How Social Media Engagement Affects TV Channel Loyalty Among Ho Chi Minh City Audiences: Mediating Roles of Social Presence and Channel Loyalty

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Abstract: This study would be an insightful evidence investigating the effects of such social media engagement has on TV channel loyalty, through the mediating roles of social presence and channel commitment. By collecting data from 252 respondents who are Ho Chi Minh city active social TV users, and testing the proposed structural model by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), apart from Communal Engagement, other social media engagements (which are, Functional Engagement and Emotional Engagement), Social Presence and Channel Commitment considerably affect Channel Loyalty. Practically speaking, according to the results of this study, it is timely for TV channel to enact such exclusively concrete digital long-term plan not only to compete with each other, but also to gain the ultimate goal of channel loyalty towards target audiences.

Keywords: Social Media Engagement, Social Presence, Channel Commitment, Emotional Engagement, Functional Engagement, Communal Engagement, Channel Loyalty, Ho Chi Minh City Viewers

1 Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed an enormous digital explosion worldwide, which by all means shifted the way human communicate and interact to one and other, as well as conduct business. Especially social media platforms, they are now not only a personal place for people to share their opinion as they used to be, but they are now one of the most effective way for business to build their long-term strategies. Social media has pushed against the geographical boundaries of all time since it appeared. Based on the nature of the business, a prudent application of social media in marketing practices can help business entity raise brand awareness among consumers, since consumers nowadays spend tremendous amount of time using social networks. Social media then allows brands to gain deeper knowledge and adapt their ways of conducting business to supply precisely to the demand of customers, by customizing, adapting their goods and service. (Chen, 2013; Choi, 2015)

Humans nowadays are exposed to a vast number of media choices to entertain themselves in the fast-paced life. They do not watch TV the way it used to be, viewers desire to watch what perfectly suits their taste, whenever they want, or wherever they go. Therefore, social media is the easiest and fastest place for TV broadcasters or TV content producers to collect prompt, exact and reliable response from target audiences to adapt and create their programs. According to research from Nielsen (2016), around 60% of tablets and smartphones were turned on as a “second screen” device while a person watching TV, for several times per week or even more, and surprisingly, about a quarter of the conversations were program related, raging from discussing about the program, program information searching, watching and sharing program-related clips, to participating in program-related community (Nielsen, 2016). Moreover, prominent TV shows in 2017 were discussed and mentioned about mainly on social networking systems, with Facebook and Youtube as the most two prominent ones, standing at 94.5% and 4.4%, respectively, which accounted for almost all the entire digital communication platforms (YounetMedia, 2017)

In 2015, Vietnam was in the top nations that owns by far the highest quantity of broadcasters in the world, with over 300 channels across the nation (Quân, 2015). Each of them has entered a real competitive market that forces them to compete non-stop fiercely to win over other competitors not only in the traditional way like they used to, but also in a “brand new dreamland” for all the broadcasters. Moreover, in 2016, the real explosion of social media rang an alarming bell towards TV channels that viewers turned away and chose to entertain themselves only on digital platforms, a lot of questions appeared since then, such as: How to approach
younger generation? How to maintain current older generation? How not to be replaced? How to penetrate into smartphones, etc.? Since then, broadcasters have tried their best to penetrate into digital world, in hope of it becoming an advertising channel, an insightful source, a profitable strategy, and finally a channel loyalty trigger. They steadily build up their own social media presence to make sure every question from the audiences is solved at a time and get well on with those customers to create a sense of commitment which can finally lead to channel loyalty. For example, HTV, VTV, and THVL are the most three prominent broadcasters in Vietnam nowadays, having official Facebook pages and official Youtube channels that rapidly updated and uploaded every single news and videos of the newly aired programs on TV. Not only one-sided offering, they also communicate well with the audiences that create a so-called virtual community best for bonding together. In hope of sustain and enhance social media engagement that acts as a precursor to customer loyalty in the end.

2 Literature review

2.1 Dimensions of Social Media Engagement

Lim and his associates (2015) suggested that the channel loyalty can surely be manipulated by three aspects of social networking sites engagement, each of them grants an unidentical powerful influence on the psychological feelings between customers and channel itself (Lim, 2015).

