

**The influence of entertainment, utility and pass time on  
consumer brand engagement for news media brands: a  
mediation model**

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## **Abstract**

Given that the current media condition provides numerous channels that create interaction between news media brands and consumers, the concept of consumer brand engagement (CBE), referred as being the interactive relationships between consumers and brands is more crucial than ever in the media sector. The purpose of this study is to examine the direct and indirect effects of three motives, utility, entertainment, and pass time, on consumer brand engagement for online news media brands. A causal model that illustrates both the direct and indirect effects of the three motives on CBE reveals the critical role of entertainment as a mediator. Utility and entertainment positively impact CBE, whereas pass time is negatively associated with CBE for online news media brands. Entertainment positively mediates the relationship between utility and CBE as well as influencing the negative relationship between pass time and CBE.

**Keywords:** news media brands, consumer brand engagement, mediation model, entertainment

## **1. Introduction**

Today, online media organizations are competing intensely for users' attention. Branding has been developed into a critical strategic management objective for an increasingly wide range of media organizations (Krebs & Siegert, 2015; Malmelin & Moisander, 2014) and helps them differentiate their products from competitors' offerings (McDowell, 2006; Nandan, 2005). In this vein, media branding entails all activities triggering valuable associations in consumers with the aim of creating a competitive advantage for a media brand (Siegert et al., 2015). Branding allows media companies to better organize their marketing activities to establish value propositions for consumers by constructing a wide range of media offerings with recognizable brand names (Baumann, 2015). Given that branding is not just an option but a strategic precondition for the success of media, there is a need for a deeper analysis of media branding (Kim, 2017; Laaksonen et al., 2019; Malmelin & Moisander, 2014). The present study attempts to fill in this gap by exploring the concept of news media branding within the scope of consumer brand engagement for news media.

The main purpose of the present study is to explore the prominent role of entertainment motive in the consumption process of branded news media websites. A recent study about whether news is regarded as being of informational or entertainment value concluded that just a few pieces of news can be fully integrated into one of the two categories (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019). In the news media context, the boundaries between entertainment and information are rather blurred (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001) and the term infotainment, which is widely used in the media industry, highlights the uselessness of this dichotomy (Vorderer, 2001). In the same vein, a study among news media consumers and professionals, regarding the perceived role of news media brands, indicated that consumers more frequently than professionals perceive news media brands as a source of entertainment and relaxation (Krebs, 2015) that helps them escape from everyday life (Vorderer et al., 2004). This finding indicates the imperative need

for a new model of thought about daily news consumption, based on utility and entertainment purposes (Elsweiler et al., 2011). Given the fact that entertainment is an important precondition for the effective processing of information (Hardy et al., 2014), the present study stresses the mediating role of entertainment on the interconnection between the media related motives and consumer brand engagement.

This study, through the conduct of a survey carried out using 523 Greek media users, examines the direct and indirect effects of the three motives, utility, entertainment, and pass-time, on consumer brand engagement for news media brands. Emphasis is placed on the mediating role of entertainment in the relationships between utility and consumer brand engagement, as well as between pass time and consumer brand engagement (see Figure 1). The present study contributes to the literature in two ways: First, based on the Uses and Gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973), it indicates that consumer brand engagement is generated by motives' gratifications and can be considered as a media effect. In this manner, it extends media branding literature, by investigating for the first time the impact of the three motives on consumer brand engagement for news media brands. Moreover, it responds to the need to explore the role of consumer motives for media brand consumption (Chan-Olmsted & Shay, 2015). Second, the present study suggests and tests a model on consumer brand engagement that highlights the critical role of entertainment motive as a mediating variable. This model can be effectively applied in the contemporary hybrid news media environment, where there is a continuous quest for the boundaries between information and entertainment concepts to be seen as distinct variables (Elsweiler et al., 2011; Chadwick, 2014; Young, 2013). To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study proposing a mediation model about how consumer motives impact a media dependent variable. The findings of this study bring to light the entertainment value of branded news media websites and go on to suggest that news media brands should focus on providing entertainment value that can be created by news games or other entertainment elements.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1 News Media brands*

News media are defined as the media that distribute daily news and event reports to the public (McKewon, 2012). News media are established in a dynamic technological environment mainly dominated by the internet (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012), where the most common form of internet presence is through their websites, providing news content combined with participation opportunities for their consumers (Jankowski & Selm, 2000; Kenney et al., 2000). In this environment, contemporary media face the blur between information and entertainment (or between journalism practices and entertainment value) without discriminating what is considered entertainment on one hand and what is information, on the other (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019). News media products provide a combination of a service package to their consumers consisting of information and entertainment value plus advertising (Baumann, 2015). For example, the daily process of reading the trading news can become a pleasurable, entertaining and enlightening experience (McDowell, 2015).

The purpose of news media is twofold; they offer information to the public whilst at the same time they strive for their profitability (Pavlik, 2000; Siegert et al., 2011). The implementation of what would turn out to be ineffective news media strategies can be a long-term threat to the news media industry as a whole (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). Given the fragmented news media marketplace, the competition among news media

outlets has been increased dramatically, and therefore, media managers are required to constantly seek innovative strategies to make their media products stand out (Krebs, 2017; Laaksonen et al., 2019). News media branding is considered as an ideal tool for differentiation (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007, Doyle, 2015). From a corporate point of view, branding entails the techniques for lining up the organization's vision with its corporate image and culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). In this context, brand identity in combination with long-term brand reputation reinforces media brand trust (Singh & Oliver, 2015). The brand reflects the verbal, visual, and behavioral aspects of the company's identity and its exceptional business model (Balmer, 2001).

