



# How can social media influence customers loyalty

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## **Abstract**

Social media marketing is a growing practice in the marketing scope. The landscape of relationship marketing is changing with new ways of relating and interacting enabled by social media. Understanding these impacts is critical once it may influence customers loyalty. Research about social media impacts on customer/brands relationship is evolving, yet social media activity impacts on loyalty and its antecedents are still unclear. As so, the purpose of this dissertation is to clarify the influence of perceived social media activities on loyalty antecedents and loyalty, for fast fashion brands. Antecedents proved to be relevant to lead to loyalty as satisfaction, trust and commitment. The research purpose was fulfilled through a broad study of previous relevant literature followed by empirical research. Before the last one, from the literature review it was proposed a framework presenting the correlation between variables. To the exception of trust-loyalty relation, all were supported by the empirical findings. These revealed that perceived social media activity has a positive influence on customers loyalty, directly and indirectly. This can impact loyalty indirectly by leading to both satisfaction and commitment. Since perceived social media activity can directly influence loyalty without any mediation, this may be considered as new loyalty antecedent. Marketers should for that understand the nature of social media platforms and the best practices to adopt. Marketers are suggested to use up to date and relevant content to portray a fun social environment. As well, the foster of interaction is advised to nurture satisfaction, trust, commitment and loyalty.

**Keywords:** Social media, loyalty, relationship, interaction

**JEL:** M310, M 390

## **Resumo**

Marketing das redes sociais é uma prática crescente no mundo do marketing. O contexto do marketing relacional está a mudar com as novas maneiras de relacionar e interagir possibilitadas pelas redes sociais. Compreender esses impactos é fundamental, pois pode influenciar a lealdade dos clientes. O estudo destes no relacionamento cliente/marca está a evoluir, mas os impactos desta atividade na lealdade dos consumidores e nos seus antecedentes ainda não estão claros. Sendo assim, o objetivo desta dissertação é esclarecer a influência que a percepção destas atividades poderá ter na lealdade dos consumidores de marcas de fast fashion. Esta relação foi estudada em antecedentes anteriormente provados como relevantes para levar à lealdade como satisfação, confiança e comprometimento. O objetivo da pesquisa foi cumprido através de um amplo estudo de literatura relevante, seguido de pesquisas empíricas. À exceção da relação confiança-lealdade, todas foram apoiadas pelos resultados empíricos. Estes revelaram que a percepção que os clientes têm da atividade das marcas nas redes sociais tem uma influência positiva na lealdade dos mesmos, direta e indiretamente. Influencia indiretamente através da satisfação e comprometimento. Os gestores devem entender a natureza das redes sociais e as melhores práticas a serem adotadas. Os profissionais de marketing são sugeridos a usar conteúdo atual e relevante para retratar um ambiente social divertido. Além disso, aconselha-se a fomentação da interação para nutrir satisfação, confiança, comprometimento e lealdade.

**Keywords:** Redes sociais, lealdade, relações, interação

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## **1 Introduction**

The ambit of this study is to understand brands' social media activity impacts of customers loyalty. The research will focus on the fast fashion industry restricted to the Portuguese audience, to limit the study width.

### **1.1 Background**

There are many background changes that justify the scope of this study. A major change relies on the adoption of social media platforms. The proliferation of social media and its uses got researchers attention, being most of the researches only published in the last few years (Ngai, Moon & Tao, 2015). One of the main reasons for this is that social media platforms have specific characteristics that allow brands to relate differently with customers (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Phan, Thomas, & Heine, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). Still, the impacts of social media use by brands on customers loyalty continue unclear (Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018). Moreover, social media platforms are widely used from both customers and brands. With such wide adoption, marketers need to be aware of its challenges and opportunities.

Social media for its nature can be a great opportunity for brands to improve relationships with customers. In fact, 74% of marketers state that a leading reason to use social media is to create a loyal fan base (Appendix A). As is known, loyalty is the goal of relationship marketing as it allows brands to maintain a continuous relationship with customers. Brands interest in creating long term relationships with customers is only increasing due to changes like increased competition, market saturation and globalization (Park, Chung, Phillips & Anaza, 2016). Combining these major changes, the increasing need to create loyal customers and the wide proliferation of social media, it becomes evident that there is a need for a further and better comprehension of social media impacts on loyalty.

### **1.2 Research Problem**

A central subject to the use of social media is the belief that these changed the way brands and customers relate (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Kaplan and Haelein, 2010; Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Paniagua & Sapena, 2014; Kietzmann,

Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013; Labrecque, Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013; Kim & Ko, 2012; Kontu & Vecchi, 2014). Relating with customers in social media comes with its challenges. A major challenge is customers' empowerment as customers have a more active role and can spread their opinion with a wide audience (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Phan, Thomas, & Heine, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).

However, many authors have been suggesting desirable outcomes from brands' social media activity as loyalty, satisfaction, trust and commitment (Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Nadeem, Andreini, Salo, & Laukkanen, 2015; Park, Chung, Phillips and Anaza, 2016). Social media can for that be considered as a new channel that gives brands new opportunities to relate and connect with customers. Therefore, social media activity aspects and impacts on relationships need further insights.

Previous researches have mentioned customers' perception of social media activity as possible reasons for positive outcomes as satisfaction, trust, commitment and loyalty (Zhang, Benyoucef & Zhao, 2016; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Dessart 2017; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Martín-Consuegra, Faraoni, Díaz & Ranfagni, 2018; Kim and Ko, 2012). Still, a gap can be detected in the literature as there is no prior research that relates perceived social media activity with such outcomes.

### **1.3 Objectives**

This dissertation objective is to elucidate how social media activity influences customers' relationship, more specifically on customer loyalty, satisfaction, trust and commitment. Moreover, this dissertation intent to fill the literature gap previously mentioned.

Henceforth, Kim and Ko (2012) construct of perceived social media activity will be used as a base to investigate perceived social media activity impacts on trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty. Having in mind this construct was applied in the luxury segment of the fashion industry and that there are considerable differences among these (Consuegra, Faraoni, Diaz & Ranfagni, 2018), this study will focus on the fast fashion segment.

As so to help managers better understand and define social media strategy, the previous relations will be analyzed and interpreted regarding the impacts of perceived social media activity of fast fashion brands, such as Zara, Stradivarius, Pull and Bear, Bershka, H&M.

## **1.4 Structure**

The present chapter presents an overview of the main topics, introducing the main limits on the literature that explain the research problem.

