

**ONLINE BRAND ENGAGEMENT**  
An investigation on antecedents and outcomes within  
the social media environment

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Dissertation submitted as partial requirement for the conferral of  
M.Sc. in Marketing

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September 2016

## **Acknowledgement**

I am particularly grateful for the constant support of a number of people, without whom this dissertation would had never been possible. I would like to thank you all for your encouragement and assistance along the way of writing this paper.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Doutora Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro for supporting me during the whole process. I highly appreciated your competent assistance and profound discussion of the research topic, through which I was able to broaden my own perspective and to develop this dissertation. Thank you for all your time, patience, advice and Skype talks.

Secondly, I want to thank all of my friends and family, who have always been on my side throughout this period. In times when I needed additional motivation, you inspired me to stay focused and keep sight of my goal. Special thanks to all those, who took the time and spent lunch breaks with me at the library; this was such a great support!

Lastly, I would like to thank the interview partners for sharing their knowledge with me and giving interesting insights into the topic. Also, I want to thank each participant who took part in the survey, because without your answers this study would have not been compiled.

Thank you!

Tatjana

## **Abstract**

As the management of digital consumer-brand interactions becomes more and more important, marketers rely on engaging with their customers through social media. While it is generally recognized that engaged customers are valuable for the firm, practitioners admit that there exists a lack of knowledge of how to actively manage it. Despite this interest, literature on brand engagement is scarce and empirical analyses are still limited. Thus, this dissertation attempts to further investigate on antecedents and outcomes of online brand engagement, to broaden the academic knowledge on the topic and to derive implications for marketing practice.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concepts of relationship marketing, service-dominant logic and uses and gratification theory. The construct online brand engagement is conceptualized as going beyond the pure transaction of goods and existing of three dimensions (cognitive, affective, behavioural). Moreover, the paper focuses on Facebook brand pages as the engagement object, due to the ongoing prevalence of the social-network. After collecting quantitative data, the conceptual research model and the corresponding hypotheses, have been tested with a partial least squares modelling approach.

The results reveal that involvement, self-brand congruence and online brand experience play a significant role as antecedents of online brand engagement. Furthermore, it could be seen that satisfaction and brand love act as outcomes and that word-of-mouth can be positively influenced by online brand engagement, mediated through brand love. Overall, the findings indicate that brand engagement with a Facebook brand page, is mainly initiated by online brand experience, which can be achieved through triggering the respective brand related stimuli.

**Key words:** Engagement, Facebook, brand, relationship marketing, brand experience, brand love, word-of-mouth

**JEL:** M310, M390

## **Resumo**

Como a gestão das interações do consumidor com a marca online torna-se cada vez mais importante, os gestores devem envolver-se com seus clientes através dos meios de comunicação social online. Ao lograr alcançar o compromisso (engagement), reconhecido como sendo valioso para a empresa, os profissionais admitem que existe uma falta de conhecimento como controlá-lo ativamente. Apesar deste interesse, a literatura sobre o compromisso da marca é escassa e a análise empírica ainda muito limitada. Assim, esta dissertação tenta contribuir para ir mais longe na investigação sobre os antecedentes e os resultados do compromisso da marca online, para poder ampliar esse conhecimento académico sobre o tema e tecer implicações para a prática de marketing.

O referencial teórico deste estudo baseia-se nos conceitos de marketing de relacionamento, a lógica serviço-dominante e a teoria dos usos & gratificação. Com base na revisão da literatura, o compromisso da marca online significa como ir além da transação e é composto de três dimensões (cognitiva, afetiva, comportamental). Além disso, o documento centra-se nas páginas da marca Facebook como o objeto em estudo, devido à prevalência em curso da rede social. Após a coleta de dados quantitativos, o modelo de pesquisa conceitual e as hipóteses foram testados com uma abordagem de modelagem de mínimos quadrados parciais.

Os resultados revelam que o envolvimento, a congruência do “eu” do consumidor e a marca e experiência de marca online desempenham um papel significativo como antecedentes do compromisso da marca online. Além disso, a satisfação e o amor à marca são vistos como o resultado direto e que o passa-palavra pode ser influenciado diretamente pelo amor à marca. No geral, os resultados indicam que o compromisso da marca com uma página da marca no Facebook, é iniciado principalmente pela experiência de marca online, que pode ser alcançado através de desencadear os respetivos estímulos relacionados marca.

**Key words:** Engagement, Facebook, marca, marketing relacional, experiência com a marca, amor à marca, passa-palavra

**JEL:** M310, M390

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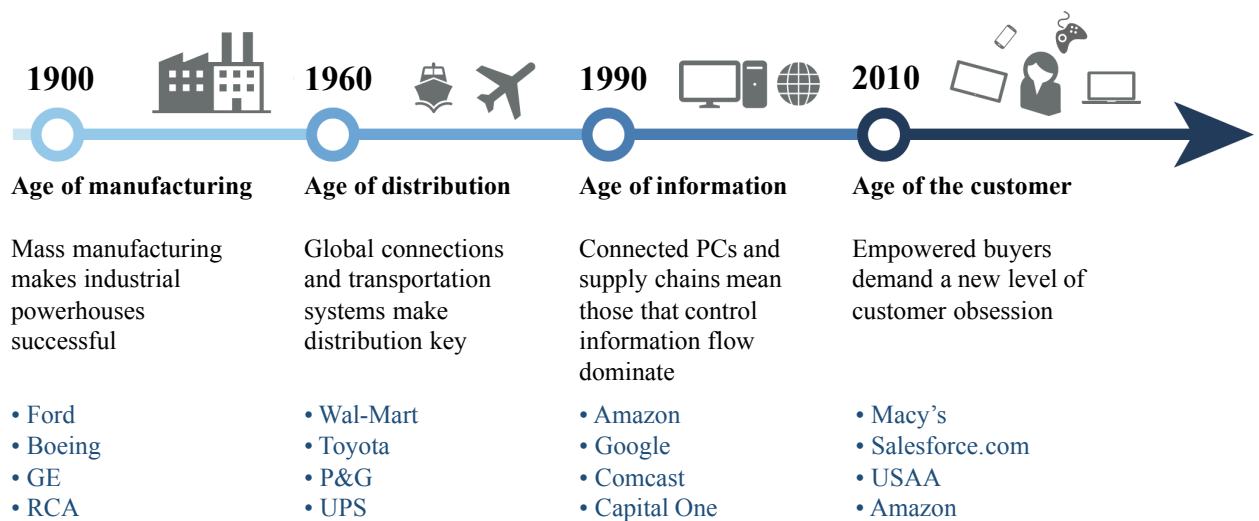


# 1. Introduction

The days in which consumers passively consumed marketing messages and had to rely on product information distributed by the company, have long been over. Hand in hand with the digital transformation of businesses and industries, consumers have become more active and autonomous regarding when, where and how they want to engage with brands. Now, customers are powerful and demanding market participants, who co-direct the way they are perceiving marketing activities. The following statement by David Cooperstein from Forrester Research (2013) makes clear, which challenge companies are facing today:

“Empowered customers are disrupting every industry; competitive barriers like manufacturing strength, distribution power, and information mastery no longer create competitive advantage. In this age of the customer, the only sustainable competitive advantage is knowledge of and engagement with customers.” (Cooperstein, 2013: 1)

The topic of engagement has not only raised interest among practitioners but recently found its way into marketing research, which has triggered a new approach in the understanding of customer-brand interaction. The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) proposes that the topic of engagement is one of the top research priorities for the next years. In particular, the question of how engagement can be defined and measured, as well as which marketing activities and how social media can drive engagement should be examined, in order to better understand consumer behaviour (MSI, 2014).



**Figure 1 – The age of the customer**  
*Source: Adapted from Cooperstein (2013)*

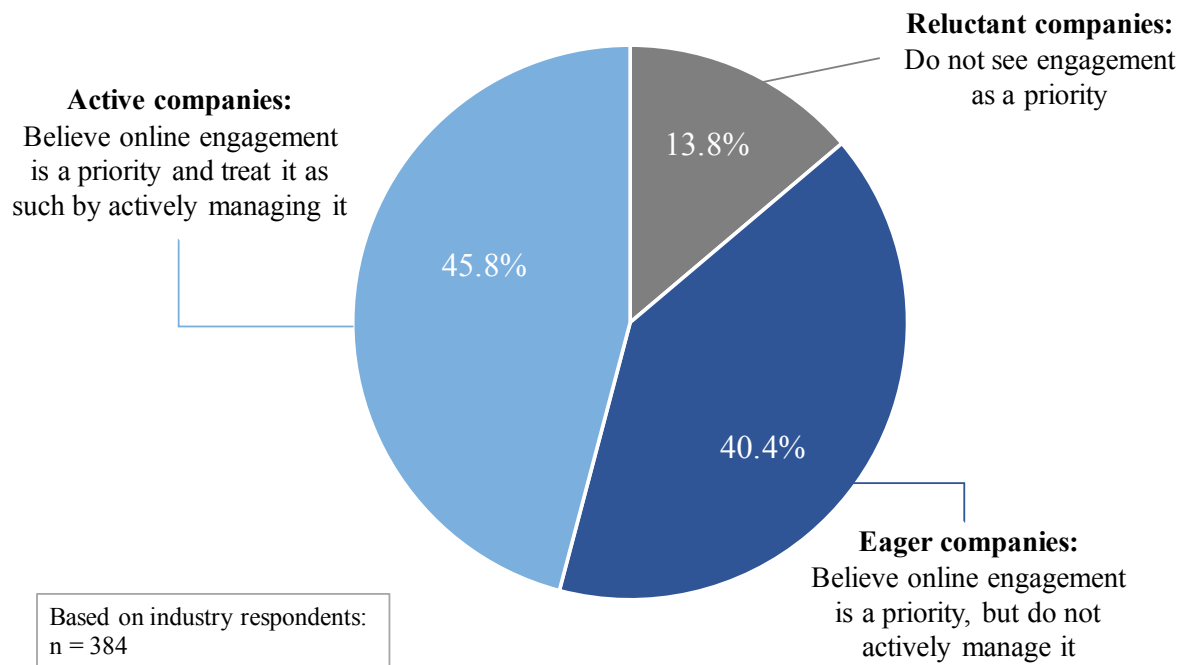
## **1.1 Relevance and interest**

From a marketing point of view, the internet represents a critical channel offering the opportunity to reach a broader audience, target the consumer more individually and market products globally. Nowadays, the stages of the consumer decision-making process have partially or completely shifted into a digital world, calling for new marketing strategies in order to catch the consumers' interest and convince them of a brand's value (Porter, 2001; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Keller (1993) emphasises that an efficient management of a brand inevitably needs to recognise novel marketing tactics made available through new media, in order to complement traditional marketing activities. Especially the rise of social media has heralded a new era for marketers in connecting with consumers. However, the management of brands is becoming increasingly demanding, as consumers are better informed, empowered and at the same time swamped with product information. Moreover, social media enables the consumers to develop the brand image and brand-related stories further, as it offers them to widely share and communicate information about brands (Gensler et al., 2013; Kozinets et al., 2010). To put it in the words of Edelman (2007: 134), it is nowadays about "becoming a loyal brand" and no longer about "creating loyal customers". This statement implies that rational aspects, like the outer appearance of a brand or technical features of a product are getting less and less important. Instead, it is more about the way people can interact and experience a brand that counts (Edelman, 2007).

As addressed before, the new challenges of the digital era, have led marketers to introduce the term "engagement", to subsume the endeavours for more interactive experiences with brands. In the "Age of the Customer", also called the "Participation Age", marketers believe that an engagement strategy can help to stand out from competitors and generate a strategic advantage (Cooperstein, 2013; Shirley & Cole, 2014). Among practitioners in the industry, engagement is understood as "a spectrum of consumer advertising activities and experiences – cognitive, emotional and physical – that will have a positive impact on a brand" (Shirley & Cole, 2014: 2).

Edelman (2007) stresses that people are spending an immense time online and thus the place where customers prefer to engage with brands lies in the digital world. Therefore, companies are heavily relying on social media, which, thanks to their interactive features, offers a great place for engagement. Within this digital environment, the social network Facebook continues to be the most relevant social media platform for such purposes.

According to Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014: 34) the “liking” of a brand page on Facebook can be seen as a “manifestation of brand engagement”. Indeed, it shows that the effect of Facebook advertisements on consumers’ purchase decisions is negligible. Instead, customers are more influenced by interactive social media profiles of brands (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015). A study of Google (Shirley & Cole, 2014) among marketers, agencies and media companies in the U.S. demonstrates that companies are indeed highly concerned with the engagement topic, especially regarding the digital world. About 86% of the respondents said that they believe that online engagement is a priority for business practice. However, only 45,8% reported that they are able to actively manage online engagement (cf. figure 2).



**Figure 2 – Engagement priority of companies**  
Source: Adapted from Shirley & Cole (2014)

In view of the results portrayed in figure 2, it becomes apparent that there is a gap between companies who see online engagement as a priority and the ones who are able to manage it actively, which underlines the importance of the topic for marketing practice. Moreover, when it comes to brand pages on Facebook, Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal (2015) point out that many companies do not fully understand how to create and manage an engaging online brand presentation on social media. The importance of the topic online engagement can also be seen in the emergence of new accountable models, which invoice media expenses on a cost-per-engagement rate (Shirley & Cole, 2014).

## **1.2 Research question and objectives**

Regarding the construct engagement itself, a considerable amount of different academic literature exists, yet research on engagement within marketing context is rare (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). For instance, van Doorn et al. (2010) state that one of the main focuses of future research should be on the antecedents of engagement and the analysis of channels where customer engagement takes place. Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012) suggest analysing an engagement scale in a variety of different contexts to better understand how engagement takes place. Moreover, little is known about how the interaction between brands and followers on social media platforms take place and which behavioural effects engagement with a brand page has (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Most articles dealing with engagement and its role in relationship marketing are limited to consumer-product-exchanges, excluding the aspect that a potential consumer who interacts with a brand online can also experience engagement (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Thus, Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012) claim that future research should address this aspect when examining the engagement construct and provide an all-encompassing approach, which includes each individual, based on the core elements of relationship marketing.

In general, investigations on the construct engagement are seen as contributing to the academic research on the broader theoretical areas of relationship marketing and service-dominant logic (Brodie et al., 2011) and the online environment is expected to provide a platform for behavioural outcomes, such as word-of-mouth recommendations, which are advantageous for the firm (Kumar et al., 2010). Thus, online engagement within social media gets increasingly popular and as shown in the section before, it is engagement within the digital world that practitioners are especially curious about. Due to the prominence of Facebook, scholars have begun to study the primary drivers for the usage of Facebook by applying uses and gratification theory to the context (Smock et al. 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013). However, academic investigations focusing on Facebook brand pages is still scarce and further research is needed to understand the scope of consumer's intention towards brands within the social media environment (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015). Jahn & Kunz (2012) even refer to Facebook brand pages as a "black box" and claim that it is still not clear what is happening inside. At the same time, the authors are highlighting that it is crucial to understand the relationship social media users have with brands online and to take advantage of the positive online and

offline behaviours those users show. Some researchers have begun to address this issue by applying the construct engagement to the social media environment and provide first analyses of how individuals engage within the Facebook context. However, to better understand the way of interaction between brands and users of social media platforms, further research on the topic is still necessary (e.g. De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014).

In summary it can be said that there is not only a gap in marketing practice regarding the active management of online engagement with brands, but also that further academic investigations are required to comprehend how online engagement works. Based on this aspect, it is the purpose of this dissertation to further research on the topic of engagement with brand pages on Facebook, in order to broaden the knowledge on how to manage brands efficiently within the social media environment. Therefore, relevant literature in view of relationship marketing, service-dominant logic and uses and gratification theory has been reviewed and potential antecedents and consequences of online brand engagement, which are described in more detail in the next sections, could be derived.

Consequently, the following research question arises:

*Do individual involvement, the connection between the online brand and the individual, as well as online experience with the brand act as drivers for online engagement? And can satisfaction, positive emotions and relationships be mediators between online brand engagement and word-of-mouth?*

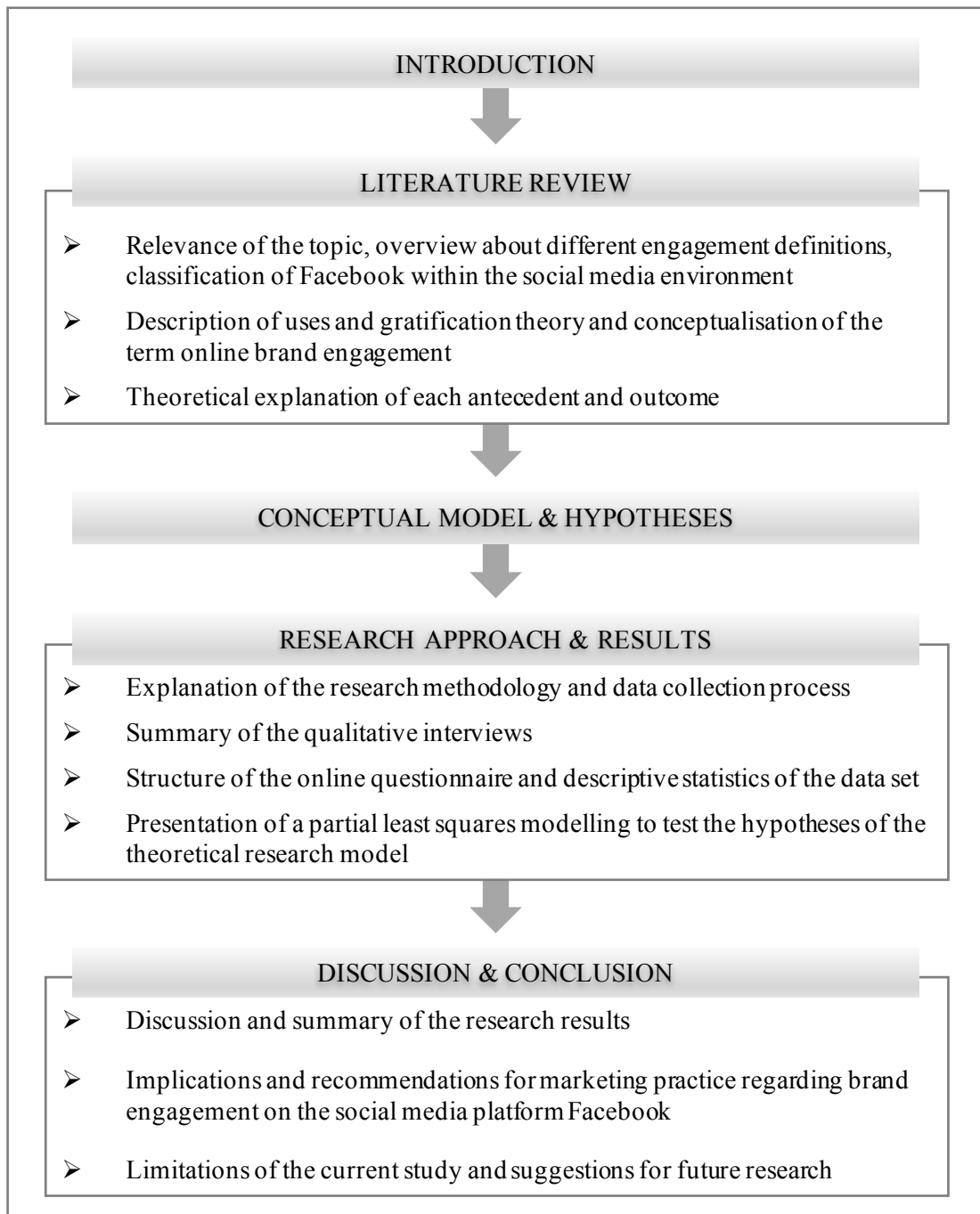
In order to answer such research question and to guide the statistical approach of this dissertation, the research objectives have been formulated as follows:

- **Identification of antecedents and outcomes of online brand engagement**
- **Compare results between gender, age and brand type**
- **Analyse which of the drivers proposed has the greatest impact on online brand engagement**
- **Analyse which is the main online brand engagement consequence**
- **Examine if word-of-mouth results as the final outcome of online brand engagement**

The next paragraph outlines the general structure of the thesis in a graphic illustration and provides key points for each part.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The dissertation is structured into five main parts, which comprise an introduction to the topic, the literature review, the presentation of the conceptual model and the research hypotheses, the description of the research methodology and review of the research results. The thesis finishes with implications for marketing practice, limitations of the current study and future research suggestions.



**Figure 3 – Structure of the thesis**

*Source: Own elaboration*

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Relationship Marketing**

Since the 1990s, the awareness that a consequent customer orientation is key to customer satisfaction and strategic long-term relationships with consumers, has been growing among marketing academics and practitioners (Bruhn, 2015). Previously, there was a strong focus on transactions and the classical marketing mix, neglecting a relational customer orientation (Grönroos, 1994). This traditional point of view, presumed a clear hierarchical structure of organizations, which are separated from a market that is determined by competition and transaction costs (Gummesson, 1999; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Grönroos (1994), claims that this original understanding of marketing is overly marked by a pure exchange of goods and mass marketing, which prevents real market orientation and the recognition of customer needs and desires. In contrast, the significance of relationship marketing is rooted in the perception of a connection between a lasting customer relationship and economic profitability (Grönroos, 1994). That is, customers who are bound to a company, whether it is a functional or an affective connection, are expected to influence revenues and costs in a favourable way. For instance, those customers are willing to pay more for a brand as they trust the firm and products that they have a relationship with. Consequently, companies can better engage in cross and up-selling activities. On the other hand, costs can be lowered, as it is cheaper to maintain existing customers than to acquire new ones. Moreover, companies can learn from their long-term consumers and improve products to better adapt them to market needs (Bruhn, 2015). Accordingly, the main goal of relationship marketing is to build, sustain and enhance customer relationships in order to improve profit (Grönroos, 1997).

In the course of the increasing globalisation and adoption of information and communication technologies among consumers and vendors alike, companies face a new form of hyperactive competition and a more network oriented approach to relationship marketing has developed (Bruhn, 2015). Indeed, it is rather assumed that there exists a complex network of relationships between several players in the market, each influencing each other in a reciprocal way (Gummesson, 1999). This is based on the fact, that nowadays all actors in the marketplace are interconnected due to technological advancement and marketing is no longer solely driven by the company, but also by other market participants (Bruhn, 2015). Especially, consumers are more informed, active and

empowered than ever before, challenging companies to differentiate their offerings from competitors (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Thus, in contrast to the more traditional, transaction-oriented marketing approach, relationship marketing recognizes that all customer contacts, be it with other consumers or a technology system, play a role in the marketing impact of a firm. The network perspective acknowledges marketing as an interactive and cooperative process, where the relational management of customers is seen as a way for differentiation and strategic advantage (Grönroos, 1994; Bruhn, 2015). Following, relationship marketing can be defined as “(...) marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships” (Gummesson, 2004: 136), where all activities are “(...) directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges.” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994: 22). In other words, relationship marketing represents a “(...) marketing perspective for a network-based organisational structure (...)”, where market participants depend on each other and the direction of cause and effect is no longer evident (Gummesson, 1999: 80). Value is created through cooperation and co-creation, as opposed to mass customization (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and interdependence between market actors reduces costs and generates higher quality (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

Another topic relevant to marketing literature nowadays is the subject matter of branding. Almost every product becomes branded, from a simple bottle of water to basic commodities and brand extension is key in current marketing strategies (Schmitt, 1999). Thus, in the consumer goods industry, relationship building strategies are focused on the creation of a bond between consumers and the brands a company offers (Bruhn, 2015). Functional, rational, emotional, tangible or intangible features can differentiate a brand, which helps consumers to simplify the decision-making process and reduce risk. From the company point of view, brands facilitate the signalling of quality and offer the chance to set a price premium (Kotler & Keller, 2006). It is argued that branding and relationship marketing significantly overlap, in particular in regard to customer attitudes and behavioural intentions (Palmatier, 2008). This is based on the presumption that customer loyalty can not be solely measured by a consumer’s repurchase intention. Instead, it is more important to understand the affective loaded relationship consumers build with brands, as this form of emotional connection results in true loyalty (Bruhn, 2015). In this context, it is argued that brands, in order to serve as a real relationship partner, must “(...) surpass the personification qualification and actually behave as an active contributing



member of the dyad.” (Fournier, 1998: 345). This can be explained by relating on the so-called theory of animism, which states that individuals tend to humanize objects that are not alive in nature, in order to facilitate interaction. Regarding brands, this means that consumers construct a brand’s personality, by inferring brand traits as communicated through marketing activities. Consequently, consumer form reciprocal and interdependent relationships with brands, based on a brand’s image that, for example evokes strong emotional feelings or enhances the consumer’s self-concept (Fournier, 1998). This orientation towards consumer-brand interactions and relationship marketing, provides the basis for examining online brand engagement. Moreover, the current conception of relationship marketing admits that it is a dynamic process and that during all stages of the relationship lifecycle, engagement activities contribute to developing a long-term customer brand relationship (Palmatier, 2008).

