

Role of Customer Engagement in Customer Loyalty for Retail Service Brands : Customer Orientation of Salesperson as a Mediator

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Abstract

This paper examined the role of customer engagement in customer loyalty for retail service brands. It further explored the role of Customer Orientation of Salesperson as a mediating variable between Customer Engagement and Customer Loyalty. A cross - sectional research on retail customers through questionnaire was conducted. The population of the study included retail urban customers of Pune and Bangalore cities in India. Responses were analyzed using factor analysis and PROCESS procedure for SPSS. The proposed model attempted to evidence the partial mediation effect of Customer Orientation of Salesperson between Engagement and Loyalty. The study established and confirmed the relationship between Engagement and Loyalty as in the literature. The effects of Engagement on Loyalty have been known, yet the function of Customer Orientation dimensions as mediators between Engagement and Loyalty intention is the original contribution of the study. This study was undertaken among an explicit group of retail customers. Thus, it confined generalization of outcomes to other population. This study elucidated the significance of customer engagement for accomplishing customer loyalty for the Indian retail sector. This awareness would enable retail outlets to equip themselves against the developing online markets. The brick and mortar shops, if they give more attention to the training of salespersons towards customer orientation and keep their customers engaged so that they are more positive towards the salesperson, would enhance the customer loyalty for their customers. Thus, the managerial efforts would contribute towards efficient improvement of the traditional retail industry against the online market.

Keywords: customer loyalty, customer orientation of sales person, customer engagement

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The demanding customers of today are not only purchasing products, but they are paying for benefits ; they expect their products to not only satisfy their current needs, but also expect them to be fulfilling and satisfying their long - term requirements. Salespersons should keep in mind this long-term objective of the customers. Most importantly, short-term influence by the salespersons should not influence the long-term relationship with the customers. Salespersons who consider this long-term aspect into their selling process are the ones who bear the fruit in the end and are more successful as they gain the most important aspect of customer relationship, that is, their trust. Progressively, long-term and viable economic benefits depend on a company's capability to maintain, endure, and cultivate its loyal customer base (Rego, Billett, & Morgan, 2009 ; Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner, & Verhoef, 2010). Customer loyalty has become an integral part of any industry. It is necessary to understand that customer loyalty also depends on the customer engagement as well. If customers are highly engaged with a business, customer value will be generated (Ramaswamy, 2009). With focused attention

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towards customer engagement, companies can create a loyal base of customers (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juria & Ili 2011). Customer engagement (CE) refers to a wider “excelling” interactive viewpoint (Vargo, 2009) and is described as a considerable means for building and cultivating affiliations with customers, which they call as service relationships (Brodie et al., 2011). In order to have such a lasting relationship with the customers, the salespersons play a vital role. Their orientation plays a dynamic role in enhancing the relationship between an organization and the customers.

Brown, Mowen, Donavan, and Licata (2002) defined customer orientation of salespersons as comprising of meeting customer requirements, and creating a delight factor in selling. However, Saxe and Weitz conceptualized this long time back in 1982 as adoption of marketing theories by salespersons in trying to help customers in making purchase judgements which would satisfy the customer requirements. With the changing business environment with reference to increasing competition, contention among companies, and the ever-changing consumption pattern of the customers, the role of salespersons also needs to be calibrated. It becomes imperative to understand the role of customer orientation of salespersons towards increasing customer loyalty of the customers. In recent years, researchers have focused on studying the relationship between customer loyalty and customer engagement. However, no such study has been explored on customer orientation of salespersons as a mediating variable between customer loyalty and customer engagement. In this paper, I aim to examine the role of customer engagement on customer loyalty for retail service brands. The study additionally discovers the role of customer orientation of salespersons as a mediator variable between customer loyalty dimensions and customer engagement.