In the next chapter, a more detailed explanation of the topics will be made through a literature review. The central focus will be on social media and relationships. To assess identified relations, a framework will be proposed.

The methodology chapter will then identify the chosen approach to test the proposed framework using quantitative methods. Multiple and simple linear regression models were estimated to validate the research hypothesis.

Finally, from the empirical findings and literature review managerial implications will be delineated, limitations and further research suggestions identified.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Relationship marketing**

Relationship marketing and loyalty are two very important and related concepts. These concepts called marketers attention for its multiple benefits. For that reason, this first chapter will clarify these concepts and its importance.

Relationship marketing was firstly defined by Berry (1983, p.25) as "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships." To do so, brands initially focused simply on transactions (Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014; Gummerus, Kowalkowski & KosKull, 2017). However, with environmental changes the way marketeers' approach and saw relationship marketing changed.

Changes like the raising globalization of markets, increased competition and even market saturation (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres, 2004; Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015; Bardauskaite, 2014; Park, Chung, Phillips & Anaza, 2016), plus the quick adoption and development of information technologies

forced brands to adapt its strategy (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Bardauskaite, 2014). With such changes, competitive advantages like customers loyalty gained a wider relevance. Consequently, relationship marketing is now about value exchange (Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014). Brands now create value to nurture brand trust, lead to repeat purchases and retain existing customers. Therefore, one can think of relationship marketing as “a process of exchange and mutual cooperation that has been shown to generate strong customer relationships that enhance customer loyalty and firm profits” (Loureiro & Sarmiento, 2017; p.3).

Given that, relationship marketing is about value exchange with customers or other parties that should occur at a profit so that both goals are reached (Gronroos, 1996; Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014). In other words, relationship marketing is also about the mutual realization of promises, meaning that customers also benefit from Relationship Marketing practices (Gronroos, 1996; Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018; Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres, 2004). Customers can benefit from advantages like special offers/treatments, for example customized service/products, social benefits and economic advantages. Other benefits are related to the decrease of uncertainty and risk reduction (Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018; Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres, 2004).

The next chapters will approach important dimensions of relationship marketing such as satisfaction, trust, commitment and loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Szymanski & Henard, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagiie-Guillen, 2003; Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004; Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000; Cifci & Erdogan, 2016; Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015).

### **2.1.1 Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is considered to be an important objective for brands since it has been linked to more profitable relationships in the long term (Eisingerich, Auh & Merlo, 2014; Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014) thanks to its impact on customers retention (Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015). Satisfied customers are more willing to participate and give constructive feedback (Eisingerich, Auh & Merlo, 2014). For that reason, understanding the antecedent can have a big impact on brands' outcomes.

Has previously stated, Oliver concluded that to become loyal customers need to be satisfied, need to feel a “pleasurable fulfillment” of needs, desires or goals. As so, satisfaction becomes a first base of loyalty. Many other definitions came after Oliver’s but the core concept of satisfaction lies on the emotional evaluation of the product/service experienced (Son, Wang & Han, 2019), as a “Postchoice evaluative judgment” (Lombart & Louis, 2012; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014; Bardauskaite, 2014; Gallarza, Saura & Holbook, 2011).

This is deeply related to Oliver’s’ disconfirmation paradigm. The disconfirmation paradigm sees satisfaction as the result of a comparison between prior expectations and actual brand performance, a comparison through which customers develop attitude towards the brand (Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015). Even though, the notion of the comparison between expectations and performance is the most associated to satisfaction (Bloemer & Kasper, 1994; Oliver 1999; Szymanski & Henard, 2001), this view has some downturns. It can become difficult for consumers to create expectations and evaluate brands as these were two isolated concepts. If a customer lacks knowledge or experience with other options that could be a reference point, it will be hard to create expectations and therefore to compare them with the actual brand’s performance (Bloemer & Kasper, 1994). In order words, the disconfirmation paradigm won’t occur and the customers may not get the “fulfilling” sentiment.

Nevertheless, when brands’ performance is above expectation positive disconfirmation occurs. Similarly, when performance is below expectations negative disconfirmation happens leading to dissatisfaction (Bardauskaite, 2014). Typically, in this case, customers release their disappointment as negative word of mouth. On the other hand, when positive disconfirmation occurs, customers become satisfied with the brand and more likely to repurchase again (Szymanski & Henard, 2001; Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014) and generate positive WOM (Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015).

Overall, satisfaction is seen has a primary step to achieve loyalty, being linked to other mentioned antecedents, trust and commitment.

### **2.1.2 Trust**

Many researchers see trust as an important quality of relationships among individuals and between these and brands (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagiie-Guillen, 2003; Hiscock, 2001; Delgado-ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2013;

Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Harris and Goode, 2004; Son, Wang & Han, 2019; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Taylor, Donovan & Ishida, 2014; Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017; Bardauskaite, 2014). Some even see trust as the foundation of relationships (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagiie-Guillen, 2003) and that the goal of marketing is to develop an intense bond between the consumer and the brand, being trust the main link. For that reason, understanding how customers establish relationships with brands requires a better understanding of brand trust.

The relation between trust and loyalty was firstly approached by Morgan and Hunt (1994) with the trust commitment model. In this, trust was defined as the “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence.”(p.23) Ever since, trust has been defined in many different ways, yet most of them see trust according to two dimensions: brand intention and brand reliability (Delgado-ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2013; Ballester & Aleman & Guillen, 2003; Bardauskaite, 2014; Milan, Eberted & Bebbber, 2015).

Brand intention is related to the belief that a brand would take the customers in consideration in case of problems and won't take advantage of them (Bardauskaite, 2014). In this dimension consumers speculate how the brand will behave in new situations including vulnerable ones. The brand intention dimension underlies the reliability dimension, in the sense that, according to the first one there is a dependence on delivering the promised outcomes (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagiie-Guillen, 2003).

Brand reliability on its turn, its related to the believe that the brand will perform and behave as promised. As so, reliability will influence the expectancy of future satisfying situations. In other words, a brand by consistently delivering what it promises makes consumers more confident about future situations (Milan, Eberted & Bebbber, 2015). In this way, the level of customer's trust works as an indicator of the durability and success of the relationship (Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016).

This idea goes along with Morgan and Hunt's view of trust in the sense that reliability will lead to a positive brand attitude, important for purchase decision and repurchase intention. Once customers trust the brand and become confident about future situations, they become more committed to it and therefore more predispose to repurchase the brand and may even be willing to pay more (Delgado-ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2013).