## **2.2 Online brand engagement construct**

To better understand the construct engagement and its relevance for relationship marketing, the next paragraphs will provide a deeper insight into the literature on engagement and conclude with a theoretical conceptualization of online brand engagement in the context of social media platforms. First, it is reviewed how engagement can be classified within relationship marketing theory. Then, how engagement is defined in marketing research and other related literature is examined. The social media topic is introduced and uses and gratification theory is described in order to provide a theoretical basis for proposing antecedents and consequences of online brand engagement. The last section summarizes the insights from literature and will conclude with six statements to conceptualise how brand engagement in the social media environment is seen in this dissertation.

### ***2.2.1 Relevance and classification of engagement***

As mentioned in the introduction, engagement undergoes enormous popularity among practitioners and is seen as a research priority for many. The term engagement is not new to academic research and is examined in a variety of different academic fields, such as sociology, psychology, educational psychology and organizational behaviour (Hollebeek, 2011b). However, it is only during the last years, that there has been a growing interest in the topic of engagement within marketing literature and the first definitions of engagement evolved (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2013). Although engagement is seen as a

promising construct for marketing practice, it is still not well established in theory and different views on its conceptualization exist (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Generally, the construct engagement is seen as emerging from an interactive relationship between a subject and a particular object, reflecting a motivational state of the subject (Hollebeek, 2011a). It is further understood as a dynamic, iterative and value co-creating process, as well as predictive of customer loyalty outcomes (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011). The brand is usually seen as the object (Spratt, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010) and the customer as the subject, who purchases the brand (Bowden, 2009). Hence, in literature the construct engagement is mainly described as “customer engagement” (Bowden, 2009; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft, 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014), “customer brand engagement” (Hollebeek, 2011a, Hollebeek, 2011b) or “consumer engagement” (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015).

Based on the perception that engagement comprises a consumer-brand relationship and acknowledges the individual as an active partner in the dyad, it can be classified in the broader notion of relationship marketing (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). Furthermore, engagement is considered to be placed within the service-dominant logic (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012), as it involves aspects of co-creation, leading to joint valuable outcomes for both, the customer and the firm (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Service-dominant logic assumes that every economic process is based on an exchange of specialised skills and knowledge, initiated by companies striving to create superior service offerings compared to their competitors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It is constituted of ten premises, whereas in particular the sixth premise highlights the customer as a co-creator of value and that by using the product the customer will contribute to the value-added process of the firm. Moreover, the premises eight to ten state that in a service-centric perspective which is relational by nature, the customer always takes the centre and that all economic actors foster the integration of resources, as well as that the benefit of a service is determined by its recipient (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Brodie et al. (2011) suggest that those four premises provide a basis for the conceptualization of engagement, as they reflect the interactive, co-creative processes a customer has, whilst engaging in a network of service relationships. According to van Doorn et al. (2010: 254) co-creation in the context of engagement is expressed by spontaneous customer behaviours that “(...) uniquely customize the customer-to-brand experience”. Such behaviours might

be “making suggestions to improve the consumption experience, helping and coaching service providers, and helping other customers to consume better” (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254). Thereby, customers are motivated by their own purpose and their behaviours are not narrowed to the time of the purchase process, but go beyond that transaction (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). In fact, the proposition that engagement needs to be considered during every convergence an individual and a brand might have, reflects that classifying engagement in the context of relationship marketing needs to acknowledge the total process of identifying and maintaining customers (Grönroos, 1997).

However, Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft (2010) point out that research on the management of customer relationships primarily focuses on the exchange of goods and customer retention, but engagement describes a rather non-transactional consumer-brand relationship. Thus, an individual does not necessarily have to purchase a brand, in order to be engaged with it (van Doorn et al., 2010). More precisely, engagement can be perceived as an interactive relationship, which will develop before, during and lasts long after a transaction of goods (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Based on this presumption, Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012) argue that engagement even enhances the understanding of consumer brand relationships and is a relevant component of relationship marketing.

It can be said that individuals who are engaged with a brand, “(...) make voluntary resource contributions that have a brand or firm focus but go beyond what is fundamental to transactions (...)” and that by providing such resources, which are more than the pure exchange of goods and money, value co-creation takes place and benefits for both the firm and the individual are generated (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014: 2). For instance, one of the positive contributions to a company is that engaged customers are seen as active brand ambassadors, who will positively recommend the firm’s brands and products (Brodie et al., 2011). Engaged customers also create non-purchase related value for the firm, by participating in new product development and providing product feedback. Additionally, those consumers are expected to buy the same brand over a long time, which will result in brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009). Thus, the significance of engagement lies in the assumption that it can lead to a variety of attitudinal, affective and behavioural outcomes (van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a), which in turn influence consumer brand relationships in a favourable way and form loyalty (Bowden, 2009). Hence, customer engagement provides financial, as well as non-financial advantages for the company (van Doorn et al., 2010) and adds to a firm’s value (Kumar et al. 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft, 2010; Brodie et al.,

2011; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Specifically, Kumar et al. (2010) strongly claim that customer engagement brings a new and broader understanding to value creation and is a new indicator for brand performance. Similar to the more well-known customer life-time value, they suggest to consider a customer engagement-value, which would also incorporate the non-transactional part of the relationship between a customer, the firm itself and its offerings (Kumar et al., 2010).

It should be noted at this point that engagement must not inevitably always be positive. For instance, a disappointed consumer might arrange public actions against the company or engage in negative online comments about the firm (van Doorn et al., 2010). According to Hollebeek & Chen (2014: 63), negative engagement is “(...) exhibited through consumers’ unfavourable brand-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during focal brand interaction”. However, it is the purpose of this dissertation to provide a deeper insight into positive aligned engagement, due to its valuable contribution to the firm. Therefore, the examination of the construct engagement itself and possible antecedents are reviewed in regard to a positive engagement process.

To sum it up, the emerging interest in the concept of engagement is rooted in the commercial relevance of the various positive outcomes, associated with engaged potential and existing customers. In respect of the resource-based view of the firm (Wernerfelt, 1984), the construct engagement offers a possibility to explain voluntary resource contributions by individuals, which provide strategic advantages for the firm, while recognizing the relational processes between the individual and the company. As it is assumed that value is created while customer-brand relationships develop, the product itself becomes less prerequisite and the management of those relationships more important (Grönroos, 1997). In fact, the co-creative and the interactive nature of engagement are key factors to activate new sources of competitive advantages (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). With this in view, the construct engagement allows an interesting perspective on the development and preservation of customer-brand relationships, expecting to generate strategic resources (e.g. word-of-mouth), which are hard to imitate by competitors and therefore advantageous for the company (Wernerfelt, 1984).

### ***2.2.2 Key findings and definitions***

In organizational behaviour literature, engagement is seen as an important component of employee motivation, job satisfaction and negatively related with the intention to quit the job (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006). It is described as the degree to which employees are “(...)

attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles” (Saks, 2006: 602). An engaged employee is expected to apply more cognitive, emotional and physical resource to their work, which will positively influence the performance of an organization (Saks, 2006). Work engagement is an enduring status which is characterized by a positive state of mind towards the overall work situation and not just a particular object (Schaufeli et al., 2002). According to Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001), engagement is the opposite of burnout and describes a state in which the employee is energetic, efficient and fully involved in his work. Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe this status with three underlying dimensions of engagement, which they call vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour is characterized by high levels of energy and willingness to invest effort, dedication describes the level of involvement in a task and absorption encompasses the state that the employee is fully and positively engrossed by the work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Kahn (1990) states that engaged employees are devoted to their work physically, cognitively and emotionally, because they see their work as meaningful and perceive themselves as useful and valuable in their job environment.

In the field of psychology, the so-called social engagement is defined as a person’s ability to take advantage of and initiate social interaction (Mor et al., 1995). Achterberg et al. (2003: 213), examine the construct social engagement in nursing home residents and argue that people with greater social engagement have “(...) a high sense of initiative and involvement and can respond adequately to social stimuli in the social environment (...). Within this framework, engagement is manifested as a behavioural construct, which is evidenced in the interaction with other individuals and the participation in social activities (Achterberg et al., 2003). In the educational psychology literature, engagement is seen as a motivational construct, as well as a form of commitment and feelings of belonging towards an educational institution (London, Downey, & Mace, 2007). Gonida, Voulala, & Kiosseoglou (2009) describe student engagement as an active behaviour, as well as an emotional experience during class, such as curiosity, enjoyment and the absence of boredom. Engaged students are seen as highly encouraged to accomplish academic work and learning tasks (Gonida, Voulala, & Kiosseoglou 2009), participate in discussions, complete their homework and take part in different academic activities (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). According to London, Downey, & Mace (2007) student engagement is influenced by situational, institutional and individual factors, which becomes apparent in a psychological connection with and academic investments in the institution.

The term engagement can also be found in the literature on interactive systems and software applications. For instance, in an exploratory study by O'Brien & Toms (2008) on engagement with four different technological applications (web searching, online shopping, video games and online learning), user engagement was conceptualized as both a process and a product of interaction. Such process is initiated by a pleasant visual appeal and novel presentation of the technological interface (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). Users are engaged with a web system, when it catches their interest and provides intrinsic rewards and curiosity (Webster & Ahuvia, 2006). Also, technology engagement has an emotional side, as it promotes positive affects and induces feelings of fun, joy and arousal (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). O'Brien & Toms (2008) state that the process of engagement with technology includes a starting point, a period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement. They identify twelve engagement attributes that are spatio-temporal, emotional and sensory related. Thus, in an extended definition they conceptualise engagement as "(...) the quality of user experience with technology that is characterized by challenge, aesthetics and sensory appeal, feedback, novelty, interactivity, perceived control and time, awareness, interest, motivation and affect." (O'Brien & Toms, 2008: 949). Furthermore, O'Brien & Toms (2010) approved a six item-scale for user engagement in technological environments, highlighting that not only attention, visual appeal and curiosity play a role for engagement, but also how easy the system is to navigate and how involved a user is with a certain technology.

### ***2.2.3 Engagement in marketing literature***

When referring to marketing literature, several definitions of engagement had been found and as mentioned earlier, there exists no consistent term which is used to describe engagement with a brand. For instance, within the neuro-marketing science literature, Marci (2006) concludes that engagement is a combination of attention and emotional impact, resulting from the exposure to media stimuli of an advertisement. Attention describes the change in the physiological constitution of an audience, when it is exposed to media stimuli, whereas the emotional impact refers to the intensity of the physiological reaction. In a biologically based measure, he detects that the degree of audience engagement is also dependent on the context in which a stimulus reaches the individual (Marci, 2006). Heath (2009: 67) points out that attention reflects a more conscious evaluation of an advertisement and is not necessary to create engagement. In contrast, he defines engagement as "(...) the amount of subconscious feeling going on when an

advertisement is processed". Thus, he sees engagement as an emotional construct, which supports the development of relational connections with brands (Heath, 2009). Rappaport (2007) argues that consumers engage with brands when they are relevant to them and when they have an emotional bond with the brand. Furthermore, Edelman (2007:131) claims that engagement is key for effective advertisement, as it "trumps awareness", which means that people want to actively interact with a company's marketing efforts.

Bowden (2009: 65), theoretically conceptualizes engagement as a psychological process which proceeds when customer-brand relationships develop and which (...) models the underlying mechanics by which customer loyalty is formed (...)"'. For the engagement process, calculative and affective commitment, as well as increasing levels of involvement, are necessary components, which will lead to purchase, repurchase and lasting brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009). Brodie et al. (2011) describe engagement as an iterative process, which creates valuable outcomes and state that it is a multidimensional construct, which involves cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions. It is proposed to be a psychological state that emerges out of an interactive and co-creative process between a customer and a focal object. However, the authors do not further analyse the propositions quantitatively and suggest that future research should address the concept in view of different settings and also in the online context (Brodie et al., 2011). Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012) point out that engagement is manifested in the level of participation, which can occur during but also outside an exchange situation. The authors set up a general theoretical model for engagement, which they developed based on qualitative interviews. Moreover, van Doorn et al. (2010) argue that engagement is a motivational construct and manifested in specific engagement behaviours, such as communicating about or repurchasing the brand. Following, they define five dimensions (valence, form, scope, nature of impact & customer goals), which reflect the way of expressing, the duration and a customer's purpose of engagement behaviour, yet their examination is solely conceptual based. Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg (2009) argue that individuals have varying tendencies to include brands as part of how they see themselves and that engagement is based on the perceived link between an individual's self-concept and the brand. They propose one of the first scales regarding engagement, which focus is however limited on the self-brand connection aspect. Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014) strongly emphasise that the brand is the key focal object in the interaction process and point out that engagement is usually seen as a positive state. The authors conceptualize consumer brand

engagement as “a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014: 154). One recent engagement definition by Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas (2016) acknowledges that engagement is not dependent on a purchase situation and goes beyond a pure exchange situation. The authors develop a 22 item scale, which reflects engagement as a three-dimensional construct with seven sub-dimensions. Besides, some research streams are explicitly focused on the examination of engagement within brand communities (e.g. Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). For instance, Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann (2005) state that the identification with a brand community can lead to greater community engagement. Based on a conceptual model they conclude that it is an interactive and intrinsically motivated state that results in behavioural intentions, such as recommending the brand and advocate their brand communities to others.

Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel (2009: 322), who examine online engagement with a website, explicitly state that engagement is a second-order constructs, which is manifested in different first-order experiences. Those experiences are defined as a “(...) consumer’s belief about how a site fits into his/her life” and the resulting engagement with the website is a collection of such experiences. However, even though interactive experiences represent a key indicator to epitomize engagement, Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014) point out that experience and engagement are two distinct constructs, most of all because experience does not require a motivational state and engagement does. That is, engagement is assumed to be motivated by extrinsic, as well as intrinsic factors (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009), such as an attention creating online presentation of a brand or the stimulation of inherent self-schemas (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Based on theoretical conclusions, Mollen & Wilson (2010: 923) develop a working definition, which says that engagement is a “cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value (...)”. The authors propose that online engagement is an experiential response that develops within a continuum ranging from interactivity to telepresence, initiated by website stimuli.

Table 1 shows the three engagement definitions most relevant for the conceptualisation of engagement in this dissertation. The full list of engagement definitions, which were found while reviewing the literature, is available in the Appendix (1).



**Table 1 – Engagement definitions***Source: Own elaboration*

Author	Definition of engagement	Engagement object	Perspective
Brodie et al. (2013) p. 107	“(…) Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.”	Brand/ Community members	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional Behavioural
Hollebeek et al. (2014) p. 154	Engagement is: “(…) a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions”	Brand	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Behavioural Emotional
Dessart et al. (2016) p. 409	“(…) Engagement is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioural manifestations that go beyond exchange situations.”	Brand, Community, Individuals, Advertisers, Social network	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Affective Cognitive Behavioural

### **2.2.4 Engagement and the social media environment**

With the rise of new media and social media in particular, the way how marketing communication takes place and how consumers relate to brands has long been changed. The term new media encompasses all digital channels which offer people the chance to “(…) engage in behaviours that can be consumed by others both in real time and long afterwards regardless of their spatial location” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010: 312). This means, consumers have the possibility to access brand related content faster and more dynamic than ever before. The brand interaction is no longer bound to a physical store and the control over brand messages has partly shifted towards the consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). This communicative power of consumers, who are digitally connected and co-create brand messages and meanings in a network of other consumers, strongly influences how relationship marketing is approached nowadays (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Social media is used as a generic term for all forms of digital media that help to share and transmit digital content with an audience and is defined as “(…) a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein,

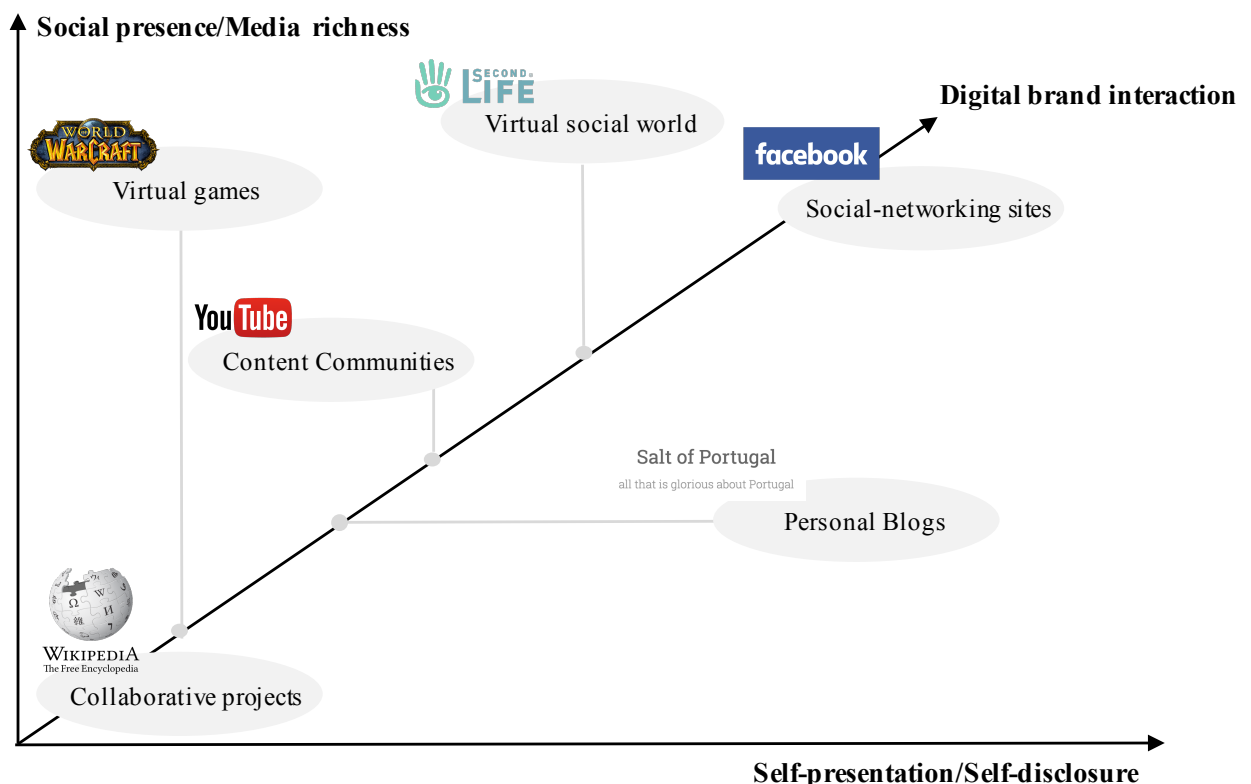
2010: 61). The main characteristic of this definition is that it acknowledges social media as a platform where all users continuously modify content, rather than just passively consuming it (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The significance of social media lies in its high usage rate among internet users worldwide. In January 2016, the penetration rate of active social media users as a percentage of the total population reached 31%, which reflects 2.31 billion active social media users. Moreover, the usage of social media is continuously growing due to the ongoing diffusion of the internet. This becomes apparent when reflecting the growth rates of the internet penetration and social media penetration, which both recorded a growth of 10% during one year (Kemp, 2016).

The different types of social media can be classified by means of two dimensions, namely social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Short, Williams, & Christie (1976) as cited by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), the social presence theory states that media differs regarding the amount of acoustic, visual and physical contact that can be reached in a conversation between individuals. Thus, a medium that offers interpersonal and synchronous communication is likely to provide high levels of social presence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Likewise, the media richness theory argues that media can be distinguished by the amount of information that can be transmitted and processed in a specific time interval, in order to change understanding and reduce equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The second dimension refers to a person's wish to control the presentation of himself/herself in order to influence the picture other people have of them (Goffman, 1959) and is usually done through self-disclosure, which describes the "(...) conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 62).

Particularly, social-networking sites have attracted the interest of companies as they provide several possibilities to interact with consumers, while offering a basis for dialogue communication and allowing a focus on non-transactional customer behaviour (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Social-networking sites are "(...) web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." (Boyd & Ellison, 2008: 211). Originally thought to facilitate the relationships with friends and families, firms have detected the chance to present their brands on social-networking sites to engage with their customer base and maintain relationships (Richter, Riemer, & vom Brocke, 2011).

Regarding adoption and usage of social-networking sites, the website Facebook clearly stands out from all other social media platforms. Facebook can register a permanent growth of monthly active users since its launch in 2004 (Richter, 2013; Statista, 2016b) and continues to be the most used social media worldwide, with now 1.59 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2016a). Facebook is currently ranked number three among all existing websites worldwide when referring to page views and visitors (Alexa, 2016). Not only is Facebook the most used social network worldwide, it also offers multifaceted ways to interact with each other and brands. Recalling that an interactive relationship is the primary basis for engagement, the medium Facebook seems to be the perfect digital place to drive online brand engagement.

Figure 4 shows the categorization of the different social media types as conceptualised by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and incorporates a suggested level of digital brand interaction for each of the medium.



**Figure 4 – Categorization of social media types**  
*Source: Extended illustration based on Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)*

Generally, engagement in the social media environment can be seen as all forms of digital interaction, such as online communication, blogging, commenting, information search and other forms of participating in online communities (van Doorn et al., 2010; Gummerus et

al., 2012). The platform Facebook offers a twofold possibility for interaction between a consumer and a brand. On the one hand, users can come together in virtual groups, where they will join like-minded people, who also like one specific brand (Gummerus et al., 2012) and on the other hand Facebook offers the opportunity to set up a so-called “brand-page” (Richter, Riemer, & vom Brocke, 2011). Virtual groups on Facebook are often called Facebook brand communities (Gummerus et al., 2012) and can be defined as “a specialized non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001: 412). A brand page on Facebook acts similar to a usual user profile, but it is only intended to display the brand. A brand can be presented with pictures, text and videos, including the brand’s logo and symbols. Those brand pages can then be followed by Facebook members, which means that users see all social media activities of the brand in their newsfeed. Jahn & Kunz (2012) could show that brand pages are an important tool for brand communication and deliver measurable effects on the customer-brand relationship.

While the two terms, brand communities and brand pages, are sometimes used interchangeable in literature, Jahn & Kunz (2012) suggest that brand pages could rather be seen as a special form of a brand community. In fact, there are distinct differences between both. Most of all, brand communities can not only be established by the company, but also by consumers or fans of a brand (Arnone, Geerts, & Scoubeau, 2009). Thus, the content created and posted in a brand community runs a higher risk not to be brand relevant. Moreover, brand communities are supposed to arrange a network of members, who all like the same brand. Hence, social interaction between members is in the foreground and not the interaction with a brand. On the contrary, “liking” a brand page is primarily about the connection between a user and one specific brand and it is about that connection that drives engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Thus, it stands to reason that brand pages on social-networking sites like Facebook, as one of the most used and interactive social media platform, offers exceptional possibilities to provide dynamic interactions and generate engagement (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Consequently, it should be highlighted at this point that the research focus in this dissertation is on engagement with Facebook brand pages and not on the analysis of brand groups or brand communities, which are rather determined by the interaction between group members (cf. Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Therefore, the term “brand pages”, instead of “brand communities” is used in the following.

Engagement with a Facebook brand page is mirrored in different types of behaviour that are summarized in table 2.

**Table 2 – Engagement behaviours in social media**  
*Source: Dolan, Conduit, & Fahy (2016)*

<b><i>Creating</i></b>
Active engagement in content creation that goes beyond the content provided by the brand page. Occurs in the following forms: Knowledge Seeking (e.g. information search, product feedbacks), Sharing Experiences, Advocating (Recommending the brand to other users), Socialising (Virtual communication with other followers), Co-developing, Affirming (Direct positive posts/comments towards the brand)
<b><i>Contributing</i></b>
An indirect form of engagement behaviour, where the user passes content on to other users. Such actions can be re-posting and sharing brand content, which increases the likelihood of other users engaging with the brand. Also, the clicking of the “Like-button” is placed within this category.
<b><i>Consuming</i></b>
The simplest form of engagement, in which a brand follower only passively views and reads brand content.
<b><i>Dormancy</i></b>
A state, where it is not possible to observe if the user is engaging with a brand page or not. It does not necessarily mean that there is no cognitive or emotional engagement taking place, but that no visible interaction occurs.
<b><i>Detachment</i></b>
Negative engagement behaviour – For instance, when a user decides to “unlike” a brand page or enables the function to hide the brand content in the newsfeed.
<b><i>Destruction</i></b>
Destructive engagement behaviour – For instance, posting negative comments, engaging in negative brand ratings or writing a public complaint about the brand on its brand page.

