

## Measuring Effects of Social Media Based Marketing Strategy: A Study on the Facebook Fan Page of Airtel Bangladesh Ltd.

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### Abstract

*Marketing is all about communicating and maintaining profitable long-term relationship with the target audiences. Emergence of social media is bringing new challenges and opportunities for the marketers. Interactive social media platforms, especially, Facebook has empowered consumers with the choice to either engage in or avoid posts and contents on Facebook provided by the marketers. Thus, the study aims to understand how the communication goal, post design and communication contents posted by the marketers through Facebook is influencing customers to be engaged with the marketers. Responses from 100 young users of Airtel's Facebook fan page have been collected through non-probability sampling technique and examined by using descriptive analysis, linear regression analysis through G suite, Microsoft excel and SPSS 19.0. Linear regression analysis has been done to identify the significance of the communication goal, design of the post and communication content on customer engagement. The communication goal and communication content have been found to have significant impact on customer engagement among the young Facebook fan page users of Airtel Bangladesh. Moreover, for deeper understanding on Facebook customer engagements behavior, Airtel should study the factors separately for longer duration with different digital campaigns.*

**Keywords:** Customer engagement, communication goal, post design, communication content, social media, Facebook fan page

### 1. Introduction

The emergence of Information Technology (IT) has changed the world's communication strategy significantly. It has changed the traditional way to communicate information with the target customer and to get feedback on company's existing marketing strategies (Chen et al., 2011). Social media has opened up a new window for the marketers to share communication information in a more efficient manner. In addition to this, the customization capacity of communication content and posts on social media has accelerated the scope of interactions with the target customer (Hollebeek, 2011). Social networking sites are becoming an important tool for customers to voice their opinions regarding a marketer's products and services which help them to feel empowered (Sabate et al., 2014). Furthermore, this empowerment allows consumers to get more choices whether to engage with or to avoid posts and contents communicated by the company in the social media. When the business finds proper and significant reach and engagement from the social media then its digital

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marketing strategies are considered as a successful and effective marketing communication tool. Hence, there is an ample opportunity for brands to engage with their consumers through values of socialization, friendship and social media content (Brown et al., 2007; Doern and Kates, 1998).

Among the social media platforms, Facebook has been accepted as an excellent platform to establish strong consumer-brand relationships between the customers and the company (Kaplan and Haelein, 2010; Hoffman and Novak, 1996). These studies have also argued that Facebook allows a company to create a fan page to connect and interact with the target group and to publish brand related communication contents to capture attention and fulfill the need for desired information and customer services. Then, Facebook is allowing customers to respond through liking and commenting on communication contents and post. Moreover, some customers are sharing these contents with their friends and other peer groups and becoming fans for those companies in the long run. The study of Mariani and Mohammed (2014) found that the ability of marketers to engage on a fan page with the customers has highly positive impact on customer interactions and can help the company to ensure superior customer services. In addition, it will have positive spillover impact on brand affinity due to sharing positive word-of-mouth and showing favorable purchase intention towards that particular brand. According to Socialbakers (2018) the monthly users of Facebook is more than 2.30 billion, which could create the biggest country of the world! Facebook has given scope to the brands to have impressive numbers of fans/users to connect, share, interact and co-create with. Therefore, brands can easily establish effective interactions and information sharing platform by communicating through Facebook fan pages.

The marketers and advertisers have recognized the value of customer engagements and interactions and endeavoring to do that through social media in Bangladesh (Hasan, 2016). Airtel Bangladesh Limited has been operating telecommunication business since 2007 and in 2016 it has merged its business with Robi Axiata Limited for expanding network across the country to penetrate more in the market. It has been found that more than 100,000 times per month Airtel Bangladesh customers are interacting through Airtel's digital marketing platform. The company needs to find out the influencing factors to meet the key performance indicators (KPI) of its digital marketing strategy effectively. Thus, this paper aims to understand how communication content and post on Facebook are engaging users, what types of content and posts accelerate active and positive interactions and how communication goals of the marketers are influencing them.

