CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

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Purpose: The development of ICT has led to an increased interest in the domain of consumer engagement. The article entails an attempt at identifying the symptoms of and the factors influencing consumer engagement, as well as seeks to formulate a model for building Generation Z consumer engagement in the clothing industry.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted using in-depth group interviews, in accordance with the principles of grounded theory. The data collected in interviews was processed by transcription. The data coding and analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti computer software.

Findings: The article elaborates a consumer engagement model incorporating the impact of the following factors on consumer engagement: satisfaction, loyalty, trust, product quality, customer involvement and interest in the product category. The consumer engagement behaviors expressed by the interviewees were classified.

Research limitations/implications: The consumer engagement model was formulated based on qualitative data. A future quantitative study should provide quantitative verification of the relationships identified. Further research can be expanded to include other groups of respondents, varying in financial status, age.

Practical implications: The results of the study indicate the urgency of following both pathways of building consumer engagement in the practice of clothing companies. They provide clues of sources that should be utilized in consumer engagement building as well as routes to motivate consumers and modify their behavior.

Social implications: The results of the study reveal a link between consumer engagement behavior and customer needs satisfaction, as well as high product quality and brand trust. They touch upon the issues of sustainability and the need for a strategy shift in the clothing industry toward sustainable production.

Originality/value: The article elaborates a consumer engagement model serving as a basis for the building of strategies aimed at increasing consumer engagement.

Keywords: consumer engagement, consumer brand engagement, customer engagement marketing, fashion.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century, in tandem with the development of new digital technologies, has brought a dynamic advancement of the concept of consumer engagement (CE), both in science as well as in business practice (Bowden, 2009; Kumar et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Sashi, 2012; Vivek et al., 2012). Marketers gained new online tools and means of interacting with consumers, which changed the roles of buyers and sellers (Acharya, 2021).

The new means enabled consumers to participate in value creation by interacting not only with sellers, but with other customers and stakeholders (Malhan et al., 2021). Consumers have become active co-creators, contributing to the fulfillment of companies' marketing functions, e.g., recommending a given company and its products to other customers, co-creating new products and content along with the company, and supporting other customers in using the company's products (Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020).

Consumer engagement, and transfer of control over part of the marketing function to consumers, brings positive results for organizations, by improving company performance: either directly (e.g., by increased sales, lowered costs of new customer acquisition) (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020) or indirectly (e.g., by improving the company's reputation, customer satisfaction and loyalty) (Hao, 2020; Chandni, Rahman, 2020).

One potential area of application of the consumer engagement concept is the clothing industry, particularly the apparel brands targeting younger consumer groups, i.e., customers who interact with new technologies on a daily basis.

The article aims to examine Generation Z consumer engagement with apparel brands, more specifically:
1. To classify consumer engagement behaviors.
2. To identify the factors affecting customer engagement behavior (CEB).
3. To identify the direct motives driving consumer engagement.
4. To formulate a model of clothing industry consumer engagement.

2. Consumer engagement - literature overview

2.1. The concept of consumer engagement

The literature lacks a single universally accepted concept of consumer engagement (Hao, 2020). The topic of engagement has been addressed by various academic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, political science and organizational behavior, leading to

a diversity of conceptual approaches emphasizing different aspects of engagement (Kumar, Pansari, 2016).

The literature on marketing also fails to provide a unified take on the issue of engagement, while the emerging theory of consumer engagement keeps evolving based on various theories and paradigms, including:

1. Relationship marketing and the service-dominant logic approach (e.g., Acharya, 2021; Hollebeek et al., 2023).
2. The Social Exchange Theory (e.g., Beckers et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2019).
3. The concept of customer value co-creation and the Value Cocreation Theory (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014).
4. The Social Identity Theory (e.g., Harrigan et al., 2018; So et al., 2016) and the Regulatory Engagement Theory (RET) (e.g., Higgins, Scholer, 2009).
5. Theories interpreting the use of and engagement with new media, e.g., the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT), and Technology Acceptance Models (e.g., Florenthal, 2019; Pawlak, 2022).

Engagement refers to processes consisting of interactions between and/or experiences shared by the primary subject (e.g., the customer) and the object (e.g., the brand, product or organization) of engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2021; Dessart et al., 2015; Harmeling et al., 2017).

Many authors address engagement within the context of customer engagement (e.g., Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2010), consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015), brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011; Gambetti et al., 2012) customer engagement behaviors (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

The advancement of digital technologies has prompted a great deal of research to address the online environment: customer engagement via social media, brand community engagement or customer engagement via mobile apps (Storbacka et al., 2016; Barari et al., 2021). The object of research has broadened as well - instead of customer-company/brand interactions, extended relationships (actor engagement) are studied, along with the entire network of related actors (company stakeholders): current and future customers, employees, contractors, the general public (Storbacka et al., 2016; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Chen et al., 2021).

Table 1.

Selected definitions of consumer engagement

Author	Definition
Higgins, Scholer, 2009	Engagement is a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something - sustained attention.
Van Doorn et al., 2010	Customer engagement behavior (CEB) - customers' behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. CEBs include a vast array of behaviors including word-of-mouth (WOM) activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews, and even engaging in legal action. The behavioral manifestations, other than purchases, can be both positive (i.e., posting a positive brand message on a blog) and negative (i.e., organizing public actions against a firm).
Kumar et al., 2010	Customer engagement value (CEV) - customers provide value to the firm through their (a) own transactions (CLV), (b) behavior of referring prospects (CRV), (c) encouragement on other customers and individuals to make (or not make) initial or additional purchases (CIV), and (d) feedback to the firm on ideas for innovation/improvements (CKV). These four dimensions (purchasing, referral, influencer, knowledge) together constitute a costumer's engagement value.
Brodie et al., 2011	Customer engagement - a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships.
Hollebeek, 2011	Customer brand engagement - the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions.
Sashi, 2012	Customer engagement is defined as turning on customers by building emotional bonds in relational exchanges with them.
Vivek et al., 2012	Customer engagement is the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiates. (The individuals may be current or potential customers. CE may be manifested cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, or socially).
Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014	Customer engagement behavior – behavior, through which customers make voluntary resource contributions that have a brand or firm focus but go beyond what is fundamental to transactions, occur in interactions between the focal object and/or other actors, and result from motivational drivers.
Dessart et al., 2015	Customer engagement - psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative experiences with a focal agent/object (i.e. a brand) in a focal service relationship.
So et al., 2016	Customer engagement - a customer's personal connection to a brand, as manifested in cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses outside of the purchase situation.
Storbacka et al., 2016	Actor Engagement is conceptualized as both the disposition of actors to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context provided by a service ecosystem.
Lemon, Verhoef, 2016	Customer engagement - an element of the customer experience via specific touchpoints, including interactions with staff or social media channels.
Pansari, Kumar, 2017	Customer engagement - the mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution (direct contributions consist of customer purchases, and indirect contributions consist of incentivized referrals that the customer provides, the social media conversations customers have about the brand, and the customer feedback/suggestions to the firm).
Harmeling et al., 2017	Customer engagement - customer's voluntary resource contribution to a firm's marketing function, going beyond financial patronage.
Hollebeek et al., 2019	Customer engagement - customer's motivationally driven, volitional investment of focal operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge and skills), and operand resources (e.g., equipment) into brand interactions in service systems.
Rather, 2019	Customer engagement - the emotional bond established between consumer and brand, as a consequence of the accumulation of consumer experiences that assumes a favorable and proactive psychological state.
Thakur, 2019	Customer engagement - psychological state that leads to frequent interactions with the focal object that goes beyond the transactional motive of immediate purchase intention. The motives for interactions with the focal object may be utilitarian, to obtain information for potential purchase, or hedonic, with the objective of keeping abreast of the environment.

Cont. table 1.

Hao, 2020	Customer engagement is a multidimensional concept, depicts customers' deep psychological commitment and active behavioral involvement. It is cultivated and maintained through a long-lasting service relationship beyond the transactional motive of immediate purchase. In the service eco-system, engaged customers interact with various focal objects (e.g. online activities, specific behaviors). Customer engagement occurs within a dynamic, iterative process that customers co-create value through interactions with multiple focal agents, and thus creates a variety of engagement relationships (e.g. customer-to-brand/firm, customer-to-customer engagement, customer-to-staff engagement, customer-to-community engagement, etc.).
Bilro, Loureiro, 2020	Customer engagement - a motivational and relational state (comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects) that may occur between two agents, one being the consumer(s) and the other a brand, firm, or organization, which can operate online, offline or both.