Customers trust brands based on previous experiences with it throughout the evaluation of a brands' performance, integrity and benevolence (Lien, Wen, Huang & Wu, 2015; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier,2015). Demonstrations of care, concern and honesty can induce such perceptions (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). Those evaluations are benefic for brands since trust reduces the perceived risk, (Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Lien, Wen, Huang & Wu, 2015) and can even have a very important role to restore a customer's loyalty after service failure (Choi & La, 2013). Plus, trust promotes open exchange of ideas and communication between parties and positive WOM (Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015).

As mentioned brand commitment appeared as a link between trust and advantageous outcomes (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016). In fact, Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán (2001) argue that by affecting commitment, brand trust can influence price tolerance. In the case of high involvement situations, this ability to influence brand commitment is even stronger than satisfaction. Watson IV. Beck, Henderson and Palmatier (2015) mention that together these give customers the idea that their relationship with the brand is more than just a transaction by giving the sense that the relationship is pleasurable (Bardauskaite, 2014). In essence, it is important to understand how brands can generate trust and how they can use it for loyalty purposes in order to obtain advantageous outcomes.

### **2.1.3 Commitment**

Commitment is also considered a relevant variable to drive loyalty (Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017; Bardauskaite, 2014; Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Tanfor, Raab & Kim, 2011; Park, Chung, Phillips & Anaza,2016). The attachment that committed customers have towards brands lead to a willingness of those to stay in a relationship. Not only that, committed customers are also willing to make an effort to preserve it (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Mahmoud, Hinson, Adika, 2018; Park, Chung, Phillips & Anaza, 2016). Such characteristics are important to foster loyalty.

The mentioned characteristics are highlighted in Morgan and Hunts' model where commitment is defined " as an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures

indefinitely” (p.23). This means that commitment encloses attachments that the customer may have towards a certain brand, psychological and economic (Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013). After the given definition, many others came relating commitment to different concepts (Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004; Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000; Cifci & Erdogan, 2016; Gruen, Summer & Acito, 2000; Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2013).

The most dominant view sees commitment as a combination of affective commitment and continuance commitment (Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004; Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). Affective commitment is an emotional attachment to the brand linked to identification, occurring when a customer identifies with a brand (Fullerton, 2003; Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011) and has a feeling of belongingness (Tanfor, Raab & Kim, 2011). When a customer is affectively committed to the brand, he/she will like the brand regardless of the type of service/product offered (Cifci & Erdogan, 2016; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

On the other hand, continuance commitment is linked to the customers believe, that leaving the relationship with the brand will lead to sacrifice (Fullerton, 2005). In other words, continuance commitment constrains consumers. Switching cost and lack of alternatives are one of the main reasons for this (Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004; Cifci & Erdogan, 2016; Tanfor, Raab & Kim, 2011).

Other views of commitment believe that to fully understand and foster it, brands must consider 3 concepts instead of only 2. The third concept is normative commitment (Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004; Gruen, Summer & Acito, 2000). For being linked to a perceived obligation, normative commitment translates in a feeling of having to. The other two concepts, affective and continuance commitment are respectively linked to a desire and cost-based attachment. Following this, consumers can stay with the brand "because they want to, because they feel they ought to, and because they feel they have to" (Bansal, Irving & Shirley, 2004, p.247).

The importance given to commitment is deeply related to its outcomes. Morgan and Hunt believe that relationship commitment can lead to outcomes like increase acquiescence and cooperation and less propensity to leave. Yet, it is important to notice that these outcomes are affected differently by the different components of commitment (Fullerton 2011).



Fullerton (2005), studied the impact of each of these components. While affective commitment positively affects advocacy and negatively affects switching intentions, continuance commitment had a weak influence in last one. Additionally, Tanfor, Raab and Kim (2011) linked affective commitment to advocacy and purchase behavior. Plus, Singh and Batista-Foguet (2011), suggest that brands should foster affective commitment along the entire customer experience to generate loyalty.

Giving the nature of continuance commitment there are authors that believe that this can arm affective commitment (Cifci & Erdogan, 2016; Tanfor, Raab & Kim, 2011; Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011). Therefore, higher commitment doesn't necessarily improve relationships. Commitment can enhance and harm them. In fact, when consumers feel constrain to a brand, due to continuance commitment, it can lead to negative outcomes like suppressing positive word of mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Fullerton 2011). This fact underlines once more the importance of understanding the right way to foster commitment so that loyalty intentions arise.

#### **2.1.4 Loyalty**

The development of long-term relationships is considered to be an everlasting competitive advantage for brands (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). For most marketers and academics having loyal customers is a synonym of multiple advantages. On that account, loyalty is now seen as the final goal of relationship marketing (Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015). As so, loyalty has been a current object of study in multiple industries, leading to various conceptions and classifications of loyalty (Harris & Goode, 2004). For that reason, the present section will go through the conceptualization of loyalty and its manifestations.

First it is important to understand what brand loyalty refers to. Loyalty was firstly defined by Oliver (1999) as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.” (p.34). As mentioned, loyalty is associated with repetitive purchasing behavior from customers. Nevertheless, repeat purchases solely can't be used as an indicator of customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Nisar & Whitehead, 2016; Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017; Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015;

Lam, Shankar, Erramili & Murthy, 2004; Fullerton 2005; Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015).

How can brands tell if customers are loyal when they purchase inconsistently? Financial constraints, lack of appropriate alternatives and usage conditions may lead to an inconsistent purchase behavior. On the other hand, when a customer has a repeated purchasing behavior he or she may be acting as a result of a habit or convenience, instead of true loyalty (Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015). For instance, "... a traveler who always chooses to stay in a hotel may do so because it is a convenient location. When a new hotel with better offers opens nearby, he will very likely switch" (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016, p. 745). As evidenced, loyalty can't be analyzed only based on the actual behavior of purchasing. Having this in mind Oliver (1999) suggested other indicators: "(1) The brand attribute ratings (beliefs) must be preferable to competitive offerings, (2) this "information" must coincide with an affective preference (attitude) for the brand, and (3) the consumer must have a higher intention (conation) to buy the brand compared with that for alternatives". (p.35).

Similarly, other authors believe that there are other ways through which customers manifest their loyalty. For Lam, Shankar, Erramili & Murthy. (2004), customers manifest their loyalty by repatronage the brand and by recommending it to others. Fullerton (2005), shares this vision by mentioning advocacy, through positive Word-of -Mouth, and repurchase intention to assess loyalty. All researches considered, loyalty can be manifested in various ways that eventually will lead to the positive outcomes mentioned in the first section.

