



Social Media Brand Modeling: A Predictive Study on Consumer Engagement

M.DILIP MURTHY¹, DR.A.CHIRANJEEVI²

¹MBA Student, School of Commerce and Management, Mohan Babu University.

²Associate Professor, School of Commerce and Management, Mohan Babu University.

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Abstract

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of brand-consumer interactions, necessitating sophisticated approaches to understand and predict consumer engagement. This research investigates the determinants of consumer engagement with brand communications on social media platforms, employing a predictive modeling framework that integrates behavioral, psychological, and technological factors. Drawing upon the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm and the uses and gratifications theory, this study develops a comprehensive model for predicting consumer engagement outcomes across multiple social media platforms. The predictive model achieves an accuracy of 78.3% in forecasting high-engagement content, offering practical utility for brand managers. Platform-specific variations were observed, with visual-centric platforms demonstrating stronger effects of aesthetic appeal while text-based platforms showed greater sensitivity to informational value. The research contributes to both theoretical

understanding and practical application by providing a validated predictive framework that enables brands to optimize their social media strategies for enhanced consumer engagement.

Keywords: Social media marketing, consumer engagement, brand modeling, predictive analytics, digital brand communication



Introduction

The contemporary marketing environment has witnessed an unprecedented transformation driven by the ubiquitous adoption of social media platforms. With over 4.9 billion social media users globally and approximately 467 million users in India alone, these platforms have evolved from mere communication tools into sophisticated ecosystems where brands and consumers interact in increasingly complex ways. The traditional paradigm of one-way brand communication has given way to dynamic, multi-directional engagement where consumers actively participate in brand narratives, co-create content, and influence brand perceptions through their interactions.

Consumer engagement on social media represents a multifaceted construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Unlike passive exposure to traditional advertising, social media engagement involves active consumer participation through liking, commenting, sharing, and creating user-generated content related to brands. This engagement carries significant strategic value for organizations, as engaged consumers demonstrate higher brand loyalty, increased purchase intentions, and greater propensity to serve as brand advocates within their social networks.

The challenge confronting contemporary marketers lies in understanding and predicting what drives consumer engagement in an environment characterized by information overload, fragmented attention, and rapidly evolving platform dynamics. While substantial research has examined various aspects of social media marketing, there remains a significant gap in developing comprehensive predictive models that can forecast engagement outcomes based on multiple input variables. The ability to predict engagement has profound implications for marketing resource allocation, content strategy development, and overall digital marketing effectiveness.

The Indian social media landscape presents particularly interesting dynamics for investigation. With the second-largest internet user base globally and distinctive cultural, linguistic, and demographic characteristics, India offers a unique context for examining brand engagement phenomena. The rapid penetration of smartphones, affordable data plans, and a predominantly young population has created a dynamic social media ecosystem where both global and domestic brands compete for consumer attention and engagement.

This research addresses the critical need for predictive modeling in social media brand management by developing and validating a comprehensive framework that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives with advanced analytical techniques. The study seeks to move beyond descriptive analyses of engagement patterns to construct models capable of predicting engagement outcomes, thereby providing actionable insights for marketing practitioners while advancing theoretical understanding of consumer-brand interactions in digital environments.

The structure of this paper proceeds as follows: the subsequent section presents the background of the study, reviewing relevant literature and establishing the theoretical foundations. This is followed by a detailed exposition of the conceptual framework and research methodology. The results and findings section presents both the predictive model performance and substantive insights regarding engagement determinants. The paper concludes with implications for theory and practice, along with directions for future research.



Objectives of the Research Paper

This research paper pursues several interconnected objectives designed to advance both theoretical understanding and practical application in the domain of social media brand management:

Primary Objective: To develop and validate a predictive model for consumer engagement with brand communications on social media platforms, incorporating behavioral, psychological, and technological factors as predictor variables.

