

Consumer engagement on social media: insights from a virtual brand community

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Received 1 February 2017
Revised 21 March 2018
Accepted 22 March 2018

Abstract

Purpose – Based on the conceptual model of consumer engagement in a virtual brand community, this study aims to investigate this phenomenon and gauges the validity of the model's assumptions in the context of a Facebook fan page.

Design/methodology/approach – The interactions between L'Oréal Paris Brazil and the members of its virtual community were collected for three months using a netnographic approach. The data of these interactions were evaluated using content analysis techniques.

Findings – The dimensions, processes and sub-processes of the conceptual model of consumer engagement, as proposed in the literature, were confirmed. Furthermore, the results reinforce the perspective that simple participation or involvement does not presume engagement, which reflects a complex psychological state dependent on the context and requiring previous and subsequent processes to manifest.

Research limitations/implications – The findings were based on an examination of a high-end beauty product brand's Facebook page. Nevertheless, these findings are not necessarily limited to high-end context consumers. Larger scale research (i.e. involving wider product categories) could endorse the underlying theoretical model of engagement.

Practical implications – The study contributes to understanding the dynamics of how brands build relationships with consumers through social media and confirms the dynamics of the engagement concept and its role as a tool to increase brand value and competitive advantage.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the field by bridging the knowledge gap concerning consumer engagement in a social media context with practical and empirical evidence.

Keywords Facebook, Social media, Content analysis, Netnography

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Currently, there are approximately 4 billion internet users in the world, i.e. 60 per cent of the global population (Itu, 2018), reconfiguring the human socialization processes, social relationships and empowering consumers (Acar and Puntoni, 2016; Castells, 2015; Cova and Pace, 2006). Indeed, the internet has been a means for organizations to strengthen their relationships with consumers and build their brands using social media strategies, such as virtual brand communities (VBCs) (Perren and Kozinets, 2018; Hakala *et al.*, 2017; Islam *et al.*, 2017). In this context, the term engagement often appears in the discussions of academics and practitioners as a key factor for creating and maintaining intensive relationships between organizations and consumers and a consistent source of competitive advantage (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). This scenario of growing



interest for both audiences is notable. For example, it has been included in the list of priority research topics by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) since 2010 (MSI, 2016/2018; Brodie *et al.*, 2013) and has been discussed in special issues of journals (Hollebeek and Andreassen, 2018; Rodgers and Thorson, 2018; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010).

However, few empirical studies have been focused on this topic, especially considering the empirical evidence of the consumer engagement construct in the context of VBCs (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). As shown by Hollebeek *et al.* (2017) and Barger *et al.* (2016), there is a gap in the discussion of brand communities, consumer practices in these communities and social media engagement topics. This gap might be explained as follows:

- It is a relatively new marketing phenomenon and, therefore, there is not much knowledge on how it can be created, maintained and measured (Barger and Labrecque, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016).
- Having various formats and structures, social media platforms, such as Facebook, have become fragmented, making it harder for managers to track and coordinate their marketing efforts. Moreover, this fragmentation tends to force the brand to distribute content across several channels. This occasionally leads consumers to be more selective how they view and interact (Dessart, 2017; Straker *et al.*, 2015; King *et al.*, 2014).
- Despite the social nature and its dynamic, social media platforms have been used as a promotion and sales delivery channel, which may have a negative impact on brand equity (Schultz and Block, 2014).

In the context of the beauty industry, studies like this are scarce. Dhaoui (2014) studied the impact of luxury brand marketing in driving consumer engagement on social media platforms. Stokinger and Ozuem (2015) investigated social media and consumer retention in the context of luxury beauty products, stressing the aspirational inclination of beauty products. However, based on an extensive search of business research databases (i.e. Web of Knowledge, Ebsco, ProQuest, Jstor, ScienceDirect, Scopus and Google Scholar), the authors did not find any peer-reviewed papers investigating consumer engagement on social media in the beauty industry context in an emerging market.

Thus, the following question guides this study:

Q1. Is the conceptual model of consumer engagement in a VBC (Brodie *et al.*, 2013) valid in the context of a Facebook fan page?

To investigate the consumer engagement model, the Facebook fan page for L'Oréal Paris Brazil was selected. This is the fourth largest VBC in the cosmetics, personal hygiene, and beauty category in the region (Socialbakers, 2016). The company's official fan page was created in 2010. It now has over seven million fans who receive daily content related to this brand universe. It should be emphasized that this study aims to validate the conceptual model of consumer engagement in a VBC (Brodie *et al.*, 2013) by examining a Facebook fan page, identifying different types and/or levels of consumer engagement, and identifying and validating themes or issues that underpin the theoretical tenets of engagement.