Regarding the classification of loyalty, one can find different approaches in the literature. Oliver saw loyalty as a sequence of 4 stages: cognitive, affective, conative and action. (Oliver, 1999) In a first stage, loyalty is cognitive since it is based on customers' brands beliefs. These beliefs are the result of information about the brand or previous experiences. Here loyalty is merely the result of brand performance (Asperen, Rooji & Dijkmans, 2018). When customers experience multiple satisfying occasions, it can lead to brand affection and "pleasurable fulfillment". On its turn, if this situation happens repeatedly leads to the third stage of loyalty, conative loyalty. Only at this stage, customers start to have intention to rebuy the brand. Still, this stage is limited to the intention. The actual behavior, purchasing, only happens at the final stage, action loyalty (Curran, Varki & Rosen, 2010).

Other authors also make the distinction between types of loyalty. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), mention two types of loyalty, behavioral and attitudinal. This approach to loyalty turned out to be the most common, as there are multiple studies that use these two dimensions of loyalty (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015; Nam, Ekinci & Whyatt, 2011; Nisar & Whitehead, 2016; Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015; Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017). According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), the first “consists of repeated purchases of the brand” (p.82), mostly related to habits and circumstantial triggers (Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015).

Conversely, attitudinal loyalty, is seen has the psychological component of loyalty (Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017), here defined as “degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand” (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p.82). Attitudinal loyalty comes from evaluations that customers process to form attitudes (Watson IV. Beck, Henderson & Palmatier, 2015). Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt (2011) add that attitudinal loyalty is also about recommending the brand (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016; Kumar, Pozza & Ganesh, 2013).

The definition of loyalty itself highlights the main advantages of having loyal customers and maintaining a long-term relationship with them. Loyal customers by repeatedly purchasing the brand can become a stable source of revenue and contribute to wider market share, also for being more resistance to competitive offers from other brands (Lam et al., 2004; Son, Wang & Han, 2019; Milan, Eberted & Bebbber, 2015; Curran, Varki & Rosen, 2010; Bardauskaite, 2014). Not only that, loyal customers are more likely to talk positively about the brand to new potential ones and to act as enthusiastic advocates (Harris & Goode, 2004; Fullerton, 2011; Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018). Thus, loyalty can make it possible for brands to set higher prices (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres, 2004).

As evidenced, relationship marketing and loyalty can improve business results, especially for mature markets like the fashion industry (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres, 2004). Moreover, mentioned loyalty antecedents are affected differently depending to the product category. This means that, marketers should adapt their efforts taking the brands’ product category into consideration for a more effective strategy (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Regardless of the classification of loyalty there are forces shaping customers relationships with brands. Loyalty is now surrounded by new concepts as social media. In an era where customers are always connected and engage with their preferred brands offline and online, new opportunities for research on loyalty emerge. As a matter of fact, Kandampully, Zhang and Bilgihan (2015) suggest social media and customer loyalty has a research priority, giving the impacts of social media and social interactions on customer loyalty.

## **2.2 Social Media**

“Digital media platforms have revolutionized marketing, offering new ways to reach, inform, engage, sell to, learn about, and provide service to customers” (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016, p.146). The appearance of social media platforms has called the attention of multiple brands and researchers interested in the phenomenon, impacts and reach coming from these (Kaplan and Haelein, 2010; Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Paniagua & Sapena, 2014; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

For a start, social media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010 p. 61). Social media platforms have been benefiting from environmental changes that lead to a great adoption of these. The wide proliferation of social media is the result of other technological developments as the wide adoption of mobile devices, more affordable high-speed connections, and the characteristics of social platforms itself (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). In 2018 the estimated number of worldwide social media users was 2.65 billion and according to statist’s forecast, this number will increase up to 2.82 billion in 2019 (Appendix B). As so, the importance of comprehending the nature and characteristics of social media increases with these numbers.

Even though social media raised this many attention, there is still no systematic way in which different social media platforms are categorized. Researchers have categorized social media and have been associating different attributes to these platforms (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Paniagua & Sapena, 2014; Weinberg, 2009). There are many different social media platforms with different characteristics.

Regarding classification, Kaplan and Haelein (2010) classified social media platforms based on social presence, media richness, self-presentation and self-disclosure. Social presence and media richness are two related concepts. While social presence is related to the extent of contact that the media allows between the users, media richness is related to the information that it allows to be transmitted. The other two concepts, self-presentation and self-disclosure, are related to the way the platform allows users to present themselves in the way they wish by revealing personal information through self-disclosure.

These researchers developed a classification scheme for social media, defining and categorizing 6 different types social media platforms:

1. Collaborative projects: platforms that enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users, as Wikipedia.
2. Blogs: the Social Media equivalent of personal websites and can come in a multitude of different variations, for a wide range of different media types, including text, photos, videos, ppt, ...
3. Social networking sites: applications that allow the connection of users through the creation of profiles with personal information that those can share with others. These platforms enable users to invite friends and colleagues to have access to their profiles and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. They allow the sharing of any type of information including photos, video, audio files, and blogs.
4. Virtual worlds: platforms that replicate a three-dimensional environment in which users can appear in the form of personalized avatars and interact with each other as they would in real life.
5. Virtual social worlds: allows inhabitants to choose their behavior more freely and essentially live a virtual life similar to their real life.
6. Content Communities: relies on the sharing of media content between users.

The classification of each platform can be found in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Different types of social media platforms**

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs and Microblogs (e.g., Twitter)	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g. YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)

Source: Kaplan and Haelein (2010)

On the other hand, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) developed a framework that defined social media according to 7 functional characteristics: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups.

Each characteristic represents a specific side of social media user experience and implications, also mentioned and supported by other authors. These try to explain the different functionalities of social media, which can be or not present in each different platform. Understanding the functionalities of social media also implies the realization of the obstacles that came from these. The following paragraphs explain each functionality and possible impacts and obstacles for brands.

### Identity

Identity was defined as "the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p.244). In social media users can present themselves by sharing personal information like name, age, profession. Moreover, these as well as brands can share information that conveys users and brands in a certain way. As a possible positive impact to brands, this feature can make it easier for customers to identify with the brand and get to know the brand (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013).

