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The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement with the Brand Community and Its Effect on Corporate Reputation

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ABSTRACT

The literature on media management addresses social media as a means for brands to build relationships, share experiences, communicate interactively, and collectively with consumers, and compete for the attention and engagement of their audiences to maximize performance. In this paper, we check the impact of brand involvement and perceived homophily on consumer engagement with brand communities in social media and the effect of the latter on corporate reputation. We find that community engagement has a strong, positive association with corporate reputation and fully mediates the relationship between brand involvement and perceived homophily with corporate reputation. As reputation positively influences sales and profitability, our results provide important managerial implications for online media professionals, brand managers and marketers, agents who develop communication and content strategies for social media brand communities with the aim of enhancing corporate performance.



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Introduction

The extant research recognizes that brand management media activities, such as advertising (Fombrun & Shanly, 1990), exposure (Wartick, 1992), communication (Gray & Balmer, 1998), publicity (Carter, 2006) and public relations (Cornelissen, 2008), have impacts on brands' corporate reputation. This study partially addresses the drivers of brand corporate reputation attributable to branding in social media, in particular, the building of community engagement and two of its antecedents. We test a theoretical framework with brand involvement and perceived homophily as the antecedents of social media community engagement and the relation of the latter with corporate reputation (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Wirtz et al., 2013).

The number of people connected to the internet has consistently grown from 2.87% of the world population in 2000 to 40.65% in 2010 (World Bank, 2015). Research suggests that creating a brand community or page on social

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media improves brand corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015), increases sales and returns on investments, fosters positive word-of-mouth (Kumar, Bhaskaran, Mirchandani, & Shah, 2013) and is associated with brand equity (Aaker, 1996), leading most of the Fortune Global 100 companies (87%) to be active on at least one social media platform (Burson-Marsteller, 2012). For Guo (2014), social media is an effective channel for brands to build relationships and to promote experience sharing, a function lacking in traditional mass communication media.

Lueg (2001) states that brand management and corporate communication might bring benefits to companies when computer networks are the means for these activities. Social media allows for connectivity with consumers personally, interactively, and collectively, as a two-way marketing channel, and competes for the consumers' leisure time, providing opportunities for brands to retool their marketing strategies (Chan-Olmsted, 2011).

Will and Porak (2000) state that corporate communication needs to generate knowledge and trust to brands and to call for consumers' attention, requiring communication strategies to move into a community approach. Engagement is an important variable to integrate communication with communities in digital platforms (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018), as online engagement is a recognized criterion to assess the performance of the interaction with audiences in the online space, a common challenge for website managers and marketers (Yang & Coffey, 2014). As a result of the interest of brands and researchers, the term engagement (Mollen and Wilson 2010) is frequently used to represent the relationships between brands and consumers in social media, playing a central role in the process of relational exchange (Brodie, Ilić, Jurić, & Hollebeek, 2013).

Although there are different vectors of engagement in social media, the literature on online brand communities indicates that the brand and the community are the most relevant (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015, 2016). Schaedel and Clement (2010) found that online community engagement is influenced by social status, social relations and social identity. Likewise, Salo, Lankinen, and Mäntymäki (2013) identified affinity, interaction and social identity as reasons for social media participation. Davies Mersey, Malthouse and Calder (2010) define two dimensions of engagement with online media: (1) personal and (2) social interactive. Kim (2017) highlights the importance of people's ideology and familiarity in the process of building media brand personality, which is meant to make customers congruent to the brand-self and to provide behavioral and attitudinal outcomes for brands.

As the literature indicates that brands and community followers (Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015) are the vectors of interaction between brands and consumers in social media (Dessart et al., 2016), the effects of consumers' identification with other members and their involvement with the brand itself

on engagement need to be understood. We test brand involvement and perceived homophily – the degree to which interacting individuals perceive themselves to be similar to each other in relation to attributes such as beliefs, values, education and social status, demographics and behavior – as antecedents of community engagement. Furthermore, we assess the mediation role of community engagement between its two antecedents and corporate reputation.

