



Exploring the drivers of B2B end user engagement

Amy Greiner Fehl, Valerie Good & Todd Arnold

To cite this article: Amy Greiner Fehl, Valerie Good & Todd Arnold (2022): Exploring the drivers of B2B end user engagement, Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, DOI: [10.1080/08853134.2022.2120488](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2120488)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2120488>



Published online: 15 Sep 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Exploring the drivers of B2B end user engagement

Amy Greiner Fehl^a , Valerie Good^b  and Todd Arnold^c 

^aDepartment of Economics, Marketing, and Supply Chain Management, School of Business, Georgia Gwinnett College, 1000 University Center Ln, Lawrenceville, Georgia, 30043, USA; ^bDepartment of Marketing, Seidman College of Business, Grand Valley State University, 50 Front Ave SW, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49504, USA; ^cSchool of Marketing and International Business, Spears College of Business, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA

ABSTRACT

While engagement has enjoyed an abundance of academic and practitioner attention recently, few studies have examined engagement from the perspective of end users utilizing products and brands at work. In acknowledgement of the important role end users play in B2B sales and service ecosystems, the current study applies both social exchange and social identity theories to illuminate the process through which B2B end user engagement develops. By using scenarios with random assignment – an under-utilized approach in sales research – our results suggest that the perceived interactivity of supplier firm activities moderates the relationship between cognitive engagement and behaviors such that it nudges end users toward proactively advocating for the supplier firm brand. Moreover, the supplier firm activity is even more effective when a salesperson personally introduces the initiative to end users. Hence, with intentional and interactive connection, salespeople can influence end user engagement behaviors and add value to the sales process, a key insight for supplier firms. Finally, we explore two key drivers of end user engagement: end user work identity and need to belong. A better understanding of how and why end user engagement and subsequent behaviors develop will help salespeople connect more effectively with end users and ultimately drive more sales. These contributions meaningfully increase our understanding regarding contextual influences of end user engagement within the B2B sales arena.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 August 2021
Accepted 30 August 2022

KEYWORDS

B2B end user engagement; sales and service ecosystems; perceived interactivity; work identity; need to belong; experimental design

Recent research has highlighted that B2B selling accounts for nearly half of total U.S. revenues, although research focusing upon buyer behavior is often skewed toward examining consumers (Grewal et al. 2015). Fundamentally, however, B2B buying behavior differs substantially from consumer buying behavior. For example, B2B buying processes are often characterized as multi-stage and complex, potentially involving many decision-makers and multiple stakeholders, frequently with conflicting priorities (Holliman and Rowley 2014; Ranjan and Friend 2020). While B2B research has traditionally emphasized the relationships between the supplier firm and decision makers in the customer firm, i.e., procurement (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna, and Houston 2006; Chakravarty, Kumar, and Grewal 2014), the customer firm is typically composed of several disparate groups, as highlighted in the ‘service ecosystems’ of selling (Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018; Wang et al. 2020). Building on this theoretical foundation for selling, our research aims to expand understanding of a research-neglected group of B2B stakeholders in the service ecosystem: end users. We define end users as the individuals who use the supplier firm’s product in a way that is central to their job function as part of their daily job activities but who do *not* have purchasing authority. Put another way, the end user is the person within the firm who actually uses the branded products purchased at the organizational level.

Recent research emphasizes that ‘activities fostering exchanges with end users are an important foundation for creating valuable offerings’ and suggests that research on B2B end users should become a priority in marketing (Homburg, Theel, and Hohenberg 2020, 9). Addressing such a call, our research focuses upon the development of engagement with B2B end users, and how supplier firm activities targeting end users can influence this process. Salespeople may intuitively understand that end users are influential, but research is lacking on how to best engage them (Rangarajan et al. 2020).

Since end users are the ones who use the products that salespeople sell as part of their daily job requirements, end user engagement with the supplier firm may typically be derived through experiences with the product itself. However, presently, gaps exist in research regarding what individual end user characteristics contribute to engagement with a supplier firm brand and what factors beyond product satisfaction may engender engagement. That is, what is end user engagement? How can sales professionals get end users engaged, and what are the mechanisms? Moreover, can salespeople increase end user engagement behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth and requesting repurchase?

Addressing these research questions is important for two key reasons: (1) end users can be consequential influencers in the decision-making process of the customer firm

(procurement commonly weighs their informed opinion heavily before buying, e.g., Kohli 1989); and (2) end users are a unique source of feedback for supplier firms, thus co-creators of value in the selling process (Ernst, Hoyer, and Rübsaamen 2010; Blocker et al. 2012). End users are accordingly key actors in service ecosystems and provide a crucial ‘thin crossing point’ (i.e., the location at which service can be efficiently exchanged for service) for salespeople to deepen their relationships in pursuit of stronger ties and collaboration with buying firms and ultimately drive value creation (Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018, 2).

To address these questions, this paper provides an empirical investigation using two separate scenario-based experiments with actual end users in their own work contexts that reproduce the unique circumstances found in B2B selling. Findings reveal how the interactivity of a supplier firm activity – and salespeople in particular – move end users from cognitive engagement to engagement *behaviors*, which are most valuable to salespeople and their firms. This paper also explores how an end user’s innate need to belong, as well as his/her work identity, influence the development of end user engagement distinct from what one might expect to see in a consumer context. Hence, from a practical perspective, salespeople have the ability to influence engagement above and beyond just relying on the products being sold. That is, through intentional connection with end users and interactive supplier firm activities, salespeople can influence end user engagement behaviors and add value to the sales process.

This manuscript makes the following contributions to extant literature. First, we propose, operationalize, and demonstrate the effectiveness of a parsimonious definition of end user engagement while investigating an overlooked, yet influential, stakeholder group in sales and service ecosystems. Second, we explore which mechanisms drive end users to engage with brands *on the job* – specifically, work identity and the individual’s need to belong. A better understanding of how and why end users develop engagement with the supplier firm and subsequent behaviors will help salespeople connect more effectively to end users and ultimately drive more sales. To effectively sell in any B2B context, salespeople must understand the motivations and interests of key stakeholders (Homburg, Theel, and Hohenberg 2020; Plouffe, Williams, and Leigh 2004). Hence, understanding that work identity and the need to belong are important drivers of end user engagement can help salespeople determine how to best connect with this important group of stakeholders. For example, salespeople need to recognize that rather than spending money on golf outings that may not resonate with key stakeholders within the customer firm (e.g., Lingqvist, Plotkin, and Stanley 2015), meeting end users at their job site and connecting through the work itself will be more beneficial. Finally, we explore how the perception of the interactivity of supplier firm activities, via salespeople in particular, can help encourage valuable engagement behaviors from end users. These contributions meaningfully increase our understanding of end user engagement.

This paper is organized as follows. We first describe engagement, then introduce support for our hypotheses. After explaining our methodology and revealing our findings, we conclude with a discussion of theoretical contributions and managerial implications and directions for future research.

Conceptual background

Engagement in marketing

Within the domain of relationship marketing, customer engagement has become increasingly popular, spurred both by the expanding interest in service dominant logic and the value co-creation inherent in selling activities (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018), as well as the availability and potential impact of technology and its role in fostering customer engagement (Zoltners et al. 2021). Venkatesan (2017) explains the interest in engagement: ‘The relationships between a firm and its customers are ever evolving, with growing opportunities to connect to other customers and firms through social media and mobile devices’ (p. 289). Customer engagement may be particularly applicable to end users in the B2B context because it pertains to ‘individuals who interact with the brand, without necessarily purchasing it or planning on purchasing it’ (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012, 127). Hence, the lack of an individual’s involvement in the decision to purchase does not preclude the individual from becoming engaged with the supplier brand. End user engagement is particularly useful for salespeople to understand and cultivate because once engaged with a product or brand, end users become internal advocates that can help sell the benefits to procurement individuals within the company (e.g., Lawrence et al. 2019; Kohli 1989). In fact, as shown in Table 1, some literature hints at the importance of end users in sales and service ecosystems, yet surprisingly little scholarship exists beyond conceptual or qualitative inquiry.

Furthermore, a lack of consensus exists in current marketing literature on how to best define engagement (e.g., Mollen and Wilson 2010; Vivek et al. 2014; Harmeling et al. 2017). For clarity’s sake, we advocate the importance of distinguishing the psychological state from subsequent behaviors. Past research has conceptualized customer engagement to be ‘a customer’s cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand’ (Mollen and Wilson 2010, 1). This psychological state of engagement can be considered an antecedent to engagement behavior and in fact can provide the underlying theoretical explanation for behavior. Adapted from Brodie et al. (2011), the following definition serves as the basis for our study:

End user engagement is the level of an end user’s sense of connection to, and mutual understanding with, a focal agent/object (e.g., brand).

Our definition reflects end users’ unique position of daily interaction with the brand that is central to the function of their job. Indeed, end users rely on brands to complete

Table 1. Building a case for the importance of end users in personal selling & sales management.

Year	Authors	Investigation type	End users	Drivers of engagement	Key findings related to end users
Current	This Study	Quantitative	Explicit focus	Product satisfaction, need to belong, and work identity, perceived interactivity	This research explores mechanisms leading to end user engagement beyond product satisfaction while also demonstrating how perceived interactivity – including salesperson actions – moves end users from cognitive engagement to valuable engagement behaviors.
2021	Rustholkarhu et al.	Conceptual	Implied in 'actors' and 'experts'	N/A	Customers' complex needs introduce actors who may not have previously attended the traditional sales meetings (e.g., experts) in the B2B sales and value creation processes. To manage these more complex customer experiences, consisting of multiple interactions, companies need many internal and external resources and capabilities. This places more emphasis on organizing not only the collaboration between sales and marketing but also within the organization as a whole, and between customers and other stakeholders.
2020	Homburg et al.	Qualitative & Quantitative	Explicitly mentioned	Importance of engagement mentioned, no antecedents investigated	Firms need to develop an 'end user' priority, defined as a strategic emphasis on engaging with the final customer, who applies or consumes the offering, and leveraging the final customer insights for growing the business. Activities fostering exchanges with end users are an important foundation for creating valuable offerings, and B2B companies try to establish connections with end users. Hence, in developing 'marketing excellence' scholarship on end users should be a top priority.
2020	Wang et al.	Conceptual	Implied in 'stakeholders in the organization'	N/A	This investigation represents the longstanding and continuous effort to understand and articulate the important and evolving role of the salesperson. Effectual selling is focused on resource integration, stakeholder interaction, and value co-creation under environmental uncertainty. Selling has become interactions between multiple salespeople within a selling organization and multiple stakeholders within a buying organization.
2019	Lawrence et al.	Quantitative	Implied in 'buyer advocate on the inside'	N/A	As organizational buying systems grow more complex and sophisticated, suppliers increasingly rely on buyer advocacy, which is broadly defined as a person on the inside of the buyer organization who tries to influence his/her colleagues – specifically advocating for the supplier's products and services – such that the supplier's standing is improved.
2019	Brotspies & Weinstein	Quantitative	Explicitly mentioned	N/A	Consistent with the relationship marketing paradigm and trend toward co-creation of value, we would expect B2B organizations to collaborate more with their current and prospective customers on end user needs. Firms dealing directly with the end user and may have a better assessment of their customers and the success of their targeting efforts.
2018	Hartmann et al.	Conceptual	Explicitly mentioned in the service ecosystem of sales	N/A	This article demonstrates that the sales literature is converging on a systemic and institutional perspective that recognizes that selling and value creation unfold over time and are embedded in broader social systems. The authors redefine selling in terms of the interaction between actors aimed at creating and maintaining thin crossing points – the locations at which service can be efficiently exchanged for service – through the ongoing alignment of institutional arrangements and the optimization of relationships. This definition underscores how broad sets of human actors engage in selling processes, regardless of the roles that characterize them. A service ecosystems perspective reveals that selling continues to be an essential activity and how broader sets of actors participate in selling processes. The authors explicitly state, 'many would argue that [an example company in this research] excelled in prospecting by targeting end users rather than following the industry norm of targeting executives... after a successful trial, end users often lobbied their managers to try the solution (e.g., they engaged in selling, the thinning of crossing points)'; p. 12.

