# Journal of Product & Brand Management

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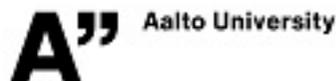
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# Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to delineate the meaning, conceptual boundaries and dimensions of consumer engagement within the context of online brand communities both in term of the engagement with the brand and the other members of the online brand communities. It also explores the relationships of consumer engagement with other concepts, suggesting antecedents of engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 international online brand community members, covering a variety of brand categories and social media platforms.

**Findings** – This paper suggests that individuals are engaging in online communities in social network platforms both with other individuals and with brands. The study also identifies three key engagement dimensions (cognition, affect and behaviours). Their meaning and sub-dimensions are investigated. The paper further suggests key drivers, one outcome and objects of consumer engagement in online brand communities. These findings are integrated in a conceptual framework.

**Research limitations/implications** – Further research should aim at comparing consumer engagement on different social media and across brand categories, as this study takes a holistic approach and does not focus on any particular category of brands or social media. Consumers' views should also be evaluated against and compared with marketing managers' understanding of consumer engagement.

**Originality/value** – This paper contributes to the fast-growing and fragmented consumer engagement literature by refining the understanding of its dimensions and situating it in a network of conceptual relationships. It focusses on online brand communities in rich social media contexts to tap into the core social and interactive characteristics of engagement.

**Keywords** Marketing, Brand engagement, Social media, Consumer engagement, Online brand community

**Paper type** Research paper

**An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this issue.**

## 1. Introduction

Consumer engagement is receiving increasing attention in recent marketing literature. Heralded by a key research priority (MSI, 2010), the concept has been the subject of a number of special issues in international academic journals (i.e. *Journal of Service Research*, 2010; *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 2010; *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 2014). With its roots in relationship marketing (Fournier, 1998), consumer engagement offers a further enhancement of the current theoretisations around consumer and brand relationships. Its added value lies in supporting the increasingly interactive and experiential nature of consumer relationships (Vivek Beatty and Morgan, 2012), while extending their scope beyond core purchase situations. By being engaged, consumers exhibit dispositions that go beyond traditional market-ascribed consumer behaviours, in accordance with the value co-creation logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Using this conceptual lens allows the assumptions of conventional relationship marketing and its concern with linear company–consumer, exchange-centric relationships to be relaxed and expanded to provide a richer notion of relating to a brand (Vivek *et al.*, 2012).

Consumer engagement is also of pragmatic relevance: having an engaged consumer base is quickly becoming one of the key objectives of many marketing professionals. The reportedly positive implications of engagement for consumer behaviour and brand performance (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b) are driving the academic and practical interest in explaining and manipulating the concept (Vivek *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the significant interest, the nascent academic literature on consumer engagement shows a number of shortcomings. First, the concept definition warrants more attention. There seems lack of consensus on what consumer engagement is, with some authors stressing a psychological process and others maintaining behavioural focus. For example, Brodie *et al.* (2011a, p. 260) define consumer engagement as a "psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative experiences with a focal agent/object (i.e. a brand) in a focal service relationship". Taking a perspective of engagement as an overarching process, ultimately leading to loyalty, Bowden (2009, p. 65) defines it as a:

> [. . .] psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which consumer loyalty forms for new consumers of a service brand, as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase consumers of a service brand.

Although different, these two approaches have the psychological view of engagement in common. Van Doorn *et al.* (2010), however, offer a different approach and construe consumer engagement as a sum of "behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". In view of these conflicting prescriptions, further conceptual refinement seems warranted.

Second, the current literature is inconsistent in its treatment of the dimensionality of consumer engagement. Multiple approaches are advanced and both uni- and multi-dimensional views are presented. Some authors focus on one dimension of engagement alone, capturing most often behaviour (i.e. Sprott *et al.*, 2009; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). Other studies offer a broader perspective and include affective and cognitive dimensions (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a). Although over a dozen different dimensions of the concept have been proposed in the literature, much of the literature is conceptual (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010; Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). The handful of empirical examinations show inconsistency in the number and the nature of the suggested dimensions of consumer engagement (Sprott *et al.*, 2009; Brodie *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b; Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Calder *et al.*, 2013; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Clearly, there is a need for further empirical research to establish the dimensionality of the phenomenon.

Third, the empirical examinations of consumer engagement concern a narrow set of contexts and are of limited focus. Consumer engagement is a state directed at an object, which can be of varied nature (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a). Thus far, most studies capture the engagement with objects such as a good or service brand, an organisation or other organisational entities (Bowden, 2009; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Typically, the study focus concerns engagement with a brand (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Vivek *et al.*, 2014; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), and this is understandable given the pragmatic imperative to understand the direct effect of firm efforts on their consumers (Calder *et al.*, 2013). However, engagement with other marketplace actors, such as other consumers, can also greatly impact a brand or organisation (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b) as recognised in brand community literature (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Research thrust thus far examines direct consumer–brand engagement, and consumer engagement with like-minded individuals in rich social contexts is yet to receive attention.

The current study answers calls for more empirical research on consumer engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). The study aims to offer an improved conceptualisation of consumer engagement by addressing two objectives:

1  To investigate the dimensionality of consumer engagement, and thus contribute to its conceptual clarity.
2  To explore the interplay between engagement and other relational concepts in the context of online brand communities, thus contributing to the understanding of the nature and dimensionality of consumer engagement in online brand communities.

Contending that consumer engagement is best understood in rich social contexts that foster beyond-purchase, social and interactive manifestations, online brand communities embedded in social media are chosen as a context for investigation of brand and brand-related consumer engagement.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the notion of consumer engagement in consumer and online brand community literature to show similarities and divergences in their respective approach. The next section describes the methods used to collect and analyse the data. This is followed by study findings, which lead to an integrative framework of consumer engagement in online brand community. The paper closes with a discussion of results, study limitations and directions for future research.