Other studies have examined the nomological validity of community engagement with other relational concepts, such as 1) brand commitment and online interaction propensity as concurrent constructs (Dessart et al., 2016), p. 2) behavioral intention of brand loyalty as a consequence (So, King, & Sparks, 2014); and, p. 3) brand community identification as an antecedent (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). There are no studies, however, that jointly examined the relational antecedents of engagement associated with the brand and community members.

Algesheimer et al. (2005) found that community engagement leads to membership continuance, membership recommendation, and participation intentions, resulting in brand loyalty and brand-related purchases, community membership duration, community recommendation, and community participation. Dijkmans et al. (2015) and Li, Berens, and de Maertelaere (2013) reveal that consumer online engagement enhances brand corporate reputation. Nevertheless, no study connects community engagement to corporate reputation while addressing its mediation role in linking perceived homophily and brand involvement to corporate reputation.

Our study differs from others on community engagement because it combines personal involvement with brand characteristics and homophily perception with other members as drivers of community engagement. This study also indirectly connects these antecedents to corporate reputation by means of community engagement, positioning social media management as central for the development of the latter.

Chan-Olmsted and Wolter (2018) consider media engagement as a multidimensional construct that is important for brands to obtain the audiences' attention. The authors highlight the difficulties in measuring such engagement in a conceptually meaningful and methodologically accessible manner, given its complexity, as it varies according to the subject, object and context in which it is analyzed (Dessart et al., 2016). Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, and Morgan (2014) developed a brand engagement scale applicable to different contexts and objects, which has been validated with objects such as product, brand, and retail, being one widely used and replicated in several contexts, including social media (see Aragão, 2016). By specifying the consumer as a subject, the brand community as an object and social media as a context, we advance this concept by adapting this scale to assess engagement with brand communities in social media.

In the next section, we review the media management literature, which states that media activities can foster corporate reputation. We focus on the characteristics of social media in terms of interactivity, collectiveness and relationship building that differ from those of traditional mass communication media. We explain its advantages to compete for consumer attention and engagement. Then, we describe the aspects of social media community engagement that might lead to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes – in particular, corporate reputation. Next, we connect the characteristics of brand involvement and homophily perception to the building of engagement in social media, as they are the pillars that sustain the framework that we propose and are used to set the hypotheses and their respective testing procedures. Finally, the testing of the proposed framework and its results allow for a discussion and conclusions on how we advance knowledge in this field and how these activities can be addressed by practitioners.

We expect that the proposed mechanisms of engagement building in brand communities tested in this article may bring practical applications for media managers, which should help them take advantage of social media environments to enhance community engagement and improve the reputation of the brands they manage.

Literature review

The literature largely addresses the relation between media brand management and corporate management. Variables such as advertising activity and media visibility (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), media exposure (Wartick, 1992), communication (Gray & Balmer, 1998), mass publicity (Carter, 2006), public relations and press releases (Cornelissen, 2008) are drivers of corporate strategy and reputation. In the specific domains of social media, Aula (2010) considers it a context that expands the dynamics and implications for reputation management, while Dijkmans et al. (2015) find that consumers' intensity of social media use is positively related to their engagement in social media activities, which fosters brand corporate reputation.

In a scenario in which consumers place more trust in online reviews from consumers than in traditional media (Nielsen, 2012), it is increasingly important that companies develop brand communities or pages to interact with people online, create shareable content, deal with negative content online, and follow up on what is shared by means of social media (Dijkmans et al., 2015). In these brand–consumer interactions, Fournier (1998) suggests that a brand may be a legitimate partner, an active object that contributes to a dyad. This proposal is legitimized by the understanding that a brand can be animated, humanized, or somehow personalized. A brand may act as a 'close friend' and interact with consumers by means of personification, thus behaving as an active member in the

relationship. In addition, consumers may attribute traits of human personality to brands (Aaker, 1997), Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) argue that online social networks themselves (e.g., brand fan pages) can also act as primary actors and serve as a proxy for individual identification who follow them.

We organize the following literature review by first connecting brand management to social media and presenting its implications to brand corporate reputation. Then, we address community engagement as an effective tool for brand management in social media and describe brand involvement and homophily perception as antecedents of community engagement, following the theoretical framework development and hypotheses building.