### ***2.2.5 Uses and gratification theory***

In order to make use of the opportunities new media offers to companies, it is important to understand why people are attracted to new media and what drives them to use it (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Similarly, it can be concluded that to explain the development of online brand engagement, it is necessary to understand the primary intention of people to follow brand pages. A common theory used to understand social media usage, is the so called uses and gratification theory (U&G theory) (Smock et al., 2011; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Whiting & Williams, 2013). As the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate further on

the causes and effects of engagement within the social media environment, referring to U&G theory should help to better understand how the proposed factors were chosen.

The approach of U&G theory dates back to the 1970s, but still influences media research to date (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). According to Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1974), as cited by Sundar & Limperos (2013: 506) the U&G theory is concerned with “the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations from the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences (...)”. This means that media is expected to satisfy inherent user needs or motives, which in turn lead to gratification and the selection of one media type over another (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Although the media landscape has rapidly changed over the last years and new media forms that offer novel features have emerged, Sundar & Limperos (2013) argue that there is a pivotal overlap of gratifications provided by old and new media types. In addition, novel features of new media types are able to satisfy even further needs, which before then have not played any matter of fact (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The study of Nambisan & Baron (2007) highlights that the originally proposed categories of gratification by Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1974) (cognitive-, social-, personal- and hedonic benefits), are suitable to explain participation in virtual customer environments. Although the authors do not further specify a medium representing such virtual environments, their work on the topic of online interaction between customers and firms shows that the theory is applicable to social media environments. In particular, Facebook and its variety of interaction features is expected to satisfy user needs and offer the aforementioned benefits (Smock et al., 2011). For instance, Whiting & Williams (2013) conducted an exploratory study and summarized different U&G themes that drive general Facebook usage. Amongst others, participants reported that they derive gratification by socially interact and communicate with other users, finding entertainment and useful information about products and sales. Furthermore, the ability to express thoughts and opinions, share information, escape from reality and simply pass time are further mentioned gratifications (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In fact, brand pages on Facebook similarly provide those aspects and therefore gratification for its followers. According to Gummerus et al. (2012), gratifications provided by a brand page can be clustered in five subgroups. Firstly, the brand page delivers practical benefits, such as information about the brand that is posted on the site. Secondly, social benefits can be derived through interacting with other followers, but also

with the brand. Thirdly, brand pages offer social enhancement by giving the followers the feeling of being useful and recognizable. Fourthly, a follower of a brand page can satisfy its need for economic benefits by getting discounts and special offers through engaging on the brand page and fifthly, the brand page provides entertainment. Such motivation towards an object (e.g. brand page), which is based on the satisfaction of different hedonic or utilitarian needs, values and interests of a person, are in literature subsumed by the notion involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Mittal & Lee, 1989).

Jahn & Kunz (2012) argue that a user derives gratification from the direct interaction with the brand, represented through the brand page, which encourages further engagement and to get into a relationship with the brand. De Vries & Carlson (2014) call this kind of relationship based dimension of gratification “brand strength” and could verify in their studies that it has a positive influence on engagement with a brand page. Moreover, they suggest to view brand strength “(...) through the lens of involvement and self-brand congruity (...)” (De Vries & Carlson, 2014: 501). In particular, it is assumed that through the specific content generated via a brand page, the brand is portrayed in a distinct way. Followers of the brand page derive satisfaction and value as they can find congruence between the image of the brand and their personal picture of themselves, resulting in increasing levels of engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014). More explicitly, Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014) state that the “liking” of a brand page on Facebook is an expression of the person’s actual or ideal self, satisfying the need for enhancing his/her self-concept.

Individuals also derive gratification through satisfying experiential needs for sensory pleasure, variety and cognitive stimulation (Keller, 1993) and the online environment is ascribed to provide such beneficial experiences (Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009). For instance, Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel (2009: 322) argue that “consumer engagement with a website is a collection of experiences with the site” and Mollen & Wilson (2010) state that the satisfaction of experiential values leads to online engagement. On a brand dimension, it is further argued that experience is evoked by brand-related stimuli, which can be cognitive, sensory, affective or behavioural in nature, leading to gratification by preventing individuals from boredom and providing joy (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Thus, it can be inferred that a Facebook brand page also offers certain beneficial experiences with the brand, through incorporating brand related stimuli, which results in engagement. Indeed, Sundar & Limperos (2013) propose that elements of

experience, the self and active participation should be incorporated in the gratification considerations regarding digital media. This approach to U&G theory seems even more suitable when examining the construct online brand engagement, as it acknowledges the previously described relationship-based concepts involvement, self-brand congruence and brand experiences as gratification forms. Furthermore, it reflects gratification to develop over time, which acknowledges the nature of engagement as a process and not something spontaneously happening. Hence, interaction-based benefits are originated in the value co-creation process and influence participation rates (Nambisan & Baron, 2007). Based on those considerations, it is concluded that need gratification, which can also be emanating from interactivity, drives engagement with a Facebook brand page and can be represented with the constructs involvement, self-brand congruence and brand experience.

### ***2.2.6 Theoretical conclusion towards online brand engagement***

Despite the growing interest in engagement and the importance for companies to understand the dynamics of social media and how brands can profit from social-networking sites, literature on online engagement is still limited. As reviewed before, there exists no general definition of engagement to date, which extends to the application of the engagement construct to social media as well. However, it is especially in the social media environment, where interactive, co-creative behaviours, which are representative of engagement, come about. Researchers have begun to propose different influence factors and outcomes of engagement, yet they suggest further validating such propositions with quantitative methods and testing an engagement scale in different contexts (e.g. Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan 2012; Mollen & Wilson, 2010). However, engagement scales, which conceptualise engagement with the three dimensions cognitive, affective and behavioural are rare in literature and most academic papers analyse engagement rather conceptual. One of the first profound engagement scales - reflecting engagement as a three dimensional construct - was developed by Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014). The authors highly recommend to develop the scale further and to test it in different contexts and with different engagement objects, in order to better understand its features. Thus, it could be seen that there is a gap between the high interest regarding the topic of online brand engagement among practitioners, as well as academics and statistical examinations of drivers and effects regarding the construct. Generally, it is predominantly mentioned that there exist somehow motivational drivers which create engagement by stimulating behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions inside the individual (e.g. Vivek, Beatty,



& Morgan, 2012; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). Motivation is provided by extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors and can be seen as determined by inherent needs. A satisfaction of those needs provides the individual with gratification and stimulates to further engage with an object, in this case, the Facebook brand page. Also, it is assumed that engagement arises from experiencing the brand as the focal engagement object (e.g. Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Additionally, engagement is asserted to be predictive of a variety of behaviours and it seems clear that engagement is rather a process and develops over time, instead of taking place spontaneously (e.g. Bowden, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2010, van Doorn et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011).

The following propositions clarify, how online brand engagement (OBE) is conceptualised in this dissertation:

**1) OBE is placed within relationship marketing and service-dominant logic**

Classifying engagement within those theories highlights its relevance for establishing long lasting consumer-brand relationships and achieving value through co-creation with engaged individuals.

**2) OBE goes beyond pure exchange of material goods**

A central point of view is that a brand can provide benefits for an individual that go beyond the transactional relationship in which the exchange of a product is predominant (Rappaport, 2007). Hence, a purchase or a consumption action does not necessarily need to be preceded, in order to create engagement. Instead, engagement can be seen as going beyond pure transaction of goods, evolving before, during and after the purchase of a brand.

**3) Facebook is an ideal setting for OBE**

Engagement is identified as a relational process, so it seems reasonable that it occurs in social context, similar to relationships between humans (Rappaport, 2007). Thus, the features of the social-networking site Facebook make it the ultimate platform for online engagement, as they provide various interaction possibilities and are focused on relational connections among users and between user and brands. Besides, the relevance of Facebook lies in its high adoption and usage rate by internet users worldwide.

**4) OBE is a motivational construct and composed of three dimensions**

Online brand engagement is understood as a motivational construct that assumes positive

oriented cognitive, emotional and behavioural resource contributions towards an interactive relationship with a brand page (e.g. Hollebeek, 2011b). The cognitive dimension captures the processing and elaboration of thoughts, whereas the affective dimension refers to the emotions an individual develops towards the brand during the engagement process. The behavioural dimension comprises the active part of the engagement construct and it is described as the level of energy, effort or time invested during the interaction (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014).

#### **5) The brand is the key focal object**

Most conceptualizations of engagement found in marketing literature, incorporate the brand as the focal engagement object (e.g. Hollebeek, 2011a & 2011b; Brodie et al., 2013). This focus on brands can be explained by the growing importance of branding during the last years and the interest in the management of brands across all customer brand touch-points (Keller, 1993; Gensler et al., 2013). The brand is seen as an active relationship partner and is more than a passive transaction object (cf. Fournier, 1998).

#### **6) Relational concepts serve as antecedents and consequences of OBE**

Based on the classification of engagement in the context of relationship marketing and in virtue of its co-creative and interactive nature, other relational concepts should act as antecedents and outcomes of the construct (cf. Brodie et al., 2011 & 2013). In view of U&G theory, it is inferred that online brand engagement results from the satisfaction of specific needs. In particular, relationship and experience oriented gratifications are expected to be critical. With this in view it is proposed that involvement, online brand experience and self-brand congruence might act as influence factors to drive online brand engagement. Because engagement is viewed as a positive aligned process, it is assumed that it leads to a state of satisfaction and the more affective loaded state of brand love.

Based on those six aspects, in this dissertation the construct engagement is examined and conceptualized as an interactive, co-creative and motivational construct, which consists of an affective-, a behavioural- and a cognitive dimension. Due to the value and strong company focus on branding, the brand (represented by a brand page on Facebook) is seen as the key focal object in the engagement process. Also, engagement encompasses every individual interacting with the Facebook brand page, whether the individual has purchased the brand or not. Following, in this dissertation the construct will be called “online brand engagement” where the term “customer” is deliberately omitted.

## **2.3 Antecedents of online brand engagement**

The following paragraphs review each construct that is proposed as an influential factor of online brand engagement. As previously depicted, in view of uses and gratification theory the constructs involvement, self-brand congruence and brand experience, are assumed to play a pivotal role as antecedents.

### ***2.3.1 Involvement***

The construct involvement is a widely spread concept in marketing literature and consumer behaviour research. The interest in involvement can be explained by the shift in marketing from a transactional to a relationship orientated perspective and towards the analysis of consumer brand interaction (Evrard & Aurier, 1996). Involvement is a motivational construct and results from different sources, that provide value and pleasure for the individual. Those sources can be grouped into the three categories, utilitarian, self-value and hedonic goals. Brands can communicate those benefits and provide satisfaction of such needs (Mittal & Lee, 1989). Moreover, involvement is seen as predictive of behavioural outcomes, such as a higher motivation to search for and process product information (Warrington & Shim, 2000). Also, consumers who are involved, are expected to develop brand commitment (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988), brand and store loyalty (Warrington & Shim, 2000). Involvement has been defined as: “A person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests.” (Zaichkowsky, 1985: 342) and is assumed to “(...) engender an ongoing commitment on the part of the consumer with regard to thoughts, feelings and behavioural responses to a product.” (Gordon, McKeage, & Fox, 1998: 447). In addition, Mittal & Lee (1989) point out, that involvement goes beyond perceived importance and argue that low involvement product categories can still be of high functional importance for consumers.

The construct involvement is mainly differentiated in three sub-constructs. That is, a person can be involved with the product itself (which means during consuming, using or simply possessing it), the act of purchasing or the product communication (Evrard & Aurier, 1996). Following, in literature the term involvement is used with a variety of prefixes, such as product-, purchase-, brand-decision- or ego involvement, whereas the latter refers to the importance of the product or the brand referring to the individual’s self-concept (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988; Mittal & Lee, 1989). It is argued that it can be distinguished between high and low involvement and that depending on the level of involvement, a different amount of cognitive processing, searching for alternatives and

referring to opinion groups, takes place (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Gordon, McKeage, & Fox, 1998). Especially in low involvement situations, people tend to make use of peripheral cues and already existing information about a product (Gordon, McKeage, & Fox, 1998). In contrast, people who are highly involved with one brand, search for more brand related information, are greater engaged in the decision between alternatives, are more aware of the differences between brands from the same category and show a higher preference for the specific brand (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Gordon, McKeage, & Fox (1998) showed that if a consumer is highly involved, relationship marketing tactics are even more effective and increase the likelihood of a purchase.

Summing up, involvement can be considered to be influenced by and originating from an individual's characteristics such as needs, values, interest and a person's individual goals (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Warrington & Shim, 2000). More precisely, it is the perceived individual importance of an object that directs the level of involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Additionally, situational conditions of a purchase situation, such as a person's perceived risk with the purchase decision and the type of media used when communicating product features, influence involvement (Warrington & Shim, 2000; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Lastly, involvement is influenced by the symbolic and hedonic value of a brand, as well as utilitarian benefits and emotional appeal that creates pleasure (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Mittal & Lee, 1989). Due to the features assigned to the construct involvement, it is seen to be a relevant component in the overall process of engagement (Bowden, 2009). However, it is distinctive from the construct engagement. According to Mollen & Wilson (2010: 329), engagement is a construct that goes beyond involvement, as it encompasses an interactive relationship with a brand and the "(...) intention to act trumps the involvement construct's more passive allocation of resources." Moreover, involvement is distinct in so far as to develop engagement, it requires not only cognitive elaboration, but also experiential and instrumental values need to be satisfied, which is not ultimately necessary for involvement (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). In other words, a person can already be involved with an object simply by mentally processing information of an object, but engagement is rather an interactive elaboration on affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions.

### ***2.3.2 Online brand experience***

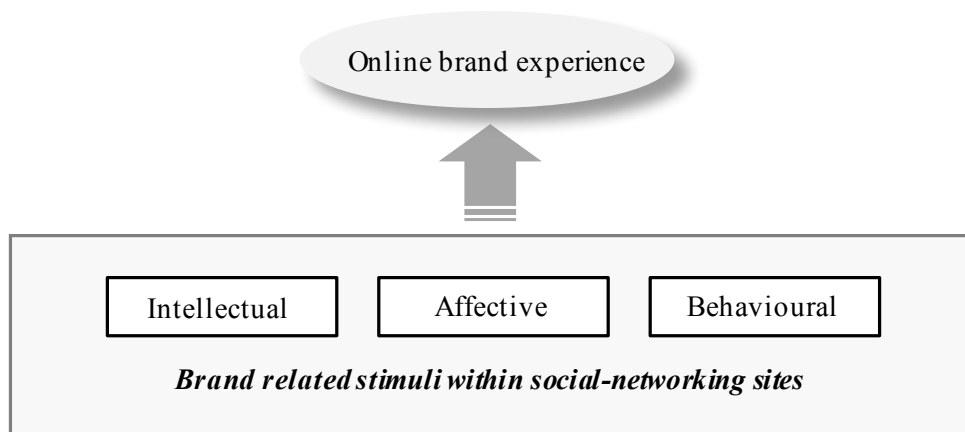
The idea of brand experience is conceptualised as a subjective, internal consumer response towards specific brand features. It occurs in a variety of settings when a consumer searches

for, buys or consumes a product and also when customers enter a website (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009), whereby the brand itself is seen as the source of “(...) sensory, affective, and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experiences” (Schmitt, 1999: 57). Nowadays, as consumers expect more distinctiveness from brands, besides functional product features, a unique brand experience can help to differentiate one brand from another and strengthen brand equity. Focusing on creating experiences with brands, acknowledges the consumer as a rational, as well as emotional being and captures consumption as a holistic process (Schmitt, 1999). Gentile, Spiller, & Noci (2007) stress that experience takes place during all moments of a customer’s contact with a company and its offerings. Due to the advances in information and communication technology, as well as the increasing use of the internet, many of such customer contacts have shifted towards the internet, providing the possibility for more dynamic and real-time brand experience (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013).

Brand related stimuli are part of a brand’s design, identity, communication and packaging strategy. They can take various forms from colours, sounds and haptics, to logos with special typefaces and designs, slogans with a high recall value or brand characters in the form of mascots (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). For instance, intellectual stimulation through a brand, can result from a challenging brand slogan, which evokes curiosity, stimulates a consumer to think about the brand message or fosters complex problem solving. Brands can also provide inspirational power that motivates individuals to engage in physical activities, such as sport or meeting friends. A sensory brand experience is created by all stimuli that reach a person’s sensory system, such as sounds, visual impressions, smell or haptic features (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Bruhn, 2015). In addition, affective brand experience is stimulated by brand features that evoke feelings of fun, inspiration or nostalgia (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) and can also be induced by presenting atmospheric pictures and videos together with the brand (Bruhn, 2015).

Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009) highlight that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a certain stimulus type and a certain experience dimension. It is rather that one brand related stimulus can trigger simultaneously several brand experience dimensions. Those brand related stimuli, which constitute the brand identity, can also be found when a brand is presented online (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). This is due to the fact, that a presentation of a brand on its

digital key channels, should be in line with its brand identity through using the right brand related stimuli. Thus, Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou (2013: 22) define online brand experience as a “(...) holistic response to the stimuli within website environment.” In particular, social networking sites like Facebook offer the possibility to include a variety of brand related stimuli through pictures, text, videos and audio material that can be posted directly on the brand page. For example, the Facebook brand page of the brand “Nike” regularly posts content with highly motivating content, prompting physical activities and stimulating the followers to think about the brand meaning. Inspirational videos displaying strong emotions are published and the language used is characterized by emotional words (cf. Facebook.com/nike, 2016).



**Figure 5 – Online brand experience**

*Source: Adapted from Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009)*

Although it is suggested that online engagement comes from digital experience (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009), followers on Facebook cannot feel, touch or smell the products and the visual impact of the brand is restricted due to the general Facebook website design. Thus, it is inferred that brand pages on Facebook can offer high cognitive, behavioural and affective stimulation, but rather low sensory experience. Based on the definition of Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009), figure 5 shows the composition of online brand experience, constituted of an affective-, intellectual- and behavioural dimension, each influenced by stimuli related to a Facebook brand page.

In conclusion it can be said that previous and ongoing experience with a brand is seen as critical in the process of engagement (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011). In particular, Mollen & Wilson (2010) who argue that online engagement is a response to website stimuli, propose that future research should address other experiential stimuli than

telepresence. It is important to note that brand experience differs from brand engagement in so far as it does not presume a motivational state (Hollebeek, 2011a). This means, that a brand experience can also occur, when an individual is not interested in or has any personal connection with a brand. Further, it is not required that a person has made a personal judgement about a brand prior to a brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In contrast, online brand engagement results from an individual's motivation towards a brand and represents a more proactive reaction, compared to a reactive response to brand related stimuli (Hollebeek, 2011a).

### ***2.3.3 Self-brand congruence***

As depicted earlier, Facebook is a medium that scores high on the level of self-presentation and self-disclosure, hence users can create a profile that represents them in a preferred way. Similarly, companies can design a brand page in a certain way to reflect the brand's personality. Aaker (1997: 347) defines brand personality as a "set of human characteristics associated with a brand". Thus, through strategic marketing communication techniques the brand's personality traits can be influenced, creating a long-lasting picture of the brand in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1997). Furthermore, the brand image is determined by the people who consume or possess a brand and the attributes associated with those consumers (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Additionally, it is the story that is narrated in conjunction with a brand that helps consumers to comprehend the brand features and the symbolic brand meaning. Typically, advertisements use stories to evoke desired brand associations, which consumers use to construct and approve their self-images (Escalas, 2004). However, Mollen & Wilson (2010) point out that brand narratives can also be easily communicated in the online environment, creating a distinct image of a brand.

Subsequently, individuals will infer from a brand's personality and the image a brand has, if it fits to the image they have about themselves, which is referred to as self-concept (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Self-concept describes the awareness of a person about "(...) attitudes, feelings, perceptions and evaluations of oneself as an object" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967: 24) and is viewed as a set of self-schemas (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009). Those self-schemas are defined as "(...) cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information" (Markus, 1977: 64). In general, the self-concept is seen as having four different dimensions. The actual self refers to how a person sees him-/herself, the ideal self describes how a person would like to perceive him-/herself, the social self refers to how a

person assumes that others see him-/herself and the ideal social self expresses how someone wants to be seen by others (Sirgy, 1982). As individuals strive for maintaining self-consistency, they are motivated to choose and interact with a brand that is consistent with their self-concept and neglect incongruous information to avoid dissonance (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006). In other words, the greater the individual's perceived fit between his/her self-concept and the brand is, the stronger the relational connection with that brand will be (Fournier, 1998; Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Escalas & Bettmann, 2003). This leads to a positive assessment of a brand choice and continuous repurchase of the same brand (Kressmann et al., 2006). Due to the symbolic meaning of brands, consumers not only choose one brand over another to confirm their self-concept, but also experience self-enhancement by the desirable social meaning of a brand (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Thus, people use brands to establish their self-images and also to represent to others how they see themselves (Escalas & Bettmann, 2003).

Mollen & Wilson (2010) argue that this perceived congruence between the brand image and a person's self-concept is inevitable for the general process of engagement and it is suggested that the same holds true for the development of engagement with a Facebook brand page (Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2014). According to Peluchette & Karl (2010), Facebook users mainly use their profiles to portray consciously a particular self-image to others. Keeping in mind, that it is a key feature of Facebook that other users can see who has "liked" and engages with a brand page, it theoretically means that "liking" a Facebook brand page not only follows the intention of being connected with a brand, but also helps the users to deliberately show others how they see themselves. Hence, creating a self-identity in terms of social and ideal social self, apparently plays a key role on Facebook (Peluchette & Karl, 2010) and as argued by Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014), users will "like" and therefore engage with a brand on Facebook, in order to express their ideal or social self. Consequently, it is expected that users show greater engagement with a Facebook brand page that matches their self-concept (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2014).

In literature, a perceived congruence between self-concept and the brand image is referred to as self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982), self-brand congruence (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettmann, 2003), brand-image congruence (Fournier, 1998) or self-image congruence (Kressmann et al., 2006). However, those terms are often used interchangeably (Kressmann et al., 2006). In the following, the term self-brand congruence



will be used, as it includes both the notion “brand” which is the key focal object and the “self” which reflects the importance of the self-concept.

## **2.4 Consequences of online brand engagement**

Since online brand engagement is conceptualized as a positive process, it is proposed that the outcomes will be satisfaction and a more emotional brand-relationship status, called brand love, which are described in more detail in the following. Also, it is generally assumed that highly satisfied individuals will positively talk about and recommend a brand (Anderson, 1998; van Doorn et al., 2010). Thus, word-of-mouth is presumed as the final consequence mediated through satisfaction and brand love. Although, not new to marketing research, word-of-mouth still has an undeniable significance, due to its possibility to generate a strategic advantage and has re-emerged as a key function in marketing practices (Edelman, 2007; Schmitt, Skiera, & Van den Bulte, 2011).

### ***2.4.1 Satisfaction***

Satisfaction continues to be a proper target variable for companies, as it positively influences consumer attitudes and different behavioural intentions (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Oliver, 1999; Oliver, 1980). For instance, it is associated with increasing customer loyalty, intention to purchase and word-of-mouth recommendations (Bowden, 2009). Satisfaction within marketing literature, is described as a “fairly temporal postusage state for one-time consumption or a repeatedly experienced state for ongoing consumption that reflects how the product or service has fulfilled its purpose.” (Oliver, 1999: 41). This definition implies that the consumer perceives that consuming a product, serves a specific purpose, he has anticipated before and satisfaction arises after a positive alignment of expectations and product or service performance (Oliver, 1999). Thus, from a psychological point of view, satisfaction or dissatisfaction evolves from a confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations regarding a product performance (Johnson & Fornell, 1991). In addition, satisfaction arises through positive disconfirmation, when the performance of a product exceeds the previously developed expectations and reversely dissatisfaction results from negative disconfirmation, when the performance of a product is even lower than expected (Oliver, 1980). Moreover, Johnson & Fornell, (1991) argue that satisfaction accelerates over time, as individuals will pursue using a product or system that has satisfied them before. Hence, a stored positive experience in the consumer’s mind increases and expectations about the performance become relatively stable, slightly

converging with the perceived performance. Generally, the construct satisfaction is understood as a cognitive model, which reflects the conscious assessment process within the individual, resulting in the confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations (Oliver, 1980). Nevertheless, it is argued that seeing satisfaction only as a cognitive construct is too limited and that some categories of positive affects, such as arousal or pleasant surprise coexist and determine satisfaction. For instance, consumers can form affective related expectations (e.g. provision of joy), towards a consumption situation and delivering the appropriate arousal level results in satisfaction (Oliver, 1993; Wirtz, Mattila & Tan, 2000).

