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To cite this article: Shavneet Sharma, Gurmeet Singh & Asheefa Shaheen Aiyub (2019): Use of Social Networking Sites by SMEs to Engage With Their Customers: A Developing Country Perspective, Journal of Internet Commerce, DOI: [10.1080/15332861.2019.1695180](https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2019.1695180)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2019.1695180>



Published online: 02 Dec 2019.



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Use of Social Networking Sites by SMEs to Engage With Their Customers: A Developing Country Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate use of Social Networking Sites by SMEs to engage with their customers. A conceptual framework is developed that tests the relationship between customer satisfaction, customer engagement and customer loyalty. This research adopts a quantitative approach where data is collected from 336 respondents. Analysis is performed using structural equation modeling. The empirical results show that customer satisfaction has a positive influence on customer loyalty. When customer engagement was modeled directly to customer loyalty, a positive relationship was found. The multi-dimensional nature of customer engagement is also confirmed by this study. This study highlights the value of social networks for SMEs and contributes to literature by testing the research model to better understand the research topic.

KEYWORDS

Customer engagement; customer loyalty; customer satisfaction; Fiji; SME; structural equation modeling

Introduction

There is consensus amongst researchers regarding the communication changes social media has brought about, leading to businesses creating websites to directly interact and connect with customers (Martins and Patrício 2013; Hajli 2014; Zhang et al. 2017). This has given businesses the opportunity to improve their performance and achieve its commercial goals (Rapp et al. 2013). Businesses are now using social media for brand management (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, and Beukeboom 2015; Hudson et al. 2016; Moro, Rita, and Vala 2016; Parsons and Lepkowska-White 2018), to build consumer trust (Calefato, Lanubile, and Novielli 2015; Zhang et al. 2017; Cooley and Parks-Yancy 2019), electronic commerce (e-commerce) and social commerce (Tajvidi et al. 2018), new product development and innovation (Leonardi 2014; Dong and Wu 2015; Du, Yalcinkaya, and Bstieler 2016; Roberts and Piller 2016), knowledge sharing (Leonardi 2014; Munar

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and Jacobsen 2014; Bharati, Zhang, and Chaudhury 2015; Leonardi and others 2017), electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Leung, Bai, and Stahura 2015; Islam and Rahman 2016; Wakefield and Wakefield 2018), customer relationship management (CRM) (Trainor et al. 2014; Agnihotri et al. 2017; Cheng and Shiu 2018; Pan, Torres, and Zúñiga 2019) and sales growth (Kumar et al. 2013; Agnihotri et al. 2016; Agnihotri et al. 2017; Kumar, Choi, and Greene 2017).

Despite the growing number of studies focusing on how social media can enhance the capabilities and performance of businesses (Trainor et al. 2014), there are limited studies carried out in the context of SMEs (Putzke et al. 2014; Mumi, Obal, and Yang 2019). Much of the research has been focused on larger businesses that have more extensive resources. Additionally, there is little research that has been conducted in developing country context. The majority of the theories and models in this area have been tested in developed and western countries. Therefore, this research contributes significantly in this regard.

This study focuses on SMEs in Fiji. There is no unique definition of an SME which is accepted worldwide. The term 'SME' has myriad definitions as different countries and organizations have set up different guidelines when it comes to defining SMEs which are based on the value of sales, assets and number of employees. For the purpose of this research, the definition provided by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) will be used. RBF defines a small enterprise as an enterprise that has total assets or turnover between F\$30,000 and \$100,000 and employs between 6 and 20 employees (The Reserve Bank of Fiji 2013). Medium enterprise is an enterprise that has total assets or turnover between F\$100,000 and F\$500,000 and employs between 21 and 50 employees (The Reserve Bank of Fiji 2013). This definition is based on the annual turnover of the business, asset and the number of employees it has. According to the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF), as of 2004 there approximately 12,000 SMEs that are registered of which 5,000 are active. The National Center for SME Development (NCSMED) estimated that SMEs account for 10–12% of Fiji's GDP. This highlights the importance of SMEs to the growth and development of the Fijian economy and its people.

