

Brand Loyalty States as an Antecedent of Customer Engagement in Virtual Brand Communities

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The author investigates loyalty states as core drivers of customer engagement so that companies can provide a more targeted communication based on customer's loyalty levels, and perhaps, eventually increase the consumers' engagement. Responses from 193 customers that were asked to fill out a structured questionnaire in the context of virtual brand communities were analyzed quantitatively with regards to the brand loyalty states, psychological and behavioral customer engagement constructs. The results demonstrate that specific loyalty states drive specific customer engagement states. These results are useful for managers in the endeavor to reap the firm performance outcomes of having more engaged customers.

Keywords: Brand loyalty, psychological customer engagement, behavioral customer engagement

1. Introduction

Brodie et al. (2011, pp. 9) propose that customer engagement (CE) “occurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing CE levels”. In a follow-up study, the authors investigate CE in the context of an online brand community and demonstrate that CE occurs at different intensity levels (Brodie et al. 2013). In an investigation in the literature to find out the reason why consumers might have different engagement intensity levels, the customer attitudes toward the brand have appeared to be the focal point. The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980) posits that people's attitudes affect their choice of action. By the same token, it can be inferred that the positive attitudes toward a brand could influence the people's choices to become a member of the brand's virtual community, which also confirms the definition of brand community as the admirers of a brand by Muniz & O'Guinn (2001). On the other hand, as these attitudes take various forms through the brand loyalty process (Oliver 1999), and assuming that attitudes impact behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980), then it is possible that these different attitudes result in different behaviors in virtual brand communities. Indeed, these differences could be resulting in different customer engagement intensity levels. Correspondingly, van Doorn et al. (2010) suggest that customer engagement behaviors are likely to be the functions of several antecedents, and loyalty is likely to be the attitudinal antecedent of these engagement behaviors.

Accordingly, this study examines the role of brand loyalty on CE intensity in the context of virtual brand communities. The theoretical basis comes from attitude theory, and relies on the significant role that attitudes play in driving behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). More specifically, the positive attitudes towards the brand can be in various forms through the brand loyalty development

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process. According to Oliver (1999), attitudes towards the brand which leads to brand loyalty occur initially in a cognitive way, later in an emotional manner, and still later in conative manner. Thus, at each state the positive attitudes toward the brand get stronger. These attitudinal stages of brand loyalty consequently lead to the behaviors, such as re-purchasing the product, which is called as behavioral loyalty. The proposition that the attitudinal loyalty leads to behavioral loyalty has its basis on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). Based on the attitude theory, we could further suggest that the other behavioral consequent of the increase in the positive attitudes through the loyalty stages could be the increase in the customer engagement. Accordingly, the study investigates how attitudes develop through the brand loyalty process, and how this progression may help explain differences in CE intensity.

Understanding the impact of brand loyalty on CE intensity will help firms to provide a more targeted communication to the customer community, and to increase customers' engagement. As it is assumed that different attitudes generate different behaviors based on the attitude theory, then loyalty states each of which comprises various positive attitudes and loyalty strengths would result in different behaviors while consumers are engaging with the brand. Knowing how these loyalty states indeed impact behaviors would supply companies with the ability to target customers based on their loyalty levels and select the best communication method for them to increase their engagement. Accordingly, it is in the interest of this research to investigate the impact of the brand loyalty states on the consumers' engagement with the brand in virtual brand communities. The remainder of the paper outlines the theoretical framework. Then the hypotheses are stated. Finally, the results and their implications are discussed.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Brand Loyalty