## 2. Nature and dimensions of consumer engagement

A number of studies address the notion of consumer engagement in the marketing literature (Table I). The literature reflects the nascent nature of the concept. Marketing scholars have built on engagement work in other social sciences fields, such as organisational behaviour (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002) or education (Bryson and Hand, 2007). Based on this theoretical underpinning, consumer engagement has been defined as "a psychological state that occurs through interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object" (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a, p. 2). Although subject to various interpretations, consumer engagement is often understood as a motivational construct, with varying intensity. It involves an object (i.e. a brand) and a subject (i.e. the consumer), and it has a valence (positive versus negative) (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). Table I shows the existing state of consumer engagement research, highlighting the type of study, concept under investigation and engagement object.

Several conclusions may be drawn from the review. Until 2012, consumer engagement research suffered from a strong conceptual bend, and empirical work has only recently, albeit rapidly, begun to emerge. The review illustrates a lack of agreement over the conceptual domain of engagement, some authors coining "consumer engagement" (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a), others "brand engagement" (Sprott *et al.*, 2009) and a majority of others "customer engagement" (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). The *locus* of engagement, or its object, has been predominantly set on brands (of goods or services), organisations or firms, with limited interest in consumer communities (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Finally, most studies concentrate on one object of engagement at a time, and there are very few studies that acknowledge multiple objects of consumer engagement (Vivek *et al.*, 2014).

In terms of the concept dimensions, extant studies vary, offering a multitude of dimensions, as detailed in Table II. For example, research identifies dimensions related to identity, vigour, civism or absorption (Patterson *et al.*, 2006; Calder *et al.*, 2013). In addition, some authors embrace a uni-dimensional (often behavioural) view of the concept, while others take a multi-dimensional perspective (Table II). This fragmentation is surprising given the richness of conceptual contributions, yet it provides a fertile ground for further exploration. Although various dimensions have been suggested, a good significant proportion of the published work emanates from, or relates to Brodie and Hollebeek's work (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; Brodie *et al.*,

**Table I** Review of consumer engagement research

| Engagement object | Authors | Paper type | Construct |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Engagement with the brand/branded organisation/firm* | | | |
| Service organisation | Patterson *et al.* (2006) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement |
| Service brand | Bowden (2009) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement process |
| Brand, personified by website | Mollen and Wilson (2010) | Conceptual | Engagement |
| Brand or firm | van Doorn *et al.* (2010) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement behaviours |
| Brand or firm | Verhoef *et al.* (2010) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement |
| Brand | Kumar *et al.* (2010) | Conceptual | Customer engagement value |
| Service brand/organisation | Brodie *et al.* (2011a, 2011b) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement |
| Brand | Hollebeek (2011) | Conceptual | Consumer-brand engagement |
| Service firm | Kaltcheva *et al.* (2014) | Conceptual | Customer engagement |
| Brand | Franzak Makarem and Jae (2014) | Conceptual | Brand engagement |
| Brand | Sprott *et al.* (2009) | Empirical quantitative | Brand engagement in self concept |
| Brand | Gambetti *et al.* (2012) | Empirical qualitative | Consumer-brand engagement |
| Brand | Hollebeek (2013) | Empirical qualitative | Consumer-brand engagement |
| Brand | So *et al.* (2012) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |
| Brand | Hollebeek and Chen (2014) | Empirical qualitative | Brand engagement |
| Brand | Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer brand engagement |
| Service brand | Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) | Empirical qualitative | Consumer engagement behaviour |
| Brand | Sarkar and Sreejesh (2014) | Empirical quantitative | Active customer engagement |
| Brand | Wallace *et al.* (2014) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |
| *Engagement with the brand community* | | | |
| Online brand community members | Wirtz *et al.* (2013) | Conceptual | Online brand community engagement |
| Brand community | Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) | Empirical quantitative | Brand community engagement |
| Community | Gummerus *et al.* (2012) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |
| Brand community | Kuo and Feng (2013) | Empirical quantitative | Brand community engagement |
| Brand community | Habibi *et al.* (2014) | Empirical qualitative | Brand community engagement |
| *Engagement with other objects* | | | |
| Task | Higgins and Scholer (2009) | Conceptual | Consumer engagement |
| Media context (website) | Calder *et al.* (2009) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |
| Advertising | Phillips and MacQuarrie (2010) | Empirical qualitative | Engagement |
| Entertainment piece | Scott and Craig-Lees (2010) | Empirical quantitative | Audience engagement |
| Product or service | Calder *et al.* (2013) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |
| *Engagement with multiple entities* | | | |
| Multiple entities | Gambetti and Graffigna (2010) | Conceptual: literature review | Engagement |
| Brand and/or community members | Brodie *et al.* (2011a, 2011b) | Empirical qualitative | Consumer engagement |
| Organisational offering or activities | Vivek *et al.* (2012) | Empirical qualitative | Consumer engagement |
| Organisational object, consumption activity or event | Vivek *et al.* (2014) | Empirical quantitative | Consumer engagement |

2011b; Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). They conceptualise engagement as multi-dimensional construct with a cognitive, an affective and a behavioural dimension. Following this approach, consumer engagement has been defined as a cognitive, affective and behavioural commitment to an active relationship with the brand (Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). As the most widely accepted conceptualisation thus far, this three-dimensional view offers a foundation for a further development of the concept in this study.

## 3. Research focus

Despite the fact that participation with a community of like-minded consumers is an important factor contributing to

the success of the brand, consumer engagement with other consumers, such as community members, has so far been under-investigated (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Instead, the literature has considered various objects of engagement, such as brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011), media engagement (Calder *et al.*, 2009) or product/service engagement (Calder *et al.*, 2013).