The objective of this research is to examine customer engagement and how this leads to customer satisfaction which in turn influences customer loyalty for SMEs in Fiji. Contribution to literature is done in two ways. First, the psychometrically sound and concise scale proposed by So, King, and Sparks (2014) is tested in the context of social media for SMEs in Fiji. The scale has been tested mostly in a highly developed countries which is significantly different from a non-western and developing country like Fiji. So, King, and Sparks (2014) suggested that the scale be tested in a different

setting and culture to enhance the robustness and applicability of the model. Second, this research empirically tests the proposed conceptual model that incorporates customer engagement as an antecedent of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty as an outcome of customer satisfaction. The following sections of this paper outline the dimensions of customer engagement and look at its possible antecedents and consequences of customer engagement. The method employed in this study of Fijian consumers is also outlined in the following section together with the results of the research model. This paper concludes by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of this research and proposes directions for future research.

Literature and hypotheses

Social media

There are various definitions of social media. Social media has been described by Kietzmann et al. (2011) in terms of its functionality, including identity (the extent to which users reveal themselves), presence (the extent to which users know if others are available), sharing (the extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content), relationships (the extent to which users relate to each other), groups (the extent to which users are ordered or form communities), conversations (the extent to which users communicate with each other), and reputation (the extent to which users know the social standing of others). Therefore, social media can also be defined in terms of the purposes it serves. In practice, social media refers to specific platforms through which people communicate, such as discussion forums, blogs, wikis, social networks, and multi-media sites, being some of the most popular Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google+, Flickr, Twitter, and YouTube (Bradley & Barlett 2011; Gupta, Armstrong, and Clayton 2011). These specific platforms may change over time or be replaced by some others, but it seems valuable to address social media by looking at the specific platforms people use for ‘the advent of social media has substantially changed the manner in which many people, communities, and/or organizations communicate and interact’ (Ngai et al. 2015: 33).

Customer engagement

“Since its initial study in the working environment by Kahn (1990), the concept of engagement has attracted widespread attention from the academic world” (Zhang et al. 2017: 230). The perusal of literature is indicative of the fact that marketing scholars do not concur with the definition of customer engagement (Zhang et al. 2017). For the purpose of this study,

we use the following definition. Customer engagement is defined as the repeated interactions that takes place between a consumer and a business that strengthens the physical, psychological and emotional investment that the consumer has in the brand or the business (Phang, Zhang, and Sutanto 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014). The notion of investment is underpinned by the social exchange theory which states that an individual evaluates the intangible and tangible costs and benefits of engaging in a relationship (Kelley and Thibaut 1978). At the very least, there should be a balance between the costs and benefits for customer brand engagement to persist (Brodie et al. 2011). For instance, attention and enthusiasm may be invested by consumers in engaging with a business or brand to receive benefits such as offers, product news or a sense of belongingness (Foa and Foa 1980; Blau 2017). Social media is profoundly different from other previously used marketer-customer technology platforms. It has become a dominant enabler of customer engagement as they are transparent despite being owned by customers and facilitate two-way interactions between the business and the customer (Dwyer 2007; Deighton and Kornfeld 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012; Swani et al. 2017; Simon and Tossan 2018). According to Goh, Heng, and Lin (2013), messages from engaged customers were 22 times more valuable than those of marketers. Customers who are highly engaged play a crucial role when they generate content, co-create customer experience and value, and make referrals (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014; Hajli 2014; Zhang et al. 2017). This underlines the importance of understanding customer engagement for SMEs.

Dimensions of customer engagement

‘As far as the dimensions of customer engagement, little attention has been paid to it in the current academic world’ (Zhang et al. 2017: 231). Waqar et al. (2015) informed that few studies have investigated consumers’ engagement on websites as well as social media. Nonetheless, many scholars do agree that there can be three dimensions such as cognition, emotion and behavior (Zhang et al. 2017). However, we adopt the five dimensions of customer engagement that originally conceptualized by So, King, and Sparks (2014) and includes attention, absorption, enthusiasm, identification and interaction since this appears to be more wholesome. Two of these dimensions (enthusiasm and interaction) are similar to what was used by Vivek (2009)—enthusiasm, conscious participation and social interaction.

Attention

The customer’s level of focus towards the business both consciously or subconsciously is referred to as attention. A persistence of this attention

towards the business or its products and services can lead to increased level of customer engagement (Lin, Gregor, and Ewing 2008; Scholer and Higgins 2009). This research believes that customers will pay attention if they are attracted to certain sites. Various studies, in the likes of Dwivedi et al. (2017), Hsu and Lin (2008), Jung et al. (2016), Lee and Hong (2016), Wamba et al. (2017), do mention that customers are more attracted to social media ads if these are creative and attractive.

