social media communication is bidirectional rather than unidirectional as is the case in traditional communications (e.g., advertising) (Gretry, Horváth, Belei, & van Riel, 2017), which allows us to measure customers' perceived brand interactivity adequately. Respondents were asked to answer the following two questions: (1) Are you a social media user? (2) Have you ever interacted with a brand/firm through social media? If they failed to pass these questions, they were not allowed to complete the survey. After passing the screen questions, they were asked to answer the questions relating to the constructs of interest. Also, throughout the survey, we placed some attention check questions to see whether they read and understood the instructions and questions. Those who failed to answer these questions correctly were not allowed to complete the survey.

In Study 1, a total of 185 undergraduates (111 females and 74 males, $M_{age} = 21.51$) participant in exchange for partial course credit. Type of brands/firms varied, ranging from Nike to BMW to Apple to LuluLemon. Platforms where they interacted varied and included Instagram (55.7%), Facebook (19.5%), Twitter (12.9%), Snapchat (1.6%), and others (10.3%) that includes firms/brands' websites, blogs, and other social media platforms.

3.1. Measures

All our constructs were adapted from previous studies. Specifically, we utilized brand engagement from France et al. (2016), brand interactivity from Labrecque (2014), brand trust from Laroche et al. (2012) and Grohmann (2009), brand satisfaction from Zboja and Voorhees (2006), brand commitment from Dessart (2017), and brand loyalty from Labrecque (2014). We measured these constructs with multiple items on a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). The reliabilities of these scales exceed the recommended cutoff point for alpha (Churchill Jr, 1979) (See Table 2 for the items and reliabilities).

3.2. Convergent and discriminant validity of the measures

We assessed convergent validity based on average variance extracted (AVE) of each measure. Each construct's AVE is very close or exceeds the recommended threshold (0.5), providing evidence of convergent validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998) (See Table 2 for the standardized factor loadings and the AVEs).

Discriminant validity was examined using the AVE method (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results revealed that the AVE for each pair of constructs was greater their squared correlation, providing the support for discriminant validity (See Table 3).

Table 2
Measurement properties.

Constructs and Items (Study 1)	Standardized factor loadings	AVE	α
Brand engagement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
When I am dealing with the brand, I am deeply engrossed.	0.67	0.51	0.85
I am passionate about the brand.	0.89		
I have a sense of belonging to the brand.	0.73		
I am enthusiastic towards the brand.	0.74		
When involved with the brand, my mind is focused on what is happening.	0.58		
When interacting with the brand, I concentrate entirely on the brand.	0.60		
I am a dedicated brand customer.	0.75		
Brand involvement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
The brand means a lot to me.	0.92	0.62	0.86
The brand is significant to me.	0.90		
For me personally, the brand is important.	0.86		
I am interested in the brand.	0.72		
I am involved with the brand	0.45		
Brand interactivity (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
The brand will talk to back to me if I post a message	0.77	0.58	0.84
The brand would respond to me quickly and efficiently.	0.82		
The brand would allow me to communicate directly with it.	0.72		
The brand listens to what I have to say.	0.72		
Brand trust (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
I trust the brand.	0.76	0.48	0.82
I rely on the brand.	0.48		
The brand is an honest brand.	0.75		
The brand is safe.	0.66		
The brand gives me everything that I expect out of the product/service.	0.73		
The brand never disappoints me.	0.72		
Brand satisfaction (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
I am satisfied with my decision to purchase this brand's product/services.	0.85	0.76	0.94
My choice to buy this brand's product/services was a wise one.	0.83		
I think that I did the right thing when I bought this brand's product/services.	0.90		
I am happy that I bought this brand's product/services.	0.93		
I truly enjoyed my purchase of this brand's product/service.	0.84		
Brand commitment (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
I have grown to like this brand more than others offering the same product/service.	0.85	0.60	0.80
I like the product/services offered by this brand.	0.70		
To me, this brand is the one whose product/services I enjoy using most.	0.76		
Brand loyalty (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)			
I am willing to complete a survey for the brand.	0.41	0.48	0.71
I am willing to say positive things about the brand to others.	0.77		
I am willing to encourage close others to do business with the brand.	0.93		
I plan to do business with the brand in the next few years.	0.54		