Yet the interest in online brand community has been growing strong in the past 15 years, both in practice and academia. It has been observed that consumers consciously join groups of like-minded individuals who interact around a focal object (Koh and Kim, 2004), this object often being a brand (Veloutsou, 2009). Brand communities were first

**Table II** Review of consumer engagement dimensions

| Authors \ Dimensions | Absorption | Affective | Behavioural | Civic | Cognitive | Dedication | Emotional | Identity | Interaction | Intrinsic enjoyment | Social | Utilitarian | Vigour |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Patterson et al. (2006) | x | | | | | x | | | x | | | | x |
| Sprott Czellar and Spangenberg (2009) | | | | | | | x | | | | | | |
| Kumar et al. (2010) | | | x | | | | x | | | | | | |
| Mollen and Wilson (2010) | | x | | | x | | | | | | | | |
| van Doorn et al. (2010) | | | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| Verhoef et al. (2010) | | | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brodie et al. (2011a, 2011b) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Brodie et al. (2011a, 2011b) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Hollebeek (2011) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Gummerus et al. (2012) | | | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hollebeek (2013) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| So et al. (2012) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Vivek et al. (2012) | | | x | x | x | | x | | | | x | | |
| Calder et al. (2013) | | | | | | | | x | | x | x | x | |
| Wirtz et al. (2013) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Hollebeek et al. (2014) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) | | | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vivek et al. (2014) | | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | |

defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) as "specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand". Although these groups of individuals can form both online and offline, the online environments seem increasingly relevant (McKenna *et al.*, 2002). With the advent of the Internet, groupings of consumers moved online, and now over 50 per cent of the top 100 global brands have an online brand community (Manchanda *et al.*, 2012). Online brand community is thus an expanding phenomenon, which can be defined as a grouping of individuals sharing a mutual interest in a brand, using electronic mediation to overcome real-life space and time limitations. From a research perspective, they are known to provide valuable information on consumer behaviour (Kozinets, 2002), culture (Kozinets, 1999) and influence networks (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010), which is of great strategic significance.

Although brand communities arise from the strong emotional relationships that individuals have with brands, these bonds seem to be fostered and enhanced in community settings (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Community membership and identification contributes to higher levels of individual consumer intentions and behaviours towards the brand (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004), supported by a collection of internal value-laden engaging practices (Schau *et al.*, 2009). Ultimately, online brand community participation and consumer engagement are two congruent phenomena. Highly engaged online brand community members exhibit all three key community markers proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001): shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b).

Even though research on brand engagement in a community or social media context is gaining traction (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013), the role of the online brand community is only partially acknowledged, being framed as a background context that sustains engagement with a focal brand. Following seminal brand community studies (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Schau *et al.*, 2009), this paper brings the community to the foreground and contends that consumers can also be engaged with the online brand community itself, as personified by its members. The notion of engagement gains a particular depth in social media contexts thanks to their interactive nature (Malthouse and Hofacker, 2010; Kuo and Feng, 2013; Habibi *et al.*, 2014) and an understanding of consumer engagement in such conditions requires further work.

Online brand community research provides some insight into the existence of engagement practices in groupings of individuals. The idea of engaging with a community of like-minded consumers was first proposed by Algesheimer *et al.* (2005, p. 21) who conceptualised community engagement as "members' intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members". Through their exploratory netnographic analysis, Brodie *et al.* (2011b) later proposed that engagement in a virtual community can be directed at the brand or other members of the community, and that it emerges through five sub-processes, namely, learning, sharing, co-developing, advocating and socialising. These sub-processes demonstrate affective, cognitive and behavioural qualities. The behavioural aspect of engagement on social media is further exemplified by Gummerus *et al.*

(2012), who stress the relevance of website metrics (such as number of "likes" or "comments" on Facebook) to quantify engagement behaviours.

The relevance of studying consumer engagement in online brand community context is strongly supported by Schau *et al.*'s (2009) findings in a study of nine cross-category brand communities. Healthy brand communities are rife with dynamic practices that continuously evolve and inspire interactive engagement with the brand and among members. Engagement in practices is ultimately a vector of value creation, and co-creation, from which brands can reap the benefits, in the form of increased brand equity and loyalty (Cova *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons, consumer engagement in online brand communities rightfully appears as requiring more attention, and there is interest of studying consumer engagement in the context of online brand communities to tap into the social aspect of the engagement concept.

This study aims to reveal the antecedents, dimensions and sub-dimensions of consumer engagement in online brand community embedded in social media to offer an integration of current conceptualisations. In this endeavour, empirical data are collected from social media users active in online brand communities, allowing a deep understanding of the online brand community engagement phenomenon through evidence of engagement experiences.

## 4. Methodology

To investigate the complex and emergent phenomenon of consumer engagement in online brand community, this study adopts a social media user-oriented approach. Based on the premise that consumer engagement is context-specific (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; Brodie *et al.*, 2011b), social media allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and represent a rich context for engagement manifestations, as they foster the creation of strong, interactive consumer relationships (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012), while they permit the proliferation of online consumption and brand communities rich in consumer participation (Zaglia, 2013). For these reasons, social media platforms serve as the context of this study.

Given that the subject of engagement is an individual consumer, this study focusses on the consumer as a unit of analysis. Semi-structured interviews with social media users provide the study data. The interview begun by exploring participants' experiences with social media in general, and their participation in one or several online brand community of their choice, with which they feel particularly engaged. The study design did not predetermine or impose any social media or brand categories, as it is still unclear which types of online brand community are more likely to generate high levels of engagement (Vivek *et al.*, 2014). Having explored the context, the remaining questions probed into the emotional, behavioural and cognitive aspects online brand community participation. Interpretive questions helped to identify interpretive properties encompassing a concept's domain (Wacker, 2004). Interviewees had the opportunity to provide their own definition of consumer engagement and give examples of situations where they felt engaged with a community, or brand, and explain their feelings and behaviours. At this later stage of the interview, the participants

were asked to elaborate on their engagement with official online brand communities, that is, communities that are managed by the corporate brand, as opposed to extra-corporate, consumer-lead communities.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 35 and 140 minutes and were conducted by a researcher based in the UK either in person, when the respondent lived in the UK, or through online video call, when the respondent was not living in the UK. The sample includes English- and French-speaking respondents from a range of countries. This cross-cultural focus results from the multinational nature of online brand communities/social media environments which attract audiences independently of geographical location (Hutton and Fosdick, 2011). The choice of French and English specifically was driven by practical considerations (the principal researcher being native in French and fluent in English), as well as methodological guidelines. Prior studies provide support for the cultural equivalence of French and UK consumers in an online context (Garnier and McDonald, 2009). At the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were offered a choice of the language. Given our aim to tap into rich personal accounts of subjective feelings and experiences, the choice of language helped to facilitate expression and enhance the breadth and depth of our data, similarly to other studies in online consumer behaviour (Park and Jun, 2003). To ensure cross-cultural equivalence, the interview guide was translated using iterative team translation principles in line with existing guidelines (Douglas and Craig, 2007).

