The Impact of Social CRM on Brand Image: The Intermediary Role of Engagement and Experience in FMCGs

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Abstract

In the context of the modern digital world, it is becoming increasingly difficult for food companies to maintain authentic and meaningful relationships with their customers. Social customer relationship management (CRM) is more than just a technical tool; it has become a strategic lever that makes interactions more personal, establishes emotional connections, and fosters trust. This study aims to understand how these interactions affect brand image, focusing on two main aspects: customer engagement and brand experience. This study is based on detailed interviews conducted with Moroccans who use social media and digital marketing experts. The results show that social CRM works well because the responses are quick, clear, and sincere. The participants said that it is important to communicate with care, understanding, and respect for culture. Customers are more likely to engage with a company when they feel that their opinions are taken into account and recognized. This results in deeper and more satisfying interactions with the brand. As a result, these experiences contribute to the development of more robust and coherent brand identities.
The aim of this research is to propose a simplified conceptual model for the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, characterized by the convergence of relational intensity, emotional experience, and image development. This study proves that people's perceptions of a brand are influenced not only by advertising but also by emotional resonance. That's why it is easier to understand how SCRM can enhance the human aspect of the brand in highly competitive sectors.

Keywords: Social CRM, Brand engagement, Brand image, Brand experience, FMCG.

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1. Introduction

In today's environment, where the majority of brand-customer interactions occur in the digital realm, companies engaged in the sale of fast-moving consumer goods are encountering a significant challenge. In an increasingly competitive digital landscape, it is essential for businesses to cultivate enduring relationships with their customers while maintaining a consistent brand image. Social media has evolved from a platform primarily for advertising to a medium through which individuals can share, exchange, and engage in collective experiences. This illustrates the rapidity with which these channels can influence perceptions of a brand's value. With the rapid evolution of technology, Social CRM is increasingly recognized as a vital approach for businesses to address the evolving needs of customers. Social CRM integrates social networks with customer relationship management, enabling businesses to gain a more profound understanding of their customers and engage in more meaningful dialogues with them. This enhances customer satisfaction and fosters greater loyalty. When managing customer data, it is crucial to emphasize the necessity of transcending mere collection and passive management of this information. Maintaining consistent communication with clients is essential, ensuring that every interaction is genuine and customized to their specific needs. Employing a dialogic approach in client interactions enhances the emotional bond established between you and your clients. This facilitates the company's ability to address customer inquiries and enhances the personal nature of online interactions. Numerous recent studies, including those conducted by Elshaer and Elshaer in 2023, as well as Harrigan and his team in 2021, have demonstrated that this mode of interaction fosters greater spontaneity and authenticity among individuals. This commitment goes beyond simple words; it reflects a pro- found and authentic bond. Individuals engaged in this phenomenon maintain their connection with the brand over an extended period, participate in numerous related activities, and may collaborate to enhance its significance. This connection enables customers to establish a genuine emotional bond with the business, enhancing the immersion and enjoyment of their experiences. Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory, introduced in 1990, posits that profound and immersive engagement in an activity can facilitate the attainment of a flow state. This emotional state enhances memory retention and fosters a deeper connection to the events occurring. Engaging with an event enhances memory retention due to its heightened sensory influence and more pro- found significance. The experience associated with a brand is a critical component in the development and enhancement of its overall image. The perception of a brand is shaped by its products, services, and communications as viewed by individuals. When an individual engages with a brand, it initiates a complex cognitive process. This interaction establishes a network of cognitive, emotional, and symbolic connections that influence the consumer's overall image of the brand. Iglesias et al. (2021) and Bapat and Goyal (2023) demonstrate that enhanced digital experiences significantly influence individuals' perceptions of a brand. This framework aims to examine the interplay between various components to enhance our comprehension of their impact on customer relationships. The objective was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the impact that a meticulously designed digital interaction has on individuals. A qualitative study was conducted in Morocco, involving both Moroccan consumers who utilize social media and professionals within the fast-moving consumer goods sector.

2. Literature Review

Social CRM: shifting from a technological instrument to a relational instrument

At first, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was mostly based on technology and transactions. The main goal was to collect, manage, and use customer data for segmentation and loyalty purposes. This way of doing things, which has been the norm for a long time, didn't work when connected, informed consumers started to appear who are more demanding in terms of relationships.