To this end, we begin by discussing the social network in terms of internet dynamics and its uses as a brand marketing/communication platform. We then introduce consumer engagement in a VBC concept, as proposed by Brodie *et al.* (2013), followed by a discussion of the applicability of the conceptual model for investigating consumer engagement in the context of a Facebook fan page. Finally, we present the conclusions, practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Social networks on the internet

Social networks on the internet are made possible through several platforms known collectively as social media (Whiting and Williams, 2013; Smith, 2011). According to Ngai *et al.* (2015), social networking sites like Facebook allow users to create a profile as an individual or organization and interact with other members by sharing their lives, interests, and desires. These platforms have transformed the way people communicate, socialize, learn and make decisions (Fuchs, 2014). With regard to consumer relations, it is possible to perceive changes in the patterns of recommendations and sharing of experiences on these platforms, creating new ways of establishing bonds of trust and credibility among consumers (Sabate *et al.*, 2014).

On Facebook, when a company creates a fan page, it can publish specific marketing content to establish relationships with its consumer base. This relationship is formally established when users access the company's page and use the reaction button (like, love, haha, wow, sad or angry) to show their emotions. Only after this behavioral, proactive action is the content promoted by the brand displayed to the consumer and his network of friends. In this respect, these fan pages can be considered VBCs, since they follow the basic premises of being a nonphysical, specialized community based on strong social ties between members and brand (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001).

In this environment, brand value propositions should be inspiring and appealing so that consumers can identify them with their own narratives and, consequently, realize the value brands have in their life (Holt, 2004). Gobé (2010) noted that consumers want to establish relationships with brands when they perceive that the brand plays a positive and transformative role in their lives. The goal of brand management from this perspective is to forge a consistent and meaningful emotional relationship with consumers and become part of their stories, memories and social relationships. Establishing these spaces results in a larger base of faithful and committed clients. The composition of these spaces is based on three basic characteristics: shared consciousness; the rituals, stories and shared traditions that help convey the meaning of the community; and, ultimately, the development of a responsibility or moral duty shared within the community by its members (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001). In this sense, most virtual communities are individually established around unique interests that may be related to different topics (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). This premise can be seen in the definition of a virtual community presented by Ridings *et al.* (2002). They considered virtual communities as "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly, for a determined period of time, in a way organized on the Internet, using a specific mechanism".

According to Kozinets *et al.* (2017), virtual communities have diverse cultural effects, including their influence on the behavior of the consumer. In some cases, the objects of interest of these communities are products, organizations and/or brands. Such communities are known as VBCs. Even when referring to brands and organizations, it is important to consider that participation in these communities is based on a social interaction in which individuals deliberately act in accordance with community characteristics (Schau *et al.*, 2009). The greater the alignment of the group's central activity with the members' objective, the greater the possibility of participation in that virtual community (Kozinets, 1999).

Considering the common points found in all definitions (such as personality, belonging, and affective ties), it is important to note that the motivators for participating in a VBC are the benefits that stem from interactions between members, between members and the company and the consumption of exchanged information (Habibi *et al.*, 2014). In general, benefits of two distinct natures can be considered when discussing the idea of participation,

namely hedonist and utilitarian, both explained by social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and social capital theories (Bourdieu, 1983). According to the theory of social identity, an individual joins a VBC to frame some symbolic social category in such a way as to fulfill his/her need for belonging and identification (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). As long as he/she remains in the group, a self-referral process takes place (Muniz and Schau, 2007).

The concept of social capital, according to Bourdieu (1983, p. 241), can be understood as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a long-lasting relationship network of somewhat institutionalized knowledge or mutual recognition”. This concept reinforces the notion that individuals relate to others via a utilitarian logic, doing what is right or good to maintain the relationship. Through symbolic exchanges, here in the form of communal ideals, the individual seeks to obtain more information about the brands to make better use of their products and services. It is believed that the information transferred among peers or influencers tends to be more valuable and accepted by members within the same network, since they share the same interest and affection (Zaglia, 2013).

An individual attains a sense of community when he/she perceives the following benefits derived from his/her participation. The first benefit is related to association and shared consciousness. This implies members’ investments in the process of joining the network, such as the purchase of the product in question. The second is related to the process of co-creating value for the community and, possibly, the brand. The third is related to the identification and fulfillment of needs that are met using community resources, derived from its status or collective group information. The last benefit is related to shared emotional connections, commitments and beliefs, all of which support the perception of an individual’s participation in a VBC as an extension of their individual identity (Kornum *et al.*, 2017; Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