The paper has been structured into seven sections. The second section describes the objectives of this study. In section three, a brief study related literature review is given. The fourth section explains the methodology used for this paper. This has been followed by the analysis and findings related to the positive and negative relations of communication goals, design of the posts and contents as well as identification of some major factors that affect customer engagement and interactions. The sixth section summarizes the key findings of this study. Finally, this paper arrives at a conclusion to get a portrait of the social media activities with some policy recommendations.

## 2. Objectives

The main aim of the research is to find out the factors influencing online fans of Airtel Bangladesh Limited to engage through Facebook fan page. Thus, throughout this paper the focus of this study is to find out the broad objective that is to identify and evaluate the factors influencing the customer engagement through Facebook fan page. The other specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To get better understanding of Facebook posts and contents that influence fans to like, comment and share.
- To identify the impact of the communication goals on customer engagement behavior.
- To recommend policies to Airtel Bangladesh Ltd. to improve its current social media marketing activities.

## 3. Literature Review

Social media has given the opportunity to the marketers to share communication information on a wider scale. The booming usage of social networking sites, especially Facebook, is providing an excellent platform to the marketers (Kaplan and Haelein, 2010; Brown et al., 2007). Social media can be defined as an application based on the internet to create and exchange product and service-based contents (Kaplan and Haelein, 2010). The increasing trends and popularity of social media (Hollebeek, 2011) helps consumers to feel empowered and to voice their opinions and make recommendations (Dina, 2006).

Harrison and Barthel, (2009); Firat and Dholakia, (2006) and Thackeray et al., (2008) suggested that the focus of customer engagement is to satisfy customers through ensuring superior customer value to those of competitors which will help to build trust and commitment in the mind of the customers in the long-term. Engaging customers in the service delivery process will help the marketer to make them a partner to satisfy their needs in a better way (Wirtz et al., 2010). Furthermore, Gallup (2009) found that customer engagement is helping customers to erect emotional bonds in relational exchanges with the product and service providers. Gradually, customers become reference groups and advocates for companies to interact with other customers and to attract potential customers (Sashi, 2012).

Appropriate customer engagement ends with strong transaction-based relationship and strong emotional attachment between customers and service providers (Sashi, 2012). Thus, customer engagement can be termed as the consequential communication with proper connection and creation among the consumers' community who are using brands (Nordin, 2009). In addition to this, the paper has also identified that customer engagement can be varied with the differences in the type and level of endorsement. Sashi (2012) supported the study done by Nordin (2009) and emphasized two other phases with which customer engagement can also be varied. Firstly, the relational exchange and secondly, the emotional bonds. Generally, at the first phase it is difficult

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to have relational exchange and emotional bonds between customers and marketers. However, it may lead to customer satisfaction once the relation between relational exchange and emotional bonds are possible to establish. Sashi (2012) developed customer engagement matrix (see figure 1) based on the intensity (low or high) of relational exchange and emotional bonds.

|                    |      |                         |                 |
|--------------------|------|-------------------------|-----------------|
|                    |      | Relational Exchange     |                 |
|                    |      | Low                     | High            |
| Emotional<br>Bonds | High | Delighted Customers     | Fans            |
|                    | Low  | Transactional Customers | Loyal Customers |

Figure-1: Customer Engagement Matrix

Source : Sashi, 2012, P. 265

Communication goals carefully link target audiences to achieve the organization's overall goal. Patterson and DeRuyter (2006) have defined communication goals as the triangulation of activities, materials, and media used by marketers to inform or remind current and potential customers about a particular product and service offerings to persuade them to consume. This process of marketing communication is mainly dominated by one to one communication (Jerman and Zavrsnik, 2012). Various studies found that different instruments can be used in marketing communications to target and reach final or end consumers (Shevlin, 2007; Trusov et al., 2009).