Table 3
(Study 1): Correlation matrix and validity.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Brand engagement	**4.63**	**0.98**	**0.51**	0.43	0.04	0.27	0.24	0.31	0.30
Brand involvement	**5.14**	**1.01**	0.66	**0.62**	0.02	0.26	0.29	0.32	0.28
Brand interactivity	**4.65**	**1.22**	0.21	0.15	**0.58**	0.10	0.05	0.05	0.08
Brand trust	**5.33**	**0.89**	0.52	0.51	0.32	**0.48**	0.45	0.38	0.28
Brand satisfaction	**5.89**	**0.89**	0.49	0.54	0.22	0.67	**0.76**	0.55	0.40
Brand commitment	**5.65**	**0.95**	0.56	0.57	0.23	0.61	0.74	**0.60**	0.37
Brand loyalty	**5.68**	**0.94**	0.54	0.53	0.29	0.53	0.63	0.61	**0.48**

Note: The diagonal value (values given in bold) refers to the AVEs of each construct; below the diagonal are the pairwise correlations between constructs and above are the squared pairwise correlations.

4. Study 2

To improve the generalizability of our findings, we conducted another online survey with a more generalizable sample. We followed the same procedures and used the same measures as those in Study 1 to measure the construct of interests. We recruited a total of 146 adult subject from Amazon Mechanical Turk to participate in this study (81 females and 65 males, $M_{age} = 38.15$). Type of brands/firms, ranging from T-Mobile to Starbucks to Amazon to Panera. Platforms where they interacted varied and included Facebook (63.7%), Twitter (15.1%), Instagram (4.1%), Reddit (2.1%), and others (15%) that comprise firms/brands' websites, blogs, and other social media platforms.

5. Data analysis

This study uses fsQCA to examine the explicit connections between brand engagement and all possible combinations of binary states (i.e., presence or absence) of its conditions (i.e., brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment). FsQCA is a set-theoretic research method based on Boolean algebra that explains cases as combinations of attributes (i.e., conditions and the outcome condition in question) (Ragin & Fiss, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). That is, the method identifies combinations of factors, rather than individual factors, that generate the same result.

QCA can help explain cases where X has a positive impact on Y, X has a negative impact on Y, and X and Y share no relationship (Gabriel, Campbell, Djurdjevic, Johnson, & Rosen, 2018; Ordanini et al., 2014; Woodside, 2014). QCA helps uncover how combinations of causal attributes (e.g., brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment) can lead to the same outcome (equifinality) (e.g., brand engagement). That is, the method allows researchers to account for asymmetric relationships among independent variables and dependent variables (Fiss, 2011; Rihoux & Grimm, 2006; Wagemann, Buche, & Siewert, 2016). Importantly, QCA does not seek to establish causality, rather it seeks to explain cases (e.g., brand engagement) as combinations of attributes (e.g., brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction) that generate the same result (Schneider & Wagemann, 2010).

Since the variables in the study are not dichotomous, we used fuzzy set membership scores than can specify membership in the interval 0 to 1. We calibrated all the variables in both studies included in the model into fuzzy sets and used three memberships scores. Consistent with extant guidelines, the threshold for full membership was set to 0.95, the threshold for maximum ambiguity was set to 0.50 and the threshold for full non membership was set to 0.05 (Ragin & Fiss, 2008). For the calibration process this study used the recommendations of Greckhamer, Furnari, Fiss, and Aguilera (2018). In the two studies, the endpoints of the 7-point Likert scales serve as the two qualitative anchors for calibration of full membership (value 7) and full non-membership (value 1), while the crossover (value 4) point was calculated by observing the distribution and median scores of each attribute. This is consistent with Greckhamer et al. (2018), Woodside, Nagy, and Megehee (2018), and Russo and Confente (2018). In this study the literature did not suggest a cross over point, thus we used the median of each attribute. We used the fs/QCA 2.5 program and applied the log-odds method for an automatic calibration procedure.