Secondary Objectives:

1. To identify and empirically examine the key determinants of consumer engagement across different social media platforms, establishing the relative importance of various factors in predicting engagement outcomes.
2. To investigate the mediating role of emotional resonance in the relationship between brand communication characteristics and consumer engagement behaviors.
3. To examine platform-specific variations in engagement determinants, providing nuanced understanding of how different social media environments influence consumer-brand interactions.
4. To assess the moderating influence of demographic and psychographic variables on the relationship between brand communications and consumer engagement.

Background of the Study

The evolution of social media has fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between brands and consumers. Early conceptualizations of social media marketing focused primarily on reach and frequency metrics inherited from traditional advertising paradigms. However, as platforms matured and consumer behaviors evolved, scholars and practitioners recognized that engagement—rather than mere exposure—constitutes the meaningful outcome variable for social media brand activities.

The theoretical foundations for understanding consumer engagement on social media draw from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The uses and gratifications theory, originally developed to explain media consumption patterns, provides insights into why consumers choose to engage with brands on social media. According to this perspective, consumers actively seek content that fulfills specific needs, including information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. Brands that align their communications with these motivational drivers are more likely to generate engagement.

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm offers another valuable lens for examining social media engagement. This framework posits that environmental stimuli (brand communications) influence internal organismic states (cognitive and affective responses), which subsequently drive behavioral responses (engagement actions). Applied to social media contexts, this model suggests that the characteristics of brand content serve as stimuli that trigger psychological processes ultimately manifesting as engagement behaviors.



Research on brand personality and its congruence with consumer self-concept has also informed understanding of social media engagement. Consumers are more likely to engage with brands whose personality characteristics align with their own self-image or aspirational identity. This phenomenon appears particularly pronounced on social media, where public engagement with brands serves as a form of self-expression and identity signaling to one's social network.

Furthermore, while individual-level factors (demographics, psychographics) and content-level factors (message characteristics) have been studied extensively, there has been insufficient attention to the interaction between these levels in determining engagement outcomes. The mediating mechanisms through which brand communications translate into engagement behaviors also require further investigation.

This study addresses these gaps by developing an integrated theoretical framework that incorporates multiple perspectives, employing advanced analytical techniques capable of generating predictive models, and examining both content-level and individual-level factors along with their interactions.

Concept of the Work

The conceptual foundation of this research rests on an integrated framework that synthesizes insights from multiple theoretical traditions to explain and predict consumer engagement with brand communications on social media. This framework positions brand communications as stimuli that interact with consumer characteristics to produce engagement outcomes, with emotional and cognitive processing serving as mediating mechanisms.

Stimulus Factors: Brand Communication Characteristics

Brand communications on social media vary along multiple dimensions that influence their capacity to generate engagement. The framework identifies six primary content characteristics:

Content Authenticity refers to the perceived genuineness and transparency of brand communications. Authentic content reflects the brand's true values, acknowledges imperfections, and avoids overly promotional or manipulative messaging. In an environment of consumer skepticism toward corporate communications, authenticity serves as a differentiator that builds trust and encourages engagement.

Informational Value captures the extent to which brand communications provide useful, relevant, and accurate information to consumers. Content that helps consumers make decisions, solve problems, or acquire knowledge delivers functional value that motivates engagement, particularly in high-involvement product categories.

Entertainment Value encompasses the hedonic appeal of brand content, including humor, novelty, and aesthetic qualities. Entertaining content captures attention in crowded social media feeds and provides intrinsic enjoyment that motivates sharing and other engagement behaviors.



Interactive Features refer to elements that invite consumer participation, such as polls, questions, contests, and calls for user-generated content. Interactive content transforms passive consumption into active participation, directly driving behavioral engagement.

Visual Appeal addresses the aesthetic qualities of visual content, including image composition, color schemes, video production quality, and overall visual coherence with brand identity. Given the visual nature of most social media platforms, aesthetic appeal significantly influences engagement probability.

Emotional Resonance describes the capacity of brand content to evoke emotional responses in consumers. Content that triggers emotions—whether positive emotions such as joy and inspiration or even controlled negative emotions such as concern—generates stronger engagement than emotionally neutral content.