Wirtz et al. (2010) defined Facebook post or status update as a message, comment, picture or other media which are posted on the user's Facebook page or Facebook wall. Facebook users can post a long paragraph with pictures and videos as it is not limited to 140 characters like tweets on Twitter. To create a successful Facebook posts (Hampton et al., 2011a) a certain methodology needs to be applied to ensure customer engagement with desired action. According to Social Apps HQ (2012), seven qualities are truly important for an excellent Facebook post (See figure 2).

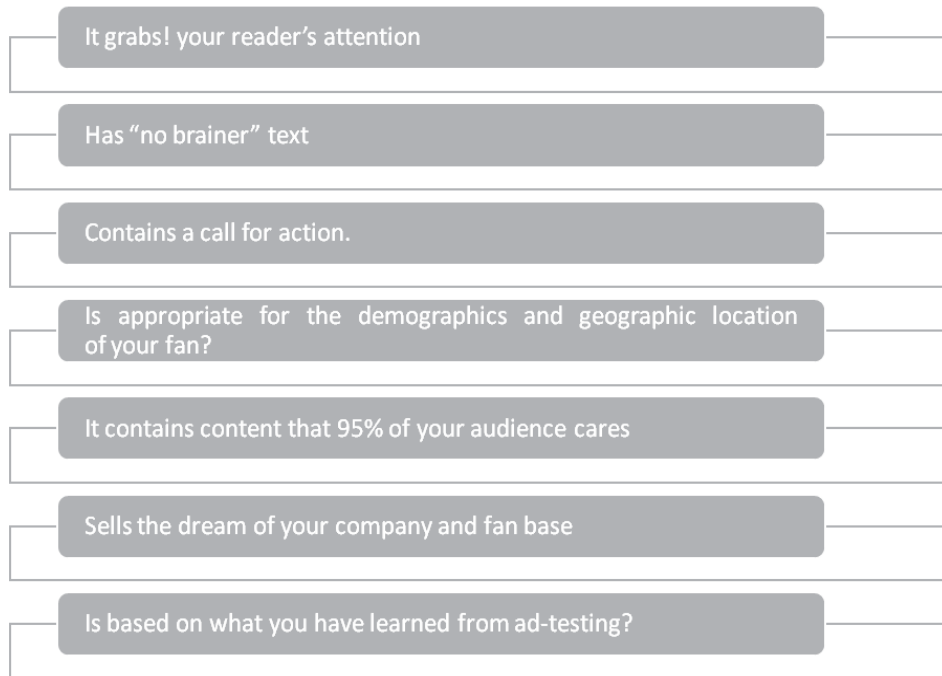


Figure-2 : Seven qualities to Facebook post

Source: Social Apps HQ, 2012

Hampton et al. (2011a) have also found that design of the posts is highly linked with the trustworthiness for the Facebook users than users of Twitter or LinkedIn. Moreover, it will help the marketer to create a 'social media buzz' (Hampton et al., 2011b).

Several studies have found a significant contribution of the social engagement of the customers based on the related contents of the communication tools (Lee et al., 2017; Jerman and Završnik, 2012). Content of marketing communication establishes a connecting bridge between consumers and the capacity of the contents to capture attention. Content with appropriate humor and emotion to the related brand personality ensures the possibility of consumer engagement through giving likes, comments and shares (Lee et al., 2017). However, price related directly informative contents have found association with lower levels of engagement, higher engagement levels with brand-personality related attributes. An expert content marketer is always focusing on contents that better engage their targeted users and lead them to their ultimate desired goals (Kelly et al., 2010).

Kotler et al., (2013) have argued that in the traditional communication platform marketers were enjoying the full control of the brand related message shared to the customer. However, today with the booming use of social media, this power is shifting dramatically from the marketer to the consumer. Moreover, marketers are sharing their

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strategic marketing decisions related to product, pricing, packaging etc. with their customers to develop more specific and concentrated marketing communication program to ensure superior customer value. Thus, branding is no more only about communicating but also about connecting and engaging customers with marketers' social media-based communications.

Based on the aforementioned review of the related literature, three factors have been identified to construct a theoretical framework for this study (see figure 3) which will have significant impact on customer engagement.