Absorption

Absorption goes further than attention. Here, the customer is engrossed or concentrates highly on the business or its related products or services (Schaufeli et al. 2002). This leads the customer to not being aware of the amount of time he is dedicating towards the business (Patterson, Yu, and De Ruyter 2006; Scholer and Higgins 2009).

Enthusiasm

The strong level of zeal or excitement and the interest a person has towards the business or its related products/service is referred to as enthusiasm (Vivek 2009: 60). As per Glassman and McAfee (1990), enthusiastic people tend to take risks and the initiative to elude uncertainty and for better understanding. Not only this, the enthusiasts, in so doing are able to enhance customer trust with others in the social networks and this in turn can 'directly improve customer perception of the value created' (Zhang et al. 2017: 237).

Identification

Customers tend to identify themselves more towards certain brands over others, especially when these are closely related to their self-image (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). This idea is drawn from the social identity theory that suggests that a person has a social as well as a personal identity. The business a person associates with are a manifestation of the social identity function of the brand (Tajfel and Turner 1985).

Interaction

Interaction is a crucial aspect of customer engagement. It involves the exchange and sharing of thoughts, ideas and feelings relating to a customer's experience with a business or its related products or service (Vivek 2009). This interaction is part of the behavioral element of customer engagement. Highly engaged customers tend to start 'interesting interaction' which can include teasing and funny contents (Zhang et al. 2017). Many researchers agree that consumers develop relationships with

marketing companies more so than interpersonal relationships with employees of those companies (Yim, Tse, and Chan 2008). According to Waqar et al. (2015: 433), the psychological state influenced by co-creation and interaction are the key ‘concerns of companies dealing with interactive websites and social media’. Yet, not much research has been done on ‘interactive forms of online communication such as social media and peer recommendations ...’ (Waqar et al. 2015: 432).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as a judgement that a product or service characteristic or the product or service itself, is providing (or provided) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of over fulfillment and under fulfillment (Oliver, Rust, and Varki 1997). According to Gustafsson et al. (2005), satisfaction is based on an overall evaluation of products and services, affecting customers emotional attitude. As such, if a customer is satisfied with his or her purchase, then he may engage in repeat purchase. However, a customer that engages with the business would go beyond the purchase and provide feedback, referrals and have conversations about the brand on social networking sites (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Satisfaction differs from engagement in that engagement is more of a motivational state during participation in interactive activities (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014); it is more about intrinsic motivation than evaluation (Welfald and Downey 2009). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Customer engagement has a significant impact on customer satisfaction for SMEs in Fiji

Consequences of customer engagement

The consequences of customer engagement include brand experience, trust, satisfaction, commitment, customer equity, customer value, financial outcomes and brand loyalty (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Hollebeek 2011). Through their study, Porter and Donthu (2008) confirm that trust leads to relational behavior of customers towards the firm, which in turn leads to willingness to share their personal information, participate in new product development and being loyal. Situational factors such as age, degree of socialization and computer experience influence psychological connections (Funk and James 2001). This study will test customer loyalty as one of the consequences of customer engagement. Loyalty is an outcome variable that has been used in previous studies (Mattila 2001; So et al. 2016; Harrigan et al. 2017; Sparks and Fredline 2007). However, there is still limited

empirical evidence to clearly establish an understanding of the connection between customer engagement and customer loyalty (So et al. 2016). Therefore, this was considered appropriate for this study.

Despite the limited empirical evidence supporting the association between customer engagement and customer loyalty, studies suggest that when a product or service is evaluated by a customer, attitudes develop about the purchase that justify a loyal business relationship (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996; Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim 2010; Nam, Ekinci, and Whyatt 2011). A customer's commitment to consistently repurchases a preferred brand represents loyalty (Oliver 1999). On the other hand, customer engagement summarizes the connection between the business and the customer that goes beyond the purchase (So, King, and Sparks 2014; Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012). Interactive brand experiences that go beyond the purchase accompanied by an enduring psychological connection enhances purchase decisions and loyalty (Patterson, Yu, and De Ruyter 2006; Hollebeek 2009). Also, an engaged customer is more likely to develop a favorable attitude towards a brand, company or product leading to loyalty towards the entity (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012; So, King, and Sparks 2014). As per the research of Akar and Topçu (2011), there is a positive relationship between the use of social media and customers' attitude. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Customer satisfaction has a significant impact on customer loyalty for SMEs in Fiji

