RESEARCH CATEGORIES IN STUDYING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION
The term customer engagement, which most often refers to the customer’s increasingly active role either with regards to the customer’s emotional or cognitive involvement with brands, their behavioral manifestations beyond purchase in interaction with brands or their role in the value co-creation process, has been consolidated in the literature in the recent years as a relevant concept for the current marketing theory (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2012; Sawhney et al., 2005; Brodie et al., 2011) and the amount of attention consecrated to it has increased significantly (Brodie et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2010; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). The Marketing Science Institute emphasized customer engagement as a research priority in its Guide for research 2010-2012 (MSI, 2010). The concept has also been substantially adopted among practitioners (Gallup, 2001; EIU, 2007; Sashi, 2012; Roberts & Alpert, 2010). Contexts in which it has been applied, range from social networks to value co-creation paradigm, media consumption, consumer experience, loyalty programs, customer relationship management, brand performance, involvement in product development, service marketing, consumer behavior and others.

The broad and popular usage of the concept also created certain confusion and ambiguity around it (Brodie et al., 2011; Gambetti et al., 2011; Mandelli & Accoto, 2012). The body of research related to it lacks consistency and common understanding, which represents an obstacle for the concept’s development. The marketing field has witnessed numerous attempts of customer engagement conceptualization and thanks to these studies the understanding of the phenomenon has developed significantly, however a general consensus has not been yet reached. This continues to represent a disadvantage for the concept’s studies as it is applied in too many different areas, which consequently makes it difficult to adopt one umbrella definition without disregarding certain substantive dimensions.

Instead of yet another conceptualization, this paper rather proposes that future studies should be placed within specific research streams which can further offer a solution for specifying the concept without compromising its richness. For that purpose, we suggest a) a categorization of customer engagement in four research directions which we built upon the study done by Brodie et al. (2011) and b) situating upcoming studies within these directions. Based on our systematic literature review, on the previous conceptual and empirical studies and on the categorization of customer engagement elaborated by Brodie et al. (2011), we propose that following these research directions would consolidate this increasingly popular concept, reduce its ambiguity and increase its value for the marketing theory in terms of understanding the active role of customers.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT
The larger context within which the concept of customer engagement is most often situated, is the service management approach (Grönroos, 2007) and the relationship marketing paradigm (Sheth & Partiyavar, 1995). The later emphasizes the importance of customer orientation, customer partnering (Egan, 2001), relationships orientation (Grönroos, 1994), interaction between customers and brands (Egan, 2001; Payne et al., 1995), while the former focuses on customers’ active role value co-creation as defined in the service-dominant logic research (Gummesson, 2002; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). As social media enhanced interactions among customers and brand and provided new possibilities for customers’ empowerment and activities, customer engagement is often investigated in the online context (Gummerus et al., 2012; Abdul-Ghani et al., 2012; Pagani, 2011-2012),
however it is equally considered in other situations of marketing communication, such as loyalty programs (Bowden, 2009) or events (Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006). Significant literature reviews of the notion of customer engagement and the engagement in general have already been conducted in the recent years (Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012; Hollebeek 2011; Gambetti & Graffigna 2010) and they pointed out the following outcomes. Firstly, the studies emphasized that the term has a solid tradition in other disciplines such as organizational behavior, education, informatics, psychology, sociology, management, health communication and political sciences. (Vivek et al., 2012; Brodie et al., 2011), which exposes its general relevancy for social sciences. Secondly, as the concept is only in the process of being established in the academic literature, many authors came up with different definitions (see Table 1) and conceptualizations (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Sashi, 2012; Fliess et al., 2012; Higgins & Scholer, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2009; Calder et al., 2009). While some of them conceptualize the phenomenon on a highly abstract level, as for instance establishing a link with the value co-creation theory (Brodie et al., 2011), others focus mainly on one component of the customer engagement process, i.e. antecedents (Mollen & Wilson; 2009), behavioral acts as such (Van Doorn et al., 2009), or concept’s application in specific media environment (Calder et al., 2009; Pagani et al., 2011-12). It can be also noted that so far only few studies approached the concept from a critical angle (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Mandelli & Accoto, 2012), added the social dimension to it (Fliess et al., 2012) or proposed a qualitative approach to it (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2012). However, this vivid interest has not yet led to an agreement about the most accurate and recognized conceptualization of the phenomenon in the research community (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012; Gummerus et al., 2012). Thirdly, numerous reviews and studies of the concept confirmed that the relevancy of the customer engagement concept is related to understudied representations, dynamics and processes of increasingly active role of consumer and consequently its implications for marketing and brand performance (Kumar et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2012; Roberts & Alpert 2010; Sashi, 2012). The customer-orientation paradigm and customer-centric logic emphasize the importance of investigating the firm-customer interactions and consumer’s active participation in the creation of marketing value (Kumar et al., 2010).