In line with Fiss (2011) we evaluated the robustness of our findings by varying the cross-over point for causal conditions that lead to new solutions that were less consistent with the literature on brand engagement and also had lower coverage.

We set the cases that led to high levels of brand engagement in accordance with extant guidelines (Woodside & Baxter, 2013). A value of '1' is indicative of an outcome of high brand involvement. Next, we refined our true table using two criteria: frequency and consistency (Ragin & Fiss, 2008; Greckhamer, Misangyi, & Fiss, 2013). Ragin and Fiss (2008) and Kraus et al. (2018) suggest the value of '1' as the threshold for the frequency of medium-sized samples (e.g., 10–50 cases). Our samples were larger, thus we chose a frequency threshold of two observations for Study 1 and three for Study 2 to exclude less relevant configurations. This choice allowed us to achieve a balance considering the trade-off resulting from the inclusion of findings that are more parsimonious and the inclusion of rare configurations as important elements for the research topic.

The consistency measure in both studies was calculated as the sum of the consistent, or shared, membership scores in a causal set, divided by the sum of all the membership scores that pertain to that causal set (Ordanini et al., 2014; Russo et al., 2016). Consistent with Fiss (2011), this study used the raw consistency approach. We utilized the fs/QCA 2.5 software that provides an output consisting of a complex solution, a parsimonious solution, and an intermediate solution. This study used the intermediate solution studies, in line with Ragin and Rihoux, (2009), Leischnig and Kasper-Brauer (2015), and Miranda et al. (2018) who argue the intermediate solution to be superior and offer benefits over the other two solutions. In line with previous research, we set the lowest acceptable consistency score at 0.80, which is above the minimum recommended threshold of 0.75 (Woodside & Baxter, 2013). Next, we computed the coverage measure for each sufficient configuration ensuring it exceeded 0.10 (Woodside et al., 2018) in both studies.

A multi-step analysis was executed to explore the relationships of

interest. First, the contrarian case analysis was performed to examine Proposition 1 and verify the presence of contrarian cases by cross-tabulation. We conducted contrarian analysis to investigate the existence of contrarian cases that have opposite impact (i.e., negative and positive) on the same outcome. Contrarian case analysis helps better illustrate the complexity of customer engagement. The investigation starts with a quintile analysis, which divides the respondent cases from the lowest to highest quintile for each measured construct and explores the relationships among two or more constructs (Russo & Confente, 2017). To verify the existence of contrarian cases, a contingency table considering quintiles needs to be created. This computation was performed using SPSS software creating a 5×5 table for every set of variables representing all possible combinations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. We found the existence of contrarian cases in our two studies where the main results had confirmed the main large effect for constructs such as brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, brand involvement, brand trust and commitment. On the contrary, this did not occur for the brand interactivity construct which had several negative contrarian cases in its relationship with brand engagement. To show this we built a contingency table considering quintiles indicating the negative contrarian cases and positive contrarian cases (Figs. 1 and 2). That is, in some cases a low degree of perceived brand interactivity (i.e., PERCEIN) leads to high brand engagement (i.e., BRAND), while in some other cases a high degree of perceived brand interactivity leads to a low degree of brand engagement.

The presence of contrarian cases can also be observed through the fuzzy plot presented in Figs. 3 and 4, which further indicates that the relationship between perceived brand interactivity and brand engagement is in some cases asymmetric. Thus, Proposition 1 is supported.

5.1. Main QCA results

Tables 4 and 5 summarize the results of the QCA analysis. The tables provide the coverage and consistency of the different resultant configurations. Ragin and Fiss (2008) suggest a clear way of presenting the results of fuzzy-set analyses. Specifically, black circles ('●') indicate the presence of a condition and circles with a cross ('⊗') indicate its absence. Moreover, a blank cell indicates the 'do not care' condition, which signifies that a specific condition is not considered in a solution.

Table 4 presents the results for Study 1 and indicates three possible combinations (recipes) of factors that lead to high brand engagement, while Table 5 presents the results for Study 2 and indicates three possible combinations (recipes) of factors that lead to high brand engagement. This supports Proposition 3 indicating equifinality in reaching high levels of customer satisfaction.