In this light, Social CRM has become a necessary step forward for traditional CRM by adding social media to brands' relationship strategies. Social CRM values real-time interaction, co-creation of value, and personalization of exchanges, in a spirit of reciprocity (Harrigan et al., 2021). It doesn't just allow for one-way management of data. It's not enough to just manage the customer relationship anymore; you have to keep it going through both public and private conversations.

In the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry, where decisions are made quickly and products can be switched out easily, Social CRM gives companies a chance to build emotional capital that is hard to copy by making the relationship more human, talking directly to the community, and building emotional capital. Food brands that use this kind of strategy tend to stand out not only because of the product, but also because of how well the exchange goes (Trainor et al., 2022). In this way, Social CRM becomes a powerful symbol that can change how people think about the brand and where it fits into their mental world. So, Zhou, Fang, and Xu (2025) stress that Social CRM is more than just a tool for managing customers; it has become a way to activate identities in FMCG. Islam and Rahman (2023) also point out that Social CRM makes people feel more emotionally connected and engaged with consumer goods.

2.1. Brand commitment :engagement, relevance, and cognitive awareness

Brand engagement is a state in which a person voluntarily and subjectively interacts with a brand. This interaction can be affective, cognitive, or behavioral (Hollebeek et al., 2021). Engagement is more than just loyalty or attachment; it includes active participation, psychological resonance, and a lasting mental presence that goes beyond just buying something.

Over time, engagement has become a useful qualitative measure, especially in digital spaces where community involvement (likes, comments, shares, UGC) shows how connected people are to a brand (Dessart et al., 2023). But it's not just a social metric; it also shows a personal investment that is often hidden and shows a deep connection to the brand.

Especially since engagement can't just be a visible interaction anymore; it shows a deep investment in identity (Sokolova & Kefi 2025) and shows that emotional engagement changes how people see brands over time (Ferraro & Ilicic 2021). Ferraro and Ilicic (2021)

Brand engagement in the fast-moving consumer goods sector often shows up in small but constant ways, like following the brand, reading its content, defending its values, and identifying with it. This is because the physical experience is quick and repetitive. Food brands that are able to get people to interact with them are the ones that can make their messages resonate with people on an emotional level and become part of their daily digital lives (De Veirman & Hudders, 2022).

Although this article doesn't test brand engagement as a variable, but it does give us a useful way to think about how relational efforts made through Social CRM can affect how consumers see their experiences and images.

2.2. Brand experience: a bond that is actively felt

People have long linked the brand experience to using the product or being in the sales environment. But as digital interactions become more common, this experience is changing. It is becoming shared, co-constructed, scripted, and sometimes even fully lived online. Iglesias et al. (2021) say that brand experience is a multidimensional construct that depends on emotional, sensory, cognitive, and behavioral stimuli that happen when a brand and a customer interact.

In the world of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), where brands are a part of everyday life (like coffee breaks, snacks, and family dinners), the digital experience is like an emotional projection. The experience is not so much about the product itself as it is about the universe it brings to mind, the language it uses, and the stories it tells. So, when a customer watches a brand's recipe video or reacts to an Instagram story about a product, they aren't consuming; they're experiencing a symbolic closeness.

When this kind of experience is good, makes sense, and is interesting, it leaves a mark on the mind and heart that affects how people think about, remember, and choose the brand (Godey et al., 2022). When it comes to Social CRM, the experience is the time when the brand stops talking about itself and lets the customer live with it.

2.3. Understanding Brand Image Through the Lens of Consumer Experience

Brand image is a key idea in marketing. It is the set of mental, cognitive, and emotional pictures that a person makes about a certain brand. Brand image was once thought of as something that was built by advertising and visual elements. Now, it is co-constructed, fluid, and evolving, and it is heavily affected by digital and social interactions (Christodoulides et al., 2023).

The brand's image is no longer just what it says about itself; it's also all the experiences, stories, signals, and conversations that people have about it. In the FMCG sec- tor, the image is even more fragile because brands are quickly consumed, people don't care much about them, and there is a lot of competition. So, it is important to keep this image alive by sending constant signals of emotional, relational, and quality (Chen, 2024). Tazi and El Madani (2025) say that in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry, a brand's image is no longer based on the quality of the product but on how it makes people feel when they interact with it. Yoon and Park (2025) say that the more smooth and human the experience is, the better people think of the brand image.

