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ONLINE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A MIXED METHOD RESEARCH

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Abstract

Focusing on accommodation establishments, such as hotels, this study examines the factors that lead customers to engage in social media platforms and determines whether the importance of these factors differs according to the customers' demography. We used exploratory sequential mixed method research (MMR) design. Customer reviews on the Facebook page of a 5-star hotel in Alanya, Turkey analyzed for the qualitative part of the study. Subsequently, in the quantitative part, a questionnaire was created based on the results of the qualitative study and the relevant literature. The quantitative part employed the convenience sampling method using an online survey filled out by 602 social media users. Based on the factor analysis we identified seven customer engagement dimensions: experiential benefit; identity; appreciation; information; advocacy; recommendation; and satisfaction. The appreciation dimension was introduced to the literature as a new dimension that had not been used in previous empirical studies. One of the most striking results obtained from the study was that there were significant differences between all demographic variables (gender, marital status, education, and age) and customers' perceptions of the information dimension.

Keywords: online customer engagement, social media, demographic variables, hospitality industry

INTRODUCTION

Social media provides an ideal channel for customers to adopt, identify and interact with brands (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017) by making it easier than ever for people to share their opinions through millions of posts every day (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Built on Web 2.0 technologies that enable user participation these platforms have become active brand partners through which customers produce content beyond the classical patterns and share their information and ideas with both other customers and company itself. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012), Web 2.0 provides a way to interact, collaborate, and share information. Using the internet as a new business platform, all stakeholders—potential customers, current customers, salespeople, and marketers—can now connect, learn, plan, analyze, interact, and collaborate in business matters. If this interaction is managed successfully, a strong sense of loyalty can be established between customers and companies and the company's strategies can be effectively directed. In case of mismanagement, the same

communication system can cause brands to rapidly lose value, and thus followers. Making correct and strategic decisions in social media studies requires systematic and detailed measurement of customer interactions.

Customers often share their experiences on social media such as a dish they enjoy at a restaurant or a natural wonder they visit. Studies carried out in the field of tourism have reported that social media platforms contribute to the experiences of customers (Cuomo et al., 2021; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Li, Meng, & Zhang, 2022; Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2017).

Customer engagement is defined as a psychological process that supports customer loyalty (Bowden, 2009). Customers who engage in brand pages on social media platforms are in constant interaction with establishments. Companies can promote their products and services through active use of social media and can follow the comments and evaluations made about their brands (Kesgin & Murthy, 2019). Customer engagement has been discussed in the literature, especially regarding marketing. That notion has also begun attracting attention in the field of tourism in recent years. In addition, there are studies conducted on systematic reviews for customer engagement in hospitality and tourism (Chen, Han, Bilgihan, & Okumus, 2021; So, Li, & Kim, 2020). In 2020, a special issue titled "Customer Engagement in Hospitality and Tourism Services" was published in a leading hospitality and tourism journal (So & Li, 2020).

Despite the increasing interest in the current literature about customer engagement on social media platforms, which offer important opportunities for customer reviews about the brand, the concept has not been sufficiently examined in the field of tourism. As a result, the need for empirical research on tourism businesses has arisen (Harrigan et al., 2017). The present study examines the factors that cause customers to engage in social media platforms of accommodation establishments and seeks to determine whether these factors differ in significance based on the customer's demography. In this study, customer engagement is examined in detail using the mixed method design, and a new set of dimensions are introduced to the literature. In addition, based on the new results obtained by considering demographic variables, suggestions are made for future studies, especially for marketing managers in the sector.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Customer Engagement

The first use of the *engagement* term to describe issues including moral or legal obligation, duty bond, military conflict, and employment, for instance, dates to the 17th century

(Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). The concept of engagement, which attracts attention in many academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, and organizational behavior, has been increasingly used in the marketing literature since 2005 (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011). A literature review shows that engagement represents a multidimensional concept that includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013).

Comparatively, the concept of customer engagement continues to evolve in the marketing literature. Brands, products, organizations, and brand communities are key engagement elements stated in the literature. Although there are many marketing studies that discuss the concept of engagement, the definition, dimensions, and operationalization of customer engagement are inconsistent and complex (Cheung, Lee, & Jin, 2011).

Bowden (2009), described customer engagement as a psychological process that supports customer loyalty and primarily examined the formation and development of customer relationships. According to Brodie et al. (2011), customer engagement is a psychological state characterized by levels of intensity that occur in dynamic, repetitive processes of engagement. Customer engagement on virtual brand pages includes private interactive experiences between customers and other members of the brand or community. Customer engagement is related to contexts where customers can create value, develop a competitive strategy, collaborate in the firm's innovation process, and internalize the company (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017).

The concept of customer engagement is also mentioned as brand engagement and customer brand engagement in the literature (Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Tiensuu, 2015). Today, customers can interact directly with a brand, discuss, evaluate, and publicly establish personal connections with it without making any purchases. These capabilities that customers acquire by means of today's technology form the structure of the concept of customer brand engagement (Bijmolt et al., 2010). van Doorn et al. (2010) define brand engagement as a brand- or company-oriented behavioral manifestation that results from motivational factors beyond purchasing. Wide network elements including other current and potential customers, suppliers, the general public, and company employees are also targeted.