Literature Review

(1) Customer Orientation of Salespersons : Businesses have shifted their focus on customers to customize their business strategies and they uniquely and perennially try to engage and interact with them to flourish and grow (Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, & Schlesinger, 2009). Salesperson customer orientation has become the new mantra for any organization to be successful. Salesperson interaction with the customers has become pivotal and has undergone changes with time. It involves active engagement from the salesperson to keep the customer from being disengaged and providing the right kind of information to the customer at the right time and at the right place. Sales orientation - customer orientation (SOCO) is poised of two factors, sales orientation and customer orientation, of which sales orientation is when a salesperson is focused only on getting the deal closed. His/her sales activities are directed toward only closing a deal (Schultz & Good, 2000) ; whereas, customer - orientation implies that the salespersons try to understand the customers' needs, evaluates them, and helps them in selecting the best possible alternative for them (Jaramillo, Ladik, Marshall, & Mulki, 2007). Their focus is always faith and extensive association rather than using sales skills to get people to buy a product or service for only once (Saxe & Weitz, 1982).

Orientation of customers has been largely categorized into two dimensions, personal selling literature (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) and services marketing literature (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002). In services marketing, Brown et al. (2002) envisioned that orientation of a salesperson towards customers is not only about being appreciative of the customers' requirements and satisfying them, but it is also about the overall interaction with the customers and creating a delight factor for them. As an author, for this research study, I would like to contemplate an utmost recognized explanation for salesperson's orientation towards customers as given in the personal selling literature by Saxe and Weitz (1982). According to them, adoption of marketing theories by a salesperson in trying to help customers in making their purchase judgements, which will satisfy the customer requirements, is the customer orientation of a salesperson. Saxe and Weitz (1982) investigated and recognized seven required demonstratives of a salesperson. They developed a tool to measure the customer orientation of salespersons in the

process of selling against the customer orientation practiced by them in a real scenario. This method is popularly referred to as the “SOCO” perspective.

The items identified by Saxe and Weitz (1982) to measure customer orientation of salespersons are as follows :

- ☞ To help the customer and be his/her guide in making a good purchase decision.
- ☞ To be a facilitator in guiding customers to know their exact needs.
- ☞ To judge the needs of the customers and provide the right kind of products to satisfy those needs.
- ☞ The product should be described accurately, and no false arguments should be made.
- ☞ To adopt a sales presentation to match with customer style.
- ☞ Deception or manipulation of the customers to forcefully buy a product should be avoided.
- ☞ High-pressure techniques should be avoided.

Thomas, Soutar, and Ryan (2001) suggested that the differentiating aspect of customer - oriented selling from former selling approaches include salesperson's involvement in the whole selling process, his/her desire to know and learn about customer needs, avoiding use of high pressure selling, avoiding deception and manipulation in describing products and services adequately, and being a facilitator and guide in customer's satisfactory purchase decisions. Salespersons who are high on motivation are in demand these days as they help to increase customer loyalty by enhancing their experience. This orientation keeps the persons more customer focused. Singh and Koshy (2012) highlighted the six domains for salesperson orientation. These areas are : providing facts to customers, being considerate towards customer needs, sustaining customer satisfaction, gratifying customer needs, generating and delivering customer value, and continuance of long-term customer associations.

There is some research available, which examines the associations between principled leadership, customer orientation, assurance to providing higher customer value, and job pressure in the salesforce (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). It was concluded through empirical study that principled leadership via customer orientation influenced salesperson's assurance to provide advanced customer value. Additionally, both principled leadership and salesperson's guarantee to provide value affect the job pressure of a salesperson. Jaramillo et al. (2007) did a meta - analysis in order to analyze the relationship between salesperson's orientation towards customers and his/her employment performance. They used a well - established scale developed by Saxe and Weitz to measure the orientation towards selling and concluded that there was no moderation effect of customer type and employment performance measures with SOCO and employment performance. Singh and Venugopal (2015) studied the salesperson's customer orientation and its practicality to explain the usefulness of empathies and proficiency at a single level. This study was conducted in an Indian setting. The authors concluded that the association between customer orientation was completely mediated by salesperson's sales aptitude and capability to control his/her emotions.

