

**Not online? Then you probably think engagement is a diamond
ring...**



Social media has changed the advent of communication. Brands are expected to have a presence online which gives them the opportunity to talk about their offering. At the same time, social media offers customers the chance to search for information and share their own opinions in virtual communities. Large portions of marketing budgets and time are invested in creating an online presence without brands fully understanding what leads to online community engagement.

A study was conducted by Maralize Mulder, a [master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to investigate the predictors of online community engagement. There is no consensus on what leads to online community engagement

or the effect of certain antecedents on online community engagement therefore more research is warranted.

With over 24.6 million Facebook in South Africa, it is important to understand what makes people engage online. Membership in an online community creates opportunities for brands to engage with their current and prospective consumers.

The research investigates whether brand loyalty, trust, and satisfaction positively influence online community engagement in, specifically focussed on the hospitality industry in South Africa. It is important to note that online community engagement could lead to positive outcomes for the brand.

An online survey was conducted and 417 participants, who are active on a hospitality Facebook page, completed the survey. The study revealed that all three drivers were statistically significant predictors of online community engagement. The strongest predictor was brand loyalty, followed by satisfaction then trust. To encourage online community engagement, managers should ensure that customers remain brand loyal (commitment to repurchase), are satisfied (perception that the brand fulfills the customer's needs) trust (depending on the capability of the brand to accomplish its stated purpose) the brand.

Managers should ensure that there is regular interaction between the customer and the brand, and for the brand to stand out from the competitors as this will lead to brand loyalty. Delivering on the brand promise and assuring that the customer's information will be kept confidential, can instil confidence and trust from the customer. Great service leads to satisfaction which is key in the hospitality industry as the customer will remember the last experience with the brand. Positive online community engagement is possible by ensuring that customers stay brand loyal, trust the brand and is satisfied by the brand.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2022 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Maralize Mulder under the supervision of [Dr Danita van Heerden](#).