Multidimensional approach to brand loyalty which combines attitudinal and behavioral measures has been widely accepted by various scholars in brand loyalty literature (e.g. Bonfield 1974; Traylor 1981,1984; Baldinger & Rubinson 1996, 1997; Rundle-Thiele et al. 2001; Dick & Basu 1994; Oliver 1999). Brand loyalty is further studied in order to explain the attitudes' effect on brand choice behavior. For instance, one of the pioneers, Bonfield (1974), has found that attitude, social influence, personal norm, and intention as well as situational influences have an impact on individual brand choice processes. Baldinger & Rubinson (1996, 1997) segmented loyal customers according to their attitudinal and behavioral loyalty levels into 3 categories: (1) "Real loyals" those who have both behaviorally and attitudinally strong loyalty levels, (2) "vulnerables" those who have strong behavioral loyalty but weak attitudes, and (3) "prospects" those who have strong attitudes but weak behavioral loyalty. In addition, Dick & Basu (1994) have advanced the attitude-behavior relationship argument by analyzing the antecedents and consequences of this relationship. According to them repeat patronage (i.e. behavioral loyalty) is derived from relative attitudes which is moderated by social norms and situational influence. They analyze the antecedents of "relative attitude" based on the traditional attitudinal categories: "cognitive - those associated with informational determinants (e.g. brand beliefs), affective – those associated with feeling states involving the brand, and conative – those related to behavioral dispositions toward the brand". They argue that each determinant has different learning processes, therefore play different roles in defining the attitudes in the brand loyalty concept.

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The cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of attitudinal brand loyalty have been adapted by various scholars and been used in multi-dimensional brand loyalty conceptualizations (e.g. Oliver 1997, 1999; Härtel & Russell-Bennett 2010; Worthington 2009). Oliver (1999) argues that brand loyalty is a chain model composed of four distinctive states including cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioral loyalty. Härtel & Russell-Bennett (2010), furthermore, studies the cognitive and emotional dimensions of brand loyalty in order to advance the understating of these notions based on Katz's (1960) utilitarian, knowledge, value-expression, and ego-defense functions of the attitudes. Furthermore, Worthington (2009) states that all human behavior is a blend of these three dimensions: "cognitive responses (I think), emotive responses (I feel), and behavioral responses (I do)".

Oliver's (1999) brand loyalty framework which is a sequential process has been tested by various researchers in many industries (e.g. Harris & Goode 2004; Blut et al. 2007; Back & Parks 2003; Roy et al. 2009). As the primary focus of this research is to investigate the impact of different attitude forms which develop through brand loyalty states on CE, we adapt Oliver's (1999) cognitive-to-action brand loyalty framework. and hypothesize that;

H1: Cognitive brand loyalty has a direct and positive effect on affective brand loyalty.

H2: Affective brand loyalty has a direct and positive effect on conative brand loyalty.

H3: Conative brand loyalty has a direct and positive effect on behavioral brand loyalty.

2.2 Customer Engagement

As the customer engagement concept is still emerging in the marketing literature, there is a lack of consensus regarding its dimensionality and operationalization (Cheung et al. 2011). Customer engagement in the marketing literature can be separated into two classifications: unidimensional conceptualizations which are predominantly focusing only on behavioral aspect of customer engagement (Kumar et al. 2010; van Doorn et al. 2010; Bijmolt et al. 2010), and multidimensional conceptualizations which comprise several dimensions including cognitive, emotional, physical, and/or behavioral (Patterson 2006; Vivek et al. 2012; Hollebeek 2011; Mollen & Wilson 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Cheung et al. 2011).

Cheung et al. (2011) and Brodie et al. (2011) express that the marketing practitioners have a tendency to concentrate on behavioral measures of customer engagement. Van Doorn et al. (2010) who practice unidimensional approach and define customer engagement as a "behavioral manifestation" declares that the dominant stance of customer engagement as a behavior in the literature reflects that taking action differentiates engaged customers from others. Correspondingly, Bijmolt et al. (2010) with a view of customer engagement as a behavioral manifestation include word of mouth, co-creation, and complaining behaviors to the operationalization of the concept. On the other hand, the multidimensional view defines it as a "psychological state" comprising cognitive, emotional, physical and/or behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al. 2011, 2013; Patterson et al. 2006; Hollebeek 2011; Vivek 2009; Cheung et al. 2011). Hollebeek (2011) defines customer brand engagement as "the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in brand interactions". Likewise, Patterson et al. (2006) define customer engagement dimensions by absorption, dedication, vigor, and interaction which correspond to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement dimensions respectively (Brodie et al. 2011). Furthermore, Brodie et al. (2013) provide an exploratory support in their study which concludes that members

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demonstrate cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement states at fluctuating intensity levels.