Organism Factors: Consumer Characteristics and Processing

Consumer characteristics moderate the relationship between brand communications and engagement outcomes. The framework incorporates several individual-level factors:

Brand Personality Congruence measures the alignment between perceived brand personality and consumer self-concept. Consumers engage more readily with brands whose personality characteristics match their own identity or aspirational self-image.

Social Media Usage Patterns capture habitual behaviors including frequency of platform use, diversity of platform engagement, and typical modes of interaction. Heavy users and those with active engagement histories demonstrate different response patterns than passive consumers.

Platform Preferences reflect consumers' platform-specific behaviors and preferences, as engagement determinants vary across different social media environments.

Demographic and Psychographic Variables including age, gender, education, income, and personality traits influence both exposure to brand content and propensity to engage.

The framework also conceptualizes cognitive and affective processing as mediating mechanisms. When exposed to brand content, consumers engage in cognitive elaboration (processing informational content) and affective responses (emotional reactions). These internal processing activities mediate the relationship between stimulus characteristics and behavioral engagement outcomes.



Response Factors: Engagement Outcomes

Consumer engagement on social media manifests across a behavioral spectrum ranging from low-effort actions to high-involvement behaviors. The framework distinguishes among:

Passive Engagement includes behaviors requiring minimal effort, such as reading brand content without taking visible action. While not directly measurable through platform metrics, passive engagement represents initial attention that may lead to subsequent behaviors.

Reactive Engagement encompasses single-click actions such as likes, reactions, and saves. These behaviors indicate positive evaluation but require minimal cognitive or temporal investment.

Interactive Engagement involves greater effort through comments, replies, and direct messages. These behaviors indicate willingness to expend time and cognitive resources on brand interaction.

Participatory Engagement represents the highest engagement level, including sharing, creating user-generated content, and participating in brand communities. These behaviors involve significant investment and carry social implications as consumers associate themselves publicly with the brand.

Model Dynamics and Predictions

The integrated framework generates several theoretical predictions. First, content characteristics will demonstrate differential effects on engagement outcomes, with authentic, emotionally resonant, and visually appealing content generating higher engagement. Second, these effects will be moderated by consumer characteristics, such that brand personality congruence amplifies the positive effects of content quality on engagement. Third, emotional resonance will mediate the relationship between other content characteristics and engagement outcomes, serving as a proximal driver of engagement behavior. Fourth, platform-specific variations will emerge, reflecting differences in platform affordances, user demographics, and normative behaviors.

The predictive modeling component of the research operationalizes these theoretical constructs into measurable variables and employs machine learning algorithms to construct models capable of forecasting engagement outcomes based on input characteristics. This approach bridges theoretical understanding with practical application, enabling evidence-based content optimization.

Objectives of the Study

Building upon the conceptual framework articulated above, this study pursues the following specific objectives:

1. **To develop reliable measurement instruments** for the key constructs in the framework, including content authenticity, informational value, entertainment value, interactive features, visual appeal, emotional resonance, and brand personality congruence, ensuring validity and reliability in the Indian context.



2. **To empirically test the hypothesized relationships** between brand communication characteristics and consumer engagement outcomes, establishing effect sizes and statistical significance for each relationship.

3. **To examine the mediating role of emotional resonance** in the relationship between brand communication characteristics and engagement behaviors, testing whether content characteristics operate through emotional mechanisms to influence engagement.

Proposed Solution

The proposed solution involves a multi-method research approach combining primary data collection, secondary data analysis, and advanced analytical techniques to develop and validate predictive models for consumer engagement.

Research Design

The study employs a mixed-methods sequential design with two primary phases. The first phase involves quantitative data collection through structured surveys and behavioral observation, enabling model development and hypothesis testing. The second phase incorporates qualitative insights through in-depth interviews with marketing practitioners to contextualize findings and assess practical applicability.

Sample and Data Collection

Primary data were collected from 847 active social media users across India's major metropolitan regions (Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad) and tier-two cities (Pune, Jaipur, Lucknow). Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure representation across age groups (18-55), gender, and socioeconomic categories. Inclusion criteria required active social media usage (minimum three platforms, daily usage) and exposure to brand content within the past week.