The Study 1 results presented in Table 4 can be interpreted as follows. Solution 1 indicates that when brand involvement, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand interactivity and brand trust. Solution 2 indicates that when brand interactivity, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand involvement. Interestingly, Solution 3 indicates that when brand interactivity is high, customers indicate high brand engagement even in the absence of brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. Solution 1 has the highest raw coverage (i.e., 0.94) indicating that this solution is the best representation of brand engagement, followed by Solution 2 (i.e., 0.81) and Solution 3 (i.e., 0.18). With regard to the coverage, the findings indicate an overall solution coverage of 0.97 and an overall consistency of 0.84, suggesting that a substantial proportion of the outcome is covered by the three configurations.

The Study 2 results presented in Table 5 can be interpreted as follows. Solution 1 indicates that when brand interactivity, brand trust,
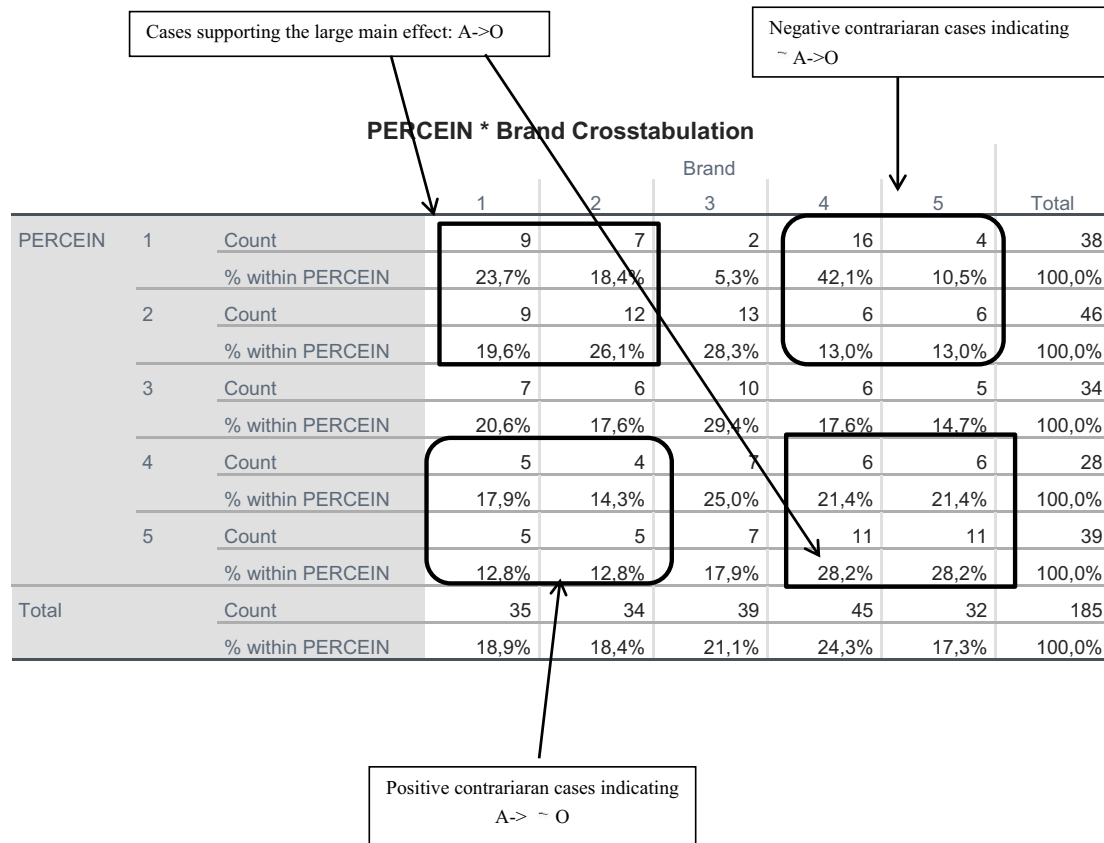
Fig. 1. Two outcomes: Brand Interactivity and Brand Engagement (Study 1).

brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand involvement. Solution 2 indicates that when brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand interactivity. Solution 3 indicates that when brand interactivity is high, customers indicate high brand engagement even in the absence of brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. Solution 2 has the highest raw coverage (i.e., 0.94) indicating that this solution is the best representation of brand engagement, followed by Solution 1 (i.e., 0.86) and Solution 3 (i.e., 0.16). With regard to the coverage, the findings indicate an overall solution coverage of 0.95 and an overall consistency of 0.89, suggesting that a substantial proportion of the outcome is covered by the five configurations. Considering that Solution 3 in both studies indicate that brand interactivity is sufficient for high engagement and must not be combined with other ingredients, Proposition 2 is not supported.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this manuscript is to offer a comprehensive and unifying perspective on the body of literature exploring factors that contribute to customer engagement and explore the possible combinations of factors that lead to high levels of customer engagement. We conduct two studies to achieve these objectives. In the process, we make several noteworthy theoretical and managerial contributions.

7. Theoretical implications

Previous studies have empirically examined some factors that must be present for brand engagement to occur, such as perceived brand

interactivity (France et al., 2016), brand involvement (Hollebeek, 2011), satisfaction with the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Pansari & Kumar, 2017;), and commitment (Dessart, 2017). We expand on this body of literature that examines factors that lead to customer engagement by also empirically examining the role of brand trust and brand loyalty. Considering the relevance of these two constructs in the customer relationship literature, our proposed model helps provide a more comprehensive understanding on the determinants of brand engagement.

We also contribute to the brand engagement literature by going beyond the 'all-or-nothing' association presumed by traditional statistical models such as multiple regression analysis or structural equation modeling. As such, we seek to complement past studies that have employed regression analysis by offering a different perspective on the various factors that have been linked to customer engagement. Specifically, our first study identified three distinct combinations of factors that lead to customer engagement. The first combination or 'recipe' indicates that when brand involvement, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand interactivity and brand trust. The second possible combination indicates that when brand interactivity, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand involvement. Interestingly, the third combination indicates that when brand interactivity is high, customers indicate high brand engagement even in the absence of brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. While past studies suggested a direct link between brand interactivity, brand involvement, and brand engagement (e.g., France et al., 2016), our findings indicate that the presence of these variables is not always necessary. Specifically, a combination of either one of these factors (i.e., brand

PERCEIN * BRAND Crosstabulation

Cases supporting the large main effect: A->O

Negative contrariaran cases indicating ~ A->O

PERCEIN			BRAND 1	2	3	4	5	Total
PERCEIN	1	Count	7	5	7	7	4	30
		% within PERCEIN	23,3%	16,7%	23,3%	23,3%	13,3%	100,0%
		% of Total	4,8%	3,4%	4,8%	4,8%	2,7%	20,5%
	2	Count	7	7	10	6	3	33
		% within PERCEIN	21,2%	21,2%	30,3%	18,2%	9,1%	100,0%
		% of Total	4,8%	4,8%	6,8%	4,1%	2,1%	22,6%
	3	Count	4	5	3	6	3	21
		% within PERCEIN	19,0%	23,8%	14,3%	28,6%	14,3%	100,0%
		% of Total	2,7%	3,4%	2,1%	4,1%	2,1%	14,4%
	4	Count	9	5	8	3	7	32
		% within PERCEIN	28,1%	15,6%	25,0%	9,4%	21,9%	100,0%
		% of Total	6,2%	3,4%	5,5%	2,1%	4,8%	21,9%
	5	Count	3	4	3	5	15	30
		% within PERCEIN	10,0%	13,3%	10,0%	16,7%	50,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	2,1%	2,7%	2,1%	3,4%	10,3%	20,5%
Total		Count	30	26	31	27	32	146
		% within PERCEIN	20,5%	17,8%	21,2%	18,5%	21,9%	100,0%
		% of Total	20,5%	17,8%	21,2%	18,5%	21,9%	100,0%