The choice of the participants in this study followed two criteria. First, given the nature of the research, the study focusses on highly involved participants, as reflected by the intensity, frequency and duration of their online brand community behaviour. Interviewing highly involved users is a common practice inherent to brand community research (Cova et al., 2007; Muniz and Schau, 2005), and participants' identification was achieved through a four-week-long observation of social media users on Facebook and Twitter. These observations took place within one of the researcher's extended personal network to speed up access, in line with previous research in online brand communities (Healy and McDonagh, 2013). The observation included assessment of intensity (reflected by the role of the participant and volume of contributions), frequency and duration of their online brand community behaviour (Kozinets, 2002). The frequency of posts, likes and comments was indicative of high levels of engagement in line with Gummerus et al. (2012). Second, the study sought diversity in terms of the interviewees' profiles. Such diversity is necessary to tap into the complexity and multiplicity of online brand community engagement experiences and gain a deeper understanding of our research focus.

Based on the observation, highly involved individuals were contacted by private message on the social media platform they used. Data were collected until no new information was generated, thus reaching the saturation point (Creswell, 2007). In total, 21 social media users participated in the study. The informants had varied backgrounds and habits in terms of the social networks and brand communities they participated in. Previous research shows that a breadth of communities allows deeper insight into community behaviour (Schau et al.,

2009). Information on interviewees' profiles, social media and online brand community participation can be found in Table III.

Data analysis follows established procedures (Pratt, 2009). The interviews were transcribed and produced 192 single-space A4 pages of text. The transcripts were content analysed using a line-by-line analysis in line with recommended qualitative procedures (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Expressions or phrases that offered insight into consumer engagement in online brand community were sought. Coding involved an open approach that moved from simple to more aggregated categories that emerged from looking at relationships between codes. Coding involved a constant iteration between data and theory, as codes were progressively integrated and adapted based on the data at hand.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 The object of engagement: a dual engagement focus

We find that the study participants use a wide range of platforms and interacted with other individuals, as well as brands, on these platforms. The platforms most widely used among the 21 participants are Facebook (21) and Twitter (13). Some interviewees also rely extensively on LinkedIn and YouTube, and we find some evidence of engagement with Pinterest or Instagram. All Asian respondents also report heavy usage of Sina Weibo. On all these platforms, the informants are members of brand communities.

We find evidence of a double focus of community participation. When talking about their experiences in online brand communities, the participants refer both to interaction with the community, as personified by other individuals in the group, as well as the brand itself, as personified by the corporate administrator of the group. This double focus of interaction has been suggested by Wirtz et al. (2013) but has not been thus far empirically investigated. We argue that there are two engagement objects in online brand communities: the community and the brand. This is evidenced in Claire's statement, and subject of further investigation in this section:

> I asked [the brand] if they had an eye cream in their offering, because, you know, I've come to an age where I need an eye cream, and then they replied that they did, and other followers also tweeted me that they had it and I should definitely buy it.

Participants advocate reasons such as the strong networking or informational value of the platforms they were using as key drivers of usage. The informants suggest that each social network provides somewhat different networking opportunities. Facebook facilitates self-expression, Twitter seems to be used as a personal branding tool, while LinkedIn is portrayed as the platform for promoting a professional profile. Evidence shows that platforms facilitate the engagement with other community members:

> Twitter really allows you to interact with a lot of people that you don't necessarily know. Via the system of "hashtags" and mentions, you see people talking about things and brands that you are interested in, and you can jump into the conversation Ray.

The ability to interact with brands is also a common theme in social media usage (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Participants evoked a range of brands that they feel particularly engaged

**Table III** Interviewees' profiles

| Name | Country of origin | Country of residence | Gender | Age group | Occupation | Language of interview | Mostly used social media | Brand communities | Brand category |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anthony | Belgium | Belgium | M | 45-50 | Employee | FR | Facebook, Twitter | The Walloon ICT agency | Services |
| Ali | Pakistan | UK | M | 26-30 | Student | EN | Facebook | Marks & Spencer, JP Morgan | Retail, Services |
| Nigel | Chinese | UK | M | 26-30 | Student | EN | Facebook, Sina-Weibo, Ren-Ren | Starbucks | Food and beverage |
| Denis | Canadian | China | M | 26-30 | Self-employed | EN | Facebook, Twitter, Sina-Weibo | Shanghaïst | Media |
| Daniel | Belgium | Luxemburg | M | 26-30 | Self-employed | FR | Facebook, Twitter | Decathlon | Retail/Sports |
| Helen | Greece | UK | F | 20-25 | Student | EN | Facebook | Inspiring Interns | Services |
| Flora | Peru | The Netherlands | F | 20-25 | Employee | EN | Facebook, Twitter | KLM, Disney | Services, Entertainment |
| Jim | Belgium | Canada | M | 26-30 | Employee | FR | Facebook | Valmetal | Durable goods |
| James | UK | UK | M | 26-30 | Student | EN | Facebook, Twitter | Rangers F.C., BOSE | Sports, Technology |
| Lisa | Belgium | Belgium | F | 26-30 | Employee | EN | Facebook | Rotary Club | Services |
| Claire | UK | UK | F | 30-35 | Student | EN | Facebook, Twitter | Urban Outfitters, Liz Earle | Retail/Fashion, Beauty |
| Laura | Germany | UK | F | 20-25 | Employee | EN | Facebook, Twitter | Made by Humans, Bastille | Online retail, Entertainment |
| Mary | Greece | UK | F | 20-25 | Student | EN | Facebook | Sticky, Shoe shop | Home, Retail |
| Michael | Belgium | Belgium | M | 20-25 | Student | EN | Facebook | Coldplay | Entertainment |
| Ray | Belgium | Belgium | M | 26-30 | Employee | FR | Facebook, Twitter | Brussels Airlines | Services |
| Olivia | Belgium | Belgium | F | 26-30 | Employee | FR | Facebook, Twitter | | |
| Sabrina | Belgium | Belgium | F | 26-30 | Employee | EN | Facebook | Nutella, Esprit | Food and beverage, Retail/Fashion |
| Steve | Belgium | Belgium | M | 26-30 | Employee | FR | Facebook, Twitter | Twitter (as a brand) | Technology |
| Sally | Pakistan | UK | F | 20-25 | Student | EN | Facebook | The Body Shop | Beauty |
| Sam | Pakistan | UK | M | 26-30 | Student | EN | Facebook | Marks and Spencer | Retail |
| Liam | China | UK | M | 20-25 | Student | EN | Facebook, Twitter, Sina-Weibo | Vivienne Westwood | Fashion |

with on social media, from FMCG to celebrities. Key brand categories emerging particularly strongly are retailers (i.e. Marks & Spencer's), fashion brands (i.e. Urban Outfitters) and services (i.e. KLM), which is congruent with the current stance that engagement can be equally induced by utilitarian or hedonic brands (Vivek *et al.*, 2014):