The notion of interactive experience underlies the concept of brand engagement. The focal point is the customer: it is the level of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interactions of customers directly with the brand or with other users of the brand on a brand's online platform (Brodie et al., 2011). Customer brand engagement is discussed in three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The *cognitive dimension* is defined as the level of

reflection and elaboration of the customer's thoughts about the brand in brand interaction. The *emotional dimension* is the customer's love for the brand and positive interaction with the brand or other customers. Finally, the *behavioral dimension* is the level of energy, effort, and time that the customer spends for a brand in customer/brand interaction (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Literature Review on Dimensions of Customer Engagement

The factors that caused customer engagement in social media platforms in recent years are discussed in a range of conceptual and empirical studies (Baldus et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2017; Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Potdar, Joshi, Harish, Baskerville, & Wongthongtham, 2018; So, King, & Sparks, 2014; So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016; VanMeter, Grisaffe, & Chonko, 2015). Dimensions of customer engagement that are most frequently discussed in the literature are as follows:

- *Identity*: Identity, from the perspective of the customer, refers to the individual's sense of belonging to a brand (So et al., 2016). Customers may identify themselves with a particular brand. They express this through the posts they share on the brand's social media page. The user group, who perceive the brand's social media community as 'us' rather than 'them', may interpret a negative critique of the brand as a personal criticism, or may perceive a praise of the brand as a personal compliment (Harrigan et al., 2017).

- *Information*: The information dimension can be expressed as the fact that brand pages inform their followers about the brand and product through the posts they share and help them to stay up to date (Baldus et al., 2015). The need for information is one of the main factors that ensures engagement in online brand communities (Karjaluoto et al., 2015). According to another definition, the information dimension is the exchange of ideas that occurs among visitors, and in this context, the gain of members of the online community who look for information. Therefore, information is a communication model that emerges from the interaction of the individual with other customers and that has a positive contribution to the individual (Kesgin & Murthy, 2019; VanMeter et al., 2015).

- *Recommendation*: Potdar et al. (2018), define recommendation as the way customers direct other users to purchase the services of the business using comments, shares, and likes that can activate the behavioral component through social media. In their study, VanMeter et al. (2015) describe recommendation as the brand user's ability to gather advice from the brand community using social media.

- *Advocacy:* Advocacy is a visitor's willingness to spread their positive thoughts and their active effort supports the brand with which they are affiliated and promotes its positive qualities (Kesgin & Murthy, 2019). If a customer shares positive posts about a brand on social media, that means they accept that they have adopted the brand and send strong signals about the value of the brand. On the other hand, the customer puts in an active effort in advocacy. For example, a customer reaches out to friends and acquaintances and recommends certain brands to them. These brand-focused orientations can significantly shape customers' ideas about the brand (Lobschat, Zinnbauer, Pallas, & Joachimsthaler, 2013).

- *Affiliation:* Kesgin and Murthy (2019), define the affiliation dimension as belonging to the brand's community or being in interaction with members of this community who share the same values. From the psychological point of view, affiliation is a person's positive feelings about other brand users and the sense of community that these feelings create among them. According to Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012), affiliation is a psychological bond based on the sense of belonging that emerges between people who interact in brand communities.

- *Benefit*: The benefit dimension is the gains resulting from being a part of a brand community that motivate them to increase their involvement in the community. The benefit dimension focuses on the individual. It is essentially a feeling of self-esteem and general happiness that community members gain by interacting with other members (Kesgin & Murthy, 2019). According to another approach, the benefit is the degree to which a community member gains utilitarian rewards, such as monetary rewards or time savings, through their participation in the community (Baldus et al., 2015). The economic benefits obtained make being a part of the brand community attractive (Karjaluato et al., 2015).

- *Experience*: Experience is the perception that remains in the mind of the customer after brand use: the customer remembers the brand through this perception. Experience is subjective because it is built on the individual's perceptions and thoughts. During the interaction with the brand that triggers the senses and arouses emotion, the customer creates the perception of experience by comparing their expectations with their experiences. The way that brand use occurs causes the resulting experience to be positive or negative. Giving feedback to user complaints arising from negative comments and behavior by responding quickly and in a timely manner has a strong impact on the customers' experience. Positive experiences make customers feel that the brand page is specially made for them and strengthen their loyalty to the brand (Potdar et al., 2018).

- *Satisfaction*: Satisfaction is that sense when a customer thinks that a decision to purchase a product or a service from a brand is correct and that the brand meets their expectations (Dwivedi, 2015). Satisfaction, which is the result of an examination in the mind of the customer over the brand experiences, is the situation in which the customer's expectations and brand performance match. Brand interaction increases customer engagement when it leads to customer satisfaction. The brand supports customer satisfaction with the positive experiences it provides through social media. (Potdar et al., 2018).

Literature review shows that studies on customer engagement are limited and that such studies have only begun to be carried out in recent years. In general, there are studies in areas such as health, banking, automotive, and tourism. The conceptual and empirical studies on customer engagement that were found are shown in Tab. 1.

Table 1 Dimensions of customer engagement

Author(s)	Method/Study Area	Customer Engagement Dimensions
Bowden (2009)	Conceptual	1. Involvement 2. Commitment
Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, (2009)	Quantitative / News Websites	1. Stimulation and Inspiration 2. Self-esteem and Civic Mindedness 3. Participation and Socializing 4. Intrinsic Enjoyment 5. Social Facilitation 6. Utilitarian 7. Temporal 8. Community
Brodie et al., (2011)	Conceptual	1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioral
Cheung et al., (2011)	Scale Development / Social media platforms (Facebook)	1. Vigor 2. Dedication 3. Absorption
Vivek et al., (2012)	Managers in Qualitative/ Marketing, cosmetics, logistics, hospitality and retail	1. Value 2. Affective Commitment 3. Loyalty 4. Trust 5. Word of Mouth 6. Brand Community Involvement
Brodie et al., (2013)	Panel with Qualitative / Academic Experts	1. Sharing 2. Learning 3. Advocating 4. Co-developing 5. Socializing
Lobschat et al., (2013)	Quantitative / Automotive brands	1. Conversation 2. Utility 3. Information 4. Identity 5 Affiliation. 6. Advocacy
So et al., (2014); So et al., (2016)	Quantitative / Tourism and hospitality sector	1. Identification 2 Absorption. 3. Attention 4. Interaction 5. Enthusiasm
Hollebeek et al., (2014)	Qualitative / Social media users	1. Cognitive processing 2. Affection 3. Activation
Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, (2015)	Quantitative / Facebook pages	1. Enjoyment 2. Enthusiasm 3. Attention 4. Absorption 5. Learning 6. Endorsing 7. Sharing
Dwivedi (2015)	Quantitative / Business students using mobile phones in India	1. Vigor 2. Dedication 3. Absorption