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Year	Authors	Investigation type	End users	Drivers of engagement	Key findings related to end users
2016	Torvinen & Ulkuniemi	Qualitative (Case Study)	Explicitly mentioned	Engagement emphasized in value co-creation process	This paper focuses on the way value creation can be enhanced through actively engaging end-users as co-creators of value in public procurement via a case study analysis.
2016	Lapoule & Colla	Qualitative	Explicitly mentioned	N/A	The purpose of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the multi-channel impact on the role of sales forces and the way in which they are managed in a B2B context. The omni-channel strategy implies shifting the emphasis in the channel and moving from a focus on direct sales to the buyer ('selling-in') to a stress on direct sales to the end user ('selling-out').
2015	Lingqvist et al.	Editorial	Implied in 'more people inside the organization are taking part in the buying decision process'	N/A	Decision-making authority for purchases is slipping away from individuals in familiar roles – often those with whom B2B sales teams have long-standing relationships. More people the organization are playing pivotal roles in sizing up offerings, so the path to closing sales has become more complicated.
2015	Schmidt et al.	Editorial	Implied in 'the different roles in the organization' that have veto power in buying decisions	N/A	Salespeople need to sell to multiple roles because any one of these roles can act as a 'mobilizer' (champion) within an organization to help with the conversion process.
2012	Rodriguez & Peterson	Conceptual	Explicitly mentioned	The need for customer engagement emphasized	In sales and service, B2B professionals are dealing with entire organizations, which are comprised of individuals who are key decision makers, from the gate keeper to the end user to the person who signs the check. With every step in engaging a prospect or current customer, the B2B salesperson must first build credibility with each of these individuals.
1989	Kohli	Quantitative	Implied in 'expert power'	N/A	A field investigation of 251 organizational purchase decisions suggests that expert power (from end users) is the most important influence determinant in a buying center. Individuals (end users or others) aim to sway decision makers.

their job requirements, and through this reliance there exists the potential to develop strong connections to brands and a sense that the brand understands their job requirements and designs its products accordingly.

Hypotheses development

Product satisfaction and social exchange theory as mechanisms driving engagement

Harmeling et al. (2017) explain that engagement happens through experiential activities that 'stimulate heightened psychological and emotional connections to the firm, brand, or other customers' (p. 322). In a B2B context, engagement can develop from co-creative experiences similar to B2C. However, there are two crucial contextual distinctions in a B2B environment: 1) compulsory use of the brand (product/service) on the *job* and 2) the brand's importance to the individual's *work* identity based on the centrality of work to the individual's sense of self (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001).

What is the mechanism behind individuals developing engagement in response to interactive experiences with a focal agent/object (or brand)? Hollebeek (2011) advocates one place to start may be social exchange theory (SET), which suggests that an individual will feel a sense of obligation to a focal object/agent based on the benefits received from it

(Blau 1964). The end user's compulsory experience with the supplier firm's brand¹ requires that end users have experienced the supplier firm's product on the job and, as a result, will experience some degree of product satisfaction. We define end user *product satisfaction* as the evaluation of brand performance in a work context based on experience with the product or service (Russell-Bennett et al. 2007). As suggested by SET, a positive experience with a product may lead to end user-brand reciprocity in the form of cognitive and affective connection to the supplier firm's brand (Shiau and Luo 2012). While this relationship (i.e., performance to positive brand evaluations and feelings) has been established in past literature, we first hypothesize for the main effect before testing for moderating influences. Thus, we predict,

H1: The higher the end user's product satisfaction with the supplier firm's branded products, the higher the end user engagement with the supplier firm's brand.

Need to belong and social identity theory as mechanisms driving engagement

In addition to reciprocity, as suggested by SET, another possible explanation behind the development of engagement may be an individual's desire to be part of a group (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Consumer-level consumption research confirms that individuals use brands as important pieces of their concept of self and specifically to meet

personal goals (Fournier and Alvarez 2013). Likewise, research has shown that brands can build a sense of community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Recent research even suggests that companies should create marketing content that is designed to appeal to individuals' need to belong as a way to increase customer engagement (Giakoumaki and Krepapa 2020). In other words, brands that satisfy consumers' need to belong will thereby generate higher engagement.

In a work – rather than consumer consumption – context, the supplier firm brand is also a potential focus of an individual's need to connect. Recent qualitative findings from sales research highlight the importance of need to belong in a work context and note that brands on the job can provide a sense of belonging for salespeople. While such research was focused on salesperson brand identification with the brands they sell, it elucidates how an individual's need to belong can encourage them to feel connected to a brand: 'The connection that participants noted toward the brands through their identification illustrates this need' (Gillespie and Noble 2017, 233). As explained by Baumeister and Leary (1995), some individuals have a stronger need to belong than others, and we assert that these individuals would feel a stronger desire to connect to brands and the salespeople who represent them and feel higher engagement with salient work brands. Specifically, we hypothesize,

H2: The higher the individual end user's need to belong, the higher the end user's engagement with the supplier firm's brand.

Individuals with a higher need to belong are those who more actively seek a sense of connection in their lives, including on the job. They are more likely to feel connected to a brand – brand engagement – because they are more likely to be looking for opportunities to connect (Baumeister and Leary 1995). In a similar way, higher product satisfaction has more of a positive impact on brand engagement for individuals with a higher need to belong because they are more likely to use the higher product satisfaction to meet their need to connect. We find this effect in consumer behavior literature (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester, and Palazon 2016), and we propose that the same effect is present in a work environment and perhaps even more so. That is, the establishment of a product as a trusted complement to a work role (i.e., a facilitator to work accomplishment, hence a satisfying product to use) creates the opportunity for connection/belonging for the end user. Following the logic of SET theory, individuals with a higher need to belong would also respond more positively to higher product satisfaction and would feel a stronger sense of connection to brands that satisfy their products' needs on the job (Snyder and Newman 2019). Consistent with this, we propose:

H3: End user need to belong moderates the relationship between product satisfaction and engagement such that the relationship is stronger when need to belong is higher.

Work identity and social identity theory as mechanisms driving engagement

In addition, for end users, the group identity provided by their job and their profession may be potent. Ashforth and

Mael (1989) explain that social identification stems from the ability to categorize individuals as a group and is driven by the stature and distinctiveness of the group identity. The supplier firm brands that an end user experiences at work can be perceived as enhancing (or detracting) from the end user's self-image if the supplier firm's brand is perceived as helping (or hindering) the end user's success on the job (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Hogg and Terry 2000).

End users for whom work is more important to their identity (higher work identity) place more importance on a job well-done. These same individuals would thus be more invested in brands on the job, simply because these brands help them get the job done. In other words, those for whom the job is more important are also more likely to be affectively engaged with the brand that plays a central role in the job (such as a forklift for the operator or a learning management system for teachers). In short, the more central one's work identity is to one's sense of self, the more likely that the individual will feel connected to the supplier firm brand (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001) because it is a symbol of work and job commitment. Therefore, we predict and control for end user work identity in our model due to the B2B sales context. More formally,

H4: The higher the end user's work identity, the higher the level of end user engagement with the supplier firm's brand.

The relationship between psychological engagement and engagement behaviors

The work context also has important implications for end user engagement behaviors as well. As explained by Van Doorn et al. (2010), a sense of engagement can lead to several behavioral outcomes beyond purchase, such as positive word-of-mouth (WOM), providing product or service support information to other customers, brand community participation (online and off), and referrals (p. 253). Within the context of buying centers, these engagement behaviors – asking the decisionmaker for a certain brand or talking to coworkers about a preferred supplier brand – function as influence attempts (Kohli 1989). End users often engage in influence tactics and promotions for supplier firm brands, from comments on Reddit to wearing supplier firm-branded clothes to asking managers for a specific supplier firm brand, whether it is an equipment operator asking for a Caterpillar center-pivot 440 backhoe or a teacher requesting Brightspace Desire2Learn for online classes. A higher sense of connection and belief in mutual understanding between the brand and the end user undergirds these behavioral intentions (Van Doorn et al. 2010). We propose that end user engagement will lead to a constellation of brand-positive behaviors. Accordingly,

H5: The higher the level of end user engagement, the higher the likelihood the end user will exhibit engagement behaviors, such as word-of-mouth (WOM) and brand-related social media activities.

Perceived interactivity and social exchange theory as mechanisms driving engagement behaviors

In addition to an end user's direct experience with a product and work identity, the supplier firm's choice of

customer-focused activities is an important tool for salespeople to connect with and ultimately influences stakeholders within the customer firm (Rapp, Agnihotri, and Forbes 2008). Following the logic of social exchange theory (SET), supplier firm activities can capitalize on many possibilities offered by various media (e.g., email, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, smartphone apps, etc.) and encourage end users to respond similarly to an individual's impulse to respond when someone says 'hello'. With the advent of new technologies, there are more ways for salespeople to interact with customers and the entire B2B ecosystem than ever before, and savvy supplier firms use these new technologies to influence the buying process (Rodriguez, Peterson, and Krishnan 2012). These types of interactions took on heightened importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrating how SET mechanisms elucidate digital interactions as well as face-to-face (Cortez and Johnston 2020).

We define *supplier firm activities* in a B2B context as actions and communications undertaken by the sales team and/or marketing departments 'that facilitate and maintain value through exchange with multiple stakeholders' (Hult et al. 2011, 44). Some examples include posting customer polls on LinkedIn, hosting a user forum online, and salespeople exchanging tweets with stakeholders in the customer firm (Agnihotri et al. 2016). Each one of these examples provides the opportunity for customers to interact with the firm or the firm's representative (Marshall et al. 2012).

We propose a definition for the *perception of interactivity* based on actual business practices: in a reproduction of interpersonal communication, end users perceive they have the opportunity to respond to stimuli in such activities. In other words, an interactive supplier firm activity is one where feedback is potentially collected from the receiver of the supplier firm activity (McMillan and Hwang 2002). The perception of interactivity would naturally result from some action by the supplier firm, but ultimately it is the perception of the end user rather than the intent of the supplier firm that drives engagement outcomes. Extant literature has found important discrepancies between the intended interactivity of the firm's outreach activity and the perception of interactivity by the target audience (Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). We thus focus on the perception of interactivity by the end user. We expect a positive effect on end user behavioral intentions due to the possibility of reciprocal communication (that is, interactivity) and a natural urge to respond in kind. More formally we hypothesize,

H6: The perception of interactivity of the supplier firm's activity is positively related to end user engagement behaviors.