Source: Higgins, Scholer, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Sashi, 2012; Vivek et al., 2012; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Dessart et al., 2015; So et al., 2016; Storbacka et al., 2016; Lemon, Verhoef, 2016; Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Rather et al., 2019; Thakur, 2019; Hao, 2020; Bilro, Loureiro, 2020.

Marketing literature defines the concept of consumer engagement somewhat ambiguously. Most authors identify consumer engagement as a mental process (state) arising from interactive, co-creative experiences of customers with an object (e.g., brand, company), taking place within a service relationship (Brodie et al., 2011; Bowden, 2009; Brodie, et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011; Rather et al., 2019; Thakur, 2019). According to some authors, consumer engagement emerges not only as a result of direct interactions of the customer with the object (brand, company), but also within the entire network of relationships: consumers, company employees and other stakeholders (Kumar, Pansari, 2016; Brodie et al., 2011). The relationship participants exert influence on each other (Hollebeek et al., 2019) and can initiate engagement relationships (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018; Beckers et al., 2017).

During interaction, customers develop individual motivational states - disposition to act, signifying willingness or tendency to engage with a brand, company or community (Hollebeek, 2011). This disposition leads to behavioral manifestations. In this perspective, engagement encompasses several dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioral (Storbacka et al., 2016).

Several authors emphasize that engagement is based on customers' voluntary contribution (investment) in their interactions with the company. Customers "invest" their resources - cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social - in interactions with the brand, the company, other customers, and the company's stakeholders (Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2023; Bilro, Loureiro, 2020). Such resources include, e.g., the customer's network capital, persuasive capital, knowledge and creative resources (Malhan et al., 2021; Harmeling et al., 2017).

More broadly, engagement constitutes a dynamic, iterative process (Brodie et al., 2011), encompassing an entire series of customer interactions and experiences (offline and online) with the brand, the company, its customers and employees (Lemon, Verhoef, 2016; Bowden, 2009; So et al., 2016). Engagement can therefore refer to a number of phenomena, different stages of customer decision-making, attitude formation, knowledge acquisition, and engagement behavior. Given this perspective, different stages of the engagement process can be considered: passive and active engagement (Ng et al., 2020).

The literature also provides a purely behavioral definition of engagement, identifying it as the customers' behavioral manifestation towards a brand or company, extending beyond purchase, driven by motivational factors (Verhoef et al., 2010; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Consumer engagement, in this perspective, encompasses a wide range of behaviors, such as: positive word-of-mouth (WOM) about a company and its product/s, assisting other customers, blogging, sharing recommendations or posting reviews, and even pursuing legal action. These activities entail value creation for the company (Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020).

In defining customer engagement, authors capture the dimensions, direction (value) and intensity of engagement variously (Hao, 2020).

The literature features one-dimensional and multidimensional approaches to the concept of consumer engagement (Hao, 2020). Some authors define engagement in behavioral terms exclusively (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Kumar et al., 2010; Harmeling et al., 2017). The advantage of this approach lies in the ease of measurement - only such consumer behaviors as customer reviews, information exchanges with other customers, customer complaints and suggestions are measured (Ng et al., 2020). Few researchers focus on the emotional dimension (Ng et al., 2020).

Most research on consumer engagement involves the multidimensional perspective (Chandni, Rahman, 2020; Bilro, Loureiro, 2020; Gambetti et al., 2012; Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2018; Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018; So et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2021; Lim, Rasul, 2022), covering two or more dimensions from among: the cognitive, behavioral, emotional and social dimensions.

The behavioral dimension encompasses beyond-purchase customer behavior, which is driven by motivational factors (Dessart et al., 2015), focused on the brand or company, and relies on customer input (his/her time, effort, knowledge) when interacting with the company, brand, other customers (Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Hao, 2020; Kumar, Pansari, 2016). Consumer engagement behavior entails a wide range of behaviors:

1. Sharing resources with the company - the customer shares his/her resources (knowledge, energy, time) with the company, through, e.g., suggestions, feedback, complaints, in order to improve the company's marketing functions. Customers can provide information regarding improvements to existing products and participate in the development of a new product.

2. Sharing resources with other parties - customers share their knowledge, experience, energy, time, emotions and privileges with other parties (e.g., other customers). Customers provide information, advice, technical assistance, participate in discussions, develop content of interest to the community.

3. Direct influence - customers influence other actors' attitudes or behaviors toward the company by sharing tips, recommending or discouraging product purchases, influencing others' perceptions of the company (Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Shin 2022; Barari et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014).

A different stance is presented by authors (Kumar et al., 2010) who focus on measuring the value of consumer engagement for the company, taking both the customer purchasing behavior and the impact of the said non-transactional behavior into account. These authors also factor in the dependencies linking various elements (e.g., product recommendations to other customers may also increase the recommending person's purchases).

When defining consumer engagement in multidimensional perspective, the following dimensions are additionally factored in:

1. Cognitive dimension - it is a state of individual concentration on and/or absorption with the brand (Higgins, Scholer, 2009; Dessart et al., 2015), referring to the consumer's level of processing and elaborating brand-related thoughts (Hao, 2020). According to Hollebeek et al. (2023), it entails consumers' cognitive investment in interacting with a brand.

2. Affective/emotional dimension - the sum and level of the emotions experienced by the consumer when interacting with the brand (Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020). The emotional dimension can be represented by the level of inspiration and customer pride associated with brand consumption, or brand loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2023; Bilro, Loureiro, 2020). It entails consumers' emotional investment in interacting with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2023).

3. Social dimension - less often studied, usually when engagement is discussed more broadly in relation not only to customers, but to all actors within the brand interaction network (actor engagement) (Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020). The social dimension can be viewed as a special component of the emotional dimension of consumer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2019). It involves the creation of the customers' and other stakeholders' social interactions surrounding the brand or company, uniting all actors around the brand/company, through participation in the brand community, dialogue with other participants, co-creation, and value sharing (Gambetti et al., 2012; Vivek et al., 2012). The social dimension has been greenlighted by the new means of online communication facilitating real-time customer (actor) interactions (Gambetti et al., 2012).

The majority of researchers studying engagement focus on positive consumer engagement, whereas negative aspects are less frequently addressed in the literature (Ng et al., 2020; Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020; Barari et al., 2021; Chandni, Rahman, 2020).

Positive consumer engagement involves those activities which produce positive short-term and long-term effects (financial and non-financial) for the company. In positive engagement, customers disseminate positive information about the company, provide assistance to other customers, and provide the company with product improvement suggestions (Hollebeek et al., 2023). In some instances, however, such customer activity can produce negative effects, e.g., as a result of miscommunication among customers, misleading or useless information about the brand may be disseminated (Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010), customers may also feel overwhelmed by the communication directed to them (Florenthal, 2019).

Negative engagement can manifest itself in unfavorable customer thoughts, feelings and behaviors, as a result of dissatisfaction with the company's offer, level of service, other company activities relevant to the customer (e.g., unethical, environmentally or locally harmful activities (Ng et al., 2020). Engaged customers can negatively influence other customers, warn them away from the brand/company, and even organize boycotts against the brand or company. (So et al., 2016; Chandni, Rahman, 2020; Florenthal, 2019).

Consumer engagement can vary in intensity (different levels). At the beginning of a customer's interaction with a company/brand, levels of engagement are generally relatively low. They build up over time, under certain favorable conditions, over the course of subsequent interactions (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012). In terms of the level of engagement, two types of engagement can be distinguished: passive and active (Chen et al., 2021). Passive engagement is a less active form of engagement, in which customers passively consume content or utilize simple forms of feedback, such as "likes" or information sharing on social media (Ng et al., 2020; Florenthal, 2019). Active engagement is associated with customers' efforts to advocate for a brand or company, e.g., product review posting, product recommendations to others, comment response or collaboration with the company (Florenthal, 2019).

Consumer engagement is typically studied within the online or offline (less often both simultaneously) context (Ng et al., 2020). Research conducted within the online engagement context addresses customer interactions with the brand/company via mobile apps, social media, websites, virtual reality, augmented reality, gamification, content marketing and artificial intelligence (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2021; Malhan et al., 2021; Acharya, 2021; Lim, Rasul, 2022). Studies conducted within the offline context address customer interactions with retail sales personnel, outlets, and products (Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014). Some studies, often conceptual in nature, investigate both online and offline engagement (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2019; Harmeling et al., 2017; Brodie et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2010; Hollebeek et al., 2021).