2.1.1 Functional Engagement

This is considered as the most sought index to assess the effectiveness of broadcasters utilizing social networking sites to interact with viewers (Neiger, 2012). This can be resulted from the fact that on digital social media platforms, broadcasters can definitely control the flow of the communication, invite audiences to give feedback, manipulate them to share feelings, content of program-related. Furthermore, some of the new types of sharing information on social media is hashtags about a specific topic, which is now considered as one of the most important indicators (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2015; Bik, 2013; Neiger, 2012). Recently, there have been more and more researchers re-modified the term into a more relational type. In specific, this can be defined as an interaction between people with people in this modern world, which is used to smooth the way for communications between any business or customers that are being impacted by the business’s operation (Kim J. S., 2012).

2.1.2 Emotional Engagement

The next level of social media engagement highlights the emotion, feelings of viewers using social media as a channel to interact with others, which is known as emotional engagement. Audiences will not only engage with other viewers, commentators, but also the broadcasters and their related-partners. Looking a little broader, this emotional engagement can be well explained by the business market, “emotional attachment” of netizens towards a brand (Mollen, 2010; Park, 2010). This emotional attachment is then the most indespensable feature of consumer engagement that it seems to be the only aspect that can affect consumer behavior (Park, 2010).

2.1.3 Communal Engagement

A recent study has pointed out that, this approach of social media engagement is the second most commonplace reason why social TV viewers interact with other audiences and the broadcasters for the program-related content while watching TV (Viacom, 2013). What is more, its role can be explained in the virtual community of a particular brand. Getting target customers involve in the brand, community or organization has always been an ultimate goal in the marketing world (McAlexander, 2002). With the deep fanthoming about the engagement from the identification view can therefore shift the personalities of viewer engagement from short-term to long-term connection with the channel itself, which is believed to lead to commitment and loyalty.

2.2 Social Presence Theory: a sense of togetherness owing to the effect of social TV

According to Lim et al. (2015), on social media platforms nowadays, exist a real-time communication online, during a live television broadcast, which is called as the practice of social TV activities (Lim, 2015). Recently, most popular liveshows on television incorporate with some of highlighted tweets, and display them onto TC screen while airing the program to trigger their viewers to engage with the program (Harrington, 2012). A really long time ago, when the social TV activities has appeared and emerged, Kim and Biocca (1997) had already visualized this sense of presence and it would explain the fact that how TV audiences interact with other viewers and get a strong sense of the presence of society (Kim, 1997).

Because the presence of real or artificial entities through the act of interacting with them through virtual platforms can be easily felt by customers, social presence is considered as a psychological train of thought that people at that state of mind feel the sense of togetherness with perceived intelligence that can
community into a impact of e
age reflecting emotional or psychological attachment to
ment of other social actor entities,
acting with each other
motional engagement on channel loyalty, with channel commitment acts as a
The sense of group presence could increase the
el a sense of engagement with the brand as well as others who
2012)
believed that the impact of customer commitm
2.7
the same thing for a long time, it would turn out to be habits. Therefore, the third hypothesis is:
H2. Social presence is positively correlated with channel commitment.
2.6
How functional engagement influence the feelings of social presence
Social presence, it is defined by Short (1976) that it is the psychological thought in a communicative
evironment when people can interact with other actors (Short, 1976). Another way to define a social TV user
was the fact that it 24/7 enables us to communicate with friends and family who have the same hobby, and
especially adding some people those who are online at that time, engage in a real-time talk (Johns, 2012). It has
also highlighted that: "It tends to make me feel like I’m actually watching the program with other people, even
though we aren’t physically in the same room together. I enjoy the interactive element and the conversation with
my peers” (Johns, 2012). Moreover, McCarthy, Kietzmann, Pitt, and Silvestre (2012) also agreed to the point that a feeling of presence is
a crucial motive for active engagement, especially for those who prefer to engage and interact a in real-time
conversation but not in the same place, they prefer the feeling of being connected with people without being
physically engagement (Kietzmann, 2012).
H1. The higher a user’s functional engagement through social, the greater social presence is perceived when
conducting social TV.
2.5
The effect of Social Presence on Channel Loyalty, the mediating role of Channel Commitment
Several researchers have stated that with the deeper consumer engages with a brand through social
media platforms used, the greater degree they feel a sense of engagement with the brand as well as others who
share the same interest (Abercrombie, 1998). Needless to say, the more viewers are associated in social TV activities, the more likely
they are willing to engage with the programs and the channels; since they develop a strong sense of experienced
and commitment to those items.

