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The Relationship between User Interaction and Brand Advocacy in Digital Environments

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Abstract

In this work in progress Empreds will analyse how user interaction and frequency of interaction has an influence on brand advocacy specifically within digital contexts, and types of content that encourage this action. As a quantitative study, the research has gathered data from a diverse group of social media users, to assess the user interaction data as an influential factor for brand advocacy by using multiple regression analysis together with ANOVA/ANCOVA. The study objectives show that engagement rate, interaction frequency, visual content value are predictors of brand advocacy, where young people are said to have high advocacy. Thus, these outcomes supplement the existing body of knowledge by detailing how various forms of users' engagement affect brand recommendations and; providing digressive tactics that may be useful to brands attempting to strengthen their bond with their users through digital marketing. It may also be understood as the need for developing engaging and effective content along with focusing at the young people to improve the online brand promotion.

Introduction

The technological advancement has brought change in the manner the brands approach the end users, marking a new period in marketing. The use of social media, mobile apps, and several online platforms in marketing communication has enhanced the engagement of consumers and the brands as they can be able to engage in a real time communication and feedback (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). It will be important for the capture of contemporary consumer activity and management approaches for brands to move from the traditional static one way communication to the dynamic two way communication (Rakić & Rakić, 2014; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010; Macnamara & Gregory, 2020).

User engagement can be described as any activities within a digital context and they include such actions as liking, commenting, sharing, and writing of a review. These interactions are quite essential in developing and fostering relationships between brand and consumers thus fostering a sense of brand loyalty around the brand (Malthouse et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022; Kumar & Kaushik, 2020; Cardoso et al., 2022). Further, such interactions ensure that

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organisations gather valuable information through which they may enhance the marketing strategies and consequently enhance the flow of customers (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Rosário & Raimundo, 2021; Tariq et al., 2022).

However, even though the involvement of users is acknowledged as a key concept, there is a lack of knowledge regarding such interactions' impact on brand advocacy (Li et al., 2022; de Regt et al., 2021). Perceived brand advocacy also defined as the consumers' extent of positive word of mouth regarding a brand, and considered as the key to word of mouth communication that ranked by many scholars as the most effective marketing communication method (Keller, 2007). However, there is scarce research that establishes the user cooperation as a dependent variable in relation to brand promotion, especially in digital platforms (Hudson et al., 2015; Rangaswamy et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020).

The research objective of the current study is to use quantitative methods to compare the effects of interaction on brand advocacy in the digital arena. The first set of research questions are as follows; To what extent does user interaction affect brand advocacy On which users' interaction metrics does the advocacy depend The practical implication of the research is aimed at offering solutions to digital marketers. The attainment of these objectives will support the existing scholarly research on digital marketing and consumer behaviour while providing some insights to the brand managers (Urdea et al., 2021; Stocchi et al., 2022; Apasrawirote et al., 2022).

Many theories exist regarding the investigation of this association. According to Social Exchange Theory, man and other animals engage in social behaviour to get the most for the least, following Homans (1958). Described by Blau (1964) in the social exchange theory, this theory posits that consumers interact with a brand when they feel that the gains of such interaction are worth the effort and time to be invested. Another relevant theory is the Engagement Theory that has to do with the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment of consumers in their interaction partners, which is particularly important for loyalty and advocacy (Higgins & Scholer, 2009; Sweeney et al., 2020; Quaye et al., 2022).

Therefore, research works give inconclusive results with what transpires between users and brand or company's application regarding positively promoting a brand. For example, Dessart et al. (2015) established that "the degree of customer engagement in online brand communities is positively related to brand loyalty and brand advocacy". Relling et al. (2016) have also shown that the mentioned customer engagement behaviours are significant determinants of brand advocacy in social media contexts. Nevertheless, other studies indicate that the influence that user interaction has on brand advocacy is not universal and might depend on the given type of interaction and the used platform (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

A number of studies presented by such authors as Leckie et al. (2016) pay considerable attention to the effects of customer engagement in relation to brand equity, including customer loyalty and advocacy. From their study they argue that those brands that are more involved with their customers on digital media are the ones likely to gain from positive word of mouth and advocacy. This is in line with Rather et al. (2019) stating that in the hospitality industry, brand engagement helps consumer to mobilize brand loyalty and advocacy. Furthermore, Verhoef et al. (2010) also stressed that the behaviours of the customer engagement are needed for the firms to sustain their competitive advantage in digital technology. Since the results presented a variation and because previous literature mostly relied on examination of combined interaction indicators, the present research intends to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge by presenting an objective quantitative analysis of four key interaction metrics in relation to brand advocacy. As an understanding of engagement rate, interaction frequency

and contents sharing, this research aims at assessing the factors influencing brand advocacy in the digital contexts.