Theoretical underpinning

When a latent construct like customer engagement is being measured, consideration needs to be made to the nature of the construct (i.e., reflective vs. formative; (Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma 2003)). It was stated that measurement theory is affected by causality (Hair et al. 2006). In a formative model, it is assumed that the construct is a result of the indicator, whereas in a reflective theory, the indicator is caused by the latent factor. As such, the concept of customer engagement is quite similar to other social science constructs such as behavioral intention, attitude and personality (Hair et al. 2006). Therefore, a reflective model of customer engagement is proposed with specific dimensions of identification, attention, absorption and interaction and enthusiasm. It is expected that the five dimensions will covary with each other. That is, changes in one dimension will be associated with promotional changes in other dimensions (Hair et al. 2006) (Figure 1).

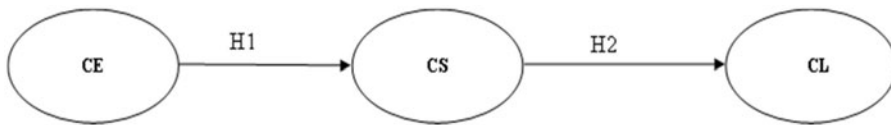


Figure 1. Conceptual model of customer engagement. *Note.* The latent factor labels represent the following: CE: customer engagement; CS: customer satisfaction; CL: customer loyalty.

Method

This study has three constructs of interest. Firstly, customer satisfaction was measured using the 3-item self-developed scale. Secondly, customer engagement was measured using the five dimensions of customer engagement 25-item scale by So, King, and Sparks (2014). The scale included five subscales, namely (1) absorption, (2) identification and (3) interaction (4) attention (5) enthusiasm (items in Table 1). Third, customer loyalty was measured using the 6-item scale adopted from Saleh (2016). Finally, basic demographic was collected about age, gender and educational background. An online survey was conducted in Fiji with links to the questionnaire being circulated through the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn).

As it is not possible to get a list of all elements in the population, the research will utilize a non-probability sampling technique to identify respondents. This method is very useful in getting general ideas about the phenomenon of interest (Sekaran and Bougie 2010). Besides, it collects information from a population conveniently available to provide this information. This was deemed most appropriate for the study due to the difficulty in accessing information about all social media users in Fiji.

A total of 336 responses was received from which 324 valid questionnaires were used. Descriptive statistics were carried out using SPSS (25.0) and the structural equation modeling in AMOS (24.0).

Results

The analysis supported the reliability and validity of the scales. The reliability of all factor scales was examined by internal consistency analyses; the Cronbach's alpha for customer satisfaction (0.79), identification (0.853), absorption (0.913), interaction (0.915), overall customer engagement (0.944) and customer loyalty (0.901) all indicated high internal consistency. Maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared squared variance (ASV) were both lower than the average variance extracted (AVE) for all factors. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the scale was accepted (see Table 1).

A descriptive analysis of the respondents indicates that a total 12.3% of the respondents were under the age of 20, 45.1% of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years of age, 26.5% of the respondents were between 31

Table 1. Demographic profile.

Demographics	#	%
Age		
Under 20	40	12.3
20–30	146	45.1
31–40	86	26.5
41–50	38	11.7
51 and above	14	4.3
Gender		
Male	150	46.3
Female	174	53.7
Qualification		
High School	38	11.7
Undergraduate	120	37
University Graduate	140	43.2
Masters	20	6.2
PhD	6	1.9

and 40 years of age, 11.7% of the respondents were between 41 and 50 years of age while 4.3% of the respondents were above 51 years of age. Of the 324 total respondents, 46.3% were male, while 53.7% were female.

Construct validity (Tables 2 and 3)

Reliability

The recommended level of construct reliability of 0.70 was achieved by all factors (Hair et al. 2006), with the values of composite reliability, ranging from 0.795 to 0.917 as depicted in Table 1. Also, strong indicator reliability was demonstrated as the AVEs for all constructs tested in this study were above the recommended cutoff by Fornell and Larcker (1981) of 0.50. The statistical tests suggested that reliable and valid scales were used to measure the latent variables.