Consumer engagement. As highlighted by Hollebeek *et al.* (2017), consumer engagement has been defined as a way to establish value-laden consumer/firm interactions and relationships. Although the notion of engagement has been present in discussions about relationship marketing (Kumar and Shah, 2009; Burnham *et al.*, 2003) and services marketing (Nambisan and Baron, 2007; Williams and Anderson, 2005) for a long time, few studies properly discussed the subject in Marketing until a decade ago. Despite the growing interest (MSI, 2016/2018), there seems to be a lack of consensus with regard to the exact nature of this phenomenon. In the marketing literature, several studies have addressed the notion of consumer engagement considering a plethora of perspectives, with some grounded in a psychological point of view, while others define it as a behavioral manifestation (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Notably, the seminal studies by Vivek (2009), Van Doorn *et al.* (2010), Brodie *et al.* (2011) and Hollebeek (2011) examining consumer engagement are of especially important when it comes to gaining a better understanding of engagement. Discussions on the theme gained attention in mid-2005 when terms such as consumer engagement (Bowden, 2009; Shaw *et al.*, 2006), customer engagement (Wagner and Majchrzak, 2006; Sawhney *et al.*, 2005) and brand engagement (Sprott *et al.*, 2009; Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006) began to appear more frequently. It is worth noting that the AMA (2018) marketing dictionary states that the term consumer refers to the ultimate user of a product and customer is the actual or prospective purchaser. These terms are, as seen in Brodie *et al.* (2011), Hollebeek (2011) and Dessart *et al.* (2016), for instance, presented without clear differentiation. Even though there is a lack of agreement over the conceptual domain of the phenomenon, its focal object has been mostly related to brands and its multiple manifestations, such as products and services (Calder *et al.*, 2013), communications (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018) and brand communities (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013).

As an early example of the perception and plurality of the concept, [Algesheimer et al. \(2005\)](#) viewed the engagement of the brand community as the interaction and cooperation between members of a particular brand community. In the following year, [Patterson et al. \(2006\)](#) published one of the studies that best supports the concepts of engagement discussed in later publications. According to [Patterson et al. \(2006\)](#), customer engagement is the extent to which an individual is physically, cognitively and emotionally involved with a company.

As a basis for understanding engagement, [Vargo \(2009, p. 373\)](#) synthesized engagement and the service-dominant logic perspective, analyzing “relationships that transcend traditional conceptualization”, as engagement happens by means of the co-creation of value by consumers in the processes of interacting with brands, thus creating a counterpoint to the traditional concept of goods-dominant logic. Based on [Vargo’s \(2009\)](#) findings, [Vivek \(2009\)](#) proposed that, when pursuing consumer engagement, brands should focus on producing experiences rather than simply supplying goods and services. In this sense, consumers must engage in a sustainable way to create long-term relationships and long-lasting and consistent emotional connections. This context is only possible, therefore, by the extent to which the consumer is part of the value creation process through numerous interactions. [Vivek \(2009\)](#) also clarified that consumer engagement is broader than customer engagement, as it includes current and potential shoppers in marketing programs.

In making use of theories related to relationship marketing and services, [Vivek \(2009\)](#) suggested that engagement could be assumed as the intensity of participation and connection of the consumer with the offers of an organization, stimulated by activities initiated by either the consumer or the organization. From this perspective, [Fernandes and Remelhe \(2016\)](#), for instance, highlighted the changes in consumer behavior influenced by the internet, shifting from passive to active participation in the co-creation process of innovation through social media platforms.

Specifically in the context of online environments, [Mollen and Wilson \(2010, p. 920\)](#) defined brand engagement as the “affective and cognitive commitment one has to the relationship with a personified brand through a website or other computer-mediated entities”, the purpose of which is to communicate value propositions by the brand. Brand engagement is characterized by the cognitive dimensions involved in the relationship process, namely, the individual’s perception of instrumental value, utility and relevance, and experiential value, which is the emotional alignment of the individual with the narratives proposed by the brand. This perspective was explored in [Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou’s \(2013\)](#) study of online brand experiences with search engines and websites and consumers’ perceptions of them.

[Van Doorn et al. \(2010\)](#) underscored the need for understanding how and why customers behave in a particular way when considering engagement, a construct given the name of Customer Engagement Behavior. [Van Doorn et al. \(2010\)](#) developed a model for understanding these behaviors and consequently using information in strategies to promote long-term benefits for the organization in question. [Van Doorn et al. \(2010\)](#) believed that engaged clients tend to maintain relationships with peers and can exert strong influence on each other regarding purchasing decision-making processes.

Following Linda Hollebeek’s body of work on engagement, [Hollebeek \(2011\)](#) argued that customer brand engagement should be understood as the level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment through brand interactions. [Hollebeek et al. \(2014\)](#) developed a consumer brand engagement (CBE) scale, based on the three dimensions of interaction with a brand. Lastly, revisiting the initial fundamental propositions (FPs) from [Brodie et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Hollebeek et al. \(2016\)](#), [Harrigan et al. \(2017\)](#) investigated consumer engagement and the relationship between the CBE scale with involvement, self-brand connection and usage.

Based on these main themes and concepts, Brodie *et al.* (2013) constructed a set of five FPs functioning as delineators of an integrative definition. The intention of establishing the FPs was to provide a conceptualization of engagement that could be used in several areas rather than a specific context or regarding a specific object, such as a brand community or client. From these five FPs and a proposed definition of engagement, the relationships between the dimensions and objects of engagement within a VBC were established.