Though the literature is in disagreement about the dimensionality of customer engagement, as Doorn (2011) states "...these views do not need to be exclusive and might be reconcilable". Doorn (2011) further suggests that a distinction between psychological state and behavioral customer engagement can be made with an inspiration of Oliver (1999)'s loyalty model which distinguishes attitudinal and behavioral loyalty states. Respectively, Cheung et al. (2011) develop a conceptual model of customer engagement for an online social platform which integrates both views and makes a distinction between psychological and behavioral engagement as applied in the current study and depicted in our conceptual model (Figure 1).

Cognitive engagement is defined by Cheung et al. (2011) as "*being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in an online social platform*". Cognitive engagement in a virtual brand community in our study, therefore, refers to being immersed in the information and the content of the brand page. Furthermore, emotional engagement in an online social platform is defined as "*a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge towards an online social platform*" (Cheung et al. 2011). These emotional responses are expected to develop only after certain time of satisfying cognitive immersion in the brand's community page. Oliver (1999) posits that when the satisfaction about a brand is processed, a person goes from cognitive loyalty to affective loyalty stage. Based on the same reasoning, it can be proposed that when people spend time on the brand page for reasons such as information gathering which initially leads them to be cognitively engaged, they become emotionally engaged after certain period of time spent with the brand's community members, if they are satisfied with their experiences,. Therefore, we propose that;

H4: Cognitive engagement has a direct and positive effect on emotional engagement.

Moreover, physical engagement is "*the level of energy and mental resilience while using an online social platform, willingness to invest time and effort in one's role as a customer*" (Cheung et al. 2011). At this stage a person is willing to spend long periods of time on the brand community page trying hard to perform well as a member and "always preserve, even when things do not go well" (Cheung et al. 2011). Therefore, this engagement phase can be considered to be the strongest psychological engagement level. The effect of emotional engagement on physical engagement is also evident in the statement of an online brand community member in Brodie et al. 's (2013) study. The interviewee states that "*the blog eventually meant so much to me that I would do anything to assist anyone connected to it in any way I can.*" This statement clearly demonstrates that the community member's affective attitudes toward the brand community resulted in willingness to devote personal time and energy for the community. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis;

H5: Emotional engagement has a direct and positive effect on physical engagement.

2.3 Relationship between Brand Loyalty and Customer Engagement

Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggest that loyalty is likely to be the attitudinal antecedent of CE behaviors. Likewise, Brodie et al. (2011) indicate a positive relationship between loyalty and CE in interactive environments and assert that validation of these connections is still to be carried out through empirical research. Accordingly, we expect to find a positive relationship

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between loyalty states and engagement states. First, we propose that the higher the cognitive loyalty, the higher the one's interest and concentration on the brand's attributes, and therefore, the higher the cognitive engagement intensity level on a virtual brand community. Based on this argument, it is proposed that

H6: Cognitive loyalty has a positive and direct impact on cognitive engagement.

Furthermore, it is highly possible that the emotional engagement which represents the psychological CE phase where favorable emotions are evoked toward the brand and the others in the community is positively affected by the consumers' affective and conative loyalty where consumers have a high degree of affect toward the brand. In other words, affective and conative loyalty will increase the likelihood for the consumers to be emotionally engaged in the brand's community page. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed;

H7: Affective loyalty has a positive and direct impact on emotional engagement.

H8: Conative loyalty has a positive and direct impact on emotional engagement.

Behaviorally loyal customers are characterized with high commitment to the brand and their pledge to remain loyal even when they have to overcome obstacles related to the brand (Oliver, 1999). In a virtual brand community, this willingness to make personal sacrifice is the willingness to devote more time and energy in one's role as a community member, such as by actively participating and "trying hard to perform better" (Cheung et al. 2011) as a brand-loyal consumer on the brand's community page. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H9: Behavioral loyalty has a positive and direct impact on physical engagement.