The moderating impact of perceived interactivity

When the supplier firm's activities are perceived as interactive, end users will be pulled toward communicating and deepening the process of engagement with a supplier firm brand (McMillan and Hwang 2002). As noted previously, a sense of connection and understanding is a key aspect of brand engagement. We propose that an actual perception of interactivity is the nudge that moves end users toward behavioral intentions and actual behaviors.

Considering the logic of reciprocal relationship dynamics outlined in SET, it could be that giving end users a way to interact with the supplier firm can build upon psychological brand engagement to nudge end users toward actual behaviors, such as positive word-of-mouth and social media activities (Hollebeek 2019). For those end users with higher brand engagement, interactive supplier firm activities will be an even more effective nudge toward engagement behaviors. As explained by McMillan and Hwang (2002), individuals respond positively to a sense of control provided by the supplier firm activity as well as salesperson interaction through facilitated interactivity. These types of activities encourage end users to engage in value-enhancing activities for salespeople and the supplier firm (Nambisan and Baron 2010). Thus, we predict,

H7: Perceived interactivity of the supplier firm activity moderates the relationship between end user engagement and behaviors such that the relationship is stronger when perceived interactivity is higher.

The role of end user engagement, its antecedents, and behavioral outcomes are demonstrated in our proposed model (see Figure 1).

Study 1 – medium-to-heavy equipment operators

Method

Design

We conducted a 2x2x2 scenario-based experiment using a forklift operator and a fictitious forklift brand (Doer Forklift), where the participants – who themselves identified as being medium-heavy equipment operators – imagine themselves in a shipping warehouse (such as the one they presently work in) and are exposed to a supplier firm activity similar to tools realistically employed by salespeople today (Rangarajan et al. 2020). Participants were asked to read (1) either a low or high product satisfaction scenario, (2) either a low or high work identity scenario and (3) either a scenario with an interactive supplier firm activity or a supplier activity without an interactive component. The supplier firm activity scenarios were deployed to generate variance in the perception of interactivity and designed to reflect the type of initiatives that supplier firms use to reach end users. The scenarios and manipulations are shown in Figure 2.

Procedure and sample

We recruited 260 survey responses from Prolific (Harding and Murdock 2022), using a panel of medium-to-heavy equipment operators. In addition, respondents were screened in the survey itself with the question: 'Do you use medium-to-heavy equipment as part of your job function?' The respondents all received \$1.90 per completed survey, meeting the minimum wage requirement of Prolific for high-quality data. Five surveys were excluded due to skipped questions, leaving 255 surveys for analysis. In this sample, 34% of respondents were female. The mean tenure at their current employer was approximately five years, with a range

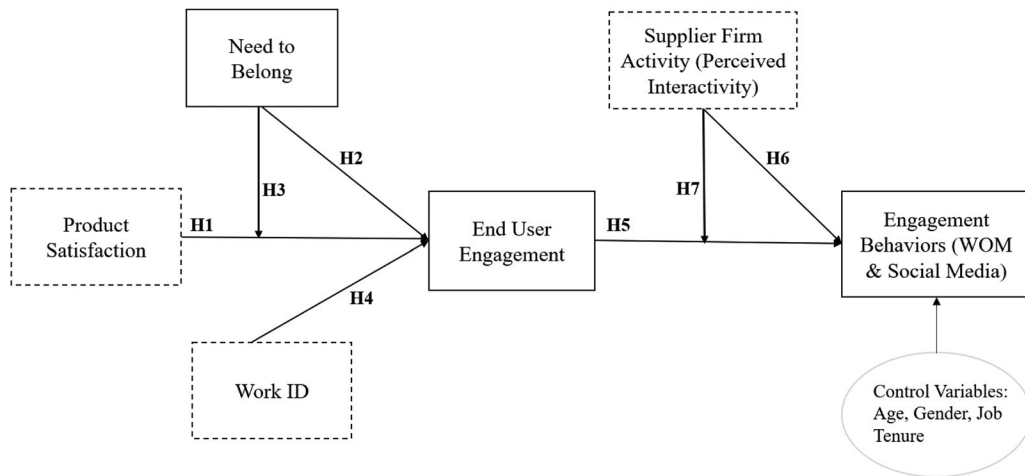


Figure 1. Conceptual model of end user engagement antecedents and outcomes. Note: Constructs in dashes were manipulations in the experimental design; constructs with solid black lines are latent variables. Interactive supplier firm activities were manipulated; perceived interactivity was then measured as a latent variable. Work ID was manipulated, and we also controlled for actual identity within the model.

Experimental Scenario for Medium-to-Heavy Equipment Operators – ALL Participants

For the following questions, please imagine that you are a forklift operator in a large shipping warehouse, Big Deal Shipping. You have worked the day shift from 7 AM to 4 PM Monday through Friday for the last three years. You unload trailers, stack the bundles of flat cardboard, feed the bundles to the various machines as they need them and take off the finished bundles of boxes. Your number one priority is to keep the sorting machines running.



Work Identity Conditions	Product Satisfaction Conditions	Supplier Firm Activity Conditions
<p>Work Identity 1 (LOW)</p> <p>You feel indifferent towards your job as a forklift operator. You had not planned on being a forklift operator, but you had previously gotten your Class 1 (tractor trailer) license for a summer moving truck driver job and that was all the company required for you to start work.</p> <p>If anyone asks what you do for a living, you respond, "I work for a shipping company," without specifying that you drive the forklift because it's not important for you. You are currently saving money to go to cooking school. Your job as a forklift operator is not important to your sense of self.</p> <p>This is your favorite shirt for the weekend.</p> 	<p>Product Satisfaction 1 (LOW)</p> <p>You drive a forklift made by Doer, a nationally known supplier of heavy-duty construction equipment.</p> <p>You do not like your Doer forklift. It is sluggish and slow. You have used forklifts made by other brands and most of them perform better than your Doer. Sometimes you feel like you are fighting with your Doer forklift to just be able to meet your performance targets.</p> 	<p>Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 1 (Flyer on Phone - LOW)</p> <p>Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their forklift on the job.</p> <p>You have received a free app from Doer for your smartphone that provides you with an informational flyer when you open the app.</p> <p>Please take a minute to examine the informational flyer "on your phone."</p> 
<p>Work Identity 2 (HIGH)</p> <p>You love your job. In short, you feel like you are playing with big toy blocks all day, and your friends and coworkers are right there playing alongside you. All this stuff that's real, rewarding work. You are having fun and getting paid pretty well, too. If anyone asks you what you do, you proudly answer, "I'm a forklift operator and I love it."</p> <p>Prior to getting this job, you got your Class 1 (tractor trailer) license specifically to become a forklift operator because you had always liked watching them.</p> <p>Your job as a forklift operator is very important to your sense of self and you cannot imagine doing another job for a living.</p> <p>This is your favorite shirt for the weekends.</p> 	<p>Product Satisfaction 2 (HIGH)</p> <p>You drive a forklift made by Doer, a nationally known supplier of heavy-duty construction equipment.</p> <p>You love your Doer forklift. It handles wonderfully and helps you get your job done quickly and efficiently. You have used forklifts made by other brands, but none of them perform as well as a Doer forklift. It lifts smoothly and never locks and seemingly has a full 360 degree turning radius like a roulette wheel. Your Doer forklift makes you look good and helps you meet all of your performance targets.</p>	<p>Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 2 (Interactive App - HIGH)</p> <p>Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their forklift on the job.</p> <p>You have received a free app from Doer for your smartphone that include tips on efficient stacking and upcoming training modules for forklift operators. The app also allows you to send feedback directly to Doer about your experience with the product. The write up of the app promises that Doer will respond to any questions or feedback within 24 hours.</p> <p>When you open the app, it first asks for feedback on Doer's forklift and how to improve it for the next version.</p> <p>Please type your suggestions below:</p> <div data-bbox="1005 1606 1404 1669" style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>Next page: response from the app "Thank you for your feedback. Your suggestions will be sent to the Doer forklift engineering team."</p>

Figure 2. Scenario-based experiment for medium-to-heavy equipment operators.

of a few months to 32 years. Approximately 66% of respondents were younger than 35, 29% were between 35 and 55, and the rest were over 55. Approximately 21% of the medium-to-heavy equipment operators worked in a rural community, 45% worked in a suburban community, and 35% worked in an urban community.

Measures

In addition to the scenarios manipulating *product satisfaction*, *supplier firm activity*, and *work identity* (randomly assigned, see Figure 2), we measured the other target constructs with scales validated in previous research. *Need to Belong* was measured as a trait using seven items from Leary

et al. (2013). *End User Engagement (Psychological)* was measured using eight items from Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009). *End User Engagement Behavior* was measured using a scale of eight behavioral intentions adapted from Vivek et al. (2014) and Kumar and Pansari (2016). Subsequent to the *supplier firm activity* manipulation in Figure 2, we measured the *perceived interactivity* of the supplier firm initiative using six items from McMillan and Hwang (2002)'s perception of interactivity scale. The perceived interactivity of the supplier firm activity (i.e., the measured construct) was used in the analysis, consistent with theory and our hypotheses. More specifically, following extant literature (McMillan and Hwang 2002; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011) and the marketing discipline's focus on lived experience, interactivity as a construct is not based on whether the supplier firm intends to deploy an interactive initiative but whether the target audience (end users, in this case) perceives the initiative as interactive. To control for the individual's work identity (trait-like) in addition to the manipulation, we measured *work identity* using five items from Paullay, Alliger, and Stone-Romero (1994). The scale items for *work identity* and *need to belong* were asked prior to the manipulations at the beginning of the survey. All items and composite reliabilities are available in the Appendix.

Analysis

A moderated mediation model was run with version 3.5 of the PROCESS macro by Hayes, using Model 22 for one moderator prior to the mediation and one moderator after the mediation (Hayes 2017). As shown in Figure 1, need to belong was analyzed as a moderator of the relationship between product satisfaction and psychological engagement (the mediator) with engagement behavior as the dependent variable of interest. In addition, perceived interactivity of the supplier firm activity was analyzed as a moderator of the relationship between psychological engagement and engagement behavior. Work identity was included as a covariate. The model also controlled for the respondent's age, gender, and job tenure. To establish the discriminant validity of our latent variable measures, we computed the AVE-SV comparison; in Table 2, the diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE values, which are greater than all the off-diagonal correlation values, meaning each latent variable shares greater variance with its indicators than with other latent variables (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Descriptive statistics also are available in Table 2.

Steps to mitigate common method variance (CMV) and multicollinearity. Common method variance (CMV) could be a potential source of bias in survey-based results; however, we took several steps to ensure CMV is not a concern in this research. In this study, we combine experimental conditions with random assignment and survey data (separate sources – i.e., researcher assigned vs. respondent indicated); and, more importantly, we test interactions, which past research conveys are not artifacts of common method variance (Siemsen, Roth, and

Table 2. Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics for study 1 variables (equipment operator end users).