> I like, I comment, I share, I ask questions [. . .] for instance if I see a design that I like, I ask questions about it and they [the brand] always reply. They have a website as well, but I like using Facebook to get frequent updates and see their designs in more detail [. . .] I really like this store! Mary.

Evidence from the data shows that engagement with both the community and the brand is closely related, and even intertwined, each one of them sustaining the other, and together representing to facets of the same phenomenon. The stated significance of online brand community engagement in enhancing consumer brand interactions is particularly well exemplified by James:

> I would definitely still be engaged [with my football team] if the Facebook page did not exist. Now that the page exists, I it would be harder to do without: it is nice added value.

More specifically, engagement with others through the online community appears to affect brand interactions on all three levels of engagement: affective, cognitive and behavioural:

> When I want to know something about them, I'll more easily go on their Facebook page, rather than on their website (Michael).

> Hmm [. . .] I think I interact with brands, companies or pages more through other people than directly (Denis).

### 5.2 Categories of engagement
The analysis of the interviews with social media users confirms three main aspects of consumer engagement in online brand communities: affective engagement, cognitive engagement and behavioural engagement. The predicted multi-dimensionality of consumer engagement is thus reflected in the data. Participants' experiences not only corroborate existing conceptualisations but, most importantly, deepen and clarify them through rich social media user insight. This allows us to further explicate seven sub-dimensions of consumer engagement: enthusiasm, enjoyment, attention, absorption, sharing, learning and endorsing. Table IV provides definitions for each of the dimensions and subdimensions of consumer engagement, which are detailed in the following analysis.

#### 5.2.1 Affective engagement
The affective dimension of engagement captures the summative and enduring level of emotions experienced by a consumer with respect to his/her engagement focus (Calder *et al.*, 2013) and transpires through long-lasting and recurrent feelings, rather than one-off emotions. This dimension was clearly present in the data. In expressing their feelings about the online brand community, they are respondents who allow narrowing down to the affective dimension to two complementary aspects: enthusiasm and enjoyment.

*5.2.1.1 Enthusiasm.* It reflects a consumer's intrinsic level of excitement and interest regarding the online brand community. In instances of repeat interaction with peers through comments, social media users' level of enthusiasm is triggered and sustained:

> If I like a brand post, or comment on a brand status, my friends in turn are likely to comment on it as well. And in these cases, I am so excited that I am quite happy to keep the conversation going and talk more (Liam).

*5.2.1.2 Enjoyment.* It is indicative of the consumer's pleasure and happiness derived from interaction with the online brand community and its members:

> It's not necessarily important to have comments on what you posted, but it's a pleasure, it's a nice added value (Anthony).

> They always have something fun to tell on their page, something that is really "Nutella", something that is really about gourmandise, fun [. . .] so I really like this page because it represents me and it represents what I enjoy in life (Sabrina).

The affective dimension of engagement relates to various forms of content and interactions. Respondents express pleasure in seeing comments on their own posts and sustaining the conversation by replying to these. They enjoy commenting on others' content, and fostering interactions related to their own content. At other times, they simply enjoy reading fun and relevant posts by the brand. Enthusiasm (Vivek, 2009; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and enjoyment (Calder *et al.*, 2013) characterise the affective dimension of customer engagement.

#### 5.2.2 Cognitive engagement
The cognitive aspect of online brand community engagement was prominent in the data. In an engagement context, cognition refers to a set of enduring and active mental states that a consumer experiences with respect to the focal object of his/her engagement (Hollebeek, 2013; Mollen and Wilson, 2010). Interviews, such as those of Flora, reveal that cognition is best broken down into an element of sustained attention, and an element of absorption:

**Table IV** Dimensions and sub-dimensions of consumer engagement

| Dimensions | Definitions |
| --- | --- |
| **Affective** | The summative and enduring levels of emotions experienced by a consumer with respect to his/her engagement focus |
| **Enthusiasm** | A consumer's intrinsic level of excitement and interest regarding the focus of engagement |
| **Enjoyment** | Consumer's feeling of pleasure and happiness derived from interaction with the focus of their engagement |
| **Cognitive** | A set of enduring and active mental states that a consumer experiences with respect to the focal object of his/her engagement |
| **Attention** | The cognitive availability and amount of time spent actively thinking about and being attentive to the focus of engagement |
| **Absorption** | The level of consumer's concentration and immersion with a focal engagement object |
| **Behavioural** | The behavioural manifestations toward an engagement focus, beyond purchase, which results from motivational drivers |
| **Sharing** | The act of providing content, information, experience, ideas or other resources to the focus of engagement |
| **Learning** | The act of actively or passively seeking content, information, experience, ideas or other resources to the focus of engagement |
| **Endorsing** | The act of sanctioning, showing support, referring. In a community context, endorsement can have an internal or external focus |

> It [engagement] just depends on how much time you are willing to sacrifice for the group [. . .] how much time you spend thinking about it (Flora).

*5.2.2.1 Attention.* It is the cognitive availability voluntarily dedicated to interacting with the online brand community. As Sania puts, being present on online communities on social media "is an engagement of the mind!" Interviewees exhibit consciousness that time spent on online brand communities requires some mind space, which keeps them from performing other tasks. A few of them have even put in place "rules" of only checking their social media in the morning and in the evening to prevent from office-hours procrastination.