News media brands offer enhanced value propositions (Baumann, 2015) about what their consumers may expect in terms of content, interactivity, and consumption experience (Ots, 2008). News media brands can be considered as signs of credibility and quality (Laaksonen et al., 2019; Krebs, 2017; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019), designed to communicate traits and feelings, and to enhance the product value (McDowell, 2006). A brand can be associated with previous product experience and can create expectations for future outcomes (Esch et al., 2006). Keeping in this vein, a news media brand serves as a construct that reflects emotional, cognitive, stylistic, conscious, and unconscious indications for a news medium (Siegert et al., 2015).

The significance of news media brands was stressed by Marshall McLuhan, in his popular quote, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). News media brands function as a formative trait of media messages and affect the process of news elaboration. In particular, news media readers encode, store and retrieve better the news that is offered by a specific media brand, rather than the news provided by non-branded media. Credible news media brands trigger stronger arousal responses, which in turn improve information storage and retrieval efficiency (Laaksonen et al., 2019).

In the current web 3.0 technological environment, media users expect customized engagement opportunities from media brands (Chan & Shay, 2015). Engagement retains existing relationships between consumers and news media brands in the contemporary multi-platform context (Davidson et al., 2007; Doyle, 2015). Online engagement is of great interest for news media brands because it builds trust, increases loyalty (Chung & Nah, 2009; Krebs & Lischka, 2019), positively affects perceived quality (Krebs & Lischka, 2019) and boosts readership (Mersey et al., 2010).

## *2.2 Consumer Brand Engagement*

"Engagement" is considered as a critical factor that predicts consumer behavior, such as brand loyalty (Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Pham & Avnet 2009; Schau et al., 2009), and it is increasingly replacing other strongly established concepts such as "participation" and "involvement". Engagement as a term indicates a motivational condition (van Doorn et al., 2010), pertaining to individual's (the "engagement subject") interactive experience with a specific object (the "engagement object") (Hollebeek 2011). In the business sector, a consumer can be the engagement subject while a brand can be the engagement object (van Doorn et al., 2010).

Over the last 25 years, a growing stream of academic research has focused on the dynamic relationships between consumers and brands (Aaker et al., 2004; Brodie et al., 2013; Brodie et al., 2019; Calder et al., 2009; Dessart et al., 2016; Fournier 1998, Gligor et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Morgan-Thomas et al., 2020; Ramani & Kumar, 2008). In this context, consumer brand engagement is a concept that has been conferred increased attention (Chan-olmsted & Wolter, 2018; Dessart et al., 2015; Dwivedi, 2015;

Gambetti et al., 2012; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Consumer brand engagement has its roots in the broader theoretical frameworks of service-dominant logic (Karpen et al., 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008) and relationship marketing (Vivek et al., 2012), reflecting the interactive relationship between brands and consumers. Consumer brand engagement emphasizes the active role that modern consumers have in specific brand-related actions (Pagani et al., 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Hence, the present digital media landscape provides a suitable ground for the establishment of dynamic interactive relationships between brands and media consumers (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018; Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010).

Consumer brand engagement is defined as “a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Using the framework of this definition, the construct of consumer brand engagement is made up of three dimensions, cognitive processing, affection, and activation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Cognitive processing refers to “a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction”. Affection is defined as “a consumer’s degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction”. Activation refers to “a consumer’s level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction”.

High levels of consumer brand engagement positively impact organizational performance. Previous studies stress that consumer brand engagement positively influences brand referral, consumer contribution to brand development, consumer/brand experience, sales expansion, profitability, and cost decline (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Prahalad, 2004; Sawhney et al., 2005). Therefore, consumer brand engagement becomes a significant key metric for measuring brand performance (Bowden, 2009; Kumar et al., 2010).

In relation to the concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) that is prominently used in the media branding literature, consumer brand engagement is regarded as an antecedent variable (Algharabat et al., 2020; Machado et al., 2019). CBBE comprises brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other brand assets (Aaker, 1992). Prior research has indicated that consumer brand engagement influences brand loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011; Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Sprott et al., 2009) and future brand purchases, builds significant relationships, contributes to higher levels of trust and commitment among consumers, and the brand, and as a result creates value for both consumers and marketers (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Brodie et al., 2011; Schau et al., 2009; Tsai & Men, 2013; van Doorn et al., 2010). Keller (2001) supports that CBBE can be built through consumer brand resonance, and one of the most valuable components of brand resonance is consumer engagement. Based on all the above studies, the significance of consumer brand engagement for news media brands lies also in the fact that it can build CBBE.

In the media management literature, engagement studies mainly focus on the relationship between consumers and media content or the interactive relationship between media platforms and media consumers (Napoli, 2011; Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018), while they measure media audience engagement mainly as a behavioral construct reflected in the number of likes, comments or shares on media content (e.g. Ha et al., 2018; Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Ksiazek et al., 2016; Riskos et al., 2019). Chan-Olmsted and Wolter’s (2018) qualitative study shows that consumer brand engagement in the media industry can be expressed through the three dimensions of affection,

cognition, and behavior that have been determined by Hollebeek et al. (2014). Embracing this multi-dimensional approach, the present study adopts the construct of Hollebeek et al. (2014) to measure consumer brand engagement with news media brands.

