

## **An investigation into consumer brand engagement: Scale refinement, drivers and outcomes**

Consumer-brand engagement (CBE) has received much research attention owing to its strategic imperative to modern firms. Regardless of this focus, CBE continues to divide in terms of its conceptualisation, dimensions, measurements, drivers, and outcomes.

Literature shows variances in the conceptualisation of CBE, with different perspectives used to describe the concept. This has resulted in the development of different scales to measure CBE. Most of these scales were developed in the service context and their generalisability to other contexts is limited. Despite this limitation, there is a growing trend to adapt the service context-orientated CBE scales to product contexts. This poses a challenge as service and product contexts differ on tangible and intangible attributes that influence consumers' decision-making. Furthermore, the empirical studies focusing on the relational drivers and brand outcomes in service and product brand contexts are limited.

In this regard, an empirical research was conducted by Thinkwell Ndhlovu, a [Doctoral](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#) to investigate CBE's conceptualisation, measurement, drivers, and outcomes in the product- and service-brand contexts. Smartphone brands were used to represent product brand context and social media brands embodied the service brand context. The different theoretical fundamentals of CBE were explored. The study developed and validated two CBE scales specifically for product- and service-brand contexts through a scale refinement process. In addition, the drivers, and outcomes of CBE in the product- and service-brand contexts were explored, and the mediating role of CBE was assessed. This study was conducted in two phases. The first phase focused on the scale refinement process and the second phase explored the different relationships between CBE and other marketing constructs.

Data was collected from an adult sample (18 years and older) of smartphone and social media users in South Africa using the convenience sampling method. In the first phase, the sample sizes comprised 420 and 428 usable responses for smartphone and social media contexts respectively. Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) using principal axis factoring (PAF) with Promax rotation were used to extract the dimensions of CBE in both contexts. In the second phase, the sample size consisted of 503 and 491 usable responses for smartphone and social media contexts respectively. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were used to confirm the measurement models developed through EFA and structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to examine the hypothesised relationships in the study.

The results reveal two validated CBE scales specifically for the product-and service-brand contexts. The first is a 29-item scale that has two dimensions (affection and reasoned behaviour) in the smartphone context. The second is a 20-item scale that has four dimensions (affection, identification, absorption, and social connection) in the social media context. The two refined scales demonstrated good psychometric properties.

Furthermore, in the smartphone brand context, brand trust, self-expressive brand, and brand interactivity have different effects on the CBE dimensions (affection and reasoned behaviour). Specifically, brand trust positively influences CBE affection, with self-expressive brand and brand interactivity positively influencing CBE reasoned behaviour. In the social media brand context, only self-expressive brand positively influences CBE as a second-order construct (reflective of four dimensions: affection, identification, absorption, and social connection). In addition, the study found that brand satisfaction plays a mediating role on the effects of brand trust, self-expressive brand, and brand interactivity on CBE in both brand contexts.

The study reveals different results when it incorporated both the relational drivers and brand outcomes of CBE. Findings show that, in the smartphone context, brand trust and brand interactivity positively influence both dimensions of CBE (affection and reasoned behaviour), while self-expressive brand had different effects on the CBE dimensions (affection and reasoned behaviour). In the social media context, brand trust, self-expressive brand, and brand interactivity all positively influence CBE as a second-order construct (reflective of four dimensions). Findings also reveal that in both brand contexts, CBE positively influences brand evangelism and consumer-based brand equity.

This study responds to the over-generalisation of service context CBE scales in other contexts by developing and validating two CBE scales specifically for the product-and-service-brand contexts. It advances the existing knowledge of CBE by developing and empirically testing an S-D logic-informed holistic model showing CBE's key drivers and brand outcomes in both brand contexts. The model advances consumer-brand relationship research in product-and-service-brand contexts. The research highlights the importance and central role played by CBE beyond purchase, in promoting positive brand outcomes for firms. Finally, this study provides managers with tools to measure CBE in product-and-service contexts and advances insights on the drivers and outcomes of CBE that will assist in the development of holistic customer relationship management (CRM) strategies.

The research was conducted by Thinkwell Ndhlovu, as part of the fulfilment of the requirements of a [Doctor of Philosophy \(PhD\) degree](#) with specialisation in Marketing Management in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), under the supervision of [Prof Tania Maree](#).