(2) Customer Engagement : Customer engagement has been defined as an emotional state attained by a sequence of collaborating customer involvements with the help of some objects in any service relationships. Customer engagement plays a pivotal role in constructing customer-brand association quality and, in turn, customer loyalty towards a brand (Brodie et al., 2011). Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) emphasized the relationship of brand experience with brand personality, loyalty, and customer satisfaction. Customer engagement augments consumers' trust for a brand as well as their succeeding loyal behavior. Importance of customer engagement from a business perspective was studied by Gambetti and Graffigna (2010) ; Kumar, Aksoy, Donkers, Venkatesan, Wiesel, and Tillmanns (2010) highlighted that customer engagement lays more emphasis on the customer value that it creates. An engaged customer can help in developing a brand in the social media (Wirtz, Den Ambtman,

Bloemer, Horváth, Ramaseshan, van de Klundert, Canli, & Kandampully, 2013). In addition, if they start sharing their experiences on the social platform, there is no doubt they would emerge as the brand ambassadors for companies. Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, and Morgan (2014) also confirmed the fact that engaged customers behave like loyal customers and customer engagement has affirmative influence on customer loyalty.

With reference to shopping mall behavior among tier II consumers, it was concluded by Khanna and Seth (2018) that the factors that impact the perception of shopping malls among these consumers are various hedonic factors, some promotional offers, and enjoyment.

Customer engagement is the emotional relationship that exists between businesses and consumers focusing on the interaction with customers and customers' value. The idea of customer engagement (CE) is evolving as an important pointer for the strength of the relationship between a customer and a brand. However, few research studies explained the perception of how CE augments the efficiency of constructing such a relationship, especially in retail services.

In the year 2014, Vivek et al. conceptualized customer engagement as a three-dimensional second order construct composed of Conscious Attention, Enthused Participation, and Social Connection. For this research paper, I will be using these dimensions only, and the items used to measure these dimensions have been adopted from Vivek et al. (2014).

(3) Customer Loyalty : Customer loyalty has been conceptualized as a behavioral as well as attitudinal measure. Attitudinal loyalty is customers' advantageous preference towards a service as compared to any other organization which is offering the same service. Customers with such type of loyalty are most likely to switch the moment they find an alternative, which has more advantages and features or is available at less price (Lenka, Suar, & Mohapatra, 2009) ; whereas, behavioral loyalty is strong assurance of customers to commit to a particular product or service even though there are many alternatives available in the market (Lenka et al., 2009). The present study considers customer loyalty as an amalgamation of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Considering the outcomes of customer loyalty for any organization, it would be satisfaction, especially in the retail sector (Lu & Seock, 2008 ; Martenson, 2007; Meyer & Schwager, 2007 ; Sivadas & Baker - Prewitt, 2000 ; Verhoef et al., 2009). Meyer and Schwager (2007) defined customer satisfaction as an outcome of a sequence of customer involvements, which is considered as imperious for forthcoming customer behavior for recommendation and sustenance (Seiders, Voss, Grewal, & Godfrey, 2005), and which additionally influences organizations' market share as well as profitability (Kumar et al., 2010). With reference to the retail sector, literature has always supported the fact that the precursor to customer loyalty is customer satisfaction (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Additionally, loyalty has been considered as a strong emotion behind repurchase intention (Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997). Similar studies have been conducted in an online setting, where authors confirmed the relationship of e-loyalty and customer satisfaction (Kurup & Jain, 2018). The attitudinal and behavioral dimensions have been studied by researchers, but few researchers studied all the four dimensions of loyalty (Harris & Goode, 2004 ; Oliver et al., 1997 ; Sivadas & Baker - Prewitt, 2000). The study conducted by Kumar, Gupta, and Kishor (2016) described the antecedents of cognitive loyalty as the components of store image like the atmosphere of the store, facilities provided by them, service quality, and transparent system. Shetty, Bhandary, Chandra, and Shetty (2018) used the PLS - SEM mediator analysis to conclude that customer perceived value was a full mediator to loyalty and items like image of restaurant and quality of food led to satisfaction. Bowen and Chen (2001) used two items to measure customer loyalty.