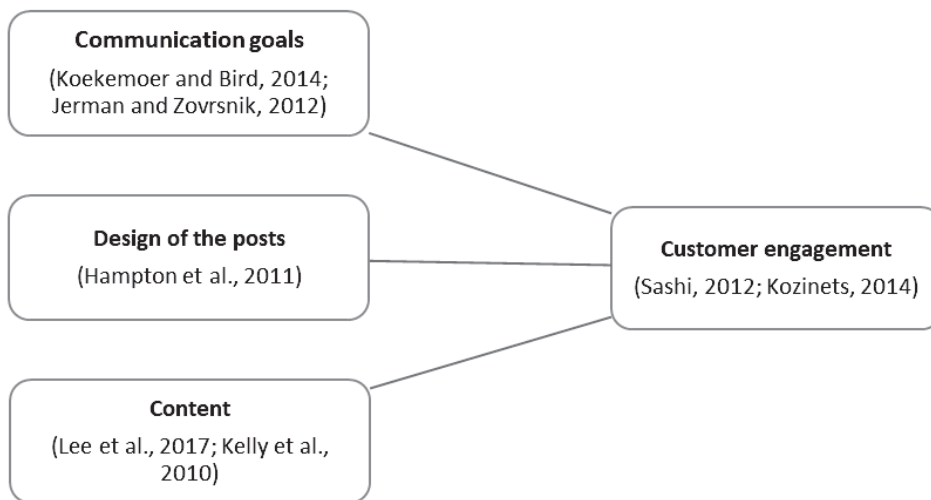


Figure-3 : Theoretical Framework

Source: Author's constructs based on literature

### 3.1. Research Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

Considering the objectives of this research, related review of the literature and variables found relevant for this study, the following research hypotheses have been used.

**H<sub>1</sub>** = *The communication goal influences customer engagement behavior.*

**H<sub>2</sub>** = *Design of the post directly impacts engagement.*

**H<sub>3</sub>** = *The presences of emotional and entertaining attachment in the content facilitates active and positive customer engagement*

Based on the hypotheses, the author has developed the following conceptual framework for this study.

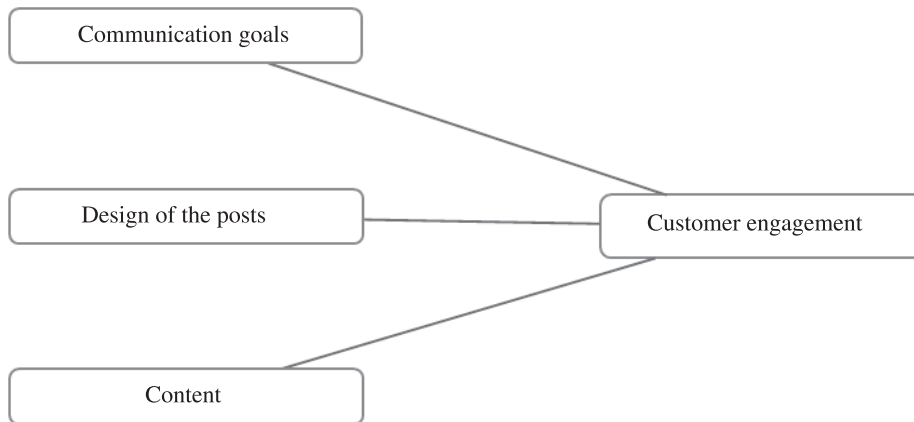


Figure-4 : Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's construct

#### 4. Methodology

Exploratory research methods such as secondary data analysis, literature review, and expert survey (Yin, 1989) have used to explore variables related to customer engagement behavior and to identify the appropriate research design for this study. Along with secondary data analysis and literature review, three experts from Airtel Bangladesh Ltd who are responsible for social media-based marketing activities were selected for conducting personal interview. Further study has been carried out following the descriptive research design backed by the support of qualitative method (Brinberg and McGrath, 1985) for identifying factors affecting Customer Engagement in Facebook and related hypotheses. To test relative significance of each of the factors, primary data was collected by using the survey method.