Corporate reputation, brand management, social media and community engagement

Corporate reputation is a valuable and intangible asset that influences consumer buying decisions (Ponzi, Fombrun, & Gardberg, 2011). Corporate reputation results from company actions (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001) and is a collective phenomenon that includes direct and indirect interaction experiences (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). While recognizing that corporate reputation forms in the assessment of different stakeholders, the importance of customers has stood out (Walsh & Beatty, 2007), which is evidenced in the number of studies that assess reputation only with this group.

Brand management complexity increases with the emergence of social media and review sites. It is more difficult to monitor and shape corporate reputation when consumers have changed their way of seeking information (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Studies recognize many actors in social media that contribute to attract followers, such as managers (e.g., bloggers or brand managers), community members and other followers (Brown et al., 2007). Consumers can engage with brand community, with other followers and/or with the social media itself (Baldus et al., 2015) to obtain information and assessments about brands.

One of the first researchers to combine the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements of customer brand engagement, Hollebeek (2011) defines it as “the level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions” (p. 790). Another consumer engagement definition is that it “goes beyond the purchase and is the level of the customer’s (or potential customer’s) interactions and connections with the brand or firm’s offerings or activities, often involving others in the social network created around the brand/offering/activity” (Vivek et al., 2014, p. 406).

Davies Mersey et al. (2010) divide engagement into two components: (1) personal and (2) social interactive. The personal component is defined as an individual effort driven by the identification with the brand, an involvement observed as customers are subject to ideology and familiarity effects that maximize brand-self congruence on behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Kim, 2017). In that component, the reasons for social media participation would be the identification with the object's content and affinity with the brand (Salo et al., 2013), as the perception of the conversion of a brand personality on one's self usually leads to positive outcomes (Nienstedt, Huber, & Seelmann, 2012).

The social interactive component of engagement represents the effort to engage interactively and collectively with brands and other agents, which is typical from online communities and is usually driven by interactions motivated by social status, social relations, and social identity building (Salo et al., 2013; Schaedel & Clement, 2010).

In the next section, we describe the connections between brand involvement and perceived homophily with community engagement as triggered by brand personality building and the identification of participants with other community members.

Customer brand involvement and perceived homophily as drivers of community engagement

According to McDowell (2004), customer-based brand associations are stronger and more durable when they include intangible characteristics. Involvement is defined as the perceived personal relevance or importance of a product or brand (Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003; Mittal, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994). Involvement is related to but different than consumer engagement, as the former refers to a more passive allocation of mental resources (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Many studies connect brand involvement with impacts on consumer engagement, namely, Brodie et al. (2013), Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014), Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson (2016), Li, Berens, and Maertelaere (2013), Mollen and Wilson (2010), and Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012).

Involvement antecedes the personal aspect of engagement by means of the development of brand ideology and familiarity, which fosters the consumers' perception of brand-self congruence (Kim, 2017) and brand personality as their own (Nienstedt et al., 2012). Involvement also antecedes personal engagement because of the recognition of content relevance and affinity (Salo et al., 2013). Thus, social media, as a means for brands to personally connect with consumers (Chan-Olmsted, 2011), presents an opportunity to build community engagement.

According to McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001), homophily refers to the degree to which interacting individuals are similar to each

other in attributes such as beliefs, values, education and social status, demographic factors, and behaviors. Homophily holds the principle that interactions with similar people occur more frequently than with different people (McPherson et al., 2001). Attribute similarity can occur between people, organizations or entities in a network.

Authors such as Alkhateeb, Alli, and Moussa (2012) and Tukachinsky and Tokunaga (2013) state that homophily may have impacts on consumer engagement with different objects. The perception of homophily between consumers and brands in social media might activate drivers of engagement, such as the convergence of perception of brand personality with the consumer's own personality (Niensedt, 20120), the building of affinity (Salo et al., 2013), and the identification of a shared ideology and familiarity with the brand, a phenomenon known as brand-self congruence (Kim, 2017).

