

Customer Engagement Marketing and Firms' Deliberation on E-Word of Mouth Communication on Online Platforms : A Study on Millennials and Zoomers

*Shampa Nandi*¹
*S. Shyam Prasad*²

Abstract

Purpose : Customer engagement (CE) has become extremely popular since social media emerged. However, there is disagreement over the proper definition, metrics, and operationalization of CE in social media and its implications. It is unclear how millennials and zoomers use social media and what tactics firms can use to improve CE. This study aimed to investigate and quantify CE for millennials and zoomers in social media.

Methodology : We quantified CE through its three dimensions, namely Vigour, Absorptions, and Dedication and measured its impact on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. Using structural equation modeling based on 250 responses obtained using a purposive sample strategy, we evaluated the difference in CE across two generation cohorts. We also looked at the effect of the enterprises' purposeful approach.

Findings : There was no discernible difference in the relationship between zoomers and millennials regarding CE and eWOM. The intentional strategy of the companies had little effect as a mediating factor between eWOM and CE.

Practical Implications : Our research provided profound insights into the use of social media by tech-savvy generations through an exploration of the three dimensions of CE. It discussed how a customer adds value to any company through eWOM. This would allow the managers to involve customers in brand promotion through social media, segment the market, and develop more successful marketing plans.

Originality : The study model examined the effects of eWOM communication, which is the first type, by combining the original CE components with the age cohort as a moderator and the firm's strategy as a mediating variable.

Keywords : customer engagement, eWOM, millennials, zoomers, social media

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Customers have been the epicenter of marketing since the marketing concept evolved. Firms initially focused on transaction marketing. However, in the last decade of the 20th century, transactional marketing has evolved into relationship marketing, aiming to improve customer trust, commitment, and loyalty through better products, services, and other programs. One such program in that direction is customer engagement (CE). CE is a tool to develop stronger customer relations beyond purchases and build interaction and participation in the long run (Sashi, 2012). Hollebeek (2011) defined CE as the customer's motivational, brand-related, and

¹ *Professor in Marketing, Quantitative Techniques & ¹ Principal PGDM, International School of Management Excellence, Bangalore - 562 125, Karnataka. (Email : shampanandi12345@gmail.com)*

ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6270-288X>

² *Professor in Corporate Strategy and Marketing, International School of Management Excellence, Bangalore - 562 125, Karnataka. (Email : s_shyam_prasad@yahoo.com) ; ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3710-3858>*

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context-dependent state of mind and described CE through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities of a customer in his/her direct brand interactions. Beyond mere financial support, other definitions of CE include consumers' volunteer resource contributions to a business's marketing efforts (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Engaged consumers are devoted, make larger purchases, and help the business grow (Kuvykaitė & Tarutė, 2015). According to a survey by Rosetta Consulting (2014), highly engaged customers are four times more likely to recommend a brand and make purchases 90% more frequently and \$60 more each time. Scholars and managers have taken notice of these advances and findings regarding CE (Roy et al., 2018), and it is anticipated that interest in CE will not decrease. According to a study, the researchers have focused more on academic topics and have not addressed concerns related to practical engagement, such as budget allocation, decision-making, or other difficulties pertaining to internal marketing and communication practices of businesses and their personnel (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). Social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and many more are utilized a lot these days for marketing and promotion. Social media has become the main marketing tool for companies like Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Nike, Dell, Dove, Starbucks, and others (Paruthi & Kaur, 2017). Even small and medium-sized businesses use social media marketing through blogs, wikis, social networks, communities, and social forums (Sharma, 2012).

Different people may respond to CE in different ways, and this is especially true if the customers are from different generations. According to a recent study by Claffey and Brady (2017), different behavioral inclinations and personality factors impact CE on social media. A study conducted in 2021 predicted that by 2030, the two largest adult consumer groups will be millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) and zoomers (those born between 1997 and 2012). Studies have indicated behavioral differences between generations, specifically between zoomers and millennials.

Scholars and professionals are interested in CE, but their knowledge bases are not fully aligned. Therefore, no research has assessed CE in terms of its three dimensions and variations between the two cohorts of generations. Through an exploration of three dimensions of CE and measurement of how the younger generations look beyond the transaction, their level of engagement with any brand on social media, and the extent to which they promote the brand through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, our empirical study fills in theoretical and practical gaps in the literature.

To improve customer interactions, businesses began implementing various CE policies and marketing techniques (Harmeling et al., 2017). Firms should initiate various promotional approaches to motivate, empower, and measure customers' contribution to marketing functions. Customers should be rewarded or incentivized to show a higher level of engagement. Recently, many firms have adopted a new promotional tool called gamification to enhance customer loyalty, fostering eWOM sharing behavior and purchase intentions (Al-Zyoud, 2020) through social media. Our study is unusual in that it looks at how companies intentionally use social media as a mediating factor to increase the engagement of younger generations on social media and promote more eWOM communications.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Customer Engagement

The pervasive growth of Web 2.0 and a wide range of digital technologies and tools, coupled with the advent of numerous social media sites with interactive nature, has enabled companies to engage customers and serve them better. In marketing literature, the idea of engagement is still evolving, but is showing promise for the future. Since 2010, it has been under debate. An intimate, long-term relationship with customers was considered CE by Sashi (2012) in an Adobe-sponsored survey. The theory of CE states that if a customer is satisfied with the firm and has

an emotional attachment with the firm, then he/she would be engaged with the firm in the form of purchases (direct contribution), referrals, influence, and feedback (indirect contribution) (Pansari & Kumar, 2018). This work uses three dimensions of CE, as stated by (Hollebeek, 2011), and they are as follows:

✦ **Vigour** is the physical dimension of CE, which is all about customers' energy and mental resilience on online social platforms (Patterson et al., 2006).

✦ **Absorption** is the cognitive dimension of CE, which measures consumers' engrossment and concentration level with online social platforms (Schaufeli, Martínez, et al., 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002).

