

POSITIVELY- VS. NEGATIVELY-VALENCED ENGAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR S-D LOGIC

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Forum session: Service-Dominant (S-D) logic

Topic: Experience, value-in-use & value-in-context

Purpose - After generating significant interest in business practice, the ‘consumer engagement’ (CE) concept has emerged in the academic service literature, including analyses addressing Vargo and Lusch’s (e.g. 2004, 2008) service-dominant (S-D) logic. Although pioneering research provides exploratory insights in the emerging S-D logic/CE interface (Brodie *et al.*, 2011), little is known regarding the nature, key characteristics and specific S-D logic-based implications of focal positively-/negatively-valenced manifestations of CE, as addressed in this paper. Specifically, while positively-valenced CE may centre on particular favourable or affirmative cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related expressions (e.g. consumers’ purchase of a brand, or brand usage-related enjoyment); negatively-valenced CE, by contrast, is exhibited through focal brand-related denial, rejection, avoidance and negative word-of-mouth. Based on the findings, we develop a conceptual model addressing the key characteristics of positively- and negatively-valenced CE segments with focal brands, and draw a number of key S-D logic-based implications arising from our analyses, adopting a particular emphasis on Vargo and Lusch’s (2008) FPs 6, 8 and 10.

Methodology/approach - Based on the findings from a literature review we develop a conceptual model providing a CE segmentation ranging from strongly negatively- to strongly positively valenced CE, and provide a number of ensuing S-D logic-based implications.

Findings - Based on our analyses, we develop a conceptual model, which provides a CE segmentation of positively-/negatively-valenced expressions of CE, and ensuing S-D logic-based implications.

Research implications - Findings indicate a need for future research testing and validating the proposed model in large-scale, quantitative analyses; for specific categories, contexts, or brands. Additionally, longitudinal analyses focused on the development of focal positively/negatively-valenced CE over time, are required to further advance insights into this emerging area.

Practical implications - This research is expected to contribute to enhanced managerial understanding of focal positively- and negatively-valenced expressions of CE, which may be used to guide managerial decision-making relating to managing specific brand portfolios, undertaking focal CE-based strategies and/or evaluating the performance of specific organisational brands.

Originality/value - Proposing a conceptual model incorporating a CE segmentation reflecting the differentially valenced nature of focal CE expressions, this paper provides further insights into the S-D logic from a novel, positively-negatively-valenced engagement perspective.

Key words - Consumer engagement, positive/negative valence, S-D logic

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

After gaining traction in the business practice literature, the ‘consumer engagement’ (CE) concept has transpired in the academic service literature, including analyses addressing Vargo and Lusch’s (e.g. 2004, 2008) service-dominant (S-D) logic. Specifically, the CE concept has been posited to engender particular relevance with respect to Vargo and Lusch’s (2004, 2008) fundamental propositions (FPs) 6 (i.e., The consumer ‘is always a co-creator of value, which highlights the interactive, co-creative nature of value creation between customers and/or other actors within service relationships), FP8 (i.e., ‘A service-centred view is inherently customer-oriented and relational,’ which highlights the transcending, relational nature of service; Vargo 2009), and FP10, (i.e., ‘Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary,’ which emphasises the highly experiential, inherently subjective, and contextual nature of value co-creation (Brodie et al., 2011).

Although exploratory research provides exploratory insights in the emerging S-D logic/CE interface (Brodie et al., 2011), relatively little is known regarding the nature, key hallmarks and specific S-D logic-based implications of focal positively-/negatively-valenced manifestations of CE, as addressed in this paper. Specifically, while positively-valenced CE may centre on particular favourable or affirmative cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related expressions (e.g. consumers’ purchase of a brand, brand usage-related enjoyment or distributing positive word-of-mouth); negatively-valenced CE, by contrast, is exhibited through focal brand-related denial, rejection, avoidance and negative word-of-mouth. Based on the findings we develop a conceptual model addressing the key characteristics of positively- and negatively-valenced engagement with a focal brand, and draw a number of key S-D logic-based implications arising from our analyses, adopting a particular emphasis on Vargo and Lusch’s (2008) FPs 6, 8 and 10.

Literature Review

We provide an overview of recent CE research in the marketing discipline in Table 1. Despite the apparent debate regarding the interpretation of CE, Brodie et al.’s (2011) S-D logic-informed analysis reveals the existence of ‘interactive experiences’ between a specific engagement subject (e.g. customer) and object (e.g. a brand) as a core hallmark typifying CE, thus highlighting the two-way, interactive nature of engagement (Hollebeek, 2011). Further, concurring with Van Doorn et al. (2010), the authors identify CE as a multi-dimensional

concept comprising relevant cognitive/emotional and behavioural dimensions, although their specific expression may vary across contexts. To illustrate, while Mollen and Wilson (2010) identify ‘active sustained processing’ and ‘experiential/instrumental value’ as online engagement dimensions, offline CE applications have been conceptualised by the dimensions of ‘absorption,’ ‘vigour’ and ‘dedication’ (Patterson, Yu and De Ruyter, 2006).