Development of Hypotheses

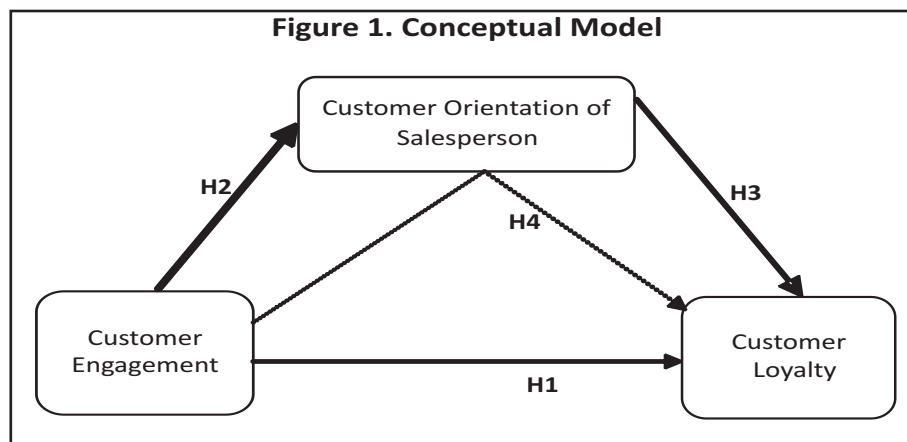
In the recent years, researchers have focused on studying the relationship between customer engagement and loyalty. Recently, in the year 2017, Hapsari, Clemes, and Dean (2017) identified the determinants of customer

loyalty for a high frills Indonesian airline. Customer engagement was found to have an exciting outcome on customer loyalty followed by customer satisfaction. In a cross-sectional study on social media active customers in the year 2016, Solem and Pedersen (2016) confirmed a positive outcome of customer participation on brand loyalty, which was mediated by customer satisfaction. However, the same study on insurance customers concluded that customer participation would not have a long-term positive impact on satisfaction and loyalty, but only a short - term effect. A similar study was conducted on online banking customers by Khan, Rahman, and Fatma (2016), who concluded that customer - brand engagement influenced brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. They also studied another construct, customer experience and concluded the mediating effect of customer experience on brand engagement, customer loyalty, and satisfaction. In the year 2015, O'Brien, Jarvis, and Soutar concluded the full mediation effect of customer engagement between loyalty and CSR issues. Saxe and Weitz (1982) conferred that a salesperson needs motivation in order to be a customer-oriented salesperson. Such motivation can be generated through intrinsic or extrinsic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thakor and Joshi (2005) emphasized that salespeople have to be motivated to be employed in customer oriented selling. There is no research which relates that an engaged customer can also motivate customer orientation of salespersons. The discussion with the experts in the area of marketing has encouraged authors to test if engaged customers can be the external motivating factor for salespersons' customer orientation.

In the year 2007, Knight, Kim, and Crutsinger had inspected the effects of work stress on customer orientation and performance of retail salespersons. Yu and Tseng (2016) concluded that relationship quality was a mediator between salesperson characteristics and relational selling behavior on customer loyalty. Colwell, Hogarth - Scott, Jiang, and Joshi (2009) studied the impact of orientation of a salesperson in the service industry on customer loyalty. Their paper found that customer orientation of salespersons in the service industry could decrease customer costs and upsurge customer profits.

The literature from the recent years has shown the direct impact of customer engagement and customer loyalty. In addition, how a salesperson's orientation would affect customer loyalty is still to be researched. This helped me in proposing the following hypotheses and the research model (Figure 1) :

- **H1** : Customer engagement positively influences customer loyalty.
- **H2** : Customer engagement positively influences customer orientation of salespersons.
- **H3** : Customer orientation of salespersons positively influences customer loyalty.
- **H4** : The effects of customer engagement on customer loyalty are mediated by customer orientation of salespersons.



Research Methodology

The study was undertaken in Pune and Bangalore cities in India between December 2017 to March 2018. Bangalore being the fifth-largest city in India, with a fast growing and emerging market was considered appropriate for the study. Pune being the second largest city in Maharashtra and an important economic hub in Maharashtra was also found suitable for the study. The data collection were carried out in various shopping centers, hypermarkets, etc. in these two cities. Convenience sampling technique was used for the study. The respondents that did not meet the qualifying criteria were not considered for further study. The qualifying criteria for the study was that the customers should have visited the retail outlets at least twice in the last two-months with an average transaction size of ₹ 1000.

A structured questionnaire was deployed to quantify the validity of various factors relating to customer engagement, customer orientation of salespersons, and their outcomes. A 7 - point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) was used to collect the responses. The functioning descriptions of the constructs and the basis for this study are revealed in the Table 1.

The Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of the sample. Demographics reveal that out of the total

Table 1. Sources of Operational Definition of Each Construct

Construct	Items	Source
Customer Engagement (CEG)	Anything related to shopping at this shop grabs my attention. (CEG1)	Vivek et al. (2014)
	I pay a lot of attention to anything about shopping at this shop. (CEG2)	
	My days would not be the same without shopping at this shop. (CEG3)	
	I spend a lot of my discretionary time shopping at this shop. (CEG4)	
Customer Loyalty (CL)	You will continue visiting the retail outlet. (CL1)	Bowen & Chen (2001)
	You will refer the retail outlet to your family and friends. (CL2)	
Customer Orientation of Salesperson (COSO)	The salesperson tries to figure out what the customers' needs are. (COSO1)	Saxe & Weitz (1982)
	The salesperson tries to find out what kind of products would be the most helpful for a customer. (COSO2)	
	The salesperson tries to influence a customer by information rather than by pressure. (COSO3)	
	The salesperson has the customer's best interest in mind. (COSO4)	
	The salesperson tries to offer the products that are best suited to the customers' problems. (COSO5)	

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Sample Characteristic	Name	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	81	43.8
	Female	104	56.2
Average Transaction Size	1: Between ₹ 1000 to ₹ 2000	41	22.2
	2 : Between ₹ 2000 to ₹ 3000	93	50.3
	3: Above ₹ 30000	51	27.6
Income (in ₹)	1: Less than 2 lakhs	45	24.3
	2: Between 2 to 5 lakhs	103	55.7
	3: Between 5 to 7 Lakhs	17	9.2
	4: Above 7 lakhs	20	10.8

respondents, 56.2% were female and the remaining 43.8% were male respondents. Average transaction between ₹ 2000 - ₹ 3000 was reported by 50.3% of the respondents. Of the entire population, 55.7% had an annual income between ₹ 2 - 5 lakhs and 63.2 % were postgraduates.

Data Analysis and Results

The analysis of the study is carried out by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability and internal consistency of the sample was established by Cronbach's alpha values. The reliability scores for the constructs in the study are between 0.817 to 0.869, as shown in the Table 3.

(1) KMO and Bartlett's Test : The sample adequacy is established using KMO and Bartlett's test (Kaiser, 1974). KMO values above 0.8 are considered good. The KMO value of 0.838 explains that the responses are valid and explains the variance in the responses.

(2) Factor Analysis : Exploratory factor analysis is used to extract the factors relevant for the study. The factors that have an Eigen value of 1 or more are further used in the research. Using the criteria of an Eigen value greater than 1, three factors emerge, accounting for 71.082 % of the total variance. The principal component matrix is rotated

Table 3. Results of Reliability of All Variables

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Customer Engagement	4	0.817
Customer Loyalty	2	0.861
Customer Orientation of Salesperson	5	0.869

Table 4. Factor Analysis Results

	Pattern Matrix ^a		
	Component		
	1	2	3
Customer Engagement 1(CEG1)	.055	.909	-.114
Customer Engagement 2 (CEG2)	.019	.689	.178
Customer Engagement 3 (CEG3)	-.005	.687	.195
Customer Engagement 4 (CEG4)	-.001	.795	-.017
Customer Orientation of Salesperson 1 (COSO1)	.843	.004	-.004
Customer Orientation of Salesperson 2 (COSO2)	.885	.116	-.106
Customer Orientation of Salesperson 3 (COSO3)	.816	.097	-.206
Customer Orientation of Salesperson 4 (COSO4)	.763	-.010	.137
Customer Orientation of Salesperson 5 (COSO5)	.657	-.246	.393
Customer Loyalty 1 (CL1)	.000	.127	.855
Customer Loyalty 2(CL2)	-.080	.031	.954

Note. Extraction Method : Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method : Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

^a Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

promax rotation and a factor loading above 0.5 is used for identifying the items under the three factors. The rotated component matrix is presented in the Table 4. The three factors with Eigen values 4.975, 1.679, and 1.165 from the total variance explained are selected for the study.