### Conversation

Conversation or communication is a well know characteristic of social media. Once in social media users can communicate with others and with brands to a certain

extent (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). With this social media is now as an additional channel for brands to communicate and as in any other channel the way brands do it influences communication's results (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016). For instance, brands that participate appropriately in conversation apart from showing the audience that they care, are perceived as a good addition to it (Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012; Gu & Ye, 2013). In other words, the way brands stimulate and participate in conversations is a very important aspect. On the other hand, being relevant when communicating in social media may be difficult. The velocity at which conversations happen can make it hard for brands to follow in such a way that they can also be part of it (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013).

### Sharing

Many platforms also allow users to share, change, and receive content. With this, sharing an object, being it a text, video, picture,groupon, is what connects people on social media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). The concept of sharing is linked to platforms' media richness, this is, it is related to the information that it allows to be transmitted. A platform with high levels of media richness leads to reduced uncertainty and ambiguity (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010). As a result, being aware of the object that connects people in a certain platform is very important for brands that want to engage followers in order to choose the proper platform and tools. Additionally, customers by being present and sharing on social media are giving brands important information that marketers can use to forecast products/services demand, response to new products. This happens because while participating in social media customers expose their preferences, especially in communities (Kim, Choi, Qualls & Han, 2008).

### Presence, Relationship and Reputation

The fourth characteristic, presence, is the extent to which users can see others' availability. According to Kaplan and Haelein (2010), a platform that allows higher levels of presence are more likely to lead to more influential conversations once users prefer to interact in real time. As so, platforms like Instagram and others offer the possibility to

know if other users are available through status indicators. The most relevant implication of this, is the fact that presence is related to conversation and relationships, affecting both.

As mentioned, not all social media platforms present the 7 functionalities analyzed and for that reason the type of relationship developed on those differs. The nature of the social media platform influences the types of relationships that happen within (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). For instance, on LinkedIn relationships are more formal and regulated, since it allows users to see how apart they are from meeting a possible employer. On the other hand, LinkedIn also has a referral system that works as a chain to build relationships until the user meets the target person or employer. In other platforms, relationships are more informal like Skype or messenger, that focus on maintaining existing relationships (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Similarly, the nature of the platform also influences the way brands' reputation can be measure. Depending on the platform, reputation can be measured as the number of views, likes and the strength and sentiment of mentions, for instance. Finally, reputation also affects how brands should relate and engage on social media (Kim and Ko, 2012). For instance, platforms like TripAdvisor where customers show their opinion and interact with brands, can influence brand perception and relation with customers (Harrigan, Evers, Miles & Daly, 2017). Here reputation and identity are aligned as these types of platforms can be used by brands to present themselves and share content, but also to build a reputation based on customers' feedback.

### Groups

The last characteristic, groups, is related to the possibility that users have to create communities (Phan, Thomas, & Heine, 2011; Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh & Kim, 2008). When brands create these communities, they need to be careful with how the members relate between them as these can have a big impact on relationships (Lu, Zhao & Wang, 2010; Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014). In communities, users can relate with others and also with brands. The interaction that occurs in these platforms can influence customer/brand and customer/other customer relationships' (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).



The awareness of identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups as social media characteristics is very important for brands. Those allow a better understanding of the nature of each social media platform supporting the development of appropriate social media strategies.

### **2.3 Social media impacts on relationships**

From the mentioned social media characteristics and implications, it is evidenced that these platforms have the power to influence business performance, operationally, financially and relationally (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). For instance, companies like Amazon, Google Play, and many others have been using information posted by users to drive sales and retain customers (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). The present chapter will focus on social media impacts on relationships between brands and customers.

Social media can be used to manage long term relationships by maintaining the existing ones and consequently retain customers. In fact, a study by Harvard Business analyzed more than 200 brands in 11 industries. The study was able to identify 29 distinct types of relationships and multiple relationship dimensions. Having this in mind, social media relationship with customer's gains another meaning (Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014).

One can think of doing relationship marketing in social media as a pinball game and traditional marketing as bowling. In this way, "bowling" is played in mass media channels, through which marketers use marketing instruments to reach the consumers. When adding social media to these channels, interactivity is also added, changing the game to pinball (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). With social media customers go from just receiving the message to actively share their experiences and opinions about the brand with a wide number of other customers, in a short span of time (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Phan, Thomas, & Heine, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). In addition, they also have access to more information about competitive products and brands. From the brands' perspective, the information made available by these platforms has an important role even if users don't match the brands' traditional target (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013). Even so, users' behavior on social media is useful to define patterns of emotions and trends but is also useful to suggest relationship groups (Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014).

With all these changes a major consequence comes along: the shift of power. While customers gain power through social media, brands lose control over marketing activities (Labrecque, Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). Customers' empowerment can complicate the management of the relations that happen in social media. For that, brands need to find the balance between engagement/participation and restriction. This has special importance in the case of brands crisis (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). On the other hand, once social media empowers customers it gives them as well new ways to engage with brands and foster relationships (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013).

Such opportunity has been noticed in the fashion industry and changed the way fashion brands relate with customers (Kim & Ko, 2012). According to BOF and McKinsey & Company in "The State of Fashion 2018" report, the adoption of digital platforms is one of the forces shaping the fashion industry. As a result, the traditional consumer purchase journey is becoming more complex with multiple touch points, online and offline (Luarn et Lin, 2003; Harris and Goode's, 2004). Customers expect a consistent brand experience, regardless of having contact in the digital or physical world. The contact in the digital world is with social media even more relevant as it influences customers' purchase decision (Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014).

Social media by enabling the access to content, that previously only a limited group of people had access, is leading to the democratization of fashion. For instance, nowadays customers of convenience fashion brands can see runway shows and live collections of luxury brands (Kontu & Vecchi, 2014). Brands like Burberry and Dolce and Gabbana are now doing live streams of their fashion shows reaching a scope of individuals that was previously difficult to reach. As a result, social media can be a great advantage for fashion brands for being such a rich information platform. When using social media brands can share information and create a better perceived credibility through update and accurate content, giving customers another source of information (Chu, Kamal & Kim, 2013).

#### **2.4 The link between social media, trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty**

To develop and implement the right strategy to cultivate customer loyalty, brands need to know loyalty main antecedents and how these can be fostered in social media. Social media can lead to different levels of loyalty by contributing to the increment of its

antecedents like trust, commitment and satisfaction (Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018; Harris & Goode, 2004; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu & Yu, 2010; Luarn & Lin, 2003; Martín-Consuegra, Faraoni, Díaz & Ranfagni, 2018).