In the online environment satisfaction (sometimes described as e-satisfaction) also plays an important role in online shopping, website usage intention or loyalty towards the website (Flavián, Guinaliu, & Guerra, 2006; Evanschitzky et al., 2004; Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011). Within the digital world, satisfaction can be seen as an attitudinal status and directly influenced by website usability (Flavián, Guinaliu, & Guerra, 2006). Muylle, Moenaert, & Despontin (2004: 545) define it as “the attitude toward the web site by a hands-on user of the organization’s web site”. Based on an exploratory study, the authors identified that features such as the website layout, structure and speed, ease of use, information provision, and language customization, influence general satisfaction with a website. Referring to online shopping, Kim, Jin, & Swinney (2009) show that e-satisfaction leads to e-loyalty and is critical for re-purchase on a given website, willingness to pay more and resistance to switch to another online retailer. Elements such as the website design, fulfilment of the shopping process (Kim, Jin, & Swinney, 2009) and web aesthetics (Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011) proved to be of importance in the formation of satisfaction with the online retailer.

However, it can be summarized that such investigations on e-satisfaction are more focused on satisfaction with elements and practical features of a website or during online shopping. Contrary, in this dissertation it is proposed that a positive engagement process with a brand page leads to satisfaction, based on the confirmation-disconfirmation approach as described before. In line with the conceptualization of Oliver (1980), satisfaction is considered to be a more cognitive determined outcome with some affective aspects, resulting from a consciously evaluation of the engagement with the Facebook brand page.

#### **2.4.2 Brand love**

Fournier (1998: 363) claims that “At the core of all strong brand relationships was a rich affective grounding reminiscent of concepts of love in the interpersonal domain”. The term love in consumer-brand relationships describes a strong, passionate and long-lasting

feeling towards a brand, which is more than preference or satisfaction with the product performance (Fournier, 1998). Recently, the term brand love has found its way into academic research to subsume exactly those emotional ties consumers form with brands. For instance, Albert & Merunka (2013: 259) describe brand love as a relationship that is “(...) deep and enduring (beyond simple affect), such that the loved brand is considered irreplaceable“ and that an individual will not only suffer from withdrawing the brand, but also has a biased, positive evaluation of the brand. Brand love is distinct from the cognitive related construct of satisfaction, as it is emotionally driven, does not require an expectancy or disconfirmation, is manifested in relationships and includes the willingness to state the love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Brand love is identified as consisting of “cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, which consumers organize in a mental prototype.” (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012: 2) and is distinguishable from other relational constructs, such as commitment or brand trust (Albert & Merunka, 2013). However, Albert & Merunka (2013) demonstrate in their studies that brand love has a greater influence on brand commitment than brand trust and a stronger impact on positive word-of-mouth than brand commitment. A frequently used theory to explain why people postulate that they actually love a brand, is the Sternberg’s triangular theory of interpersonal love (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Huber, Meyer, & Schmid, 2015). This theory states that love is made of the three components intimacy, passion and decision/commitment that “(...) together can be viewed as forming the vertices of a triangle.” (Sternberg, 1986: 119). The component intimacy encompasses feelings of closeness and warmth, whereas passion refers to romance and physical attraction and the decision/commitment component describes the decision to love someone and to maintain that love (Sternberg, 1986). According to Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012), the concept of brand love similarly involves a passion component, as a form of passionate attraction towards the brand and feelings of connectedness with the brand. Thus, brand love can be defined as “(...) the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name.” (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006: 81). It is argued that in order to create passion and consequently brand love, individuals need to perceive a connection between their self-concept and the brand, an aspect missing in interpersonal love theories. If an individual observes that a brand fits the own personality, the brand becomes relevant for the person’s self-concept and the emotional bond stronger (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Huber, Meyer, & Schmid, 2015).

Interestingly, Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) revealed that opposed to interpersonal love, which is more unconditional, for the development of brand love it is unalienable that a brand delivers great quality and faultless performance. To put it another way, people do not only form bonds with brands due to emotional values, but also because of utilitarian aspects. Huber, Meyer, & Schmid (2015) show that such utilitarian values influence aspects of the self-concept and following passion for a brand, an effect that even gains in relevance over time. Besides the quality aspect of brands, Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) uncover another nine sets of features which constitute the mental prototype of brand love. Accordingly, strong held values and meaningfulness of the brand, as well as intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards are important. The brand needs to help to construct a person's current and desired self-identity, provide a positive affect, a sense of rightness and passionate feelings within the individual. Also, the length of usage, the features of the emotional bond developed and the investment of time, money and thoughts play key roles (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

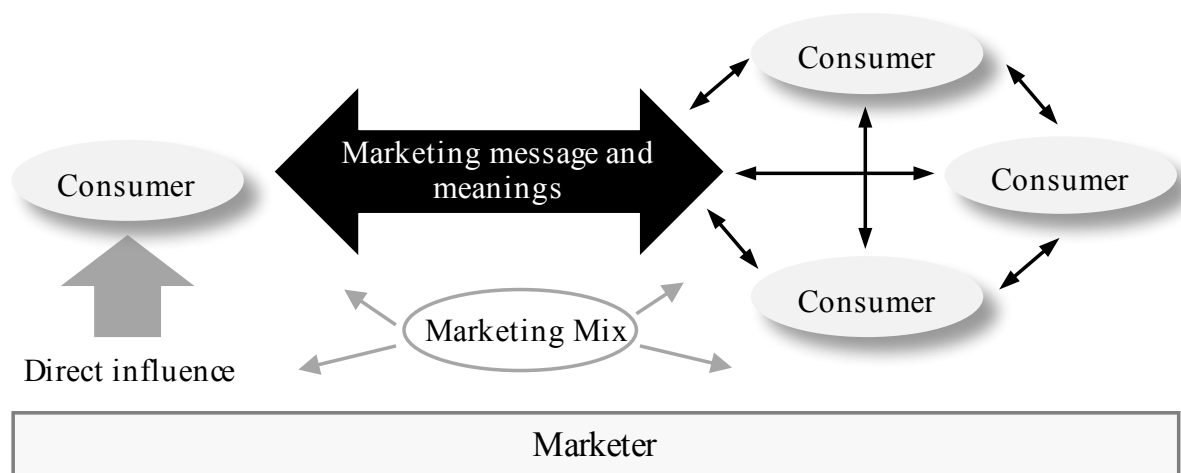
Although research on brand love within the online environment is limited, it is expected that the previously described components of brand love similarly play a role when interacting with a Facebook brand page. Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) highlight that a frequent interaction with the brand is necessary to develop brand love and interaction also characterizes the online brand engagement process. For instance, a study of Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014) on brands in the social media environment reveals, that individuals can indeed develop brand love with self-expressive brands, which they have "liked" on Facebook. According to the authors, "liking" implies that the person is engaged with the brand page, consequently it can be inferred that positive online brand engagement will lead to the creation of brand love.

#### ***2.4.3 Behavioural intention***

Due to the relevance of positive customer-to-customer recommendations for value creation for the firm (Kumar et al., 2010), the concept of word-of-mouth will be examined as the final behavioural outcome of online brand engagement, which is presumed to be triggered by satisfaction and brand love.

For quite some time, marketers have recognized the significance of the word-of-mouth phenomena and its power regarding consumers' attitude and product choice, compared to traditional advertisement (Dichter, 1966). Whether incentivised by the firm or organically developed, the management of word-of-mouth communication regained in importance

with the ever growing use of the internet and speed of message distribution (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Originally, word-of-mouth refers to the simple “(...) exchange of product and brand-related marketing messages and meanings”, between two consumers in an organic manner and without inducement by marketers (Kozinets et al., 2010: 72). Thus, it can be defined as “(...) informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services, rather than formal complaints to firms and/or personnel” (Anderson, 1998: 6). In general, word-of-mouth is linked to higher sales performance and future cash-flows, as well as decreasing churn rate and lower advertisement costs to attract new customers (Luo, 2009; Kumar et al., 2010; Schmitt, Skiera, & Van den Bulte, 2011). Thus, companies also try to stimulate word-of-mouth recommendations through incentivised referral programs. In fact, customers acquired through referrals show a significant higher contribution margin, a greater customer value and a better retention rate compared to non-referred customers (Schmitt, Skiera, & Van den Bulte, 2011). Contrary, negative word-of-mouth is related to higher costs for customer acquisition and decreasing repurchase intention. In the end, it can also negatively impact the company’s image and consequently reduce a firm’s cash flow and stock price (Luo, 2009).



**Figure 6 – The network coproduction model**  
*Source: Kozinets et al. (2010)*

Nowadays, as presented in figure 6, consumers are assumed to be active co-creators of a marketing message in a network of other individuals. Due to the diffusion of the internet, consumers are digitally interconnected, which facilitates the distribution of messages and marketers can deliberately spread messages within a communicative network. Through word-of-mouth marketing within digital communities such as blogs, marketing messages

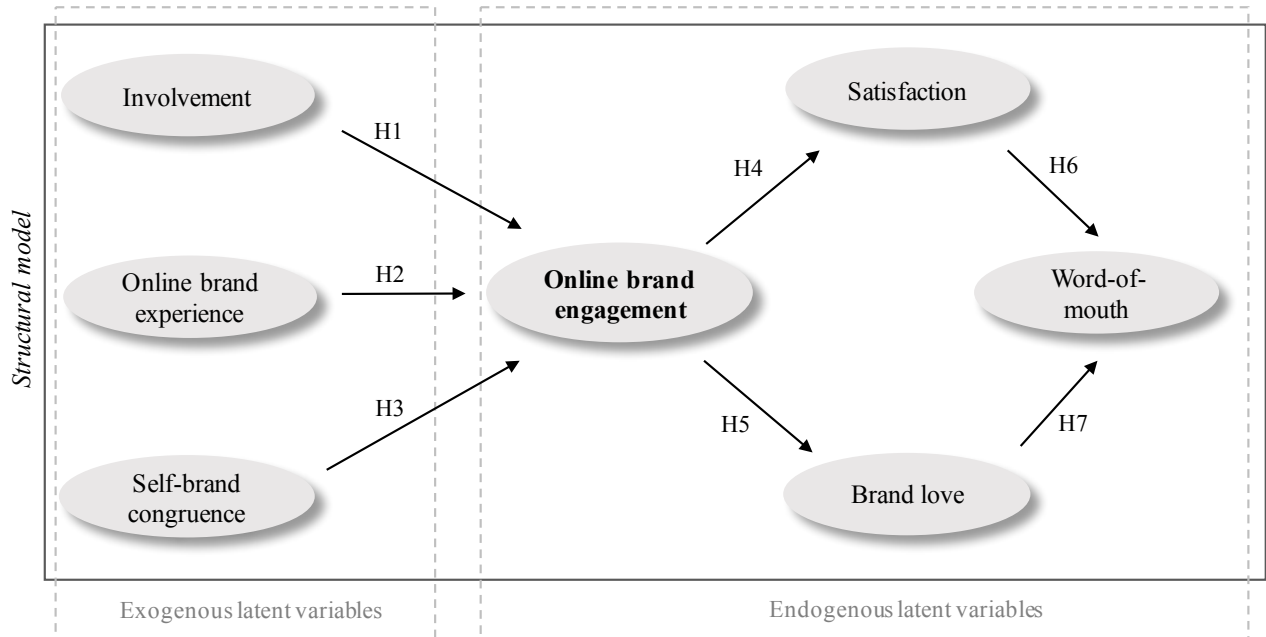
and meanings are modified and therefore more authentic to the community (Kozinets et al., 2010). Word-of-mouth is no longer static or dyadic, instead characterized by network-conversations, which in particular on social media platforms are highly dynamic, shaping consumer attitudes and expectations towards the brand (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Word-of-mouth in the digital world is often referred to as “electronic word-of-mouth”, which is defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004: 39).

It is generally assumed that satisfaction is a predictor of brand recommendations (Anderson, 1998) and it could be shown that brand love is positively associated with brand advocacy and positive word-of-mouth (Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2014; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Moreover, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) identified a variety of factors that drive electronic word-of-mouth and among others the intention to contribute positive product reviews and comments is influenced by prior satisfying product experiences. Therefore, it is expected that brand recommendations in the form of word-of-mouth communication result as the final consequences of online brand engagement, mediated through satisfaction and brand love. In addition, the conception of word-of-mouth in this dissertation follows the propositions of Kimmel & Kitchen (2014: 14), who point out that the boundaries between electronic word-of-mouth and its offline counterpart become increasingly blurred. According to the authors, word-of-mouth should be understood as a “(...) communication that evolves and is transformed via the ebb and flow of conversations that shift from online to offline to online context, and jump from one social media platform to others”. Therefore, the behavioural intention of engaged individuals to recommend the brand, is not focused on either offline or online word-of-mouth, but is understood as spreading within a network of active consumers, which is depicted in figure 6.

After reviewing the relevant literature of the proposed influence factors and consequences of online brand engagement, the following section represents the conceptual research model and the corresponding research hypotheses. Following, the research process is described in more detail and the results of the study are presented.

### 3. Conceptual model and research hypotheses

Based on the literature review a conceptual research model could be established, which consists of three exogenous latent variables and four endogenous latent variables that constitute a structural model. As illustrated in figure 7, there are seven paths that represent the proposed connections between the three antecedents and three consequences of online brand engagement (Hair et al., 2014).



**Figure 7 – Conceptual research model**

*Source: Own elaboration*

As depicted previously, involvement is seen as a critical influence factor and highlighted as one of the key antecedents of engagement by different authors (e.g. Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**→ H1: Involvement (IV) has a positive influence on OBE**

Furthermore, it was highlighted that Facebook brand pages can include specific brand related stimuli and it is therefore assumed that brand experience also evolves when a user encounters a brand page. Comparable to a brand experience in offline settings, this online brand experience similarly represents an individual's internal, subjective response to the brand related stimuli, conveyed through the brand page (cf. Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In the following, the term online brand experience will be used to

describe exactly that brand experience a follower has with a Facebook brand page and hypothesis 2 is formulated as follows:

**→ H2: Online brand experience (OBEX) has a positive influence on OBE**

Moreover, it was reviewed that the perceived connection between an individual's self-concept and the brand's personality as portrayed through the Facebook brand page is supposed to be influential in the formation of online brand engagement (e.g. Jahn & Kunz, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Based on the possibility to represent a brand through a Facebook brand page in a symbolic way and in accordance to its brand personality, as well as to make use of narrative processing, it is inferred that users will engage with a brand page when it matches their self-concept. As individuals might not only engage with a brand page that reflects their inner self, but also to demonstrate others which brand they are following, it is further concluded that all dimensions of a user's self-concept play a distinctive role. Thus, hypothesis 3 is proposed as follows:

**→ H3: Self-brand congruence (SBC) has a positive influence on OBE**

It is further assumed that individuals will consciously evaluate their engagement with a Facebook brand page, based on a confirmation-disconfirmation process of expectations towards the online interaction with the Facebook brand page. Johnson & Fornell (1991: 278) point out that "The more experience we accumulate regarding any particular product or service the more likely we are to be satisfied with its repeated purchase and consumption" and it is assumed that the same effect holds true for the engagement process. In sum, it is proposed that satisfaction arises after engagement and that there exists a positive connection between those two constructs.

**→ H4: OBE has a positive influence on satisfaction (SA)**

In addition, it was concluded that the components that constitute brand love as described by Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012), also evolve during the online engagement process. That is, the brand page is usually created in an appealing way, provides a good online performance quality and practical functionality. Self-brand integration can be derived through the engagement process with a symbolic brand page, giving the individual the chance to assign values and meaning to the brand and find self-brand congruence. It is expected that individuals are willing to invest time in the interaction with the brand page and that the deletion of such would result in displeasure. The aspect that brand love needs



time to develop, can also be ascribed to engagement, as it is understood as a process. Also, the engagement process is expected to generate both intrinsic and extrinsic value for the individual. Thus, it is inferred that online brand engagement positively influences brand love and hypothesis 5 reads as follows:

**→ H5: OBE has a positive influence on brand love (BL)**

The last outcome proposed in the structural model is the construct word-of-mouth. It is expected that satisfaction and brand love both lead to word-of-mouth and hypothesis 6 and 7 are formulated as follows:

**→ H6: Satisfaction has a positive influence on word-of-mouth (WOM)**

**→ H7: Brand love has a positive influence on word-of-mouth (WOM)**

It should be noted that the structural model presented above, consists of both formative and reflective measurement models. That is, the two latent variables online brand experience and online brand engagement are second-order constructs, based on their first-order dimensions. Those first-order dimensions represent formative indicators, as they influence the value of the latent variables (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Namely, online brand experience is composed of an affective, behavioural and intellectual dimension and online brand engagement is determined by the dimensions cognitive processing, affection and activation. All other variables, as well as each of the first-order dimensions is assessed by reflective indicators, which can be seen as functions of the latent constructs (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

## **4. Research approach and results**

### **4.1 Research methodology**

This section is intended to describe the general methodology used to answer the research question of this dissertation and to test the hypotheses. Therefore, the research philosophy, approach, design and strategy are explained based on the concept of Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009). In order to understand the chosen research methodology, the overall structure of this dissertation is recalled: An initial literature review was undertaken, trying to elaborate on the gap in literature on the topic of online brand engagement. That is, due to the importance of social media and the relevance of brand engagement for marketing management, a high interest among practitioners and academics alike exists, however academic investigations lag behind and are mainly conceptual. It was seen that first

engagement scales were developed, calling for further investigations on antecedents and outcomes and the adaptation of such a scale in different contexts. With the methodology chosen, as described in the next sections, the following research objectives could be achieved:

- **Identification of antecedents and outcomes of online brand engagement**
- **Compare results between gender, age and brand type**
- **Analyse which of the drivers proposed has the greatest impact on online brand engagement**
- **Analyse which is the main online brand engagement consequence**
- **Examine if word-of-mouth results as the final outcome of online brand engagement**

#### ***4.1.1 Research philosophy and approach***

According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009), to begin the determination of the research methodology, one should clarify which research philosophy and research approach the study follows. Research philosophy falls into the categories positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Those can be ascertained by means of ontology, which refers to the researcher's view of the nature of reality and epistemology, which refers to the researcher's view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Another aspect classifying the research philosophy is the so called axiology, which describes the researcher's view of the role of values in research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). In this dissertation, it is attempted to gather statistical data about the construct online brand engagement and other inter-related concepts, in order to make tentative conclusions about the population under investigation. Existing theories were used to develop the research hypotheses and the conceptual framework. Thus, the research philosophy used on this dissertation refers to positivism (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The way to answer specific research objectives can be either deductive or inductive. The inductive approach is concerned with the context in which a study takes place and usually uses a small sample size. It tries to collect qualitative data in order to develop a theory and is less concerned with the generalization of its findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Hence, it is also described as a theory building process, which is based in the observation of particular occasions (Kenneth, 2000). In contrast, the deductive approach is focused on explaining causal relationships between variables, collection of quantitative data and the

generalization of results (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). According to Kenneth (2000) the deductive approach tries to investigate if a theory can be adapted to another instance. In this dissertation, a deductive approach prevails, as the focus is on investigating how different variables are related to each other. For this purpose, hypotheses which are derived from a literature review, are developed and will be tested by statistical means.

#### ***4.1.2 Research design and strategy***

The research design is related to the research philosophy and determines how the research questions will be answered and the research strategy refer to the exact way of data collection and analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Typically, if there exist only few prior investigations regarding an issue, the researcher's goal is to examine the situation further by using an exploratory research design. The main techniques used in such a case are personal interviews, focus group interviews, projective tests, observational studies and ethnographies. When building upon previous exploratory research, a descriptive research design tries to describe exactly specific circumstances (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). Usually, structured interviews are used in a descriptive research design to identify "general patterns" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009: 322).

However, this dissertation follows an explanatory research design, as the main goal is to detect causal relationships between variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). According to Mooi & Sarstedt (2011: 17) explanatory research, also called causal research, is focused on "the relationship between an event (the cause) and a second event (the effect), when the second event is a consequence of the first". The scientific meaning of causality implies that a cause is seen as only one of other possible influence factors and that the connection between cause and effect tends to be probabilistic (Malhotra, 1993). In order to test the proposed research hypotheses by statistical means, a survey strategy was applied to collect quantitative, primary data with the help of an online questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The advantages of the use of primary data are that they deliver up-to-date information and specifically relate to the research purpose (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). In addition to the online questionnaire three expert-interviews have been conducted, as it is increasingly suggested by researchers to use different methods concurrently while studying a certain topic (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner 2007). This method is referred to as mixed-method research, where both qualitative and quantitative data is collected either at the same time or one after another, but not combined (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). A mixed-method approach is expected to enhance the

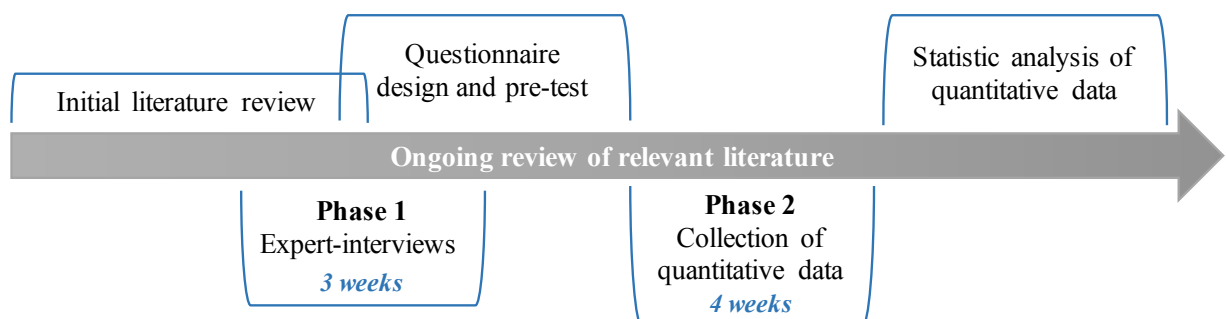
understanding of a topic and the overall picture on a current research issue (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner 2007). In this dissertation the expert-interviews have been conducted before developing the questionnaire and during the course of the literature review, in order to better understand key issues of the construct online brand engagement. Referring to the mixed-method design matrix by Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004), this approach can be classified as a sequential method with a dominant status of quantitative research.

## 4.2 Data collection

In this paragraph, it is described how the qualitative and quantitative data was collected. In figure 8, the general timing of the data collection process is shown.

### Phase 1:

As mentioned earlier an initial exploratory research phase took place while reviewing the literature, in order to better understand the topic online brand engagement. More precisely, it was the purpose of this phase to investigate the following aspects: How relevant is online brand engagement for marketing practice and how do marketing managers define the construct? What key performance indicators are used to measure online brand engagement? Are the factors online brand experience and brand love assumed to play a relevant part for creating online brand engagement? Moreover, as it became apparent while reviewing the literature that the social media environment is currently the preferable place to drive online brand engagement, the expert-interviews should help to reassure that focusing the study on social media is reasonable. Lastly, it was the purpose to understand how engagement with a brand online is initiated and maintained.



**Figure 8 – Time frame of data collection**  
*Source: Own elaboration*

In order to conduct the expert-interviews, an interview-guideline was established, which contained open formulated questions that covered the relevant topics mentioned above (Lamnek, 2010). According to Lamnek (2010), undertaking interviews based on pre-defined open questions creates a narrative mode in which the interviewee will feel comfortable to share its knowledge, while still focusing on the research purpose (Lamnek, 2010). Thereby, the interviews all had more or less the same structure and could be easier compared afterwards. However, during the interview process the questions were slightly changed, depending on the flow and the direction of the interviewees' answers, which is also referred to as semi-structured interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The interviews took place in the headquarters of L'Oréal Germany in Düsseldorf in February 2016 and were conducted face-to-face. The interview partners are all working in the digital marketing department for the brand L'Oréal PARiS and have long-term experience in the field of digital and social media marketing. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were briefly informed about the research topic and the purpose of the interview. It was explained and agreed by the interviewees that the complete interview would be recorded to facilitate later recall of information and further examinations. As suggested by Lamnek (2010) a written transcript of each interview based on the audio-recording, was made to better analyse what the interviewees have said. The interview guideline and the transcripts of each interview can be found in the Appendix 4 and 5.