**METHODOLOGY**

Our study consisted of two parts. In the first one we examined the already existing literature reviews on customer engagement in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon and how it has developed (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012; Hollebeek 2011; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). We especially considered the classification elaborated by Brodie et al. (2011) as it is one of the rare studies that offers a thorough schematization of customer engagement studies and their dimensions. On the other hand, their schematization mainly investigated if the definitions had been uni- or multi-dimensional but it did not suggests to situate further studies within different research stream. It rather tried to propose an all-encompassing definition. We built upon their classification to propose a model that corresponds more accurately with the recent research trends.

In the second part of the study, we searched for the articles with key words “customer engagement”, “consumer engagement”, “audience engagement”, “brand engagement” and “user engagement” for the time period from 2009 to 2012 in the databases of ABI / Inform, ISI Web of Knowledge and ScienceDirect. This time period was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it has been confirmed that there has been a significant increase in articles related to the topic of CE from 2008 and 2009 on (Brodie et al., 2011). However, as several literature reviews have already been conducted for the time period up to 2009 (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012; Hollebeek 2011; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010), we wanted to focus
specifically on the most recent development of the research on the concept - additionally so because the interest for it in the marketing community has significantly increased after 2008 (MSI 2008; Brodie et al., 2011). Initially, we looked into 427 articles. After revising the title and the abstract, we selected those where one of the keywords represented a central concept of the study. In the end we examined in-depth 30 most relevant articles that were seen as the crucial ones for the advancement of the concept’s research since 2009. Following classification of engagement’s dimensions proposed by Brodie et al. (2011), we observed different focuses of customer engagement in the studies. If the literature review of Brodie et al. (2011) showed that the multidimensional approach had been rarely adopted among the existing definitions and studies of the customer engagement, it can be observed that the conceptualization that takes into account different dimensions - cognitive, affective or behavioral - has become increasingly applied in the last years (Brodie et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 2011-12; Gambetti et al., 2012). Furthermore, it has been noted that a critical discussion of customer engagement arose (Gambetti et al., 2012; Mandelli & Accoto, 2012) which questions simplified, one-sided conceptualizations and calls for a more complex viewing of the phenomena.

RESEARCH STREAMS
Brodie et al. (2011) categorized customer engagement studies as either uni- or multidimensional and identified the dimensions as behavioral, emotional and cognitive. Our study confirmed that these dimensions or a combination of them remained as the core ones also in the studies published between 2009 and 2012. However, we propose a modified categorization of the customer engagement research streams which differs from the study of Brodie et al. (2011) in the three main points. The first one concerns the fact that the behavioral perspective as defined by van Doorn et al. (2010) has become so largely adopted, that it should be recognized as a separate research stream. The behavioral customer engagement is also strongly linked to the idea of customer’s active role that represents the underlying rational for the importance of customer engagement concept (Van Doorn et al., 2010), that is why we propose one research stream to be solely focused on that. Secondly, we propose a unification of the cognitive and affective (emotional) perspective in one research stream, the psychological customer engagement. The reason for that lies in the fact that both cognitive and emotional studies focus on the psychological processes that are antecedents to the act of engagement, both cognitive as emotional. More than separating the emotional and the cognitive dimensions would be thus important to recognize which processes take place on the psychological level prior to behavioral engagement. Thirdly, if the majority of customer engagement literature has focused so far on investigating the phenomenon on the individual level and on the customer-firm premise, it has been identified that the social customer engagement, represented and observed in the communities, social network and C2C, has to be taken into more attentively into account (Gambetti et al. 2012) and first steps into that direction have already been made (Fliess et al. 2012; Gummerus et al. 2012). The main research streams for investigating the customer engagement (Figure 1) that were identified in the academic literature, are thus the following: a) behavioral perspective – concerned with the behavioral aspects of customer engagement and customers’ activities, most often beyond purchase; b) psychological (cognitive and affective) perspective - investigating customers’ cognitive and affective processes which are antecedents to engagement or to interaction with brands; c) multidimensional perspective - unifying different dimensions of customer engagement and proposing multidimensional approach; d) social perspective - investigating the social and network component of the phenomenon. In the coming part we will shortly comment on each of these research directions.
Behavioral perspective
This stream of studies on customer engagement (Sashi, 2012; Gummerus et al., 2012; Ahuja & Medury, 2010; Ojiako et al., 2012; Javornik & Mandelli 2012) bases the research on the definition elaborated by Van Doorn et al. (2011) that considers customer engagement as “…behaviors (that) go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as customer behavioral manifestations that have a brand or a firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.”