The relationship between user interaction and brand advocacy in digital environments remains underexplored despite the significant role that digital engagement plays in modern marketing strategies. The rapid growth of social media platforms and other digital channels has made it increasingly important for brands to understand how their interactions with users can be leveraged to foster brand advocacy. However, empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which user interaction translates into brand advocacy is sparse. Existing studies have often focused on the general impact of social media engagement without dissecting the specific types of interactions that are most effective in promoting advocacy. Furthermore, there is a need for quantitative research that examines these dynamics in various digital contexts, as different platforms and types of content may influence consumer behavior in unique ways. Addressing these gaps is crucial for both academic understanding and practical application in digital marketing.

Questions of the Study

1. To what extent does user interaction influence brand advocacy in digital environments?
2. Which specific user interaction metrics (e.g., engagement rate, interaction frequency) are the most significant predictors of brand advocacy?
3. How do different digital platforms and types of content affect the relationship between user interaction and brand advocacy?

Methods

In this research, various quantitative research techniques were used to determine the correlation between user engagement and brand promoter on digitalisation platforms. The structured and systematic approach of data collection and data analysis was aimed to give reliable and validate results. In the process of participant selection, the research adopted a stratified random sampling method. The targeted demographic was composed of active participants of social media websites who come across brand content and is interested in it. In order to achieve data diversification, the sample was split by the significant demographic variables such as age, gender and geographical area. Thus, this approach allowed the identification of users' interactions in different groups, improving the external validity of the study.

Instrument

The main data gathering tool was an online survey questionnaire; its purpose was to assess how often users engaged with brand content on digital media and several aspects of brand endorsement. The set self-administered questionnaire comprised items on engagement indices which were; likes, comments, shares & reviews for the brand; and a five Likert scale to rate brand advocacy. The survey was distributed via email and social media channels, ensuring a wide reach and high response rate.

To ensure that the survey instrument developed was valid, validation of the survey was done in two stages. Initial assessment of the questionnaire involved a pilot test with a view of ascertaining content validity and this was done with the help of a panel of experts in digital marketing and consumer behavior. Their inputs were used in improving the received survey items especially concerning clarity and relevance. Second, with an intent of designing reliable and valid, an exploratory study having fifty participants was conducted. In the analysis of the internal consistency of the pilot data, Cronbach's alpha was used; the value obtained was 0.87,

indicating high reliability. The construct validity of the study was established through exploratory factor analysis showing that all the items tapped onto the intended constructs. Collection of data was done over one calendar month, though this was divided into four weeks. The survey link was sent out to 1,000 purposively selected SNS users using a stratified random sample. The follow up messages were sent to the participants one week and three weeks after dissemination in order to enhance response rates. The total number of completed questionnaires received was 783, giving a response rate of 78 percent. 3%.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data that was collected was analyzed and some kind of descriptive and inferential statistics were used. These included measures of central tendency and variability, and the frequencies and percentages of scores. Inferential statistics were used to test the study's hypotheses: Inferential statistics were used to test the study's hypotheses: (1) Correlation Analysis: The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the correlation between various forms of user engagement (for instance likes, comments, shares, and brand advocacy; (2) Regression Analysis: Finally, the interaction metrics were subjected to multiple regression analysis with the view of establishing the measures that would most strongly explain brand advocacy status. These were measures of the frequency and nature of engagement, including the proportion of the audience that regarded themselves as fans, the reciprocal of the number of days taken for the engagement rate to double, and the type of content, with brand advocacy as the dependent variable; (3) ANOVA and ANCOVA: Test of between group differences was made using Analysis of variance (ANOVA) in an attempt to determine the significance of difference in brand advocacy scores across demography segments. Additionally, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to control for potential confounding variables such as age and gender, ensuring a more accurate assessment of the relationship between user interaction and brand advocacy; (4) T-test: Independent samples t-tests were utilized to compare the mean levels of brand advocacy between users with high and low engagement rates.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for User Interaction Metrics

Interaction Metric	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	Freq	Percentage
Likes per Post	45.3	20.7	5	120	783	100
Comments per Post	12.1	8.5	0	50	783	100
Shares per Post	9.4	6.8	0	40	783	100
Reviews per Month	3.2	2.5	0	15	783	100

The table shows that, on average, users liked brand posts 45.3 times, commented 12.1 times, shared 9.4 times, and wrote 3.2 reviews per month. The relatively high standard deviations, particularly for likes and comments, suggest considerable variability in user engagement levels.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Advocacy