2.2. Consumer engagement models

Table 2.
Selected models of consumer engagement

Autor	Causes	Engagement dimensions	Effects
van Doorn et al., 2010	Customer-based: -Satisfaction, -Trust/commitment -Identity -Consumption goals -Resources -Perceived costs/benefits Company-based: -Brand characteristics -Company reputation -Company size/diversification -Company information usage and processes -Industry Context-based: -Competitive factors -PEST (political, economic/environmental, social, social, technological factors)	Consumer Engagement Behavior: -valence (positive, negative CE) -form or modality (np. WOM), -scope, -nature of its impact (direct, indirect), - customer goals	Customer consequences: -Cognitive -Attitudinal -Emotional -Physical/Time -Identity Company consequences: -Financial -Reputational -Regulatory -Competitive -Employee -Product Others: -Consumer welfare -Economic surplus -Social surplus -Regulation -Cross-brand -Cross-customer
Verhoef et al., 2010	Company strategies: -CRM/ Customer intelligence -Channels - Media Moderating factors: -Customer characteristics -Company initiatives -Environment (i.e. competition, economic, climate)	Customer engagement: -Customer Interaction (i.e. Word-of-Mouth) -Co-creation -Blogging etc.	Company Value: - Customer retention -Customer lifetime Value/ customer equity - New product performance
Hollebeek, 2011	Involvement Relationship Quality (only current customers): -Trust, -Commitment, -Customer Satisfaction	Consumer Brand Engagement: Cognitive Emotional Behavioral	Relationship Quality: -Trust, -Commitment -Customer Satisfaction Customer Loyalty (as Relation Quality effect)
Vivek et al., 2012	Involvement Customer Participation	Customer Engagement	Value Trust Affective Commitment Word-of-Mouth Loyalty Brand Community Involvement
Sashi, 2012	Connection (with customers via online and offline channels), Interaction (with the company, its staff and other customers, and the community), Satisfaction, Retention, Commitment (affective and calculative commitment) Advocacy	Customer engagement	----------------

Cont. table 2.

Pansari, Kumar, 2017	Experience Satisfaction Emotion moderating variables: -Convenience (the time and effort that consumers invest in purchasing a product) -Type of Company (B2B, B2C) -Nature of Industry (Service vs. Manufacturing -Level of Involvement (Higher vs. Lower) -Brand Value (Higher vs. Lower)	Customer Engagement: Direct – Buying Indirect: Referring, Influencing, Feedback	Benefits of Customer Engagement: Tangible: -Company Performance Intangible: -Opt-in -Privacy Sharing -Relevant marketing (Customer Experience)
Islam et al., 2019	Service Quality Moderation effect - Gender	Customer Engagement	Brand Experience Repatronage Intent
Florenthal, 2019 (U&G & TAM2)	- Entertainment - Informativeness - Irritation - Credibility - Interpersonal Utility - Subjective Norm	Brand engagement on social media sites: Social Media Engagement Value, Attitude toward Brand Content, Attitude toward Engagement with a Social Media Site	Brand-driven SMEB (social media engagement behavior) - Co-creation/ Co-destruction -Positive Contribution/ Negative Contribution - Consumption - Search - Dormancy - Detachment
Ng et al., 2020	Customer-related: 1. Customer capabilities 2. Situational factors 3. Attitudinal factors (Repeat customers) -Trust -Commitment -Satisfaction Company-related (Customer support) 1. CEM initiatives -Task-based CEM -Experiential CEM 2. Social CEM	Customer engagement: 1. Multi-dimensional 2. Behavioral 3. Process 4. Disposition Manifestation: 1. Focal actor 2. Focal objects 3. Valence 4. Intensity 5. Level of interaction 6. Context (online vs offline)	Customer's perspective: 1. Satisfaction 2. Trust 3. Loyalty 4. Purchase intention 5. Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Company's perspective: 1. Customer lifetime value 2, Customer referral value 3. Customer influencer value 4. Customer knowledge value 5. Company performance
de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020	Trust Commitment Satisfaction Positive emotions Moderators (Convenience, Product Involvement, Type of Company, Product Value, Type of Industry, Type of social media)	Customer engagement	Behavioral intention Word-of-Mouth Performance

Cont. table 2.

Barari et al., 2021	Promoted pathway (Functional initiative, Experiential initiative) Organic pathway (perceived quality, perceived value) Relationship quality (Satisfaction, Trust, Commitment) Moderators (Engagement context: Online vs. Offline, Industry type: Service vs. Manufacturing Product type: Hedonistic vs. Utilitarian, Cultural context).	Customer engagement: -attitudinal engagement -behavioral engagement	Outcome: -Loyalty -Company Performance
Chen et al., 2021	1. Company-related: -Marketing communication skills and features (i.e. type of content and post, frequency of posting etc.) -Corporate strategies and policies (i.e. CRM) -Management response -Application of technology -Brand image 2. Customer-related -Customer satisfaction -Customer trust -Customer experience -Customer perceived value 3. Context-related -Information communication technology -Social media platform -New Technologies (AI and VR)	1. Manifestation a) Process -Value co-creation -Customer experience b) Behavior -Interaction -Collaboration -WOM -Online review c) Multi-dimensional -Identification, attention, enthusiasm, absorption, and interaction -Physical, cognitive, and emotional presence 2. Context -Online, -Offline	1. Company perspective -Customer relationship -Customer loyalty -Customer satisfaction -Customer trust -Corporate reputation -Sustainable development -Value co-creation 2. Customer-perspective -Customer experience -Customer innovation -Value co-creation
Acharya, 2021	Brand Familiarity	Customer Brand Engagement: -Cognitive -Affective -Activation (time and effort)	Self-identification Word-of-Mouth

Source: van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012; Sashi, 2012; Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Islam et al., 2019; Florenthal, 2019; Ng et al., 2020; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Barari et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Acharya, 2021.

Depending on the research perspective adopted, different factors shall be explored in the models explaining the process of building consumer engagement. The models commonly include categories associated with the customer, the brand or company, as well as moderating variables: economic, political, environmental, social or technological factors (Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020). Selected models explaining the formation of consumer engagement are presented in Table 2.

Customer-related factors influencing customer engagement include:

1. Customer characteristics - knowledge of the brand and product category, as well as the customer's skills, personality, socio-demographic and economic characteristics affecting his/her ability to interact, and co-create value, with the company or other customers (Ng et al., 2020). They also affect the amount of time and resources

a customer can devote to interacting with the company and other customers, and the perceived costs of engagement, e.g., fear of losing reputation or key relationships, due to negative comments, for instance (van Doorn et al., 2010).

2. Factors related to customers' attitudes toward the company/brand - i.e., customers' trust in the company/brand, their satisfaction with their interaction with the company, resulting from their assessment of the overall purchase and consumption experience, as well as customers' emotional engagement (commitment), i.e., their desire to maintain a relationship with the company (Jaakkola, Alexander, 2014; Rosado-Pinto, Loureiro, 2020).

   The factors in this group are cyclical in nature and can both influence as well as result from engagement (Hollebeek, 2011; Ng et al., 2020). This stems from the very nature of engagement as a process occurring sequentially (Brodie et al., 2013). Current customers, who have experienced e.g., trust, commitment and satisfaction during their relationship with a given object, re-interact with that object, building a relationship based on a personal connection with it (Bowden, 2009).

3. Contextual factors - these factors include the technological, economic, environmental, political-legal or competitive factors affecting consumer engagement, e.g., the development of new ICT technologies facilitating knowledge sharing among customers, or competitors' efforts to raise awareness of the poor quality of a given company's products (van Doorn et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2020).

One important group of factors influencing consumer engagement involves customer engagement marketing (CEM) efforts, which entail motivation, reinforcement and measurement of voluntary customer input into the company's marketing functions, extending beyond business transactions (purchases) (Harmeling et al., 2017). This translates into an active solicitation of customers by the company to act as marketers (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Corporate CEM (customer engagement marketing) activities can be divided into two categories:

1. Relational approach - also referred to as the organic pathway - complies with relationship marketing, and entails the creation of lasting and long-term, time-distributed interactions between the customer and the company, its personnel, products, other customers (Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Bowden, 2009). Under this approach, the company focuses on the social-emotional aspects of the customer-company relationship. It is assumed that customers will reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward the company as a result of a satisfying experience (Barari et al., 2021). The company's task is to offer, throughout the interaction, a complex experience, with multisensory, hedonistic and social benefits (van Doorn et al., 2010) in order to build emotional attachment to the company, develop a sense of psychological ownership of the brand or product in the customer, change his/her beliefs and attitudes, as well as motivate him/her to take action for the benefit of the company, the brand and other customers (Barari et al., 2021).

Organic initiatives should result in increased customer perceived value and perceived quality, leading to higher satisfaction, greater trust in and emotional connection (commitment) to the company. They culminate in affective (attitudinal) engagement, followed by behavioral engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017; Barari et al., 2021).