Positive contrariaran cases indicating A-> ~ O

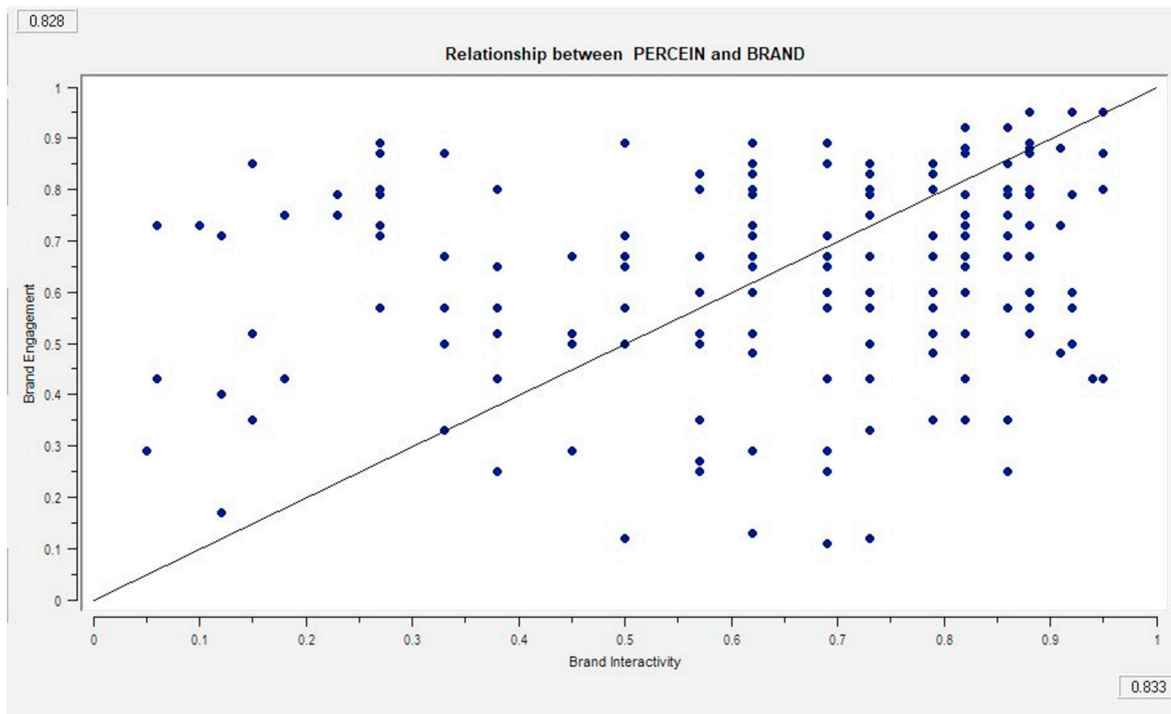**Fig. 2.** Two outcomes: Brand Interactivity and Brand Engagement (Study 2).