	Product satisfaction manipulation	Need to belong	Centrality of work ID measured	Centrality of work ID manipulated	End user engagement	Perceived interactivity	Engagement behaviors WOM	Engagement behaviors social media	Age	Job tenure
Product satisfaction manipulation	1.000									
Need to belong	-.029	.751								
Centrality of work ID measured	.074	.291	.874							
Centrality of work ID manipulated	-.057	-.080	.019	1.000						
End user engagement	.469	.201	.334	.335	.863					
Perceived interactivity	.212	.188	.219	.223	.659	.853				
Engagement behaviors WOM	.492	.134	.322	.259	.775	.538	.809			
Engagement behaviors social media	.449	.166	.338	.212	.740	.531	.864	.864		
Age	-.140	.235	.058	.050	-.079	-.039	-.048	-.073	1.000	
Job tenure	-.148	-.036	.148	.028	.006	.073	-.044	-.009	.586	1.000
MEAN	N.A.	4.289	3.355	N.A.	4.104	4.663	3.963	3.623	33.2	4.9
S.D.		1.185	1.510		1.437	1.246	1.518	1.669	11.1	5.5

Note: $n = 255$ observations; The diagonal values (italicized) represent the square roots of the AVE values. The off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations. Correlations in bold are significant at the .05 level.

Oliveira 2010; Lussier, Hartmann, and Bolander 2021). We likewise conducted confirmatory factor analyses to examine the factor structure of the survey measures; we examined the factor loadings, the composite reliabilities for all latent variables in the model, and the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Results help substantiate that CMV does not bias the findings in this study. In addition, the variance inflation factors are all less than 3.0, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern (Good, Hughes, and Wang 2022).

Study 1 results

Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks at the end of the survey asked respondents to think back to the scenario and rate how satisfied they were with the product, how important the job was to their sense of self, and how interactive the supplier firm materials were on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. ANOVA results from the manipulation checks for the product satisfaction condition ($M_{HighSat} = 4.43, SD = .717, M_{LowSat} = 2.04, SD = .986, F_{1,253} = 498.70$), the work identity condition ($M_{HighWorkID} = 3.94, SD = 1.12, M_{LowWorkID} = 2.08, SD = 1.30, F_{1,253} = 220.22$), and the perceived interactivity condition ($M_{App} = 3.29, SD = .95, M_{FlyerPhone} = 3.08, SD = 1.082, F_{1,253} = 2.71$) offered support for our approach.

PROCESS results

The product satisfaction condition and work identity condition were contrast coded (Pereira et al. 2022). Findings from the moderated mediation model indicate that product satisfaction had a positive effect on end user engagement, as predicted in H1 ($\beta = 1.36, p < .001$). The main effects of need to belong ($\beta = .176, p < .01$) and work identity, both manipulated ($\beta = .761, p < .001$) and measured ($\beta = .235, p < .001$), on end user engagement were also positive, as we predicted in H2 and H4.

The interaction effect of need to belong and product satisfaction on end user psychological engagement was considered in addition to the main effects and found to be significant ($\beta = .222, p < .05$), as predicted by H3. As

predicted in H5, there was a positive relationship between end user engagement and engagement behaviors, ($\beta = .553, p < .001$).

Finally, the results also highlight the importance of the perceived interactivity (measured on a 7-point Likert scale) of the supplier initiative. As predicted by H6, perceived interactivity had a significant and positive relationship to end user engagement behaviors ($\beta = .178, p < .01$). Importantly, we also note a significant and positive interaction between psychological end user engagement and perceived interactivity, suggesting that perceived interactivity can function as a nudge to end users to promote supplier firm brands behaviorally ($\beta = .091, p < .01$). We offer the total effects on engagement behaviors in Table 3, which also provides a summary of the results. Graphed interactions for this study are available in the web appendix.

Study 1 discussion

Study 1 offers initial support for the hypothesized relationships in our conceptual model. A key strength of the study is the use of a sample of actual medium-to-heavy equipment operators, in combination with an experimental approach, which is an underutilized method in sales research. The findings demonstrate the robustness and relevance of end user engagement and engagement behaviors in a B2B selling environment. Medium-to-heavy equipment operators weighed in on their inclination to provide value to the supplier firm, first through psychological engagement and most importantly through WOM behaviors and social media activities that could influence the decisionmakers within the customer firm.

Moreover, Study 1 demonstrates the importance of an individual's need to belong and work identity as drivers of psychological engagement with a supplier firm brand. One advantage of an experimental approach with a fictitious brand is that it controls for extraneous brand differences. Study 1 also highlights the importance of perceived interactivity of supplier firm initiatives to both increase the likelihood of engagement behaviors directly and also nudge end users with higher engagement toward higher behavioral intentions.

Table 3. Results for study 1 equipment operator end users.

	β (s.e.)	C.I.
Product satisfaction => Engagement (Psych)	1.363 (.145)***	1.076, 1.649
Need to belong => Engagement (Psych)	.176 (.067)**	.056, .296
Product satisfaction x Need to belong => Engagement (Psych)	.222 (.121)*	.015, .445
Work identity measured => Engagement (Psych)	.235 (.052)***	.133, .337
Work identity manipulated => Engagement (Psych)	.761 (.143)***	.479, 1.042
Age => Engagement (Psych)	-.006 (.008)	-.022, .011
Job tenure => Engagement (Psych)	.018 (.016)	-.015, .050
Gender => Engagement (Psych)	.042 (.159)	-.272, .356
Product satisfaction => Engagement behaviors	.609 (.137)***	.339, .879
Perceived interactivity => Engagement behaviors	.178 (.066)**	.049, .307
Engagement (Psych) x Perceived interactivity => Engagement behaviors	.092 (.029)**	.036, .149
Engagement (Psych) => Engagement behaviors	.553 (.065)***	.425, .681
Age => Engagement behaviors	.003 (.006)	-.009, .017
Job tenure => Engagement behaviors	-.012 (.013)	-.038, .017
Gender => Engagement behaviors	.003 (.129)	-.222, .285

Note: $n = 255$; $R^2 = .39$ *** for Engagement (Psych); $R^2 = .67$ *** for Engagement behaviors. $p < 0.10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Experimental Scenario Teachers and Learning Management System – ALL Participants

For the following questions, regardless of your current teaching role, please imagine that you are a high school teacher in a large local public high school, Central High. You have been working at this high school for the last three years. You typically have at least 30 students in each of your classes and about 150 students overall. Although the school provides you with basic outlines for materials you need to cover, you are responsible for building all of your classes largely from scratch. Since the start of the pandemic, the school expects all course materials to be made available to students in an online format in addition to what you cover in class. You are evaluated based on statewide learning targets, and Central High's number one priority is to meet or exceed the statewide learning targets because otherwise you will lose funding from the state. Please also imagine that your school uses the nationally recognized learning management tool from Doer Learning Solutions, LearningGr8ness.

Work Identity Conditions



Work Identity 1 (LOW)

You feel indifferent towards your job as a teacher. When you started undergraduate classes, you had not planned on being a teacher. You decided to try teaching because a friend of yours said that there were lots of job opportunities and that the pay was pretty good. You also liked the idea of having summers off.

If anyone asks what you do for a living, you respond, "I work at a high school," without specifying that you teach because it's not important for you. You are currently saving money to go to cooking school. Your job as a high school teacher is not important to your sense of self.

This is your favorite shirt for the weekend. Please picture yourself wearing this shirt.

Work Identity 2 (HIGH)

You love your job. You feel like you have the most rewarding job in the world, making a difference every day with the students, and your friends and coworkers are right there alongside you. You find your work to be real and rewarding. You are having fun and getting paid pretty well, too. If anyone asks you what you do, you proudly answer, "I'm a high school teacher and I love it."

Prior to getting this job, you had always dreamed of teaching and picked out your undergraduate program specifically to become the best possible teacher.

Your job as a high school teacher is very important to your sense of self and you cannot imagine doing another job for a living.

This is your favorite shirt for the weekends. Please picture yourself wearing this shirt.



Product Satisfaction Conditions

Product Satisfaction 1 (LOW)

You use Doer's LearningGr8ness learning management software to plan and deliver all of your classes.

You do not like your LearningGr8ness software. It is sluggish and slow and often freezes and tasks you would like the software to accomplish cannot be intuitively found. You have used other learning management software, like Google classroom and Blackboard Learn, and most of them perform better than your Doer's LearningGr8ness.

Your students regularly complain about the software too. Sometimes you feel like you are fighting with Doer LearningGr8ness to just be able to meet statewide learning standards each year.



Product Satisfaction 2 (HIGH)

You use Doer's LearningGr8ness learning management software to plan and deliver all of your classes.

You love your LearningGr8ness software, because it makes your job easier. It has useful templates for all of the topics you teach and helps you get your job done quickly and efficiently. You have used other learning management software, like Google classroom and Blackboard Learn, but none of them perform as well as Doer's LearningGr8ness. Your students also like LearningGr8ness.

Your Doer LearningGr8ness makes you look good and helps you meet all of the statewide learning standards each year. You are so satisfied with this software that you have added a sticker of the Doer Learning Gr8ness logo on your laptop.

Figure 3. Scenario-based experiment for teachers: work identity and product satisfaction conditions.

Study 2 – teachers

Given that Study 1 had some limitations, such as a smaller sample size of 255 participants, we designed and implemented a second study of supplier firm activities aimed at end users. To enhance the potential generalizability of our findings, we decided to collect data from a larger sample in an entirely different industry: teachers as end users of learning management systems. In this second study, we also further explored the role salespeople may play in encouraging value-adding end user behaviors by including a scenario with a salesperson.

Method

Design

We conducted a second scenario-based experiment using teachers and a fictitious learning management system (LMS), which we called Doer LearningGr8ness. For the second study, we employed a 2x2x4 design, where similar to the Study 1, respondents were randomly assigned to read a scenario with high and low product satisfaction for the LMS and a scenario with high and low work identity. In addition, respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of four possible supplier initiatives: LMS brochure on a phone, LMS physical brochure, LMS interactive app that requests feedback for the company, or LMS interactive app that requests feedback for the company demonstrated by a salesperson

from the supplier company (Doer LearningGr8ness). Participants (who themselves were teachers) were also asked to imagine that they worked for a local high school that uses the fictitious LMS brand. Study 2 incorporated supplier firm activities similar to tools realistically employed by salespeople (Rangarajan et al. 2020) and the intervention of a salesperson in one scenario. Again, similar to procedures in Study 1, these supplier firm activity scenarios were chosen to generate variance in the perception of interactivity by respondents and highlight the importance of salesperson intervention on the jobsite. The scenarios and manipulations for product satisfaction and work identity are shown in Figure 3. The four supplier firm activity scenarios are depicted in Figure 4.

Procedure and sample

We recruited 410 survey responses from Prolific (c.f., Harding and Murdock 2022), using a prescreened panel of teachers. In addition, we asked respondents to select from several types of teaching jobs, such as high school teacher or adjunct professor, to confirm that the respondents were currently working as teachers. We also asked respondents to indicate which LMS they use in their current teaching position as a screener in the survey to exclude any teachers that were not using LMS. The respondents all received \$2.38 per completed survey, as required by Prolific to meet the minimum wage per hour to ensure high quality responses.

Supplier Firm Activity Conditions for Teachers and LMS



*Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 1
Flyer on Phone - LOW*

Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their LearningGr8ness software on the job.