Homophily directly antecedes the social interactive aspect of engagement because it enhances its motivations, such as the development of social status, social relations and social exposure (Schaedel & Clement, 2010), and the building of social identification with other members of social media online communities (Salo et al., 2013; Schaedel & Clement, 2010). As social media is a means for brands to connect with consumers interactively and collectively (Chan-Olmsted, 2011) and for building relationships and experience sharing (Guo, 2014), it is appropriate for promoting the perception of homophily between community members.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

As the literature indicates that homophily (Alkhateeb et al., 2012; Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013) and involvement (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016; Li et al., 2013; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Vivek et al., 2012) might have impacts on consumer engagement, which in turn can improve corporate reputation (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Li et al., 2013), we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1: Perceived homophily with other members is positively correlated with brand involvement in brand communities.
- H2: Perceived homophily is positively associated with consumer engagement with brand community.
- H3: Brand involvement is positively associated with consumer engagement with brand community.
- H4: Consumer engagement with brand community is positively associated with corporate reputation.

Considering the central role of engagement and the lack of previous evidence of a direct relationship between perceived homophily and brand involvement with corporate reputation, we propose that engagement is an important mediator of this relationship. Consequently, we expect the indirect (mediated) relationship to be strong and propose the following hypotheses:

- H5: Consumer engagement with brand community significantly mediates the relationship between perceived homophily and corporate reputation.
- H6: Consumer engagement with brand community significantly mediates the relationship between brand involvement and corporate reputation.

Method

Sample

We ran a survey with followers of different brand pages and used the Vidi Shoppers database, one of the main and most representative online databases of consumers in Brazil. With access to more than 60,000 people from different regions of the country, Vidi services companies such as Nike, Unilever, Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, Red Bull, and Nestlé. Respondents have to cite the brand whose fan page they most interact with and to indicate their level of agreement with a set of affirmatives.

As filters, we asked respondents if they had a Facebook account, if they followed brand fan pages and their recent frequency of Facebook use. Those who did not have a Facebook profile, did not follow brands and/or did not access Facebook frequently were excluded. We also asked the respondents to select, among the brands they followed, one that they liked and interacted with regularly. This factor was the reference brand for the items in the scale. As a final check, we verified the pages indicated by respondents and deleted the questionnaires that related to inactive or low interaction pages (see Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002), the ones with less than seven brand posts in the most recent week.

Measures

Homophily

McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) developed a scale to measure perceived homophily. Although it has two dimensions – attitude and background – the background dimension does not make sense in the context of social media (Chu & Kim, 2011). We follow Chu and Kim (2011) and use only the attitude dimension of McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006) updated homophily scale.

Consumer involvement

We measure consumer involvement by means of 8 of 10 items from the semantic differential scale developed by Zaichkowsky (1994). Mittal (1995) evaluated the four main scales of involvement in a comparative analysis and found that the most cited and replicated was elaborated by Zaichkowsky (1985), the personal involvement inventory scale, revised and reduced from 20 to 10 items (Zaichkowsky, 1994). As previous research used this scale to assess the relationship of involvement with consumer engagement in social media (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014), we also employed it. Two items, unimportant/important and mundane/fascinating, were excluded by Hollebeek et al. (2014), who suggested that they did not fit the social media context (Varki & Wong, 2003).

Consumer engagement

There are several scales to measure engagement as a multidimensional construct (Baldus et al., 2015; Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). In the context of media engagement, Chan-Olmsted and Wolter (2018) state that there are difficulties in measuring engagement in a way that is conceptually meaningful and methodologically accessible because of its complex, multidimensional nature.

Vivek et al. (2014) developed a scale for multiple contexts, and Dessart et al. (2016) developed a scale for multiple objects. Although Dessart et al.'s scale (2016) has been developed in the social media context to analyze engagement with brand or brand community, it contains seven dimensions and 22 items, making it difficult to include it in an instrument with other concepts.

With 10 items and three dimensions and validated with products, brands and retail stores, Vivek et al.'s (2014) scale is one of the most used and has been replicated many times. This scale was also validated in the context of social media (see Aragão, 2016). In addition to being suitable for several contexts, the scale of Vivek et al. (2014) can be used with different objects, such as brand community. Thus, we chose to replicate the scale of Vivek et al. (2014) – composed of the dimensions of conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection – to measure brand community engagement.