Fig. 3. Plot of the relationship between Brand Interactivity and Brand Engagement (Study 1).
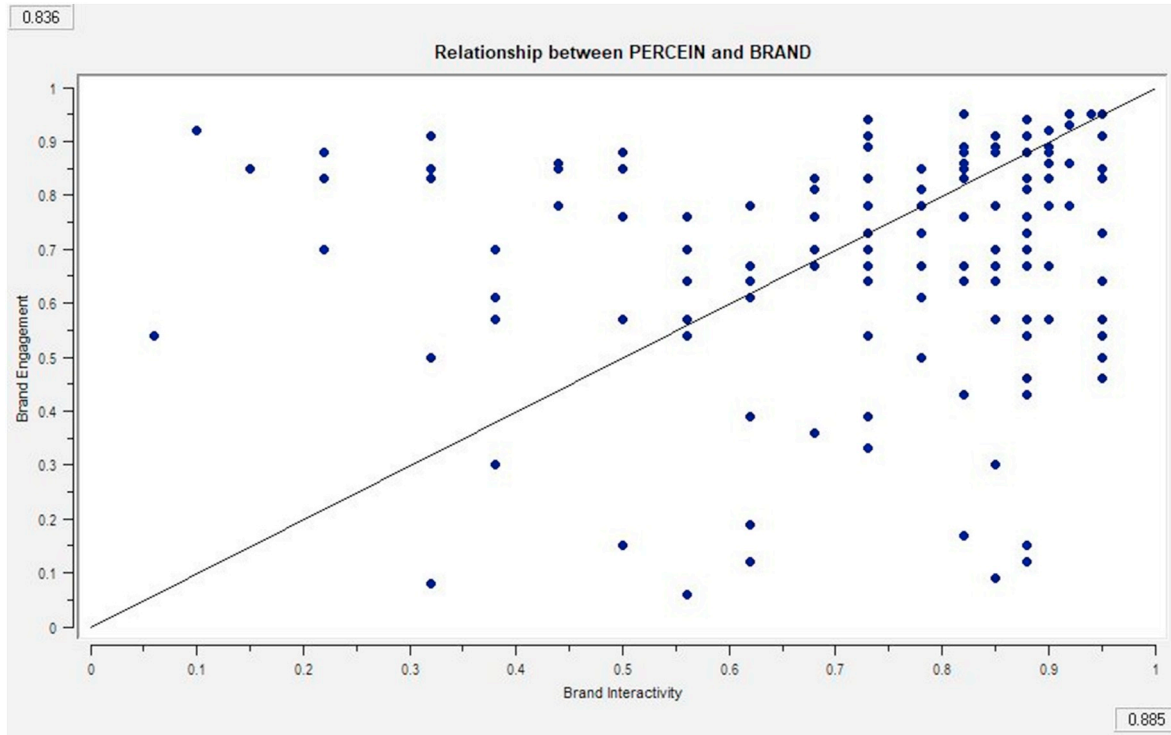
Fig. 4. Plot of the relationship between Brand Interactivity and Brand Engagement (Study 2).

Table 4
Configurations for achieving high brand engagement (Study 1).

Configurations	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Brand Interactivity		●	●
Brand Involvement	●		⊗
Brand Trust		●	⊗
Brand Satisfaction	●	●	⊗
Brand Commitment	●	●	⊗
Brand Loyalty	●	●	⊗
Consistency	0.87	0.89	0.94
Raw coverage	0.94	0.81	0.18
Unique coverage	0.16	0.02	0,01
Solution coverage	0.97		
Solution consistency	0.84		

● = Core causal condition present.
⊗ = Core causal condition absent.

Table 5
Configurations for achieving high brand engagement (Study 2).

Configurations	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Brand Interactivity	●		●
Brand Involvement		●	⊗
Brand Trust	●	●	⊗
Brand Satisfaction	●	●	⊗
Brand Commitment	●	●	⊗
Brand Loyalty	●	●	⊗
Consistency	0.92	0.92	0.86
Raw coverage	0.86	0.94	0.16
Unique coverage	0.01	0.09	0,01
Solution coverage	0.95		
Solution consistency	0.89		

● = Core causal condition present.
⊗ = Core causal condition absent.

interactivity or involvement) along with the presence of other elements, such as brand trust, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty, can compensate for the absence of one of these factors (i.e., brand interactivity or involvement). Study 2 offers similar alternative combinations.

Perhaps the most interesting finding and contribution are derived from Solution 3, identified in both studies, which indicates that the presence of brand interactivity can be sufficient to lead customers to engage with the brand. This was a rather surprising finding, and the prompted us to conduct the second study which further reinforced the finding: customers can still engage with the brand in the absence of brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment provided that the consumers experience a high level of brand interactivity.

Further, the results of our contrarian case analysis indicate instances where one of the model factors (i.e., perceived brand interactivity) can relate to brand engagement positively, negatively, or not at all; yet the overall relationship between the two variables could be significant and positive (Misangyi et al., 2017; Ordanini et al., 2014). This finding complements extant literature that has exclusively examined the net effects of perceived brand interactivity on brand engagement. Thus, we make a noteworthy contribution to the literature by identifying these asymmetric relationships between brand engagement and the factors that must be present for brand engagement to occur.