Table 1 (continued)

Karjaluoto et al., (2015)	Conceptual	1.Community 2. Economic Benefits 3. Enjoyment 4. Identify 5. Information
Baldus et al., (2015)	Mixed Method / Social media users	1. Brand Influence 2. Connection 3. Validation 4. Helping 5. Up-to-date information 6. Rewards (Hedonic) 7. Rewards (Utilitarian) 8. Brand passion 9. Self-expression 10 Like-minded discussion 11. Seeking assistance
Pansari & Kumar, (2017)	Conceptual	1. Direct 2. Indirect 3. Referring 4. Influencing 5. Feedback
Harrigan et al., (2017)	Quantitative / Tourism-related social media	1. Enthusiasm 2. Attention 3. Absorption 4. Interaction 5. Identification
Potdar et al., (2018)	Qualitative/ User comments of Australian banks on Facebook pages	1. Communication 2. Interaction 3. Experience 4. Satisfaction 5. Continued involvement 6. Bonding 7. Recommendation
Kumar, Rajan, Gupta, & Pozza, (2019)	Qualitative/ Service managers	1. Direct contribution 2. Indirect contribution
Kesgin & Murthy, (2019)	Qualitative/ User comments of tourism attractions in New York on Facebook pages	1.Information 2. Utility 3. Identity 4. Advocacy 5. Conversation 6. Affiliation
Yoong & Lian, (2019)	Quantitative/ Social media users who experience 4- and 5- star hotels in Malaysia	1. Surveillance 2. Social Interaction 3. Sharing of Information 4. Attraction
Rasoolimanesh, Noor, Schuberth, & Jaafar, (2019); Rasoolimanesh, Khoo-Lattimore, Noor, Jaafar, & Konar, (2021)	Quantitative / Visitors of Kinabalu National Park in Malaysia	1.Enthusiasm 2. Absorption 3. Interaction 4. Attention 5. Identification
Naumann, Bowden, & Gabbott, (2020)	Quantitative/ Service business customers	1. Affective 2. Cognitive 3. Behavior
So, Wei, & Martin (2021)	Quantitative / Hotel and airline customers	1. Identification 2. Enthusiasm 3. Attention 4. Absorption 5. Interaction

Source: Authors' own editing

The Role of Demographic Variables in Customer Engagement

Demographic variables have an important place in studies that examine social media users (Chang, Choi, Bazarova, & Löckenhoff, 2015) and consumer behavior (Kim & Kim, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et.al, 2021) in the field of marketing. Age and gender come to the forefront most frequently referred among these variables (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021; Schirmer, Ringle, Gudergan, & Feistel, 2018). However, there are few studies that discuss demographic variables in the context of online customer engagement (Yay, 2021; Gupta, 2021; Msallati, 2021; Islam & Rahman, 2017; Osei-Frimpong, 2019).

Yay (2021) examined the effect of experienscape components on the engagement in online brand communities for restaurant establishments and found that there was a significant difference between customer engagement dimensions by gender, age, and education level. Gupta (2021), in examining the effect of customer engagement in mobile travel applications on customer value, reported significant differences in engagement levels in travel mobile applications by gender, age, occupation, and time spent in the application. In another study, Msallati (2021) determined a moderating effect of generations (X, Y, Z) in the relationship between the types of advertising messages and customer engagement. Islam and Rahman (2017) found no moderating effect of gender in their study that examined the effect of online brand community features on customer engagement. Osei-Frimpong (2019) investigated the effect of consumer motivation on online social brand engagement and found that gender and age had partial moderating effects. It is seen in the abovementioned studies examining online customer engagement that age and gender factors come to the fore and are used as study variables.

METHOD AND RESULTS

The exploratory sequential mixed method research (MMR) design was used in this study. The purpose of the two-stage exploratory design is that the data obtained from the first stage, the qualitative stage, helps to develop and provide data for the second, the quantitative stage (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2017).

In the qualitative phase of the study, netnography, which is an adaptation form of ethnography, a qualitative research method, to the virtual environment, was used. This method was preferred because of the widespread use of the internet in tourism. It also simplifies data collection and allows companies to observe customers' interactions (Tavakoli &Wijesinghe, 2019). Content analysis was applied to the data collected using this method. The quantitative stage was planned based on the qualitative results in the second stage of the study. Firstly, a questionnaire was prepared for the purpose of measuring the engagement of customers in social media platforms of hospitality establishments and the reasons why they share posts on these platforms. The themes obtained from the analysis of the qualitative data and the literature review were taken as the basis for the preparation of the questionnaire.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research, the first stage of the study, was carried out based on user reviews from the corporate Facebook page of a 5-star hotel in Alanya, Turkey. At the quantitative stage of the study, social media users who interacted with the social media platforms of the accommodation establishment and engaged formed the scope of the study. The questionnaire

was prepared only in Turkish and was limited to the participants using this language. The validity and reliability of the data obtained are limited to the candid responses of the people who answered the online questionnaire.