In particular, the main reason for using questionnaire survey was to obtain significant information from the sample. To collect data from the customers (Facebook users), the target population is defined to be those who are using Facebook fan pages of Airtel Bangladesh especially the young consumers aging from 18-35. It has been found through the personal interviews that the existing social media marketing initiatives of Airtel Bangladesh are mainly focusing on young consumers who are aging from 18-35. A total number of 100 respondents were selected for this study as sample. A non-probability sampling technique (judgmental technique) has been followed to select these samples from population. In selecting sample, the following criteria were followed:

- The respondent must have experience of Facebook fan pages of Airtel Bangladesh.

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- S/He must be within the targeted age group of 18-35.
- The respondent customer must have the willingness to help for the study.

A questionnaire was administered through personal interview and the information needed for this study. The questionnaire comprised of 12 items, which were scored on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Based on the related literatures three independent variables were identified to investigate impact on dependent variable (customer engagement). To identify the significance of these variables on customer engagement behavior, 4 items were taken for communication goals; 2 items for design of the post and 3 items for content of the post were taken. Each variable and item used in this study has been found relevant and significant in different studies, which also ensures the validity of the used instrument.

The authors have checked the reliability and validity of this questionnaire using various theories, interviews with experts and pretesting on a small sample of 10 respondents. Regression analysis model has been adopted to analyze the significance of communication goals, design of the post and content on the customer engagement behavior (Malhotra, 2011). For analyzing and tabulating the primary data collected through survey, G Suite, Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 19.0 has been used. Regression analysis technique has been used in this study as this technique is mostly used when the dependent variable (customer engagement behavior) and independent variables (Communications goals, design of the posts and content) are metric (Malhotra, 2010). The following classical regression model (CLRM) has been used to measure the linear relationship between explanatory variables and dependent variable (as advocated by Malhotra, 2010).

$$Y (\text{Customer Engagement}) = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Communication Goals}) + \beta_2 (\text{Design of the Post}) + \beta_3 (\text{Content}) + e$$

Where,

Y indicates Customer Engagement;  $\alpha$  is the constant term;  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  are the coefficients of explanatory variables, and e is the error term.

## **5. Analysis of Findings**

### **5.1. Demographic Profile**

This section analyzes the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Most of the fans and users of Airtel Bangladesh are young users, as Airtel Bangladesh Limited focuses and targets young customer base of Bangladesh. They are mostly studying in different levels across the country. Although for finding's variance several-targeted age group was contacted for and surprisingly only one respondent aged over 30 years was found in this survey (see table 1).



Table-1 : Demographic Profile

| Overview        |              |      |        |       |
|-----------------|--------------|------|--------|-------|
| Based on Gender |              | Male | Female | Total |
|                 |              |      | 73     | 27    |
| Age             | 18-25 Years  | 41   | 22     | 63    |
|                 | 26-30 Years  | 31   | 5      | 36    |
|                 | 31- 35       | 1    | -      | 1     |
| Occupation      | Student      | 50   | 14     | 64    |
|                 | Graduated    | 7    | 9      | 16    |
|                 | Professional | 16   | 4      | 20    |

Source: Author's Field Study

64% of the respondents are young students studying in the universities, whereas, 16% respondents have already graduated from university and 20% young professionals are found through this research representing respondents' educational knowledge and well-being in real life as well as clear brand perception and awareness. These tables provide fragmented and clear characteristics of the respondents. To avoid gender biasness issue, 27% responses were collected from female respondents that made the demographic profile of this study more representative.

## 5.2. Regression Analysis

It is combined with various explanatory variables to make the model useful so that it will reduce the uncertainty of multicollinearity as much as possible. Gujarati (2003) has identified that to obtain a representative result, the regression model must fulfill the assumption of no multicollinearity among the repressors' (explanatory variables). Thus, the reliability of the customer engagement model has been assessed based on the Cronbach's alpha value to identify whether the used set of attributes can explain each construct or not (Yin, 2003) and the score of 0.70 is acceptable as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). All the variables with associated items were found to have Cronbach's alpha more than 0.70 (see table 2).