Recent studies show that how people think about social interactions affects how they think about brands, especially when it comes to closeness, honesty, and dependability (Zollo et al., 2021). A rich, personalized digital experience that meets consumers' cultural expectations helps to create a strong, interesting, and memorable brand image.

2.4. Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

This study presents a targeted conceptual model aimed at clarifying how relational initiatives propelled by Social CRM affect brand image in an environment where digital presence extends beyond just information dissemination to encompass engagement, experience, and emotional resonance. The objective is to delineate a pertinent relational pathway from Social CRM to brand image, facilitated by two intermediary dynamics: engagement and experience, rather than merely multiplying variables.

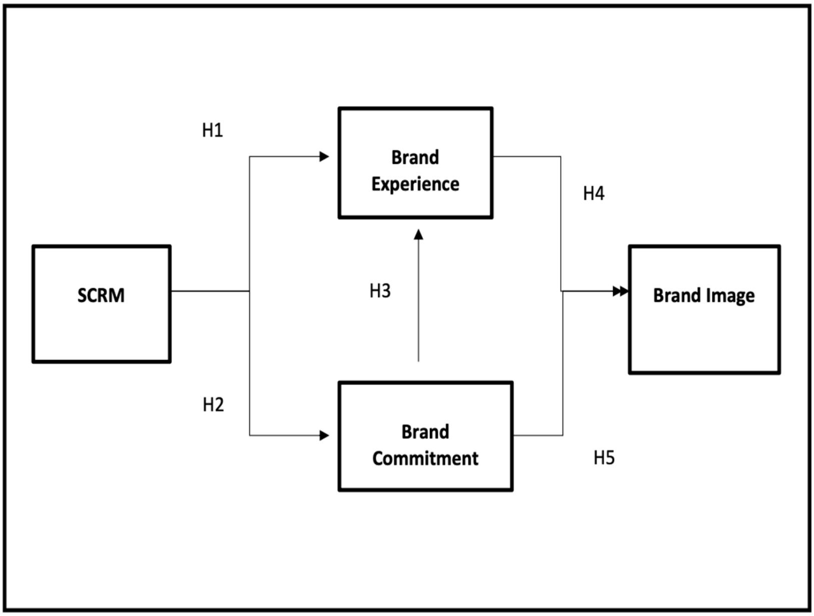

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework NMP

Source : Rania NASSAF & Chakib HAMADI (2025)

The first theoretical foundation utilized is the Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964), which proposes that social relationships become durable when they are regarded as reciprocal, balanced, and advantageous for both parties. In the context of brands, this reasoning indicates that increased customized, transparent, and human interaction enhances the likelihood of consumer investment in the relationship. Contemporary studies in digital marketing substantiate this methodology. Ameen et al. (2022) demonstrate that perceived reciprocity enhances emotional engagement; Gong et al. (2021) underscore the significance of transparency as a catalyst for behavioral engagement; and Hafez (2021) elucidates the influence of relational intimacy on spontaneous involvement.

In the fast-moving consumer goods sector, where brands typically build themselves through uncomplicated yet repetitive everyday acts, this commitment is particularly significant as it depends on ongoing micro-relationships. These encounters also contribute to the formation of the experience. Sharma & Baoku (2023) demonstrate that perceived proximity in digital interactions within the food context enhances emotional experiences. Melancon et al. (2022), on the other hand, underline the power of brands to transform functional encounters into memorable experiences, thanks to the relational character of Social CRM.

H1: Social CRM enhances brand involvement positively. H2:

Social CRM positively impacts brand experience.

The second theoretical paradigm referenced is Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It elucidates how active participation can result in an immersive experience. When an individual is intellectually, emotionally, and sensorially engaged, they achieve a state of flow in which the interaction is seamless, pleasurable, and immersive. In the context of brands, engagement—such as through playful contact, creative participation, or social recognition—catalyzes this state. Chahal and Rani (2021) demonstrate that these factors provide a heightened experience of the brand-individual relationship. Algharabat et al. (2022) assert that digital participation enhances focus and immersion, rendering the brand experience more significant.