2.4
Channel Loyalty
In general, customer loyalty in business can be explained by the term of re-do things with that brand,
such as, re-buy, re-prioritize, re-call, re-recommend, etc. (McIlroy, 2000).
2.3
Channel Commitment
Commitment exists in order to name the greatness in which viewers deeply engage with the programs
and the relationship between them. In other words, TV program commitment is also once defined as “a viewer’s
long-term attitudinal disposition toward a program, often reflecting emotional or psychological attachment to
the program” (Lin J. S., 2016). Viewers’ commitment level therefore may manifest itself as the consequences of
increasing dependence of viewers towards program (Lin, 2016; Rusbult, 1998). In this multiscreen and digital
world, committed viewers seem to turn into the one who intensely attached and connected to a particular
program, and also its participants, actors and celebrities taking part in it via a solid social media usage
(Abercrombie, 1998). In specific, McIlroy and Barnett (2000) pointed out that customer loyalty happens when customer feel
2.2
Simulate others point of view (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003; Lee, 2004). At a higher level, Biocca et al.
(2003) also argued that the definition of co-presence goes beyond the state of being in the identical physical
space. Another sub-notion of presence, the social presence is a psychological state of mind in which a user of
world emerging technology and likely digital experiences virtual environment of other social actor entities,
when receiving a certain amount of signal to communicate and interact with others (Lee, 2004).
2.1

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free and willing to spend more time with the brand in terms of buying goods and services from times to times, researching lots of information about the brands, and hopefully recommending that brand to others, which is known as the act of word of mouth (McIlroy, 2000). Similarly, customer loyalty is once defined by Oliver that even made the term more powerful than ever before, which is the tendency of purchasing and prioritizing the goods and services they love in a long-term future, despite other experiences happening, such as the penetration of other competitors (Oliver, 1997). Obviously, in real life, people tend to be loyal with brands that they feel a sense of commitment to them, which would keep them with that brand for a long-term relationship.

**H4. The emotional engagement is positively correlated with channel commitment.**

The merits of how this engagement can be beneficial to a brand is denoted much well enough in previous researches, not only in this industry but also same as others, that is to say gaining a deep understanding about the relationship between emotional engagement and customer loyalty is the most desirable sought in business nowadays. Some marketing researchers such as Bowden (2009) and Sashi (2012) said that emotional engagement can be described as the first and foremost factor in building customer loyalty. For instance, one of Bowden’s process model has once proved that consequently, the stage of loyalty to a single brand can be reached with the beginning step of being engaged through emotional feelings, and it has to be affected by the role of commitment factor in the middle of the process (Bowden, 2009; Sashi, 2012). So as to be a mediator in this relationship, channel commitment also requires to show a positive relation towards the emotional engagement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that once viewers are emotionally attached to a particular TV program and therefore leading to the TV channel loyalty, their positive feelings can be converted from the program itself to the broadcaster.

**H5. Channel commitment is positively correlated with channel loyalty**

2.8 **How communal engagement affect channel loyalty**

A majority of TV broadcasters and program content producers have taken advantage of social media in hope it can create a habitat that their target customers can directly engage with them at the right time and the right place. Social TV users interact with other viewers at the time of watching, so users on social media platforms enjoy the “communal experience of group viewing without being physically together” (Wohn, 2011). Communal engagement gives broadcasters a huge number of benefits at hand. In this level, viewers’ purpose is not simply just to serve a communication itself, but to build up relationships with others who they consider as like-minded co-viewers. All of which can lead to the state of strengthening the channel community which they are in. Broadcasters nowadays have therefore recognized the importance of online communication and interaction, that is the reason why they have been looking for ways and adopting them to create new strategy of social TV practice to give audiences a huge number necessary information, and interact with them via a virtual environment, and also helping to elevate viewers’ sense of loyalty to the network that they are using under their brand names (Greer, 2011).

**H6. The channel loyalty is positively affected by the communal engagement**

The figure below shows the proposed structural model adapted from the research of Lim et al. (2015)

![Figure 1: Proposed research model adapted from Lim et al. 2015, p165.](website://image.png)
3 Methodology

3.1 Research Method

This research will apply only quantitative approach. Quantitative method, the most-used approach using mathematics procedure, is of paramount importance to study thoroughly into statistical meaning of variables in order to finally construct as a research method (McDaniel & Roger, 2002).