2.4 Relationship between Psychological Level CE and Behavioral CE

Psychological levels of CE, which are cognitive, emotional, and physical CE respectively, are anticipated to be antecedents of behavioral engagement, namely word of mouth and participation behaviors. Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) state that people's accessible beliefs which refer to the perceived possibility that an object has a specific attribute determines their attitudes toward that object. As the attitude object is the behavioral engagement in our research model, the beliefs toward the attitude object will only be accessible through the process of psychological engagement where members cognitively, emotionally and physically engaged. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses;

H10: Cognitive engagement has a direct and positive impact on the participation.

H11: Cognitive engagement has a direct and positive impact on the WOM.

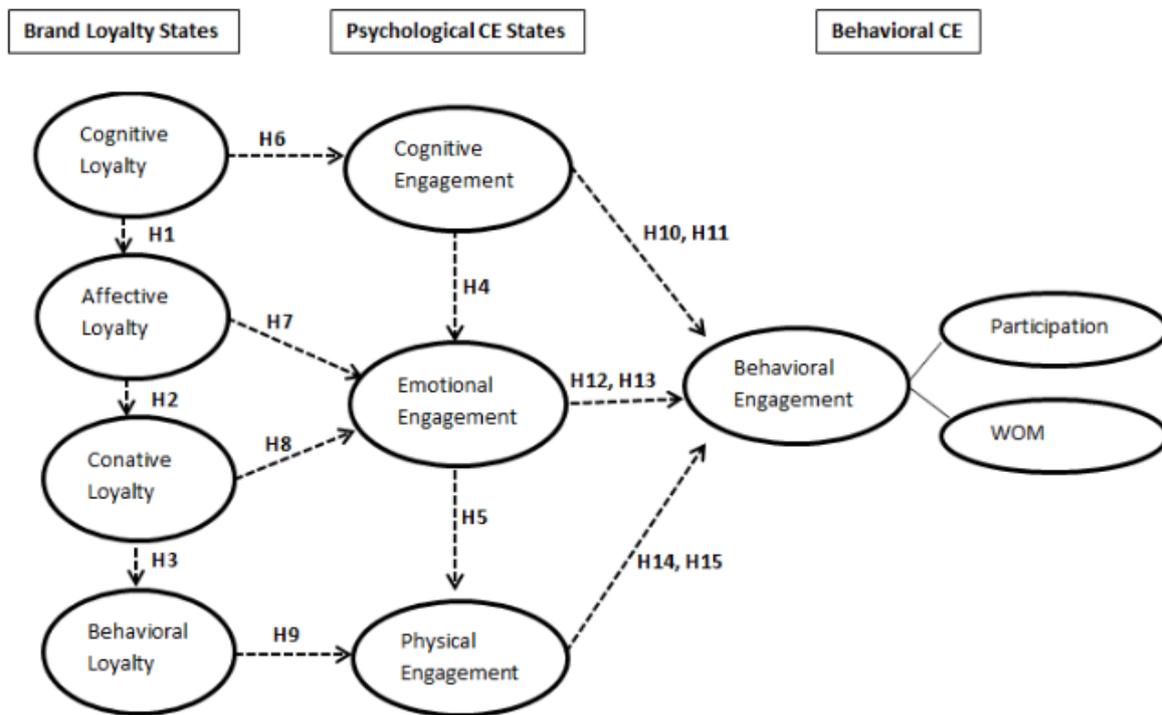
H12: Emotional engagement has a direct and positive impact on the participation.

H13: Emotional engagement has a direct and positive impact on the WOM.

H14: Physical engagement has a direct and positive impact on the participation.

H15: Physical engagement has a direct and positive impact on the WOM.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Brand Loyalty’s Impact on Customer Engagement



3. Methodology

Following a positivist philosophy and applying deductive reasoning, a quantitative research design is chosen with the conduction of an online questionnaire to measure the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) is composed of three sections that form the main constructs of our conceptual model: namely brand loyalty, psychological customer engagement, and behavioral customer engagement. Moreover, it is the focus of our research to investigate the relationships between the different attributes of each construct. Accordingly, the constructs are multidimensional (Table 1). All constructs in our conceptual model are latent or unobservable variables that cannot be directly observed. Therefore, we used three to six observable items for each dimension of the main constructs, all adapted from previous studies (Table 1). In the questionnaire all items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1: strongly disagree, to 7: strongly agree.