Brand Advocacy Metric	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	Freq	Percentage
Likelihood to Recommend	4.1	0.8	1	5	783	100
Positive Word of Mouth	3.9	0.9	1	5	783	100
Brand Loyalty	4.2	0.7	1	5	783	100
Participation in Brand Campaigns	3.7	1.0	1	5	783	100

The mean scores for brand advocacy metrics indicate generally positive consumer attitudes towards the brands. The likelihood to recommend a brand had a mean score of 4.1, suggesting high brand advocacy. Positive word of mouth had a mean score of 3.9, while brand loyalty was

slightly higher at 4.2. Participation in brand campaigns had a lower mean score of 3.7, indicating variability in engagement.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics by Age Group

Age Group	Engagement Rate	Brand Advocacy	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	52.5	4.3	200	25.5
25-34	47.8	4.1	250	31.9
35-44	41.2	3.8	180	23.0
45-54	36.5	3.5	100	12.8
55	28.7	3.2	53	6.8

The engagement rate and brand advocacy scores vary across different age groups. Younger users (18-24) had the highest mean engagement rate (52.5) and brand advocacy (4.3). The engagement rate and advocacy scores decrease with age, with users aged 55 and above having the lowest scores. This suggests that younger users are more engaged and more likely to advocate for brands compared to older users.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Interaction Types

Interaction Type	Frequency	Percentage
Liking Posts	783	100
Commenting on Posts	683	87.2
Sharing Posts	543	69.3
Writing Reviews	473	60.4

Liking posts was the most common interaction type, with all participants engaging in this behavior. Commenting and sharing posts were also frequent, with 87.2% and 69.3% of participants engaging in these activities, respectively. Writing reviews was the least common interaction type, with 60.4% of participants engaging in this behavior. This distribution highlights the varying levels of engagement across different interaction types.

This analysis examines the relationships between different types of user interactions and brand advocacy, using Pearson correlation coefficients.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Likes per Post	Comments per Post	Shares per Post	Reviews per Month	Likelihood to Recommend	Positive Word of Mouth	Brand Loyalty	Participation in Brand Campaigns
Likes per Post	1.00	0.65**	0.60**	0.45**	0.50**	0.48**	0.53**	0.47**
Comments per Post	0.65**	1.00	0.68**	0.52**	0.55**	0.57**	0.59**	0.54**
Shares per Post	0.60**	0.68**	1.00	0.48**	0.58**	0.56**	0.62**	0.55**
Reviews per Month	0.45**	0.52**	0.48**	1.00	0.40**	0.42**	0.44**	0.43**
Likelihood to Recommend	0.50**	0.55**	0.58**	0.40**	1.00	0.78**	0.75**	0.65**
Positive Word of Mouth	0.48**	0.57**	0.56**	0.42**	0.78**	1.00	0.77**	0.69**
Brand Loyalty	0.53**	0.59**	0.62**	0.44**	0.75**	0.77**	1.00	0.71**
Participation in Brand Campaigns	0.47**	0.54**	0.55**	0.43**	0.65**	0.69**	0.71**	1.00

Indeed, analysis of the results has shown that likes per post are positively associated with different measures of brand advocacy, the strength of the correlation being moderate to high. The highest coefficients are with brand identification and loyalty, which equal to 0.53, as well

as with tendency to recommend the brand, which equals to 0.50, Mean frequency with which users like posts demonstrates their brand loyalty. Number of comments per post are positively related to all brand advocacy measures most especially with brand loyalty and positive word of mouth with correlation of 0.59 and 0.57 respectively. This means that users who write comments are more suitable and willing to promoting brand. Sharing posts has a very significant positive relationship with brand loyalty and willingness to recommend. Existing research shows that content sharers are much more likely to be a brand loyal and recommend it. As with other forms of interaction, there is a moderately positive relationship between the number of reviews per month and all the brand advocacy measures. The highest correlation to be gotten is with brand loyalty (0.44) meaning that often reviewers are always brand loyal customers. Likelihood to Recommend: This measure has very high coefficients with POwM (0.78) and brand loyalty (0.75,) and so the users that are likely to recommend a brand are also likely to engage in positive word of mouth and are also loyal to the brand. Positive Word of Mouth: This measure also has strong correlation with the brand loyalty and with brand's campaign 0.77 and 0.69 respectively, which indicate that the users who are positive towards the brand are likely to be loyal towards it and are likely to participate in the brand campaigns. Participation in brand campaigns has also a very strong positive relationship to brand loyalty, the correlation coefficient being of 0.71, which means that customers who are loyal are most likely to participate in brand campaigns. Participation in Brand Campaigns measure is strongly correlated with all other brand advocacy measures, particularly brand loyalty (0.71) and positive word of mouth (0.69), showing that users who participate in brand campaigns are more likely to be loyal and advocate for the brand.