The results getting from this approach are often presented in statistical form that is run by SPSS application. Furthermore, it is said that quantitative approach is always preferred by most marketing researchers and is often nominated to be conducted marketing research.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

In this research study, a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire is chosen because of its fitness, with 1 is “Totally Disagree” to 5 is “Totally Agree”. Therefore, the participants are required to express their level of agreement among the 5-scale on how much these items describe them in a way.

The functional engagement’s 4 items were adapted from (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Pagani & Mirabello, 2011), the emotional engagement was based on (Hull & Lewis, 2014; Johns, 2012), the communal engagement was taken from the idea of (Bruhn, Schnebel, & Schafer, 2014; Hull & Lewis, 2014). Especially 9 items of social presence were traced back from its original (Xu and Yan’s 2011). Channel commitment was adopted from (Pihlstrom, 2007) and channel loyalty from (Zeithaml et al.’s, 1996).

In addition, demographic analysis can not be ignored in studying such an issue, 4 categories have been put into the questionnaire in to enrich and qualify the data are: gender, age, education level, and marital status.

3.3 Sampling Method and Sample Size

Owing to the limitation of money, thesis time-bound due date, and man power, the surveys were distributed to the target population by convenience sampling method. In 1992, Comrey and Lee recommended that the scale for the adequacy of the sample size is: 50 means very poor, 100 is poor, while 200 is considered as fair, and 300 is called a good sample size. (Comery & Lee, 1992). Hence, the target sample size for this research is 252 people, which is a good and adequate number of respondents to finally draw reliable and practical conclusion.

3.4 Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the target sample by both online (Google Form) and offline platforms (paper survey). The target population of the study are HCMC adults, who have already experienced discussing and sharing TV program related information with other viewers or broadcasters (who are active social TV users); with no age restriction.

4 Results

4.1 Reliability Test and Exploratory Factor Analysis

The reliability test was conducted to test how consistent are the items within each factor in the model. In this test, we need to look at the Cronbach’s alpha first, to make sure all of them are higher than 0.7. Secondly, Corrected Item-Total Correlation, if it is lower than 0.3, the item needs omitting from the study because it would bring different outcomes from the whole measurement scale (Field, 2005), with higher than 0.6 is acceptable.

If the Reliability Test above tests the reliability of the research, in this part, the Exploratory Factor Analysis is used to check the validity of the data. After nine times running EFA for the independent and mediating variables, in the final round, KMO index is 0.854 (> 0.8) and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity Sig is .000, by which the study is qualified. In addition, the components retained accounted for around 67.261% (> 50%) of the total variance. Turning to Channel Loyalty – the dependent variable, KMO index is 0.838 and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity Sig is .000, with the total variance explained is 77.624%. Therefore, this factor analysis is absolutely appropriate.

Table 1: The Results of Reliability Test and EFA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Given Names</th>
<th>Number of Items Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional Engagement (FE)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Engagement (EE)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communical Engagement (CE)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Presence (SP)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel Commitment (CC)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel Loyalty (CL)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis is now used after EFA in order to test the correlation amongst 5 factors remaining, whether the observed variables or the measurement model fit well with the data collected. The final result is qualified – Chi-square = 269.693, df = 140, Chi-square/df = 1.926 (<3), CFI = 0.948 (>0.9), GFI = 0.902 (>0.8), TLI = 0.937 (>0.9), and RMSEA = 0.061 (<0.06) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Composite Reliability (CR) – A value of CR > 0.6 is required in order to achieve composite reliability for a construct, and finally is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) – it must be higher than 0.5, which is accepted for further test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The outcome is satisfied which is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Results of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent constructs</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Average variance extracted (AVE)</th>
<th>Composite reliability (CR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.571</td>
<td>0.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.702</td>
<td>0.904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The results of SEM are shown in figure 2 below, after two times running SEM test, with Chi-square = 276.585, df = 144, Chi-square/df = 1.921 (<3), GFI = 0.901 (>0.8); TLI = 0.937 (>0.9), CFI = 0.947 (>0.95), RMSEA = 0.061 (<0.06) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, all the p-value were noted as ***, showing that they are all qualified.

Furthermore, the squared multiple correlation coefficient (R²) of the dependent variable – Channel Loyalty (CL), is 0.619. Therefore, it can be said that it is estimated that the model analyzed can explain nearly 62% of the variances.