Brodie *et al.* (2013) proposed that the definition of consumer engagement in a VBC is:

[...] the experiences of interaction between consumers and brand and/or with other members of the community. It should be considered as a highly context dependent psychological state that can be observed and classified from levels of commitment established by dynamic and continuous interactions. Engagement is a multidimensional concept that has behavior, cognition and emotion as fundamental dimensions, besides having elements of related meaning that function as antecedents and/or consequences in the process.

For the purpose of this study, the authors considered this proposition as the working definition for consumer engagement.

The observation and analysis of interactions in a VBC enabled the construction of a model of engagement processes and sub-processes. Brodie *et al.* (2013) identified five sub-processes of engagement that occur in an iterative and dynamic manner:

- (1) Learning is characterized by the indirect acquisition of cognitive competences that consumers apply during the purchase activity or even in the process of decision-making (Andersen, 2005).
- (2) Sharing is related to the dimensions of behavior and cognition in a virtual community when consumers share their knowledge on the subject (Valck *et al.*, 2009).
- (3) Advocacy occurs when a consumer or group actively and often recommend an item, be it a product, service or brand (Schau *et al.*, 2009).
- (4) Socializing points to a sense of belonging and community, pertaining to social identity theory (Longmore, 1998; Tajfel and Turner, 1986).
- (5) Co-creation is a sub-process in which consumers contribute to the organization in the development and improvement of products, services, brands and other types of offers (Lusch and Vargo, 2006).

There is also a state of dormancy (i.e. temporary consumer inactivity) and disengagement (i.e. no more activity). Like its sub-processes, there is no sequencing or ordering for the analysis of the consequences of engagement, which are based on consumers' perceived level of co-constructed value. The consequences of engagement include loyalty, satisfaction, consumer empowerment, self-brand connection and emotional attachments, trust and commitment (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Vivek, 2009).

Methodology

Owing to the nature of this study, we opted for a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both a qualitative approach and the methodological procedures of observational netnography (Kozinets, 2015), which can be defined as an adaptation of the traditional ethnographic method for cultural studies and virtual communities on the internet. As advocated by the author, netnography is faster, simpler, more naturalistic and less obtrusive than other methodological choices, such as focus groups or interviews. By closely following the

directives, it is possible to understand the meanings, symbolism and consumption patterns of virtual consumer groups.

Kozinets (2015) explained that the process begins with cultural entry, which in this study meant the first author joining the Fan Page by liking it, and obtaining authorization from the page administrator to conduct research and reading several posts to become familiarized with the community. There was no formal structuring of the script for observation and initial analysis, which were guided by the dynamics and interactions of users in the community.

The second step was collecting data from August 1, 2016, to October 31, 2016, using SCUP (now Sprinklr), software used specifically for data collection on social media. SCUP was a Brazilian tech startup that became an immediate success when it began providing social media monitoring at the dawn of web scraping and analytical technology in 2009 (Gordon, 2013) for a market with one of the most active social network populations in the world (Antunes, 2015; Karr, 2013). The main reasons for choosing this system were that it allows for the configuration of a specific Facebook page, followed by the composition of keywords to optimize the search on the topic of interest. A display of mentions related to the brand that can also be filtered by time period, searchable media channels, kinds of interactions among users, levels of user participation, and user geolocation. A total of 16,638 posts generated by both company and consumers were collected from the L'Oréal Paris Brazil Facebook fan page. Regarding the interactions of users with content via Facebook Reactions (either like, love, haha, wow, sad or angry), shares and/or comments, 362,631 entrees were recorded.

In the third stage, to ensure the data interpretation pattern and reliability, the authors conducted several rounds of discussion, following the qualitative analytical steps originally proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and adapted for netnography, as seen in Kozinets (2015). First, in compliance with the coding process, the authors gathered all data collected and, individually, performed a pre-categorization in accordance with the content analysis method (Bardin, 2011). In this case, the categories indicated by Brodie *et al.* (2011) in their conceptual model for analyzing consumer engagement in VBC were supplemented by some semantic criteria (Bardin, 2011), as shown in Table I.

In the second step, reflections on data generated annotations, thoughts and ideas about the phenomenon were compiled in a Google Drive document shared with the authors. This was followed by a triangulation process to compare the sorted data to identify patterns and coherency with the category criteria. As a checking and refinement procedure, we returned several times to the field to compare findings with new data and corroborate the understanding of patterns, similarities and differences. After the fourth step, it was possible to establish a small set of explanations regarding consumer engagement on the L'Oréal

Category	Semantic criteria
Brand	Messages that stimulate brand associations and aspirational meanings
Products	Messages about products, price and free samples
Organization	Messages about the company, promotional actions, job vacancies and professional education
Industry	Messages about the beauty market, such as competitors and suppliers
Virtual community	Messages that address the community itself
Community policies	Messages that address the community use policy
Community members	Messages that address other members of the community

Table I.
Semantic criteria for the categorization of posts

Paris Brazil social media platform, which was compared with the main propositions concerning consumer engagement in a VBC from Brodie *et al.* (2013).