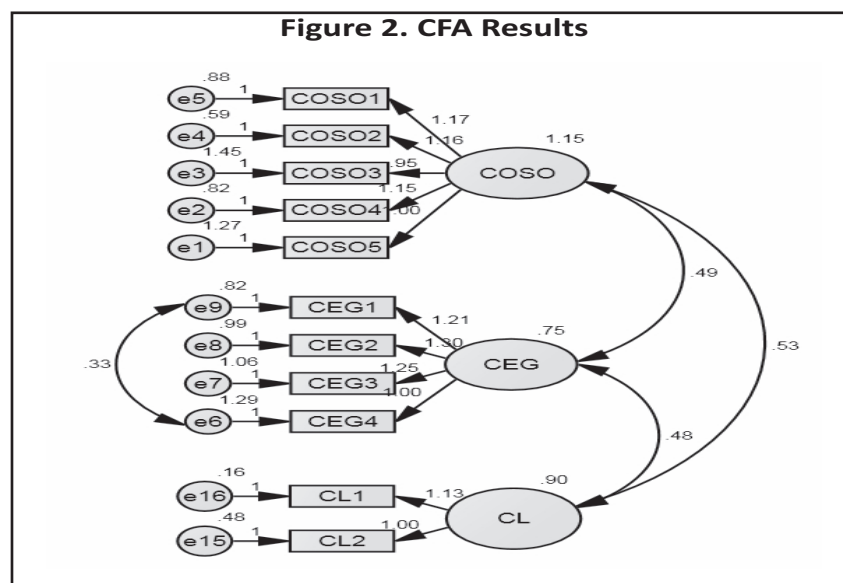
The main factor loadings as per the promax rotation under Factor 1 are customer orientation of salesperson 1 (COSO1), customer orientation of salesperson 2 (COSO2), customer orientation of salesperson 3 (COSO3), customer orientation of salesperson 4 (COSO4), and customer orientation of salesperson 5 (COSO5) (refer to Table 1 for the item statements). This construct explains Customer Orientation of Salesperson. The main loadings on Factor 2 are variables : customer engagement 1 (CEG1), customer engagement 2 (CEG2), customer engagement 3 (CEG3), and customer engagement 4 (CEG4) from the questionnaire. This construct explains Customer Engagement (refer to Table 1 for the item statements).

The main loadings on factor three are variables : customer loyalty1 (CL1) and customer loyalty 2 (CL2). This construct explains Customer Loyalty (refer to Table 1 for the item statements). The Table 4 highlights the factor loadings of each construct.

(3) Confirmatory Factor Analysis : These extracted factors are confirmed using measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA of the measurement model of independent, mediating, and dependent variables shows a reasonably good fit as detailed in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Table 5. Results of Goodness - of - Fit Indices of the Measurement Model

Indices	Recommended	Model
Model chi-square	> 0.05	92.202
CMIN/df	< 5.0	2.305
GFI	> 0.90	0.919
CFI	> 0.90	0.947
TLI	> 0.90	0.928
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.084
IFI	> 0.90	0.948



(4) Mediating Role of Customer Orientation of Salesperson : A simple mediation model as specified by Hayes and Scharkow (2013) is considered in the study to test the intervening role of Customer Orientation of Salesperson between Customer Engagement and Customer Loyalty. The hypothesized model is tested and estimated by PROCESS - a procedure for SPSS (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Earlier in the year 2008, Preacher and Hayes used various approaches to assess the direct and indirect effect in any multiple mediator model. However, for this study, I have used bootstrapping method, which is a non - parametric resampling procedure. The bootstrapping method does not assume any kind of normality or symmetry in the sampling distribution for any kind of indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The mediating role of Customer Orientation of Salesperson in relation between Engagement and Loyalty is confirmed using the bootstrapping method as shown in the Table 6. The overall outcome of Customer Engagement on Customer Loyalty is established since the beta value is 0.4455, p - value is less than 0.01, and CI = 0.3266 to 0.5644. This signifies that if there is a one unit increase in the Customer Engagement quantity, this would associate with about half of a point increase in Customer Loyalty. Significant effect of Customer Engagement on Customer Orientation of Salesperson is also observed with beta value : 0.4525 ; $p < 0.01$; CI = 0.3121 to 0.5928, hence supporting H2. On controlling the variable - Customer Engagement, there is a significant impact of mediator variable Customer Orientation of Salesperson with beta value : 0.2886 ; $p < 0.01$; CI = .1721 to 0.4051 (supporting H3) on Loyalty. Additionally, direct effect of Customer Engagement on Customer Loyalty while controlling the proposed mediator - Customer Orientation of Salesperson is also found to be significant (beta value 0.3149 ; $p < 0.01$; CI = 0.1910 to 0.4388). On statistically controlling the Customer Orientation of Salesperson, the loyalty intention differs as a function of Customer Engagement. This supports hypothesis H1. Hypothesis 4 is partially established since there is a drop in the value of direct effect and connotation of both total as well as direct effects specify a partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Table 6. Mediation of the Effect of Customer Engagement on Loyalty Through Customer Orientation of a Salesperson