### **Phase 2:**

According to Malhotra (1993: 318), the main way to collect quantitative data within a survey strategy is by using a standardized questionnaire, which can be defined as “a formalized set of questions for obtaining information of respondents”. Therefore, after the first phase of data collection was finished and the interviews evaluated, a questionnaire was designed, which is described in more detail in the following paragraph. The questionnaire was set up online using the software tool Qualtrics (qualtrics.com), which offers profound survey design and data collection possibilities. Once the questionnaire was established on the platform, a survey link was provided that could be distributed online. The survey was active for one month, from the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 until the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2016. During that time, each participant who clicked on the survey link was redirected to the beginning of the questionnaire and could immediately start to answer the survey questions, regardless of time or location. Moreover, the online survey was mobile friendly, which ensured that every device could be used to answer the questionnaire.

### **4.3 Questionnaire design and measurement scales**

As it can be understood based on the literature review that the social-network Facebook is currently the best social media environment to create online brand engagement, the author decided to focus the research on this platform and the online questionnaire was designed accordingly. It consists of four parts and comprises all items to measure the proposed variables. At the beginning an introductory text was presented, giving general information about the topic of the questionnaire and a contact address for questions regarding the survey. Participants were also informed that answers are given anonymously and about the duration of taking the survey. Initially, two screening questions were presented asking the participant if he/she has a Facebook profile and has liked a brand page on Facebook. To ensure that only people who are following a Facebook brand page take the survey, every participant who would click on the “no” button for those two questions, was shown a default message with an apology note and then redirected to the end of the questionnaire. All other participants who answered those questions with “yes”, were asked to write down the name of one specific brand they are following and to state how often they are using Facebook. Asking those questions were intended to deliver descriptive data about Facebook brand pages and also should help the participant to get familiar with the topic and to better answer the subsequent questions.

The third part displayed the different items to measure each construct. All items had been taken from existing measurement scales that were found in literature and measured with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “I strongly disagree” to 7 = “I strongly agree”. The participants were instructed to rate their level of agreement for each statement on the corresponding scale, while keeping in mind the brand they have mentioned. As the measurement-scales were taken from different research papers, the item wording had to be adapted to the specific context of online brand engagement. Table 3 lists the measured constructs and the corresponding sources of each. A full list with all items and their adapted wording can be found in Appendix 2.

The constructs involvement and self-brand congruence were both measured using the scales from De Vries & Carlson (2014). Those scales seemed appropriate as they had been applied in the social media context and the self-brand congruence scale reflects the assumption of this dissertation that all dimensions of the self need to be taken into consideration. Online brand experience was measured with the brand experience scale from Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009), which consists of four dimensions that

constitute the higher-order construct brand experience. However, the dimension for sensory experience was not taken into account, as it is proposed in this dissertation that it plays a minor role regarding experience with a Facebook brand page. For the construct online brand engagement, the multi-item scale from Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014) was used, which reflects the three dimensions of engagement. As described previously, online engagement can occur in a variety of different behaviours, ranging from active to more passive interaction with the brand. Thus, the term “interaction” was shortly explained to the participant, since all forms of engagement should be captured. Satisfaction was measured with a scale from Loureiro, Miranda, & Breazeale (2014) and the items for brand love were adapted from the working paper of Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia (2014). Word-of-mouth was measured with a scale from Ismail & Spinelli (2012), as those items reflect online, as well as offline word-of-mouth communication, which mirrors the presumption of this dissertation that word-of-mouth is taking place in an entangled network of offline and online communication (cf. Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). The questionnaire ended with two more socio-demographic questions, asking about the participants’ age and gender. The complete questionnaire is annexed in the Appendix 3.

**Table 3 – Measurement scales**  
*Source: Own elaboration*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Adapted from</b>
Involvement	De Vries & Carlson (2014)
Online brand experience	Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009)
Self-brand congruence	De Vries & Carlson (2014)
Online brand engagement	Hollebeek et al. (2014)
Satisfaction	Loureiro, Miranda, & Breazeale (2014)
Brand love	Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia (2014)
Word-of-mouth	Ismail & Spinelli (2012)

While designing the questionnaire attention was paid to always be clear about what the participant was expected to do. Thus, whenever it seemed to be necessary short descriptions were provided to explain question blocks and how the items needed to be rated. Furthermore, the wording of the statements was made as simple and precise as possible to diminish ambiguity. In addition, as some items of the same construct tend to be

quite similar, the statements were slightly randomized within question blocks and across the questionnaire to reduce boredom and inattention. Moreover, by not placing all items of one construct directly next to each other and focusing on clear wording and the reduction of ambiguity, common method biases can be prevented (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Loureiro, 2015). In order to decrease the drop-out rate a progress bar was included, showing the remaining percentage of the questions that need to be answered.

After the questionnaire design was finished and the whole survey was set up online, it was first pre-tested with four test-participants. Pre-testing a questionnaire is seen as an essential step to reassure clarity of questions and item wording (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). The best way to pre-test a questionnaire is to use personal interviews, so the researcher can directly observe the reactions of the people taking the test (Malhotra, 1993). For that purpose, Qualtrics provides a test-link, which was sent to four people who were informed to test the questionnaire. While those people were doing the questionnaire, the author of this dissertation was cut in using Skype phone calls. Hence, the test-participants could easily communicate any problems they had with the wording and comprehension of questions or other technical issues. As suggested by Malhotra (1993) a pre-test should cover any aspect of the questionnaire. Therefore, the test-participants were also asked about the general design, flow and duration of the survey. After pre-testing the questionnaire, only a few item wordings had to be modified to improve their understanding.

#### **4.4 Results of the expert interviews**

According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009), using a mixed-method approach means that qualitative data is analysed qualitatively and quantitative data is analysed quantitatively. In particular, as the expert interviews were intended to get a first insight into the topic, the analysis was focused in comprehending and grouping the answers into two categories. The first summarises how online brand engagement is defined and evaluated by marketing practitioners and the second what actions are carried out to drive such engagement (cf. table 4).

Online brand engagement was described by the practitioners as an active interaction with the brand itself, the brand's online content or a participation in the social media activities. To measure engagement, different key performance indicators are used. For instance, on social networking sites indicators such as "likes", "comments", "views" or "shares" are measured and on the brand webpage indicators like "dwell-time", "return-rate" or



“bounce-rate” are used. Moreover, behaviours such as signing up for a newsletter are seen as a sign for engaging with the brand. However, although a webpage is seen as the basis for a brand’s online presentation, it was also explained that engagement can be best achieved and measured in the social media environment. This prompts the conclusion, which was also drawn from the literature review that online brand engagement on social networking sites is crucial and thus will be the focus of this research. In addition, it was said that “sharing” something about the brand, is the ultimate engagement form, which emphasises the importance of word-of-mouth as a consequences of online brand engagement. In order to drive online brand engagement, it was said that incentives are often used to stimulate a specific engagement behaviour. Particularly, free product-test or sweepstakes perform very well. Nevertheless, it was highlighted by the participants that this kind of “bought engagement” is not the “most honest” form of interaction and that the focus should be on balancing induced and “real” engagement.

**Table 4 – Results of the expert interviews**  
*Source: Own elaboration*

***Definition and relevance of OBE from a practitioner’s point of view***

- It is an active participation and showing of interest in the brand
- Interaction with the brand’s content online
- Positively impacts buying decision, brand awareness and brand loyalty
- Relevant for the goal to become a love brand
- Increases positive communication about the brand
- Key indicators are “likes”, “shares”, “comments”, “views” (social media), “dwell time” and “bounce-rate” (webpage)

***How online brand engagement is initiated and intensified by marketers***

- Addressing the consumer online by using a direct speech or questions
- Providing incentives when consumers actively interact online
- Offering the right solution at the right moment (“Zero moment of truth”)
- Create a good service experience and a solid e-commerce solution
- Create a brand experience with the online content
- Targeting the emotional side of the consumer, e.g. by promoting charity campaigns

As another example it was said that charity campaigns, which have a sustainable purpose the consumer believes in and can identify with, have a huge impact on online brand engagement. The marketing managers also stated that online brand engagement is important as it increases brand awareness, brand loyalty and positive communication about the brand. One interviewee explicitly stated that online brand engagement is aspired in order to create a love brand. Regarding the topic of brand experience, it was said that a consumer needs to experience that a brand is reliable and available for them at the “zero moment of truth”. This means that if the individual has a specific need, the brand should deliver an instant solution for that problem through its digital key channels. For instance, if a consumer wants to buy the brand at a shop, providing a well performing store-finder at the right moment is key. As it was said by one participant: *“You have to always send them the same message or address them in the right moment with the right message and be consistent. It’s key number one to do it”*. Following, creating a rich experience during this product-decision funnel will foster the development of online brand engagement. Besides, it was said that forms of sensory experience are not extensively used, as they are not expected to deliver a distinctive outcome. It was even said by one interviewee that it is rather perceived as being annoying for the consumer if he/she gets overloaded with sensory stimulation. This contributes to the presumption in this dissertation that the sensory dimension of brand experience is not that important for online brand engagement with a Facebook brand page.

Generally, the tenor of each interview was that online brand engagement is an important issue in marketing practice and is taken into account when planning social media activities. Moreover, it was mentioned that a good brand experience, communication of a certain lifestyle and targeting the consumers emotionally play a key role, which led to the conclusion that those factors should be included into the conceptual research model. However, it was also mentioned that it is still hard to measure and not yet clarified what is the best way to create such engagement. In particular, new concepts like brand love seem to be of importance for marketing practice, but are still underdeveloped. Therefore, this study tries to detect which are relevant influence factors for online brand engagement and if it can be verified that it leads to word-of-mouth. Also, the passive form of online brand engagement like the status of *dormancy* (cf. paragraph 2.2.3), which seem to be quite difficult to measure in marketing practice, are taken into account.

## 4.5 Data analysis

### 4.5.1 Data preparation and treatment

Before analysing the data by statistical means, the data set that could be downloaded from Qualtrics had to be prepared. First of all, participants who have dropped out of the survey at some point or left incomplete answers, were deleted from the data set. Moreover, after downloading the data file it could be seen that for some items the value numbers were assigned from 41 to 35 or 14 to 8 or 27 to 21. However, all values should have the same numbers from 1 to 7, which means that the value numbers first had to be recoded into correct value numbering. In addition, the measurement items of each construct had been summarized and grouped under a new variable to better get access and perform statistical tests for each construct. Furthermore, the following three items of the construct online brand experience were measured in a reversed way: “*I do not have any strong emotions for this brand*”; “*The brand does not encourage me to engage in physical behaviours*”; “*I am not motivated to think about the brand*”. Therefore, the value labels for those items had to be reverted prior to any statistical analysis. In order to statistically treat the answers of the open question that asked respondents to name one brand they are following on Facebook, the mentioned brands were grouped into different categories. While screening the answers, it was seen that the brands could be clustered into the categories: Fashion (Apparel-, jewellery- & cosmetic brands), Lifestyle (Technology-, travel-, media- & entertainment brands), FMCG, Sport and Cars. Accordingly, codes, in that case numbers from 1 to 5, were assigned to each category (Malhotra, 1993).

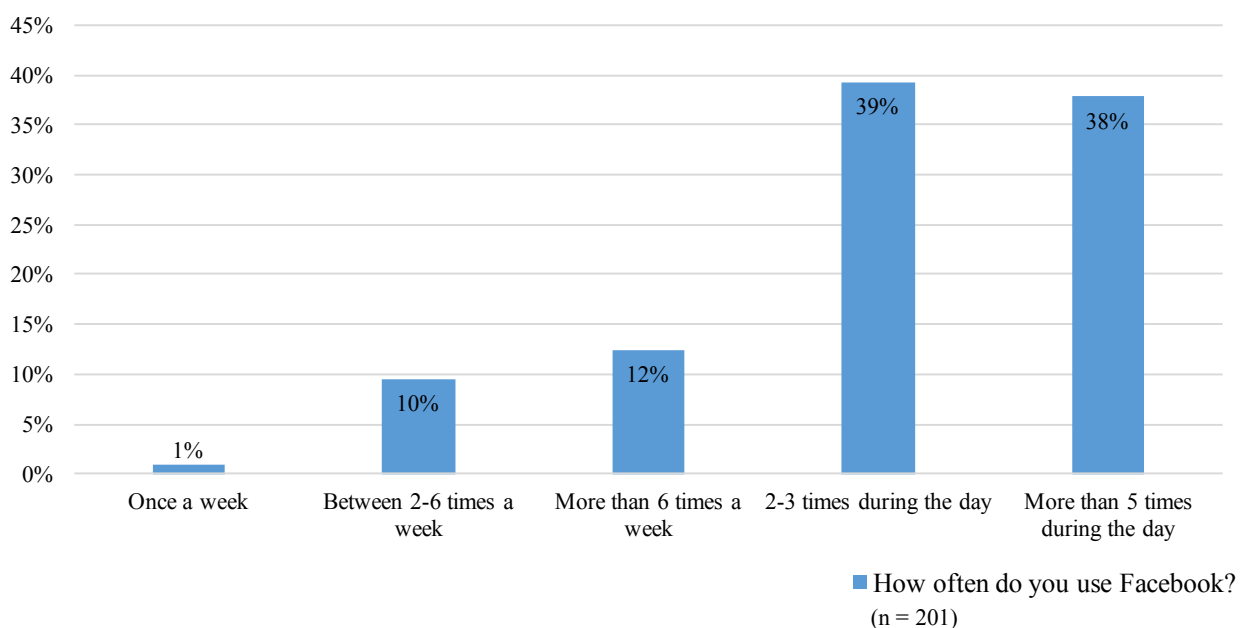
To analyse the data set further, demographics, general descriptive statistics and hypothesis tests had been computed with the software *IBM SPSS Statistics 23*. In order to run those statistics, it is important to determine what kind of data had been collected. As this seems clear for variables like gender or brand type, there is much more controversial discussion in literature when it comes to data that has been collected using a Likert-scale (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Sullivan & Artino (2013) suggest that researchers should always state prior to their analysis, how they will treat such data. Therefore, it is noted that in this study data that was collected with a 7-point Likert-scale, is treated as interval data. This follows the statement by Jamieson (2004) that it became common practice in research to treat a Likert-scale as an interval scale. Thus, as it is suggested by Norman (2010), parametric tests could be conducted. Afterwards, the proposed conceptual research model and the hypotheses were tested using the *SmartPLS (2.0)* program. The partial least squares (PLS) approach is

a form of structural equation modelling (SEM), which aims to “maximize the explained variance of the dependent latent constructs.” (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011: 139). The PLS method is increasingly used in marketing practice, as it allows to estimate complex cause-effect relationships with formative and reflective constructs at a relatively small sample size. In particular, when the objective is to identify key drivers of a construct it is suggested to choose the PLS method over the covariance based SEM (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

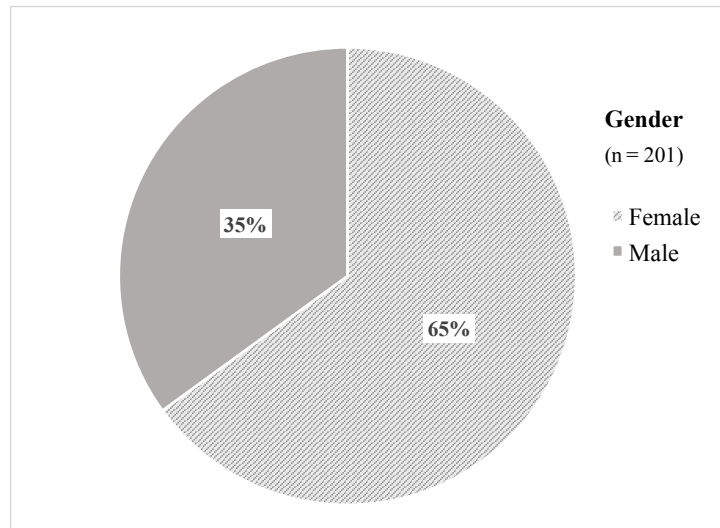
#### 4.5.2 Sample profile

After reassessing the data set and excluding incomplete survey answers, the sample contains 201 valid survey answers and consists of 70 male and 131 female participants. All of those participants are following at least one brand page on Facebook and the majority are frequently using the social-network during the day. More precisely, it could be seen that 79 participants are using Facebook at least two to three times during the day and 76 participants are even using Facebook more than five times during the day. This shows how intensely and regularly the social-network Facebook is still used.

The graphic below displays the answers to the question “How often do you use Facebook?” and its distribution in percentage and the following figure 10 shows the percentage distribution of the participants’ gender.

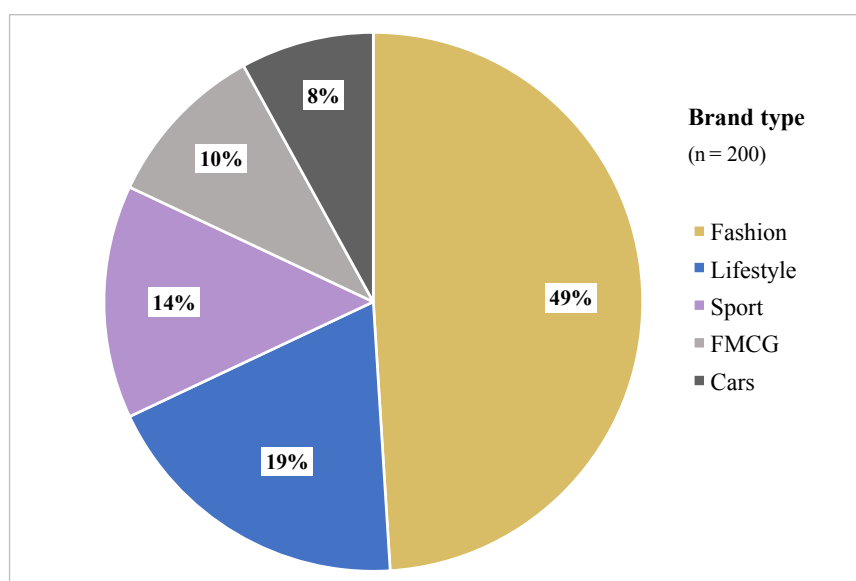


**Figure 9 – Usage intensity of Facebook**  
Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output



**Figure 10 – Distribution of gender**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

When asked to indicate one specific brand page on Facebook, the participants named a lot of different brands that could be summarized into five overall brand type groups. However, there was one mentioned brand type, the author could not allocate to any real existing brand, so this one question was excluded from any analysis regarding brand types. All other mentioned brands had been assigned to the categories “Fashion”, “Lifestyle”, “Sport”, “FMCG” and “Cars”. Following, it was seen that the brand type “Fashion” was mentioned most frequently and accounts for 49% of all valid answers. Figure 11 shows the general distribution of the different brand types in percentage and makes visible how dominant the category “Fashion” brands is.



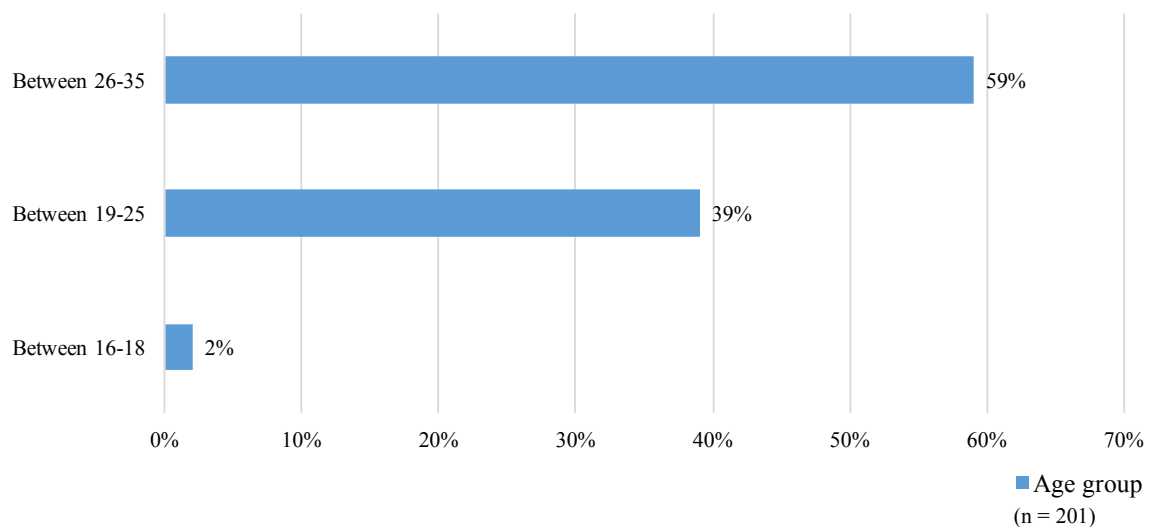
**Figure 11 – Distribution of brand type**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Not surprisingly, when looking more closely into the different gender groups, it became apparent that the quantity of mentioned type of brand is different for females and males. As outlined in table 5, it could be seen that 40% of the total percentage of fashion brands mentioned, can be allotted to the female participants and only 9% to the male participants. In contrast, males mentioned more car and sport brands compared to females, which in total accounts for 15% of all mentioned brand types. However, also for the male participants it can be seen that fashion brands have been named quite often with a frequency of 18, which represents 26% of the 70 brand types males have named.

**Table 5 – Quantity of mentioned brand types**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Count		Brand Type					Total
		Fashion	Lifestyle	Sport	FMCG	Cars	
I am...	Female	80	25	9	12	4	130
	Male	18	13	19	8	12	70
Total		98	38	28	20	16	200

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were also asked to state how old they are. To make this question more convenient, the participants did not have to tell their exact age, but to choose one of three age boxes. As presented in the following, more than half of the participants are between 26 and 35 years old. About 39% are between 19 and 25 years old and only about 2% of the participants are between 16 and 18 years old. This shows that the sample mainly consists of the so-called millennials, which are characterized for their dominant use of mobile communication and social media.



**Figure 12 – Age groups**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

## **4.6 Descriptive statistics**

The following paragraphs will present the results of the descriptive statistics that have been computed with the SPSS software. For each scale item, measures of centrality and dispersion have been calculated and the scale reliability was verified. Moreover, to take a deeper look at the different groups in the sample set, means have been compared using independent samples t-tests and ANOVA.

### ***4.6.1 Reliability***

Reliability of the measurement scales for each construct was assessed by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It is assumed that a high Cronbach's alpha, which varies between 0 to 1, indicates a good internal consistency of the scale. In general, literature states that a satisfactory value would be 0.80 or higher. However, 0.70 is sometimes also accepted as a lower limit of reliability (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). For six of the seven multi-item scales assessed in the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha lies above the suggested threshold of 0.80, which means that the items are appropriated to measure the corresponding constructs. Only for the construct *brand love* Cronbach's alpha is 0.767, which is less than the critical value of 0.80 (cf. Appendix 6). Nevertheless, as mentioned before this value is still acceptable and all measurement items had been retained.

### ***4.6.2 Measures of centrality and dispersion***

As the data obtained is numerical and treated as interval data, the mean, to determine the central tendency and the median, to estimate the mid-point (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) can be computed as appropriated descriptive statistics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Contrary to the mean, the median is not sensitive to extreme values and can help to see if the value of the mean is biased by outliers (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). Moreover, when applying a Likert-scale it is suggested to examine the median, as the mean can deliver unclear results when it shows a number with a decimal place (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). To estimate the dispersion of numerical, interval data the standard deviation can be used to see how the data values are spread around their central tendency (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). In order to interpret the standard deviation, literature suggests to refer to the so-called "rule of thumb" that "two-thirds of all observations are between plus and minus one standard deviation away from the mean." (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011: 86). However, this rule should only be applied when the data is showing a bell-shape distribution. If this is not the case, it is more appropriate to use the

rule of Chebychev’s inequality, which states that at least 75% of the observations are between  $\bar{x}$  (sample mean)  $\pm 2s$  (standard deviation) and at least 89% of the observations are between  $\bar{x} \pm 3s$  (Kvanli, Pavur, & Keeling, 2006).

For the construct *involvement* (cf. table 6) it can be seen that the item “I am interested in this brand” was highest rated on the measurement scale with a mean value of 6.1. Also, the median shows a value of 6.0, which indicates that there are no outliers who bias the mean. The standard deviation is rather low with a value of 0.78, which shows that the participants all rated this item very similar. The lowest ranked item in this scale is “The brand plays a relevant part in my life” with a mean of 4.2 and with the highest standard deviation among all items.