Finally, we also contribute to the acceptance of complexity theory within the field of social sciences. As Sterman and Wittenberg (1999, p. 338) argue, "Developing the full potential of complexity theory, especially in the social sciences, requires more rigorous theory development and fewer popular articles extolling the virtues of the 'new paradigm', more studies testing the new theories and fewer anecdotal claims of efficacy, greater development of tools tailored for particular contexts, and fewer claims of universality. Without such rigor, social scientists face the danger that, despite its high potential, 'complexity theory' will soon be discarded, perhaps prematurely, as yet another unfortunate case of physics envy". Our results provide further evidence that the tenets of complexity theory present a solid theoretical foundation on which future studies can expand.

8. Managerial implications

For managers, we identified three distinct combinations of factors that lead to customer engagement. The first combination or 'recipe' indicates that when brand involvement, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand interactivity and brand trust. The second possible combination indicates that when brand interactivity, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are present, customers indicate high brand engagement irrespective of the customers' reported levels of brand involvement. Finally, the third combination indicates that when brand interactivity is high, customers indicate high brand engagement even in the absence of brand involvement, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. These findings provide several unique insights to managers.

First, managers can use these 'recipes' as guidelines when trying to achieve higher levels of customer engagement. The solutions depict alternatives that managers have to implement when trying to lead customers to engage with their brands.

Second, our results indicate to managers that brand interactivity, brand involvement, and brand engagement are not always necessary. The presence of other elements, such as brand trust, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty, can compensate for the absence of one of these factors.

In essence, we suggest to managers that not all these conditions (i.e., brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment) must be concomitantly present for customers to engage with the brand. This has important implications from a resource allocation perspective as it suggests to managers that they do not need to devote resources to simultaneously develop all these factors. Rather, various combinations of these elements can yield the same outcome: high levels of brand engagement.

Third, both studies indicate that the presence of brand interactivity can be sufficient to lead customers to engage with the brand. This finding has noteworthy implications for managers signaling the importance and sufficiency of brand involvement in leading customers to engage with the brand. Specifically, managers should prioritize the development of high brand interactivity as a solution for increasing brand engagement.

Finally, our findings indicate to managers that while for some customers perceived brand interactivity can have a negative impact on brand engagement, the overall effect (i.e., the effect for the majority of customers) is positive. That is, managers should not diminish their efforts to develop perceived brand interactivity even if it negatively impacts some customers' brand engagement, as increased perceived brand interactivity should have an overall positive impact on the majority of customers.

9. Limitations and future research

Our study has several limitations that also present opportunities for future research. We only investigate the impact of several possible factors on brand engagement (i.e., brand interactivity, brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, and commitment). Future research should explore additional factors (e.g., brand value, brand self-congruity, brand image, personalization) in order to increase our understanding of what drives consumers to engage with brands. We examined the relationships of interest in a social media setting which restricts the applicability of our findings outside this context. Future research should consider different settings to increase the generalizability of our findings.

We conducted two studies with two different samples. Future studies should attempt to replicate our findings utilizing additional, distinct samples to further increase the generalizability of our findings. We used perceptual measures to operationalize the variables of interest.

Future research should seek to operationalize brand engagement using objective data to provide further evidence for the findings. Therefore, it would be important to generalize the findings in different contexts, for example, culture distance might influence brand engagement in the context of global strategy.

In addition, future research should employ alternate methods, such as experiments or field study to provide additional insights into the processes that lead to brand engagement. QCA can provide significant insights into the relationships of interest, but additional methods can help improve the findings' generalizability. Further, we tested our propositions in the context of social media. Future research should explore additional contexts. Finally, we focused on the attributes that must be present for customers to engage. Future research could also apply QCA to explore the factors that lead to disengage with brands.

In conclusion, we hope our study will prompt further studies on customer engagement using QCA. Importantly, in this study we do not argue that QCA is superior to traditional regression analysis. Rather, we highlight the complementary nature of QCA and the unique insights it can provide when trying to understand the factors that lead customers to engage with brands.

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