### **3. Research Hypotheses**

#### *3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory*

According to the uses and gratification (U&G) theory (Katz et al., 1974), users actively engage in news consumption in order to satisfy their motives such as pass time, entertainment and information seeking (e.g. Henke, 1985; Parker & Plank, 2000; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Yoo, 2011). These three types of motives can be regarded as media-related (Vincent & Basil, 1997; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009), whereas interpersonal motives can be considered as another distinct broad category (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). The U&G paradigm tries to interpret how the use of media satisfies users' needs, what are the main motives driving users to consume media content, and what are the consequences of the interaction between motives, needs, and media use (Katz et al., 1974).

Academics have extensively used the U&G paradigm to investigate users' motives for selecting a specific platform to read international, national or local news (Ruggiero, 2000), and to understand the reasons why readers consume news across different online platforms like online media (e.g. Eveland et al., 2004; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Mersey et al., 2010; Ruggiero, 2000) or social media (e.g. Lee & Ma, 2012; Wohn & Ahmadi, 2019). The present study utilizes the theory of Uses and Gratifications in order to build the research hypotheses regarding the direct and indirect impact of utility, pass time, and entertainment motives on consumer brand engagement with news media websites.

#### *3.2 The impact of utility motive on consumer brand engagement*

Based on the U&G theory, information seeking is one of the main motives leading people to use media. Online media consumers seek information to satisfy their general interest and curiosity about a topic, looking for tips and advice on practical matters, collecting information about relevant events, etc. (Mersey et al., 2010). The general construct of information seeking is divided into various sub-concepts. Media utility is considered as a sub-concept of information seeking, and it is related to utilitarian behavior (Calder et al., 2009). Utilitarian behavior is defined as a determined and logical action concerned with effectiveness and instrumental value (Voss et al., 2003). Utilitarian behavior is a construct that can be drawn on to adequately explain consumer behavior in the online context (Pöyry et al., 2013).

Information seeking and utility motives are positively related to internet news consumption (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). According to Mersey et al. (2010) online media provide utilitarian experience by offering actionable advice and tips. When users search for utilitarian experience in the media landscape, they actually seek for utilitarian value provided by the medium (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019). Utilitarian value is considered as the holistic evaluation of functional benefits provided by media (Díaz et al., 2018). Utilitarian value is associated with task-specific media use, such as finding useful and credible information by reading, for instance, a historical news article.

Literature supports that gratifications, such as information seeking and utility, which are obtained by news media use, positively affect a user's behavior and decision-

making process (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Completing an action in an efficient and proper way forms one of the prerequisites for the gratification of utilitarian motivation (Cotte et al., 2006). Utilitarian media users have specific objectives and follow a concrete behavior, based on the information they receive from the media. For instance, online utilitarian information, leads to selective exposure and engagement behavior during the news consumption process (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012).

Motives' gratification results in increased levels of engagement with media content (Young, 2013). In a similar vein, positive motivational gratifications favorably influence attitude and loyalty toward online news media brands (Krebs & Lischka, 2019). Within the online environment, utilitarian news is shared more often (Bobkowski, 2015), while news sharing is regarded as an engagement behavior with online news media (Krebs & Lischka, 2019). The gratification of utility motive has an impact on the attitude toward online newspapers that in turn has a positive effect on repeated visit intention (Yoo, 2011). Moreover, prior research on the experience that urges consumers to engage with online news media concluded that utilitarian experience positively affects social-interactive media engagement (Mersey et al., 2010). Similarly, the study by Calder et al. (2009) supported that utilitarian experience positively affects media engagement. Based on the aforementioned analysis the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1: Utility motive positively influences consumer brand engagement with a branded news media website.*

### *3.3 The impact of pass time motive on consumer brand engagement*

Pass time is a self-evaluative motive that deals with dysphoric moods like boredom (LaRose & Eastin, 2004) and loneliness (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). For instance, internet users visit user-generated media for relaxing purposes or for relieving boredom (mood management) (Shao, 2009), a process that leads users to engage more extensively with the media (Poon & Leung, 2013). Prior research supports that in the context of online news media, pass time gratification expresses audiences' need to fill free time rather than to do something productive (Yoo, 2011). A news media ability to gratify the audience's pass time motive is as crucial as its ability to entertain and provide useful information. Hence, the gratification of pass time is considered as an important criterion for news media websites adoption (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000), given that online media are consumed in order to alleviate boredom and fill consumers' free time, even when they are on the go (Brenner, 2013).

Research in U&G theory supports that pass time is regarded as a "ritualistic gratification" in the context of the active media selection process (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). A ritualistic orientation reflects a higher exposure to the medium rather than to precise content (Rubin, 1993). However, pass time is also positively related to funny news (Diddi & LaRose, 2006) and mobile soft news consumption (Chan, 2015).