The survey instrument captured:

- Responses to stimulus materials (brand posts representing different content characteristics)
- Self-reported engagement behaviors and intentions
- Brand personality perceptions and self-concept measures
- Social media usage patterns and platform preferences
- Demographic and psychographic variables

Secondary data were obtained through API access and manual collection of engagement metrics from 42 consumer brands across categories including fast-moving consumer goods, consumer electronics, fashion and apparel, food and beverage, and financial services. For each brand, six months of social media content were analyzed across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, capturing post characteristics and engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, views).



Measurement Instruments

Content characteristics were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established instruments with modifications for social media contexts. Content authenticity was measured using a six-item scale based on authenticity measures from prior research, with items such as "This brand communicates honestly with consumers" and "This brand's social media posts reflect its true values." Informational value was assessed through four items capturing usefulness, relevance, accuracy, and comprehensiveness of brand content.

Entertainment value was measured using five items addressing enjoyment, fun, and hedonic appeal. Interactive features were coded objectively based on presence of participatory elements. Visual appeal was assessed through both objective coding (image quality, composition) and subjective ratings. Emotional resonance was captured through self-report measures of emotional response intensity and valence.

Brand personality congruence was measured using a discrepancy approach, calculating the difference between brand personality perceptions and ideal self-concept across Aaker's brand personality dimensions. Social media usage was measured through self-reported frequency, duration, and modes of engagement across platforms.

Engagement outcomes were measured through both self-report (intentions and stated behaviors) and behavioral observation (actual engagement with stimulus materials presented in a simulated social media environment).

Analytical Approach

The analytical strategy proceeds in several stages:

Stage 1: Measurement Validation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to validate the measurement model, assessing factor structure, reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), and validity (convergent and discriminant validity through average variance extracted and factor loading patterns).

Stage 2: Structural Equation Modeling

SEM was used to test hypothesized relationships between latent constructs, including direct effects of content characteristics on engagement, mediating effects of emotional resonance, and moderating effects of consumer characteristics.

Stage 3: Machine Learning Model Development

Predictive models were developed using machine learning algorithms including random forest, gradient boosting machines, and neural networks. These models were trained on a randomly selected 70% of the data and validated on the remaining 30%. Model performance was evaluated through accuracy, precision, recall, F1 score, and area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC-ROC).



Stage 4: Cross-Platform Comparison

Separate models were estimated for each platform, and parameter estimates were compared to identify platform-specific dynamics. Multi-group analysis in SEM and separate machine learning models enabled assessment of cross-platform generalizability.

Stage 5: Qualitative Contextualization

Semi-structured interviews with 18 marketing practitioners provided context for quantitative findings, assessed practical applicability, and identified implementation considerations.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypotheses Related to Content Characteristics

H0: Content authenticity is positively associated with consumer engagement on social media.

H1: Informational value is positively associated with consumer engagement on social media.

Hypotheses Related to Mediating Effects

H2: Emotional resonance mediates the relationship between content authenticity and consumer engagement.

H3: Emotional resonance mediates the relationship between entertainment value and consumer engagement.

Results and Findings

Sample Characteristics

The final sample comprised 847 respondents with the following characteristics: gender distribution of 52.3% male and 47.7% female; age distribution with 28.4% aged 18-24, 34.2% aged 25-34, 22.7% aged 35-44, and 14.7% aged 45-55. Educational attainment showed 72.3% with graduate or postgraduate qualifications. Platform usage revealed Instagram (89.2%), Facebook (76.8%), YouTube (91.4%), and Twitter (47.3%) as the most prevalent, with respondents using an average of 4.2 social media platforms.

Measurement Model Results

Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the hypothesized factor structure with acceptable fit indices (CFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.931, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.048). All factor loadings exceeded 0.70, and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.84 to 0.92) indicated adequate internal consistency. Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the square root of AVE for each construct exceeding its correlation with other constructs.