**Table 6 – Descriptive statistics for involvement**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I1: For me personally this brand is important	5.2	5.0	1.26
I2: I am involved with this brand	4.9	5.0	1.49
I3: It is a meaningful brand for me	5.1	5.0	1.27
I4: The brand plays a relevant part in my life	<b>4.2</b>	4.0	1.62
I5: I am interested in this brand	<b>6.1</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>0.78</b>
I6: The brand means a lot to me	4.4	5.0	1.37
Cronbach’s alpha: 0.851			

Regarding the scale items of the construct *online brand experience* (cf. table 7), it can be seen that the item “The brand animates me to think about it and its message” has the highest mean and lowest standard deviation. It was also interesting to see how the statements of each dimension performed. For the behavioural dimension the highest mean has the item “It encourages me to engage in physical activities” and for the affective dimension the highest mean has the item “The brand is an emotional brand”. Moreover, it could be seen that some statements have a quite low mean with values of 3.3 (OBEX3), 3.9 (OBEX6) and 3.4 (OBEX9). This is based on the fact that those items are measured in a reversed way, as they are formulated negatively. The low mean values indicate that the respondents have clearly read all statements and understood its meanings. After reverting those items, Cronbachs’ alpha was computed, which shows a good value of 0.801 that ensures reliability of the scale. When looking at the median values and compare them with the corresponding mean values, it can be concluded that for all items the mean values are not biased by outliers.



**Table 7 – Descriptive statistics for online brand experience***Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
<b>Intellectual</b>			
OBEX1: The brand animates me to think about it and its message	<b>5.2</b>	5.0	1.25
OBEX2: Experiencing this brand evokes my curiosity	5.0	5.0	1.37
OBEX3: I am not motivated to think about the brand	<b>3.3</b>	3.0	1.42
<b>Behavioural</b>			
OBEX4: It encourages me to engage in physical activities (e.g. booking a holiday/go shopping)	<b>4.7</b>	5.0	1.68
OBEX5: Following this brand results in physical experiences (e.g. doing sport/meeting friends)	4.0	4.0	1.81
OBEX6: The brand does not encourage me to engage in physical behaviours	3.9	4.0	1.72
<b>Affective</b>			
OBEX7: The brand is an emotional brand	<b>5.1</b>	5.0	1.64
OBEX8: The brand induces sentiments and feelings in me	4.8	5.0	1.39
OBEX9: I do not have any strong emotions for this brand	3.4	3.0	1.51
Cronbach's alpha: 0.801			

For the construct *self-brand congruence* (cf. table 8), the item “The brand image corresponds with my self-image in many ways” shows the highest mean value with 4.7 and a median of 5.0. The two statements SBC3 and SBC5 both have the exact same mean value of 4.2, which is also the lowest mean of all items. Table 8 shows that all items have been rated quite similarly around value 4, with only a difference of 0.5 between the highest and the lowest mean. Thus, it seems that the participants do not have a clear opinion about those statements, as number 4 on the Likert-scale states “Neither agree nor disagree”.

When the proposed consequences online brand engagement was examined, it could be seen that the items of the construct *satisfaction* (cf. table 9) are all rated very similarly, showing the highest mean for the item “I am satisfied with the social media appearance of that brand” with a value of 5.4 and a median of 6.0. The statement SA2 has the lowest mean with a value of 4.6. For the *brand love* scale (cf. table 10) the item “My overall evaluation of this brand is positive” has the highest mean of 5.8 and the lowest standard deviation of only 0.92. The lowest ranked statement is BL5 with 3.7, which also shows the highest standard deviation of 1.70.

**Table 8 – Descriptive statistics for self-brand congruence**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
SBC1: What the brand personifies is a lot like I see me	4.3	5.0	1.37
SBC2: This brand reflects what I am	4.6	5.0	1.27
SBC3: How the brand is presented, mirrors how I see myself	<b>4.2</b>	4.0	1.39
SBC4: The brand image corresponds with my self-image in many ways	<b>4.7</b>	5.0	1.29
SBC5: Through liking this brand, I can show others what I find important in life	<b>4.2</b>	4.0	1.68
Cronbach's alpha: 0.855			

**Table 9 – Descriptive statistics for satisfaction**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
SA1: I am satisfied with the social media appearance of that brand	<b>5.4</b>	6.0	1.43
SA2: I think the Facebook profile of this brand is one of the best compared to others	<b>4.6</b>	5.0	1.48
SA3: Overall, the brand offers a great possibility to interact with it on Facebook	4.7	5.0	1.44
Cronbach's alpha: 0.825			

**Table 10 – Descriptive statistics for brand love**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
BL1: The brand says something true and deep about who I am as person	3.9	4.0	1.47
BL2: I am desiring this brand	4.8	5.0	1.32
BL3: I have positive emotions towards this brand	5.3	5.0	1.07
BL4: I will follow this brand on Facebook for a long time	5.3	5.0	1.08
BL5: If the brand would delete its Facebook account, I will feel sad about it	<b>3.7</b>	4.0	1.70
BL6: My overall evaluation of this brand is positive	<b>5.8</b>	5.0	0.92
Cronbach's alpha: 0.767			

When looking at the mean values of the items for the construct *online brand engagement* (cf. table 11), it can be seen that the difference between the highest and the lowest mean is quite high with a value of 2.8. The item “When I see the brand’s social media activities I start to think about it”, which belongs to the dimension “cognitive processing” has a fairly high value of 5.5 and a high median of 6.0. This statement also shows the lowest standard deviation in this item set with a value of 1.02. In contrast, the lowest ranked item is “Whenever I am online on Facebook, I usually look for that brand” with a very small mean of 2.7 and an even lower median value of 2.0. The highest mean within the dimension “affection” shows OBE4 and within the dimension “activation” the highest mean is observed for OBE8.

**Table 11 – Descriptive statistics for online brand engagement**

*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
<b>Cognitive processing</b>			
OBE1: When I see the brand’s social media activities I start to think about it	<b>5.5</b>	6.0	1.02
OBE2: While I am interacting with the brand, I think a lot about the brand	4.9	5.0	1.40
OBE3: When I am interacting with the brand, I want to learn more about it	4.6	5.0	1.44
<b>Affection</b>			
OBE4: I feel very positive when I am interacting with the brand	<b>5.1</b>	5.0	1.32
OBE5: Following the brand’s Facebook account makes me happy	4.3	4.0	1.45
OBE6: I feel good, when I am interacting with the brand	4.6	5.0	1.31
OBE7: Interacting with that brand makes me feel proud	3.3	3.0	1.64
<b>Activation</b>			
OBE8: I spend a lot more time interacting with this brand, compared to any other brand	<b>4.2</b>	4.0	1.74
OBE9: Whenever I am online on Facebook, I usually look for that brand	<b>2.7</b>	2.0	1.50
OBE10: I generally interact with that brand, when I log in to Facebook	3.0	3.0	1.55
Cronbach’s alpha: 0.885			

The final proposed outcome of online brand engagement is the construct *word-of-mouth* (cf. table 12). The statement WOM4 shows the highest mean of 5.4 and also the highest median of 6.0 and the lowest rated statement is WOM1. However, all items of this construct had been rated very similar with a very small difference between the highest and the lowest mean of only 0.3.

**Table 12 – Descriptive statistics for word-of-mouth**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

Item	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
WOM1: I encourage friends and my family to buy this brand	<b>5.1</b>	5.0	1.41
WOM2: Whenever someone seeks advice, I would recommend this brand	5.2	5.0	1.26
WOM3: When the brand is mentioned in a conversation (online and/or offline), I would recommend it	5.3	5.0	1.20
WOM4: I have already recommended this brand (online and/or offline) to my friends and family	<b>5.4</b>	6.0	1.48
Cronbach's alpha: 0.855			

#### 4.6.3 Comparison of means

In order to further examine if the groups gender, age and brand type differ regarding their average evaluation of each construct, the parametric tests independent samples t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were computed. One assumption of those tests is that the data is normally distributed or the sample size is greater than 30. As the sample size of the study is  $n = 201$ , this criterion is fulfilled. Moreover, the data values are independent from each other, as the participants only took the online questionnaire once and the groups are distinctive from each other. For all tests a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was applied, which means that the probability of falsely rejecting (Type 1 error) or accepting (Type 2 error) the null hypothesis is 5% (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011).

The means of the groups female and male were compared using an independent samples t-test. As outlined in table 13, it could be seen that the means for the two gender-groups are quite similar. Only the t-test regarding the construct *involvement* yields a significant result, which also has the greatest difference between the means of 0.38. For this construct the t-test shows a significance value of 0.010, which is lower than the  $\alpha$ -value of 0.05. In conclusion, the null hypothesis “the two means of the groups female and male are equal” is

rejected. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference in how the females and the males have rated the construct *involvement*. In general, the highest mean value can be seen for the males regarding the construct WOM and the lowest mean value is shown for the females and the construct OBE.

**Table 13 – Independent samples t-test**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

	Mean (Population)		t-test for equality of means	
	Female	Male	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Involvement	4.85	5.23	-2.60	<b>0.010</b>
Self-brand congruence	4.33	4.51	-1.096	0.275
Online brand experience	4.64	4.80	-1.167	0.245
Online brand engagement	4.31	4.38	-1.577	0.117
Satisfaction	4.92	4.88	0.215	0.830
Brand love	4.74	4.90	-1.171	0.244
Word-of-mouth	5.12	5.44	-1.945	0.053

One-way ANOVA was carried out to further analyse if the average evaluation of the different constructs is likely to be dependent on the age and brand type groups. ANOVA allows to compare the averages of three or more groups, yet before performing ANOVA, additional assumptions needed to be checked. That is, the dependent variable needs to be at least measured on an interval scale and the population variances have to be similar (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). As previously mentioned, the data is treated as interval data and suitable for parametric tests (Jamieson, 2004; Norman, 2010). Moreover, the assumption of equality of variances was given for all tests, except for one. When analysing the means of the five brand type groups regarding the construct online brand experience, the significance value of the Levene's test yields 0.024 and equality of variance could not be assumed at the 5% level (cf. table 15). Therefore, as suggested by Mooi & Sarstedt (2011) the Welch-test was chosen, as an alternative to ANOVA when the groups sizes are not equal.

The ANOVA results for the different age groups are presented in table 14. It can be seen that the lowest mean with a value of 4.04 accounts for the group of participants who are between 19-25 years old and the construct *online brand engagement*. The highest mean

shows the group of participants who are between 16-18 years old regarding the construct *word-of-mouth*. However, six out of seven tests did not yield any significant results. Only the comparison of the mean values regarding the construct *word-of-mouth* shows a significance value of 0.016. Therefore, it can be concluded that at least one of the population means of the age groups significantly differs from the others for the dependent variable *word-of-mouth*.

**Table 14 – ANOVA for age groups**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

	Mean (Population)			Levene's test	ANOVA	
	<i>Between 16-18</i>	<i>Between 19-25</i>	<i>Between 26-35</i>	Sig.	F	Sig.
Involvement	4.89	4.80	5.12	0.875	2.448	0.089
Self-brand congruence	4.13	4.33	4.44	0.996	0.315	0.730
Online brand experience	4.56	4.67	4.72	0.257	0.92	0.912
Online brand engagement	4.47	4.04	4.32	0.120	1.924	0.149
Satisfaction	5.22	4.83	4.94	0.271	0.283	0.754
Brand love	4.67	4.70	4.90	0.999	1.050	0.352
Word-of-mouth	5.83	4.96	5.40	0.160	4.245	<b>0.016</b>

When analysing the results of the ANOVA statistics for the different brand type groups, it becomes apparent that sport brands mostly show the highest mean value closely followed by car brands. Only for the dependent variables *online brand engagement* and *word-of-mouth* the brand type “Cars” shows a higher mean. The overall lowest population mean of 4.14 shows the group FMCG brands for the construct *self-brand congruence* and the group car brands shows the overall highest mean of 5.50 for the construct *word-of-mouth*. Furthermore, it can be said that at least one of the population means regarding the average evaluation of the dependent variables *involvement* and *self-brand congruence* significantly differ from each another.

As mentioned before, for the variable *online brand experience* a Welch-test was conducted as the assumption of equality of variance did not hold. The Welch-test yields a test-statistic of 8.203 and a significance value of 0.000, which is lower than the threshold of 5% and it could be concluded that at least one of the population means of the brand type groups significantly differs from one another (cf. Appendix 8).

**Table 15 – ANOVA for brand type groups**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

	Mean (Population)					Levene's test	ANOVA	
	<i>Fashion</i>	<i>Lifestyle</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>FMCG</i>	<i>Cars</i>	Sig.	F	Sig.
Involvement	4.86	5.03	5.36	4.73	4.99	0.565	2.455	<b>0.047</b>
Self-brand congruence	4.34	4.16	4.90	4.14	4.70	0.055	2.523	<b>0.042</b>
Online brand experience	4.59	4.39	5.31	4.82	4.84	0.024	4.607	0.001
Online brand engagement	4.19	3.95	4.36	4.26	4.66	0.120	1.924	0.149
Satisfaction	4.89	4.78	5.23	4.53	5.21	0.179	1.245	0.293
Brand love	4.72	4.68	5.18	4.72	5.03	0.934	2.111	0.081
Word-of-mouth	5.27	5.05	5.40	4.99	5.50	0.110	0.892	0.470

As the variable *online brand engagement* exists of three dimensions, it was further analysed how the brand type groups differ regarding their average evaluation of the three dimensions. As described before car brands show the highest mean value for the variable *online brand engagement*, which extends to the different dimensions as well. The overall highest ranked OBE dimension, is the cognitive dimension with a population mean of 5.29. In contrast, the lowest ranked dimension is “activation” and can be observed for the brand type category “Lifestyle” with a value of only 2.91.

Moreover, it could be seen that the population means of the females and males significantly differ with a difference of 0.55, regarding the activation dimension of *online brand engagement* (cf. Appendix 7).

**Table 16 – ANOVA for brand type groups and OBE**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output*

	Mean (Population)					Levene's test	ANOVA	
	<i>Fashion</i>	<i>Lifestyle</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>FMCG</i>	<i>Cars</i>	Sig.	F	Sig.
OBE cognitive	5.07	4.61	5.06	5.12	5.29	0.565	2.455	0.047
OBE affective	4.25	4.24	4.44	4.55	4.67	0.979	0.782	0.538
OBE activation	3.24	2.91	3.57	3.03	4.02	0.540	2.500	<b>0.044</b>

## 4.7 Analysis of the conceptual model

In this section the results of the estimation of the conceptual research model and the hypotheses are presented. To analyse the cause-effect relationships with the PLS method, a two stage process needs to be applied. Firstly, reliability and validity of the measurement model (outer model), which represents the latent variables and their corresponding indicators, needs to be evaluated. Secondly, if the requirements of the measurement model are met, the structural model (inner model) is assessed using a bootstrapping approach (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

### 4.7.1 Measurement model

As mentioned previously, the conceptual research model consists of reflective, as well as formative measurement models. Thus, in order to estimate the reliability and validity of the outer model, the two types of measurement models need to be examined with different procedures. For a reflective measurement model, the internal consistency and indicator reliability is examined through analysing composite reliability and indicator loadings. Validity can be assessed through the examination of the average variance extracted (AVE). For formative measurement models, which are in this study represented through second-order constructs that are composed of their first-order dimensions, the significance of each dimension is assessed through the analysis of their outer weight and their variance inflation factor (VIF), whereas the latter helps to interpret if an indicator's information is redundant (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics (2009) state that to estimate internal consistency within a PLS path model, it is more appropriate to examine the composite reliability instead of referring to the usually used Cronbach's alpha value. That is because the Cronbach's alpha tends to underestimate the internal consistency reliability of latent variables, whereas the composite reliability recognizes different indicator loadings and yields a more suitable result (Chin, 1998; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). It is suggested that the internal consistency reliability is satisfactory, when the composite reliability value, which varies between 0 and 1, exceeds a threshold of 0.70 (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994 as cited in Hair et al., 2014). When looking at the values presented in table 17, Cronbach's alpha shows a good value ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ) for most constructs, except for *OBEX Intellectual* that only has a  $\alpha$ -value of 0.623. However, composite reliability shows throughout a higher value than the Cronbach's alpha and is above the threshold of 0.70 for each construct, demonstrating a good internal consistency of the reflective measurement models.



**Table 17 – Reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS 2.0 output*

Construct	Mean	Item loading range (reflective measure)	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
OBE activation	3.2	0.771 - 0.893	0.715	0.882	0.798
OBE affection	4.8	0.831 - 0.860	0.722	0.886	0.808
OBEX affective	4.4	0.740 - 0.846	0.635	0.874	0.806
OBEX behavioural	4.3	0.773 - 0.905	0.720	0.885	0.805
Brand love	5.1	0.707 - 0.756	0.517	0.842	0.766
OBE cognitive	5.1	0.790 - 0.813	0.643	0.844	0.723
WOM	5.2	0.813 - 0.866	0.700	0.903	0.857
OBEX intellectual	5.1	0.834 - 0.869	0.726	0.841	0.623
Involvement	4.8	0.707 - 0.849	0.643	0.899	0.860
Satisfaction	4.9	0.772 - 0.908	0.732	0.891	0.825
Self-brand congruence	4.4	0.708 - 0.887	0.650	0.902	0.864
Second-order formative constructs	First-order constructs/ dimensions		Weight	t-value	VIF
Online brand experience	Affective		0.536***	10.097	1.519
	Behavioural		0.403***	5.724	1.120
	Intellectual		0.353***	9.611	1.541
Online brand engagement	Activation		0.861***	11.233	1.997
	Affection		0.468***	17.140	2.061
	Cognitive Processing		0.222***	13.020	1.788

\*\*\*p<0.001

After assessing the internal consistency of the latent variables, it is further necessary to examine the adequacy of each measurement item of the different constructs. It is generally presumed that a latent variable should explain at least 50% of each indicator's variance (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). For reflective measurement models this is indicated by an item outer loading of 0.70 or higher (Hair et al., 2014). The column "item loading range" in table 17 shows that in this study all items' outer loadings on the corresponding constructs exceeds the value of 0.70 and it can be concluded that each indicator is significant in describing the corresponding variable.

To estimate the relative importance of the indicators of the formative measurement model, the significance of the first order constructs' outer weights needs to be examined (Chin, 1998). In this way, it can be seen if the first order dimensions are indeed relevant in forming the second-order constructs (Hair et al., 2014). As a formative measurement model can be interpreted similarly to a multiple regression analysis, an indicator can not explain more than 100% of the constructs variance (Cenfeteli & Bassellier, 2009). According to Chin (1998) an indicator weight greater than 0.2 can be considered as satisfactory and the weights of the first-order dimensions show values ranging from 0.222 to 0.536. However, in order to test if the outer weights are significantly different from zero, a bootstrapping procedure is processed to calculate t-values for each dimension (Hair et al., 2014). When looking at the the t-values in table 17, it can be seen that all values are greater than the critical number of 2.58 at a significance level of 0.001 (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Thus, it can be concluded that each dimension significantly contributes to the variance of the latent variable (Robert & Thatcher, 2009).

Moreover, due to the characteristics of formative indicators regarding their latent variable, it is not desirable that those indicators correlate with another. To check for collinearity, the tolerance level, which represents a formative indicator's amount of variance that is not explained by the other indicators of the same construct, should be assessed (Hair et al., 2014). Diamantopoulos & Sigauw (2006) suggest to use a tolerance level of 0.30, which would indicate that an indicator's variance is predicted by another indicator with 70% or more and problems of multicollinearity could be an issue. A commonly used measure to assess the degree of multicollinearity is the VIF, which can be seen as the "reciprocal" of the tolerance (Hair et al., 2014: 124). Thus, based on the suggested tolerance level of 0.30, a VIF of 3.33 ( $1/0.30$ ) is seen as the critical value for estimating if multicollinearity could be a problem (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2006). Reviewing the VIF numbers presented in table 17, shows that all values are below the critical value of 3.33. Hence, it can be concluded that multicollinearity is not a problem in this study and there is no need to exclude one of the dimensions from the study (Cenfeteli & Bassellier, 2009).

The next step in analysing the measurement model, is the examination of convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity describes the "extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct (Hair et al., 2014: 102). A conventional measure for the assessment of convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE). Fornell & Larcker (1981) state that the AVE provides a more

comprehensive examination of the shared variance in a measurement model and how much variance is captured by a particular construct. The critical value of the AVE is 0.5 (or higher), which means that a construct explains at least half (or more) of the variance of its indicators. In case of an AVE value that is less than 0.5, the validity of a measurement model is questionable, as it can be assumed that the variance influenced by measurement error is greater than the variance, which is captured by the latent variable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As presented in table 17 all reflective measures demonstrate convergent validity as the AVE for each construct shows a value higher than the threshold of 0.5.

In order to analyse if one construct is truly distinctive from another and represents a certain aspect that is not represented by another construct in the model, two measures can be assessed. First, discriminant validity can be verified through the examination of the cross loadings of the indicators and second, through applying the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair, et al., 2014). The criterion postulates that the AVE of a construct should be greater than the squared correlation between this construct and all other latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In other words, a latent variable should capture more variance of its corresponding items than with any other construct (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

**Table 18 – Discriminant validity of the measurement model**  
*Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS 2.0 output*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
<b>AVE</b> <sup>1/2</sup>	0,85	0,80	0,85	0,85	0,72	0,80	0,84	0,85	0,80	0,86	0,81
1. OBE Activation	1,00										
2. OBE Affection	0,66	1,00									
3. OBEX Affective	0,43	0,42	1,00								
4. OBEX Behavioural	0,34	0,30	0,28	1,00							
5. Brand love	0,44	0,56	0,56	0,34	1,00						
6. OBE Cognitive	0,59	0,61	0,41	0,23	0,46	1,00					
7. WOM	0,32	0,39	0,36	0,27	0,53	0,31	1,00				
8. OBEX Intellectual	0,44	0,47	0,58	0,31	0,46	0,54	0,27	1,00			
9. Involvement	0,50	0,47	0,64	0,31	0,57	0,41	0,56	0,47	1,00		
10. Satisfaction	0,25	0,25	0,25	0,02	0,27	0,28	0,18	0,22	0,24	1,00	
11. Self-brand congruence	0,44	0,47	0,41	0,43	0,50	0,35	0,42	0,41	0,57	0,12	1,00
<b>Correlation between first- and second-order constructs</b>											
Online brand experience	Affective			Behavioural			Intellectual				
	0,85			0,66			0,79				
Online brand engagement	Activation			Affective			Cognitive				
	0,86			0,90			0,82				

To assess the Fornell-Larcker criterion in statistical terms, the square root of the AVE of every latent variable is computed and compared with the correlation this variable has with any other construct in the research model. The results presented in table 18 show that the  $AVE^{1/2}$  of each construct is indeed greater than the highest corresponding correlation value with the other latent variables. Thus, discriminant validity of the constructs within the reflective measurement models can be assumed and no indicators need to be removed from the constructs (Hair et al., 2014).

However, for the formative second-order constructs that are composed of first-order dimensions an analysis of convergent validity is not necessary, as formative indicators are not expected to highly correlate with each other (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). This extends to the assessment of discriminant validity with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which therefore is only applicable to constructs within a reflective measurement model (Hair et al. 2014). Thus, the correlation between the formative second-order constructs and each of their first-order dimensions had been computed separately, which is outlined in the lower part of table 18. It could be seen that those correlation values range from 0.66 to 0.90, with no value lower than 0.50. This indicates that the first-order dimensions and their second-order constructs all have more than half of the variance in common, which is preferable (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011; Loureiro, 2015).