We collected primary data through a self-administered online survey technique which posed the respondents sets of standardized, structured questions. After the questionnaire is translated into Turkish language, a public event page is created, with an explanation and the web link to the questionnaire, on Facebook where the target population is present. In total, 613 Facebook users were invited to respond the questionnaire, out of which 435 completed. Therefore, the response rate is 71%. Furthermore, out of 453 respondents 193 people declared that they are a member of at least one Facebook virtual brand community page. Hence, we have 193 qualified respondents.

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Table 1: Scale Items used for each construct for this study

1- Brand Loyalty	
Cognitive Loyalty	<i>Adapted from Back & Parks (2003)</i>
This brand provides me superior product/service quality as compared to any other brand in the same category	
No other brand in the same category performs better than this brand	
I believe that this brand provides more benefits than any other brands in the same category	
Affective Loyalty	<i>Adapted from Back & Parks (2003)</i>
I love using this brand	
I feel better when I use this brand	
I like this brand more than any other comparable brand	
Conative Loyalty	<i>Adapted from Back & Parks (2003)</i>
Even if other comparable brands have lower prices, I still prefer this brand	
I intend to continue using this brand	
I consider this brand to be my first choice among other brands in the same category	
Behavioral Loyalty	<i>Adapted from Roy et al. (2009)</i>
I spend more money for this brand than any other comparable brands.	
I purchase this brand more frequently than any other comparable brands	
I use the brand more often than any other comparable brands.	
2- Psychological Customer Engagement	
Cognitive Engagement	<i>Adapted from Cheung et al. (2011)</i>
Time flies when I am visiting this brand page.	
This brand page is so absorbing that I forgot about everything else.	
I am rarely distracted when I visit this brand page.	
I am immersed in the content of this brand page.	
My mind is focused when I read through the content of this brand page.	
I pay a lot of attention to this brand page.	
Emotional Engagement	<i>Adapted from Cheung et al. (2011)</i>
I am enthusiastic in this brand page.	
This brand page inspires me.	
I find this brand page full of meaning and purpose	
I am excited when I use this brand page.	
I am interested in this brand page.	
I am proud of being member of the brand page.	
Physical Engagement	<i>Adapted from Cheung et al. (2011)</i>
I can visit this brand page for very long periods at a time.	
I feel strong and vigorous when I visit this brand page.	
I feel very resilient, mentally, as far as brand page is concerned.	
In this brand page, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.	
I devote a lot of energy to this brand page.	
I try my hardest to perform well on this brand page.	
3- Behavioral Customer Engagement	
Participation Behavior	
Provide new information about the brand to other people in this brand page.	
Actively participate in the activities on this brand page	
Supporting other members of the brand page.	
Word of Mouth	
I tell positive things about this brand page to other people.	
I recommend this brand page to anyone who seek my advice about the brand	
I encourage people to use this brand page	
I won't hesitate to refer other people to this brand page	

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3.1 Sample Demographics

Table 2 demonstrates the sample's demographic profile. The age interval represented in the sample is between 20 and 41. In total, the average age is 28. According to comScore statistics, the largest age group on Facebook in Turkey is between 18 - 24 (34%), and 25 – 34 (29%), followed by the users in the age group 33 – 44 (13%). This indicates that the majority of Facebook users in Turkey are aged between 18 and 44 with 76%. Therefore, our sample, composed of Facebook users aged between 20 and 41 with an average age of 28, can be considered to be representative of the population in terms of age. Gender demographics indicate that both genders are well represented in our sample, yet there is a slight female dominance: Females characterize 57.5% of the sample with 111 female respondents in total, and males represent 42.5% with 82 male respondents.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N=193)

Demographical Variables		
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	64	33,2
Female	129	66,8
Education		
High School	2	1
University	104	53.9
Master and above	87	45.1
Frequency of Facebook Visit		
Daily	185	95.9
2-3 times a week	8	4.1
Duration of Facebook Usage Daily		
Less than half an hour	30	15.5
1 hour	62	32.1
Between 1-2 hours	56	29
2-4 hours	30	15.5
More than 4 hours	15	7.8
	Min / Max	Average
Age	20 / 41	27