2. Promotional approach (promoted pathway) - involves the use of direct economic incentives to drive customer engagement activities, e.g., posting a product review (van Doorn et al., 2010). Engagement behavior entails customer effort, mental or physical, which is why customers are requited for their input in favor of the company, usually in the form of rewards, discounts, points (Kumar et al., 2010; Kumar, Pansari, 2016). Task-based engagement initiatives mainly motivate customers externally (Vivek et al., 2012; Harmeling et al., 2017), do not result in lasting customer behavior changes, and may cause customers to undermine their relationship with the company. The main advantage of the functional approach lies in its direct and immediate impact on consumer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017). This engagement, however, is contingent on the presence of economic incentives. The promoted pathway yields short-term impact, lasting only as long as the exchange of benefits between the customer and the company continues (Barari et al., 2021).

The relational and promotional approaches are intended to encourage customers to actively participate in and contribute to the company's marketing functions. According Barari et al., (2021) the two pathways can impact one another by increasing the perceived value of the relationship with the company, strengthen customer loyalty and increase company performance.

In elucidating the pathways to customer engagement, the impact of the technological solutions employed by the company should also be mentioned. New Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (e.g., mobile applications, social media, virtual customer communities, online stores, virtual and augmented reality) facilitate companies with channels to build consumer engagement along the promoted and organic pathways: they enable customers to express their thoughts, complaints, ideas, and interact with other community participants (the company and other customers), as well as provide avenues for rewarding active consumers (with points, discounts, by assigning a specific status level within a ranking system) (van Doorn et al., 2010). Digital means of communication provide a way to increase customer knowledge, through online training, social media, app or community information. Augmented reality, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, in turn, enable companies to include personalized interaction features (Barari et al., 2021).

CEM activities can produce different results, depending on the customers' perceived brand value, the company's reputation, the nature of the market (consumer and non-consumer goods) and the nature of the product (buyer engaging/non-engaging) (Pansari, Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010).

The effect of increased engagement can involve a number of factors, which can be divided into two groups: The effect of increased engagement can involve a number of factors, which can be divided into two groups: customer-perspective engagement effects and company-perspective engagement effects. Customer-perspective engagement effects entail increased customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty or purchase intent (Ng et al., 2020). Some of these categories occur in customer engagement models as antecedents to customer engagement. This is particularly true when customers have previous experience with a particular brand, company.

Company-perspective effects of engagement, in turn, are associated with increased customer value for the company (Kumar et al., 2010) and include:

1. Customer lifetime value (CLV) for the company - the present value of future profits generated by the customer over the course of his/her relationship with the company, which reflects the future customer profitability. It accounts for the total financial result of transactions with a given customer - i.e., revenues less costs - throughout his/her relationship with the company. Engagement increases customer lifetime value to the company by raising the value and recurrence of purchases and boosting incremental sales (Kumar et al., 2010).

2. Customer referral value (CRV) - engaged consumers recommend products, brands, companies to new customers. CRV is centered entirely around new customer acquisition through existing customers' activity (both online and offline), for which they are rewarded (e.g., with discounts, points). When calculating CRV, the probability of acquiring a new customer through a recommendation, the cost of that acquisition, the probability of a given person becoming the company's customer regardless of the recommendation, as well as the partial impact of multiple recommendations to the same potential customer should be taken into account (Kumar et al., 2010). CRV involves conversion of potential customers into actual clients, through a formally structured program of referrals by existing customers. The program assumes compensation for customers who recommend products; hence, CRV stems from extrinsic motivation (compensation).

3. Customer influencer value (CIV) - customers voluntarily influence other customers (potential and current), share information about the company and its products, persuade customers, help them, encourage them to buy more, minimize objections to products or the company. CIV arises from the intrinsic motivation of current customers. Companies can create environments encouraging product discussion and customer support via the Internet (e.g., in the form of a virtual community centered around the brand) (Kumar et at., 2010).

4. Customer knowledge value (CKV) - customers accumulate knowledge about the product, brand, company and other customers. Engaged customers share information on products, their needs, participate in product discussions with other clients, as well as provide companies with product/service improvement complaints and suggestions (Pansari, Kumar, 2017). The information gained from customers can help companies understand customer expectations as well as inspire new product and service improvement ideas. Customers can also participate in the conceptualization, development of new products (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Individual factors can strengthen or weaken the impact of the other elements comprising customer value (Kumar et al., 2010).

3. Study of consumer engagement in the clothing industry

3.1. Research methodology

The study was carried out in the form of in-depth group interviews, conducted from October to November 2022, at a Faculty of Management at one of Warsaw's universities. The sampling was purposive. First- and second-year students participated in the study. Fourteen interviews were conducted, with five to eight participants in each, for a total of 92 persons. The respondents were 40.2% female, 59.8% male.

Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. During the interviews, the respondents commented freely on, inter alia, their clothing purchases, clothing brands shopped for, clothing choice criteria, means and places of purchase, sources of information on fashion and favorite brands, as well as clothing brand loyalty. The entire process of clothing purchase was examined, from the information-seeking stage to the actual purchase, use of clothing and disposal of used clothing.

The study was conducted in accordance with the recommendations of the grounded theory. The research hypotheses, as well as the categories and the relationships involved, were developed and modified in the course of data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Existing theories of consumer engagement were applied at later stages of the study - not at the outset (Glinka, Czakon, 2021). The respondents' utterances were transcribed, coded and classified. Open, focused and selective coding were used (Gibbs, 2007).

The coding and data analysis process involved the use of qualitative data analysis software - Atlas.ti, which facilitated the process of coding, note-writing, test fragment and code comparison, broader category generation, as well as code-category linkage. The transcription of the data was verified by the respondents, and the coding - by a second researcher.

3.2. Research findings and discussion

The interviews provided information on the various elements involved in the process of building consumer engagement. Relationships linking the categories were identified and mapped into two types of consumer engagement: company-directed and customer-directed behavior.

The factors contributing to the respondents' engagement efforts were identified: fashion interests, perceived satisfaction resulting from the experience with the company, brand/company loyalty and trust, as well as the respondents' perceived product quality.

The relationships between the various factors and the constituent categories highlighted by the respondents are illustrated in Figure 1.

Based on the respondents' input on the various forms of engagement, a classification into passive and active engagement was established.

Passive engagement involves consumer efforts to seek information on the offer of the clothing brands they shop for. Many of the respondents' utterances concerned the sources of information used to obtain information on fashion and clothing (193 utterances). Some of the statements referred exclusively to brands which the respondents were loyal to - they declared regular purchases, or that these were their "favorite" brands (43 statements). Selected interviewee responses are presented in Table 2; Figure 2 shows the counts of the respondents' utterances regarding each source of information.
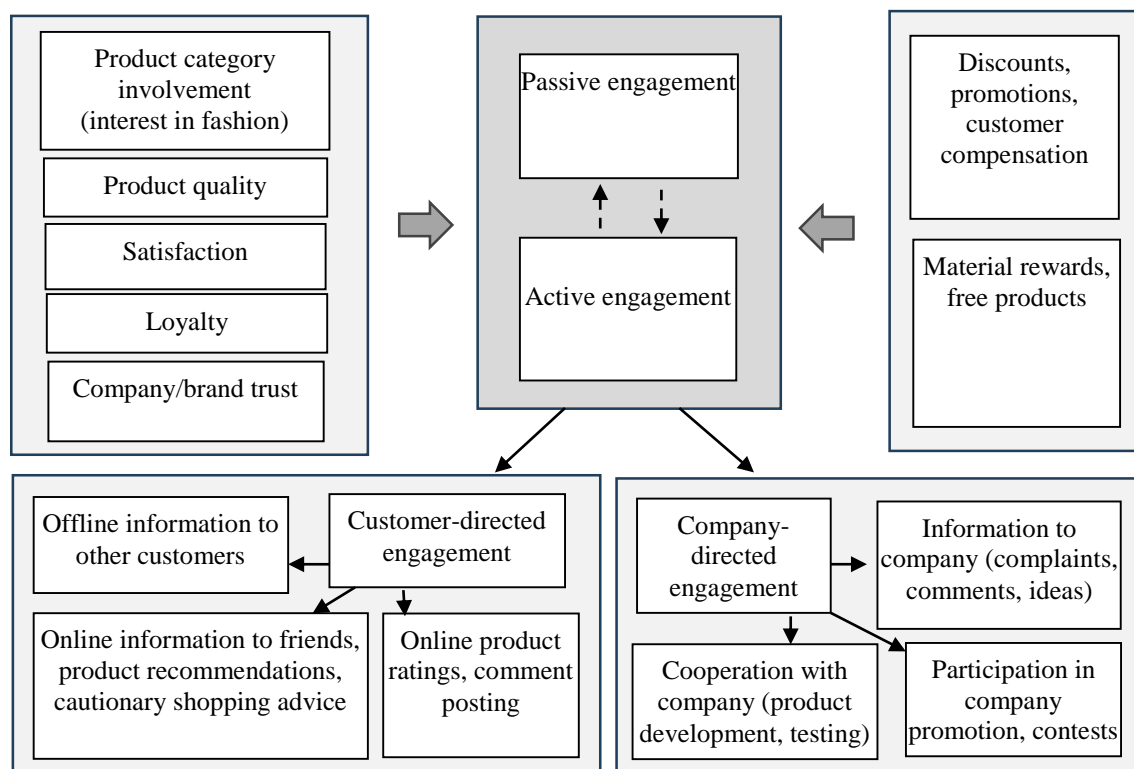