*5.2.2.2 Absorption.* It goes a step further than attention: it is indicative of the inability to detach oneself once interacting with the online brand community, as shown by Lisa and her complete immersion with branded accounts on Pinterest:

> Well, I try not to go too often, but when I do go, it takes a lot of time. It's like Facebook but it is even worse [. . .] Facebook I am more able to turn it off when I really want to. Pinterest it's impossible! (Lisa).

This example might seem extreme; however, the number of interviewees exhibits a considerable difficulty to detach themselves from social media platforms, once connected. They reflect that this absorption is largely due to the interesting and entertaining content posted by brands on such platforms.

High levels of absorption can also be of briefer duration in the case of a specific community event. Sabrina gave interesting example of absorption with a community, when she took part in a photo-posting contest launched by one of her favourite Facebook pages. She recalls that she spent "three whole days" on the page to promote her participation in the contest and try and win. She states that she was "really engaged with the page at the time of the contest", which indicates a complete dedication and absorption (Patterson *et al.*, 2006); in this case, sustained by activities of both the brand and other community members.

### 5.2.3 Behavioural engagement

Behavioural consumer engagement features in a handful of studies (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Sawhney *et al.*, 2005; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). The impetus for research on behavioural engagement might be linked to the Marketing Science Institute defining consumer engagement as "consumers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, which results from motivational drivers [. . .]" (MSI, 2010, p. 4). Although the findings above show the existence of affective and cognitive dimensions of engagement, behaviours remain strong indicators of engagement, and they manifest in a number of ways on social media (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012).

*5.2.3.1 Sharing.* In line with Brodie *et al.*'s (2011b) findings, sharing is strongly present on social media and a way for online brand community members to exchange experience, ideas or just interesting content. In accordance with seminal research on co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), online brand community engagement relies heavily on the exchange of experiences (Vivek *et al.*, 2012), content and information. This was expressed from the participants of this study:

> [I use the Facebook group] [. . .] to exchange experiences about visits. If there is a place where we have been, we can inform other people who are interested in visiting! (Mary).

> Well yes, for instance, if somebody asks a question about a football game (i.e. "Did you see what just happened?") I would very quickly answer. (James).

The act of sharing is defined in this study as a collaborative and interactive exchange, driven by the motivation to provide resources, as the experiences of Mary and James show. Social media environments and brand communities are both contexts which are particularly prone to the development of sharing behaviours, as they are based on usage, which is, in a large part, driven by content. In social media contexts, sharing can manifest itself through shares, comments and posts, tweets, replies or even direct messages on Twitter or Facebook.

*5.2.3.2 Learning.* The search of resources represents the other side of the coin, whereby consumers seek help, ideas, resources and information from the company or other consumers (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Learning is an important facet of consumer engagement (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b), as shown by the increased focus on content strategies, and as reflected in the tale of Claire:

> If you post something on Twitter people will help you and give you suggestions, which I think is quite nice because it helps. Like, I got a pen burst out in one of my favourite bags and I tweeted about it and asked if anybody had any "at-home" remedies for what to do, and I got loads back.

Learning and improving their skills is a key aspect of online community participation (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004) and social media are particularly suited to this goal, as they allow users to post their questions freely and receive feedback from other knowledgeable members, or the brand itself (Zaglia, 2013).

Learning represents a complex subdimension of engagement. Although the information-processing aspect of learning intuitively lends itself to a cognitive categorisation, excerpts from the interview suggest its underlying behavioural nature, as they stress the active and committed act of looking for information. By searching to improve their experience, learn more or fix issues, customers show engagement which contrasts with passivity and the avoidance of information search found in a disengaged consumer (Lee *et al.*, 2009). Participants suggest that learning can be done by using the community as a source for the latest news and trends, or by seeking help for a specific consumption-related issue, like Claire. In any case, they present it as a purposeful rather than unconscious act, as Sally explains about following The Body Shop Facebook page:

> I follow them just to make sure I know which products they are launching, what is in their new summer collection. I want to know what is new at the moment.

*5.2.3.3 Endorsing.* The last behavioural manifestation of online brand community engagement found in the interviews is the act of endorsing. On social media, members of an online brand community can sanction group activity, content or ideas through the Facebook "like" mechanism, for instance (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012):

> I'm liking things a lot, I'm the kind of person that sees something and then, hop, I like it (Laura).

Rather than being limited to close community settings, endorsement can also go beyond the community boundaries (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Similar to learning, endorsing is accomplished by the respondents in a very proactive way:

I would always post about, or tell people "oh you should try this", so I would quite happily give this kind of recommendations over Twitter or on Facebook Claire.

Schau *et al.* (2009) refer to external endorsement as "impression management". This is supported by Brodie *et al.* (2011b, p. 7) sub-dimension of "advocating". This occurs "when consumers actively recommend specific brands, products/services, organisations and/or ways of using products or brands":

> I suggested my friends to follow them on Facebook, and see more designs. I didn't just say that I bought my shoes from a store and gave them the address; I told them "No, you have to go on the page and see more designs and ask them more questions, they are very kind" (Mary).

### 5.3 Antecedents of engagement

Another key observation emerging from the data concerns the interplay of online brand community engagement with other phenomena. Expanding conceptualisations by Wirtz *et al.* (2013), data reveal that online brand community engagement is triggered by a number of drivers, which derive from brand-related, social, community value, as well as functional aspects of online brand community membership.

First, "the relationship with the focal brand" seems to give impetus to consumer engagement in the community. By relating to the brand and what it stands for, online brand community members feel closer to the rest of the community around it (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). Participants expressed congruence between their own values and those of the brand, which provided a ground for relating to the community. The following example is characteristic of both identification with the brand, and identification with the online brand community members, because, due to their interest in the focal brand, they share similar interests:

> If I follow H&M, I know that other people are interested in fashion too. And with KLM, I know that it is people that like travelling too, you know. So, yes, I feel part of a community, there is something in common (Flora).

Online brand community engagement also appears to be triggered by existing brand knowledge, satisfaction and trust.

Secondly, "benefits, or value gained from online brand community" participation also enhance the affect, cognition and behaviours of members. These benefits can be related to the informational or entertaining quality of the content posted on the online brand community, communication facilitation, or the explicit monetary incentives, such as deals, sweepstakes or coupons (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007). Some respondents even admit being part of online brand communities mainly for the discounts or rewards they can reap:

> I like Facebook pages out of personal interest; because I like them a lot; or sometimes simply because they give you free samples (Nigel).