✦ **Dedication** refers to the emotional aspect of CE, which is all about a sense of pride, enthusiasm, and feelings of enthusiasm on his/her favorite social media (Luo et al., 2019).

The term “customer engagement” was coined by Bowden (2014). A lack of clarity and consensus is observed regarding the appropriate definition, forms, dimensionality measurement, and operationalization of CE in social media. This study aims to explore CE and intends to measure CE precisely in social media for millennials and zoomers.

The Emergence of Social Media and Significance of the Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication (eWOM) as a Customer Engagement Tool

According to Dimitriu and Guesalaga (2017), Harrigan et al. (2017), Makri and Schlegelmilch (2017), and other scholars, customer engagement in social media (CESM) is a specialized method of engaging with customers through quicker and more spontaneous interactions between brands and consumers. It has garnered a lot of attention from both corporations and researchers. Social media users mainly engage with a brand if there is valuable and entertaining content (Kujur & Singh, 2019). According to Fatima and Ali (2023), social media CE is just as important for micro and small organizations. Measures to compute CE on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been established by recent researchers (Muñoz-Expósito et al., 2017; Pongpaew et al., 2017).

Social media's omnipresence and growing popularity have influenced organizations to create their brand pages on various social media platforms and use them to get constant customer feedback regarding likes, comments, shares, and podcasts in the form of eWOM. Because eWOM has a high degree of trustworthiness, reliability, and influence, it greatly impacts how consumers perceive products and judge what to buy (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). Okazaki (2009) stated that eWOM is an unofficial network for social influence. Positive or negative comments about a company, product, or service can be included in eWOM (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2013).

In this case, CE is advantageous because it lowers acquisition costs, converts consumers into quasi-marketers, and boosts customer satisfaction after a purchase (Malthouse et al., 2013). According to Ranjan and Read (2016), CE is more successful in boosting customer satisfaction, loyalty, and, eventually, business performance, especially on online social platforms. The lifestyle, fashion, and beauty industries rely significantly on social media influencers to craft brand messaging and interact with consumers (Tanwar et al., 2021). The present study has focused on measuring millennials' and zoomers' engagement in social media and its influence on eWOM. Thus, the proposed hypotheses are :

✦ **H01** : The CE Absorption component in an online social platform will not affect online social platform participation in eWOM.

✦ **Ha1** : The CE Absorption component in an online social platform will positively affect online social platform participation in the form of eWOM.

⇒ **H02** : The CE Vigour component in an online social platform will not affect online social platform participation in eWOM.

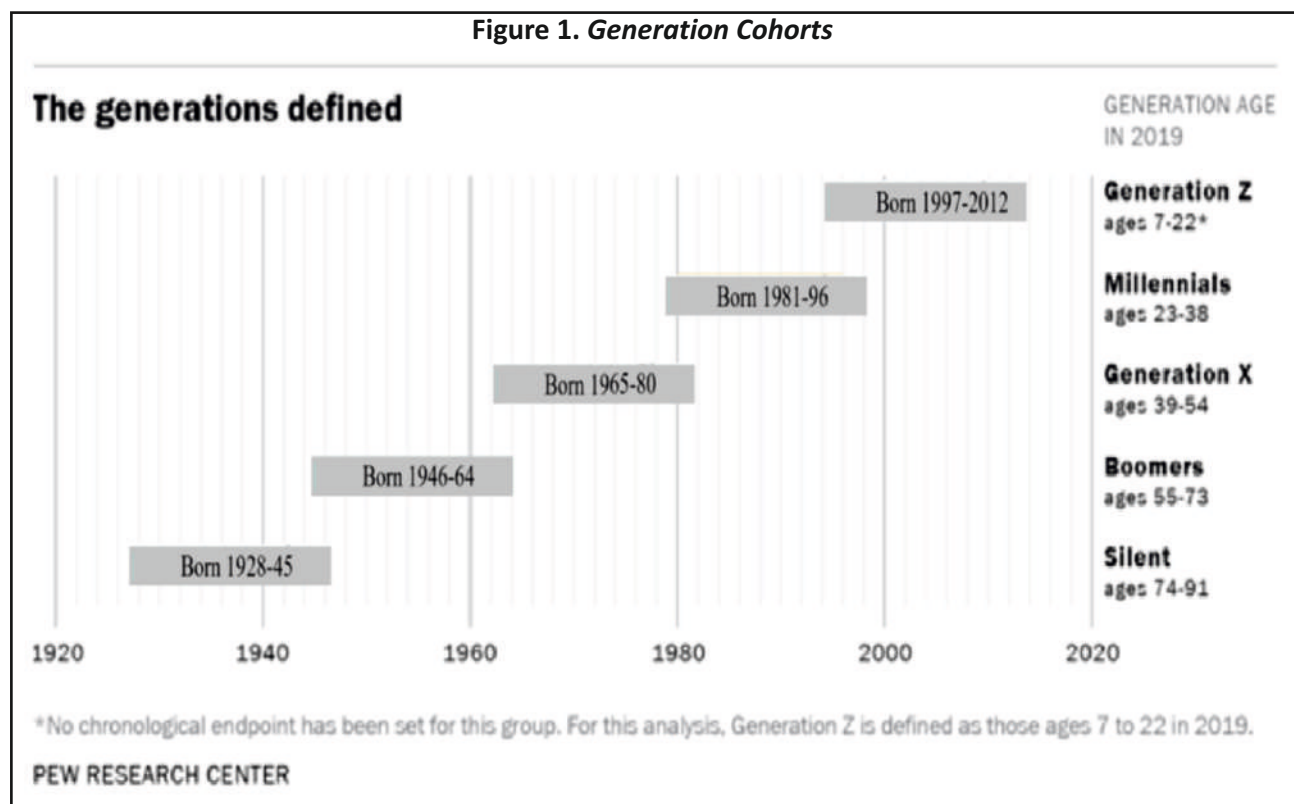
⇒ **Ha2** : The CE Vigour component in an online social platform will positively affect online social platform participation in the form of eWOM.