For instance, Asperen, Rooij and Dijkmans (2018), focusing on the travel industry, studied the relation between social media engagement and the first two stages of loyalty: conative and affective. As a main finding, these researchers concluded that affective loyalty could be fostered by social media activities, specifically by fostering interaction. Harris and Goode's (2004) developed a robust framework considering all the antecedents mentioned above: trust, satisfaction and brand perceived value. The study was able to analyze how the 4 stages of loyalty were influenced by these in e-commerce platforms. Other studies tried to understand how the different social media platforms can influence antecedents in different product/market categories (Kim & Ko, 2012; Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2014; Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016).

Trust has been considered an important antecedent of loyalty, especially online if customers don't have physical contact with the brand. Adding the fact that these platforms are also associated to privacy and security issues, trust becomes crucial for brands that aim to establish long term relationships with customers (Nadeem, Andreini, Salo, & Laukkanen, 2015). Social media, e-commerce and trust studies are widely linked to some of the mentioned characteristics of social media, communities and interaction. These by allowing users to relate with others and even with the brand communities, enhance customer/brand and customer/other customer relationships (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).

In fact, there are findings suggesting that trust on online recommendation can have a big influence on purchase intention. According to Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu and Yu (2010), platforms that foster the sharing of opinions and information among customers are perceived as capable and honest. Similarly, Barreda, Bilgihan and Kageyama (2015) state that if users perceive the brand social page as honest and benevolent, this is if brands create a trustworthy environment, users are more likely to trust the brand. This happens because customers put more trust on other opinions' than in the information provided by the brand itself (Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu & Yu, 2010; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015). Young consumers are specially affected as these see social media as a more trustworthy place to look for information than traditional communication channels (Ismail, 2017).

Porter and Donthu (2008) reached the opposite conclusion. In their study on interactions between communities' members, this did not have a relevant influence on building trust. On the other hand, quality content significantly affected it. Furthermore, Hollebeek and Macky (2019) found evidences that digital content marketing in social can positively influence brand trust. Nadeem, Andreini, Salo, and Laukkanen (2015), highlighted social networks' ability to enhance trust towards e-tailers brands and consequently, loyalty intention. According to the researchers, the way brands present itself in social media pages is likely to influence the development of trust. Update page look, good and update content were suggested to do so. Apart from stimulating and relevant content, trust has also been linked to target actions for the users (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). In addition if brands provide content that makes customers want to relate with them over time these can lead to trust (Dessart, 2017).

In conclusion, the mentioned studies highlight the importance of brands' presence in social media and the fact that the way customers perceive their presence can have an impact on trust and loyalty. These views lead to the following hypotheses:

**H1:** E- trust has a positive effect on loyalty.

Similarly, to trust, commitment has also been related to social media. Most of the researches rely on the fact that social media allows customers to connect/relate so that commitment components are fostered.

One of the connections pointed in the literature relies on identification. The main reason for this is that social media can be a great tool to help customers identify with the brand. On these platforms customers can interact with brands in the context they wish to, that is related to their values and lifestyle, facilitating as result identification with the brand (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Dessart 2017). Once identification is one of commitment's components, these platforms can on its turn lead to commitment. Not only that, the use of social media is also suggested to nurture the sense of belongingness with users and enhance loyalty (Park, Chung, Phillips and Anaza, 2016).

There are many studies that prove connections between social media, commitment and loyalty. Gamboa and Gonçalves (2014) found that brands by fostering commitment can enhance loyalty through their Facebook pages, for instance by using targeted actions. Additionally, Turri, Smith and Kemp (2014), showed that, for the music industry, social media can lead to affective commitment by self-presentation and identification. Once

committed to the artist, users started to manifest loyalty behaviors like advocacy and prioritization of the artist. Plus, Dessart (2017) believes that when brands provide relevant and interesting content for customers, they are able to gain customers attention and lead to both trust and commitment and finally brand loyalty. In the travel industry, Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu (2013) found that user perception of the brand in social networks influenced affective commitment and, consequently loyalty. Customers committed to brand communities have also showed higher levels of brand loyalty (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh & Kim, 2008).

Once more, it is evidenced that social media activities can influence an important antecedent of loyalty.

These lead to the following hypothesis:

**H2:** E- commitment has a positive effect on loyalty.

Concerning satisfaction in the online environment, studies in e-commerce platforms have concluded that satisfaction can directly influence loyalty. In other words, satisfaction can be promoted online and, on its turn, improve loyalty levels (Lin & Luarn, 2003).

These insights are extended by Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush (2016), who found evidence that social media, for its interactive nature, can influence satisfaction in business to business sales by helping communication between sales persons and customers. This influence was proved to be true when sales person uses social media adequately by providing relevant information to the customers, becoming a first basis of satisfaction.

The importance of brands' social media behavior is also highlighted in Gu and Ye (2014) study that related brand responses on social media to customer satisfaction. Here the main conclusion drawn was that responses affected customer satisfaction. Thus, if customers don't get a response while seeing others receiving a feedback from the brand, this will likely lead to low levels of satisfaction.

Apart from the B2B, this relation was also proved to be true in other industries. Focusing on the health care segment, Pinto (2015) found that social media positively influenced patient's satisfaction. Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott (2017) concluded

that social reviews of retailers had a big impact on customers satisfaction, since social media has a great impact on the purchase decision making process.

Content is also a characteristic mentioned to influence satisfaction. When customers find brand image like their self-concepts there are more likely to be satisfied with the brand and lead to loyalty (Zhang, Benyoucef and Zhao, 2016).

As demonstrated, there is evidence that supports the believe that social media can lead to satisfaction and loyalty. Thus:

**H3:** E-satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty.

#### **2.4.1 Perceived social media activity**

Kim and Ko (2012) studied the impacts of perceived social media activity for the luxury fashion segment. To study it's impacts on relationship, these authors created a construct for perceived social media activity. This concept was based on entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM. These are respectively related to social media activity ability to be fun, allow and promote interaction/sharing with other users; to provide up to date relevant content, customized information and finally to induce customers' intention to share this content. More recently based on this concept of perceived social media activity, Ismail (2017) also concluded that perceived social media activity can influence customers loyalty and, for that reason, can be used to develop relationships with customers.