Corporate reputation

Although one-item scales represent a simplification of the construct, multiple items such as 'company has a good overall reputation' or 'reputation of company is better than other companies' have presented satisfactory results and are indicated for model validations (Walsh, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009), as is the case in this research. We used the three items developed by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) to measure corporate reputation.

To standardize all scales, we decided to use five-point Likert and semantic differential scales. The items and scales are presented in [Table 1](#).

Analysis and procedures

Pretests and final surveys were collected with Qualtrics and made available to the Vidi Shoppers database. We performed two pretests: one aimed specifically to verify whether the writing of the items was appropriate and the other to check whether the different types of brands (e.g., beverage, media, sports, electronics, retailers, industries, among others) hindered the understanding of respondents.

As pretests were satisfactory, we collected the final data and analyzed them by means of covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) with Amos 22.0 software (IBM, Chicago, IL). We followed Fornell and Larcker's procedure (1981) to test the composite reliability and construct convergent and discriminant validity. Finally, we analyzed the structural model considering the chi-square per degree of freedom (χ^2/df), GFI, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA indices for model fit, providing a good background for assessing the suitability of the estimated model.

Sample description

Our final sample had 277 valid responses. The sample consisted mostly of women (62.5%), married respondents (50.9%), those with higher education (33.5%), and the mean age was 35.2 years (standard deviation of 9.78). One hundred sixty-six different brands were followed, with a wide variety of sectors, company sizes, and brand communities. The most cited brands were Samsung (16), Nike (12), Flamengo (football team) (9), Apple (6), Adidas (5), Dafiti (e-commerce) (5) and Fiat (5), while the sectors that stood out were technology, hygiene and cosmetics, sports, automotive, fashion, retail, and food and beverage. Regarding the scale items, [Table 1](#) shows their means and standard deviations.

Results and discussion

Results

We used maximum likelihood estimation and started with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each construct and then analyzed the structural model. As a result of the CFA, five items were excluded (see [Table 1](#)). Among these, we excluded one item per engagement dimension (CA2, EP3, and SC1), with factor loadings between .67 and .71, to improve the convergent and discriminant validity of the dimensions. Considering that we applied the

Table 1. Scales for constructs measurement and descriptive statistics.

Construct	Source	Item	Items description	M	SD
Brand involvement	Zaichkowsky (1994)	[Brand] is:			
		Inv2	Boring/Interesting	4.18	1.00
		Inv3	Irrelevant/Relevant	3.96	0.96
		Inv4	Unexciting/Exciting	3.77	1.03
		Inv5	Means nothing/Means a lot to me	3.74	1.07
		Inv6	Unappealing/Appealing*	4.08	0.98
		Inv8	Worthless/Valuable	4.00	0.99
		Inv9	Uninvolving/Involving	3.92	0.98
		Inv10	Not needed/Needed	3.97	0.98
Perceived homophily (attitude dimension)	McCroskey et al. (2006)	Other followers of the [Brand] community:			
		H1	Does not think like me/Thinks like me	3.64	0.96
		H2	Behaves like me/Does not behave like me	3.46	1.03
		H3	Similar to me/Different from me	3.54	0.99
		H4	Unlike me/Like me	3.48	0.98
CE with brand community (conscious attention dimension)	Vivek et al. (2014)	CA1	Publications related to the [Brand] community on Facebook grabs my attention	3.75	0.94
		CA2	I like to learn more about [Brand] through its Facebook community*	3.72	1.09
		CA3	I pay a lot of attention to the publications related to the [Brand] community on Facebook	3.78	0.96
CE with brand community (enthusied participation dimension)	Vivek et al. (2014)	EP1	I spend a lot of my discretionary time interacting with [Brand] community on Facebook	2.63	1.21
		EP2	I am heavily into [Brand] community on Facebook	3.14	1.10
		EP3	I am passionate about publications on [Brand] community on Facebook*	3.40	1.10
		EP4	My days would not be the same without the [Brand] community on Facebook	2.26	1.28
CE with brand community (social connection dimension)	Vivek et al. (2014)	SC1	I like to interact with the [Brand] community on Facebook when my friends are also interacting*	3.35	1.14
		SC2	I enjoy [Brand] community on Facebook more when there are other people interacting	3.24	1.10
		SC3	It is more fun to interact with the [Brand] community on Facebook when other people participate in the interaction	3.42	1.14
Corporate reputation	Nguyen and Leblanc (2001)	Rep1	In general, I believe that [Brand] always fulfills the promises it makes to its customers	3.88	0.95
		Rep2	[Brand] has a good reputation	4.29	0.81
		Rep3	I believe that the reputation of [Brand] is better than that other companies*	3.82	0.93

Notes – *Excluded items; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; n = 227; Five-points Likert and semantic differential scales.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix, reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity.