These studies investigate consumers’ activities such as word-of-mouth, recommendations, repeat purchases, social media activities, community participation, interactions with brands and similar. Such approach is often favored by practitioners as it can lead to quantification and measurement of consumers’ activities in their interactions with brands.

Psychological (affective and cognitive) perspective
This stream of studies tackles engagement from various psychological, mainly affective or cognitive, angles. This perspective has provided a solid direction for quantitative empirical studies and offers valuable insight into motivational triggers for consumers’ attention, cognition and affection. Some authors suggest that engagement represents a basis of consumer experience with a media or with a brand through marketing or other type of marketing communication (Calder et al., 2009; Pagani & Mirabello, 2011-2012). Calder et al. (2009) defined that the engagement is actually established through user’s experience with the media and thus the behaviors represent only a consequence of the engagement and are not its indicators. The user’s telepresence and sustained attention can also be viewed as a part of the engagement process (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Such studies become especially relevant in the online environment, where different levels of interactivity influence the process of engagement (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Pagani & Mirabello, 2011-2012). Calder et al. (2009) showed that engagement with online media is triggered by new motivational factors that differ to a certain extent from those that lead to the engagement with traditional media, as the social and interactive components become crucial, which was further confirmed by study of Pagani and Mirabello (2011-2012). Studying different types of individual motivations for engagement with brands represent one of the concept’s central research topics (Ashley et al., 2011), developed also in the regulatory engagement fit theory (Higgins & Scholer, 2009), which is why we propose a separate psychological approach to customer engagement.

Multidimensional perspective
There have been numerous attempts to unify different levels of customer engagement (Mollen & Wilson, 2009; Sashi, 2102; Brodie et al. 2011;Vivek et al.,2012; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). Multidimensional approach to customer engagement aim to bridge the customer’s and firm’s perspective by applying the conceptualization within the larger context of value co-creation and customer’s active role in it.

Studies within this research stream often focus on linking the cognitive and affective triggers with engaging behaviors (Mollen & Wilson, 2009) and (Sashi, 2102; Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al., 2012). Brodie et al. (2011) provide also a complex and all-encompassing conceptualization of customer engagement. While this highly theoretical definition points out the contribution of the concept, it does not succeed in distinguishing different approaches to the study of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, Mollen and Wilson (2010) show that there has been limited empirical academic literature that would prove direct correlation between online engagement and behavioral manifestations.

Social customer perspective
Even though the majority of the initial studies on customer engagement focused on the individual aspects, there has also been a recent emergence of studies that investigate social
dimensions of the phenomenon (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Mandelli & Accoto, 2012; Fliess et al., 2012; Grumesson et al., 2012).

Through their analysis of the marketing debate, Gambetti and Graffigna (2010) emphasized the complex nature of the customer engagement as it is built or influenced by many different components and that it has to be considered in specific contexts as it is mutable due to its postmodern character. Customer engagement should be thus approached with qualitative studies as they would better capture its multi-faceted reality (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2012) on a social level. Further on, a complex and critical analysis by Mandelli and Accoto (2012) highlighted that the process of engagement (intended as active behavior of the customer) is strongly linked to the process of interactions, i.e. to the processes of negotiated meaning and discourse and thus always embedded in the socio-cultural context of the relationship. Taking into account the phenomenological and socio-cultural layers of the interaction between brands and customers, Mandelli and Accoto (2012) follow Grönroos approach to value co-creation conceptualization (2011) and emphasize that applying a direct link between customer engagement and value co-creation (assuming that active behavior is always positive for the relationship) oversimplifies the reality, as the value of interactions and experience for customers emerges from the perceived value of this experience and not merely from “being engaged”.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This article aimed to outline the differences among different approaches to the phenomenon and suggests that these differences should be recognized more attentively. The attempts to establish customer engagement as an all-encompassing term that unifies all the dimensionalities of interactions between brands and consumers or antecedents and precedents to it, can result in a loss of some of the concept’s richness and dimensionality. An establishment of clear distinguishing of different research directions related to the concept could on the other hand contribute to clearer advancement of the related studies.