Sample of Qualitative Study and Data Collection

In this stage of the study, visitors of the corporate Facebook page of a 5-star hotel located in Alanya, Turkey were chosen as the sample. This hotel business was chosen because of the professional management of the Facebook page, the high number of followers, interactions and customer comments, and the regular content sharing by the business.

A total of 383 customers have expressed their opinions on the social media platform of the hotel. Customer comments on the Facebook page of the hotel were collected manually by the researcher without using any software. Data were collected in September 2018. Customer comments on the social media platform of the relevant hotel after September were excluded from the scope of the study.

Reliability of the Qualitative Research

The reliability and validity model developed by Guba (1981), which includes the stages of credibility, consistency, transferability, and verifiability, was used to measure the reliability of the qualitative part of the study. Starting from this point of view, the stages related to reliability were applied in this study as follows.

- *Credibility (Internal validity)*: To increase internal validity in the study, screenshots of customer comments made on the social media platform of the hotel were used. Direct quotations from customer comments were included in the presentation of the data to increase credibility.

- *Consistency (Internal reliability)*: To increase the internal reliability of the study, the coding processes were carried out separately by two researchers at different times, the issues of consensus and disagreement were determined, and necessary corrections were made. The reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) [p = consensus / (consensus + disagreement)] was calculated and a consensus of 95% (p = 0.95) was obtained between the two researchers.

- *Transferability (External validity)*: Each stage of the data collection and analysis process was described in detail so that readers could better understand and visualize each process of the study. The current picture was shown by giving as much detailed information as possible in the results and comments section. The aim was that different readers could understand the same meaning using a clear and simple language in the writing of the study.

- *Verifiability (External reliability)*: To ensure external reliability (verifiability) in the study, all raw data (customer comments, site screenshots) obtained were kept by the researcher for the relevant persons and institutions to examine. Information about the hotel was deleted in the quotations sent so that the hotel within the scope of the study would not be understood by the readers. The personal information of the customers within the scope of the study was hidden and each customer was assigned a sequential number (C1, C2, …).

Qualitative Results

The themes in Tab. 2 were created as a result of the analysis of the data on the engagement of the customers in the social media platform of the hotel.

Table 2 Examples of themes and participants' opinions

Satisfaction (f:303)	**Service (f:112)** "Food options were great. Hotel rooms were always clean. The waiters/waitresses were welcoming. Beach bar was amazing." (C45)
	Structural Problems (f:14) "There is a lot of noise coming from the road. The hotel is very far from the airport." (C40)
	Disappointment (f:16) "I got disappointed. Bed linens and bathroom were dirty. The shower was broken. The staff speak only Turkish. The hotel does not deserve 5 stars." (C7)
	Excellence (f:51) "A great hotel, we enjoyed everything…" (C22)
	Staff (f:110) "We really liked that the staff called us by our name." (C32)
Experience (f:55)	**Positive Experience (f:51)** "We really enjoyed it with my family. We had a great time." (C4)
	Negative Experience (f:4) "Bad, very bad; I will never even go past it again…" (C250)
Advocacy (f:30)	".... Don't be fooled by the comments; most of them are smear campaigns. It is impossible to stay in such a hotel at this price. I think it was fine. Thanks for everything." (C15)
Affiliation (f:56)	"…I am very happy to have a vacation here every year." (C99)
Appreciation (f:37)	"We had a vacation that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. We thank everyone very much." (C9)
Identity (f:56)	"…I felt myself very peaceful in the comfort of home at the hotel." (C52)
Benefit (f:24)	"If you catch up with the early reservation time and book a room, you will have the chance to stay at a very affordable price." (C177)

Table 2 (continued)

Information (f:147)	"It's wonderful that the hotel is very close to the beach. While you have fun in the big pool, your children can also enjoy the small pool. There is also a restaurant, pool bar, lobby bar and stage for animation shows. The children enjoyed the mini disco built for them. Rooms are cleaned every day." (C138)
Recommendation (f:33)	**Those who recommend (f:28)** "Super, a clean hotel. We were satisfied with the service; the employees are kind. I would definitely recommend." (C27)
	Those who do not recommend (f:5) "…I do not recommend anyone to spend money on a vacation here." (C65)
Request-Suggestion (f:42)	"Animation programs were monotonous. You should include activities that appeal to young people." (C24)

f: Frequency of themes C: Customer
Source: Authors' own editing

Sample for the Quantitative Part of the Study

The convenience sampling method was used because the study included a very large population, and the definite number of the participants could not be determined. The sample in the quantitative stage of the study comprised 602 people who filled out the questionnaire form online. The electronic form of the questionnaire was shared on the social media account of the accommodation establishment where the qualitative study was conducted and on other social media channels; the customers who interacted with the accommodation establishment in question were contacted as much as possible. We contacted administrators of highly rated pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on topics covering accommodation and vacation topics. We sent a questionnaire form to the followers and members of these pages. Individual messages were sent to the followers on the LinkedIn platform and feedback was obtained.

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection Process

It was planned that the questionnaire form would be completed as an online questionnaire and applied to internet users. While preparing the items for customer engagement, the themes and sub-categories obtained from qualitative data were used, and dimensions of similar research were also considered by the authors (Calder et al., 2009; Harrigan et al., 2017; Lobschat et al., 2013; Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Potdar et al., 2018; Kesgin & Murthy, 2019; So et al., 2014). To structure the questionnaire form, an item pool containing 42 questions in total was created for the dimensions of customer engagement; the first form was prepared with a total of 46 questions by adding demographic questions. The items were prepared using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicated "completely disagree" and 5, "completely agree."