Lastly, "structural elements of the community" also impact engagement. An emergent theme in the interviews refers to the community size, as show by Laura, who clearly expresses intention to become less engaged as the size of the community increases (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

> What I hate is when a group that I really like becomes really big, and it's like everybody knows them, and it is nothing special anymore, and you just kind of feel like, oh well, I'll listen to something else [. . .] And still I would not

un-like them, but I would not really look at it anymore [the online brand community] (Laura).

Although it seems that the size of the community is not necessarily a trigger for joining in, its dynamic evolution appears to affect the future intention to engage.

### 5.4 Outcome of engagement

Beyond intra-community engagement, sustained relationship with the brand is also of major importance. Analysis suggested that engagement with the online brand community and the brand can translate into increased loyalty with the brand, and this permeates strongly through participants' experiences:

> I really love Apple; but before I bought my new computer from them, I talked with friends, and other people I knew from the Facebook group, to see who had bought it, and what they thought of it. It's a cycle: you see the product in use with someone, then you go online to get more information from people, then you go in store to feel the product, then you buy it. Ali

Ali's experience shows that engaging with other people on online brand communities is part of a complex purchase process, even for brands which one is familiar with. Other consumer's input and reviews plays an important role in the purchase decision process and such support and content can be found in online brand communities (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007).

However, other unexpected ways of triggering loyalty can emerge through online brand related interactions:

> I would say that defending them [the brand] on social media against their opponents helps me reaffirm my love for the brand and even makes me more loyal to it! (Sally).

In this case, Sally shows that stepping up to support the company against its detractors contributes to reinforcing her position toward the brand and maintaining a long-term commitment to it, which results in increased brand loyalty.

Evidence also shows that, beyond sustaining loyalty of happy customers, engaging consumers on social media platforms also has the ability to keep unsatisfied customers loyal and preventing them from defecting the company. This is obvious is Ray's narrative:

> I was dissatisfied with the flight experience I got with Brussels Airlines and complained about it on Twitter. Even though I was initially unhappy with the service, the simple fact of them answering my complaint and showing concern eased my frustrations. After that, I kept flying with them. They showed that they care about what their customers think, and that was really important to me.

Overall, consumer loyalty to the brand is activated in a number of different ways through interactions with the brand and other online community members. Loyalty can be sustained simply through positive online interactions by deciding to step up as a brand defender in the face of negative content (Kumar *et al.*, 2010) or by receiving positive customer care from the brand after a negative experience.

Figure 1 presents the overall framework of online brand community engagement supported by the social media members' interviews, including the three dimensions and seven sub-dimensions of online brand community engagement, as well as their antecedents and outcomes. This framework does not represent a causal model and the arrows are only indicative of suggested relationships based on the analysis of the interviews.

**Figure 1** Online brand community engagement framework
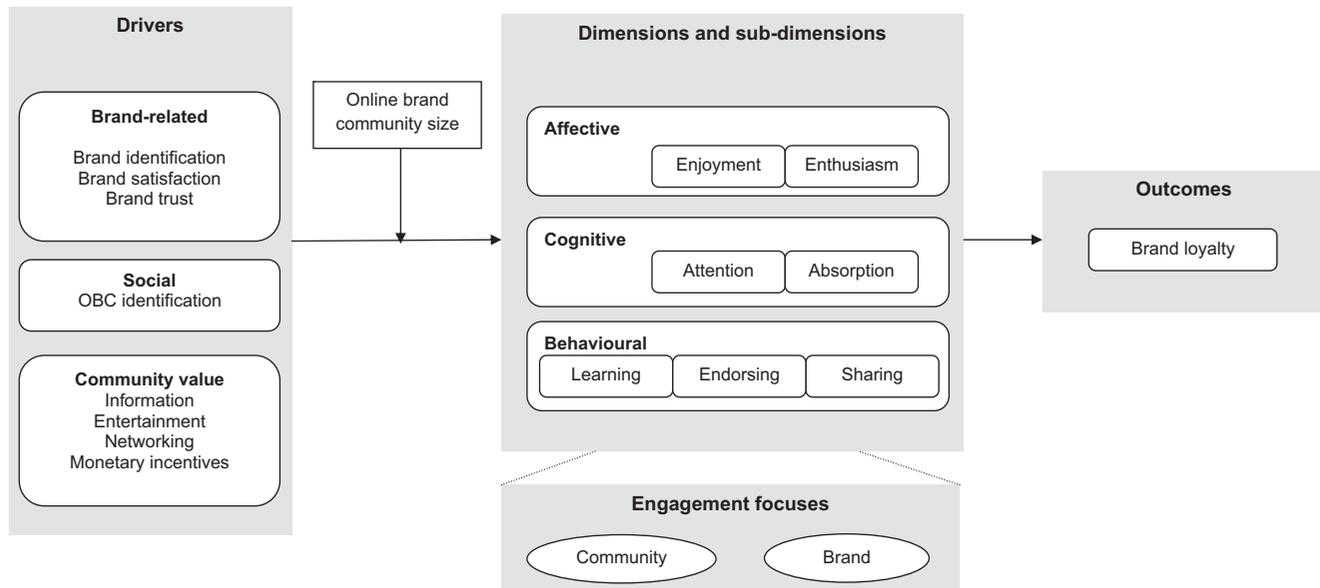


## 6. Discussion

Based on 21 semi-structured interviews with members of online brand communities embedded on social media, this paper offers a deep insight into the objects of consumer engagement in the context of online brand community, its dimensions, as well as its drivers and outcome.

Consumers that participate in brand communities get engaged not only with the focal agent or object, which is often portrayed as a brand but also with the other likeminded individuals that support the brand in the brand communities. This finding expands the empirical work on brand engagement that has thus far analysed consumers engagement with only one object, namely, organisational offerings or activities (Vivek *et al.*, 2012), a brand (Sprott *et al.*, 2009; Hollebeek, 2013; So *et al.*, 2012; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), the brand community members (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Kuo and Feng, 2013; Habibi *et al.*, 2014) and consistent with other very recent empirical work in the area of brand engagement (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b; Vivek *et al.*, 2014). The engagement transpires not along a singular consumer-brand nexus but involves a complex web of interactions where the *locus* of engagement seems anchored in multiple sites including brand, other individuals, platform, etc.