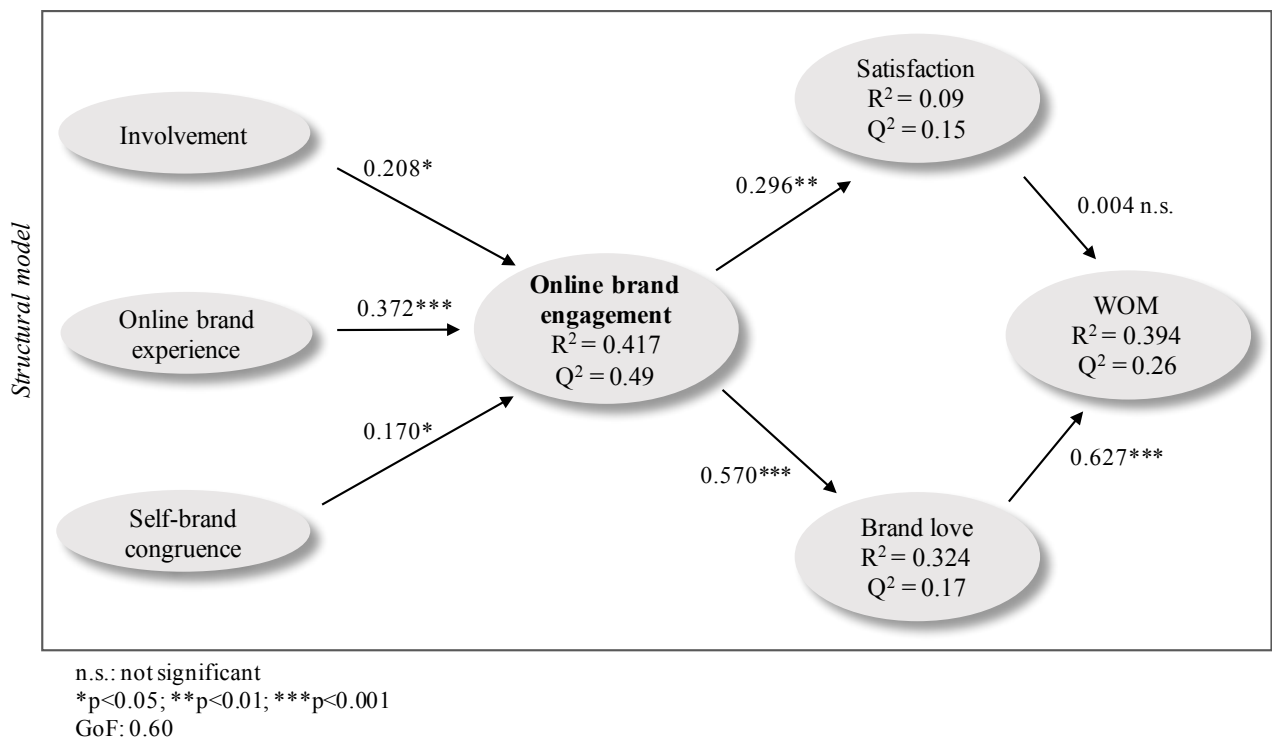
After the assessment of the measurement model, which showed that the construct's measures are all reliable and valid, the inner model could be examined. The next paragraph presents the results of the structural model evaluation.

#### **4.7.2 Structural model results**

To analyse the structural model and estimate how well it supports the theorized connections between the different latent variables, several further steps need to be conducted. First, the path coefficients, which represent the hypothesized relationships between two constructs, were assessed. The path coefficients vary between  $-1$  and  $+1$ , whereas values close to  $+1$  indicate a strong positive connection between two constructs and vice versa for values close to  $-1$  (Hair et al., 2014). When looking at the path coefficients as presented in figure 13, it becomes apparent that all paths show convincing positive values, only the connection between the constructs *satisfaction* and *word-of-mouth* is quite weak with a small value of 0.004. However, even if a path coefficient yields a

positive value, it is still necessary to ascertain if the relationship is significant (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, a bootstrapping approach (500 re-sampling) was applied to assess if the path coefficients are significantly different from zero and the proposed hypothesis can be supported or not (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Chin, 1998).

The results of the bootstrapping procedure indicated that all path coefficients are significant at the 0.05, 0.01 or 0.001 level, only the weak path coefficient for SA → WOM showed a non-significant result. Moreover, it can be seen that the exogenous variable *online brand experience* has the strongest effect and *self-brand congruence* the weakest effect on the endogenous construct *online brand engagement*. The overall strongest effect in the structural model can be found for the relationship between *brand love* and the construct *word-of-mouth* with a path coefficient value of 0.627.



**Figure 13 – Structural model results**  
Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS 2.0 output

Even though path coefficients yield significant bootstrap results, the evaluation of the inner model needs to be based on non-parametric prediction-oriented key figures (Hair et al., 2014; Loureiro, 2015). Therefore, the model’s predictive power was verified by computing the R-square, and the Stone-Geisser criterion. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) represents the ”(...) squared correlation between a specific endogenous construct’s actual

and predicted value” and shows how much variance in an endogenous variable is explained by the exogenous variable linked to it (Hair et al., 2014: 174). Values of  $R^2$  vary between 0 to 1, whereas it is generally recommended to have a high  $R^2$ , as the aim of the PLS method is to explain the endogenous variables’ variances. Albeit, there exists no consistent threshold of acceptable  $R^2$  values in literature (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Hair et al., 2014). According to Chin (1998) a weak level of  $R^2$  would be 0.19 or lower, which means that higher values are quite acceptable by implication. Examining the results presented in figure 13, the model demonstrates a good level of predictive power ( $R^2$ ) as the respective exogenous constructs explain 41.7% of the variance in *online brand engagement*, 32.4% of the variance in *brand love* and 39.4% of the variance in *word-of-mouth*.

Additionally, the predictive relevance of the path model needs to be assessed with the so-called Stone-Geisser criterion ( $Q^2$ ), which refers to the model’s capability to predict the observed indicators of an endogenous latent variable (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). In other words, the Stone-Geisser criterion shows how “well-observed values are reconstructed by the model and its parameter estimates” (Chin, 1998: 318). In order to obtain the  $Q^2$  values for the endogenous constructs, a blindfolding procedure is processed, which is an iterative process based on a sample reuse technique. If the resulting  $Q^2$  values are greater than zero, it can be said that the model shows predictive relevance for a certain endogenous variable (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2014). In this study, all endogenous constructs show a positive  $Q^2$  value and consequently it is ascertained that the independent latent variables provide predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

The last step in assessing the structural model, is the evaluation of a goodness-of-fit (GoF) criterion. Tenenhaus et al. (2005: 173) propose a GoF index for PLS path models, which is calculated as the “geometric mean of the communality and the average  $R^2$ ”. The GoF index ranges between 0 to 1 and can be interpreted in the same way as the  $R^2$  value (Tenenhaus, Amato, & Vinzi, 2004). Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, & van Oppen (2009) suggest a cut-off value of 0.36 for a large GoF, a value of 0.25 for a medium GoF and a value of 0.10 for a small GoF. The GoF in this study yields a value of 0.60, which is even greater than the highest suggested threshold of 0.36, indicating a good overall fit of the structural model.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of research results and theoretical implications

From a theoretical point of view, this study offers a comprehensive attempt to identify antecedents and consequences of online brand engagement. This follows the suggestions of several researchers within the evolving marketing literature on engagement, to approach a better understanding of the construct by applying quantitative methods (e.g. van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a & 2011b; Brodie et al., 2011 & 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014, Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). As proposed by authors such as van Doorn et al. (2010) or Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012), this study examines online brand engagement irrespective of a customer purchase, which allows a much broader perspective on the construct. Statistical analysis of the data, which was collected with an online questionnaire, yielded several findings that will be summarized and discussed in more detail in this section.

First of all, the results seem to indicate that all of the proposed exogenous variables of the path model, are in fact drivers of online brand engagement. The construct involvement, is suggested by several authors to be a key factor in the process of brand engagement (e.g. Bowden, 2009; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012; De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). For instance, Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014) could demonstrate in their study, that involvement has indeed a positive influence on all three dimensions (activation, affection, cognitive processing) of brand engagement. Similarly, in this study the path IV → OBE shows a significant  $\beta$ -value of 0.208 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and thus **hypothesis 1** is accepted. Consequently, it can be concluded that involvement does also play an important role when creating brand engagement in the social media environment.

The strongest impact on the construct OBE can be observed for the exogenous variable online brand experience ( $\beta = 0.372$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding is particularly interesting, as the consumer's experience had been suggested by several authors to be most likely relevant for eliciting brand engagement. However, quantitative examinations regarding the impact of such concept remained scarce so far. Thus, this study answers the call for further scrutiny on how those two constructs interplay (e.g. Calder, Malhouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014), by examining online brand experience as a possible antecedent of online brand engagement. Although some engagement conceptualisations in literature describe the construct as

consisting of experiential interactions between two entities, it should be recalled that this study refers to the concept of brand experience, since the brand is the key focal object under examination. Based on this interpretation, the author has drawn on the multi-dimensional brand experience construct developed by Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009). Contrary to the motivational construct online brand engagement, Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009: 53), state that brand experience does not “presume a motivational state”, which suggested the assumption of placing OBEX as an antecedent of OBE. Unlike Hollebeek (2011a), who argued that brand experience might be a consequence of brand engagement, the results of this study highly encourage this assumption, as **hypothesis 2** was supported. As  $OBEX \rightarrow OBE$  even shows the highest path coefficient among all proposed drivers, it can be concluded that online brand experience, created by the reactive response towards various brand related stimuli, provokes online brand engagement rather than involvement and self-brand congruence.

Moreover, **hypothesis 3** is supported as a significant path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.170$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) can be observed for  $SBC \rightarrow OBE$ . This finding contributes to the examinations of the authors Jahn & Kunz (2012) and De Vries & Carlson (2014), who analysed that the satisfaction of self-related needs, such as finding congruence between an individual’s self-concept and the brand image, positively influence brand engagement. Furthermore, based on theoretical conclusions Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014) have suggested that a perceived fit between the self-concept of a person and a Facebook brand page induces users to “like” the brand, whereas “liking” reflects brand engagement. Thus, this study supports this assumption by showing that a felt connection between the individual and a brand is a relevant driver for online brand engagement. However, SBC has the weakest effect on OBE and seems to play a minor role in the creation of engagement with the Facebook brand page.

In literature, satisfaction had been proposed as a definite consequence of customer brand engagement, due to the value co-creative nature of engagement (e.g. Hollebeek, 2011a; Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011 & 2013). Nevertheless, the construct had also been suggested to be a potential antecedent of engagement, mainly regarding existing customers (e.g. van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a). The authors Brodie et al. (2013) even propose to view satisfaction in a twofold way, being cause and effect at the same time. In fact, the results of the path model evaluation in this study indicate that there exists a significant, positive relationship between online brand engagement and satisfaction ( $\beta =$



0.296,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports **hypothesis 4**. Therefore, it can be concluded that satisfaction might indeed act as a consequence of online brand engagement. Besides satisfaction, which is considered to be a rational confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations towards the engagement process with the Facebook brand page (cf. Oliver, 1980), the concept of brand love is hypothesized as another direct consequence of online brand engagement. Interestingly, this proposed connection of OBE  $\rightarrow$  BL, shows a much higher  $\beta$ -value of 0.570 ( $p < 0.001$ ) compared to the path coefficient of OBE  $\rightarrow$  SA. Thus, **hypothesis 5** is supported and it can be concluded that online brand engagement has a greater influence on a positive, emotional connection between the individual and a brand, than on a positive, rational evaluation of the engagement process.

Furthermore, it was proposed that the state of satisfaction leads to brand recommendations in terms of word-of-mouth. However, the low predictive power of the construct satisfaction ( $R^2$  value = 0.09), indicates that it is not very effective in predicting WOM. Analysing the proposed connection between SA  $\rightarrow$  WOM reflects this result, as the path is not found to be significant and **hypothesis 6** needs to be rejected. In contrast, **hypothesis 7** is supported as the path BL  $\rightarrow$  WOM ( $\beta = 0.627$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrates a strong, positive and significant relationship. This finding shows that in order to foster brand recommendations among individuals, satisfaction only plays a minor role and that it is more important to achieve deep and positive feelings towards the brand. Such result underlines the general importance of creating an emotional relationship between a brand and an individual, not only offline but also on social media (cf. Fournier, 1998; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Similar conclusions had been found by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), Albert & Merunka (2013) or Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony (2014) who showed that brand love has a positive, direct effect on word-of-mouth and that it is also encouraged by brand love for Facebook brands.

When taking a more detailed look into the characteristics of the sample, it can be seen that with 49% fashion brands are by far the most mentioned brand type (cf. figure 11). As this might be explained with the fact that the sample consists of more female than male participants, it is however interesting to see that fashion brands did not show the highest population means when comparing the brand type groups and the respective evaluation of each construct. Actually, as shown in table 15 the highest means regarding all antecedents, as well as for satisfaction and brand love can be observed for the group representing sport brands. Only for the constructs online brand engagement and word-of-mouth the car

brands revealed the highest population means. Although not every test statistic yields a significant result, it seems that participants who are following a sport or car brand have a tendency to agree more to the different measurement items. Thus, it can be assumed that those brand types provide a superior interaction and experience through their Facebook brand pages, are better able to achieve self-brand congruence, which in turn seems to create higher satisfaction and brand love, as well as word-of-mouth. However, to investigate further on what exactly those brands are doing differently, so that the average evaluation of the items is throughout higher than for other brand types, would be subject to future research. Further, it could be seen while examining the variable online brand engagement, that males significantly ranked the items referring to the “activation” dimension higher than females (cf. Appendix 7). Nevertheless, this seems not too surprising, as it was also seen that males mentioned more car and sport brands than females and it can be expected that those brand types are more action related regarding their social media presentation on Facebook (cf. table 5). In general, the results regarding online brand engagement, as well as online brand experience show that respondents have a tendency to agree more to items referring to the cognitive and affective dimensions, compared to items describing a behavioural dimension. This seems to show that not only the evocation of emotions is relevant, but also to trigger curiosity and problem solving within the individual. While examining the mean values of each item, it became evident that the overall lowest ranked item regarding all constructs is the statement “Whenever I am online on Facebook, I usually look for that brand”. This low value seems to show that the participants are not actively looking for a brand page, but rather come across the brand’s Facebook activities while generally using Facebook. This is not surprising as all activities of a brand page a user has “liked” on Facebook will automatically appear in the newsfeed and the user does not have to actively look for that brand page. Conversely, it can be expected that brands who are not actively posting content on Facebook are not recognized by users and will not be able to achieve either online brand engagement, satisfaction, brand love or word-of-mouth recommendations.

Summing up, it can be said that this dissertation contributes to the emerging literature on brand engagement within the social media environment in the following ways: Firstly, involvement, online brand experience and self-brand congruence had been affirmed as antecedents of online brand engagement. Moreover, the results draw attention to the importance of online brand experience as a driver of online brand engagement, which to

the author's knowledge, has not been examined in this manner before. Secondly, the results regarding brand love and satisfaction highlight that creating passionate feelings towards a brand is way more important in order to achieve word-of-mouth recommendation than merely focusing on satisfaction. Thirdly, the relevance of brand engagement for marketing practice in general is reinforced by the strong connection identified between online brand engagement and word-of-mouth, mediated by brand love.

## **5.2 Managerial implications**

As highlighted by Rappaport (2007), incorporating the construct engagement in a marketing strategy, needs to recognize all customer channels and touch-points. Moreover, it should be based on consumer data and insights, to better evaluate engagement efforts and develop appropriated engagement actions. Thus, the social-network Facebook, with its high user rate and different user-brand interaction possibilities, seems to be necessarily taken into account when creating engagement within digital touch-points. Furthermore, the platform offers access to a variety of user statistics, helping to analyse the effects of engagement strategies. Based on the statistical analysis in this study and in view of the expert-interviews, the following managerial implications can be derived, which might help to guide the development of online brand engagement with a Facebook brand page:

- *Engage in regular postings*

The study revealed that brand followers on Facebook are not actively searching for a brand page each time they log-on to the social-network and it was inferred that they mainly consume what they come across in their newsfeed. Thus, managers should focus on posting content quite often and on a regular basis to attract attention. To keep the postings interesting, different forms of posts incorporating elements like pictures, videos, live-images, voting-tools, which are offered by default for brand pages on Facebook, can be combined.

- *Understand your followers and target them respectively*

It was seen that through providing the chance to find self-brand congruence between the brand image and a follower's self-concept, online brand engagement could be encouraged. Hence, marketing managers need to understand their audience on Facebook and the characteristics of their followers. Once they know about their Facebook target group, they should focus on presenting the brand in a way that followers can identify with the brand and develop a perceived fit with the image of the brand. Although the digital presentation

of a brand will not differ significantly from its offline counterpart, it should be well-thought-out how the brand image can be transferred to a Facebook brand page, keeping in mind that social-networks are more dynamic, the user group tends to be younger and interaction possibilities are determined by the platform. Therefore, the language, tone of voice or visual material used in postings, should be applied accordingly. In addition, reposting and liking of another content has to be approached with caution, as this is always visible for the brand page followers and should be in line with a brand's image.

- *Provide content that is relevant for the audience*

It was also revealed that in order to drive online brand engagement, it is necessary to create involvement with the Facebook brand page. This means that followers require interactions that are relevant, important and meaningful for them. Hence, managers need to reflect on the needs, values and interests of their audience to publish content on the brand page that is truly relevant for their audience, which in turn can foster involvement. Questions such as 'What type of brand-post is relevant (e.g. informative, entertaining, fact-based)?' or 'At what time should something be posted?' or 'In which stage of the purchase funnel are followers?' (e.g. "zero moment of truth"); need to be answered by marketers before publishing content.

- *Trigger the emotional side of your followers*

Managers should keep in mind that when it comes to word-of-mouth, it is not sufficient to simply focus on achieving satisfaction, but rather to create true, positive feelings towards the brand. To establish such brand love, the interactions with the brand page need to be engaging in a way that elicits an affective and individual connection with the brand. For instance, content posts can include questions (e.g. asking followers to name their favourite products, colours or spokespersons) that evoke a more personal bond within the individual. It can also be useful to incentivise interaction with such postings by sweepstakes and other competitions. Positive feelings should be encouraged by motivating and inspiring messages or the use of humorous content posts. To foster attachment, the interaction process should be throughout authentic and honest. The communication of sustainable concerns, such as the support of charity campaigns, can touch the followers emotional side and strengthen the authenticity of the brand. Moreover, the online engagement strategy should be based on a valuable interaction that is beneficial for the individual. Thus, the brand page should represent a trustworthy source of information and expertise. It can be also key to use symbolic cues, brand related stories that evoke memories and familiar

feelings and to communicate a certain lifestyle the individual can identify with.

- *Create a rich brand experience by focusing on respective brand stimuli*

Besides involvement and self-brand congruence, the strongest influence on creating online brand engagement was observed for online brand experience. Yet, in that case, it is not about providing a good service experience and managing customer complaints properly, but about triggering specific brand related stimuli within the individual. Consequently, managers should create content that stimulates the individual's cognitive, affective and behavioural side. For instance, this can be attained through the usage of challenging brand slogans, interactions in which the follower has to engage in problem solving or telling of exciting brand stories. Moreover, publishing content that motivates followers for behavioural activities and using stimuli, which prompt feelings is of avail.

- *Focus on continuous and active interaction*

As online brand engagement is rooted in an interactive, co-creative process between an individual and the Facebook brand page it is important that while implementing a social media engagement strategy, an active interaction between followers and the brand page is throughout maintained. The goal should be to truly achieve a two-way communication that is dynamic and characterized by an active participation of both parties. This implies that it is not sufficient to set up a brand page and leave it to its own. Instead, all social media postings should aim for activating and involving the followers in the digital activities. Moreover, managers need to quickly react to positive, as well as negative comments on the brand page, answer questions timely and respond to all other forms of messages and communication accordingly. It might be helpful to set up an internal policy for such communication and response activities.

To put it in a nutshell, to establish online brand engagement it is not only important to post content regularly, but rather to create a rich brand experience based on the respective brand related stimuli. Furthermore, it seems advisable to stick to emotionally loaded postings and interactions speaking to the follower's curiosity and desire for knowledge. It is further necessary to create meaning for the individual and to provide action-related components of the brand. An active and ongoing interaction, which is authentic and beneficial for the followers, as well as able to provide relevant content at the right time, seems inevitable in achieving online brand engagement and its advantageous outcomes such as brand love and word-of-mouth recommendations.

### **5.3 Limitations and future research**

Even though this study provides useful insights into the topic of online brand engagement, it is not without limitations. First of all, it should be noted that in this dissertation a cross-sectional study was conducted, which means that the collection of the data was restricted to a short time interval. In contrast to longitudinal studies, it was only possible to get a “snapshot” of a situation by gaining information at a certain moment. Thus, developments or changes in the level of online brand engagement could not be tracked (cf. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Moreover, online brand engagement was conceptualized as a positive process and it was expected that the respondents have a positive mind-set towards the brand page, which excludes the fact that engagement can also occur in negative forms. However, examining both forms of online brand engagement would have been beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, future studies might wish to investigate further on negative online brand engagement and bring forth managerial implications how to cope with negative engagement behaviours on social media, in particular, negative word-of-mouth.

Regarding the influence of the factor online brand experience, only one path pointing from the higher-order construct towards the endogenous variable online brand engagement was analysed. However, online brand experience was conceptualized as existing of three first-order dimensions, which might have differing effects on online brand engagement. Also, the author inferred that sensory elements play a minor role in the social media context, as in this environment no touch or smell senses can be experienced. Hence, the sensory dimension of the original brand experience scale developed by Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009), was excluded in this research. Yet, based on the result that the construct online brand experience showed the strongest influence on online brand engagement, future research studies could be interested in examining the different dimensions and their influence separately, whilst including a sensory dimension. Likewise, after identifying antecedents and outcomes of the construct online brand engagement, researchers could further examine the individual connections of the different engagement dimensions relating to each relevant variable in the model.

It must be further noted that this study did not examine the differences between groups related to geographic or psychographic features, such as nationality, educational background or personality. Also, the group “gender” did not show an exactly equal proportion of male and female participants. In the future, studies could address those points

and reveal further insights depending on the characteristics of followers. Moreover, the sample did not cover participants older than. Hence, the conclusions and implications drawn from the statistical evaluations are mainly based on answers from millennials and it could be that they are not directly transferable to other generations. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if there exists a difference between younger and older generations of Facebook users.

The author further suggests that it could be worthwhile to examine the difference between the brand type categories in more detail. That is, in particular sport brands seem to provide a better brand experience, are rather able to involve, achieve better self-brand congruence among their followers and are on average higher ranked regarding satisfaction and brand love. Therefore, it would be interesting to understand how those sport brands are able to create such an exceptional social media interaction with their followers, compared to brands from other categories. The same applies to car brands, which showed on average the highest ranked statements for online brand engagement and word-of-mouth. Thus, another sample could be surveyed, while focusing on the comparison of one sport/car brand with one brand from the other brand type categories. Subsequent analysis of the respective evaluation of the variables in the model, could give some more indication of the different social media performances of the brands.

Lastly, the author decided to focus the research on the social-networking site Facebook, due to its high adoption rate and usage intensity. However, to enhance generalization of the research results, the examination could be extended to other social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter.