⇒ **H03** : The CE Dedication component in an online social platform will not affect online social platform participation in eWOM.

⇒ **Ha3** : The CE Dedication component in an online social platform will positively affect online social platform participation in the form of eWOM.

Generation Implication

Research has indicated that distinct buying patterns exist within age cohorts regarding fashion (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010) and the use of fair-trade goods. Furthermore, people react differently to marketing initiatives (Tavasoli et al., 2021). CE marketing has drawn particular attention for multiple reasons — extreme customer centricity, the digital revolution, the emergence of social media marketing, and the dominance of tech-savvy generations (millennials and zoomers). Zoomers and millennials vary from previous generations in that they have distinct media habits, spend more time on screens, and have easy access to a multitude of information. After 10 years of research, the Pew Research Center has discovered notable behavioral differences between millennials and those born before and after 1996 (Figure 1).



Millennials versus Zoomers

The Indian population comprises 27% zoomers and 24% millennials (“Most of the world's youngest people,” 2020). By 2030, millennials, followed by zoomers, will be the two largest adult consumer groups (Grieve, 2021). Many earlier researchers perceived millennials and zoomers as similar and have referred to zoomers as “Millennials plus.” Though the older side of the millennials is fond of brick-and-mortar shopping, the younger part chooses online shopping, and the convenience part of online shopping is appreciated by both generations (Baykal, 2020). Both generations have less fear of sharing their personalized data and embrace customized offers from retail channels (Orgel, 2019).

Zoomers are 41% more frugal and cost-conscious than their counterparts because they have experienced more economic crises, such as severe recessions and employment uncertainty brought on by the pandemic (Baykal, 2020). Additionally, they favor eco-friendly brands and customized brand experiences. Digital communication that is brief, sharp, melodic, or hilarious works particularly well with younger audiences (Munsch, 2021). The similarities and dissimilarities between millennials and zoomers necessitate a study to compare the engagement level of both generations in social media and its influence on eWOM.

So, the proposed hypotheses are :

✎ **H04** : Millennials and zoomers do not moderate the relationship between CE in online social platform participation and eWOM.

✎ **Ha4** : Millennials and zoomers moderate the relationship between CE in online social platform participation and eWOM.

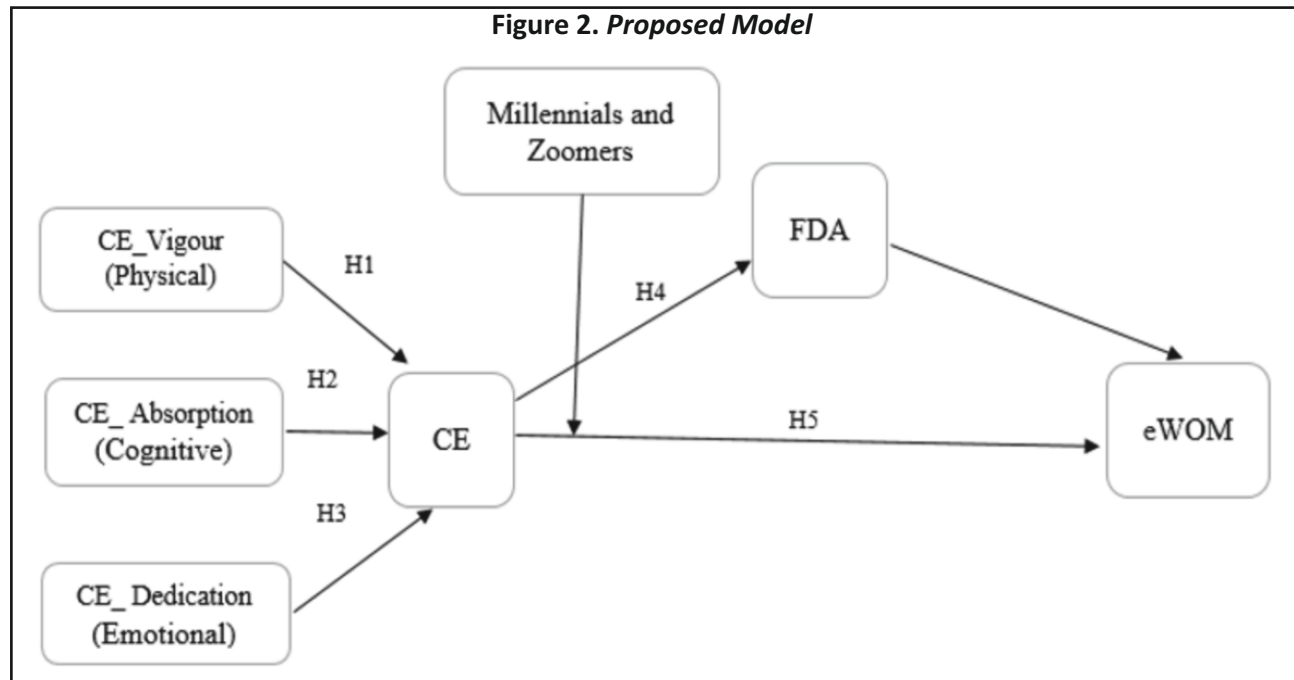
Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication and the Firm's Deliberate Approaches

Due to the enormous potential of social networking sites (SNS) for commercial growth and rising popularity, companies have begun utilizing SNS to draw in and keep consumers. Through the internet, word-of-mouth (eWOM) communications can reach a wider audience beyond geographic limits; eWOM levels are higher in business-consumer relationships (Abubakar et al., 2016). Okazaki (2009) defined eWOM as an informal network for social influence. Potential consumers utilize eWOM to reduce perceived risk and uncertainty while buying a new product/service. When a firm prompts customers to “like” or create content about its brand on social media, it is “firm-initiated CE.” However, a firm may also succeed in motivating and empowering a customer to contribute to its marketing efforts beyond purchases voluntarily (Harmeling et al., 2017), and it is regarded as “customer-initiated CE.”