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Table-2: Results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each variable

| <b>Construct</b>    | <b>Attributes</b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Communication Goals | CG1               | 0.787                   |
|                     | CG2               |                         |
|                     | CG3               |                         |
|                     | CG4               |                         |
| Design of the post  | AP1               | 0.734                   |
|                     | AP2               |                         |
| Content             | CT1               | 0.709                   |
|                     | CT2               |                         |
|                     | CT3               |                         |
| Customer engagement | CE1               | 0.721                   |
|                     | CE2               |                         |
|                     | CE3               |                         |

Source : Author's field study

Regression analysis has been used to identify whether the independent variables (communication goals, design of the post and content) can explain the significance in the dependent variable (customer engagement). Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) represents the strength of association between dependent variable (customer engagement) and independent variables (communication goals, design of the post and content) (Malhotra, 2011).  $R^2$  more than 0.5 suggests that there is a moderate association between the dependent variable and the independent variables. The result of  $R^2$  suggests that the communication goals, design of the post and content can explain 56.1% of the total variability of the customer engagement (see table 3).

Table 3 : Model Summary

| Model Summary <sup>b</sup>  |                   |          |                   |                            |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Model   | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|   | .749 <sup>a</sup> | .561     | .547              | .673                       |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication Goals, Design of the Post, Content |                   |          |                   |                            |
| b. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement                                  |                   |          |                   |                            |

Source: Author's field study

In the model summary (table 3), coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is 56.1% which indicates that the customer engagement will be increased with the communication program taken by the company if the independent variables poses positive reaction. This statement is strongly supported by the positive co-relation of the variables (R) which is 0.749. Furthermore, the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is also supporting the value of R<sup>2</sup> with the percentage of 54.7%. The standard error of the estimation is insignificant in this regard.

Table 4: ANOVA

| Model      | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Regression | 56.073         | 3  | 18.691      | 41.799 | .000 <sup>a</sup> |
| Residual   | 42.927         | 96 | .447        |        |                   |
| Total      | 99.000         | 99 |             |        |                   |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication Goals, Design of the Post, Content

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement

Source: Author's field study

The ANOVA table (see table 4) dictates the significance of the regression model. Thus, the study failed to hold the null hypothesis. The following coefficient table (see table 5) explains the contribution of explanatory variables (communication goals, design of the post and content) to the dependent variable (customer engagement). It provides each explanatory variable with the level of contribution to explain dependent variable (Y).

Table 5 : Coefficients

| Model      | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig.  |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
|            | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |       |
| (Constant) | -4.721E-17                  | .067       |                           | .000  | 1.000 |
| C. Goals   | .556                        | .083       | .556                      | 6.708 | .000  |
| Post Arch. | .130                        | .069       | .130                      | 1.882 | .063  |
| Content    | .228                        | .084       | .237                      | 2.720 | .008  |

a. Dependent Variable: C. Engagement

Source: Author's field study

According to the unstandardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient and standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient, it can be arranged according to their importance in explaining the dependent variable (Y). The impact of 'Communication Goals' became the most significant variable as its unstandardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient and standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient are the highest among the three variables with the coefficient of 0.556 and 0.556 respectively. The next significant explanatory variable found for this study is 'Content', having unstandardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient of 0.228 and standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient of 0.237. Whereas, the 'Design of the Post' variable found to have least importance on dependent variable, and its unstandardized beta ( $\beta$ ) is 0.130 and standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) is 0.130. Based on the coefficients shown in the table 5, this study has found a revised regression model. The new regression equation for this study stands at-

$$Y \text{ (Customer Engagement)} = \alpha + .556 \text{ (Communication Goals)} + .130 \text{ (Design of the Post)} + .228 \text{ (Content)} + e$$

From table 5 and the analysis above, it has been found that, communication goal strongly influences customer engagement behavior, content and design of the post

facilitates active and positive customer engagement. Therefore, final conclusion can be drawn that hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> are verified and accepted with significance at 95% confidence level and H<sub>2</sub> is rejected.