Hypothesis Testing Results

Structural equation modeling results provided support for most hypothesized relationships. Content authenticity demonstrated a significant positive relationship with engagement ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Informational value showed a significant but weaker effect ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$), supporting H2. Entertainment value emerged as a strong predictor ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Interactive features significantly predicted engagement ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$), supporting H4. Visual appeal demonstrated significant effects ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$), supporting H5. Emotional resonance showed the strongest direct effect on engagement ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$), supporting H6.

Mediation analyses using bootstrapping procedures (5,000 samples) revealed significant indirect effects. Emotional resonance significantly mediated the relationship between content authenticity and engagement (indirect effect = 0.14, 95% CI [0.09, 0.21]), supporting H7. Similarly, emotional resonance mediated the entertainment value-engagement relationship (indirect effect = 0.19, 95% CI [0.13, 0.26]) and the visual appeal-engagement relationship (indirect effect = 0.12, 95% CI [0.07, 0.18]), supporting H8 and H9.

Moderation analyses revealed that brand personality congruence significantly moderated the relationship between content characteristics and engagement (interaction effect $\beta = 0.16, p < 0.01$), supporting H10. Social media usage intensity also demonstrated significant moderating effects (interaction effect $\beta = 0.11, p < 0.05$), supporting H11.

Platform-Specific Findings

Multi-group analysis revealed significant platform differences. On Instagram, visual appeal showed stronger effects ($\beta = 0.41$) compared to Twitter ($\beta = 0.19$), supporting H12. Conversely, informational value showed stronger effects on Twitter ($\beta = 0.28$) compared to Instagram ($\beta = 0.14$), supporting H13. Entertainment value demonstrated the strongest effects on YouTube ($\beta = 0.44$) compared to other platforms, providing partial support for H14.

Predictive Model Performance

Machine learning models were developed using random forest and gradient boosting algorithms. The random forest model achieved 78.3% accuracy in predicting high-engagement content (defined as above-median engagement rate), with precision of 0.76, recall of 0.81, and F1 score of 0.78. The gradient boosting model achieved slightly higher accuracy (79.1%) with comparable precision and recall.

Feature importance analysis revealed emotional resonance, entertainment value, and visual appeal as the most important predictors in the random forest model, accounting for 52% of variable importance. Content authenticity and interactive features contributed substantially, while informational value showed more modest importance in the general model but higher importance in platform-specific models for Twitter.



Models incorporating both content characteristics and consumer characteristics outperformed content-only models, with accuracy improving from 71.2% to 78.3%, supporting H15. Platform-specific models demonstrated superior performance within their target platforms (accuracy ranging from 76.8% to 82.4%) compared to the general model applied across platforms (accuracy 74.2% when applied to specific platforms), supporting H16.

Qualitative Insights

Interviews with marketing practitioners provided valuable context for quantitative findings. Practitioners emphasized the importance of maintaining authenticity while achieving commercial objectives, noting challenges in balancing brand messaging with genuine communication. Several informants highlighted the increasingly sophisticated consumer ability to detect inauthentic content, reinforcing the importance of authenticity as an engagement driver.

Practitioners also noted the resource intensiveness of creating high-quality visual content and interactive features, suggesting that the predictive model could assist in prioritizing content investments. Platform-specific strategies were described as standard practice among sophisticated marketers, validating the research focus on platform differences.

Future Scope of the Study

This research establishes a foundation for several promising avenues of future investigation that can extend and deepen understanding of social media brand engagement.

Longitudinal Research Designs

The present study employed a cross-sectional design that captures associations at a single point in time. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking engagement patterns over extended periods. Longitudinal data would also enable more sophisticated causal inference regarding the directionality of relationships observed in this study.

Real-Time Predictive Systems

The predictive models developed in this study demonstrate proof-of-concept for engagement forecasting. Future research should develop real-time predictive systems that integrate with social media management platforms, enabling automated optimization of content timing, targeting, and format selection. Such systems could employ reinforcement learning approaches that continuously update predictions based on observed outcomes, improving accuracy over time.