Pass time gratification positively influences consumers' attitude toward online newspapers (Yoo, 2011), while it increases users' engagement with websites (Buente & Robin, 2008) and online news media (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Krebs and Lischka, 2019) during consumers' leisure time (Yadamsuren & Erdelez, 2011). Online news consumption during free time is perceived as an intellectual and meaningful action (Leung, 2020). Several studies have also indicated that pass time motivation positively affects personal media engagement (Mersey et al., 2010), whereas temporal experience is positively associated with media engagement (Calder et al., 2009). Similarly, in the

context of social media, users tend to engage in Facebook to satisfy the pass time motivation (Tsai and Men, 2013). Based on the aforementioned analysis the following hypothesis is advanced:

*H2: Pass time motive positively influences consumer brand engagement with a branded news media website.*

### *3.4 The impact of entertainment motive on consumer brand engagement*

Historically, entertainment events were mainly live-action events that were taking place directly in front of the audience's eyes, like British horse racing (cf. Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). Nowadays the news media channels are one of the main entertainment providers, producers and distributors. The new media landscape provides a broad diversity of entertainment options (cf. Sayre & King, 2003), and the "entertainment age" is not anymore a futuristic vision; we live in the "age of entertainment" (Vorderer, 2001; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). A plethora of studies (e.g. Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011) supports that media entertainment can take two distinct forms, the form of pleasure (with an emphasis on enjoyment), and the form of appreciation. The latter form of entertainment creates "moving and thought-provoking experiences" for media users (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p. 65). These experiences, which are perceived as meaningful in individual's mind, are accompanied by a strong interest in seeking "life's meaning, truth, and purposes" (Oliver & Raney, 2011, p. 985).

Considering the first form of entertainment, media users seek entertainment in a desire to get away from daily life and the social world. They use online media brands for enjoyment and relaxation purposes (Chung & Yoo, 2008). Entertainment as a construct is associated with fun, stimulation, psychological relaxation, positive experiential atmosphere, change, and diversion (Bosshart & Macconi, 1998) and leads to both an evaluative and experiential media use (Naby & Krcmar, 2004). According to Vorderer et al. (2004), entertainment experience includes at its core, a "pleasant" experiential condition that contains physiological, cognitive, and affective components.

Entertainment features positively influence attitude toward the site and behavioral intention to use the site (Chand & Wang, 2008). The need for entertainment pushes internet users to proceed to behavioral engagement actions with a website (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; O'Brien & Toms, 2008). In the same vein, high levels of perceived entertainment exert a positive effect on consumers' attitudes and loyalty toward online news brands (Yoo, 2011; Krebs & Lischka, 2019).

A recent study exploring the process of online news consumption in websites, concluded that entertainment news is the most preferred news category (compared to politics, business or other news type) by consumers (Vermeer et al., 2020). Indeed, entertainment news is one of the most significant news types and it collects a high number of user comments and replies (Riskos et al., 2019). Recent studies also support that entertainment motive enhances behavioral engagement (Liu and McLeod, 2019) and brand engagement (Krebs & Lischka, 2019) with online news media. In a similar vein, entertainment experience (Calder et al., 2009) and especially intrinsic enjoyment (Mersey et al., 2010) increases media engagement. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H3: Entertainment positively influences consumer brand engagement with a branded news media website.*



### *3.5 The mediating role of entertainment motive in the relationship between utility motive and consumer brand engagement with news media brands*

Online news media create and distribute informational content that gratifies both entertainment and information seeking needs (Young, 2013). When media users gratify their entertainment needs, they become more interested in the content, and therefore more willing to attend, and to elaborate the information provided by media (Vorderer et al., 2004). In point of fact, entertainment appears to be a central condition for high-performance information processing (Hardy et al., 2014; Vorderer, 2001).

In the online news media context, the difference between utility and entertainment gratifications has become blurred (Baym, 2017; Chadwick, 2014; Edgerly & Vraga, 2019). In a recent experimental study, participants who concentrated on the entertainment aspect of a show appeared to be both more amused and become better informed compared to the participants who focused on the purely informational side of the show (Mattheiss et al., 2013). The former group of participants did not only enjoy the show but also “appreciated” it.

According to Elswailer et al. (2011) media users are motivated to consume media content in order to fulfill their need for entertainment, though they probably start this consumption process by searching for utilitarian content that can gratify this need. For example, within the context of branded news media websites, the consumption of utilitarian content that is provided by other consumers in the comments section of a news article fulfills the need for entertainment (Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Liu & McLeod, 2019; Springer et al., 2015).

Moreover, an early study on U&G paradigm indicates that people who watch sad movies want to gratify not only their motive of entertainment but also the motive of “self-development” (Tesser et al., 1988). “Self-development” is people's motivation to find out how others may think or behave in harsh conditions. In other words, media consumers appear to experience entertainment through the consumption of useful information for their life.

A meta-analysis on the role of hedonic benefits on brand satisfaction concluded that hedonic benefits mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand satisfaction (de Oliveira et al., 2018). In this vein, the authors highlight that brand managers should provide entertainment experiences (i.e., a hedonic benefit) to consumers in order to increase their satisfaction. Brand satisfaction is considered as an antecedent variable of consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Thus, it can be assumed that utilitarian brand experience positively influences consumer brand engagement through entertainment. Take into consideration the aforementioned analysis as well as section 3.4, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H4: Entertainment motive mediates the relationship between utility motive and consumer brand engagement with a branded news media website.*

### *3.6 The mediating role of entertainment motive in the relationship between pass time motive and consumer brand engagement with news media brands*