The items in the item pool were examined by a group of 20 academics and experts. After this review, some items were changed and rewritten. In addition, the number of items was reduced; 31 were selected from the pool that included 42 items. A 35-question original questionnaire form was created by adding demographic questions. A pilot study was conducted with 40 people before the actual implementation. The alpha coefficient was 0.92, which showed very high reliability. Before the survey was administered, the required information was given to the participants. It was emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers in the survey and that each answer completely would reflect personal views and beliefs. Participants were asked to complete the survey on a voluntary basis. Data were collected from December 2018 to March 2019.

Analysis of Quantitative Data and Results

The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 24 software packages. The alpha value was 0.93 based on the reliability analysis of the scale, showing that the scale was highly reliable. First, whether the data were normally distributed was checked to determine the type of tests to be performed. The skewness and kurtosis values of the data were taken as reference in the applied normal distribution test. As a result, the skewness value for the customer engagement scale was found to be -0.530 and the kurtosis value, -0.279. Since these values were regarded acceptable for normal distribution (Hair et al., 2014), then factor analysis and parametric tests—t-test and ANOVA test—were applied.

Factor Analysis Results

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied for the construct validity of the measurement tool created. It was seen in the factor analysis carried out after the Varimax rotation that items 2, 15, and 27 were not included in any dimension and that items 9, 14, 16, 26, and 28 had not gathered under the expected factors. Accordingly, 8 items stated were removed from the scale and the analysis was repeated; a structure with 7 factors was obtained (Tab. 3). The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was .892 for the online customer engagement scale, and that the rate of explaining the total variance was 87.30% for the scale. As can be seen in Tab. 3, the factor "appreciation" had not been previously found in the literature. In addition, the dimensions "benefit" and "experience" that were discussed separately in the literature were combined under a single dimension as a result of the analysis. Accordingly, this dimension was named "experiential benefit" because it expresses the items collected under the dimensions of benefit and experience. The factor loads of the scale items varied from 0.673 to 0.930.

Table 3 EFA results

	Factor Loads	Eigen value	Rate of Explaining the Variance (%)	x̄	Alpha (α)
Factor 1: Experiential Benefit		5.490	23.870	3.74	0.95
EB20. I use it* as I know that the price-quality balance of the business is very good.	0.885				
EB21. I use it not to miss the opportunities in the discount campaigns of the accommodation company.	0.883				
EB22. I use it because it offers the opportunity to go on a vacation at the most affordable price.	0.859				
EB23. I use it to share that I have had a nice holiday experience.	0.836				
EB24. I use it to share the joyful moments that I spent at the establishment during the holiday.	0.783				
EB25. I use it to convey the negative experiences that I experienced at the establishment to people.	0.776				
Factor 2: Satisfaction		3.716	16.157	4.25	0.95
S10. I use it to indicate that I am satisfied with the service quality of the accommodation establishment.	0.921				
S11. I use it to indicate that I am satisfied with the service of the staff.	0.898				
S12. I use it to indicate that I am satisfied with every aspect of the establishment.	0.895				
S13. I use it to share my dissatisfaction with the accommodation establishment.	0.856				
Factor 3: Advocacy		3.144	13.672	3.17	0.95
A4. I use it to defend the right of the accommodation establishment against those who conduct smear campaigns.	0.930				
A5. I use it to defend the right of the accommodation establishment against users who send malicious posts.	0.928				
A6. I use it to defend the right of the accommodation establishment against the comments that do not reflect the truth.	0.849				
Factor 4: Appreciation		2.643	11.493	3.60	0.92
G29. I use it to express my appreciation to the accommodation establishment that provided me with a nice holiday.	0.889				
G30. I use it to express my appreciation to the employees who took care of me during my vacation.	0.871				
G31. I use it to express my appreciation to the accommodation establishment for the quality of the service that is provided.	0.815				
Factor 5: Identity		1.911	8.307	3.41	0.92
ID17. I use it to share that I feel comfortable in the accommodation establishment as if I were at home.	0.739				
ID18. I use it to share that the establishment makes me feel a family atmosphere.	0.714				
ID19. I use it to indicate that I consider myself as part of the establishment.	0.673				
Factor 6: Recommendation		1.696	7.373	3.95	0.90
R8. I use it to recommend the establishment that provided me with a nice vacation to my friends.	0.808				
R7. I use it to recommend the good service that I receive to others	0.892				

Table 3 (continued)

Factor 7: Information		1.479	6.429	4.07	0.74
INF1. I use it to reach up-to-date information about the accommodation establishment.	0.900				
INF3. I use it to receive up-to-date information about the price and reservation.	0.722				

Alpha (α):0.93, Rate of Explaining the Total Variance: (%)87.301, KMO Value: 0.892, Bartlett's Test Values:15198.045, df:253, p=0.000   *It: social media page of accommodation establishment
Source: Authors' calculations

After performing the EFA, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the obtained factor structures. According to the CFA results in Tab. 4, all standardized regression values for the items are over 0.66. All scale items have high t values and they are statistically significant (p<0.001). To improve the fit indices, the proposed modifications were made between the items EB23-EB24, EB24-EB25, and S12-S13. After performing the modifications, results of the CFA indicated that the goodness-of-fit indices of the conceptual model (χ^2 = 870.424 df =206, χ^2/df =4.225, RMSEA = 0.073, CFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.944, IFI = 0.956,) were acceptable (Hair et al., 2014; Marsh & Hau, 1996).