Table 1: Overview - Engagement Research in Marketing

Author(s)	Concept	Definition
Van Doorn et al. (2010)	Customer engagement behaviour	Customers’ behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers, including word-of-mouth activity, helping other customers, blogging and writing reviews.
Hollebeek (2011)	Customer engagement	The level of expression of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by a degree of activation, identification and absorption in brand interactions.
Mollen & Wilson (2010)	Engagement	A cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website.
Higgins & Scholer (2009)	Engagement	A state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed or engrossed in something (i.e. sustained attention), generating the consequences of a particular attraction or repulsion force. The more engaged individuals are to approach or repel a target, the more value is added to or subtracted from it.
Bowden (2009)	Customer engagement	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.

While this pioneering research provides foundational insights into the nature of CE, studies addressing the engagement concept from a more conceptually holistic perspective (i.e., addressing not only focal positive, but also specific potentially negatively valenced expressions of the concept) were not identified in the literature to-date. Specifically, the brand avoidance or anti-consumption literature addresses focal consumer cognitions, emotions and behaviours that run counter to (i.e., against) particular objects, including products, brands or organisations (Lee, Fernandez and Hyman, 2009).

Consumers may found specific anti-brand communities for the purpose of venting their negative feelings and views about a particular brand (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009). To illustrate, a search revealed the existence of five unique sub-communities titled ‘McDonald’s Sucks’ on the social networking site Facebook.com. Specifically, the existence of such anti-brand communities serves to illustrate the potential for high levels of consumer engagement, yet expressed from a negatively (as opposed to positively valenced) perspective. However,

despite this observation no conceptualisation capturing the full spectrum ranging from strongly negative through to strongly positive CE valences, including suggested hallmarks, is known to exist in the literature to-date. We proceed to propose such conceptualisation in the next section.