In the fourth stage, based on internet research ethics (Buchanan, 2011) and acting in accordance with local regulations from the Brazilian Association of Research Companies (ABEP, 2016), we sought to ensure the confidentiality of the participants in the reports, even if the Facebook postings were public with full disclosure of members' identities. Finally, the last step, related to the dissemination of the results and receiving feedback from the researched group, involved the presentation of the research report in a face-to-face meeting with the page administrator.

Findings

Considering the characteristics of a VBC as defined by Muniz and O'guinn (2001), the L'Oréal Paris Brazil Facebook fan page can be categorized as a VBC. There exists a shared consciousness, which is grounded in a sense of belonging and affection shared by the members towards the brand and community itself. Furthermore, there are shared rituals, stories, and traditions that help convey the meaning of the community. For example, a post on October 12, 2016 concerned a product line dedicated to hair treatment and hydration and received a large volume of interactions. In one interplay, a consumer requested information for the treatment of dandruff and generated a series of interactions with other members of the network, which culminated in a tip given by another consumer, sharing her own treatment rituals. Table II shows posts regarding the shared consciousness concept (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001).

Finally, the community and its members shared a moral duty. On September 28, 2016, the company shared a video explaining how to do a particular hairstyle, which received a considerable volume of interactions. In one of the comments, a consumer suggested that other hairstyles should be part of the content, since that particular hairstyle was unsuitable for her due to the nature of her hair. In response, L'Oréal Paris Brazil indicated that it would keep the suggestion for future reference, which indicates a sense of responsibility and commitment to the community, as shown in Table III.

The most common interaction between consumers and the L'Oréal Paris Brazil fan page was to like it using the Facebook Reactions tool, generating the highest counts compared with any other type of interaction (there were 340,890 likes). It is important to note that, under Facebook's rules, the same user can use the like button only once for each post. When examining the activity of sharing a post, the software registered 21,741 interactions, regardless of whether the same consumer shared more than once, as allowed by Facebook. Commenting, which is considered a deed of greater involvement with the community and

Shared consciousness

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| Consumer 1 | "My hair is really greasy. With other shampoos, I had to wash my hair every day. And after I researched more, and saw some reviews (which I want to do on my channel too) I searched and bought this one to test. And today thanks to this shampoo, I only wash my hair every 2 days and it looks great." |
| Consumer 2 | "Excellent product, I always use this brand of shampoo and conditioner, high quality! My hair is doing very well, just like I got with the Extraordinary Oils! I straighten my hair, but this doesn't affect it at all. I highly recommend it! Hair smells great and looks as if it has just been brushed!" |
| Consumer 3 | "I've been using it for about ten days [. . .]. So far, it has been effective, at least I can wash my hair every 2 days . . ." |
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Table II.
Posts showing a
shared consciousness

other consumers, was treated as a unique analysis unit (Bardin, 2011), though there was not a high frequency of interactions of the same members during the period in question. A total of 16,434 comments were collected, and the member that generated the most content participated only four times throughout the period. Taking into account the total universe of community members (at the time of writing around seven million fans) it can be confidently asserted that there was little interaction with the content generated by the fan page and its members. A possible explanation is that most members of this community only consume passive content, resembling the process of lurking. According to Schlosser (2006), Kozinets *et al.* (2010) and, more recently, Mousavi *et al.* (2017), lurking can be understood as passive behavior during navigation activity wherein a user is not very attentive to the content available, scrolling the content page of the website with little concentration and no clear objective.

Starting with a better understanding of the co-constructed value in the VBC and, consequently, the engagement process, the first step was to analyze the interactions through comments on posts. Considering the intermediate goal of identifying types and/or levels of engagement, the relationships established between the cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions and the objects of engagement, as well as their complexity and level of intensity, were categorized.

In several posts, there existed the presence of the cognitive dimension (through the perceived benefit of the use of the product), the behavioral dimension (through the narratives of frequent repurchase), and the emotional dimension (through admiration and strong declarations of affection). According to Brodie *et al.* (2013), a high level of emotional engagement can generate high levels of cognitive and behavioral commitment from current consumers. Moreover, the data analysis elicited the validation of categories and topics discussed by members (as shown in Table IV). It should be noted that the discussions were only initiated from a post created by the company and not directly by the consumer, which is a preeminent feature of the dynamics of using fan pages on Facebook. Table IV illustrates

Shared moral duty

Table III.
Posts showing a
shared moral duty

L'Oréal Paris Brazil	"Hello! We are happy to know that our products please you. We'll keep your suggestions for new releases. Thank you for your compliments! You can count on us!"
Consumer 4	"I'm doing well, four months without chemicals in my hair."
L'Oréal Paris Brazil	"Good luck, Consumer 4. Keep following us so you do not miss any news."