	M	SD	α	CR	Inv	Hom	CA	EP	SC	Rep
Involvement (Inv)	3.93	1.00	.93	.93	.65	.22	.21	.13	.09	.19
Homophily (Hom)	3.53	.99	.89	.89	.47***	.66	.12	.09	.07	.06
Conscious attention (CA)	3.76	.95	.68	.68	.46***	.35***	.51	.47	.30	.46
Enthusied participation (EP)	2.67	1.25	.76	.76	.36***	.30***	.69***	.51	.45	.05
Social connection (SC)	3.33	1.12	.75	.76	.30***	.27***	.55***	.67***	.61	.13
Reputation (Rep)	4.09	.91	.68	.68	.44***	.24**	.68***	.22**	.36***	.52

Notes – M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; ***bivariate correlations between the constructs significant at $p < .001$ or at ** $p < .01$; AVEs are shown on the diagonal (in bold); squared correlations are shown above the diagonal; $n = 277$.

engagement scale in a specific context and with a different object from its original application, these items may have lost meaning. As Inv6 presented the lowest factor loading (.73) and a high modification index (19.6, associated with item Inv4), it might not fit into the context of social media very well; thus, we chose to exclude it as well. Finally, we excluded item REP3, 'I believe that the reputation of [Brand] is better than that of other companies', which had a factor loading of .61. We believe that not specifying that 'other companies' were 'competitors in the same industry' might have led to misinterpretation. In the final model, the remaining items presented factor loadings between .68 and .88.

We also performed a CFA with all six constructs (involvement, homophily, reputation, and the three engagement dimensions) to check for the correlations among them (see Table 2). Table 2 shows that the reliability of the constructs stands between .68 and .93 and that the average variance extracted (AVE) is between .51 and .66, suggesting convergent validity. As the variances between pairs of constructs were smaller than the variances within the constructs (AVE), our results also indicate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) for the 15 possible pairs of constructs.

Finally, the hypothesized structural model (Figure 1) showed a good fit: $\chi^2(163) = 335.388$ ($p < .001$); $\chi^2/df = 2.058$; GFI = .891; TLI = .931; CFI = .941; and RMSEA = .062. The standardized regression weights of all items were satisfactory (between .68 and .88). We applied the Harman factor test, and the first factor explained only 34% of the data variance (less than 50%), meaning there is no common method variance.

Hypothesis testing

As shown in Figure 1, we found a positive and significant correlation between perceived homophily and brand involvement (supporting H1) and positive and significant associations of the antecedents (perceived homophily and brand involvement) and the consequent (corporate reputation) constructs with consumer engagement with brand community, thus supporting H2, H3, and H4. The results of these hypotheses tests are detailed in Table 3.

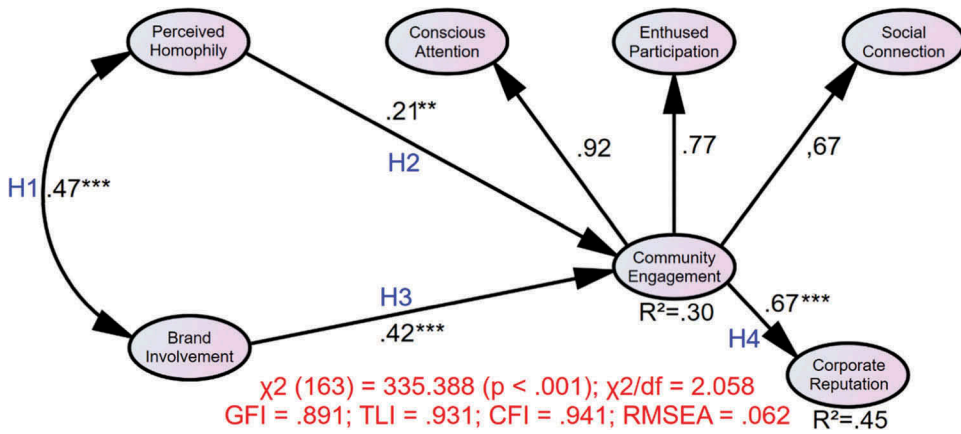


Figure 1. Hypothesized structural model.