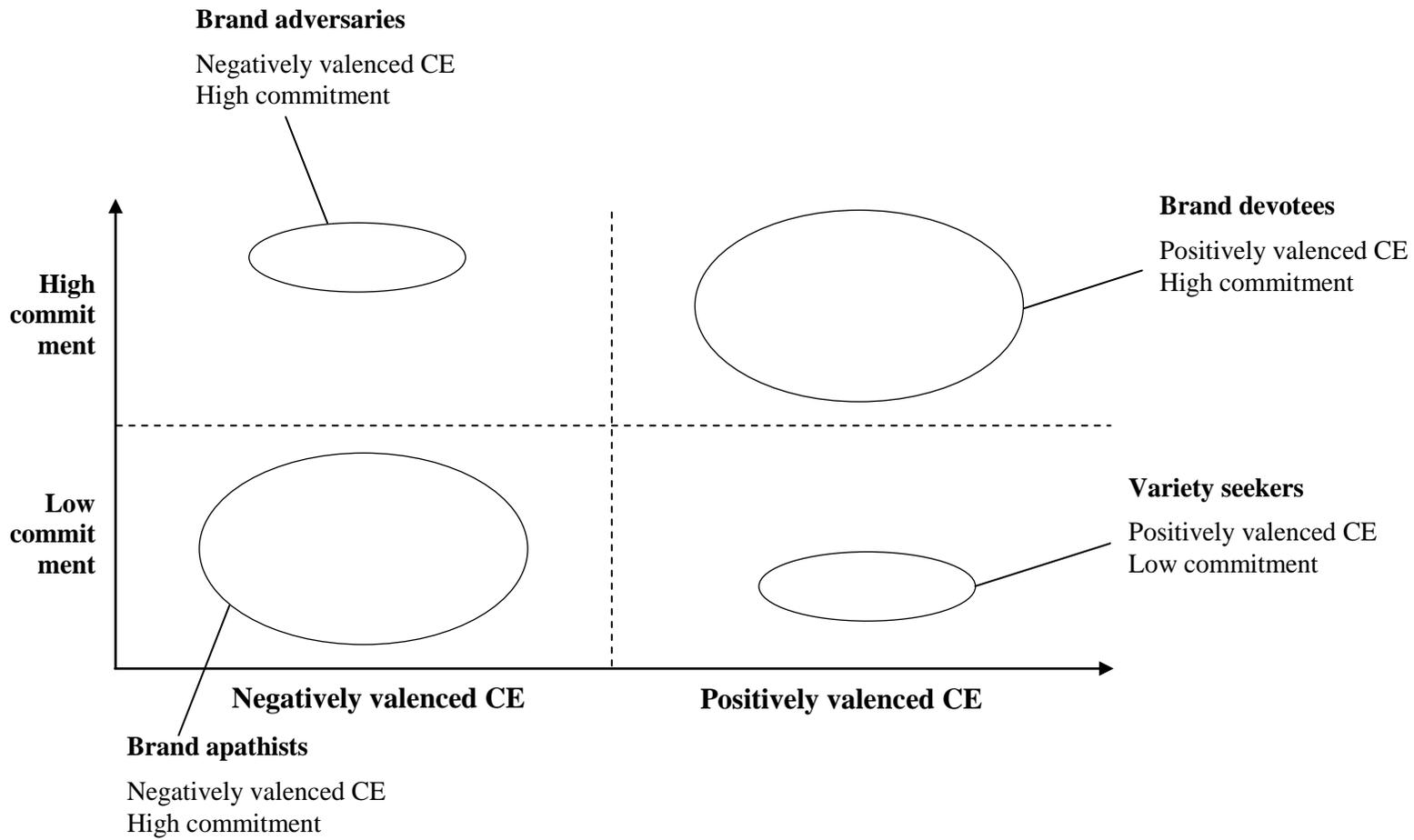
Conceptual Model

Based on the analysis presented in the Literature Review, we develop a CE segmentation, which ranges from negatively-, to positively valenced expressions of CE, and provides a number of suggested CE hallmarks for focal contexts (Figure 1).

Regulatory engagement theory (RET) posits that value represents a motivational force experience (Higgins, 2006). Specifically, experiencing an object/event as having positive value corresponds to experiencing attraction toward it (e.g., trying to move toward it), whilst experiencing something as having negative value corresponds to experiencing repulsion from it (e.g., trying to move away from it; Higgins and Scholer, 2009: p. 101). Hence implicit in this rationale developed in this paper is the notion that individuals may generate positive value from engaging in negatively valenced expressions pertaining to focal objects or activities, including brands (e.g., McDonald's Sucks).

Consumer commitment is defined as 'valuing an on-going relationship with a specific other party so as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it;' that is, a desire to maintain the relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Moorman et al., 1993). In the model we identify four key CE /commitment segments, including brand devotees (high CE, high commitment), brand adversaries (low CE, high commitment), variety seekers (high CE, low commitment), and brand apathists (low CE, low commitment). The circles shown in Figure 2 represent the expected relative segment sizes for each of the four proposed segments.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Implications

In this paper we developed a CE segmentation ranging from negative, through to positive expressions of CE, which scholarly researchers may wish to use to guide their future work in this area. Specifically, the proposed conceptual model is expected to benefit scholars and practitioners alike, who are seeking to further their understanding in the emerging research area of CE. Based on the insights gleaned we draw a number of implications arising from this research, which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview - Implications for Service Research

Area	Service Research Implication(s)
S-D logic perspective of CE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Which theoretical perspective(s), other than the S-D logic, may be used to explain and/or predict focal CE levels? ○ How may the S-D logic interact with, and/or complement other salient theoretical perspectives in predicting and/or explaining CE levels under specific sets of contextual contingencies? ○ In which ways do other key constructs advocated under the S-D logic (e.g. co-creation, consumer commitment, loyalty, citizenship behaviours) differ across distinctly-perceived or -positioned service brands (e.g., utilitarian vs. hedonic brands)?
Suggested approaches for future research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Empirical exploration and validation of the proposed CE conceptualisation is required using large-scale, quantitative methodology (e.g., SEM). ○ CE scale development catering for focal negatively- and positively-valenced expressions of CE. ○ Which types of factors serve to drive, vs. inhibit, focal positively- and negatively valenced expressions of engagement? ○ Establishment of a generalisable CE conceptualisation (a) across contexts and/or (b) over time, i.e. by using longitudinal methods (e.g., time series analysis); e.g., does the proposed conceptual model hold in iteratively-modelled CE processes over time?

Further, this research provides not only scholarly, but also several managerial implications. First, we expect our work to contribute towards enhancing practitioners' understanding of the emerging CE concept, which despite being heralded in the business practice literature for its promising contributions to focal corporate performance outcomes (e.g., sales, profitability) has received relatively little systematic development in the literature to-date. Second, this paper facilitates the development of managerial understanding that while consumers' positively valenced CE expressions may generate significant opportunities for focal organisations, negatively valenced expressions of CE may pose a threat to brand health. As such, practitioners are required to have an awareness of how to manage this process in order to attain optimal organisational performance outcomes. Third, the CE research agenda

outlined in Table 2 provides insights into the current state of CE research, thus suggesting that further study is required before managers are able to fully leverage the anticipated benefits of CE, including contributions to enhanced customer loyalty and performance.

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