You have received a free app from Doer for your smartphone that provides you with an informational flyer and tips about LearningGr8ness when you open the app. Please take a minute to examine the informational flyer on your phone.



*Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 2
Flyer - LOW*

Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their LearningGr8ness software on the job.

Doer has sent informational flyers to your school with tips about using LearningGr8ness. You see the flyers in the teachers' lounge and pick one up.

Please take a minute to examine the informational flyer shown.



*Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 3
Interactive App - HIGH*

Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their LearningGr8ness software on the job.

You have received a free app from Doer for your smartphone that includes tips on teaching your classes, including suggested podcasts and videos relevant to your subject matter. The app also allows you to send feedback directly to Doer about your experience with LearningGr8ness by pressing on the Feedback button. The app promises that Doer will respond to any questions or feedback within 24 hours.

When you open the app the first time, it asks for feedback on Doer's LearningGr8ness learning management software and how to improve it for the next version. Please type your suggestions below:

You get this response from the app: "Thank you for your feedback. Your suggestions will be sent to the Doer LearningGr8ness engineering team."



*Supplier Firm Activity from Doer 4
Interactive App HIGH and Salesperson*

Doer has a new marketing campaign and is reaching out to individuals who use their LearningGr8ness software on the job.

Doer has sent a salesperson to your school to promote a new free app from Doer for your smartphone that includes tips on teaching your classes, including suggested podcasts and videos relevant to your subject matter. The app also allows you to send feedback directly to Doer about your experience with LearningGr8ness by pressing on the Feedback button. The app promises that Doer will respond to any questions or feedback within 24 hours.

The salesperson shows you how the app works. When you open the app the first time, it asks for feedback on Doer's LearningGr8ness learning management software and how to improve it for the next version. The salesperson encourages you to provide feedback through the app so that the Doer engineers will get the feedback immediately.

You get this response from the app: "Thank you for your feedback. Your suggestions will be sent to the Doer LearningGr8ness engineering team."

Figure 4. Scenario-based experiment for teachers: supplier firm initiative conditions.

Nine surveys were excluded due to skipped questions, leaving 401 surveys for analysis. In this sample, 61% of respondents are female. Approximately 57% of respondents are younger than 35, 37% are between 35 and 55, and the rest are over 55. The mean tenure at their current institution is approximately six years, with a range of a few months to 37 years. Approximately 14% teach in a rural community, 45% teach in a suburban community, and 42% teach in an urban community.

Measures

We used the same measures and controls for Study 2 as we did for the first study. We likewise confirmed construct validity and reliability with a CFA. For end user engagement (psychological), the last three items loaded on a separate factor. Hence, these three items were dropped from the eight-item scale, leaving five items to measure end user engagement in this data. All items and their composite reliabilities are available in the Appendix, which also notes which items were dropped from the end user engagement scale for Study 2.

Analysis

Following our approach for Study 1, for this study we employed a moderated mediation model using version 3.5 of the PROCESS macro by Hayes and Model 22 for one moderator prior to the mediation and one moderator after

the mediation (Hayes 2017) and contrast coded the product satisfaction and work identity conditions (Pereira et al. 2022). In Table 4, the diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE values, which are greater than all the off-diagonal correlation values, meaning each latent variable shares greater variance with its indicators than with other latent variables (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Descriptive statistics also are available in Table 4. Finally, the same steps were undertaken to mitigate CMV for Study 2 as for Study 1. Moreover, variance inflation factors were all below 3.0, providing reassurance that multicollinearity is not a concern.

Study 2 results

Manipulation checks

Similar manipulation checks were performed for Study 2, and the ANOVA results were once again reassuring: Product satisfaction ($M_{HighSat} = 4.29$, $SD = 1.01$, $M_{LowSat} = 1.63$, $SD = .88$, $F_{1,399} = 7101.00$), Work identity ($M_{HighWorkID} = 4.36$, $SD = .91$, $M_{LowWorkID} = 1.66$, $SD = 1.03$, $F_{1,399} = 727.15$), and supplier firm activity ($M_{App} = 2.87$, $SD = 1.04$, $M_{FlyerPhone} = 2.85$, $SD = 1.16$, $M_{AppSales} = 3.28$, $SD = 1.05$, $M_{Flyer} = 2.37$, $SD = 1.16$, $F_{3,397} = 13.83$).

PROCESS results

Findings from the moderated mediation model for Study 2 again support H1: product satisfaction is positively related

Table 4. Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics for study 2 variables (teacher end users).

	Product satisfaction manipulation	Need to belong	Centrality of work ID measured	Centrality of work ID manipulated	End user engagement	Perceived interactivity	Engagement behaviors WOM	Engagement behaviors social media	Age	Job tenure
Product satisfaction manipulation	1.000									
Need to belong	-.035	.751								
Centrality of work ID measured	-.013	.048	.805							
Centrality of work ID manipulated	.067	.047	.055	1.000						
End user engagement	.634	.129	.099	.160	.949					
Perceived interactivity	.425	.223	.077	.145	.684	.873				
Engagement behaviors WOM	.565	.175	.077	.170	.765	.588	.816			
Engagement behaviors social media	.495	.168	.150	.158	.733	.599	.788	.835		
Age	-.059	-.109	.028	-.028	-.027	.005	.004	-.023	1.000	
Job tenure	.028	-.059	-.023	-.047	.051	.044	.033	.015	.573	1.000
MEAN	N.A.	5.162	3.496	N.A.	3.312	4.180	3.590	2.997	36.5	6.2
S.D.		.960	1.244		1.635	1.381	1.503	1.473	10.4	6.2

Note: n = 255 observations; The diagonal values (italicized) represent the square roots of the AVE values. The off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations. Correlations in bold are significant at the .05 level.

to end user engagement, as expected ($\beta=2.06, p < .001$). Teachers' need to belong is significantly and positively related to end user engagement ($\beta = .237, p < .001$), supporting H2. We also find that work identity, both manipulated ($\beta = .385, p < .01$) and measured ($\beta = .121, p < .05$), are positively related to end user engagement, as predicted in H4.

Providing support for H3, the interaction between need to belong and product satisfaction was significant ($\beta = .394, p < .01$). The impact of product satisfaction on end user engagement was highest for those teachers with a higher need to belong. Results from Study 2 also show a positive relationship between end user engagement and engagement behaviors ($\beta = .458, p < .001$), as predicted by H5. Moreover, the moderated mediation was significant, such that end user psychological engagement partially mediates the relationship between product satisfaction and engagement behavior (coefficient = .025, SE = .012, 95% CI = .0052, .0503; 10,000 bootstrap samples).

Furthermore, the results confirm the key role of the perceived interactivity of the supplier initiative. Replicating Study 1 and as predicted by H6, perceived interactivity (measured on a 7-point Likert scale) significantly and positively increased end user engagement behaviors ($\beta = .171, p < .001$). Perceived interactivity also had a significant and positive interaction with psychological engagement, such that the perceived interactivity had an even more positive impact on engagement behaviors when the end users had higher psychological engagement ($\beta = .062, p < .01$), supporting H7. Study 2 confirms that perceived interactivity can nudge to end users to move beyond a sense of connection to a supplier firm brand (engagement) to behavioral intentions that endorse supplier firm brands. Results for this study appear in Table 5 and graphed interactions appear in the web appendix.

Finally, distinct from the first study, Study 2 included an additional experimental condition for the supplier firm initiative that explicitly emphasized the role of salespeople as boundary spanners between the supplier firm and end users as illustrated in Figure 4. A one-way ANOVA conducted to compare the effect of the supplier firm activity conditions revealed statistically significant difference between at least two groups ($F_{3,397} = 6.83, p < 0.001$). A post hoc Tukey's HSD test indicated that there was a significant difference only between the condition where the salesperson presented the interactive app to the teacher ($M=4.65, SD = 1.33$) and the other conditions: the flyer on the phone ($M=4.15, SD = 1.18, p < .05$), the interactive app on the phone ($M=4.13, SD = 1.34, p < .05$), and the paper flyer ($M=3.79, SD = 1.53, p < .001$). The post hoc analysis suggested no statistically significant difference between the flyer on the phone, the interactive app on the phone, and the paper flyer compared to each other.

Study 2 discussion

Study 2 replicated the results from Study 1 in a distinctly different context: teachers using LMS compared to

Table 5. Results for study 2 teacher end users.

	β (s.e.)	C.I.
Product satisfaction => Engagement (Psych)	2.061 (.123)***	1.820, 2.302
Need to belong => Engagement (Psych)	.237 (.065)***	.109, .365
Product satisfaction \times Need to belong => Engagement (Psych)	.395 (.128)**	.143, .646
Work identity measured => Engagement (Psych)	.121 (.049)*	.025, .218
Work identity manipulated => Engagement (Psych)	.385 (.123)**	.144, .626
Age => Engagement (Psych)	.000 (.007)	-.014, .014
Job tenure => Engagement (Psych)	.014 (.013)	-.010, .039
Gender => Engagement (Psych)	.010 (.129)	-.243, .264
Product satisfaction => Engagement behaviors	.403 (.109)***	.190, .617
Perceived interactivity => Engagement behaviors	.171 (.043)***	.086, .256
Engagement (Psych) \times Perceived interactivity => Engagement behaviors	.062 (.019)**	.025, .100
Engagement (Psych) => Engagement behaviors	.476 (.042)***	.393, .559
Age => Engagement behaviors	.003 (.005)	-.006, .013
Job tenure => Engagement behaviors	-.028 (.009)	-.019, .0134
Gender => Engagement behaviors	.124 (.087)	-.048, .295

Note: $n=255$; $R^2 = .39$ *** for Engagement (Psych); $R^2 = .67$ *** for Engagement behaviors.

$p < 0.10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

medium-to-heavy equipment operator end users in Study 1. The differences between the two contexts highlight the strengths of the theoretical and practical implications of current research.

Study 2 confirmed the key role of perceived interactivity of the supplier initiative as a nudge for end user to move beyond psychological engagement to demonstrate value-adding engagement behaviors. Study 2 also illustrates the key role that salespeople can play in exchanges with end users on the job. In fact, in Study 2, the experimental condition where the salesperson comes to the school to promote and demonstrate the app to the teacher is the condition that stood out compared to the other conditions.

General discussion

Theoretical implications

In these studies, we find that the end user's work identity is directly and positively related to engagement with the supplier firm brand. The role of work identity may be one of the key differences between B2B and B2C engagement. To illustrate the importance of this finding, we offer a practical example. Mack Trucks offered the chance to win free tattoos of their logo to display their 'born ready' spirit at a trade show (Mack 2014). A spokesperson noted, 'We continue to be amazed by the number of people who have Mack tattoos. It reminds us how special this brand is, how the fundamentally American values that have always guided us – hard work, loyalty, reliability, accountability – still resonate today' (Mack 2014). Mack trucks, diesel engines, and transmissions are sold and serviced through an extensive distribution network in more than 45 countries, and Mack is a sponsor of 'Share the Road', an American Trucking Association public information campaign (Mack 2014). So, who is attending a trade show and hoping to get a Mack

tattoo? Truck drivers. Truck drivers who rely on the equipment to help get their job done. These are end users in a work context who are permanently imprinting a brand on their skin and serving as walking advertisements because their job is central to their identity as a person. Who is interacting with truck drivers at these trade shows? Salespeople. We advocate this is a unique context compared to our typical understanding of consumer behavior engagement because of the unique opportunities for exchange between salespeople and end users in the context of B2B sales. In this way, we are extending our understanding of social identity theory and the importance of work identity in particular. Additional understanding of how work identity may drive engagement for end users and other key stakeholders in B2B selling is necessary to advance research and understand variance in sales patterns. Salespeople need a better grasp of how end users may be different from other stakeholders to be able to connect with them effectively.