Table 4 CFA results

	Standardized Regression (≥0.5)	t values	AVE (≥0.5)	CR (≥0.7)
Factor 1: Experiential Benefit			0.778	0.954
EB20	0.854	Fixed		
EB21	0.909	31.309***		
EB22	0.958	35.012***		
EB23	0.932	33.038***		
EB24	0.858	28.018***		
EB25	0.769	23.272***		
Factor 2: Satisfaction			0.820	0.948
S10	0.930	Fixed		
S11	0.986	52.698***		
S12	0.896	38.139***		
S13	0.801	28.609***		
Factor 3: Advocacy			0.887	0.959
A4	0.932	Fixed		
A5	0.995	57.517***		
A6	0.895	38.577***		
Factor 4: Appreciation			0.810	0.928
G29	0.879	Fixed		
G30	0.933	33.031***		
G31	0.888	30.382***		
Factor 5: Identity			0.820	0.932
ID17	0.930	Fixed		
ID18	0.935	41.023***		
ID19	0850	31,418***		

Table 4 (continued)

				0.816	0.898
Factor 6: Recommendation				0.816	0.898
R8	0.937	Fixed***			
R7	0.869	31.033***			
Factor 7: Information				0.618	0.760
INF1	0.662	Fixed***			
INF3	0.893	12.854***			

Indices	χ2	df	χ2/df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI
Values	870.424	206	4.225	0.073	0.956	0.944	0.956
Status	Significant	--	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Good

*** p< 0.001
Source: Authors' calculations

The CFA results were presented regarding the validity of the online customer engagement scale in Tab. 4. Average variance extracted (AVE) values should be ≥ 0.50, composite reliability (CR) values should be ≥ 0.70, and all standardized factor loads for scale items should be ≥ 0.50 to ensure convergent validity of the scale (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, Tab. 4 shows that CR values are greater than AVE values. Thus, the convergent validity of the scale was ensured.

The correlation matrix and the square root of the AVE values were also calculated to test the discriminant validity of the scale (Tab. 5). The square root of the AVE value for each latent variable should be greater than the other correlation values between the latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results in Tab. 5 show that the scale also has discriminant validity.

Table 5 Discriminant validity values

Latent Constructs	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
Factor 1	**[0.882]**						
Factor 2	0.457***	**[0.906]**					
Factor 3	0.026	-0.131**	**[0.942]**				
Factor 4	0.599***	0.287***	0.022	**[0.900]**			
Factor 5	0.780***	0.526***	0.069	0.534***	**[0.906]**		
Factor 6	0.067	0,019	0.636***	0.029	0.130**	**[0.903]**	
Factor 7	0.017	-0.166***	0.653***	-0.049	0.009	0.353***	**[0.786]**

[in bold]: The square root of the AVE value, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Source: Authors' calculations

t-Test and ANOVA Analysis

A t-test for independent samples was administered to determine whether the gender and the marital status of the participants demonstrate a statistically significant impact on the

engagement on social media platforms. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine whether there was a significant difference based on age and education levels; the analysis results are shown in Tab. 6 and Tab. 7.

Table 6 t-Test results

Demographic Characteristics		Experiential Benefit		Appreciation		Satisfaction		Advocacy	
	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Gender									
Female	306	3.72	1.20	3.63	1.16	4.23	1.10	3.12	1.52
Male	296	3.77	1.09	3.58	1.08	4.27	1.05	3.23	1.47
t-Test		t = -0,44		t = 0,52		t = -0,46		t = -0,83	
Marital status									
Married	242	3.72	1.18	3.62	1.14	4.11	1.23	3.46	1.45
Single	358	3.76	1.13	3.59	1.11	4.35	0.95	2.97	1.50
t-Test		t = -0,49		t = 0,24		**t = -2,63***		**t = 3,97***	
Demographic Characteristics		Identity		Information		Recommendation		Customer Engagement	
	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Gender									
Female	306	3.41	1.20	3.77	0.94	3.94	0.94	3.69	0.68
Male	296	3.42	1.17	3.96	0.73	3.94	0.98	3.74	0.66
t-Test		t= -0,11		**t = -2,85***		t = -0,03		t = -0,90	
Marital status									
Married	242	3.36	1.22	4.07	0.80	3.89	0.98	3.75	0.71
Single	358	3.44	1.16	3.72	0.85	3.98	0.95	3.69	0.64
t-Test		t = -0,87		**t = 5,13***		t = -1,08		t = 1,06	

Note: *Significant at the 0.05 level (p< 0.05)
Source: Authors' calculations

Tab. 6 shows that there was no significant gender-related difference in the mean scores of experiential benefit, appreciation, satisfaction, advocacy, identity, recommendation, and customer engagement (p > 0.05). However, there was a significant difference in the information dimension according to gender (p < 0.05). The men's mean information dimension score was higher than the women's score for the same dimension.

According to other results, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of experiential benefit, appreciation, identity, recommendation, and customer engagement by marital status (p > 0.05). However, a significant difference was found between the dimensions of satisfaction, advocacy, information, and marital status (p < 0.05). For married participants, the mean values of the advocacy and information dimensions were higher. On the other hand, for single participants, the mean value of the satisfaction dimension was higher.