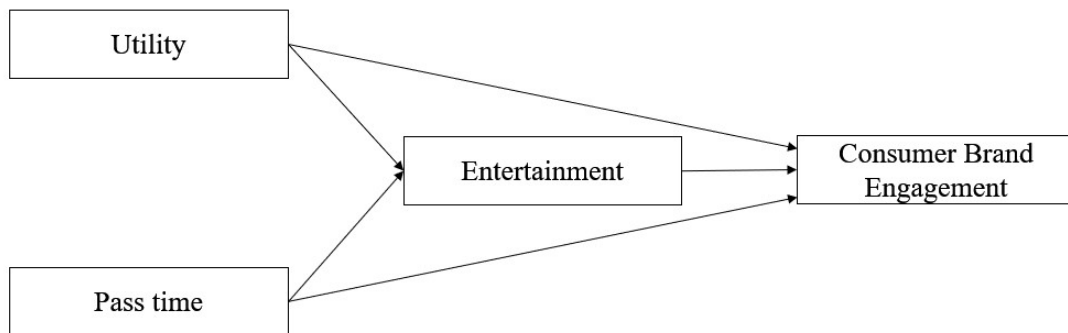
Pass time motive refers to the audience's desire to fill their leisure time. Within the online context, pass time gratification is associated with entertainment motive and soft news (Chua et al., 2012; Diddi & LaRose, 2006). News content is classified into two

broad categories, hard and soft news (Tuchman, 1973). Hard news includes stories about political, economic, or social issues, while soft news is about human-interest stories and funny ones. People who wish to pass their time by consuming online news content, tend to follow soft news (Chan, 2015) given that this news category is more entertaining and requires a limited cognitive effort from the audience (Baum, 2003; Riskos et al., 2019).

Media users who attempt to overcome boredom seek for entertainment in a temporal escape from the boring parts of their lives (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). Actually, boredom stimulates a constant search for entertainment (Vorderer et al., 2004). Indeed, Zillmann and Bryant (1994) demonstrate that people who are in a boring mood are more interested in comedy content compared to those who are in a positive mood.

Prior research supports that mobile users may strive to gratify their need of leisure in order to experience enjoyment (Chua et al., 2012). In addition, Yoo (2011) indicates that pass time motive leads to a playful use of a news website to fill in free time. Within the online environment, users with higher pass time needs engage in “free-form play” actions that reflect an entertainment experience (Sutton-Smith, 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). Bear in mind that hedonic benefits mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand satisfaction (de Oliveira et al., 2018), the aforementioned analysis about the relationship between pass time and entertainment and the section 3.4 about the relationship between entertainment and CBE, the following hypothesis is advanced:

*H5: Entertainment motive mediates the relationship between pass time motive and consumer brand engagement with a branded news media website.*



*Figure 1: The Conceptual Model of the Study*

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Procedure

In order to test the abovementioned hypotheses, an online survey was conducted in Greece. The questionnaire was translated by an expert bilingual researcher from English to Greek and then was back-translated by a second bilingual researcher from Greek to English in order to attain a credible translation. Participants were given a structured questionnaire. In the beginning, they were asked whether they consume online news. When they gave a positive answer, they were asked to indicate the online news media brand that they use more often. Some of the most highly preferred news media brands were: Kathimerini.gr, Iefimerida.gr, Naftemporiki.gr, Lifo.gr, Newsit.gr, News247.gr, Alfavita.gr, Enikos.gr, and AthensVoice.gr. Second, they were asked to evaluate their experience with this particular news media website. News media websites

have been selected as the channels to examine consumer brand engagement, because they are the most common form of news media brands on the internet (Jankowski & Selm, 2000; Kenney et al., 2000; Schultz, 1999).

Participants were recruited through the use of the snowball sampling method, via the social networking site Facebook; the most popular social networking site. According to the online snowball sampling method, existing participants send the questionnaire to other potential participants. This method is based on the virtual relationships created and maintained on the internet that constitute a significant contemporary social reality (Baltar & Brunet, 2011). This method is widely used in marketing (e.g. Ho & Shirahada, 2019; Moon et al., 2017; Perry & Chung, 2016), as well as in communication and media studies (Hartmann et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2017). The purpose of the survey was to gather responses from Greek citizens who consume online news through branded news media websites. Hence the use of Facebook as a sampling tool was considered suitable. The online survey was shared in two ways: Firstly, the researchers shared the survey link on their Facebook personal accounts asking their friends to forward the link to further three or more friends of theirs. Second, they shared the online survey on their Facebook page asking their followers to share the survey on their own personal pages as well. Overall, 523 participants completed the online survey.

#### *4.2 Sample*

Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the sample characteristics. The mean age of participants is 33.4 years old (SD= 11.68) where 55.6% are between 18 and 30 years old, 19.1% are between 31 and 40 years old, 13% are between 41 and 50 years old, 10.5% are between 51 and 60 years old and 1.7% are older than 60 years. As far as the participants' gender is concerned, 57.4% are female and 42.6% are male. Regarding participants total annual income 40% ranged between 0-5,000€, 29.4% ranged between 5,001-12,000€, 19.1% ranged between 12,001-20,000€, 7.1% ranged between 20,001-30,000€, 2.7% ranged between 30,001-40,000€ and 1.7% have total income more than 40,001€. In terms of the participants' educational level, 0.2% has finished primary school, 6.1% secondary school, 5.5% high school, 60.6% has a bachelor's degree, 22.9% has a master's degree and 4.6% holds a Ph.D.