Moreover, 53.9% (104 respondents) of the sample is university, 45.1% (87 respondents) is master degree and only 1% (2 respondents) is high school graduates. Thus, the variability of the sample in terms of education is low, as people with low education profile is not well represented in our sample. Besides, 96% of the respondents declared that they visit Facebook daily and 85% spend at least one hour a day on Facebook. Turkey, being the third most engaged online audience in Europe with 32.7 hours spent online per person per month, and Facebook being the most engaging site in Turkey (comScore), the sample demonstrating high Facebook usage is also considered to be representative of the population.

4. The Findings

Analysis was conducted in SPSS statistics tool version 17. Primarily, reliability analysis was applied for the multi-item scales to assess the internal consistency for each construct in this

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study. The corresponding Cronbach 's alpha estimates indicate highly reliable scales as all the values exceed 0.7 threshold (Table 3).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis: Brand Loyalty, Psychological and Behavioral Customer Engagement Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Loyalty	
Cognitive Loyalty	.831
Affective Loyalty	.902
Conative Loyalty	.828
Behavioral Loyalty	.862
Psychological Customer Engagement	
Cognitive Engagement	.930
Emotional Engagement	.937
Physical Engagement	.938
Behavioral Customer Engagement	
Participation Behavior	.876
Word of Mouth	.899

We identified 15 hypotheses as depicted in our conceptual model (Figure 1). In order to test the hypothesized relationships between the variables, linear regression analysis was conducted. According to the results, as illustrated in Table 4, the hypothesis H7, H10, and H11 were rejected and all the other hypothesis were accepted at the significance level $p < 0.001$.

Regarding H7, we applied a post hoc analysis and found that while affective loyalty is not correlated with emotional engagement as hypothesized, it is significantly correlated with cognitive engagement. It is an interesting finding since it demonstrates that emotions evoked at affective loyalty level are not strong enough to be transferred to the brand's community page, as the affectively loyal consumers still stay at cognitive level in their visit to the page. The second rejected hypothesis, H10, also brings an important issue on surface suggesting that cognitive engagement is significantly but negatively correlated to participation behaviors. It provides support for the proposition by Madupu & Cooley (2010) who assert that stronger information motives would lead to passive participation behaviors which is also called as "lurking". They describe lurking behaviors stating that lurkers do not contribute or interact behaviorally, but participate passively through reading and observing the content of the online brand community. As the cognitive engagement level is primarily triggered by strong information motives, this negative relationship provides an empirical evidence for their proposition. While cognitive engagement has negative impact on participation behaviors, rejection of H11 suggests that it also has no effect on WOM behaviors.

Table 4: Results of Linear Regression Analysis and Hypothesis

Hypothesized Paths	Std. Regression Coefficients (Beta)	Hypothesis
Cognitive Loyalty → Affective Loyalty	.709*	Accepted
Affective Loyalty → Conative Loyalty	.705*	Accepted
Conative Loyalty → Behavioral Loyalty	.655*	Accepted
Cognitive Engagement → Emotional Engagement	.663*	Accepted
Emotional Engagement → Physical Engagement	.589*	Accepted
Cognitive Loyalty → Cognitive Engagement	.487*	Accepted
Affective Loyalty → Emotional Engagement	.010	Rejected
Conative Loyalty → Emotional Engagement	.161*	Accepted
Behavioral Loyalty → Physical Engagement	.221*	Accepted
Cognitive Engagement → Participation	-.380*	Rejected
Cognitive Engagement → Word of Mouth	.099	Rejected
Emotional Engagement → Participation	.386*	Accepted
Emotional Engagement → Word of Mouth	.596*	Accepted
Physical Engagement → Participation	.377*	Accepted
Physical Engagement → Word of Mouth	.291*	Accepted