Cross-Cultural Extensions

While this study focused on the Indian market, the framework and models require validation across different cultural contexts. Cross-cultural research would reveal the extent to which engagement determinants are universal versus culturally contingent. Factors such as collectivism-individualism, power distance, and communication styles may moderate the relationships observed in this study. Research across developed and emerging markets would provide particularly valuable comparisons.

Emerging Platform Integration

The social media landscape continues to evolve with new platforms gaining prominence. Future research should extend the framework to emerging platforms such as short-form video applications beyond those studied here. The rise of social commerce, live streaming, and augmented reality features creates new engagement contexts requiring investigation. Research should examine how platform innovations alter engagement dynamics and whether predictive models developed for established platforms transfer to new environments.

Neurological and Physiological Measurement

This study relied on self-report measures of emotional resonance. Future research could employ neurological and physiological measures (eye tracking, facial coding, electroencephalography, galvanic skin response) to capture automatic emotional responses to brand content. Such measures would provide more objective assessment of emotional processing and enable examination of nonconscious engagement drivers.

Artificial Intelligence and Content Generation

The increasing use of artificial intelligence in content creation raises questions about engagement with AI-generated versus human-generated brand content. Future research should examine whether consumers can distinguish between AI and human content, whether perceived authenticity differs, and whether engagement patterns vary. This line of research has significant practical implications as brands increasingly employ AI tools in content development.

Dark Side of Engagement

This study focused primarily on positive engagement outcomes. Future research should examine negative engagement including criticism, complaints, brand attacks, and the spread of negative word-of-mouth. Understanding predictors of negative engagement and developing models for early warning of potential brand crises would provide valuable practical applications.



Integration with Purchase and Loyalty Outcomes

While engagement represents an important intermediate outcome, its relationship to downstream commercial outcomes (purchase behavior, customer lifetime value, brand equity) requires further investigation. Future research should link social media engagement data with purchase data and loyalty metrics to establish the commercial value of engagement and identify which forms of engagement most strongly predict desirable business outcomes.

Influencer and User-Generated Content

This study focused on brand-originated content. Future research should extend the framework to examine engagement with influencer content and user-generated content related to brands. The authenticity dynamics may differ substantially when content originates from individuals rather than corporate sources, and engagement patterns may vary accordingly.

Conclusion

This research investigated the determinants of consumer engagement with brand communications on social media, developing and validating a predictive modeling framework with both theoretical and practical implications. The study makes several contributions to the understanding of social media brand management.

From a theoretical perspective, the research demonstrates the value of integrating multiple theoretical frameworks—uses and gratifications theory, the S-O-R paradigm, brand personality theory, and relationship marketing concepts—into a cohesive model of engagement. Rather than treating these perspectives as competing explanations, the integrated framework reveals their complementary insights. The confirmation that emotional resonance serves as a key mediating mechanism provides important theoretical specification of the processes through which brand communications translate into engagement behaviors.

The finding that content authenticity emerged as a significant predictor of engagement holds particular theoretical significance in an era of increasing consumer skepticism and information overload. Authenticity operates not merely as a hygiene factor but as a genuine differentiator that predicts engagement above and beyond entertainment and informational value. This finding aligns with broader theoretical arguments about the declining effectiveness of overtly promotional messaging and the growing importance of genuine brand-consumer relationships.

From a methodological standpoint, this research demonstrates the feasibility and value of applying machine learning techniques to consumer behavior prediction in marketing contexts. The predictive accuracy achieved (78.3%) indicates that engagement outcomes, while not fully deterministic, are substantially predictable from observable content and consumer characteristics. This finding supports the practical utility of predictive modeling approaches in marketing decision support.



Despite these limitations, this research advances understanding of social media brand engagement by developing a comprehensive theoretical framework, providing robust empirical evidence regarding engagement determinants, and demonstrating the practical potential of predictive modeling. As social media continues to dominate brand communication strategies, the ability to understand and predict engagement will only grow in importance. This research provides a foundation for continued investigation and practical application in this critical domain.

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