![Figure 2: Results of Structural Model (Standardized Regression Weights)](image)

5 Discussion and Implications

Bowden and Javornik has once lamented that there was such a lack of research that provide insights about social media engagement affecting customers’ behavior activities, let aside their emotional state (Javornik, 2012; Bowden, 2009). After stages of analyzing from the beginning of the theoretical basis of Lim et al. (2015), the Communal Engagement was finally left out of the model.

There are two possible ways to explain this issue of removing Communal Engagement, which finally led to the removal of hypothesis 6 (the Communal Engagement directly affects Channel Loyalty). Firstly, in Vietnam context, social media users who experienced this kind of social TV may not see the engagement with other viewers in that channel-related virtual community is crucial, and they are not willing to contribute their ideas, knowledge, etc., with others in those communities. In contrast, they still feel comfortable when sharing, commenting or posting about program-related information on other groups or their own personal pages, which is known as they are involved in Functional and Emotional Engagement. All of which leads to the second possible reason is that, Vietnamese TV broadcasters do not utilize to the fullest of the advantages brought about by social media platforms in this digital era. TV channel’s fanpage mostly lacks of interaction, engagement and
adequate communication with customers. Obviously, the Communal Engagement factor includes the act of sharing ideas about a specific channel, sharing promotional messages of that channel, interacting with other viewers about channel, they may not seem all the rage in Vietnam at the moment. Viewers do care about specific program that they like, the actor/participants in it, and other things related that program only.

As can be seen from the final conceptual framework model, people will feel the presence of other audiences when they first post, comment, share, or like program-related information on social media (H1: $\beta = 0.439$, p < 0.001), which finally leads to channel loyalty (H3: $\beta = 0.395$, p < 0.001). With the feeling of being physically surrounded by others while watching TV and future jokes with peers, it can pass to channel loyalty by another mediating role of channel commitment (H2: $\beta = 0.387$, p < 0.001).

Turning to the contrast aspect of engagement – emotional, viewers interact with others on social networking sites owing to how they feel promptly at that real-time moment about the program or the participants, or even quote the preferable saying from them, which seems to be very the in thing in Vietnam nowadays. In that way, audiences feel the sense of bonding more with the program itself, the channel at first, in hope would bring about the psychological sense of commitment, attachment or connection between them and the channel (H4: $\beta = 0.383$, p < 0.001). Consequently come up with the ultimate goal of any brands, which is customer loyalty (H5: $\beta = 0.510$, p < 0.001). Every type of engagement plays a separately important role to the brand loyalty in the end, not any of them is less imperative than the others.

Practically speaking, for broadcasters, TV stations (channel owners), and content providers: it is of paramount importance and timely to invest more on building exclusive digital content. Facebook fanpage and Youtube official channel are currently the most-used social media platforms of Vietnamese viewers in general and Ho Chi Minh City viewers in specific. Functional engagement and emotion engagement can be easily enhanced in order to reach the ultimate channel loyalty. According to Marc Lourdes - CNN’s digital director for Asia Pacific, “Not all of the content airing on TV are able to be streaming on social media, we need to sometimes cut, edit, and choose the appropriate ones” (LOAN, 2016). Because digital world has its own characteristics and advantages, TV channels may need to employ a whole different digital team for the exclusive content that meets well with audiences’ taste. Raise awareness for up-coming programs, increase engagement and interaction for not only current real-time programs, but also pay attention to communicate with target audience on a weekly basis. Besides, invest on those “sneakpeek” or “behind the scene” stories that can make audience curious and crave for watching exclusive online content. For content providers such as Đông Tây Promotion, Cát Tiên Sa, Điền Quân, etc., they also need to communicate with target audiences as well as trigger fans to link to channel page. So as to keep in touch 24/7, get updated information and data about customers trend to capture the on-going preference and produce the most-wanted programs in the future.

Furthermore, social presence can be considered as one of the most important factor that leads to channel commitment and channel loyalty. People do not watch TV as the way they used to, they need the feeling of being surrounded by others with the same taste, that is where TV channels can jump in and build long-term strategies. For example, exclusive group chat platform for groups discussing about TV program, games for groups competing with each other, group photo contest, etc., In addition, comments airing is one of the on-trend method being practiced by a lot of western countries programs.

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