Figure 1. Model of consumer engagement in clothing industry.
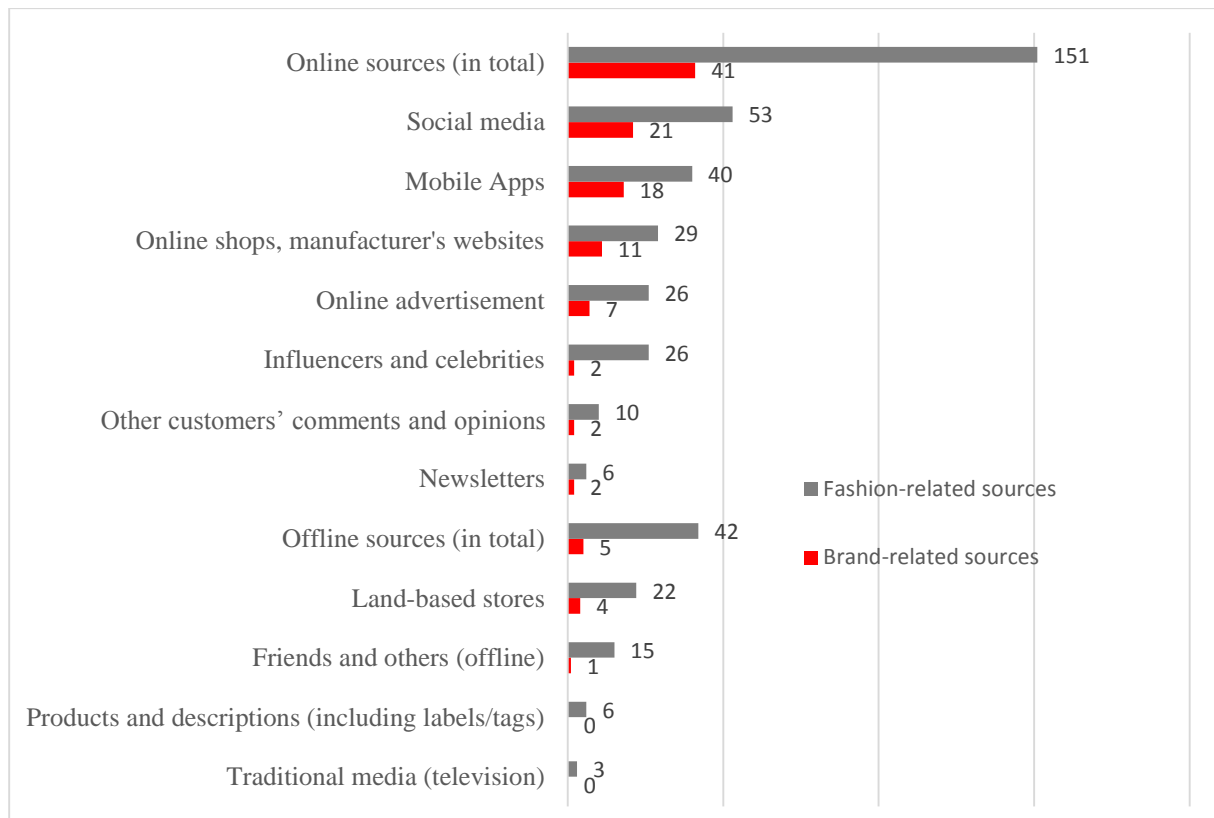
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 2. Respondents' sources of information on purchased brands and fashion.

Source: own elaboration.

The respondents' statements show that they use a variety of fashion information sources, mainly online. When they search for information about brands they are interested in, they mainly rely on several types of sources. Consumers follow brands on social media, use fashion apps, browse the online stores' offers, and are more responsive to their favorite brands' online advertising.

Table 3.
Selected respondent statements regarding sources of information

Source type	Respondent statement
Social media	Julia f1k5: "I usually [follow my brand] on Instagram. I think most young people follow different brands on Instagram, and that's where some news or information about promotions usually gets posted, e.g., Victoria Secret announced on Instagram that swimsuits are going to be sold also in Poland"
Social media	Martyna f5k1 "I keep track of Nike very often, to see whether any new collections are out. On Instagram, for instance, I like to browse through the photos of advertising campaigns"
Social media	Kinga f7k6: It's through social media that I learn about a lot of Polish brands which I had no knowledge of, but people commend them highly. As for TV commercials, I don't pay attention to them, as I don't watch TV. The only such source of information I use is social media"
Social media	Aleksandra f10k5: "As for myself, I take people's opinion and my own experience about the brand into account, and I browse Instagram. If I really like a certain item, I take inspiration from the brand right through Instagram"
Social media, internet advertising	Szymon f9m3: "In my case, this involves following various accounts of, e.g., the HM company, and checking for new additions to the assortment, but I don't pay that much attention to it. I pay more attention to it, and to Internet ads, when I need something"

Cont. table 3.

Social media, internet advertising, app, website	Wojciech f9m5: "When it comes to small-scale made clothes, I always receive information somehow, when something new comes out, it is displayed on some social networks. When it comes other brands, like I said, since I buy Nike, it is rather not news that reaches me, but once in a while I go to their website or app to see if anything new has come out"
Celebrities, friends	Adrian f2m6: "Personally, in my experience, I follow various athletes, footballers or basketball players on Instagram. It is well-known that they are closely associated with such brands as Nike, Adidas, New Balance. And this blends together, allowing me to find some great stuff. But I think we can get inspired by what our friends buy, when they buy things we like"
apps	Michał f12m1: "I have several apps just for clothing, but don't treat them as newsletters, but rather browse, or order, clothes […]. It's just that I'm often more comfortable on my phone than on my laptop or desktop computer"
apps	Dawid f11m5: "As for me, I have a habit, when it comes to my favorite brands, and when a new collection comes out, I try to check what's in it, remember some newer designs, and I try to find the items I like later, at bargain prices […]. To keep track of all these novelties, a Zalando app is enough for me, where you can simply follow a particular brand, and if any new collection comes out, you get a notification"
apps	William f4m7: "I have various apps on my phone, which send me notifications, and I get real-time information about the assortment in a given store and about special offers, so that's what I use most often. I have an app for HM, Zara, Reserved, Adidas, Pull&Bear, to name a few"
Websites, apps	Kacper f2m3: "I mostly visit websites to see the latest arrivals, and I also have apps, because apps often offer discounts, rebates, coupons"
Land-based stores, apps	Patrycja f8k5: "I draw inspiration by checking out the latest collections in land-based stores. I also follow the latest collections via apps"
Land-based stores	Tomasz f9m2: "I'm more interested in what's new, when I'm at a land-based store, or in a mall or shopping center, then I go in, look at what's new, what I could possibly buy, try on"
Internet advertising, social media, influencers	Wojciech f11m1: "I think you can learn, that is I learn, about new collections by accident. It could be an ad that pops up or a sponsored post on social media: Instagram, Facebook, or a YouTube ad; something like that, or another info posted on public figure profiles liked on Facebook or followed on Instagram, which share fashion information […]"
Internet advertising, application, company website	Jakub f9m1: "I only start paying attention to […] Internet advertising, e.g., on Facebook, when I need clothes. Sometimes I use a loyalty app, mainly because of the discounts. One such example would be the HM [app] I use. When I need something, I look for it on the website, [browse] the assortment"

Source: own elaboration.

The respondents use various sources of information, mainly to seek inspiration, information regarding new collections and financial/material benefits: promotions, discounts, sales, special offers, etc. (Figure 2).

Another major reason for this lies in the facilitation of the purchase process, which increases user convenience, saves the user time and effort involved in product information, availability and variant searching. The respondents value personalized communication, i.e., the *ease and transparency in searching for products of interest* (Przemysław f3m6), notifications, e.g., *when the product you are looking for becomes available* (Kamil f4m4), personalized online advertising, which suggests a purchase of a product when, according to Aleksandra (f1k7) "[…] *you are looking for a product, and it pops up 'on a plate*".