These analyses aim to identify the key predictors of brand advocacy and examine the differences in brand advocacy across different groups.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Predictor Variables	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Engagement Rate	0.42	0.05	8.40	0.0001
Interaction Frequency	0.31	0.04	7.75	0.000
Type of Content	0.18	0.03	6.00	0.0013

The multiple regression analysis shows that all predictor variables significantly contribute to brand advocacy. Engagement rate has the highest beta coefficient (0.42), indicating it is the strongest predictor of brand advocacy. Interaction frequency (0.31) and type of content (0.18) also significantly influence brand advocacy. The model explains 65% of the variance in brand advocacy ($R^2 = 0.65$), which is substantial. The overall model is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the predictors collectively contribute to brand advocacy.

Table 7. ANOVA Results for Brand Advocacy by Age Group

Age Group	Mean Brand Advocacy	Standard Deviation	F-Value	P-Value
18-24	4.3	0.6	45.67	0.0001
25-34	4.1	0.7		
35-44	3.8	0.8		
45-54	3.5	0.7		
55 and above	3.2	0.9		

According to the results of the ANOVA analysis there is the significant difference between the mean scores of brand advocacy depending on the age factor ($F = 45.67$; $p < 0.001$). The mean brand advocacy score is significantly highest among the youngest group the 18-24 age group (4.3) the scores reduce for each increasing age group and correspondingly is lowest for the 55

and above age group with a mean brand advocacy score of 3. 2. This means that young users will exercise more, or be more active in the promotion of the brand than older users.

Table 8. Results for Controlling for Gender

Age Group	Adjusted Mean Brand Advocacy	Standard Error
18-24	4.2	0.05
25-34	4.0	0.06
35-44	3.7	0.07
45-54	3.4	0.06
55 and above	3.1	0.08

When gender is entered into the ANCOVA, a further differentiation of significant brand Advocacy means by age is established ($F = 37.77$, $p < 0.001$). The adjusted mean of the brand advocacy scores are presented below and are comparable to the previous described ANOVA results where again the power house age groups impart higher brand advocacy. The covariate gender is not a significant factor ($p = 0.118$), that is, the gender of the customers has no effect on brand advocacy where Age is taken into consideration.

There is correlation between the levels of engagement, the number of interactions and the content with brand advocacy. The variables that are found to have an impact with the level of significance include the engagement rate, the number of interactions, and the type of content. The ANOVA and ANCOVA imply the differences in brand advocacy depending on age, while the young users are more likely to report higher levels of advocacy. As the following presentation of the results of the ANCOVA will show, controlling for gender does not alter the fact that age has a significant effect on brand advocacy: the F value of this measure is 20.077, and if the effect size is calculated by dividing this value by its df of 3, the result is 6.689 (these values imply a $p < 0.001$ and a partial eta squared of 0.291), It also means that younger audiences should be the focus of marketing initiatives, and how to properly reach out to them to boost the advocacy of the brand.

User Engagement and Brand Advocacy

The findings of the current study showed that brand advocacy has the highest correlation. Apparently, this discovery also leans towards the views of previous studies that suggest the role of the users in online communities. De Vries & Carlson (2014) have established that users' level of consumption in the form of likes, comments and shares has been found to be an essential predictor of positive brand outcomes in social media contexts. The levels of user engagement have a positive positive relationship with brand outcomes and user advocacy.

Thus, this paper is a contribution to the prior literature by revealing the relationship between certain interaction measures and brand advocacy. Unpacked as likes, comments and shares, this research gives a better understanding of which of the subtypes of interactions has the biggest impact on brand advocacy. The coefficient of engagement rate being significantly high supports that out of all the levels of interaction, the basic engagement rate own the greatest influence. This type of thinking is superior to the qualitative approach because it provides for better understanding of how specific engagement activities advance the cause of brand advocate, and therefore, would enable better and more focused digital marketing (Gavilanes et al., 2018).

These contributions hold important practical import for marketers. Since the engagement rate directly prescribes the advocacy rate, brands should pursue the strategies that would increase users' engagement with their social media accounts. This can entail development of such things as, shareable content, calling in for content created by the users and other engagement measures

such as polls, competitions as well as engagement posts. If the brand increases the user engagement the consumers will be more loyal and will act as advocates of the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021; Wang, 2021; Hollebeek et al., 2021). For example, applications such as polls and quizzes not only create the perceived interactivity of the media but also offers crucial feedbacks of the users. This type of content should be promoted as users' reviews, testimonials or posts related to brand and can increase engagement and contribute to the creation of the specific community. Thirdly, shared content, particularly visuals and multimedia increase 'likes', 'shares', 'comments', and in effect augment engagement rates.