Engagement focus	Category	Representativeness <i>N</i> = 16.434 (%)
Topic	Brand	52
	Products	36
	Organizations	11
	Industry	0
Brand Community	VBC	1
	Community rules	0
	Community members	0

Table IV.
Category'
representativeness

Note: Values represent the percentage of comments the term (e.g., the brand L'Oréal Paris) appeared in data set

the categories, their representativeness and the connection with Brodie *et al.*'s (2013) proposed conceptual model of consumer engagement.

The posts on the L'Oréal Paris Brazil brand and its main associations and meanings were the most prevalent in the period, indicating a construction of value based on emotional connections (Gobé, 2010). Table V shows examples of messages categorized according to the semantic criteria and category grid proposed by Brodie *et al.* (2013).

Object of consumer engagement	Category	Criteria for categorization	Messages
Themes	Brand	Messages that stimulate brand associations and aspirational meanings	"I recommend L'Oréal Paris if you want colorful, shiny and beautiful hair like mine!" "I love this brand!!!!" I can't believe it! What a color! I love u loreal!!
	Products	Messages about products, price, and free samples	"Is it compatible with guanidine [a chemical product]?" "I think there should be more products for afro-descendants" I bought the Extraordinary Oil Conditioner and my hair loved it, it was discolored and very dry, and it made my hair really soft, so I love L'Oréal Paris products. They are incredible, I also love the Total Repair 5, Arginine, and I can't remember how long I've been using Moisturizing Cream Collagen Max. I love it!!
	Organization	Messages about the company, promotional actions, job vacancies, professional education	"I saw an advert for the new product and my daughter is 10 years old. Can you give me more information about whether I can use it on her hair? You should think about products for teenagers." "How can I became a professional hairdresser?"
	Industry	Messages about the beauty market, such as competitors and suppliers	No messages were identified during the analysis
Virtual community	Virtual community	Messages that address the community itself	"Maria, this is the page and post I've told you about. Keep up the comments." "My mother and I always use Casting and it works very well, even with black toner. And my hair is not the most hydrated. I've already used other types of coloration that did not last long and after seeing the post here on Facebook I have never bough anything else."
	Community policies	Messages that address the community use policy	No messages were identified during the analysis
	Community members	Messages that address other members of the community	"Hi, Amanda. Talk to Elisa about the beauty ritual [. . .]" "Joana look at this comment from Iara" "I think Lara is a hairdresser, right?"

Table V.
Category criteria and examples of messages

The emotional dimension, in this case, emerged in polarized forms (positive or negative, of high or low intensity, over a long or short term) and could be ascertained as constructed by esteem, empathy, confidence, security and belonging (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). Product posts were the second highest most prevalent topic, centered on discussions about products, prices, discounts and free samples. The nature of these posts and interactions is related to the cognitive dimension, since, according to Mollen and Wilson (2010), the exchange of experiences on this type of theme contributes to the instrumental value and usefulness that the community must possess to maintain its members. Furthermore, with regard to the cognitive aspect, consumer posts on anecdotal lessons learned from product use corroborate Bourdieu's (1983) perspective of social capital: individuals relate to others by considering utilitarian logic. For example, on August 19, 2016, consumers exchanged messages about the use of a product. The nature of these interactions is shown in Table VI.

The behavioral dimension (Brodie *et al.*, 2011) can be observed in posts highlighting prices and promotions at points of sale and, undoubtedly, in community participation activities, such as liking, commenting and clicking on published links. Reinforcing the instrumental perspective, consumers communicated their intention of searching for and buying the products. In most of the requests for support in this process, L'Oréal Paris Brazil indicated the most suitable place to buy the product or even educated users on how to obtain a free sample, as seen in a post on August 15, 2016. The fan page suggestion and instructions on how to acquire a free sample of BB Cream (a combination of beauty products such as primer and foundation in one product) involved clicking on the link to a website pasted on the post thread.

Once the present researchers had identified the emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions present in the messages exchanged in the VBC, the next step was to analyze user engagement based on the five FPs proposed by Brodie *et al.* (2011). Considering the first FP, engagement must be a reflection of the client's psychological state as a function of interactive experiences with an object. In this case, the community manifested consistent themes, such as the brand and products being discussed in the form of exchange of user experiences and recommendations, going beyond the simple stimulus to purchase. For the second FP, some consumers participated by interacting through comments that contributed to the co-creation of brand value. It is important to consider that the Facebook Reactions count and post sharing volume (even in large quantities) do not necessarily contribute much to the community, since it is not possible to establish value judgments or even a user's learning curve by observing these indicators. In other words, the present researchers had to consider consumer narratives and experiences exchanged through comments with each other or the entire community, as suggested by Muniz and O'guinn (2001), when investigating the basic characteristics of a VBC.