#### *4.3 Measures*

In the present study all variables were measured by using five-point Likert scales; from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The scales of entertainment, pass time and utility have been adopted by the media literature. Utility was measured by means of a four-item scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ), adopted by Malthouse and Calder (2010). Pass time was measured by means of a five-item scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ), adopted by Rubin (1981). Entertainment was measured by means of a three-item scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ), adopted by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000). Consumer brand engagement was measured by means of a 10-item scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ), coming from the marketing literature (Hollebeek et al., 2014) (see Appendix section). The construct of consumer brand engagement is made up of three dimensions, cognitive processing, affection, and activation. Although this construct has been designed in a social media context, Hollebeek et al. (2014) suggest that the consumer brand engagement scale is applicable in various online contexts. As a result, this construct can be used in the setting of branded news media websites.

#### 4.4 Control variables

Gender (male=1, female=2), age (18-30=1, 31-40=2, 41-50=3, 51-60=4, >60=5) educational level (Primary School =1, Secondary School=2, High School=3, Bachelor's degree=4, Master's degree=5 PhD=6) and total income (1=0-5,000 €, 2=5,001-12,000 €, 3=12,001-20,000 €, 4=20,001-30,000 €, 5=30,001-40,000 €, 6=40,001 € and above) were used as control variables. A few of the bivariate correlations between these control variables and the outcomes were statistically significant (Table 2). To generate more persuasive results, statistical analyses, with and without the incorporation of control variables, were conducted. The results revealed no statistically significant difference. Therefore, control variables were excluded from further analysis (Becker, 2005).

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Number of Respondents	523	100
Gender		
Male	223	42.6
Female	300	57.4
Age		
18-30	291	55.6
31-40	100	19.1
41-50	68	13
51-60	55	10.5
>60	9	1.7
Educational Level		
Primary School	1	0.2
Secondary School	32	6.1
High School	29	5.5
Bachelor's degree	317	60.6
Master's degree	120	22.9
PhD	24	4.6
Total Income		
0-5,000 €	209	40
5,001-12,000 €	154	29.4
12,001-20,000 €	100	19.1
20,001-30,000 €	37	7.1
30,001-40,000 €	14	2.7
>40,001 €	9	1.7

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics and correlations*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.57	0.495							
2. Age	33.4	11.68	-.44						
3. Educational level	4.13	0.844	.03	-1.15**					
4. Total Income	2.08	1.18	-1.01*	.45**	.10*				
5. Utility	2.35	.78	.08	.01	-.05	-.01			
6. Pass time	2.58	1.01	.05	-.31**	-.09*	-.18**	-.02		
7. Entertainment	2.54	.66	.03	-.16**	-.09*	-.05	.59**	.48**	
8. Consumer Brand Engagement	1.77	.54	.04	-.03	-.02	-0.3	.65**	.14**	.72**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$

#### 4.5 Confirmatory factor analysis

To examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures, a confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS 21 software was conducted. Results demonstrate that the model determine a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df= 2.351$ , CFI=.962 TLI=.953 PNFI= .75 RMSEA=.051, SRMR=.0617, Hoelter's Critical N=262). All standardized coefficients were significant (ranging from .51 to .94). In addition, the measurement model was contrasted against alternative models. Results revealed that the present model fitted data significantly better than other models, supporting the uniqueness of the constructs. Furthermore, the potential influence of common method variance has been examined by conducting Harman's test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Our results demonstrated a poor fit for the one-factor model ( $\chi^2/df= 9.11$ , CFI=.764 TLI=.715 PNFI= .615 RMSEA=.125, SRMR=.1246, Hoelter's Critical N=72). Thus, common method bias does not constitute a problem for the present study.

### 5. Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 2. In order to examine the mediation model, a bootstrapping analysis was conducted (5000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals), based on the SPSS macro PROCESS software suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). The present approach addresses some weaknesses of the Sobel test and gives researchers the ability to incorporate multiple mediators. Macro PROCESS adopts a path analytic framework, given that it is a regression-based approach, and as a result uses the mediation analysis technique proposed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) or Edwards and Lambert (2007). Path coefficients are estimated with the use of OLS regression, while indirect effects are tested by constructing each variable around the assumed indirect effect that is set under investigation.

The findings indicate that utility is positively related to consumer brand engagement ( $\beta=.50$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Table 3). Hence hypothesis 1 is supported. However, pass time negatively affects consumer brand engagement ( $\beta=-.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ). As a result, hypothesis 2 is rejected. On the contrary, entertainment is positively associated with consumer brand engagement ( $\beta=.70$ ,  $p<.001$ ). As a result, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

As far as the mediation analysis is concerned, if the 95% of the bias-corrected confidence intervals for the estimates of the mediation effect does not include zero, the indirect effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Considering the mediation effect of entertainment on the relationship between utility

and consumer brand engagement, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effect did not include zero (between .18 and .26). Hence, hypothesis 4 is supported. Similarly, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effect of pass time to consumer brand engagement through entertainment did not include zero (between .17 and .27). Thus, hypothesis 5 is also supported. Table 3 presents the overall results of the study.