Marketers have a tremendous scope to drive youngsters into eWOM by analyzing and visualizing customers' purchase journeys more closely. Recently, many firms have adopted gamification strategies to improve CE and customer loyalty and increase positive WOM communications. Prior empirical research has verified that a company's loyalty initiatives, including incentives, savings, and gamification, improve client engagement, intention, and reaction (Hwang & Choi, 2020). The lack of literature to understand the role of a firm's deliberate approach to check the impact of the relationship between CE and eWOM provides space for more exploration. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

✎ **H05** : A firm's strategies to increase CE in an online social platform do not act as a mediating variable that enhances the effect of online social platform participation on eWOM.

✎ **Ha5** : A firm's strategies to increase CE in an online social platform act as a mediating variable that enhances the effect of online social platform participation on eWOM.



This study is based on a proposed conceptual model (Figure 2) that combines all three dimensions of CE as defined by Hollebeek (2011) and applies them to eWOM. Millennials and zoomers act as moderating variables, and the firm's deliberate approach to enhancing engagement is a mediating variable in this study.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

- Provide an overview of CE, the firm's deliberate approach and eWOM communication on a common platform.
- Build a framework to measure engagement marketing by suitable constructs and establish a relationship with eWOM.
- Compare and contrast the relationships between CE and eWOM communication in the case of millennials and zoomers.
- Gauge the impact of firms' deliberate approach as a mediator in the relationship between CE and eWOM communication.

Research Methods

The study adopted a quantitative research technique to establish the relationship between CE and eWOM, used age cohorts as a moderator variable, and measured the impact of the mediating variable “firms' deliberate approach.” As generation cohorts acted as the sampling frame, students (UG and PG) and working professionals in the age group of millennials and zoomers from different states of India completed the survey questionnaires through Google Forms from November 2021 till February 2022. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to collect the responses. While checking the validity of the constructs, some answers falling as outliers

were discarded in the next level of analysis. The final analysis was done on 97 millennials and 153 zoomers, with 250 responses. CE and eWOM were constructed from pre-existing well-validated measurement scales adopting a 5-point Likert Scale (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Schaufeli, Martínez, et al., 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). The study used structural equation modeling (SEM), which used AMOS and SPSS. The metrics for FDA, eWOM communication, and CE have been added to the Appendix.

Analysis and Results

Demographic Data Analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Group	Respondents' Characteristics	Number of Respondents
Gender	Male	130(52.0%)
	Female	120(48.0%)
Age Cohorts	Millennials	97(39.0%)
	Zoomers	153(61.0%)
Profession	Student	151(60.4%)
	Working	99(39.6%)
Educational Qualification	Plus II	28(11.2%)
	Undergraduate	66(26.4%)
	Post Graduate	153(61.2%)
	Ph.D.	3(1.2%)
Annual Family Income (₹)	< 5 lakhs	59(23.6%)
	5 lakhs < 10 lakhs	85(34.0%)
	10 lakhs < 15 lakhs	50(20.0%)
	15 lakhs < 20 lakhs	19(7.6%)
	20 lakhs and more	37(14.8%)
Residential Area	Rural	28(11.2%)
	Semi-Urban	57(22.8%)
	Urban	165(66.0%)
Marital Status	Unmarried	192(76.8%)
	Married	58(23.2%)

The majority of the younger generation uses social media regularly or often. As seen in Figure 3, Instagram is the most popular website, while Facebook is the least. According to earlier studies, millennials and zoomers utilize social media to acquire knowledge and develop “symbolic relationships” with brands (Helal et al., 2018). Before making a purchase, they converse with other customers (Mezzacca et al., 2019).

Measurement Model

We examined data accuracy, normalcy, missing values, and outliers of all variables. Then, we performed a

Figure 3. Most Popular Social Media Platforms and Frequency of Usage Among Millennials and Zoomers

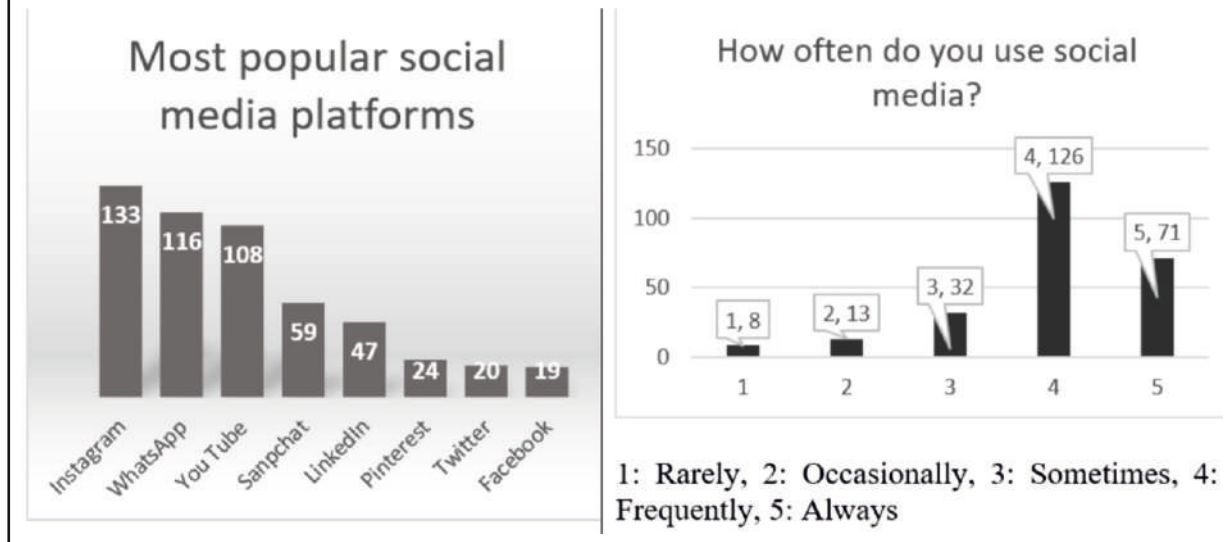


Table 2. Measurement Model (Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Explained)