Test of the conceptual model

We tested the predictive validity of the 26-item scale with a structural model, placing a path from customer engagement to customer loyalty (Figure 2). The fit indices suggested that the model fit the data fairly well; (χ^2 (293) = 614.440, $p < .001$), $\chi^2/df = 2.097$, goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.784; adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.742; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.898; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.823; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.083; PCLOSE = 0.000. The results suggest that original 26 item scale is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.752$, CR = 7.547, $p < .001$) and explained 59% of the variance in customer loyalty.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results for refined measurement items.

Factor and item description	Model and item indices				
	SL	CR	SMC	AVE	MSV
Customer engagement					
Attention		0.903		0.701	0.649
I am passionate about SMEs' social media page	0.886		0.786		
I am enthusiastic about SMEs' social media page	0.934		0.873		
I feel excited about SMEs' social media page	0.834		0.696		
Anything related to SMEs' social media page grabs my attention.	0.673		0.453		
Identification		0.853		0.658	0.649
When I talk about an SMEs on social media, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.	0.812		0.659		
This SMEs' social media page success is my success.	0.821		0.674		
When someone praises the SME on their social media page, it feels like a personal compliment.	0.803		0.645		
Absorption		0.915		0.684	0.442
When I am interacting with the SMEs' social media page, I forget everything else around me	0.768		0.59		
Time flies when I am interacting with the SMEs' social media page.	0.805		0.648		
When I am interacting with the SMEs' social media page, I get carried away.	0.875		0.765		
When interacting with the SMEs' social media page, it is difficult to detach myself.	0.865		0.749		
In my interaction with the SMEs' social media page, I am immersed.	0.816		0.666		
Interaction		0.917		0.689	0.451
In general, I like to get involved in the SMEs' social media community discussions	0.788		0.621		
I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others using the SMEs' social media community.	0.85		0.722		
I am someone who likes to actively participate in the SMEs' social media community discussions.	0.909		0.827		
In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people through the SMEs' social media community.	0.816		0.666		
I often participate in activities of the SMEs' social media community.	0.779		0.607		
Customer satisfaction		0.795		0.563	0.452
I believe the service is better when SMEs use social networks for communication with customers	0.754		0.568		
I am satisfied with the use of social networks by SMEs.	0.762		0.581		
SMEs are able to meet my expectations through their social media page.	0.735		0.541		
Customer loyalty		0.903		0.608	0.452
I feel a sense of loyalty with SMEs when communicating on social networks.	0.793		0.628		
I trust the information shared with me by SMEs through their social media page.	0.823		0.678		
I feel SMEs credibility increases when they communicate through social networks	0.767		0.589		

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Factor and item description	Model and item indices				
	SL	CR	SMC	AVE	MSV
I trust SMEs as a whole when they keep in touch with customers through social networks.	0.793		0.629		
I always purchase products/services from SMEs that I interact with through social media.	0.736		0.542		
SMEs are able to increase my loyalty towards them through the use of social media	0.763		0.582		

Note. SL: standardized loading; CR: composite reliability; SMC: squared multiple correlation; AVE: average variance extracted; MSV: maximum shared variance.

Table 3. Discriminant validity analysis from confirmatory factor analysis.

	CR	AVE	MSV	AT	AB	IN	CL	CS	ID
AT	0.903	0.701	0.649	0.838					
AB	0.915	0.684	0.442	0.665***	0.827				
IN	0.917	0.689	0.451	0.672***	0.597***	0.830			
CL	0.903	0.608	0.452	0.630***	0.556***	0.622***	0.780		
CS	0.795	0.563	0.452	0.557***	0.508***	0.473***	0.672***	0.750	
ID	0.853	0.658	0.649	0.805***	0.644***	0.665***	0.599***	0.534***	0.811

Note. The boldfaced diagonal elements are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs. *** $p < .001$. AT: attention; AB: absorption; IN: interaction; ID: identification; CL: customer loyalty; CS: customer satisfaction; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted; MSV: maximum shared squared variance.