Information on new collections, outfit suggestions, search for fashion inspiration — 55

Financial/material benefits (promotions, discounts, sales) — 49

Purchasing facilitation (e.g., personalized notifications) — 21

Information on product quality — 14

Sustainable fashion information — 12

Figure 3. Reasons for respondents' passive involvement.

Source: own elaboration.

The respondents also mentioned they use the various sources (mainly online sources) to verify information on product quality and companies' sustainable production efforts. They verify quality via company websites, social media focus groups, and friends. The issues of corporate sustainable efforts they are interested in concern the actual products (mainly the fabrics, including recycled materials), the process and place of production, non-ethical practices or charitable activities. Information in this regard the respondents draw from both offline (land-based stores, product labeling) and online (mainly social media, company websites) sources.

More than half of the respondents reported that they actively engage with the company or other customers (62% and 57% respectively). Respondent statements on engagement, including the types thereof, are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4.

Selected respondent statements regarding their active engagement

Category/number of utterances	Total	Female	Male	Interested in fashion	Not interested in fashion	Loyal	Non-Loyal
Active CE with other customers (informs others, offline or online)	**60**	26	34	44	16	54	6
- offline informing	**34**	**16**	**18**	**25**	**9**	**31**	**3**
- online informing, including:	**23**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**9**	**21**	**2**
- private CE - sends information to friends, recommends brands to them, cautions them against purchasing)	10	7	3	10	0	9	1
- public CE - evaluates products, comments publicly	16	6	10	7	9	15	1

Cont. table 4.

Active CE, with respect to the company, including:	15	7	8	12	3	9	6
- complaints, comments, ideas submitted to the company	6	2	4	5	1	6	1
- cooperation with the company (product development, testing)	5	4	1	4	1	0	5
- participation in contests, promotions	4	1	3	3	1	3	1
- responding to negative comments from other customers and participation in boycotts	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total CE activity	75	33	42	56	19	69	12

Source: own elaboration.

Most of the respondents interact for the benefit of other customers: inform them about products, recommend or caution against purchases, provide information on promotions or new collections. The most interaction with other customers occurs offline - respondents share information on brands in conversations with friends, family. Julita (f7k1) indicates: *When I talk to my friends, I often say what works for me, or what new thing I bought that's great, and recommend they buy it for themselves also. I make such recommendations when talking to my girlfriends, but I don't tend to describe or provide an opinion on a product via a website.* Stanisław (f14m1) also declares: *I comment, rate and recommend [products]. […] But I'm far from contributing in any way online. More privately, in conversations, but online I don't comment on posts or share anything via Instagram.* Of similar concern is another respondent: *[…] I try to stay anonymous online, so I don't comment on social media on practically anything, […], maybe, among friends, I may complain about a particular company or brand* (Mateusz f11m6).

Some respondents, however, do undertake to provide online information about brands to others: they post comments and opinions or send information regarding the brand via the Internet. The information sent by customers privately is particularly valuable, because the customer holds knowledge of what his/her friends are looking for, thus the information can reach customers who are interested in purchasing. Adam (f5m4), for instance, explains: [W]hen *we see something, and it's something we don't even really like, but we know that someone close to us might be interested in it, we feel obliged to share it with them* [...].

Conversely, information posted publicly online, in the form of comments and ratings under product listings or in forums, reaches a large audience. Some respondents rate and comment on products online because they themselves rely on such sources of information, as e.g., Olga (f1k6) notes: *I express my satisfaction or dissatisfaction* [*with a product*] *on Opineo and other such websites, because I know that I too look at what others have written about the brand before I shop.* Customers should therefore be encouraged to comment on brands online, the more so given that some of the respondents are prone to share their opinions in extreme situations - when they were particularly dissatisfied or satisfied. Weronika (f7k3), for example, declares: *[…] I hardly ever give feedback, unless something is very, very good or outright nightmarish.* Whereas Mikołaj (f11m2) adds: *I avoid this type of online activity altogether, but if I was very disappointed with, for example, quality or something else, I might be tempted to leave a review. I'm more inclined to leave negative than positive feedback.* Negative comments are often

a reaction to dissatisfaction with a purchase, as exemplified by Jakub's (f13m2) statement: […] *I bought leather shoes and literally after two or three days they cracked from walking, so I returned them. And then I posted a negative opinion about the brand on the Internet* […].

From the retailer's perspective, therefore, it is essential to develop mechanisms that would encourage a larger group of customers to comment and rate products, not only through rewards, but also through development of convenient and user-friendly online means, such as apps. Kinga (f7k6) has mentioned such facilitations: […] *whenever I buy something on Zalando, I post a review after a week. I even receive an automatic email asking for feedback. So, to help other consumers in their purchase, I try to say something about the product. When I buy something online, even if it's through Zalando, I look at the reviews first.* Jakub (f9m1), in turn, speaks of in-app rewards: […] *you collect points, for which you get discounts, for awarding a star, or rating a size, i.e., whether it's too big or too small. I have happened to do that.*

The respondents much less frequently report becoming engaged with companies, e.g., by informing the company, sending complaints, or undertaking cooperation, such as clothing testing and promotion.

According to the respondents, company-directed customer engagement transpires more commonly as a result of negative shopping experiences. All those who undertook such activity did so in response to their dissatisfaction with the company. Mateusz (f5m2), for instance, affirms: *If I happen to post opinions, they are rather negative, because when my expectations are met, I just get over it. When there is something I don't like* […] *about the purchase, however, I won't miss an opportunity to write about it.*

The respondents seldom taken part in product testing and contests. Those who report such activity, received the tested products in exchange, as e.g., Magda (f14k3), who notes: *I currently participate in such cooperation.* [*You test products?*] Yes, it's something like that, among other things, and I get to keep these products. […] *The brand sends me products, I use them and sort of work for the brand externally.*

Several respondents took part in contests organized by apparel companies. They usually involved social media post sharing or coining an advertising slogan, in exchange for cash or in-kind prizes. According to Julita (f7k1): *if you shared a post, you could get a set of clothes or vouchers for PLN 500 or PLN 1000 to use in a store.* Karol (f13m3) adds: […] *you had to write some kind of a slogan and share it* [on your timeline] *with a given post on Facebook* […].

None of the interviewees reported any activity involving boycotting a selected clothing company or advocating the company online in response to negative comments. The respondents, although aware of the numerous negative comments about their favorite brands, do not act on the comments, explaining, for instance, that it is *the competition that wants to put a given store in a negative light* (Karolina f1k4), that the customers were dissatisfied because *they actually had reasons for it* (Olga f1k6), or that such popular brands not always do the right thing (Aleksandra f2k1).

Table 5.
Selected respondent statements regarding engagement with other customers

CE type	Selected respondent statements
Informs other customers offline	Julita f7k1: "[…] Reviews often come in handy when choosing products, but very often I forget and don't do it. When I talk to my friends, I often say what works for me, or what new thing I bought that's great, and recommend they buy it for themselves also. I make such recommendations when talking to my girlfriends, but I don't tend to describe or provide an opinion on a product via a website"
Informs other customers offline	Stanisław f14m1: "I comment, rate and recommend [products]. Mainly, when I see a discount on expensive shoes, obviously, I tell my closest friends, acquaintances. But I'm far from contributing in any way online. More privately, in conversations, but online I don't comment on posts or share anything via Instagram"
Informs other customers offline	Mateusz f11m6: "[...] when it comes to commenting, I try to stay anonymous online, so I don't comment on social media on practically anything. And as far as any negative emotions are concerned, I rather […] don't pass them on, I don't post any comments, maybe, among friends, I may complain about a particular company or brand"
Informs other customers offline	Weronika f7k3: "[…] I hardly ever give feedback, unless something is very, very good or outright nightmarish. Usually, however, it's a face-to-face comment, when, for example, a colleague asks me if a given product is worth buying, if I recommend it, what its quality is"
Informs other customers offline	Magda f14k3: "I have never commented on anything on social media. I'm far from it. I just don't contribute. As for recommending a brand, I don't recommend either, somehow, I don't feel such a need to advertise a brand. And in terms of speaking, the only thing I mention is promo information […] But only to those closest to me, like my mom, sister, boyfriend"
Forwards online information to friends	Adam f5m4: "It's that when we see something, and it's something we don't even really like, but we know that someone close to us might be interested in it, we feel obliged to share it with them […]"
Forwards online information to friends	Wiktoria f1k1: "I forward information to friends very often, on social media, when something new comes out, if I know they are interested in a given brand"
Comments on, evaluates products online	Olga f1k6: "I express my satisfaction or dissatisfaction [with a product] on Opineo and other such websites, because I know that I too look at what others have written about the brand before I shop"
Comments on, evaluates products online	Mikołaj f11m2: [re: commenting] "I avoid this type of online activity altogether, but if I was very disappointed with, for example, quality or something else, I might be tempted to leave a review. I'm more inclined to leave negative than positive feedback"
Comments on, evaluates products online	Jakub f13m2: "When I bought leather shoes and literally after two or three days they cracked from walking, so I returned them. And then I posted a negative opinion about the brand on the Internet, and I don't buy it anymore. Even though the brand is considered exclusive, in my opinion their prices do not reflect the quality"
Comments on, evaluates products online	Kinga f7k6: "[…] whenever I buy something on Zalando, I post a review after a week. I even receive an automatic email asking for feedback. So, to help other consumers in their purchase, I try to say something about the product. When I buy something online, even if it's through Zalando, I look at the reviews first"
Comments on and evaluates products online, informs other customers offline	Jakub f9m1: "I have an account set up on H&M and there you collect points, for which you get discounts, for awarding a star, or rating a size, i.e., whether it's too big or too small. I have happened to do that. Besides that, I mostly rate products among friends, for example, when a given store has good-quality T-shirts […]"
Complaints, informing the company	Mateusz f5m2: "If I happen to post opinions, they are rather negative, because when my expectations are met, I just get over it. When there is something I don't like about the purchase, however, I won't miss an opportunity to write about it"
Product testing	Magda f14k3: "I currently participate in such cooperation. [You test products?] Yes, it's something like that, among other things, and I get to keep these products. […] The brand sends me products, I use them and sort of work for the brand externally […] As I said, I get these clothes for free, or […] for pennies"