H3: Brand commitment significantly improves the brand experience.

The third pillar is founded on Keller's Brand Equity Model (1993), which provides a comprehensive understanding of how personal encounters enhance customers' cognitive associations. The brand image is considered not merely as a graphic or semantic construct, but as a collection of experiences, emotions, and associations that each touchpoint activates or reactivates. Bapat and Goyal (2023) assert that emotional experience is a pivotal element in the creation of a picture regarded as authentic and captivating. Sasmita et al. (2021) demonstrate that immersive digital encounters, particularly interactive ones, influence perceptions of quality, trust, and cultural congruence.

H4: Brand experience positively influences the perceived image of the brand.

Ultimately, interaction with the brand functions as a direct mechanism for enhancing its reputation. Active customer engagement, including recommendations, sharing, commenting, or defending the brand, typically indicates that the brand has achieved profound identity resonance. This notion is corroborated by the principle of Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (Sprott et al., 2009), which posits that when a brand aligns with the self, it is regarded as more favorable, proximate, and authentic. Hudson et al. (2022) emphasize the correlation between emotional engagement and the perceived warmth of the brand. MacGibbon (2025), in a forthcoming review on affective loyalty, underscores the significance of participation as a conduit for identity recognition. Tatar and Ekinci (2023) assert that this symbolic integration elevates the perceived worth of the brand and its overall image.

H5: Commitment to the brand favorably boosts the brand image.

This model, intentionally simplified yet grounded in actual dynamics, facilitates the reestablishment of the emotional and relational connections between an FMCG brand and its consumer in the digital era.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative methodology to investigate Moroccan consumers' perceptions of food businesses' social media CRM tactics and their impact on brand image, brand experience, and consumer engagement. We selected the qualitative method since it enables the collection of extensive, nuanced, and contextualized data, facilitating better understanding of the emotional, cognitive, and relational variables influencing the online relationship between consumers and companies. The selected approach utilizes semi-structured interviews, allowing for fluid dialogue while adhering to the themes established by the theoretical framework. The sample comprises 24 individuals. Sixteen individuals are customers, whereas eight are experts in marketing, digital marketing, or fast-moving consumer goods. This non-random sampling method is predicated on the concept of saturation. It enables us to observe diverse and complementary perspectives on various practices and sensitivities. We selected the profiles based on the diversity of generations represented, the extent of their social media usage, and their familiarity with online food

brands.
The interviews occurred between February and April 2025, conducted either in person or via telephone, contingent upon the availability of the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure comprehensive analysis. Each session lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.
The data analysis employs a thematic analysis methodology grounded in the four variables of the simplified model: brand experience, brand image, consumer involvement with the brand, and social CRM. We conducted a dual manual coding to identify areas of consensus, areas of similarity, and significant disparities. We meticulously analyzed the verbatim responses, considering not only their content but also their implications, emotions, and underlying principles. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of Moroccan consumers' sentiments on the digital initiatives of food brands and the subsequent impact on their attachment, perception, and engagement behaviors.

4. Results

The detailed analysis indicates that individuals anticipate food businesses to engage in high-quality interactions with them on social media platforms. Many respondents indicated that personalized, responsive, and non-automated replies hold significant importance. This indicates an expectation for consumer engagement: "A brand that offers feedback shows it cares about its customers" (P4), or "An interactive brand values consumer feedback" (P12). It is essential for younger individuals to engage in dialogue with one another. A participant noted, "For Gen Z, we engage them more effectively when we utilize highly creative images or concise content" (P2). Social CRM facilitates connections between individuals and brands, particularly when brands actively listen to customer feedback and adapt their content accordingly. A participant remarked, "When the product gains recognition within my network, it encourages me to share the posts" (P7). This illustrates the significance of social connections in shaping interpersonal interactions. The data indicates that such engagement enhances the brand's quality. All participants emphasize the significance of sensory, emotional, and narrative components: "The food experience encompasses the consumer's engagement with the product during perception or tasting, transcending mere functional necessity" (P2). It is suggested by some individuals that the cultural background of the brand significantly influences the quality of the experience: "One must already be familiar with the brand from childhood and its cultural significance" (P5).
The research indicates a distinct relationship between individuals' experiences with a brand and their perceptions of it. It is often asserted that positive and enduring experiences contribute significantly to the establishment of a robust and stable brand image. For instance, "A favorable experience over time fosters emotional attachment to the brand" (P3) or "A positive experience and sustained engagement with the brand inherently indicate strong brand equity" (P6).