According to the ANOVA test results in Tab. 7, there was no significant difference between the mean score of experiential benefit, appreciation, identity, and customer engagement by education level ($p > 0.05$). However, there was a significant difference between satisfaction, recommendation, advocacy and information dimensions, and educational status ($p < 0.05$). Based on the Tukey test results, for primary school graduate participants, the mean values of the satisfaction and recommendation dimensions were higher than those with associate degrees. Regarding the advocacy dimension, the mean scores of the participants with high school and associate degrees were found to be higher than those of the primary school and undergraduate graduates. The mean information dimension scores of the associate degree and high school graduates were higher than those of the undergraduate, postgraduate, and primary school graduates. There was no significant difference by age in the experiential benefit, appreciation, satisfaction, identity, recommendation, and customer engagement dimensions ($p > 0.05$). However, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of advocacy and information dimensions by age ($p < 0.05$). Based on Tukey test results, the mean advocacy dimension scores for the participants in the age group of 46 and older were higher than those of the participants in the age groups 25 and younger and between 31–35. Regarding the information dimension, the mean scores of the participants in the 36–40 and 46 and over age groups were higher than those of the participants in the 26–30 and 25 and below age groups.

Table 7 ANOVA test results

Demographic Characteristics		Experiential Benefit		Appreciation		Satisfaction		Advocacy	
	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Educational Status									
Primary school	32	3.52	1.32	3.36	1.25	4.63*	0.36	2.52*	1.47
High school	97	3.86	1.09	3.78	1.06	4.22	1.23	3.75*	1.35
Associate	74	3.62	1.28	3.66	1.22	3.92*	1.39	3.61*	1.57
Undergraduate	267	3.84	1.11	3.61	1.11	4.33	0.95	2.93*	1.48
Postgraduate	132	3.61	1.12	3.51	1.09	4.22	1.08	3.15	1.43
ANOVA		F = 1,67		F = 1,25		**F = 3,20****		**F = 8,91****	
Age									
25 years and below	214	3.73	1.15	3.60	1.13	4.38	0.87	2.89*	1.52
26-30	138	3.85	1.10	3.65	1.13	4.22	1.05	3.15	1.48
31-35	60	3.62	1.17	3.51	1.01	4.19	1.26	3.03*	1.57
36-40	68	3.61	1.31	3.51	1.26	4.23	1.30	3.48	1.49
41-45	64	3.74	1.16	3.65	1.25	4.04	1.32	3.40	1.45
46 and over	58	3.86	1.01	3.68	0.86	4.17	1.05	3.81*	1.16
ANOVA		F = 0,70		F = 0,30		F = 1,28		**F = 4,75****	

Table 7 (continued)

Demographic Characteristics		Identity		Information		Recommendation		Customer Engagement	
	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Educational Status									
Primary school	32	3.31	1.22	3.10*	0.84	4.20*	0.75	3.52	0.70
High school	97	3.47	1.21	4.08*	0.79	3.90	0.94	3.86	0.63
Associate	74	3.23	1.30	4.31*	0.70	3.67*	1.17	3.72	0.78
Undergraduate	267	3.49	1.14	3.72*	0.85	4.02	0.93	3.70	0.66
Postgraduate	132	3.35	1.19	3.92*	0.77	3.91	0.93	3.67	0.65
ANOVA		F = 0,89		**F = 16,58****		**F = 2,55****		F= 2,06	
Age									
25 years and below	214	3.40	1.18	3.67*	0.86	3.98	0.97	3.66	0.67
26-30	138	3.46	1.14	3.75*	0.89	4.02	0.82	3.73	0.63
31-35	60	3.39	1.26	4.04	0.79	3.78	1.03	3.65	0.62
36-40	68	3.32	1.28	4.14*	0.64	4.04	1.02	3.76	0.72
41-45	64	3.25	1.25	4.04	0.86	3.67	1.11	3.68	0.78
46 and over	58	3.70	1.08	4.11*	0.74	3.99	0.86	3.90	0.62
ANOVA		F= 1,06		**F= 6,47****		F= 1,79		F= 1,40	

Note: SD: Standard Deviation, * Tukey test results, **Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Authors' calculations

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examines the engagement of customers using social media platforms of accommodation establishments and also evaluated the reasons that led them to their engagement. First, a content analysis was done based on the customer reviews sent via the Facebook page of a 5-star hotel using the exploratory sequential design method; then, the scope was enlarged with quantitative research reaching a larger sample. As a result of the qualitative analysis, the reasons for customers' online engagement were classified under ten dimensions: *satisfaction; advocacy; identity; appreciation; benefit; affiliation; request-suggestion; information; experience; and recommendation*. With the quantitative study, these dimensions were tested with the online survey method to include users who follow the social media pages of the accommodation establishments. Through the quantitative study, the participants' reasons of engagement in the accommodation establishment pages were seen to have gathered under seven dimensions: experiential benefit, satisfaction, advocacy, appreciation, identity, recommendation, and information. The request-suggestion and affiliation dimensions determined in qualitative research were not factored into the quantitative research. The dimensions of benefit and experience, which emerged as two different dimensions in the content analysis, were unified under a single factor as the experiential benefit in the quantitative research. This dimension can be explained as the

benefit obtained as a result of sharing positive or negative experiences. Warning others or sharing positive experiences guides customers in their purchase decisions. In this regard, Calder et al. (2009) explained the concept of benefit and mentioned the experiential benefit and the economic benefit. When the content on a social media platform is interesting, it helps in decision-making, and when it provides people with distance from the stresses of daily life, that shows the benefits of shared experiences.

Another factor, satisfaction, emerged as the dimension with the highest values that led customers to engage in social media platforms of the accommodation establishments in both content and quantitative analyses. Participants used social media platforms extensively to share their satisfaction with accommodation establishments. The results also showed that visitors shared positive emotions more frequently. It was determined that in the information dimension, as in the satisfaction dimension, visitors used social media pages widely to obtain up-to-date information about the accommodation establishments and to inform other users based on their positive or negative experiences with the service.