Notes – β = Standardized regression weight; *** $p < .001$; at ** $p < .01$; H5 and H6 (mediation hypotheses) are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing results.

No.	Hypothesis	β	($t_{critical}$)	p	Result
H1	Perceived homophily with other members is correlated with brand involvement in brand communities.	.470	6.145	<.001	Confirmed
H2	Perceived homophily is positively associated with consumer engagement with brand community.	.206	2.655	.008	Confirmed
H3	Brand involvement is positively associated with consumer engagement with brand community.	.421	5.162	<.001	Confirmed
H4	Consumer engagement with brand community is positively associated with corporate reputation.	.670	6.608	<.001	Confirmed

Notes – β = Standardized regression weight.

We also conducted two tests to check for the mediation hypotheses. Mediation tests are usually employed to verify whether the specification of the model makes sense. The model specification states that homophily and involvement affect corporate reputation by means of community engagement. We followed Baron and Kenny (1986), who suggest that there is partial mediation when the insertion of the mediator in the model reduces the effect of the independent variable on the dependent and total mediation when this relation becomes non-significant.

We found significant direct relationships between perceived homophily and community engagement ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$), perceived homophily and corporate reputation ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .09$), and community engagement and corporate reputation ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .39$). With the inclusion of the mediator variable, only community engagement ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$) contributed significantly to explaining corporate reputation ($R^2 = .37$). The effect of perceived homophily ($\beta = .11$, $p = .13$) on corporate reputation became not significant, indicating that community engagement is a full mediator of this relationship (the coefficient between perceived homophily and corporate reputation reduced from .30 to .11).

Table 4. Result of mediation hypotheses.

No.	Hypothesis	Direct effect	<i>p</i>	Indirect effect	<i>p</i>	Result
H5	Consumer engagement with brand community significantly mediates the relationship between perceived homophily and corporate reputation.	.023	.815	.107	.009	Full mediation
H6	Consumer engagement with brand community significantly mediates the relationship between brand involvement and corporate reputation.	.196	.118	.205	<.001	Full mediation

Notes – β = Standardized regression weight.

In relation to brand involvement, we also verified significant direct relationships with community engagement ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .22$) and with a corporate reputation ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$), as well as the relationship between community engagement and corporate reputation ($p < .001$, $R^2 = .39$). By including community engagement as a mediator, both brand involvement ($\beta = .20$, $p = .013$) and community engagement ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$) significantly explained corporate reputation ($R^2 = .43$), indicating a partial mediation of community engagement (reducing the coefficient between brand involvement and corporate reputation from .46 to .20).

Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) criticize the criteria adopted by Baron and Kenny (1986). According to the authors, a significant indirect effect is enough to present mediation, even when the direct effect is never significant. We employed, as recommended, 5,000 bootstrap samples at the 95% confidence level (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and ran the hypothesized structural model (see Figure 1), including a direct relationship between perceived homophily and corporate reputation and another between brand involvement and corporate reputation.

Our results (see Table 4) show significant indirect effects (mediated by community engagement) both between perceived homophily and corporate reputation ($\beta = .10$, $p = .009$) and between brand involvement and corporate reputation ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$). As we identified the non-significant direct effects of perceived homophily ($\beta = .02$, $p = .815$) and brand involvement ($\beta = .196$, $p = .118$) on corporate reputation, the results suggest full mediation for both. According to Zhao et al. (2010), our results correspond to indirect-only mediation, suggesting that the mediator cannot be omitted and providing support for H5 and H6.