Cont. table 5.

Product testing	Piotr f5m5: "I happen to have received post-purchase questions [from the company] in the form of a survey. And [if] it involves a few short, closed questions, I will fill it out. But if I had to show some initiative of my own and write something more, I rather not do it"
Participation in contests	Julita f7k1: "I often participated in various contests on Instagram. […] there was [some contest] where, if you shared a post, you could get a set of clothes or vouchers for PLN 500 or PLN 1000 to use in a store"
Participation in contests	Karol f13m3: "A long time ago, I happened [to participate in a contest where] to win a sweatshirt, you had to write some kind of a slogan and share it [on your timeline] with a given post on Facebook"

Source: own elaboration.

The respondents' engagement was influenced by factors associated with customer attitudes toward the product category (interest in fashion), customer perceived product quality and brand/company attitudes (satisfaction, loyalty and trust in the brand/company).

The interwiev participants varied in the degree of interest in fashion. More than half of the respondents (63%) declared they have an interest in fashion, buy clothes regularly, and follow fashion trends. Michał (f12m1), for example, stated: *I am interested in fashion. I often check websites to see if there are new collections out and promotions. I also look at outfits, what colors dominate in a given season.*

Several respondents allocate a large part of their income to clothing and regularly make purchases, e.g., Wiktoria (f1k1): […] *I spend about a quarter [of my income on clothing], but it depends on whether I need something at a given moment or just want to buy something because I like it*, or Julia (f1k5), who admits that: *There are times when I spend a hundred percent [of my income] on clothing.*

The respondents claimed that fashion provides a way for them to adapt to or stand out from their surroundings. According to Wojciech (f9m5), […] *fashion is important because it allows one to stand out. Most of the society is at least minimally interested in fashion. Through clothing, we can improve our first impression, and by doing so, we can not only suit our own taste, but also that of others.*

Some respondents admitted to becoming more interested in fashion and fashion information only in a shopping situation. Kacper (f12m2), for example, explains: *I'm rather not interested in fashion on a daily basis. I only start getting interested when, I run out of something or need to buy new clothes. Then I do some research on how much certain things cost, what the opinions are.*

Interest in a given product category influences consumer brand engagement. The respondents interested in fashion more frequently reported engagement activities: informing other customers (online and offline), informing and interacting with the company/brand (Table 4).

Engagement is influenced by customers' perceived satisfaction resulting from the purchase and use of the purchased product. Satisfaction means that the product *meets customers' expectations* (Karolina f1k4), *worth buying* (Weronika f1k8), *consumer needs are met,*

[and customers are] *satisfied with the purchase, because the price matches the quality*, *and* [*the product*] *will last for a long time* (Martyna f5k1).

Satisfaction leads to repeat purchases, as e.g., Karolina (f1k4) notes: […] *the first purchase is most important, and if* [*the product*] *works* [*for us*], *we will keep coming back to that store*. Lack of satisfaction, in turn, can stop customers from buying a particular product. According to Adrian (f1m3): [...] *if we get disappointed* [*by a product*] *once, at least I wouldn't buy* [*it*] *again*.

Satisfaction may also prompt the respondents to recommend a given product to other customers. According to Aleksandra (f10k5): *if a product of a particular brand really works for me then I recommend it, among friends*. Szymon (f11m3), in turn, states: [...] *if I was very satisfied with a garment, then there would be a good chance that I would comment on it and rate it highly*.

There were respondents who must be particularly satisfied with their purchase to post comments online, e.g., Natalia (f10k4): When it comes to sharing my opinions on my purchases with others, I happen to sometimes actually do that. When I'm really satisfied with something. When a product does not meet the respondents' expectations, they complain to the company or share information about their experience with other consumers, e.g., Mateusz (f5m2): […] *when there is something I don't like about the purchase, however, I won't miss an opportunity to write about it*.

Another factor influencing engagement is loyalty, often understood by the respondents in a behavioral sense - as repeated purchases of the same brand or purchasing a particular brand primarily or exclusively. For instance, Mateusz (f5m2) declares: *If I showed* [*you*] *my wardrobe,* [*you'd only find*] *Nike or Tommy Hilfiger* […]. *I think those two brands locked me in, so to speak*. Another respondent asserts: *when it comes to sportswear, most of my stuff is this* [*particular brand*] (Szymon f11m3).

In Karolina's (f1k4) opinion, brand loyalty means that *we don't buy from the others, the competitors*. Of similar opinion is Michał (f12m4): *When it comes to buying clothes, I usually have a few trusted stores that I just go to and don't really pay attention to others*.

Loyalty for the respondents also means that, in a buying situation, they go for a given brand's offer first. Aleksandra (f1k7) notes: […] *it's the brand we check first*. When we're looking for something, we go to their site, and only later we check others, if we can't find anything on the brand's website. Favorite brand can serve as a benchmark when rating other brands. According to Przemysław (f3m6): *We always refer to this particular brand when shopping, I mean, if we plan to buy something, we will always compare it with our favorite brand's products*. Kamil (f4m4) adds that loyalty means buying products of a particular brand, even when *a new brand has entered [the market], which offers better prices and similar products*.

The respondents rarely describe their *favorite brand* and loyalty to it in affective terms. With reference to brand loyalty, Weronika (f1k8) explains: *I buy out of brand loyalty, when I train, I really only buy Nike, I just like it best, it works best for me. Running shoes too, all Nike; it's just that kind of attachment*. Kamil (f4m1) also mentions a bond with a brand: […] *I go to that store with my friend, and he can also feel the bond, the same bond we feel with the brand*.

The respondents who are loyal to their brand/s more commonly declared engagement with other customers, both offline and online. They are more inclined to recommend or discourage a brand to friends in conversations, send information about new collections and promotions to online friends, as well as rate and comment on brands online (Table 4).

Another factor - product quality – is assessed by the respondents primarily based on garment fabric and workmanship. When asked about quality, they provided such answers as: *I check the fabric composition, if it's 100% polyester, or if it contains better textiles in the composition* (Magda f14k3); *I look closely at the fabric, namely whether the blouses are made of cotton, not polyester and other synthetic textiles* […] *whether there arere any threads sticking out, whether it's sewn well* (Marcin f13m6).

Some of the respondents, like Karolina (f1k4), admitted that they: *[…] don't check the fabric composition, but only* […] *by touch I can tell if it's the quality is good or poor*. The respondents also regard garments which are […] *more comfortable to wear* (Jakub f13m2) as good quality clothing. They check whether *the material feels pleasant in touch, so that [they] feel better in these clothes and that the clothes wear well* (Michał f12m4).

The respondents also linked quality with the place of production. According to Bartosz (f12m3): "*It would be good to have something sewn in Poland, or in some European country, because that means better quality*." Of a similar opinion is Mateusz (f5m2): "*Most garment products are made in Asia or China. These products are unlikely to be of the highest quality, because production there focuses on minimizing the costs*."

Quality, for many of the respondents, is linked with product durability. Jakub (f13m2), for example, notes that: *It's very important how a product performs after being washed several times, whether it stretches or the color fades*. Michał (f3m3), in turn, understands quality as an aspect *of considerable significance* [*because he often buys*] *clothes to last for years, as* [*his*] *size doesn't change*.