The recommendation factor also had a high level of engagement on social media platforms. Potdar et al. (2018) stated in their studies in which they discussed customer brand engagement as a process, the recommendation factor is the point to be reached and had a high degree of importance in customer engagement. It was found as a result of the content analysis that the appreciation factor, which was determined by including the expressions of the participants to convey their appreciation to the establishment, had a high level of importance in customer brand engagement. Finally, it can be argued that the identity and advocacy dimensions had a moderate level of importance in the engagement of accommodation establishments on social media platforms.

Unlike in the published literature, in this study, the request-suggestion and appreciation dimensions were also determined. Other dimensions determined in this study were similar to those that were found in previous papers. Kesgin and Murthy's (2019) study in the tourism sector discusses the dimensions of information, benefit, advocacy, affiliation, and identity. In a study that Potdar et al. (2018) conducted on the banking sector, they developed a customer engagement process model that includes experience, satisfaction, affiliation, and recommendation dimensions. Lobschat et al. (2013), in their study on the automotive sector, revealed a multidimensional structure that includes the dimensions of advocacy, information, affiliation, and identity. Karjaluoto et al. (2015) carried out a study reviewing Facebook fans and Twitter followers of an international electronics company and presented a five-dimension customer engagement structure that includes information and identity dimensions.

In the present study, the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the participants and their perceptions of these dimensions were also examined after the dimensions of customer engagement in accommodation establishments had been determined. It was concluded based on that analysis that there was only a significant relationship between gender and the information dimension. Accordingly, it is possible to say that men use social media platforms of accommodation establishments more actively to obtain information about brands and to inform others. Contrary to this study, Yay (2021) found no significant difference between gender and the information dimension in a study in which the researcher examined the engagement of customers in online brand communities in restaurant establishments. There are studies that have examined the relationship between gender and consumer engagement in general, though not directly similar to the above-mentioned studies. Gupta (2021) found a significant difference between the level of engagement in travel mobile applications and gender. Accordingly, women's level of engagement in travel mobile applications was higher than that of men. Osei-Frimpong (2019) determined that gender played a partial moderator role in the effect of consumer motivation on online social brand engagement. In contrast, Islam and Rahman (2017) found that gender did not have a moderator effect on the relationship between brand community characteristics and customer engagement.

A significant difference was found between marital status and the information, satisfaction, and advocacy dimensions. In this study, the advocacy and information dimensions came to the forefront in the married participants' engagement in social media brands; however, the satisfaction dimension was more important for single participants. Contrary to that result, Yay (2021) found no significant difference between the information and satisfaction-recommendation dimension by marital status. There was a significant difference between educational status and the satisfaction, advocacy, information, and recommendation dimensions in this study. Yay (2021), found a significant difference in identity dimension by educational status.

Finally, a significant difference was found between the ages of the participants and the advocacy and information dimensions. It is seen that as age increases, the act of advocating a brand on social media increases. In the Yay (2021) study, there is a significant difference between the age of the participants and the perceptions of satisfaction-recommendation dimensions only; however, there is no significant difference between age and information and identity dimensions. Looking at the studies examining the relationship between age and online customer engagement in general, Msallati (2021) determined that generations (X, Y, Z) have

a moderator effect on the relationship between advertising messages and customer engagement. Gupta (2021) found significant differences in the level of engagement in travel mobile applications by age. Osei-Frimpong (2019) found that age has a partial moderator role in the effect of consumers' motivation on their engagement with brands on social media.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

The most important contribution of this study to the literature is that it provides an in-depth analysis of customer engagement dimensions in accommodation establishments using a mixed method approach and allows the determined dimensions to be tested concurrently using a large sample. It also reveals important results in terms of the role of demographic variables. Based on these results, the following points can be recommended to researchers in future studies and practitioners, digital marketing managers, and tourism professionals in the tourism sector:

- Significant differences were found between the information dimension and all demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, and education level) in engagement in social media brand platforms. Marketing managers can create strategies that take these variables into account in the management of online platforms, where customers intensively engage, for the purpose of being informed and informing others.

- This study showed that some dimensions differed significantly with age. Accordingly, the change in customer engagement based on generation should be investigated in new studies. Understanding customer engagement by generation will be beneficial for accommodation establishments in terms of following strategies based on age groups in their target audience.

- It will be beneficial for practitioners to create content by considering the dimensions of consumer engagement while creating the social media calendar to increase their interactions with social media.

- In the qualitative study, coding was done by considering the reviews made by the users on the social media pages. The content shared by the companies should be divided into themes in future studies, determining thereby which content type most encourages customers to engage.

- The request-recommendation dimension, which was obtained with high frequency in the content analysis that constitutes the first part of the study, and which had not been

determined in previous empirical studies in the literature, should be tested in academic studies on the subject in the future.

- Future studies are suggested to be carried out using different accommodation establishments or travel agencies. Moreover, different social media platforms with high popularity should be examined separately.

- Understanding the characteristics of different cultures is very important for the tourism sector. For this reason, it would be useful to conduct new studies that account for cultural differences in customer engagement.

The data obtained in the qualitative part of the study conducted within the scope of online customer engagement are limited to the reviews of the customers of a hotel on the Facebook platform in September 2018. However, considering the limited number of published studies on this issue, it is expected that this study will contribute to future research. In the quantitative research part of the study, seven customer engagement dimensions were determined: experiential benefit, satisfaction, advocacy, appreciation, identity, recommendation, and information. The appreciation dimension is the original contribution of this study to the literature. Future studies will be carried out in the tourism industry focusing on different regions, and customer groups of different nationalities. Furthermore, other future research directions may cover other factors relating to customer engagement on social media, such as customer loyalty, customer trust, and customer perception.

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