Table-6: Hypotheses testing result

| Hypotheses   | Findings |
|--|----------|
| H <sub>1</sub> = The communication goal influences customer engagement behavior.   | Accepted |
| H <sub>2</sub> = Design of the post directly impacts engagement.   | Rejected |
| H <sub>3</sub> = The emotional and entertaining attachment in the content facilitates active and positive customer engagement. | Accepted |

Source: Author’s field study

### 6. Key Findings and Recommendations

- Communication goal and the content of the post found significant influence on engaging customer with the Facebook fan page based marketing communication program of Airtel Bangladesh Ltd.
- The customers of Airtel Bangladesh Ltd. are not giving priority on the design and architecture of the communication post in the Facebook fan page. They are more focused on the communication goal and the content of the communication post.
- Among the three independent variables, communication goal of the post has the maximum coefficient of 0.556. Thus, to design a customer-oriented communication program, Airtel Bangladesh Ltd. needs to make the communication goal clear for their customers to avoid the possibility of having communication clutter.
- The conceptual framework used in this study was able to explain 56% variation in engaging customer with the communication strategy taken by Airtel through Facebook fan page. Therefore, a critical analysis needs to be conducted to identify the involvement of the other potential variables, which might help to explain more about the variation in customer engagement.
- Airtel Bangladesh Ltd. should consider the target market and the needs of that target group rigorously to engage them more with their Facebook fan page based communication. Customers should be the focal point in the overall integrated marketing communications of Airtel Bangladesh Ltd.

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- Proper feedback and evaluation procedure need to be followed to design the future social media communication more accurately and efficiently with better reach and acceptance in the mind of the customer.

### **7. Conclusion**

Various studies (Forrester, 2011; Jerman and Završnik, 2012) have found that communicational goals of the posts and contents are mostly informative or emotional and have significant positive impact on customer engagement. This study also supports that the communication goal has impact on customers' social media engagement. The result of this study showed both similarity with the prior literature and contradictions (Croft, 2013) with the previous research. In this study context, Airtel's design of the post and its contents are dynamic and target audience centric although design of post was insignificant according to the result. Thus, it is believed that to increase the generalizability of this study, further research is needed as contradictory results were found in some studies (Teixeira, 2015).

This study and findings are believed to be of great influence to the digital marketers, strategy planners, and media analysts to bring some significant contributions. Furthermore, this study will be a stepping stone to explore details about other factors related the effects of customer engagement in social media. Some specialized and in-depth study in this research area might be helpful to understand more about the factors described and tested in this study. The study has showed some remarkable scenario on customer engagement in social media and expectedly communication goals of Airtel Bangladesh Limited was found to be the most influential factor on the fans to engage with Airtel through Facebook fan page. The communication strategy planners and community managers should extract more insights from the large scale of audience. In addition, contents need to be developed based on the interest and need of the target group to engage them with company's communication program. From this study, it is recommended to overlook Airtel's content and post generation strategy and work on these things to draw more engagement through these factors as well. It is also recommended to evaluate the overall effectiveness of content strategies in Airtel's integrated marketing communication strategies.

Furthermore, it is expected that both the research model and its results will direct to some meaningful insights for academicians and digital marketing practitioners on evaluating and measuring deeper understanding of customer social media engagements and interactions. The study imparts a better grasp of Airtel Bangladesh's social media marketing activities and aims to contribute some insights that will be helpful to marketers' efforts in conquering their target audiences' engagement. The data were mainly collected from Airtel's young Facebook fan page users as sample in this study. Thus, the careful interpretation of the results found from this study is necessary before generalizing on the whole population. Few researches focus on other variables that might have significant impact on customer's engagement based on the digital marketing activities. However, the significance of these variables may vary in different sectors and in different context. Adopting further econometric analysis especially the structural equation modeling could illustrate a more complex interrelationship among the used and latent constructs.

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