Quality represents an important factor in product recommendations. Adrian (f1m3) notes: *If I knew that a product was qualitatively good, I would recommend it as often as possible, free of charge*. Likewise, the respondents are reluctant to recommend products and post comments when the quality is poor, even when the manufacturer rewards for recommendations. For example, Olga (f1k6) declares: *If I knew it was lousy and [...] even for a discount, I wouldn't agree for anything*.

Consumer engagement is also affected by trust in the company. Some customers only recommend companies they trust. Michał (f5m7), for instance, explains: *I, for example, rate the products of the companies that I like and value, the rest I don't, only those that are trusted to me*. Of similar view is Wiktoria (f1k1): *When trust* [*a brand*], *we recommend it to our friends, if we happen to know they are looking for something specific, we will recommend the brand we ourselves use*.

Company trust is built based on the customer's experience with the company/brand and its product range. According to the respondents: *we trust* [*the brand*] *and just know that the product will meet our expectations* (Karolina f1k4). Whereas another respondent adds: […] *I want to be sure that the product won't break after a week; if I already have experience with a particular brand, I know more or less what to expect* (Mateusz f3m4). Kinga f7k6, in turn, emphasizes: […] *I know that nothing happens with Zara clothes, that the quality is good. And I can return these clothes at any time. I kind of feel safe when it comes to shopping there*.

Trust is also influenced by customers' perceptions of prices, i.e., how high they are, in relation to quality and production costs. The level of product prices has caused much controversy. According to Wojciech (f11m1): *The one thing I often don't like is the overpricing, because when I see what kind of product I get and see how it's made, it seems to me that it could easily be sold for half the price*. In Magda's (f14k3) opinion: [*companies*] *manufacture* [*their products*] *for a pittance and sell at such a margin that it's mind-boggling; we're just wasting money*. Of similar opinion is Aleksandra (f2k1): *We are all aware of which clothing brands benefit financially. We realize* [*that*] *we are on the losing end, and they are making a huge amount of money off of us*.

Perceived price levels are correlated with the manner and place of production. The respondents tended to be aware of the social and environmental issues associated with garment production in Asian countries: worker exploitation, child labor, environmental problems. This is illustrated by Wiktoria's (f1k1) statement: *I have mixed feelings* […] *I've heard that children are used in [clothing] production, but most brands operate that way. Thus, I do think about it, on the one hand, but still buy it, on the other. So yes, I do have mixed feelings*. Stanisław (f14m1) adds: *I could talk about exploitation, but to be fair, we don't do anything about it.* [...] *It's known that it's disgusting, but we go to these stores and buy anyway*. The respondents also declared they were eager to buy clothes made in Poland, only there is no such offer. According to (f9m5): *It's good when a product is made in Poland, but I know that for the most part this is not possible*. Paweł (f12m5) is of a similar opinion: […] *it's hard to get a product sewn in Poland*.

Table 6.

Declared reasons for consumer engagement

Reasons for engagement	Total	Female	Male	Interested in fashion	Not interested in fashion	Loyal	Non-loyal	CEB undertaken	CEB not undertaken to date
Financial	**55**	**27**	**28**	**39**	**16**	**45**	**10**	**39**	**16**
In-kind rewards, free products	40	22	18	30	10	34	6	31	9
Discount, promotion, remuneration (compensation)	23	8	15	15	8	18	5	16	7
Non-financial	**33**	**22**	**11**	**28**	**5**	**27**	**6**	**23**	**10**
Quality of company relations	12	11	1	11	1	10	2	11	1
Product quality	11	7	4	8	3	8	3	7	4
Sympathy, brand loyalty	7	3	4	6	1	6	1	6	1
Other	6	4	2	5	1	5	1	3	3
Total	**92**	**46**	**46**	**68**	**24**	**73**	**19**	**66**	**26**

Source: own elaboration.

Company trust is undermined by misleading marketing communication, according to the respondents. For example, Adam (f5m4) notes that: […] *often the advertisement says there is a sale, but the product is no longer available or there are no sizes available*. Karolina f1k4 adds: *Recently, there was a promotion in Zara for dresses* […], *and when was making the purchase, a message was displayed saying that the product could not be purchased, it was out of stock.*

The respondents' utterances indicate that their trust in clothing companies is limited, which can impede companies' ability to build engagement organically.

The study also allowed two groups of reasons underlying the respondents' willingness to undertake CEB activities in the future to be identified. The distinction was made based on the statements provided regarding the CEB activities undertaken and the likelihood of such activities in the future. Two groups of factors were distinguished: financial and non-financial.

The respondents specified that compensations for their efforts in commenting on, rating and testing products, in the form of discounts and promotions for company product purchases or remuneration for their activities, are a big incentive for them. They indicated that the products alone would also be sufficient compensation for their engagement efforts. Na przykład Wojciech (f9m5), for example, asserts: *I think it could work, in the form of this kind of barter - they give me clothes, I test them, and in return, I get to keep them, and as far as money or compensation is concerned, I think no, that's how influencers work, they take money for presenting some clothing. And as influencers we are not, I think we should not demand any money for that* […].

Some of the respondents mentioned non-financial reasons behind consumer engagement. They would take up commenting or cooperation with a brand if they valued it, trusted it, liked it or thought it was of the right quality, as e.g., Martyna (f5k1) notes: *I think that if it was a brand I use on a daily basis anyway, I wear these things, then I wouldn't need any additional compensation.* Olga (f1k6) is of a similar view: *I would share information [about the brand] with my friends even free of charge, if I was sure as to the quality of these products and knew that [my friends]* would be satisfied with it; while Aleksandra (f1k7) would engage free of charge, *out of a sense of affection or brand loyalty.*

The reasons for engagement directly indicated by the respondents correspond with the two routes of building consumer engagement, present in engagement theory: the promoted pathway and the organic pathway.

4. Research conclusions and discussion

The presented model of consumer engagement in the clothing industry is consistent with the two pathways developed in the literature on engagement theory: the relational and promotional pathways (Bowden, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2012; Kumar, Pansari, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari, Kumar, 2017; Barari et al., 2021). The factors identified - product quality, satisfaction, customer loyalty and brand/company trust, customer interest in the product category - explain the formation of consumer engagement along the relational pathway.

The basis for the formation of engagement along the relational pathway is the customer's positive experience with the given apparel brand. During the experience with the brand, the customer formulates his/her assessment of the brand, evaluates the quality of a given product, experiences satisfaction or lack thereof, and subsequently develops loyalty to and trust in the brand/company. Each of these categories fosters consumer engagement with the brand. Likewise - a customer's interest in a product category translates into his/her increased interest in fashion information and apparel brands. Consumers follow brands on social media, use fashion apps and company websites, as well as participate in social media group discussions. They are more knowledgeable and able to influence other customers.

Consumer engagement built along the relational pathway entails a long-term process, based on repeated customer-satisfying experiences with the brand, loyalty and trust in the brand.

Lack of loyalty and trust can be barriers to building clothing industry consumer engagement. The respondents listed fast fashion brands, sports brands and, less frequently, exclusive brands, as the brands most commonly shopped for. The statements expressed by the respondents show that they regularly shop for certain brands, but are not attached to, do not identify with and often do not trust those brands.

This phenomenon is consistent with the cyclical view of engagement present in engagement theory (Bowden, 2009; Lemon, Verhoef, 2016; So et al., 2016). In the initial stages of a relationship with a company, a 'rational bond' (calculative commitment) forms in customers, often referred to as a commitment to continue the relationship, based on a calculation of the utility the bond between the customer and the company/brand can provide. The factors taken into account are, e.g., favorable value for money, product features. "Emotional bond" (affective commitment), in turn, is associated with customers' emotional closeness to the brand, and involves an overall or aggregate assessment of the brand, regardless of its functional attributes (Bowden, 2009).

The respondents interviewed lacked this bond and trust in clothing companies, and even questioned the value-for-money of the brands they shop for. There are factors which, as in the case of the brands purchased by Generation Z, impede the building of commitment along the relational pathway.

Under such circumstances, engagement needs to be built along the promotional pathway, through a model of financial and material engagement reinforcement. The study found that most consumers would be willing to engage with other customers or a company if they received financial or material incentives from the company, such as cheaper/free products, discounts or remuneration (compensation).

Only a fraction of the consumers interviewed experienced company incentives promoting engagement: point and discount rewards. Facilitation of customer activeness along the promotional pathway is of equal importance to rewards. Companies can remind customers to rate a given product, as well as simplify comment posting and product testing. The promoted path, however, leads to short-term effects. Accordingly, rather than individual rewards, consumers need to be offered opportunities to participate in a system reinforcing customer activity, consisting of various types of rewards, distributed over a longer period of time and including, e.g., points, experience levels, material rewards and discounts.

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