Considering the third FP, engagement has correlated terms that act as antecedents, like participation and involvement, and consequently as affection and loyalty, which should not be used as equivalent terms. For new members of a community, participation is a

Cognitive dimension

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Consumer 5 | "L'Oréal Paris, thanks for the tip! I've already found it, it's really cool!" |
| Consumer 6 | "It was money down the drain. My hair was heavy and worse than before I washed it, and the scent is very strong, I did not like it." |
| Consumer 7 | "LV. my hair is completely different after using this product. The treatments respond better. Try it, you'll like it! Kisses" |
-

Table VI.
Posts regarding the
cognitive dimension

prerequisite for community engagement, as acting within a fan page (through Facebook Reactions, sharing, and/or commenting) is required to engage with the posts. For current members, contribution is a consequence of consumer-brand interaction, and their level of participation is related to the extension to which each consumer is engaged with the brand. On the L'Oréal Paris Brazil Facebook fan page, most consumers were involved, as they had accessed brand content. They then exchanged or interacted with this content, albeit infrequently, to the extent that the level of participation in the community is low and the state of immersion, which presupposes total focus on the object of engagement, hardly ever occurs.

Despite identifying members and posts that pointed to a sense of belonging and community, when considering the total volume of network participants, the number of active participants was not very extensive. In this case, satisfaction and trust also functioned as antecedents, since the permanence of the individual in the community is influenced by these conditions. As suggested by [Habibi et al. \(2014\)](#), the motivators of participation in a VBC reflect the perceived benefits resulting from the exchanges themselves, elicited in two distinct natures: a hedonist nature, explained by social identity theory ([Tajfel and Turner, 1986](#)), and a utilitarian nature, explained by social capital theory ([Bourdieu, 1983](#)).

The fourth FP postulates that the concept of consumer engagement from the marketing perspective is multidimensional, consisting of cognitive, behavioral and emotional aspects. From the categorization of the fan page content, activities were found that support this FP, although the total volume was not representative. Many posts contained statements on the learning process related to hair care or style (cognitive dimension), product searches and purchases (behavioral dimension) and declarations of affection and recommendations (emotional dimension). In this sense, engagement has different levels of intensity, given that the objects or topics of discussion vary. For instance, a single post made by L'Oréal Paris Brazil showed very intense declarations of consumer affection, using both words and pictures, as well as trivial and mundane requests for from another consumer to purchase products.

This scenario was predicted by the fifth FP, which points to the existence of different levels of engagement with different objects of engagement. Furthermore, as proposed by [Brodie et al. \(2013\)](#), the authors identified, observed and interpreted sub-processes that occurred in a repeated and non-linear way. Both learning, characterized by the display of cognitive skills, and sharing, which results from collaboration of value co-creation, were exemplified by an interaction on October 26, 2016, in which a consumer asked whether the advertised product could be mixed with other products, as shown in [Table VII](#).

Learning and sharing sub-processes

Consumer 6 L'Oréal Paris Brazil	"Anyone know if this shampoo affects straightened hair? I really want to buy it." "Hello, Consumer 6! The Elseve Hydra Detox is recommended for chemically treated hair! Any questions, contact us!"
Consumer 7	"You told me that it does not remove any chemicals, but it did the first time I used it."
Consumer 6 L'Oréal Paris Brazil	"Seriously, so I will not buy it." "Hello, Consumer 4! Please send us a private message about your experience with the product, email address and phone with DDD so that we can help you as best we can. You can always count on us."

Table VII.
Posts regarding
learning and sharing
Sub-processes

Subsequent reports of positive experiences from other consumers followed. According to Brodie *et al.* (2013), advocacy occurs when a consumer, based on self-experience, recommends a product and/or its use to the rest of the community, as was the case in a post on September 29, 2016, with regard to an Elseve brand product. The advocacy sub-process is illustrated in Table VIII.

The socialization sub-process reinforces the sense of belonging and the self-referral process within the VBC. It was typified in posts where certain users made statements of affection for the brand amongst themselves (Muniz and Schau, 2007; Longmore, 1998). Finally, co-creation is a sub-process in which members of the community help to improve the offerings of the organization (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016; Lusch and Vargo, 2006). Few references to this sub-process were found on the fan page, but it can be exemplified by the suggestion, presented earlier, for products for afro-descendant consumers and the ensuing interaction from the company.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence found in this study concerning subjects and themes that sustain and amplify the engagement process support the conceptual models found in the literature. Based on the social relations and exchanged content that occur within a VBC, it is possible to discern the triggers of participation motivators (Habibi *et al.*, 2014). In a fan page context, given the low level of intra-group participation and activities, it is plausible that the main motivator is not what is produced by the members themselves or by the brand, such as stories, experiences and/or product information. Instead, the primary reason why a consumer likes a brand's fan page on Facebook and joins the network is explained by social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In this case, L'Oréal Paris Brazil fans liked the Facebook fan page due to their personal identification with the meanings evoked by the brand in the acts of consumption and social engagement, such as status and self-reference (Habibi *et al.*, 2014; Muniz and Schau, 2007).