This study also examines the end user's need to belong as important for engagement in a B2B context, again following social identity theory. Assuredly, one's need to belong is even more important in today's uncertain environment given the social upheaval associated with the aftermath of the global health pandemic. Many traditional sales activities have become virtual, where the established anchors are hard to find (Good and McLeod 2022). The need to belong to a group and connect to others may thus be an even stronger driving force for many stakeholders in the new normal of sales going forward, further demonstrating the relevance of sales and service ecosystems (Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018) and digital tools for salespeople (Zoltners et al. 2021) to both generate value for the firm but also value for stakeholders, such as end users. In summary, supply firm brands can help end users satisfy their need to belong, both through positive brand experiences and positive exchanges with salespeople.

Moreover, this research establishes that the role of perceived interactivity in the sales process in general, and with end users in particular, deserves more attention for B2B engagement activities and potentially conflicting stakeholder priorities. Current findings demonstrate that in a work context, customer-focused, interactive supplier firm activities can serve as an additional nudge for end users with higher psychological brand engagement to move toward behavioral intentions that would benefit the supplier firm brand. Furthermore, our findings about interactive initiatives and end users underscore the importance of salespeople targeting stakeholder groups within the customer firm beyond purchasing employees or direct decision makers within the sales and service ecosystem who nonetheless play a key role in the buying process for organizations.

End users are the perfect example of previously ignored actors in B2B sales, who influence the purchase of B2B products and services and possess unparalleled knowledge about daily job challenges and supplier firm brands. We offer a literature review highlighting that end users may be central actors in sales and service ecosystems and emphasize that while the business press has stressed their vitalness, only limited scholarship has explored the importance of end

users in the personal selling process. Hence, we explore antecedents and outcomes of end user engagement and offer a new parsimonious definition of engagement specifically for this group. Our findings also offer points of consideration for practical application.

Managerial implications

In the case of end users, the product experience may be the preeminent source of engagement because of brand experience on the job. However, salespeople must balance the needs of different stakeholders within the firm, such as lower cost for the procurement department compared to higher performance for end users (Ranjan and Friend 2020). Since procurement employees have decision-making authority, they frequently receive the most attention from salespeople who negotiate deals to their specific requirements. Rather than impulse-buying, objective criteria such as meeting production needs at a minimum cost usually drive the purchase process (Grewal et al. 2015). Thus, end users at times may receive cheaper and possibly less-satisfying equipment as a result of cost-focused purchasing. As such, relying on product satisfaction alone may result in a suboptimal approach when considering the sales and service ecosystem. Hence, our research shows other opportunities for cultivating end user engagement and valuable end user behaviors beyond relying solely on product satisfaction.

In fact, B2B salespeople may recognize that end users are key stakeholders, but such practitioners could benefit from a better understanding of how to reach end users most effectively and increase their sense of connection with the supplier firm (Rangarajan et al. 2020). What drives engagement with end users is not necessarily the same as procurement officers. For example, based on the industry experience of the author team, commonly salespeople try to woo procurement officers with luncheons and extravagant dinners, sporting events like baseball games, golf outings, and many lavish experiences to first gain their attention then their interest. However, when meeting with an end user, it is actually his or her work identity and need to belong that drive engagement. So, meeting end users on the job as they are working and connecting about the work itself and offering a sense of belonging within the work context specifically through brand engagement is actually more beneficial than trying other types of contact (golf outings, steak dinners, etc.). An article in *McKinsey Quarterly* highlights, 'After mapping five customer segments, one industrial OEM found that nearly 70 percent of its marketing dollars and sales efforts across them were not directed at what mattered most to customers' and suggested companies need to re-think the buying process and what speaks to the key actors involved (Lingqvist, Plotkin, and Stanley 2015). Similarly, Riazi (2022) emphasizes to salespeople, 'has it occurred to you that some people aren't meat eaters and could care less about sports?'. That is, for salespeople to reach key stakeholders in the firm, it takes more than irrelevant 'free stuff' and charm – it takes an understanding of the work itself and how to improve it for key actors (Riazi 2022).

For example, one company in the construction industry has specific training classes for their salespeople to understand how to connect with end users on jobsites to both get feedback about products and understand what products they are asking for within the company. This connection on the jobsite itself helps the salesperson understand how to cross-sell and upsell and convince other stakeholders in the company of the value of their offerings. Our research demonstrates the usefulness of the engagement construct for sales and marketing practitioners in general and those targeting end users more specifically. This research promises to aid the supplier firms' development of effective sales strategies by increasing understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving engagement.

In short, our research helps explicate what may drive engagement for end users, who are an overlooked yet influential stakeholder in the buying process. Managers should consider the importance of training salespeople to interact with end users and then interpret and analyze the end users' feedback obtained as they do their work. Perhaps beyond the traditional 'SPIN' selling techniques, additional ways to query end users face-to-face on the jobsite exist (Rackham 2020). Are there genuine and concrete actions salespeople can take that can speak to end-users' psychological engagement? Companies could likewise take note of our simple yet effective work identity manipulation using t-shirts that remind end users of the importance of their work to their sense of self. Distributing this type of apparel that also features the supplier firm's brand during jobsite visits could both help salespeople connect with end users in a meaningful way and remind end users how the supplier firm helps them get their job done.

Moreover, the perceived interactivity of the firm's supplier activity represents an exciting potential way to connect with end users and nudge them toward impactful behaviors. Over a shorter term, interactive supplier firm activities – which are typically less expensive than product development and easier to adjust – are a vital tool to encourage end users to engage in word-of-mouth and social media activities as demonstrated in our studies. Given technologies available through social media, smartphone applications, and data analytics packages, among other options, supplier firms and B2B salespeople can offer supplier activities that allow individuals, including end users, to provide feedback directly to the firms.

Accordingly, offering a platform for complaints or suggestions and asking salespeople to respond may be crucial. As some respondents to our surveys noted, '... although a lot of companies seem to encourage you to communicate with them online about questions to issues, they rarely actually respond and hardly ever have live people available for you to speak to'. Another respondent mentioned, 'I wish more companies would seek feedback from the people who operate the equipment', while another emphasized, 'if it was that easy to communicate with heavy equipment companies, they would have less problems'.

Our research also elucidates the key role that salespeople can play in terms of deploying interactive tools to end

users. Findings from Study 2 suggest that having salesperson on site to introduce a new interactive initiative is the most impactful approach to increase end user engagement and ultimately engagement behaviors, which function as influence tactics within the supplier firm due to end users' role as an 'expert' within the customer firm (Kohli 1989). Having salespeople respond to feedback from an interactive supplier firm activity might make it even more interactive and thus more effective. Salespeople can adapt the findings from this research to their particular context, industry, and specialization. As noted in practitioner journals (Schmidt, Adamson, and Bird 2015), many salespeople intuitively believe that end users are important but need a better understanding of how to best reach them. Appealing to their work identity and need to belong is a good place to start.

This research also highlights how the psychological state of engagement is related to actual behaviors that influence the buying process. As sales and marketing managers develop a deeper understanding of end user engagement and associated behavioral consequences, they can more effectively target these key influencers. For example, a smartphone application that combines a channel for feedback, useful information for the job, and a way to connect with other users may be a good way to connect with end users, but current research suggests that the most effective way for firms to reach end users and increase engagement with the firms' brands may include a combination of interactive technology and the personal touch of a salesperson. As noted previously in sales research, understanding the 'interests and motivations' of key stakeholders in a sales process is a necessary first step in effective selling (Plouffe, Williams, and Leigh 2004).

Limitations and future research ideas

This preliminary study offers many insights about sales and engagement in a B2B interactive environment. Nevertheless, the generalizability of the results is, at this stage, restricted to the degree that different groups of end users may have different levels of work identity and interest in interacting with individuals versus technology (Miltgen, Popovič, and Oliveira 2013). The scenario-based experiment combined with actual end users may still lack some of the nuance and depth of actual experiences on the job, especially genuine group identities, and as such, is a limitation of current research. That said, the effects associated with work identity and need to belong are likely to be even stronger in an actual B2B environment. We also define end users as the individuals who use the supplier firm's product in a way that is central to their job function as part of their daily job activities. We selected a fictitiously branded product that we believed would be central to the functioning of the job responsibilities of our sample, but we did not measure how important the item (i.e., forklift or LMS) was to their job functioning. Hence, we suggest that researchers may wish to explore the importance of job function as it relates to end user engagement in the future.

As we transition from the 'sales broker' to the 'sales curator' era, some interesting paths for sales executives and future sales research exist on this matter.² For example, can actions salespeople take positively impact an end user's feeling of belongingness and work centrality? Are certain tools more effective when collecting feedback from end users? Could artificial intelligence be used to augment this process? Or, based on the notion of work centrality and belongingness on the job, is face-to-face the best way to connect with end users compared to virtual tools used in other sales settings? Moreover, an interesting future research question could center on how end users affect price negotiations and B2B customer lifetime value.

Future research could also examine other B2B industries and situations, focusing on how items like product complexity, extent of use, and dependence may impact the findings. In addition, as end users engage with multiple tools on the job, it is possible that their level of engagement may differ depending on their level of interaction with and reliance on each of these products and services. Future research may wish to explore this notion.

Furthermore, earlier research suggests end users may be particularly important in sales contexts where they have relatively more 'expert power' (e.g., Kohli 1989), but this aspect remains to be explored in future inquiries. Moreover, a limitation of current research is that need to belong may be an antecedent to other important constructs, such as brand identity (Lam et al. 2012; He and Li 2011) and relationship quality (Mangus et al. 2022). Future research could tease out the differential impact of need to belong on brand engagement versus brand identity or relationship quality. In addition, the current research uses an invented brand and thus does not capture additional variance from brand equity, which may be an interesting future study. It is also possible that additional moderators to these relationships could exist, so future researchers may wish to explore more nuanced findings through contingencies.

Finally, future research could explore how different types of interactive supplier firm activities may be more or less effective depending on the group of end users in question. Are some end users more impressed by a physical visit from a salesperson or an online interaction? Can supplier firms expect a better response from a salesperson asking for product feedback or tips for other end users? This paper considered one type of interactive supplier firm activity designed for end users, but there are many types employed by B2B supplier firms that deserve future study.

Notes

1. A caveat to the assumption that the end user experiences the supplier firm's brand on the job is that the brand must be visible to the end user, for example, a branded wrench rather than a wrench with no visible brand.
2. We would like to thank our review team for making this observation.