Also, in the fashion industry scope, Martín-Consuegra, Faraoni, Díaz and Ranfagni (2018), stated that perceived social media activity influences positively purchase intention through brand image. If users feel that a certain brand social media activity meets his/her expectations it could affect that brand's image. These findings go along with the idea that social media activity has the power to influence consumer relationship with brands.

The construct of perceived social media activity has as a base many aspects mentioned in the previous sections that were important to lead to trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. For that reason, the way customers perceive social media brands activity possibly influences trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. The present

construct will be used to evaluate social media activity impacts. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

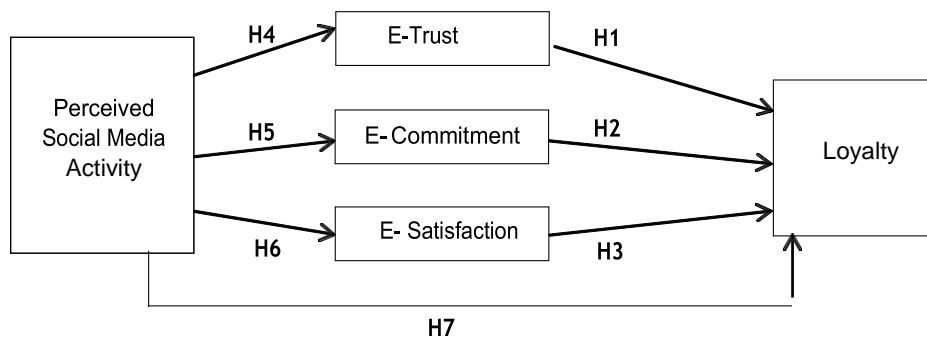
**H4:** Perceived social media marketing activity has a positive effect on brand e-trust.

**H5:** Perceived social media marketing activity has a positive effect on brand e-commitment.

**H6:** Perceived social media marketing activity has a positive effect on brand e-satisfaction.

**H7:** Perceived social media marketing activity has a direct positive influence on loyalty.

**Figure 2: Proposed Framework**



Source: Authors'elaboration

### 3 Methodology

According to Kothari (2004), research is “a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic” (p.1). When conducting research in marketing it is necessary to specify how the research is going to be conducted. The current chapter will go through the stages of marketing research from problem definition to the communication of findings (Malhotra, Nunan & Birks, 2017). Thus, this chapter will

explain and justify the chosen research approach in order to properly address the proposed framework.

### **3.1 Problem Definition- Framework**

Given the findings from the literature review, a framework is proposed to assess the supposed relations between the variables. From these, the aim of the research is to shed light on the influence of perceived social media activity on customers loyalty.

In the framework, the first component is brand perceived social media activity. Similarly, to studies in other industries, this project will focus on loyalty antecedents in the online environment proved relevant: trust, commitment and satisfaction. Here, perceived social media activity is determined to influence customers brand loyalty towards fast fashion brands like Zara, Stradivarius, Pull and Bear, Bershka, H&M (H7). This relation is possibly mediated by trust, commitment and satisfaction as postulated in H1, H2, H3, also fostered by perceived social media activity (H4, H5, H6).

As mentioned, the present project intends to focus on how social media can be used to influence loyalty in the fashion industry focusing on the fast fashion segment.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Considering the purpose of this study, the proper research approach must be defined in order to fulfill it. Kumar (2019) stated that from the objective viewpoint, research can be classified as: descriptive, exploratory, correlational and explanatory. The undertaken research approach is both correlational and explanatory as it intends to study if there is a relationship between two or more variables and moreover clarify why and how such relationship exists (Kumar, 2019; Malhotra, Nunan & Birks, 2017).

To enhance validity of the study, secondary external data were collected through literature review. This type of data is usually less time consuming, tends to have more authority and is cheaper. From the literature review it was possible to define the framework of this study, based on what was suggested by the researchers. Nevertheless, because the proposed framework has never been tested before, it is necessary to collect primary data (Sarsted & Mooi, 2012). The chosen method to do so was a questionnaire.



Before the development of the questionnaire it was necessary to define the social media platform/platforms to address. Consumers can now connect with brands in a variety of different social networks. Yet Facebook is still the most used platform as in the second quarter of 2019 it had 2.4 billion of monthly active users (Appendix C), and 802 million of daily active users (Appendix D). Moreover, Facebook is a platform that focuses on relationships (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). On top of that, as of January 2019, it was the leading platform used by marketers worldwide (Appendix E). Therefore, Facebook may be the right platform to accomplish the objective of this dissertation.

### **3.3 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire (Appendix E) was developed using Google Forms and it is composed by 25 items regarding the framework variables, followed by 7 Sociodemographic questions. Concerning the main variables, respondents were asked to rate the items on a 5-point Agreement Likert Scale, ranging from 1- Totally Disagree to 5-Totally Agree, being 3 the neutral position. The only open question was Nationality. The main variables were measure through items adapted from previous studies proved relevant and are presented in Table 1.

To clarify respondents and avoid confusion, the questionnaire started with a brief explanation of what fast fashion brands are as well as examples. The construct perceived social media activity requires that respondents have had previous contact with these brands' Facebook pages to have an opinion regarding the topic. To ensure this condition, respondents were firstly asked if they followed any fast fashion brand. If the respondent said "Yes" he/she will continue to the next questions regarding the framework variables. If the answer was "No", the next question would be "Have you ever visited any Facebook page of fast fashion brands?". Once more, if the answer was "Yes" the questionnaire would continue. If the answer was "No" the questionnaire would end. From these two questions, only the respondents that had previous contact would answer the questions that followed. The second question was needed as there is a difference between the number of Facebook followers and likes, meaning that there are respondents that don't follow the brand but have been impacted by the pages.

The questionnaire was spread on Facebook and was sent through Facebook Messenger to people that followed or have liked fast fashion brands' Facebook pages. It was available to public from 02 of July to 15 of July 2019 and a total of 232 responses was gathered.

**Table 1: Scales used to measure constructs**

Variable	Code	Number of items	Adapted from
Perceived social media activity	PSMA	7	Kim & Ko (2012) and Ismail (2017)
Active Brand Page Participation	ABPP	3	Langaro, Rita & Salgueiro (2015)
E-trust	T	4	Dessart (2017)
E-satisfaction	S	4	Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, (2015)
E-commitment	C	3	Fullerton (2011)
Loyalty	L	4	Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson (2016)

Source: Authors'elaboration

### 3.4 Data Treatment

To initiate the data treatment, the data were exported from Google Forms to Excel. In the next step incomplete answers were deleted and corrections were made regarding nationality, such as PT to Portuguese or Portugal to Portuguese. The 223 valid answers were then imported to the IBM SPSS Statistics 24 to further continue the statistical analysis.