Constructs	Item	Mean	SD	SL	SMC	CA (Cronbach's Alpha)	CR (Composite Reliability)	AVE (Average Variance Explained)
CE_Absorption	C4	3.06	1.123	0.731***	0.534	0.780	0.7829	0.55
	C5	3.25	1.173	0.774***	0.599			
	C6	3.41	0.949	0.711***	0.506			
		3.005	0.742					
	P3	2.71	1.12	0.620***	0.385			
	P4	3.11	1.11	0.738***	0.548			
CE_Vigour	P5	3.38	1.13	0.729***	0.533	0.829	0.8343	0.56
	P6	3.22	1.03	0.883***	0.780			
		2.51	0.657					
	EM5	3.46	1.04	0.692***	0.48			
	EM4	2.84	1.05	0.721***	0.52			
	EM3	3.14	0.99	0.68***	0.46			
CE_Dedication	EM2	3.27	0.99	0.73***	0.53	0.785	0.799	0.50
		2.797	0.654					
	W1	3.21	1.6	0.76***	0.578			
	W2	2.87	1.11	0.731***	0.535			
	W3	3.03	1.14	0.79***	0.624			
	W5	3.31	1.02	0.694***	0.482			
eWOM	W6	3.51	0.96	0.692***	0.478	0.85	0.877	0.54
		3.103	0.762					

Note. *** Significant at 1% level of significance.

confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model with the three constructs related to CE. Some items in each construct with low loading were removed after the initial CFA, as shown in Table 2. The measurement model of the CFA achieved excellent fit; $\chi^2 = 59.564$, $df = 40$, $\chi^2/df = 1.489$, $p < .05$, CFI = 0.983, NFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.977; GFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.04.

Reliability

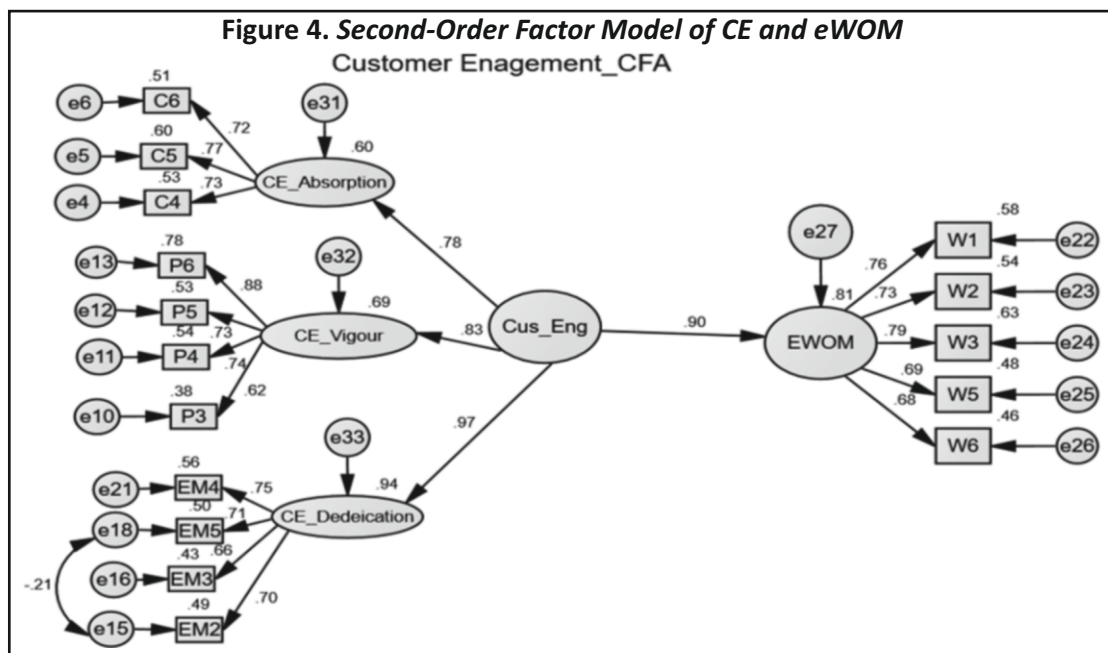
Convergent validity was verified by us through an analysis of the conditions proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All CFA factor loadings are statistically significant at $p < .05$ (see Table 2). The average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs is above the value of 0.50. All the indicators of each construct have critical values of more than 1.96. Consequently, it is determined that each construct has convergent validity (Byrne, 2016). The research instruments meet the general dependability criteria since the CA (Cronbach's Alpha) values are more than 0.70 (Table 2). In confirming the discriminant validity, we evaluated the correlations of the constructs with the square root of the AVE values for each of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All of the items' squared multiple correlations (SMCs) are more than or close to the threshold requirement of 0.5. All items acquired a mean score of more than the mid-scale point of 2.5, as the mean of eWOM ($M = 3.10$) is the highest, followed by CE_Absorption ($M = 3.004$), CE_Dedication ($M = 2.798$), CE_Vigour ($M = 2.51$), respectively (Table 2).

Table 3 shows that the square root of the AVE for each construct of CE is not higher than its correlations with other constructs; hence, the discriminant validity is not fully confirmed. Therefore, we have created a second-

Table 3. Discriminant Validity of Three Constructs of CE

Constructs	CE_Dedication	CE_Vigour
CE_Dedication	0.71	
CE_Vigour	0.78**	0.75
CE_Absorption	0.81**	0.59**

Note. ** Significant at a 5% level of significance.



order factor model on CE by connecting all three components and then checked its impact on eWOM (Figure 4). The new hypotheses are framed as follows:

⇒ **H_{0_{New}}** : CE in an online social platform will not impact online social platform participation and eWOM.

⇒ **H_{a_{New}}** : CE in an online social platform will positively affect online social platform participation and eWOM.