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## Appendix

### 1. Overview about different engagement definitions and key findings

Author	Engagement Definition//Key findings	Engagement object	Perspective
Achterberg et al. (2003) p. 213	“(…) a high sense of initiative and involvement and can respond adequately to social stimuli in the social environment—participate in social activities and interact with other residents and staff.“	Humans	<i>Psychological construct</i> <b>One dimension:</b> Behavioural (assumed)
Algesheimer et al. (2005) p. 21	“Community engagement refers to the positive influences of identifying with the brand community, which are defined as the consumer’s intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members.”	Brand community	<i>Motivational construct</i> <b>1 Dimension:</b> Behavioural (assumed)
Bowden (2009) p. 65	“(…) a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanism by which loyalty be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand.“	Brand	<i>Psychological construct</i> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Affective commitment Cognitive commitment Involvement
Brodie et al. (2010) p. 260	“Customer engagement (CE) is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that cocreate value. (...) It is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions.”	Brand	<i>Psychological construct</i> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional Behavioural
Brodie et al. (2013) p. 107	“Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.”	Brand/ Community members	<i>Motivational construct</i> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional Behavioural

Author	Engagement Definition//Key findings	Engagement object	Perspective
Calder et al. (2009) p. 322	Engagement is a: “(...) second-order construct that is manifested in various first-order “experience” constructs.”	Website	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>Multidimensional:</b> Stimulation, Social facilitation, Temporal, Self-esteem & Civic mindedness, Intrinsic enjoyment, Utilitarian, Participation & Socialising, Community
Dessart et al. (2016) p. 409	Consumer engagement is “the state that reflects consumer’s individual dispositions toward engagement foci, which are context-specific. Engagement is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioural manifestations that go beyond exchange situations.”	Brand, community, individuals, advertisers, social network	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Affective Cognitive Behavioural
Heath (2009) p. 70	Engagement is defined as: “The amount of subconscious 'feeling' going on when an advertisement is being processed.”	Advertisement	<b>Emotional construct</b> <b>One Dimension:</b> Feelings
Hollebeek (2011a) p. 790	Customer brand engagement is “The level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions”	Brand	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional Behavioural
Hollebeek (2011 b) p. 565	“Customer brand engagement (CBE) is defined as: The level of a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions.”	Brand	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional Behavioural
Hollebeek et al. (2014) p. 154	Engagement is: “(...) a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions”	Brand	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Behavioural Emotional
Jahn & Kunz (2012) p. 349	“(…) we define fan-page engagement as an interactive and integrative participation in the fan-page community and would differentiate this from the solely usage intensity of a member.”	Fan page	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>Multidimensional:</b> Participation Identification Support Interaction

Author	Engagement Definition//Key findings	Engagement object	Perspective
Johnson et al. (2001) p. 320	“Engagement refers to behaviors that broadly represent students' participation. Examples of engagement behaviors include trying hard in class, participating in discussions, completing homework, coming to class, being attentive in class, avoiding distracting behavior, and taking part in extracurricular activities.“	Educational institution	<b>Behavioural construct</b> Different engagement behaviours proposed
Jaakkola & Alexander (2014) p. 2	Customer engagement behaviour is defined as: „Customers (who) make voluntary resource contributions that have a brand or firm focus but go beyond what is fundamental to transactions, occur in interactions between the focal object and/or other actors, and result from motivational drivers“	Brand/Firm	<b>Motivational construct:</b> <b>One Dimension:</b> Behavioural (assumed)
Kumar et al. (2010) p. 297	„(...) Such active interactions of a customer with a firm, with prospects and with other customers, whether they are transactional or nontransactional in nature, can be defined as “Customer Engagement.”	Firm	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Behavioural Attitudinal Network
London et al. (2007) p. 456	Engagement refers not only to the academic investment, motivation, and commitment that students demonstrate within their institution (...), but also to the psychological connection, comfort, and sense of belonging that students feel towards their institution, their peers, professors and administrators”	Educational institution	<b>Motivational construct:</b> <b>Two Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional
Marci (2006) p. 383	Engagement is “(...) a combination of audience synchrony (attention) plus intensity (emotional impact)”	Advertisement	<b>Biological construct:</b> <b>2 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional
Mollen & Wilson (2010) p. 923	“Online engagement is a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website (...) designed to communicate brand value. It is characterized by the dimensions of dynamic and sustained cognitive processing and the satisfying of instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional congruence with the narrative schema encountered in computer-mediated entities).”	Brand (Personified through website)	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>Multidimensional:</b> Cognitive Utility Relevance Emotional
O'Brien & Toms (2008) p. 949	“Engagement is a quality of user experience s with technology that is characterized by challenge, aesthetic and sensory appeal, feedback, novelty, interactivity, perceived control and time, awareness, motivation, interest, and affect.“	Technology	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Spatio-temporal Emotional Sensory

<b>Author</b>	<b>Engagement Definition//Key findings</b>	<b>Engagement object</b>	<b>Perspective</b>
Rappaport (2007) p. 138	„The Engagement model centers on two key ideas: high relevance of brands to consumers and the development of an emotional connection between consumers and brands.“	Brand	<b>Relational construct</b> <b>2 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive Emotional
Sprott et al. (2009) p. 92	Brand engagement in self-concept is an „(...) individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves.“	Brand	<b>Psychological construct</b> <b>1 Dimensions:</b> Cognitive (assumed)
Van Doorn et al. (2010) p. 254	“Customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.”	Brand/Firm	<b>Behavioural construct</b> <b>Multidimensional:</b> Valence Form Scope Nature of impact Customer goals
Vivek et al. (2012) p. 133	“(Customer Engagement) CE is the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiates. The individuals may be current or potential customers. CE may be manifested cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, or socially “	Product/ Activities	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>Multidimensional:</b> Behavioural Cognitive Affective Social
Webster & Ahuvia (2006) p. 666	“(…), engagement is made up of three dimensions: attention focus, arousal of curiosity, and intrinsic interest.“	Web- navigation system	<b>Motivational construct</b> <b>3 Dimensions:</b> Attention focus Curiosity Intrinsic interest

## 2. Measurement items

Construct	Measurement items	Adapted from
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand means a lot to me</li> <li>• It is a meaningful brand for me</li> <li>• The brand plays a relevant part in my life</li> <li>• For me, personally this brand is important</li> <li>• I am interested in this brand</li> <li>• I am involved with this brand</li> </ul>	De Vries & Carlson (2014)
Online brand experience	<p><i>Affective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand is an emotional brand</li> <li>• The brand induces sentiments and feelings in me</li> <li>• I do not have any strong emotions for this brand</li> </ul> <p><i>Behavioural:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It encourages me to engage in physical activities</li> <li>• Following this brand results in physical experiences</li> <li>• The brand does not encourage me to engage in physical behaviours</li> </ul> <p><i>Intellectual:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand animates me to think about it and its message</li> <li>• Experiencing this brand evokes my curiosity</li> <li>• I am not motivated to think about the brand</li> </ul>	Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009)
Self-brand congruence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the brand personifies is a lot like I see me</li> <li>• This brand reflects what I am</li> <li>• How the brand is presented, mirrors how I see myself</li> <li>• The brand image corresponds with my self-image in many ways</li> <li>• Through “liking” this brand, I can express what I find important in life</li> </ul>	De Vries & Carlson (2014)



Construct	Measurement items	Adapted from
Online brand engagement	<p><i>Cognitive:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I see the brand's social media activities I start to think about it</li> <li>• While I am interacting with the brand, I think a lot about the brand</li> <li>• When I am interacting with the brand, I want to learn more about it</li> </ul> <p><i>Affective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel very positive when I am interacting with the brand</li> <li>• Following the brand's Facebook account makes me happy</li> <li>• feel good, when I am interacting with the brand</li> <li>• Interacting with that brand makes me feel proud</li> </ul> <p><i>Activation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I spend a lot more time interacting with this brand, compared to any other brand</li> <li>• Whenever I am online on Facebook, I usually look for that brand</li> <li>• I generally interact with that brand, when I log on to Facebook</li> </ul>	Hollebeek, et al. (2014)
Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am satisfied with the social media appearance of this brand</li> <li>• I think the Facebook profile of this brand is one of the best compared to others</li> <li>• Overall, the brand delivers a great possibility to interact with it on Facebook</li> </ul>	Loureiro, Miranda & Breazeale (2014)
Brand love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand says something true and deep about who I am as a person</li> <li>• I am desiring this brand</li> <li>• I have positive emotions towards this brand</li> <li>• I will follow this brand on Facebook for a long time</li> <li>• If this brand would delete its Facebook account, I will feel sad about it</li> <li>• My overall evaluation of this brand is positive</li> </ul>	Bagozzi, Batra & Ahuvia (2014)

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Measurement items</b>	<b>Adapted from</b>
Word-of-mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I encourage friends and my family to buy this brand</li> <li>• Whenever someone seeks advice, I would recommend this brand</li> <li>• When the brand is mentioned in a conversation (online and/or offline), I would recommend this brand</li> <li>• I have already recommended this brand to my friends and/or family (offline and/or online)</li> </ul>	Ismail & Spinelli (2012)

### 3. Online questionnaire (Screenshots)



#### Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement

Dear participant,

the following questionnaire is intended to answer specific research questions on the topic of *Online Brand Engagement*.

At the beginning of the questionnaire you will be asked to name one brand you have “liked” on the social media platform Facebook. Please keep in mind, that all questions are focused on the relationship between you and the named brand, which means while answering the questions, you should always think about that one specific brand.

Any questions or concerns regarding the survey, please contact: **tatjanagorgus@yahoo.de**

Answering the survey will take about 5 minutes.

Thank you for your collaboration!

Tatjana Gorgus  
Msc Marketing  
ISCTE Business School

Next

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

Do you have a social media profile on Facebook?

Yes

No

Have you "liked" a brand's social media profile on Facebook?

"Liked" implies that you follow the brand's social media profile and see all the brand's activities in your newsfeed.

Yes

No

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

Please think about one brand you have "liked" on Facebook and write its name in the text field below:

Next

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

How often do you use Facebook?

Once a week

Between 2-6 times a week

More than 6 times a week

2-3 times during the day

More than 5 times during the day

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

For all following statements, you need to mark your level of agreement or disagreement on the corresponding scales, which are ranging from **"I strongly agree"** to **"I strongly disagree"**.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements, when you think about the brand you have mentioned before:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
For me personally this brand is important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand reflects what I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am involved with this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a meaningful brand for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How the brand is presented, mirrors how I see myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand plays a relevant part in my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next

**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

Due to the nature of Facebook, brands can be represented through a variety of media and content. For example, pictures, videos, logo images or text postings might be used, to advertise the brand and communicate with followers.

**State your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements, keeping in mind how you experience the brand you follow on Facebook:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand animates me to think about it and its message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It encourages me to engage in physical activities (e.g. booking a holiday/go shopping)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not motivated to think about the brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Following this brand results in physical experiences (e.g. doing sport/meeting friends)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is an emotional brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand does not encourage me to engage in physical behaviours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand induces sentiments and feelings in me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiencing this brand evokes my curiosity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have any strong emotions for this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

**Think about the brand you have mentioned and why you have decided to "like" that one specific brand. Then, mark to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am interested in this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand image corresponds with my self-image in many ways	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through "liking" this brand, I can show others what I find important in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What the brand personifies is a lot like I see me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand means a lot to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

The subsequent statements are related to your interaction with the brand you have "liked" on Facebook. "Interaction" means any form of contact you have with the brand on Facebook. For example: You read and/or comment the brand's postings (text/video/picture etc.). You actively scroll through the brand's social media profile and/or passively encounter the brand's activities in your newsfeed.

**Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements, by using the drop-down menu on the right side.**

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| When I see the brand's social media activities I start to think about it         | <input type="text"/> |
| I feel very positive when I am interacting with the brand                        | <input type="text"/> |
| I spend a lot more time interacting with this brand, compared to any other brand | <input type="text"/> |
| While I am interacting with the brand, I think a lot about the brand             | <input type="text"/> |
| Following the brand's Facebook account makes me happy                            | <input type="text"/> |
| Whenever I am online on Facebook, I usually look for that brand                  | <input type="text"/> |
| When I am interacting with the brand, I want to learn more about it              | <input type="text"/> |
| I feel good, when I am interacting with the brand                                | <input type="text"/> |
| I generally interact with that brand, when I log in to Facebook                  | <input type="text"/> |
| Interacting with that brand makes me feel proud                                  | <input type="text"/> |

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your satisfaction with the brand?**

	Strongly agree						Strongly disagree
I am satisfied with the social media appearance of that brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think the Facebook profile of this brand is one of the best compared to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, the brand offers a great possibility to interact with it on Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

The last section is intended to measure your personal connection with the brand you have mentioned.

**Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements below:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am desiring this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand says something true and deep about who I am as person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have positive emotions towards this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will follow this brand on Facebook for a long time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whenever someone seeks advice, I would recommend this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I encourage friends and my family to buy this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When the brand is mentioned in a conversation (online and/or offline), I would recommend it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If the brand would delete its Facebook account, I will feel sad about it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My overall evaluation of this brand is positive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have already recommended this brand (online and/or offline) to my friends and family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

To finish the questionnaire, please tell us a bit more about you:

**How old are you?**

Under 16

Between 16-18

Between 19-25

Between 26-35

Over 35

**I am...**

Female

Male

**Master Thesis: Online Brand Engagement**

**You have completed the survey.**

All your answers have been collected.

Thank you for taking the time!



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#### 4. Semi-structured interview guideline



### Qualitative Interviews

#### Topic: Online brand engagement

The following questions are dealing with the topic of online customer engagement. The interview serves as a preceding information gathering and to develop the standardized quantitative questionnaire.

1. How would you define online engagement?
2. In how far do you think is online engagement important for the performance (digital and offline) of your brand?
3. How do you measure online engagement/Which KPIs do you use for it?
4. Based on your experience, can you tell which activities/campaigns work best to drive online engagement? → And why? → How important is social media in that case?
5. Do you think that creating a rich brand experience helps to drive online engagement?
6. What measures do you approach in order to create a love brand?

## 5. Transcription of the expert-interviews

**Interviewer: Tatjana Gorgus (TG)**

**Interviewee: Participant (PT)**

### Interview 1 (Digital Manager L'Oréal PARiS):

TG: To begin I would like to know how you would define online engagement just in your own words?

PT1: Online engagement for me basically nowadays goes back to a behaviour that is more than the instinct behaviour that users tend to have nowadays - so more than just a click it's a behaviour that shows us an engagement or an interest of the user that goes beyond the basic psychology that we have with a click. So for me it is an active participation or an active showing of interest in the topic or in the campaign or whatever we are trying to promote by the medium we are using.

TG: And in how far do you think that this kind of online engagement is important for the performance of your brand? On the one hand on the digital basis, but also in the offline context?

PT1: I think it's actually the most important KPI that we have, because it has very much impact on brand loyalty, brand engagement - so and also on buy and purchase decisions. We see it in different studies, like the zero moment of truth of Google that's one of the studies that we have and we work with and we see actually that it's key because users that are - that you get in a deeper step of the funnel they are already in - not in the awareness phase of their customer decision journey but they are deeper in the funnel - they are actually in just before the action phase, so it's really *really* key to measure and have those users that engage and also like segment from other users that you have.

TG: So you said in the beginning that online engagement itself is actually a KPI, but the other way around, how do you actually measure the online engagement or do you have any other KPIs to measure that online engagement?

PT1: It very much depends on the channel that you use or that you try to measure. So for instance if you are on the website and you want to have the engagement of users of the website, there is [sic] different KPIs, so the basic ones would be time spend or non-bounce is something that we use in branding - other would be a lead that people do - so they sign up for a newsletter, or deeper engagement, page depth could be something - so there's different, by channel it's different. In social media actually it would be a like, a share and you could even diversify between the engagement - so there is a soft engagement and there is kind of a like hard engagement. Soft engagement is you like - it's just easy to do. But it's not really an engagement because you just do it because it is intuitively. You kind of subconsciously saying [sic] okay I like it and you press it, it's easy, it's a click. But there is more an engagement level that is more active, you comment, you share with you friends, it's harder to reach that. So I really think it's by channel and by medium - so it's not easy to answer.

TG: So you already said that social media is important or a good example, where you can measure online engagement, so based on your experience what kind of activity or campaign also maybe on social media was a good example for online engagement?

PT1: There is one thing that always works. It's goodies and freebies. So people - you need to give them incentives, incentives their engagement and then they will jump on it, they will do whatever you want them to do and you could like select those people and work with them. Of course this is something that is, I would say a "bought-engagement", so there is a - if you want to have a good engagement you really need to think consumer centric, you need to kind of forecast the user behaviour and forecast what the user wants, what is the information you are seeking. So you need to understand the user. In social media for example, it would be giving them a solution that is highly searched on Google, you write an article about it, you formulate the social media (inaudible) right way, for example "do you also have the problem?" or "tell me more/tell us about your problem" and then you get them to respond and actively engage in your social media environment or on the website or whatever is the action to be done. I think there is - social media is really important, but it is not like the most important - but there is more also like on-site is also important and something you should not be forgetting about.



TG: In how far do you think that creating a richer brand experience is important for online engagement? Brand experience in terms of, how does a brand affect a consumer for example on a sensual way, also maybe on a visual way. So if you go to the website online and then you have a strong visual impact for example, colours, tone sounds etc.

PT1: I think it again goes back to consumer centricity. I think you need to be consistent in the way you communicate to users in [sic] the experience. You have to always send them the same message or address them in the right moment with the right message and be consistent. It's key number one to do it. I think nowadays also consumer centricity - so you need to give the right message to the right consumer. So if you are for example in a step you want to buy something and in that moment as a brand you need to give the right solution. For example, you need to give the users the opportunity or the possibility to search for the next store and confirms it's available. For example, like an advanced store finder and if you do that you can - the brand experience is excellent, you can have a great online engagement in that moment and it also creates loyalty then afterwards.

TG: Coming to my last question, what kind of measures do you approach to really create a love brand?

PT1: So there is like pre-defined engagement rate, you can have "leads" for example measured. I would say measure everything that you can and then decide by campaign and by measure if it's relevant for engagement or not. For social media there are fixed KPIs, like said engagement rate and so on, share-ability, mentions. But I would say it goes further than that. You need to measure everything on the site, clicks, ecommerce buys, leads, newsletter registration, return rates of consumers, how active are they and then you can say, yes or no, they are engaged or not. I don't think there is one single KPI that can identify the love brand in a way. It is a mixture of measurements that you need to do and then you can find out if you are loved or not.

TG: But in order to create a love brand. Do you think it's important that a brand represents a certain lifestyle for example, and how important is it that a consumer can identify with a brand, do you try to develop a brand with which the consumer can identify itself?

PT1: Yes, it is key for branding, you need to stand for something and position yourself and say that is what I am standing for, then the measurement of this is like I said a mixture of KPIs you need to take into consideration.

TG: Alright, Thank you!

Interview 2 (Digital Manager L'Oréal PARiS)

TG: To start it would be interesting to know how you would define online engagement, just in general?

PT2: Online engagement is the engagement or interaction rate of our users and consumers and our fans with the brand contents that are available online.

TG: And in how far do you think this engagement is important for the performance of your brand? On the one hand on the digital basis, but also probably in the offline context?

PT2: On the digital, it is important to further distribute the content we have online and to have the users as our distributors of content and to maximise the reach and on the offline perspective it's important for the consumers to - for offline of course it's important for the sales and for the goal to become a love brand.

TG: So you think if you have a good online engagement it also has an influence on the offline performance?

PT2: Yes, it could have, depending on the volume of engagement

TG: Ok, alright. How do you measure online engagement? Do you have any concrete KPIs for it?

PT2: In social media we are using the interactions "likes" "views" for videos and also "comments". If it is something on a website or on other digital channels we would say - we

defining it by campaign or by activity, which means for example if you have a tool, we would say an engagement is if you are interacting with a tool and uploading a photo.

TG: And what would you say, based on your experience, which kind of activity or campaign works best to drive online engagement. You already said that social media is probably very important, so maybe you can just say in general which kind of campaigns are great for that?

PT2: So of course engagement is best to measure in social media or easiest to measure, here of course product testings and sweepstakes are working very well, but they are not the most honest tool I would say to drive engagement, because the natural brand engagement with the normal contents which are not that much engaging is most probably the more honest one. Which means of course for sweepstakes or product test we have more engagement, because more people want to test the products for free, than we have for just a normal content which is for example showing a “how to” video. So we have to see it differentiated, but I think you need both in order to have a good balance.

TG: Okay, so I think this is kind of related to my next question actually, so you would say that the incentive you would give to a consumer is more important to drive online engagement than online experience?

PT2: Yes, depending on. Yes, of course if you have an incentive it is always more engaging or it's mostly more engaging, but of course it's also very important to have a rich brand experience, have good services in place and to engage the consumer subtly with the contents or the tools and services you offer.

TG: Coming to my last question, what kind of measure do you approach to create a real love brand?

PT2: So for now, this is a very difficult question and we are still in the process of defining this. But for sure as I said before the engagement rate, which means likes, shares, comments and views is very important and we are taking this into account when measuring how to become a love brand.

TG: How important do you think is it that a brand represents maybe a certain lifestyle for example, so that the consumer can identify with a brand and order to fall in love with the brand in the end?

PT2: Of course this is very important and of course this has an impact on the goal of becoming a love brand.

Interview 3 (Social Media Specialist L'ORÉAL PARiS)

TG: To begin the interview, please tell me in your own words, how would you define online engagement?

PT3: I would define it as a situation in which a consumer searches for something online or directly on the webpage of the manufacturer and afterwards engages with the brand in a way that it directly affects the producer. Ideally, this happens on the social media accounts of the brand. This is the place where I think online engagement can be measured in an effective way and those channels offer the consumer the chance to actively interact with the brand.

TG: And why would you say is this online engagement, this active interaction, important for a brand? On the one hand in the online environment and on the other hand regarding the offline environment?

PT3: I generally think that if a consumer interacts with a brand, it has influence on different factors and in the end this will influence the consumer's purchase decision. The more a brand becomes relevant to an individual, the more it is present in the mind of the consumer and it gets more likely that the individual will choose this one brand at the POS, however this connection is hard to track and different intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a role. In the best case the consumer does also communicate positively about the brand that will induce further positive purchase decisions. There are only a few people who really would talk negatively about a brand in such a case, probably one percent or so.

TG: And what would you say, which KPIs could you use to really measure that? What do you use in your company?

PT3: Yes, regarding the social media channels, it would be the KPI reach, which refers to „likes“ and the engagement using „comments“, albeit this is tricky to measure, as it still requires a manual analysis of the sentiment. However, nowadays there exists some kind of automated measurement methods, but in the end it usually has to be done by hand. So I would say it is „likes“, „comments“ and in the best case it would be „sharing“, which is really the ne plus ultra.

TG: And what kind of campaigns and activities that are feasible for a brand online, would you say are the best to drive that engagement? Maybe you can refer to an example and describe what you have experienced works best?

PT3: From my experience I can say that actually charity campaigns work pretty well. But they have to be honest and the consumer has to see that it is not only a campaign to improve the image of a company, but to support the sustainable values of a company. This can be sometimes quite difficult, but I believe that this is the key.

TG: So you would say that creating a trustable brand - a brand that is able to achieve trust - has a positive influence on engagement?

PT3: Yes, definitely. For traditional campaigns it is always difficult to track and evaluate afterwards what was the best medium, what was good and what was bad. So I really think that honest campaigns in combination with charity really work best.

TG: And in how far do you think is it important to create a multifaceted experience, not only regarding social media but also regarding the website and e-commerce, in order to drive engagement? Especially when referring to brand experience, which means for example that you create a huge visual impact. For instance, using an extraordinary colour or music on the webpage? Do you have any plans like that in future?

PT3: I think that the website is actually the basis that you need to have, but I think it is not helpful to put too much content on the website. In my opinion the webpage is not that

important and focusing only on the website does not necessarily lead to a good return of investment. Of course, consumers like to get inspiration from a brand's webpage, but actually it is also shown in studies that other factors such as influencer, print media or TV are more used by consumers to get informed. Also, I am not sure if the brand itself is that relevant for the consumer that really all aspects need to be presented online. Regarding e-commerce and if I think about my own behaviour, I also think it is difficult to find a brand that is truly inspiring and I can not remember a brand which I found had a very good e-commerce presentation. Thus, I think e-commerce needs to be convenient, but I do not think that an own brand shop is essential and justifies a huge investment. Especially, consumers often not only want to buy products from one brand when online shopping, but they want to buy several brands on the same webpage. That is why in my opinion other platforms are better, where a consumer can buy different brands all together. That way you can buy a brow stick from Urban Decay and at the same time a lipstick from Color Riche and you do not have to buy the whole range. In my opinion, sensory effects such as music that starts to play right away when you enter a webpage is rather annoying. Generally, I think the consumer is looking for inspiration, but it is not necessarily the webpage or a brand shop where he can find it.

TG: My final question is concerned with the topic of brand love. What do you think has to be done to establish a real love brand and how do you try to create such a brand?

PT3: I believe that the basis for all love brands are really great products. Vice versa, you can not become a love brand if you offer a bad product. For example, Coca Cola or Essie, where the product itself is the primary basis, as they are good and function well. Additionally, such brands provide added value for their consumers, without offering an additional product-value, which means that they establish an emotional bond with the consumer. Examples for that are the Coca Cola Santa Claus or the hashtag #essielove. It seems that there is something with those brands that triggers consumers to choose them over all other brands. It is hard to define that exactly. But I believe that in our society nowadays everything is more grey and people are more looking for the beautiful things in life and also question things more, in particularly the generation Y. Therefore, you need to emotionalise everything more in a pleasant way, but carefully as it can also backfire if not done right. In general, I would say number one is having a great product as the basis and then in the long-run try to catch the consumer in an emotional way in each situation. If you

think brands like Apple or Coca Cola who not have to do much to create online awareness as they are established in the market since a long time and also because they have great products. But of course you always need to be present at every communication touch-point to keep that going. If those brands would stop that, they would probably no longer be love brands. However, to measure that, how it can be exactly established, I do not have an exact answer - Emotional relationships.

TG: Alright, thank you!

## 6. Reliability for all constructs

### *Scale Involvement*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.851	6

### *Scale OBE\_all\_dimensions*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.885	10

### *Scale OBEX*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.801	9

### *Scale Brand Love*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.767	6

### *Scale WOM*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.855	4

### *Scale SBC*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.855	5

### *Scale Satisfaction*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.801	9

## 7. Independent samples t-test for gender

	Mean (Population)		t-test for equality of means	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
OBE cognitive	4.95	5.10	-0.972	0.332
OBE affective	4.31	4.40	-0.496	0.621
OBE activation	3.10	3.65	-2,766	<b>0.007</b>

## 8. Welch-test for online brand experience

### Robust Tests of Equality of Means

Online brand experience

	Statistic <sup>a</sup>	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	8.203	4	56.613	.000

a. Asymptotically F distributed.