Table 3: Results of direct and indirect effects

Direct Effects	Std. Beta	S.E	Sig.	Hypothesis	
Utility → CBE	0.50	0,02	p<0.001	H1	Supported
Pass time → CBE	-0.14	0,03	p<0.001	H2	Rejected
Entertainment → CBE	0.70	0,03	p<0.001	H3	Supported

Mediation paths	Std. Beta	S.E	Bootstrap 95% Confidence		Hypothesis	Result
			BootLLCI	BootULCI		
Utility → Entertainment → CBE	0.22	0.023	0.18	0.26	H4	Supported
Pass time → Entertainment → CBE	0.21	0.02	0.17	0.27	H5	Supported

## 6. Discussion

The present study investigated the direct and indirect effects of utility, entertainment and pass time motives on consumer brand engagement with branded news media websites. A sample of 523 respondents participated in an online survey. The study aimed to highlight the critical influence of entertainment on consumer brand engagement with online news media brands.

Based on previous media and communication literature that supported that utility, entertainment and pass time are three of the most prominent motives that drive media users to consume news media brands (Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Malthouse et al., 2010; Yoo, 2011), this study tested their effect on consumer brand engagement. We revealed that utility and entertainment motives can positively influence consumer brand engagement with a news media brand. Hence, the crucial role of entertainment and utility within the context of news media has been corroborated considering its impact on the multidimensional construct of consumer brand engagement. In this manner, our study extends the literature of news media branding by indicating the main drivers pushing news media consumers to engage with news media brands. News media consumers are engaged with a brand because it offers them increased levels of utilitarian and entertainment experience.

Our study demonstrated that pass time negatively impacts consumer brand engagement for news media brands. On the contrary, the study of Mersey et al. (2010) approved that pass time motive positively influences personal media engagement while the study of Yoo (2011), indicated that pass time positively affects attitude toward online newspapers and repeated visit intention. This opposite outcome our research showed may be justified based on the classification of motives between instrumental and ritualistic (e.g. Rubin, 1984; Rubin & Perse, 1987). This classification supports that instrumental motives, such as information seeking, achieve a particular utilitarian goal, for instance finding information about a specific case, and thus are more content-oriented. However, ritualistic motives, like pass time, focus more on the medium rather

than on particular content. This condition leads to media diversion. Consumer brand engagement refers to a particular news media brand. Thus, when an audience consumes the news simply to pass time, they may visit more than one online news media and consequently, may not be engaged with a particular one and its content.

The breakthrough of the present study is the mediating effect of entertainment in the relationship between utility, pass time, and consumer brand engagement. In this manner, this study extends prior research pointing out that the boundaries between entertainment and information in the news media context are significantly blurred (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Vorderer, 2001). Moreover, it stressed the need for a new model and way of thinking dealing with the daily behavior of news consumption for both utility and entertainment purposes (Elsweiler et al., 2011). Literature supports that media content often (e.g. a news article about Olympic games) gratifies both information seeking and entertainment motives (Bryant & Raney, 2000). Our study clarified that media consumers through the consumption of information on branded news media websites experience entertainment and this encourages them to get further engaged with the news media brand (Bange et al., 2020; Malmelin & Villi, 2016; 2017). This brings to light that individuals consume news media content with the aim of experiencing the entertainment value of each piece of news. Consuming utilitarian information can be regarded as an enjoyable process within the context of news media brands that ultimately leads to consumer brand engagement. This evidence supports the statement that contemporary media consumers want to gain the optimum entertainment value through media consumption (Bakshi & Mishra, 2016; Vorderer, 2001; Wolf, 1999).

The prominent role of entertainment as a mediator in the relationship between pass time and consumer brand engagement is further supported. Boredom may generate a more constant seeking for entertainment than other conditions (Vorderer et al., 2004; Zilmann & Bryant, 2004). The negative effect of pass time motive on consumer brand engagement becomes positive when entertainment motive mediates their relationship. This finding indicates the power of entertainment as a mediating factor. Although consumers who wish to pass their time hold a negative stance to engaging with a news media brand, they become engaged with the brand when they experience entertainment value. Actually, they prefer to engage with a specific news media brand only when it enables them to pass their free time pleasantly.

The mediation effect of entertainment highlights that news media brand consumption is predominantly an enjoyable process. Contrary to the belief that news media brands are consumed mainly for information purposes, this study concludes that entertainment is an exceptional concept for branded news media websites. In the same vein, Bakshi and Mishra (2016) mention that it is not credibility but entertainment that is the main driver for buying a newspaper. These studies pave the way for a new way of thinking about news media consumption that should be explored in more depth from the lenses of entertainment theory. Entertainment does not only imply joy, escapism and other hedonic experiences, but also reflects eudemonic experience like psychological growth and increasing well-being (Rieger et al., 2014). As a result, the consumption of branded news media content may reflect a delightful personal experience that fulfills intrinsic needs.

The present study contributes to the literature on news media branding in the following fundamental ways. First, it expands the media brand literature by examining media consumers' motives that lead them to engage with online news media brands. Second,

it broadens the academic literature on media branding by tackling for the first time investigation of the multidimensional concept of consumer brand engagement in the news media landscape. Given the significant gap in academic literature about how motives affect consumers to engage with a media brand, the present study fills, to some extent, the void. Third, given the critical role of mediation models on the understanding of media effects (e.g., McGuire, 1986; McLeod & Reeves, 1980; Holbert & Stephenson, 2003) as well as the lack of mediation models on news media branding literature, the present study fills a significant gap by its investigation of a mediation model for consumer brand engagement with news media brands as the dependent variable.