*Significant at $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion

The results will be interpreted in three phases and the characteristics of each phase will be discussed (Table 5). The brand community members at the first phase of CE have the lowest loyalty level. They are loyal to the brands in cognitive and affective manner. Their loyalty is based on their beliefs about the product attributes such as good quality or price (cognitive loyalty), and/or the first phase of emotional responses developed towards the brand (affective loyalty). The attitudinal responses, like the emotional attachment, towards the brand have not well developed for this member profile. Therefore, their major motivation of joining the brand page has primarily cognitive basis, such as following the information regarding the brand attributes and the reassurance of the quality of the brand. Consequently, one reason that leads to passive participation, as suggested by the current study, is the high cognitive loyalty with low attitudinal responses. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that the cognitive engagement phase does not only lead to passive participant member profile; but also results in low desire for the positive word of mouth behaviors. Indeed, it is the only phase that does not prompt members to spread the positive word of mouth to the others about the brand page.

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Table 5: Phases and Characteristics of CE in Online Brand Communities

Phase #	Psychological Engagement State	Members' Loyalty level with the brand	Members' Participation Type	Members' WOM to others	The phase is triggered by
Phase 1	Cognitive Engagement	Brand Loyalty Phase 1 and 2 Cognitive and Affective Loyalty	Passive participation – no active interaction, but reading and observing the brand page	No	Cognitive and Affective loyalty – information and quality assurance needs
Phase 2	Emotional Engagement	Brand Loyalty Phase 3 Conative Loyalty	Active Participation – active interaction with the brand community through comments and likes to the posts	Yes	Cognitive engagement and conative loyalty – higher levels of emotional responses towards the brand
Phase 3	Physical Engagement	Brand Loyalty Phase 4 Behavioral Loyalty	Active Participation – active interaction with the brand community through comments and likes to the posts	Yes	Emotional engagement and behavioral loyalty – the highest level of loyalty and emotional bonding with the brand and the brand community

On the other hand, active participation is triggered by the second and third phase of the CE. At the second phase, the favorable emotional responses towards the brand community are developed and therefore this phase is called emotional engagement. At this phase, the members start feeling inspired by the brand community and proud of being one of the members. Furthermore, the community members who are emotionally engaged on the brand page are actively participating on the online conversations. Therefore, one part of the interactive fan base of the virtual brand communities are the emotionally engaged members. Moreover, this type of members also involves in positive word of mouth behaviors by recommending others to visit the brand page. Considering that the active participants are mainly composed of brand loyal consumers at high attitudinal levels, with high emotional bonding and interaction with the brand and the brand community, it is recommended for the companies that the fan acquisition strategies should be developed in accordance with this member profile. For instance, the fan acquisition strategies which are solely targeting to create new customers and overemphasizing the information focused advertising on the brand page will be unattractive to the customers at higher loyalty phase. This will result in more cognitively engaged customers who comprise the passive fan base of the brand page. Moreover, through information-focused content of the brand page the emotional bonding with them would not be possible. Therefore, the sound strategy for an active brand page will include a type of content in a way that this customer profile can use the brand page to express their emotions and to strengthen their emotional bonds with the brand.

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The last phase, physical engagement, is triggered by emotional engagement and behavioral loyalty drivers. This has two indications for the companies. First, the increased emotional engagement will lead to more committed fan base on the brand page. Therefore, it is possible to increase active participation by generating physically engaged fans that are willing to devote more time and energy on the brand page through delivering fulfilling experiences to the members at emotional engagement phase. Second, it indicates that the consumers with the highest loyalty level to the brand, that is behavioral loyalty, become physically engaged on the brand's community pages. Therefore, another path to improve active participation on online brand communities is to identify and attract behaviorally loyal consumers through a targeted communication towards them on the brand page.