It was observed that there are still many existing challenges related to the phenomenon’s investigation and thus opportunities for further research. Firstly, the complexity of the phenomenon has to be conceptualized more precisely, avoiding simplifications or overgeneralizations. Secondly, studies of social dimension related to the concept are underrepresented, and need to be further explored. Thirdly, the theory still has to define more precisely how engaged customers contribute to the brand performance and to which extent engaged consumers co-create the value. Further on, as engagement online seems to be of a particular importance, investigation of dynamics of online interactions and experience - for instance those within social networks and brand communities or customers’ collaboration and co-production of product development - would provide additional important insights to customer engagement. Additionally, if relying mostly on exploring quantitative relationships of the phenomenon, studies risk neglecting the explanatory power of qualitative research that could further foster theory building.

Our classification does not aim to suggest that certain approach to engagement should be favored over another, but simply proposed that the upcoming studies could frame themselves within one of the research directions – behavioral, psychological, social or multidimensional - which could make further research of customer engagement less ambiguous.

Further on, as the concept of engagement is broadly considered and used in social sciences, an interdisciplinary study could largely contribute to the advancement of the concept. With our proposed categorization of the research directions for engagement within marketing science, further interdisciplinary research related to employee engagement, student engagement, stakeholder engagement and patient engagement could be facilitated.
Figure 1: Customer engagement research categorization

- Behavioral perspective
- Multidimensional perspective
- Psychological (cognitive and affective) perspective
- Social perspective

Customer engagement research categorization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research approach</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Behavioral manifestations online and offline beyond purchase</td>
<td>Customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as customer behavioral manifestations that have a brand or a firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. (Van Doorn et al. 2010). Customer engagement is an overarching construct capturing non-transactional behavior. (Verhoef et al. 2010). Engagement needs to be understood by type, the factors leading to engagement and the value associated with each in terms of ultimate adoption, sales and brand loyalty. In the Web 2.0 context, consumer engagement is visible through means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing, and networking. When measuring engagement, the level of user interaction is an obvious component, and each of the above-stated user actions indicate a different level of engagement. (Ahuja &amp; Medury 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Emotional and cognitive processes, mainly antecedents to the behaviors</td>
<td>Online engagement is a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value. It is characterized by the dimensions of dynamic and sustained cognitive processing and the satisfying of instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional congruence with the narrative schema encountered in computer-mediated entities). (Mollen &amp; Wilson, 2009). Engagement is a second-order construct that is manifested in various first-order “experience” constructs. Engagement is antecedent to outcomes such as usage, affect, and responses to advertising. (Calder et al., 2009). Engagement is a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something—sustained attention. (Higgins et al., 2009). Engagement describes consumer commitment to an active relationship with a specific market offering. Engagement with an object of consumption requires paying attention to and developing feelings for that object. Engagement applies to a consumer's connection with media, advertising, entertainment or brands. (Abdul Ghani et al. 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidimensional</td>
<td>Combination of customer’s different behavioral or psychological dimensions; Value co-creation paradigm; Engagement as a second-order construct manifested in user’s experience with a medium.</td>
<td>Customer engagement is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that cocreate value. CE plays a central role in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions. (Brodie et al. 2011) Engagement is a second-order construct that is manifested in various first-order “experience” constructs. With reference to a specific medium (newspaper, TV, or Web), user experiential engagement can be described as a collection of qualitative experiences with the medium. An experience can be characterized as all the thoughts, emotions, activities, and appraisals that occur during or as a result of an event (Pagani &amp; Mirabella 2011-12).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Focus on social dimensions of B2C and C2C interactions, conversations and community involvement; Negotiation, interpretation and sense-making</td>
<td>Engagement is a very complex concept strongly influenced by psychological, social, interactive, relational, experiential and context-based components. Engagement is a post-modern phenomenon: by nature it is multi-faced, mutable and difficult to predict since it involves interaction between individuals, and between individuals and their context. (Gambetti et al., 2010). Customer engagement (...) it is a precondition as it either facilitates reciprocal comprehension, either because it leads to co-production (collaboration) or because the negotiation processes of the interpretation contexts are more efficient (as the interpersonal communication implies more social richness then the mediated communication). (Mandelli &amp; Accoto, 2012) Phenomenon that is composed of the social or behavioral dimensions. (Fliess et al., 2012)</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