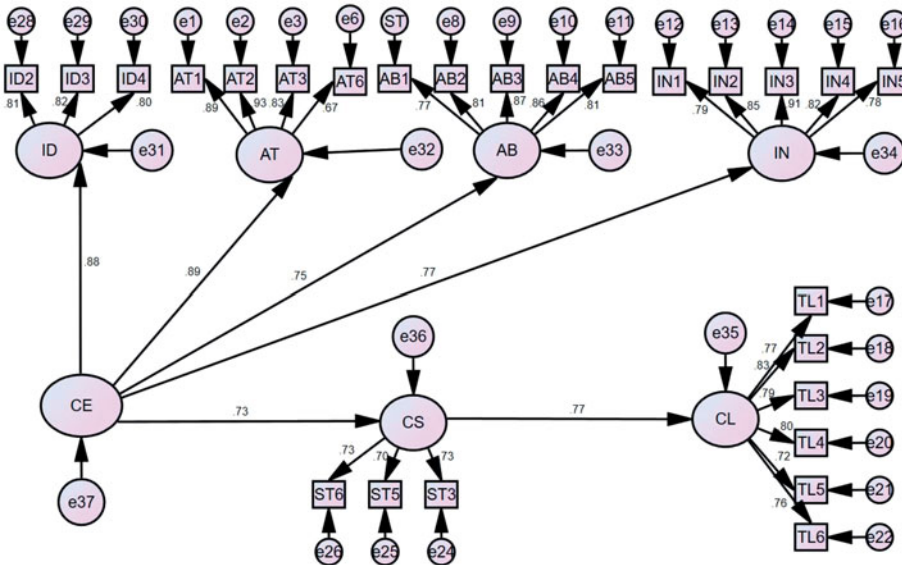


Figure 2. The four-factor model of CE structural model with customer satisfaction and loyalty. Note. The latent factor labels represent the following: CE: customer engagement; CS: customer satisfaction; CL: customer loyalty; the four factor CE 17-item scale was used to measure CE.

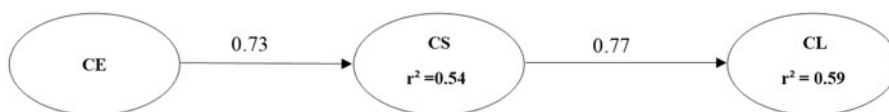


Figure 3. The relationship between customer engagement, satisfaction and loyalty. *Note.* The latent factor labels represent the following: CE: customer engagement; CS: customer satisfaction; CL: customer loyalty; the four factor CE 17-item scale was used to measure CE.

Discussion

Recently, researchers have been investigating customer engagement in a marketing context. Customer engagement has gained more interest in recent literature worldwide and is considered a useful retention and acquisition strategy (Brodie et al. 2013). Engaged customers may immensely contribute to company's innovation processes, value creation, creating brand referrals, co-creating experiences (Hoyer et al. 2010). However, this study examined the nature of customer engagement within the nomological framework proposed by So, King, and Sparks (2014). Specifically, with customer engagement as an antecedent and customer loyalty as a consequence of customer satisfaction. The current research provides empirical support for the nomological framework and finds that customer engagement is a predictor of customer loyalty on social media for SMEs in Fiji. This means that if a customer is engaged with the business, they would go beyond the purchase and communicate, provide referrals, give feedback about the business on social media sites (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014). These are all components of customer engagement. This research also finds that customer engagement is a predictor of customer loyalty. This is a relationship that has been proposed by research (for example, Bowden 2009; Hollebeek 2009; Patterson, Yu, and De Ruyter 2006). This study emphasizes the interdependence between the constructs by placing and testing customer engagement as part of the nomological framework (Figure 3).

Theoretical implications

This research contributes to SME research through the validation of the customer engagement scale that was developed by So, King, and Sparks (2014). The original scale has five dimensions of customer engagement but when modeled, one dimension (enthusiasm) was found to be not significant. This study does not deny the importance of enthusiasm, but provides justification for considering the four dimensions of customer engagement. The four dimensions were tested with customer in Fiji. Customer satisfaction was then examined as an antecedent to customer engagement (Hollebeek 2011; So, King, and Sparks 2014). This study demonstrates that customer satisfaction has a positive influence of customer engagement.

When customer engagement was modeled directly to customer loyalty, the positive relationship was found with customer loyalty.