6. Conclusion

The primary focus of this research is to contribute to customer engagement research stream through investigating the relationship between two relational constructs, namely brand loyalty and customer engagement. It was suggested by van Doorn et al. (2010) that loyalty is the likely attitudinal antecedent of customer engagement which should be further examined. Through this investigation we also aimed explaining the different customer engagement intensity levels through loyalty states, as it was suggested by Brodie et al. (2011) that the drivers leading to different intensity levels should be investigated. Moreover, the review of customer engagement literature has revealed another gap that the concept of customer engagement is either considered to be a behavioral manifestation (e.g. Bijmolt et al. 2010; van Doorn et al. 2010; Kumar et al. 2010), or a psychological phenomenon (e.g. Brodie et al. 2011; Patterson 2006; Vivek et al. 2012; Hollebeek 2011; Mollen & Wilson 2010). The present research also reconciles these two views by applying both psychological dimensions and behavioral dimensions of the concept in the research framework. Furthermore, virtual brand communities, being the most popular context of customer engagement where brand stakeholders are intermingled and non-exchange related interactions transpire, the context of the study has been chosen to be virtual brand communities. Moreover, the review of studies on virtual brand communities revealed that the customer engagement term is considered only in terms of behaviors whereas psychological customer engagement which is developed in marketing literature is not reflected on the research regarding online brand communities. Hence, the present study also contributed to the research on virtual brand communities by applying psychological customer engagement knowledge in this context.

Though, the current study is not without limitations. Restrictions in time and budget have hindered us from using probabilistic sampling methods. Therefore it is noteworthy to mention the sampling error limitation of the current methodology. Applying non-probability sampling method (i.e. convenience sampling) in this study eliminated the possibility of sampling error assessment which limited the generalizability of the sample to the whole population. Large sample sizes, on the other hand, increases data quality and generalizability. With an effort to include large amount of people in the questionnaire, we aimed eliminating the possible sampling errors and increase the quality and generalizability of the research.

Another limitation is related to the data collection. Strict rules related to the brands' Facebook pages prohibited us distributing the questionnaire to the consumers on the specific brand community pages. For this reason, the questionnaires are distributed to the Facebook users, who are reached in convenience sampling method through our own social networks. Therefore, the sample represents members of various virtual brand communities belonging

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to numerous products, brands and industries. This is considered to be a limitation due to explicitly indicated context-dependent nature of the customer engagement construct (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011). Accordingly, the results do not reflect the context-dependent nature of the customer engagement construct, but represent a large variety of virtual brand communities.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Questionnaire

Are you a Facebook user?

- Yes
- No

How often do you use Facebook?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Month
- Less than Once a Month

How much time do you spend on Facebook on average per day?

- Less than half an hour
- 1 hour
- Between 1-2 hours
- Between 2-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your education level?

- Primary school
- Middle school
- High school
- University
- Master's and above

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Are you a member of any Facebook page of a brand that you like?

- Yes
 No

Can you please state the name of one brand that you are a member of on Facebook?

Can you please answer the following questions considering the brand you mentioned above?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This brand provides me superior product/service quality as compared to any other brand in the same category	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No other brand in the same category performs better than this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this brand provides more benefits than any other brands in the same category	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I love using this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel better when I use this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like this brand more than any other comparable brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even if other comparable brands have lower prices, I still prefer this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to continue using this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider this brand to be my first choice among the whole other brands in the same category	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend more money for this brand than any other comparable brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I purchase this brand more frequently than any other comparable brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use the brand more often than any other comparable brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Can you please answer the following questions considering the Facebook page of the brand you mentioned above?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Time flies when I am visiting this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand page is so absorbing that I forgot about everything else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am rarely distracted when I visit this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am immersed in the content of this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My mind is focused when I read through the content of this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pay a lot of attention to this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am enthusiastic in this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand page inspires me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found this brand page full of meaning and purpose.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am excited when I use this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am proud of being member of the brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can visit this brand page for very long periods at a time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel strong and vigorous when I visit this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel very resilient, mentally, as far as brand page is concerned.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this brand page, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I devote a lot of energy to this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try my hardest to perform well on this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please specify how often do you do the following in the page of the brand you mentioned above?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
I provide new information about the brand to other people in this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>				
I actively participate in the activities on this brand page	<input type="radio"/>				
I support other members of the brand page.	<input type="radio"/>				

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Can you please specify how strongly do you agree/disagree to the following?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I tell positive things about this brand page to other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I recommend this brand page to anyone who seek my advice about the brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I encourage people to use this brand page	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I won't hesitate to refer other people to this brand page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you visit the brand page?

- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

How long has it been since you are a member of the page?

- Less than a month
- 1 to 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 months to a year
- More than a year