5. Discussion

This research highlights the growing significance of Social CRM for food brands aiming to cultivate engaging, interactive, and rewarding relationships with their Moroccan clientele. An effectively structured Social CRM system addresses complaints while also fostering emotional engagement, particularly among younger demographics. An expert interviewed emphasized the significance of having a community manager and engaging content that stimulates discussion to effectively attract Gen Z, particularly via emerging forms of short-form media. Research conducted by Choudhury and Harrigan (2022) as well as Yadav and Rahman (2023) provides evidence that supports this assertion. The findings indicate that relational personalization and interpersonal communication are crucial for genuine engagement, particularly among younger individuals. Being a part of the brand encompasses more than merely engaging in actions such as "liking" or sharing. This entails investing cognitive and emotional resources into a task, a process that becomes more manageable when one has prior experience and positive outcomes associated with it. Numerous individuals assert that prolonged interaction with a brand fosters trust, and that the cumulative experiences one has with a brand significantly influence that trust. This aligns with the findings of Brodie et al. (2022) and Muntinga et al. (2023): co-constructed engagement enhances the relevance of the experience, thereby increasing its memorability. The establishment of this relationship is significantly influenced by the brand experience. Participants indicated that the flavor, consistency, and aroma of the food, combined with positive emotional associations, enhance their loyalty to the brand and reinforce their relation- ship with it. One individual remarked, "the experience resembles the quality of food, and this experience holds greater significance than any other quality." Iglesias et al. (2021) and Jin et al. (2025) indicate that individuals' personal experiences significantly influence their perceptions of relational value. The findings from both studies sup- port this assertion. According to Hudson and Hudson (2022), the intensity of an individual's sensory experience influences their ability to visualize the brand mentally. The interactions individuals have with the brand, the quality of their experiences, and the effectiveness of the visuals and narrative in its digital content collectively influence the brand's image. Multiple interviewees expressed their loyalty to a particular food brand, attributing it to its consistent quality, distinctive design, and perceived value appreciation over time. A customer expressed, "I remain loyal to the brand de- spite the availability of alternatives due to my previous positive experiences and the brand's unwavering quality." According to the findings of Christodoulides et al. (2021) and Chen et al. (2024), individuals predominantly rely on their personal experiences when assessing the trustworthiness of information. The regulations governing the management of images and online communication in Morocco align with those observed in various other nations. This also reflects the cultural norms of the region, which emphasize the significance of awareness, understanding, and emotional stability.

6. Conclusion

This research suggests that Social CRM plays a crucial role in fostering robust relationships between brands and customers within the Moroccan food sector, particularly in an era characterized by the omnipresence of digital media and the rapid evolution of consumer preferences. The qualitative findings indicate that consumers, particularly those in younger demographics, desire brands to engage in dialogue, respond promptly, and demonstrate genuine concern. Individuals are increasingly drawn to subjects not merely due to passive observation, but rather through active engagement, meaningful interactions, and coherent narratives. The brand experience, enhanced by genuine and impactful interactions, fosters a sense of trust and closeness between individuals and the brand. When executed effectively, this dynamic fosters a brand image that individuals will appreciate over an extended period, grounded in consistency, authenticity, and perceived quality. In this context, social CRM goes beyond limited relationship management; it serves as a strategic approach to enhance brand development and foster customer loyalty. This study provides valuable insights for food brands operating in digital environments characterized by significant emotional engagement. In these contexts, the customer experience is intrinsically linked to the perception they hold of the brand. This approach prompts individuals to reconsider their digital strategies through a frame- work of emotional closeness that emphasizes micro-engagements, collective memories, and collaborative meaning-making. To advance this research, quantitative studies will examine the relationships identified here and assess the extent to which these factors can be modified across different age groups, particularly between young adults residing in urban areas and older consumers. The applicability of these results may be enhanced for comparative analysis if they are utilized across different sectors within the fast-moving consumer goods industry.

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