Parameter			Beta Value	SE	t	P	BC 95% CI	
							LLCI	ULCI
Engagement	→	Customer Orientation	0.452	.0711	6.362	.000	.3121	.5928
Customer Orientation	→	Loyalty	.2886	.0591	4.886	.000	.1721	.4051
Engagement	→	Loyalty (Direct Effect)	.3149	.0628	5.015	.000	.1910	.4388
Engagement	→	Loyalty (Total Effect)	.4455	.0603	7.392	.000	.3266	.5644

Note. LLCI _ lower limit confidence interval ; ULCI _ upper limit confidence interval

As shown in the Figure 1, the commands of the paths from the independent variable (Customer Engagement) to mediating variable (Customer Orientation of Salesperson) and from it to the dependent variable (Customer Loyalty) are mostly dependable with the projected hypotheses. Better Customer Engagement leads to improved Customer Orientation of Salesperson, which in turn leads to superior Loyalty.

Discussion and Conclusion

The fact that engaged individuals are more likely to be loyal customers is also confirmed by the affirmative impact of customer engagement on brand loyalty reasserts (Vivek et al., 2014). The literature supports that customer engagement has a constructive influence on customer loyalty, especially in the services industry. However, to understand the various exogenous or endogenous variables affecting this relationship is an unexplored area in the retail sector and needs more attention. There are not many studies on the engagement - loyalty model, and no

consideration has been remunerated in previous research on the part of customer orientation as a mediator in explaining the association between customer loyalty and engagement. In order to address this research gap, the present study has included customer orientation measurements as a mediator to the existing engagement - loyalty model. To illuminate this development, customer orientation, determined by Saxe and Weitz (1982), was revised and used as a probable mediator between engagement and loyalty.

The quantitative analysis of the data reveals threefold contributions, of which the preliminary learning confirms that the scale established by Saxe and Weitz (1982) for customer orientation of salespersons validates a comparable configuration when embraced for retail services in India. Thus, the findings suggest that the five items used by me to validate the scale as a mediator is accepted, and it is proven to have partial mediation between customer engagement and loyalty. The subsequent impact of the study is in establishing and confirming the association between engagement and loyalty in the writings. The results of our study support the existing literature on association between customer engagement and customer loyalty. It supplementary approves the influence of customer orientation on customer loyalty also. The model also authorizes that if a customer is involved, it would lead to intensification in the customer orientation of the salesperson. The model also endorses that there is partial mediation of customer orientation of salesperson in affecting the association between customer engagement and customer loyalty. Thus, elucidating that, if a customer is engaged, he/she will motivate the salesperson to have his/her orientation towards the customer, which would affect the customer loyalty.

Managerial Implications

From a management perspective, the results provide numerous suggestions. However, the relationship between customer loyalty and customer engagement has been studied in literature, but the influence of customer orientation as a mediator is the original contribution of the study. More precisely, engaged customers act as an external motivating factor for customer orientation of salespersons. This knowledge would enable retail outlets to equip themselves against the developing online markets. The offline shops/stores, if they give more attention to the training of salespersons towards customer orientation and keep their customers engaged so that they are more positive towards salespersons, this would enhance the customer loyalty among their customers. Thus, the administrative efforts would contribute towards efficient improvement of the traditional retail industry against the online market.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

The present study is restricted to a precise sample from India and retail service settings. Yet, I propose that future studies may possibly consider measuring the mediating role of customer orientation between engagement and loyalty intent in different service situations. Since the sample had more women respondents, this could be one of the limitations of the study. In future, similar models can be tested across different age groups and with more diverse samples. The models can be tested and compared with urban and rural consumers in Indian markets.

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