Declaration of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Amy Greiner Fehl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3498-8470>

Valerie Good  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9278-2024>

Todd Arnold  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5957-2703>

References

- Aggarwal, Pankaj, and Ann L. McGill. 2012. "When Brands Seem Human, Do Humans Act like Brands? Automatic Behavioral Priming Effects of Brand Anthropomorphism." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39 (2):307–23. doi: [10.1086/662614](https://doi.org/10.1086/662614).
- Agnihotri, Raj, Rebecca Dingus, Michael Y. Hu, and Michael T. Krush. 2016. "Social Media: Influencing Customer Satisfaction in B2B Sales." *Industrial Marketing Management* 53:172–80. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.09.003).
- Andzulis, James, Mick, Nikolaos G. Panagopoulos, and Adam Rapp. 2012. "A Review of Social Media and Implications for the Sales Process." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 32 (3):305–16. doi: [10.2753/PSS0885-3134320302](https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320302).
- Ashforth, Blake E., and Fred Mael. 1989. "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *Academy of Management Review* 14 (1):20–39. doi: [10.2307/258189](https://doi.org/10.2307/258189).
- Baumeister, Roy F., Lauren E. Brewer, Dianne M. Tice, and Jean M. Twenge. 2007. "Thwarting the Need to Belong: Understanding the Interpersonal and Inner Effects of Social Exclusion." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1 (1):506–20. doi: [10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00020.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00020.x).
- Baumeister, Roy F., and Mark R. Leary. 1995. "The Need to Belong: desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (3):497–529. doi: [10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497).
- Blau, Peter M. 1964. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Blocker, Christopher P., Joseph P. Cannon, Nikolaos G. Panagopoulos, and Jeffrey K. Sager. 2012. "The Role of the Sales Force in Value Creation and Appropriation: new Directions for Research." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 32 (1):15–27. doi: [10.2753/PSS0885-3134320103](https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320103).
- Brodie, Roderick J., Linda D. Hollebeek, Biljana Juric, and Ana Ilic. 2011. "Customer Engagement: conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research." *Journal of Service Research* 14 (3):252–71. doi: [10.1177/1094670511411703](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670511411703).
- Brotspies, Herbert, and Art Weinstein. 2019. "Rethinking Business Segmentation: A Conceptual Model and Strategic Insights." *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 27 (2):164–76. doi: [10.1080/0965254X.2017.1384750](https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2017.1384750).
- Busse, Christian, Andrew P. Kach, and Stephen M. Wagner. 2017. "Boundary Conditions: What They Are, How to Explore Them, Why We Need Them, and When to Consider Them." *Organizational Research Methods* 20 (4):574–609. doi: [10.1177/1094428116641191](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428116641191).
- Chakravarty, Anindita, Alok Kumar, and Rajdeep Grewal. 2014. "Customer Orientation Structure for Internet-Based Business-to-Business Platform Firms." *Journal of Marketing* 78 (5):1–23. doi: [10.1509/jm.12.0442](https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.12.0442).
- Cortez, Roberto Mora, and Wesley J. Johnston. 2020. "The Coronavirus Crisis in B2B Settings: Crisis Uniqueness and Managerial Implications Based on Social Exchange Theory." *Industrial Marketing Management* 88:125–35. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.05.004).
- Dutton, Jane E., Janet M. Dukerich, and Celia V. Harquail. 1994. "Organizational Images and Member Identification." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39 (2):239–63. doi: [10.2307/2393235](https://doi.org/10.2307/2393235).
- Ernst, Holger, Wayne D. Hoyer, and Carsten Rübsaamen. 2010. "Sales, Marketing, and Research-and-Development Cooperation across New Product Development Stages: Implications for Success." *Journal of Marketing* 74 (5):80–92. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.74.5.80](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.5.80).
- Fornell, Claes, and David F. Larcker. 1981. "Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error." *Journal of Marketing Research* 18 (1):39–50. doi: [10.1177/002224378101800104](https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800104).
- Fournier, Susan, and Claudio Alvarez. 2013. "Relating Badly to Brands." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 23 (2):253–64. doi: [10.1016/j.jcps.2013.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2013.01.004).
- Giakoumaki, Christina, and Areti Kreppa. 2020. "Brand Engagement in Self-Concept and Consumer Engagement in Social Media: The Role of the Source." *Psychology & Marketing* 37 (3):457–65. doi: [10.1002/mar.21312](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21312).
- Gillespie, Erin A., and Stephanie M. Noble. 2017. "Stuck like Glue: The Formation and Consequences of Brand Attachments among Salespeople." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 37 (3):228–49. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2017.1348235](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2017.1348235).
- Good, Valerie, Douglas E. Hughes, and Hao Wang. 2022. "More than Money: Establishing the Importance of a Sense of Purpose for Salespeople." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 50 (2):272–95. doi: [10.1007/s11747-021-00795-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00795-x).
- Good, Valerie, and Lisa Earle McLeod. 2022. "Are Lonely Salespeople Costing You Customers?" *Harvard Business Review*, May 2. Accessed date is June 5, 2022. <https://hbr.org/2022/05/are-lonely-salespeople-costing-you-customers?>
- Grewal, Rajdeep, Gary L. Lilien, Sundar Bharadwaj, Pranav Jindal, Ujwal Kayande, Robert F. Lusch, Murali Mantrala, Robert W. Palmatier, Aric Rindfleisch, Lisa K. Scheer, et al. 2015. "Business-to-Business Buying: Challenges and Opportunities." *Customer Needs and Solutions* 2 (3):193–208. doi: [10.1007/s40547-015-0040-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40547-015-0040-5).
- Harding, R. Dustin, and Mitchel R. Murdock. 2022. "Now Presenting the Undistinguished Achievement Award: how Relative Standing Creates Exceptional Outcomes from Recognizing Unexceptional Sales Associates." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 1–12. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2022.2049603](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2049603).
- Harmeling, Colleen M., Jordan W. Moffett, Mark J. Arnold, and Brad D. Carlson. 2017. "Toward a Theory of Customer Engagement Marketing." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45 (3):312–35. doi: [10.1007/s11747-016-0509-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0509-2).
- Hartmann, Nathaniel N., Heiko Wieland, and Stephen L. Vargo. 2018. "Converging on a New Theoretical Foundation for Selling." *Journal of Marketing* 82 (2):1–18. doi: [10.1509/jm.16.0268](https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.16.0268).
- Hayes, Andrew F. 2017. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- He, Hongwei, and Yan Li. 2011. "CSR and Service Brand: The Mediating Effect of Brand Identification and Moderating Effect of Service Quality." *Journal of Business Ethics* 100 (4):673–88. doi: [10.1007/s10551-010-0703-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0703-y).
- Hogg, Michael A., and Deborah I. Terry. 2000. "Social Identity and Self-Categorization Processes in Organizational Contexts." *Academy of Management Review* 25 (1):121–40. doi: [10.2307/259266](https://doi.org/10.2307/259266).
- Hollebeek, Linda D. 2011. "Exploring Customer Brand Engagement: definition and Themes." *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 19 (7):555–73. doi: [10.1080/0965254X.2011.599493](https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2011.599493).
- Hollebeek, Linda D. 2019. "Developing Business Customer Engagement through Social Media Engagement-Platforms: An Integrative SD Logic/RBV-Informed Model." *Industrial Marketing Management* 81 (8):89–98. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.11.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.11.016).
- Hollebeek, Linda D., Rajendra K. Srivastava, and Tom Chen. 2019. "SD Logic-Informed Customer Engagement: integrative Framework, Revised Fundamental Propositions, and Application to CRM." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47 (1):161–85. doi: [10.1007/s11747-016-0494-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0494-5).
- Holliman, Geraint, and Jennifer Rowley. 2014. "Business to Business Digital Content Marketing: marketers' Perceptions of Best Practice." *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* 8 (4):269–93. doi: [10.1108/JRIM-02-2014-0013](https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-02-2014-0013).
- Homburg, Christian, Marcus Theel, and Sebastian Hohenberg. 2020. "Marketing Excellence: Nature, Measurement, and Investor Valuations." *Journal of Marketing* 84 (4):1–22. doi: [10.1177/0022242920925517](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920925517).
- Hult, Tomas G., Jeannette A. Mena, O. C. Ferrell, and Linda Ferrell. 2011. "Stakeholder Marketing: A Definition and Conceptual Framework." *AMS Review* 1 (1):44–65. doi: [10.1007/s13162-011-0002-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-011-0002-5).
- Hulland, John, Hans Baumgartner, and Keith Marion Smith. 2018. "Marketing Survey Research Best Practices: Evidence and