Model Fitness of Structural Equation Model (SEM)

The model fitness and interrelationship among the constructs of CE and eWOM are assessed by maximum likelihood estimation in SEM using AMOS (Table 4), and the overall model fitness indices $\chi^2 = 179.957$, $df = 99$, $\chi^2/df = 1.818$, CFI = .958, TLI = .948, NFI = .911, GFI = .91, RMSEA = 0.057, and SRMR = 0.064 reflect a good model fit.

Test of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis, Ha1, investigates the contribution of the absorption component toward CE. Ha1 produces standardized regression weight ($\beta = 0.78$, $R^2 = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, Ha1 is accepted. Similarly, the second hypothesis, Ha2, examines the impact of the Vigour component on CE. Ha2 also produces standardized regression weight ($\beta = 0.83$, $R^2 = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$); therefore, Ha2 is also supported. The third hypothesis, Ha3, checks the relationship between dedication and CE. Ha3 also produces standardized regression weight ($\beta = 0.97$, $R^2 = 0.94$, $p < 0.01$); thus, Ha3 is also supported. An earlier study confirmed low customer engagement on Facebook for young consumers (Nandi & Singh, 2021). The second-order model addressed the challenges of multicollinearity between CE components and establishing discriminant validity. Ha_{New} also produces standardized regression weight ($\beta = 0.901$, $R^2 = 0.81$, $t = 8.563$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, Ha_{New} is also accepted and establishes a high level of influence of CE on eWOM.

Table 4 indicates that CE as an independent variable can explain the 81% variance of eWOM. The regression weight of CE on eWOM is significantly high (0.901), reflecting that higher CE can lead to greater promotion and communication through electronic media to recommend, share, and like the brand or product. eWOM is an effective marketing strategy and an appealing, low-cost technique for tech-savvy generations. It helps overcome consumer resistance, connects customers through social media (Ye et al., 2011), and engages in eWOM (Kim & Lee, 2015). eWOM impacts consumers' decisions to pay premium prices (Farzin et al., 2022).

The Moderating Role of Age Cohorts (Millennials and Zoomers) Between CE and eWOM

This study conducted a complete analysis of testing the relationship between CE and eWOM varying with both age cohorts and tested the moderating role of millennials and zoomers. CE displays a stronger relationship with

Table 4. Structural Equation Model Result

Hypotheses	Relationship	B	R ²	p-value	Result
Ha1	Absorption → CE	0.78	0.60	***	Accepted
Ha2	Vigour → CE	0.83	0.69	***	Accepted
Ha3	Dedication → CE	0.97	0.94	***	Accepted
Ha _{New}	CE → eWOM	0.901	0.81	***	Accepted

Note. *** Significant at the 1% level of significance.

Table 5. Age Cohorts as a Moderator

Hypotheses	Relationship	B	R ²	CR	Result
Millennials	CE → eWOM	0.863	0.75	5.152	Supported
Zoomers	CE → eWOM	0.914	0.84	6.496	Supported
H04		Z calculated = 1.437	Z Critical = 1.96		Not Rejected

eWOM than zoomers ($\beta = 0.91$, $R^2 = 0.84$, $t = 6.496$, $p < 0.01$). In the case of millennials, CE displays a relatively less strong relationship with eWOM ($\beta = 0.86$, $R^2 = 0.75$, $t = 5.152$, $p < 0.01$). At a 5% significance level, the Z-computed value of 1.437 is not greater than the Z-critical value of 1.96. H04 is, therefore, not rejected. Therefore, age cohorts don't serve as moderators. The outcome is shown in Table 5.

Age or generation cohorts are considered an essential parameter for market segmentation, yet many researchers have found little or no differences between various generations. Marketers should not view each generation as monolithic; the same age cohort might behave differently due to the influence of personal life events (Debevec et al., 2013). Our study supports the earlier argument that the same age cohort can be heterogeneous (Debevec et al., 2013; Pentecost et al., 2019), and each generation group can have conflicting behavior due to their unique demographic and psychographic characteristics. Millennials and zoomers are primarily similar in their buying behavior (Hall et al., 2017), and zoomers are an extension of the younger part of millennials. They can be considered as “Millennials plus.”

The Mediating Role of FDA on CE to eWOM

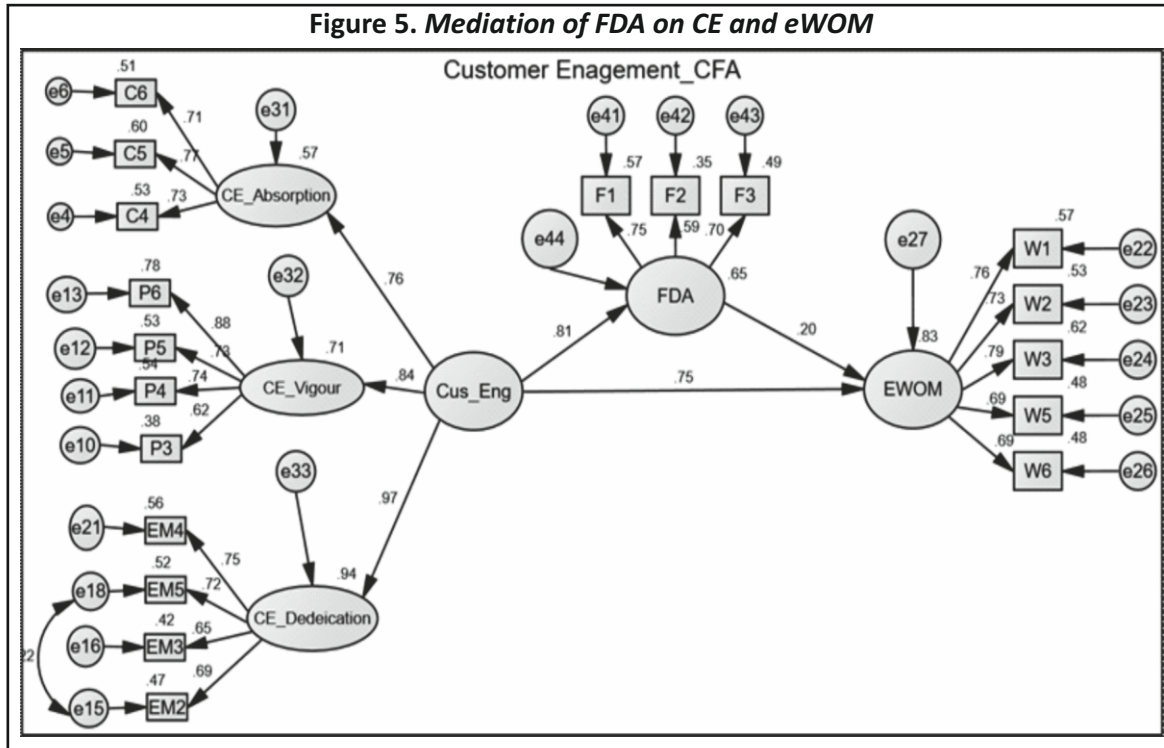
A thorough study based on the covariance structural model used a bootstrap technique to examine the FDA's mediating role in the relationship between CE and eWOM. Likewise, the mediation effects are tested using an estimating analytical method to determine the direct, indirect, and overall influence.