Discussion and concluding remarks

In this study, we confirm the impact of perceived homophily and brand involvement on community engagement in social media. We also confirm that perceived homophily and brand involvement have a positive effect on corporate reputation, fully mediated by community engagement (Dijkmans

et al., 2015). Thus, we contribute by approximating two major currents of study in social media brand management: brand engagement and community engagement, as suggested by Dessart et al. (2016).

By confirming the relations in our framework, we contribute to the literature on media management showing that social media might serve as an effective two-way marketing channel for building relationships, sharing experiences (Guo, 2014), and connecting with consumers personally, interactively, and collectively (Chan-Olmsted, 2011). Social media might be a proper setting for brand management and corporate communication activities (Lueg, 2001) that require a community-driven approach (Will & Porak, 2000), which is lacking in traditional mass communication media (Guo, 2014).

The central role of community engagement confirms the expectations of Yang and Coffey (2014) that online engagement is an important criterion to the valuation of the audience in social media, as it relates positively and directly to corporate reputation, a variable that is typically associated with sales and returns. Additionally, the involvement and homophily as antecedents of engagement and, indirectly, corporate reputation confirms the propositions of the media management literature that brand personality- and self-congruence-related variables will lead to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Kim, 2017; Nienstedt et al., 2012).

Our results show that perceived homophily with other community members, a widely used construct in the communication literature but frequently neglected in the marketing literature, has a positive association with brand involvement, and together, they positively impact brand community engagement. This result contributes to the brand community research field by confirming that self-identification aspects related to the brand itself and other followers (Brown et al., 2007) promote community brand engagement (Baldus et al., 2015).

This research identifies that brand managers may increase community engagement mainly through brand involvement. However, the company needs to attract customers with similar characteristics to its community to increase perceived homophily among members, which in turn improves community engagement. There is an opportunity for the brand, website, and social media managers to develop online, two-way communication activities, with the aim of building a shared mentality between brands and community members and to achieve convergence between brand-self and personality among the participants. This outcome might be achieved by means of posts with content appealing to community members' values, beliefs, and lifestyles as a consistent group, making connections between them and the brand itself. These activities could lead the brand communication strategies both online, including social media, and offline, in such a way that communication could offer coherent messages to its audience. Incentives to interactions between community members could also be a strategy to foster the perception of homophily among them.

The results here serve as inputs for practitioners because they represent alternative and/or complementary measures for the ones provided by the social media itself. Social media managers can use Facebook metrics to assess community engagement by means of behavioral data such as sharing, liking, posting and replying. They can check the content provided by community members by means of text mining techniques and identify posts that bring affinity, congruence, identity and appeals to the members' personalities, values, and beliefs. Gathering demographic data in the social media platforms could also be used by brands to show community members that they might have aspects in common.

Managers can also conduct surveys with community members to monitor the levels of the constructs studied here: homophily perception, brand involvement, community engagement, and corporate reputation. The knowledge of the levels of these variables is important to check whether their relations still hold and in which of them the fan pages are performing better or worse. This monitoring might support plans to conduct specific improvement and/or maintenance of marketing activities. Additionally, surveys aimed at capturing affinities, content preference, personality congruence, values, and beliefs might be useful to develop communication content that reinforces involvement and the perception of homophily, which will foster engagement and corporate reputation.

As a methodological contribution in this study, we showed that Vivek et al.'s (2014) scale can be adopted to measure engagement with multiple objects, which is a response to Chan-Olmsted and Wolter (2018) claim that engagement is an important multidimensional construct to obtain audience attention towards the brand's challenges and to integrate digital and linear platforms, but media engagement is difficult to measure. We validated Vivek et al.'s (2014) engagement scale in brand communities, although it originally measured engagement with brands. Our results attest to the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale and provide a short multidimensional scale option to measure the engagement construct. Most community engagement scales were developed with many dimensions (e.g., Baldus et al., 2015; Calder et al., 2009; Dessart et al., 2016), making it difficult to validate them in an instrument with different constructs.

Finally, our study presents some limitations and room for future research. We were not able to completely adapt Vivek et al.'s (2014) scale when measuring community engagement because three items were dropped in the validation process. Future research might seek a better fit of the scale in the context of online brand communities. Additionally, as other activities of media and social media management affect corporate reputation, there is an opportunity to address them together with community engagement as the antecedents of corporate reputation in the future research.

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