Our findings strengthen the notion of consumer engagement as a multi-dimensional concept and offer a deeper understanding of their meaning. Specifically, the framework offers three dimensions and seven sub-dimensions of engagement. Affective engagement is manifested through enthusiasm about the community and the focal brand, and enjoyment of interactions with them. The emotions that the informants feel towards the online brand community are strong and mostly positive, and include excitement and enjoyment. The affective dimension of engagement had been suggested in previous research (Sprott *et al.*, 2009; Kumar *et al.*, 2010), yet there has been limited appreciation of the type of emotions incurred. The current study aligns with the

notion of online brand community as environment where strong emotional links can develop among members and aggregate into deep and long-lasting affective bonds (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000).

The participants of the study also suggest that they consciously and actively participate in online brand communities that they are interested in, and spend time in them. They make conscious and voluntarily decision to invest time to engage in these communities, sometimes up to a point of high absorption characterised by the difficulty to detach oneself from the task. Cognitive engagement can have different intensities (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a), and that "concentration" or "engrossment" with the brand may be characteristics of engagement (Hollebeek, 2011). Our findings clarify the meaning of this dimension as a form of active cognitive availability and concentration with the focus of engagement.

Third, all the participants of this study clearly express their participation in the online brand communities of their choice through active learning, sharing and endorsing behaviours that vary in terms of involvement. They want to learn and to exchange information with the other group members and the brand, as well support them. Recently, "augmenting", "co-developing", "influencing" and mobilizing' behaviours have been found to be manifestations of offline engagement with a service brand (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), suggesting the applicability of these research findings to a variety of other engagement contexts.

Understanding the dimensionality of the concept was a necessary step that allowed the analysis to move to a second layer of findings concerning the drivers and outcomes of engagement. The participants' level of engagement is influenced by brand-related factors, such as brand identification, satisfaction from and trust in the brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b), the identification with the online brand community (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005) and the value they perceive they get from group participation (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). These findings are largely congruent with a conceptual

framework proposed by Wirtz *et al.* (2013), highlighting the antecedents and outcomes of online brand community engagement. Drivers of online brand community engagement are of brand-related, social and functional nature. Benefits are multiple for the community and the brand itself, particularly in terms of community participation and loyalty intentions and behaviours (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). As participants engage, others are drawn and this results in engagement from others, a virtuous circle seems to develop, leading to prolonged engagement and value creation (Schau *et al.*, 2009). The size of the group appeared to change the relationship between the antecedents of online brand community engagement and the online brand community engagement itself, a finding reflecting previous understanding from small online brand communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

Lastly, the findings offer insights into the duality of the focus of engagement. It has been argued that engagement is always directed at a specific object, and most studies so far have analysed engagement with one of them at a time, most often a brand. It is suggested that, in a given context, engaging with different objects, or partners, can be common, simultaneous and inter-related, mutually enhancing practices.

The study findings have a number of managerial implications. The study findings offer rich and nuanced view of engagements that transcend emotions, behaviours and intentions and extend beyond individual-brand nexus. The dual focus of engagement in online brand communities is a first element to take into account. Relationship with a brand remains a core constituent of communal engagement (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), and this gives impetus for creating and sustaining brand-administered communities. However, if the object of engagement is not just the brand but also other individuals, then more managerial attention needs to be devoted to the context beyond this nexus and brands should aim to foster engagement between consumers only, learning to take a step back and let the community practices emerge beyond their influence. The reasons for engaging are varied and suggest that micro-management of the online community based on the diverse benefits members seek and engagement profiles when participating would be adequate.

## 7. Conclusion

The study aimed to conceptually refine the concept of consumer engagement with online brand community. Although the notion of engagement received much attention in extant studies, few studies have focussed on consumer engagement in the rich context of online brand communities embedded in social media. Against the background of theoretical conceptualisations and using rich qualitative data, this paper refines the concept and offers a theoretical framework that maps its distinct domain, antecedents and outcomes. The key contribution lies in delineating three substantive dimensions of engagement, namely, cognition, affect and behaviour, and their meaning and sub-dimensions. The findings also offer detailed exploration of the relationships between engagement and other relational constructs.

This article makes three important contributions. First, it contributes to the consumer engagement literature by exploring consumer engagement dimensionality in depth in a rich social media context. It proposes a detailed understanding of the concept's dimensions, which so far lacked such depth and empirical validation. A second contribution is made to the marketing relationship paradigm by showing the interplay, and thus distinction, between strongly established aspects of relationship marketing such as brand satisfaction, trust and loyalty and consumer engagement. Lastly, the article contributes to the online brand community literature. When trying to capture the functioning of such groupings, current variables of interest are "participation", "involvement" or simply "membership". These variables tend to be determined either through behavioural actions or intentions only. Consumer engagement provides, in contrast, a broader dimensional scope to online brand community participation by integrating the affective, cognitive and emotional aspects.

Admittedly, the study is subject to several limitations. This study design underplays the distinctions between platforms but it might be relevant to compare them in the light of their varied functioning and applications. Further studies may compare online brand community engagement across different social media platforms. It is reasonable to expect that differences in engagement type, intensity and forms may occur for different brand categories. So far, research is unclear on which types of brands are more conducive of high consumer engagement. A recent study show that high engagement is not limited to high involvement product categories, but that more mundane brands can generate high levels of engagement (Vivek *et al.*, 2014). As online brand communities can focus on any type of brand, a comparative analysis in terms of brand types could be undertaken.

Avenues for future studies in online brand community engagement also include the testing of causal relationships among the constructs suggested by our framework to test the relationships derived from consumer's narrated experiences. Empirically testing the causal relationship between the different elements of the framework with a large-scale study across platforms and brand types would bring further validation of the concept. Research could also address the difference of valences that engagement can take, to examine negative engagement, a topic that this study has not touched upon. The concept of consumer engagement being relatively new, researchers should focus on expanding and deepening its understanding, considering as an example the aforementioned areas of interest.

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