## **7. Managerial implications**

Consumer brand engagement is an important concept for media managers and helps them develop strategies that go beyond the frequency of consumers' visits for news media brands. Given that utility and entertainment positively affect consumer brand engagement for news brands, we suggest that media managers should invest in content that is both meaningful and entertaining for media consumers. For example, the use of meaningful multimedia content like videos, photos or infographics that add both information and entertainment value, in combination with utilitarian content, should be a preferable choice for online news media brands.

The breakthrough of our study is the mediating role of entertainment motive on consumer brand engagement. News media brand managers have to realize that we live in the "age of entertainment" and as a result they should plan media brand strategies from an entertainment value point of view. Of course, this does not mean that news media brands have to stop providing serious journalistic content. On the contrary they should focus on both entertainment and journalistic core values. Given that news media are experiential goods, news media brands are positioned not only as sources of hard, serious information content but also as related to other industries such as entertainment, travel, shows, films or consumer goods (Matteo & Dal Zotto, 2015). This strategy can be implemented from both "light" news outlets and traditional news media brands. For example, The New York Times provides a whole section about travel news, tips and photos regarding the best places to visit all over the world, combining journalistic content with entertainment value. News media brand managers have to clearly understand that entertainment value does not contradict with the hard content and the serious core values of a news media brand (see Vorderer, 2001).

In this line, another possible strategy for consideration is the use of gamification elements (e.g. Conill & Karlsson, 2019) or serious news games (e.g. Sicart, 2008) in the presentation of news media content. Serious news games can be used for various purposes beyond just entertainment. Serious news games can convey messages in order to inform and entertain audience with ultimate purpose to cultivate the public debate (Sicart, 2008). For example, the study of Plewe and Fursich (2018) concluded that the use of news games in the presentation of refugees and migrants issues, enhances journalism and creates experiential audience engagement.

Finally, it is crucial to mention that entertainment does not only imply enjoyment in the media sector. On the contrary, entertainment can take the form of appreciation that creates thought-provoking experiences (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p. 65) and can be considered as an "emotional roller-coaster ride". Hence, based on the "meta-mood" or



“meta-emotions” theory, media managers can also build on less common strategies, like the use of nostalgia, which can be successfully implemented in the media sector.

## **8. Limitations and Future Research**

Like any other study, the present study is subject to certain limitations. First, the scales adopted were modified from other cultures to be applied in a Greek cultural context. However, they had been formed in a Western culture (Western Europe and the USA). As a result, careful consideration was paid to them (translation/back-translation methodology) (Mullen, 1995) in order to cope with the inevitable cultural differences. Furthermore, the study focused only on Greek participants. Hence, a replication in a cross-cultural context, which will reveal coinciding and opposing results between different cultures, is necessary. The snowball sampling method and the recruitment of participants through Facebook can be considered another limitation. Future studies should employ a random sampling method.

The present study explored how motives for consuming news coming from branded news media websites influence consumer brand engagement. Future studies could explore whether there are differences in news consumption patterns between branded news media websites and social media.

Moreover, the present study examined a specific media product category, that of news media brands. Future studies could examine and compare how motives affect consumer brand engagement with different media product categories, like music or video streaming platforms.

The present study investigated the impact of utility, entertainment and pass time motives on consumer brand engagement for news media brands. The extant academic literature on media and communication contains a vast range of motives that impact on media consumption process. Future research could examine additional motives.

In this study, it has not been determined whether entertainment motive comes from hard or soft news media brand websites. A future research study could examine if there are differences about the entertainment value that is provided by these two types of news outlets. Moreover, the concept of entertainment was evaluated as a motive and not as a news content category or feature. Given that entertainment motive not only reflects hedonic experience but also contains appreciation, eudaimonic and well-being aspects (Rieger et al., 2014), future studies should examine the impact of eudaimonic entertainment concept on news media branding.

Finally, given that the conventional business model of media outlets based on advertising revenues does not appear highly profitable in the internet context, media management researchers are absorbed in the quest to find key concepts that lead media users to pay online for media content acquisition. Hence, an interesting direction for future research could be to investigate whether and how consumer brand engagement affects purchase intention for online media brand content.

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## Appendix Section

### **Entertainment** (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000)

*I use the mentioned above branded news media website:*

1. Because it is entertaining.
2. Because I just like to use it.
3. Because it's enjoyable.

### **Pass Time** (Rubin, 1981)

*I use the mentioned above branded news media website:*

1. When I have nothing better to do.
2. Because it passes the time away, especially when I'm bored.
3. Just because it's on.
4. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time.

When there's no one else to talk to or be with.

### **Utility** (Maltouse & Calder, 2010)

*I use the mentioned above branded news media website:*

1. Because it gets me to try new things
2. Because I really like the tips in it.
3. To learn how to make things.
4. Because it shows me how to do things the right way.

### **Consumer Brand Engagement** (Hollebeek et al., 2014)

1. Using the mentioned above news media website gets me to think about it.
2. I think about the mentioned above news media website a lot when I'm using it.
3. Using the mentioned above news media website stimulates my interest to learn more about it.
4. I feel very positive when I use the mentioned above news media website.
5. Using the mentioned above news media website makes me happy.
6. I feel good when I use the mentioned above news media website.
7. I'm proud to use the mentioned above news media website.
8. I spend a lot of time using the mentioned above news media website, compared to other similar news media brand websites.
9. Whenever I'm reading news online, I usually use the mentioned above news media website.
10. The mentioned above news media website is one of the news media brands I usually use when I read news online.