CE has a strong, significant positive impact on eWOM ($\beta = 0.90$, $R^2 = 0.81$, $t = 8.563$, $p < .01$). Table 6 demonstrates the significance of each indirect and mediated effect. The FDA shows the limited, partial mediation impact between eWOM and CE (refer to Figure 5). Even if hypothesis Ha5 is confirmed, the FDA has little effect. Participation in eWOM via SNS can be increased with ongoing communication and financial incentives from

Table 6. Mediating Effect of the Firm's Deliberate Approach on the Relationship Between CE and eWOM

Hypothesis	Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Result
Ha5	CE → FDA → eWOM	0.912***	0.748***	0.162***	$p < 0.01$, Accepted
	CE → eWOM		0.75***		$t = 5.507$, $p < .01$, Significant
	CE → FDA		0.81***		$t = 7.703$, $p < .01$, Significant
	FDA → eWOM		0.20*		$t = 1.693$, $p < .10$, Significant at a 10% level of significance.

Note. * Significant at 10% level of significance, *** Significant at 1% level.



operators (Wang et al., 2016). A significant positive impact of the gamification experience is observed in customer engagement for millennials (Srivastava & Fernandes, 2022). The game element is positively associated with air passengers' loyalty and mediated by the psychological aspect of the passengers (Singh, 2022).

Discussion of the Findings

Social media has revolutionized how firm-related content can be produced, distributed, and consumed (Ángeles Oviedo-García et al., 2014). In the present study, the highest contribution to CE comes from the “Dedication” component ($R^2 = 0.94$), which claims that consumers get excited about using the preferred brand's social media page and prefer to buy any brand on which they had previous interactions. They love to comment, review, or post about their experiences with the brand/product and feel happy after getting responses to their posts. The high contribution of the Vigour component on CE ($R^2 = 0.69$) demonstrates that the new generations try to perform well in social media by writing blogs, content, and reviews on their preferred brands. Even essential decisions, like choosing a financial product, are influenced by blogs and opinions on social media platforms (Akhtar et al., 2023). The findings of our study support the earlier development of CE, which identified behavioral intention as an essential outcome of CE. It is aligned with a very recent study by Yang et al. (2023), which illustrated the significant impact of social media advertising on CE. The absorption component shows a contribution of 60% ($R^2 = 0.60$) in CE, confirming that zoomers and millennials get attracted to any link or advertisement posted on social media. They spend substantial time on the posted brand's page. Our study has measured CE with the three components quite well, which is evident from the high values of AVE (>0.50) and CR (>0.70) for each component (Table 2).

Second, the study investigates the relationship between CE and eWOM and reveals that a high CE level significantly impacts eWOM. Table 4 shows that 81% of eWOM is influenced by CE. Earlier research confirmed

that eWOM is significantly impacted by social media marketing (Hanaysha, 2021). Higher CE spreads positive eWOM, enhances customer-to-customer communication, and builds a robust consumer-brand relationship. High social presence on Facebook fosters CE at the Cognitive, Dedication, and Absorption levels, encouraging return visits and enhancing product knowledge (Pongpaew et al., 2017). EWOM and social image influence the branding of management institutes through social media and help them gain the limelight (Shimpi, 2018).

Third, our study is unique as it compares the relationships between CE and eWOM communication in the case of millennials and zoomers, taking the generation cohort as a mediator. Our study observed that for the millennials' case, the overall impact of CE on eWOM is 75%, and for zoomers, the value is 84% (Table 5). Nevertheless, the difference is insignificant enough to conclude that both generation cohorts engage at different levels, and CE impacts eWOM differently. This finding is supported by the fact that the generation gap is an idea that is more myth than reality (Giancola, 2006). Many argue that rigorous evidence does not support the Strauss-Howe generational theory (Giancola, 2006).

In conclusion, our research aimed to evaluate the influence of firms' intentional approach as a mediator in the connection between eWOM communication and CE. Referring to Figure 5, the FDA illustrates the limited, partial mediation impact between CE and eWOM. The reason might be the absence of specific mention of strategies like gamification or other incentives. Participation in eWOM through social media can be enhanced by continued interaction and economic benefits (Wang et al., 2016), monetary incentives (Ryu & Feick, 2007; Verlegh et al., 2013), and through gamification, electronic coupons, and discounts (Al-Zyoud, 2020).

Implications

Theoretical Implications

Our empirical study is interesting as it helps to understand the customer response pattern in online social media advertising. The development of CE is still in the early stages (Romero, 2017). Despite the complete theoretical foundations developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014) and Pansari and Kumar (2017), our empirical study contributes to a comprehensive measurement of CE in social media among tech-savvy generations.