Content Quality and Relevance: However, the quality of content is a problem that usually requires in depth and highly relevant content to interest users. It has been established that content that will go well with the target audience, highlight their needs and wishes and offer some utility is likely to be liked, shared and commented on. **Interactive and Visual Content:** Polls, quizzes, and contests evoke people's engagement to share their opinions, whereas images, videos, and infographics gain higher people's attentiveness more than text posts (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). **Community Building:** Providing user content activity, encouraging discussions in topic and using entertaining content; and rewarding active members in the community may help to improve the firm's stakeholder engagement and gain permanent consumers (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). **Timely and Responsive Interaction:** Interacting with the users in real-time and reacting to the comments or messages from the users can improve the experience of users and motivate them to be more active.

It is clear therefore that brands need to make significant investments in activities that would increase engagement with users. In this way, they can develop a pool of customers who are not only are satisfied with the propositions that are offered by the organisation in terms of its products or services but also those who are willing to promote it to their circles of influence. This advocacy can in any form word of mouth recommendation, advertising on social media, response to a brand's call out, all these play a role in the progress of the brand (Rim et al., 2020).

Interaction frequency also emerged as a significant predictor of brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the notion that frequent interactions enhance user-brand relationships (Dessart et al., 2015). Additionally, the type of content, particularly visual content, positively influences brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with research highlighting the superior effectiveness of visual content in digital marketing (Hudson et al., 2015). However, this study uniquely quantifies this impact, providing empirical evidence that brands should leverage visual content to maximize advocacy. Frequency too proved highly significant in the brand advocacy model ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) confirming the premise that increases in the interaction frequency strengthens users' brand relationships (Dessart et al., 2015). Also, the type of content influences brand advocacy especially the visual content part ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$). This detection is in line with the studies stressing the importance of visuals in digital marketing with such studies as Hudson et al. (2015). However, this study for the first time establishes the value of this impact and used empirical evidence to show that brands should adopt visual content for advocacy.

As we can observe from the above testing results of ANOVA and ANCOVA, brand advocacy is significantly different across age group; especially if the users were 18-24 years of their age. Older users in the group 55+ years have the lowest level of brand advocacy ($F = 45.67$, $p < 0.001$). This fact supports other conclusions stating that the younger audience is more digitally active and brand fond (Saulite et al., 2022). Nonetheless, by setting gender aside, this study makes age as the key determinant of the brand advocacy independently of gender, which can

boost the understanding of the demographic factors' impact on the digital marketing efficiency (Eze et al., 2021).

This research responds to the following three research questions: First, unlike the previous studies that attempted to locate the importance of usage in brand commitment and brand evangelism, this paper undertook a quantitative examination of specified measures of interaction with brands and their significance. Such a level of analysis provides amenable information to those practitioners who would wish to establish how they could enhance their DM strategies (Brodie et al., 2013). Secondly, this study helps to uncover how specific content, using visuals and texts compare to the other, can affect brand advocacy. Earlier research has mostly concentrated on overall participation without differentiating between the content categories (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Elo et al., 2014). Through the presentation of the impact of visual content as shown in this research, it presents more specific direction of contents in DM. Finally, the demographic analysis presented in this study highlights the importance of targeting younger audiences to foster brand advocacy. While earlier studies have identified age as a factor in digital engagement, this study's detailed statistical analysis offers stronger empirical support for tailored marketing strategies based on age demographics (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021).

Conclusion

In a broader perspective, this particular work enhances the current knowledge regarding online user engagement and brand promotion. This research fills important gaps in the literature by offering a qualitative and quantitative examination of certain types of interactions, content, and demographics; it will be useful for academicians and marketers as well. This is further based on the findings that enforce the need to engage the users through sharing and interactive content and especially the visually and the user generated content that has been found to enhance brand advocacy greatly. Also, the role of active users' interaction and successful targeting of the younger audience, who are more actively represented in the digital space and are more loyal to brands. Therefore, applying these considerations, brands will be able to create a better and more efficient digital marketing experience that increases the level of a user's involvement and inspires him to become a devoted advocate of the brand. Lastly, this research focuses on how to establish the constant observation for performance analysis and improvements of digital user engagements for better marketing strategies in an uncertain digital environment.

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