Although the brand proposed content that corroborates the edification of a universe of meanings, consumers made little effort to correlate, using Facebook Reactions to react or to legitimize what was published. In doing so, the content dynamics on the fan page were one-sided. Members preferred to take a passive stance rather than show reactive behavior to what was initially published by the organization. These relationship dynamics in a VBC do not constitute the process of value co-creation needed for consumer engagement (Vivek, 2009). This passiveness can be explained by the phenomenon of lurking (Mousavi *et al.*, 2017; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Schlosser, 2006), and it can be inferred that brand reconnaissance takes place and is associated with the action of liking and/or sharing the post in large volumes, albeit with few comments.

Considering the tools provided by Facebook and social network dynamics, it can be said that Facebook Reactions promote less value for the community compared with comments, as they only suggest that a user possibly agrees with the post. The user's value judgment (s)

Advocacy sub-process

Table VIII.
Posts regarding the
advocacy sub-
process

Consumer 8	"I cannot live without them. . . All the products have a unique touch and feel. I'm biased since I love all L'Oréal products. I always suggest it [the brand] to my customers!"
Consumer 9	"I love this Elseve Total Repair [. . .] really good, I recommend it!!!"
Consumer 10	"Mine is the white one, sorry that it's hard to find his ampoule which is wonderful too and I really recommend it."

or any significant affective reaction are not clear. Sharing of a post does not necessarily indicate legitimization or agreement with the post, since it is possible to insert a comment that simply, for example, establishes a relevant opinion. Comments are, therefore, the tool that best enables a greater connection with the propositions of the community and the process of co-construction of value that sustains engagement.

When identifying levels and/or types of engagement in the context of Brodie *et al.*'s (2013) three dimensions of consumer engagement, the act of using Facebook Reactions on a fan page is a strong indicator of the behavioral dimension of engagement. This operation indicates that a member has clicked a button, but it does not ensure that the content was read and/or absorbed in order to incorporate a value judgment. The act of sharing a post and using the Facebook Reactions button is further evidence of the behavioral dimension. However, prior to the decision-making process involved in sharing content, members may have made a value judgment when deciding whether to share the content or not. Finally, commenting on a post by the brand makes clear the existence of all three dimensions (cognitive, behavioral and emotional), with an additional emphasis on the emotional dimension, as members expose themselves to the entire community, which can interfere in its process of self-reference (Muniz and Schau, 2007).

This research sought to clarify the antecedents required to generate a state of engagement, such as interaction intent and participation, which would consequently create a connection with the focal brand. Even though the fan page is one of the largest in Brazil and, considering the integrative definition of engagement adopted for this study, the L'Oréal Paris Brazil fan page does not present high levels of engagement, given that the consumer base that actually interacts with the brand does not promote value co-creation. Consumer engagement in a VBC is considered a complex psychological state dependent on a multitude of variables that go beyond simple interaction and participation. Thus, the present researchers have concluded that the conceptual model of consumer engagement in a VBC (Brodie *et al.*, 2013) is valid for analyzing fan pages on Facebook. The present study showed that the dimensions, processes, and sub-processes of engagement were present in the page dynamics, occurring at varying intensities and frequencies, corroborating the FPs that support the consumer engagement construct in a VBC. Even though a regional fan page was used, there were no disparities and no need to adapt the model for analysis.

This study contributes to the field by bridging the empirical gap in consumer engagement studies, specifically in the context of social networks. As for the managerial contribution, the study contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of brand building on the internet, with consumer engagement used as a tool to increase brand value and drive value co-creation. Regarding the limitations of the study, it should be emphasized that the findings were based on a high-end beauty product brand, and the present researchers are cautious about generalizing their findings to wider audiences and different categories. That being said, the consumer engagement conceptual model was sufficiently robust to identify the extent to which consumers interact with brands. Although caution must be exercised in terms of generalizability, this study could attract attention to important topics pertaining to consumer engagement for both scholars and practitioners. For practitioners, as the sense of belonging and affection is the primary element driving consumer engagement, all communication strategies should include these initiatives. For scholars, understanding which aspects in communication trigger higher levels of "belonging" and "affection" would be of great interest. Furthermore, the tridimensional aspect of engagement must be fully acknowledged by the marketing community. Practitioners have focused excessively on the behavioral dimension, leaving room for greater attention on the emotional and cognitive dimensions. Scholars must take action regarding the integrative perspectives of this

framework, both theoretical and empirically. Furthermore, a vast range of paths related to this topic can be explored in future studies. Longitudinal studies on VBCs can be carried out to enable a better understanding of consumer engagement. Studies exploring lurking (the reasons why a consumer enters a VBC but does not participate or co-create value) could be conducted. Quantitative models can be used to model and evaluate consumer engagement using Brodie *et al.*'s (2013) conceptual model of engagement. Finally, the conceptual model can be used to gauge whether the model is applicable to social networks that do not revolve around virtual communities, such as Twitter.

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