We suggest that while discussing CE, their consequences should be addressed separately. Because a low level of engagement may result in a high level of impact (Malthouse et al., 2013). For example, a like (needs less effort) for any product is a low level of engagement but results in a high level of impact on the purchase of a brand. In contrast, a critical review (high level of engagement) on a product's performance written by a customer may not be trusted by other consumers. It might not be able to affect a decision to buy. Therefore, measuring CE with specific components through empirical study adds much value to existing literature. Our study encourages the younger generation to produce high levels of eWOM on social media by validating the suggested model (Figure 2) and testing the effect of CE on eWOM empirically (Figure 4). Millennials read blogs, ask others for their thoughts, and are swayed by what others like and dislike about a company on social media (Arora et al., 2018).

In CE and eWOM, the moderating variable—millennials and zoomers—has never been employed. According to our research, there is no difference in the degree of participation or the generation of eWOM communication through social media between zoomers and millennials. Our results corroborate the previous study's findings that segmenting CESM's millennial and zoomer populations is a passing trend. In recent years, firms have collaborated, communicated, and networked with existing and potential consumers in multiple ways through social media, and social media communication is included as a hybrid component in integrated marketing communication. WOM has transformed into eWOM in social media.

Managerial Implications

Social media has been accepted as a medium to socialize and conduct business (Yadav, 2017). Customers should be engaged for longer by social media platforms and social commerce structures (Siji, 2021). Bowden (2009) indicated that customer engagement is a more dynamic process that changes at different consumption stages and needs to be studied extensively. Both academics and working managers are interested in CE, and our research helps measure CE through empirical research. According to us, the study's findings shed light on the behavior of the two most important cohorts, expected to be the largest portion shortly. Therefore, the results would be significant to practicing managers, enabling them to segment the market and envisage better marketing strategies effectively. Ideally, marketers might consider millennials and zoomers as a common segment while framing techniques to enhance CE in social media. We believe that market segmenting is challenging. Researchers and managers must coordinate for better success. Firms should build special bonds with millennials and zoomers through the concentrated allocation of resources, yielding higher economic returns and converting them into brand advocates (Potdar et al., 2018).

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

This study has a few limitations, just like any other. This study is restricted to young individuals, specifically millennials and zoomers, due to the nature of the topic. The extension of the research result raises certain questions due to the selection of a purposeful sample (non-probability sampling). Another point is that gender differences were not considered in this study; instead, it focused on the two generational cohorts. Since CE is a complicated phenomenon, information should be acquired using various techniques, including discussion, visual aids, and observation, to comprehend CE fully. Research on how gamification, financial incentives, or awards can improve CE is possible.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Shampa Nandi conceptualized the research and identified the problem. She conceived the research design and developed the instrument jointly with Dr. S. Shyam Prasad. She analyzed the data using SPSS and AMOS. She went through the first draft and edited the manuscript thoroughly. Dr. S. Shyam Prasad and Dr. Shampa Nandi did an extensive literature review and identified the problem. Dr. S. Shyam Prasad prepared the first draft of the manuscript. He also wrote the discussion, implications, and limitations part. The authors consulted each other in the preparation of the final manuscript. Jointly, Dr. Shampa and Dr. Shyam took the responsibility of overseeing the correctness and accuracy of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Appendix

Items to measure the dimensions of CE, eWOM, and FDA are given below:

Item/ Variable	Constructs	Description
<i>C4</i>	CE_Absorption	I get attracted when I see any advertisement or link shared online on a social platform.
<i>C5</i>		Time flies whenever I visit the posted brand's page online because I want to find out more.
<i>C6</i>	CE_Vigour	Normally, I find posts of brands/products/services on online social platforms very useful.
<i>P3</i>		I try my hardest to perform well on this online social platform (by writing content, blogs, comments, reviews, etc.).
<i>P4</i>		I am willing to collaborate on various online social platforms when my preferred brand/product/service posts any message in developing new products/services/features.
<i>P5</i>		I have "liked," "commented," and/or "shared" different posts on my preferred brand/product/service on online posts.
<i>P6</i>		In general, I feel motivated to actively engage with online social platform posts on my preferred brand/product/service/topic.
<i>EM2</i>	CE_Dedication	I am very enthusiastic whenever I use my preferred brand's Facebook/Amazon or online page.
<i>EM3</i>		I am very pleased to use any brand/product/service I have interacted with on an online social platform.
<i>EM4</i>		I get excited to comment, review, or post my experience with any brand/product/service on an online social platform.
<i>EM5</i>	eWOM	It is a lot of fun when I get responses on my posts/shares/comments on my brand/product/service.
<i>W1</i>		I usually provide useful information/ comments about my preferred brand/product/service on an online social platform.
<i>W2</i>		In general, I post messages on online social platforms about my preferred brand/product/service with great excitement and frequency.
<i>W3</i>		After having a good experience with my preferred brand/product/service, I mostly post my experiences on online social platforms.
<i>W5</i>		I would recommend buying my preferred brand/product/service on online social platforms.
<i>W6</i>		If I were asked, I would love to contribute with different improvement ideas for my preferred brand/product/service on online social platforms.
<i>F1</i>	FDA	In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas (review, content, recommendation/ blogging etc.) with other customers, if appreciated by the firm.
<i>F2</i>		I would have been more actively involved in online reviews/ recommendations/posts if I got paid in cash or kind.
<i>F3</i>		I feel very motivated when my content/ blog/posts receive a large number of shares/likes.

About the Authors

Dr. Shampa Nandi completed her PGDSBA at UT Austin, MBA, Ph.D. at IIT Dhanbad, and M.Sc. in Mathematics from JU. An accomplished researcher, she has won numerous best paper awards and published 25 articles in journals with ABDC and Scopus indexes. She is the ISME's Principal at the moment.

Dr. S. Shyam Prasad has published/presented 22 papers in ABDC, Scopus-indexed journals and national/international conferences. He has won three best paper awards and has twice been recognized as the "Best Researcher of the Year." He has published a book titled *Advertising Management*.