- Recommendations from a Review of JAMS Articles.” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 46 (1):92–108. doi: [10.1007/s11747-017-0532-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-017-0532-y).
- Kohli, Ajay. 1989. “Determinants of Influence in Organizational Buying: A Contingency Approach.” *Journal of Marketing* 53 (3):50–65. doi: [10.2307/1251342](https://doi.org/10.2307/1251342).
- Kumar, V., and Anita Pansari. 2016. “Competitive Advantage through Engagement.” *Journal of Marketing Research* 53 (4):497–514. doi: [10.1509/jmr.15.0044](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.15.0044).
- Lam, Son K., Michael Ahearne, Ryan Mullins, Babak Hayati, and Niels Schillewaert. 2013. “Exploring the Dynamics of Antecedents to Consumer–Brand Identification with a New Brand.” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 41 (2):234–52. doi: [10.1007/s11747-012-0301-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-012-0301-x).
- Lapoule, P., and E. B. Colla. 2016. “The Multi-Channel Impact on the Sales Forces Management.” *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 44 (3):248–65. doi: [10.1108/IJRDM-11-2014-0159](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-11-2014-0159).
- Lawrence, Justin M., Andrew T. Crecelius, Lisa K. Scheer, and Son K. Lam. 2019. “When It Pays to Have a Friend on the Inside: Contingent Effects of Buyer Advocacy on B2B Suppliers.” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47 (5):837–57. doi: [10.1007/s11747-019-00672-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00672-8).
- Leary, Mark R., Kristine M. Kelly, Catherine A. Cottrell, and Lisa S. Schreindorfer. 2013. “Construct Validity of the Need to Belong Scale: Mapping the Nomological Network.” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 95 (6):610–24. doi: [10.1080/00223891.2013.819511](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2013.819511).
- Lingqvist, Oskar, Candace L. Plotkin, and Jennifer Stanley. 2015. “Do You Really Understand How Your Customers Buy?” McKinsey Quarterly, February, 1–6.
- Lussier, Bruno, Nathaniel N. Hartmann, and Willy Bolander. 2021. “Curbing the Undesirable Effects of Emotional Exhaustion on Ethical Behaviors and Performance: A Salesperson–Manager Dyadic Approach.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 169 (4):747–66. doi: [10.1007/s10551-019-04271-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04271-z).
- Mack. 2014. “Mack Fans Can Display Their ‘Born Ready’ Spirit with Free Tattoos at the Mid-America Trucking Show,” March 19. <https://www.macktrucks.com/mack-news/2014/mid-america-trucking-show-tatoos/>
- Mangus, Stephanie M., Dora E. Bock, Judith A. Garretson Folse, and Eli Jones. 2022. “The Comparative Effects of Gratitude and Indebtedness in B2B Relationships.” *Industrial Marketing Management* 103:73–82. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.03.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.03.009).
- Marshall, G. W., W. C. Moncrief, J. M. Rudd, and N. Lee. 2012. “Revolution in Sales: The Impact of Social Media and Related Technology on the Selling Environment.” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 32 (3):349–63. doi: [10.2753/PSS0885-3134320305](https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320305).
- McMillan, Sally J., and Jang-Sun Hwang. 2002. “Measures of Perceived Interactivity: An Exploration of the Role of Direction of Communication, User Control, and Time in Shaping Perceptions of Interactivity.” *Journal of Advertising* 31 (3):29–42. doi: [10.1080/00913367.2002.10673674](https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2002.10673674).
- Miltgen, Caroline Lanceot, Ales Popovič, and Tiago Oliveira. 2013. “Determinants of End-User Acceptance of Biometrics: Integrating the ‘Big 3’ of Technology Acceptance with Privacy Context.” *Decision Support Systems* 56:103–14. doi: [10.1016/j.dss.2013.05.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2013.05.010).
- Mollen, Anne, and Hugh Wilson. 2010. “Engagement, Telepresence and Interactivity in Online Consumer Experience: Reconciling Scholastic and Managerial Perspectives.” *Journal of Business Research* 63 (9–10):919–25. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.05.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.05.014).
- Muniz, Albert M., and Thomas C. O’Guinn. 2001. “Brand Community.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 27 (4):412–32. doi: [10.1086/319618](https://doi.org/10.1086/319618).
- Nambisan, Satish, and Robert A. Baron. 2010. “Different Roles, Different Strokes: Organizing Virtual Customer Environments to Promote Two Types of Customer Contributions.” *Organization Science* 21 (2):554–72. doi: [10.1287/orsc.1090.0460](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0460).
- Palmatier, Robert, Srinath Gopalakrishna, and Mark Houston. 2006. “Returns on Business-to-Business Relationship Marketing Investments: Strategies for Leveraging Profits.” *Marketing Science* 25 (5):477–93. doi: [10.1287/mksc.1060.0209](https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1060.0209).
- Pansari, Anita, and V. Kumar. 2017. “Customer Engagement: The Construct, Antecedents, and Consequences.” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45 (3):294–311. doi: [10.1007/s11747-016-0485-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0485-6).
- Paullay, Irina M., George M. Alliger, and Eugene F. Stone-Romero. 1994. “Construct Validation of Two Instruments Designed to Measure Job Involvement and Work Centrality.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 79 (2):224–8. doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.79.2.224](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.2.224).
- Pereira, Beatriz, Amy Greiner Fehl, Stacey R. Finkelstein, Gabriela M. Jiga-Boy, and Marta Caserotti. 2022. “Scarcity in COVID-19 Vaccine Supplies Reduces Perceived Vaccination Priority and Increases Vaccine Hesitancy.” *Psychology & Marketing* 39 (5):921–36. doi: [10.1002/mar.21629](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21629).
- Plouffe, Christopher R., Brian C. Williams, and Thomas W. Leigh. 2004. “Who’s on First? Stakeholder Differences in Customer Relationship Management and the Elusive Notion of ‘Shared Understanding.’” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 24 (4):323–38.
- Rackham, Neil. 2020. *SPIN®-Selling*. London: Routledge.
- Rangarajan, Deva, Riley Dugan, Maria Rouziou, and Mike Kunkle. 2020. “People, Process, and Performance: Setting an Agenda for Sales Enablement Research.” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 40 (3):213–20. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2020.1761822](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2020.1761822).
- Ranjan, Kumar Rakesh, and Scott B. Friend. 2020. “An Integrative Framework of Sales Ecosystem Well-Being.” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 40 (4):234–50. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2020.1822176](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2020.1822176).
- Rapp, Adam, Raj Agnihotri, and Lukas P. Forbes. 2008. “The Sales Force Technology–Performance Chain: The Role of Adaptive Selling and Effort.” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 28 (4):335–50. doi: [10.2753/PSS0885-3134280401](https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134280401).
- Riazi, Atefah. 2022. “How Do You and I Meet?” *Medium*, <https://medium.com/@atti-riazi/how-do-you-and-i-meet-1d04870972e>.
- Rodriguez, M., and R. M. Peterson. 2012. “The Role of Social CRM and Its Potential Impact on Lead Generation in Business-to-Business Marketing.” *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising* 7 (2):180–93. doi: [10.1504/IJIMA.2012.046255](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2012.046255).
- Rodriguez, M., R. M. Peterson, and V. Krishnan. 2012. “Social Media’s Influence on Business-to-Business Sales Performance.” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 32 (3):365–78. doi: [10.2753/PSS0885-3134320306](https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320306).
- Russell-Bennett, Rebekah, Janet R. McColl-Kennedy, and Leonard V. Coote. 2007. “Involvement, Satisfaction, and Brand Loyalty in a Small Business Services Setting.” *Journal of Business Research* 60 (12):1253–60. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.05.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.05.001).
- Rustholkarhu, Sami, Pia Hautamaki, and Leena Aarikka-Stenroos. 2021. “Value (co-) Creation in B2B Sales Ecosystems.” *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* 36 (4):590–8. doi: [10.1108/JBIM-03-2020-0130](https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2020-0130).
- Schmidt, Karl, Brent Adamson, and Anna Bird. 2015. “Making the Consensus Sale.” *Harvard Business Review* 93 (3):106–13.
- Shiau, Wen-Lung, and Margaret Meiling Luo. 2012. “Factors Affecting Online Group Buying Intention and Satisfaction: A Social Exchange Theory Perspective.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 28 (6):2431–44. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2012.07.030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.07.030).
- Sicilia, Maria, Elena Delgado-Ballester, and Mariola Palazon. 2016. “The Need to Belong and Self-Disclosure in Positive Word-of-Mouth Behaviours: The Moderating Effect of Self–Brand Connection.” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 15 (1):60–71. doi: [10.1002/cb.1533](https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1533).
- Siemsen, Enno, Aleda Roth, and Pedro Oliveira. 2010. “Common Method Bias in Regression Models with Linear, Quadratic, and Interaction Effects.” *Organizational Research Methods* 13 (3):456–76. doi: [10.1177/1094428109351241](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428109351241).
- Snyder, Deirdre G., and Kevin P. Newman. 2019. “Reducing Consumer Loneliness through Brand Communities.” *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 36 (2):337–47. doi: [10.1108/JCM-04-2018-2657](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-04-2018-2657).
- Sprott, David, Sandor Czellar, and Eric Spangenberg. 2009. “The Importance of a General Measure of Brand Engagement on Market Behavior: Development and Validation of a Scale.” *Journal of Marketing Research* 46 (1):92–104. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.46.1.92](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.46.1.92).

- Torvinen, Hannu, and Paulina Ulkuniemi. 2016. "End-User Engagement within Innovative Public Procurement Practices: A Case Study on Public-Private Partnership Procurement." *Industrial Marketing Management* 58:58-68. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.05.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.05.015).
- Van Doorn, Jenny, Kay Lemon, Vikas Mittal, Stephan Nass, Doreen Pick, Peter Pirner, and Peter Verhoef. 2010. "Customer Engagement Behavior: Theoretical Foundations and Research Directions." *Journal of Service Research* 13 (3):253-66. doi: [10.1177/1094670510375599](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510375599).
- Vargo, Stephen, and Robert Lusch. 2004. "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 68 (1):1-17. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036).
- Venkatesan, Rajkumar. 2017. "Executing on a Customer Engagement Strategy." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45 (3):289-93. doi: [10.1007/s11747-016-0513-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0513-6).
- Vivek, Shiri, Sharon Beatty, and Robert Morgan. 2012. "Customer Engagement: Exploring Customer Relationships beyond Purchase." *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 20 (2):122-46. doi: [10.2753/MTP1069-6679200201](https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679200201).
- Vivek, Shiri D., Sharon E. Beatty, Vivek Dalela, and Robert M. Morgan. 2014. "A Generalized Multidimensional Scale for Measuring Customer Engagement." *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 22 (4):401-20. doi: [10.2753/MTP1069-6679220404](https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679220404).
- Voorveld, Hilde A., Peter C. Neijens, and Edith G. Smit. 2011. "The Relation between Actual and Perceived Interactivity." *Journal of Advertising* 40 (2):77-92. doi: [10.2753/JOA0091-3367400206](https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367400206).
- Wang, Hao, Wyatt A. Schrock, Anand Kumar, and Douglas E. Hughes. 2020. "Effectual Selling in Service Ecosystems." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 40 (4):251-66. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2020.1834865](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2020.1834865).
- Wrzesniewski, Amy, and Jane E. Dutton. 2001. "Crafting a Job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of Their Work." *Academy of Management Review* 26 (2):179-201. doi: [10.2307/259118](https://doi.org/10.2307/259118).
- Zoltners, Andris A., Prabhakant Sinha, Dharmendra Sahay, Arun Shastri, and Sally E. Lorimer. 2021. "Practical Insights for Sales Force Digitalization Success." *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 41 (2):87-102. doi: [10.1080/08853134.2021.1908144](https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2021.1908144).

Appendix: Scale items and composite reliabilities

All items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

End user Engagement (Adapted from Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009), CR S1=.96, CR S2=.83

1. I feel like the Doer brand gets me.
2. I feel close to the Doer brand.
3. I feel that the Doer brand understands me well.
4. I feel that the Doer brand is on the same wavelength as me.
5. I feel connected to the Doer Brand.
6. I expect that Doer will respond to my needs.*
7. I expect to share my experience with the Doer brand. *
8. I expect Doer to be responsive to me.*

*These three items were dropped due to poor factor loading for the second sample.

Need to Belong (Leary et al. 2013), CR S1=.90, CR S2=.86

1. I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
2. I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
3. I want other people to accept me.
4. I do not like being alone.
5. I have a strong 'need to belong'.
6. It bothers me a great deal when I am not included in other people's plans.
7. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.

Centrality of Work Identity (Paullay, Alliger, and Stone-Romero 1994), CR S1=.94, CR S2=.89

1. In my view, an individual's personal life goals should be work.
2. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work.
3. The most important things that happen to me involve my work.
4. Work should be considered central to life.
5. Overall, I consider work to be very central to my existence.

Perceived Interactivity of Supplier Initiative (McMillan and Hwang 2002), CR S1=.94, CR S2=.95

1. Doer's marketing initiative facilitates two-way communication.
2. Doer's marketing initiative gives me the opportunity to talk back.
3. Doer's marketing initiative enables concurrent communication.
4. Doer's marketing initiative is interactive.
5. Doer's marketing initiative has a variety of content.
6. Doer's marketing initiative keeps my attention.

Customer Engagement Behaviors (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Vivek et al. 2014)

Word-of-Mouth (WOM), CR S1=.882, CR S2=.887

1. I would mention Doer to others quite frequently.
2. I would seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about Doer.
3. I would tell my manager that I would rather use a Doer forklift/learning management software.
4. I would post a review about Doer forklifts/learning management software online.

Social Media, CR S1=.920, CR S2=.900

1. I would discuss my experience with Doer forklifts/learning management software on a job forum.
2. I would 'like' Doer on its Facebook page.
3. I would take a selfie with my Doer forklift/LearningGr8ness.
4. I would follow Doer on Instagram.