In the competitive SME market in Fiji, the key question that emerges is how social media can be used to increase engagement. The theoretical contribution of this study is by empirically testing customer engagement by placing it within a nomological framework for practitioners and researchers where customer satisfaction leads to customer engagement which in turn leads to customer loyalty. The multi-dimensional nature of customer engagement is also confirmed by this study. This study builds on the work by So, King, and Sparks (2014) by conceptualizing customer engagement and operationalizing it with SMEs in a developing country. The focus on social media for SMEs is an important contribution to the social network marketing literature. Despite SMEs having different characteristics than other types of businesses, the findings can be applied to other businesses as well. Social exchange theory is an appropriate theoretical underpinning for this study regardless of the type of business as there is evidence that the exchange between the business and the customer is crucial for customers to identify with and interact with the businesses.

Practical implications

The findings of this research have several practical implications as well. This study provides valuable insights for SMEs, particularly in Fiji about the potential of social networks in engaging with their customer base. Through the use of the scale, SMEs in Fiji can evaluate their business performance against that of their competitors through the comparison of customer engagement. This will help the owner-managers to determine if there needs to be changes in their marketing program to achieve the expected objectives. It also provides SMEs in Fiji with an important tool to effectively measure their marketing strategies. The measurement can allow SMEs to assess their customer engagement prior to and post launch of a marketing program. This will allow SMEs in Fiji to be able to provide a measurable justification for the investment in social networks.

Such knowledge is crucial to academics and owner-managers of SMEs in Fiji to increase the adoption of customer engagement strategies and also due to an increasing amount of academic attention being given to customer engagement as a superior predictor of customer loyalty. As the five dimensions of customer engagement are important, owner-managers should focus on using social media to enhance all these dimensions with more emphasis given identification and attraction which have a higher factor loading. SMEs in Fiji must also understand the various functions of social networking sites which can be generated by customers of the business themselves,

such as blogs, comments, reviews, polls, videos and pictures. This can foster customer engagement. For example, SMEs in Fiji can provide informative or entertaining content through the use of blogs to absorb customers. These types of activities can help SMEs in Fiji develop a distinctive image of the business on social networking sites that enables customers to identify with them. SMEs in Fiji providing transparent and honest feedback to customer reviews can also allow for positive interactions with customers. This will encourage customers to immerse themselves in the interactive experience with the business, thus allowing the development of customer engagement with the business. Also, owner-managers of SMEs in Fiji can increase attention needed to provide customers with information that is interesting and relevant as these types of information can induce attention (Celsi and Olson 1988). Using social media, SMEs in Fiji can increase dialog with customers, enhance business to customer and customer to business communication. This is a crucial change in the speed, volume, ease of contact and nature of interaction. Rather than using the classic suggestion box, SMEs in Fiji can use social media to gain these feedbacks. The owner-managers need to provide customers with opportunities and incentives for interaction, such as reward and recognition scheme that encourage participation (Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli 2005). As customer loyalty is illustrated as the outcome for customer satisfaction, this emphasizes to owner-managers of SMEs in Fiji the importance of being present on social networking sites and developing strategies to effectively engage customer.

Research limitations and future directions

Despite this study contributing to SME literature in gaining important insights into customer behavior and psychology, there are a number of limitations that needs to be highlighted which will pave the way for future research. Despite this study contributing to literature on customer engagement with SMEs in developed countries, more empirical research is needed to support the findings.

In evaluating the findings, the sample size of this research was small and respondents had experience of social networks. This together with a non-random sampling technique limits the generalization of results in countries with varying cultures. Future research should validate the customer engagement scale with SMEs in other developing countries. Also, this study uses a cross-sectional design which can only imply an association between customer engagement, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty rather than demonstrating a causal relationship. This study has only looked at the positive perspective of customer engagement, future studies can look at negative experiences with customer engagement and how this affects customer

engagement outcomes. As, this study only looked at customer satisfaction as one of the antecedences, other factors such as brand commitment and interactivity can be looked at in future studies. Future research can also look at other outcomes of customer engagement such as financial outcomes, customer equity and brand recognition (Van Doorn et al. 2010). These recommendations will be useful in advancing knowledge about SME brand management through the use of social media.

Conclusion

This study was carried out with the aim of investigating the business value of social networks for SMEs. It tested the relationship between customer satisfaction, customer engagement and customer loyalty. Through the collections of data from 336 respondents, this study was able to explain a 59% of the variance in customer loyalty. Results indicated there is a positive relationship between customer engagement and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction then positively impacts customer loyalty for SMEs in Fiji. This study contributes theoretically and practically to social media research for SMEs in a developing country.

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