To properly analyze the data, the first step was to identify the correct type of variable for each item. For the main variables, in which it was used a 5-Point Likert Scale, a scale variable was used as it was treated as ordinal data (Sullivan and Artino, 2013).

#### 3.4.1 Respondent Profile

From the demographic questions, the respondent's profiles were analyzed. The 223 valid responses belong mostly to women, about 73%, corresponding the remaining

28% to men. Respondents age ranged from 18 to more than 55 years old (4 respondents). The age range with the highest number of respondents was 18-24 years old. Yet most respondents are between 18 and 34 years old (86.4%). Regarding the living area, more than half live in the city (58.3%) and 25% live near it.

The next variables to be analyzed were occupation and education. Most participants are students (49.3%) or are workers (44.8) with a classification correspondent to the Secondary School (36.3) or Bachelor degree (39.9). Finally, regarding monthly income, 25.6% of participants decided not to answer. From the ones that have revealed their income, 32.3% mentioned not having any income and 17.9% referred an income between 600-1000 euros.

## 4 Descriptive Statistics

The following section contains the descriptive analysis characterizing the sample regarding the study' variables. To do so, for each variable the percentage of different responses was analyzed to take conclusions about respondents' position.

### 4.1 Responses Analysis

#### 4.1.1 Active Brand Page participation

The variable average brand page participation was used to characterize respondents' behavior regarding fast fashion brands Facebook pages. With this, respondents were asked to classify how often they interacted with those pages based on a 5-point Frequency Likert Scale. In general, respondents don't usually interact with fast fashion brands Facebook pages as most of them rarely or never commented/responded to comments/tagged someone or shared brands' posts. Despite this, 30% of them frequently liked or reacted to those posts.

**Table 2: Distribution of responses (%) to the ABPP Scale**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Liked/Reacted	15.4%	18.1%	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>29.0%</b>	<b>8.1%</b>
Commented/responded to comments/tagged someone	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	19.7%	15.7%	2.7%
Shared content from these pages with friends	<b>27.6%</b>	<b>29.9%</b>	19.5%	19.0%	4,1%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

#### 4.1.2 Perceived Social media Activity

In the questionnaire this construct was presented through 7 items related to how respondents perceived the fast fashion brand presence on Facebook. More than 50% of respondents agreed with the proposed items, apart from the last item PSMA7 (“I would like to share information from these brands' Facebook pages to my friends”). Even so, PSMA7 had a higher number of agreement than disagreement and neutral responses. According to the percentage of agreement, one can assume that respondents perceived Facebook pages of the fast fashion brands they had in mind has interesting and up to date (PSMA1, “The content shared on these brands' Facebook pages is interesting”, and PSMA2 “The content shared on these brands' Facebook is UpToDate”). These two items were the ones with highest percentages of agreement. In other words, from the 7 items of perceived social media activity the ones that respondents agreed the most were related to the Facebook page content. Respondents’ perception of the Facebook brand pages can be summarized as:

- 80.7% perceive content as up to date
- 71.8% perceive content as interesting
- 62.30% perceive the Facebook page as a place where they can share information with others
- 58.70% consider fashionable to use the Facebook page to look for information
- 57.40% perceive the Facebook page as a place where they can share and have conversation with others
- 57.40% consider it is fun to follow the page
- 42.20% would like to share content from the Facebook page

**Table 3: Distribution of responses (%) to the PSMA Scale**

	Disagree totally	Disagree	Neither Agree, or Disagree	Agree	Agree totally
The content shared on these brands' Facebook pages is interesting	1.3%	6.7%	20.2%	<b>61.9%</b>	9.9%
The content shared on these brands' Facebook is UpToDate	1.8%	1.8%	15.7%	<b>63.7%</b>	17.0%
On these brands' Facebook pages I can share information with others	5.4%	5.8%	26.5%	<b>50.2%</b>	12.1%

On these brands' Facebook pages I can share my opinion and have a conversation with others	3.1%	7.6%	31.8%	<b>48.0%</b>	9.4%
Using these brands' Facebook pages to search for information is trendy	5.4%	10.8%	25.1%	<b>49.3%</b>	9.4%
It is fun to follow/visit these brands' Facebook pages	4.5%	8.5%	29.6%	<b>50.7%</b>	6.7%
I would like to share information from these brands' Facebook pages to my friends	9.9%	14.3%	33.6%	<b>35.9%</b>	6.3%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

### 4.1.3 Trust

Trust was the first mediating construct to be asked with 4 items. All items have at least 50% of responses agreeing with what was asked. The item which respondents agreed the most was regarding brand safety and the one with the least agreement was regarding the believe that those brands are honest. In general, respondents agreed that the fast fashion brands they have been impacted through Facebook are secure, honest and trustful. Thus, respondents believe they can rely on those brands.

**Table 4: Distribution of responses (%) to the Trust Scale**

	Disagree totally	Disagree	Neither Agree, or Disagree	Agree	Agree totally
I believe these brands are honest.	3.1%	10.3%	26.5%	<b>50.7%</b>	9.4%
I believe these brands are safe.	1.8%	9.9%	18.8%	<b>58.7%</b>	10.8%
I rely on these brand.	2.2%	8.1%	26.9%	<b>53.4%</b>	9.4%
I trust these brand.	2.2%	5.8%	30.0%	<b>52.0%</b>	9.9%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

### 4.1.4 Satisfaction

The next construct was satisfaction also presented through 4 items. Similarly, to trust, the majority of respondents agreed with the proposed items as the percentage of agreement varies from 58% to 87%. Such high values express that most respondents are satisfied with the fast fashion brands they have considered. Thus, these are particularly

pleased with their experience with those brands as this item had the higher percentage of agreement (87.4%).

**Table 5: Distribution of responses (%) to the Satisfaction Scale**

	Disagree totally	Disagree	Neither Agree, or Disagree	Agree	Agree totally
I feel satisfied with these brands.	1.8%	3.1%	16.6%	66.4%	12.1%
My experience with these brand is pleasing..	1.3%	2.7%	8.5%	73.1%	14.3%
These brands makes me happy.	1.8%	4.9%	35.4%	48.4%	9.4%
These brands do a satisfactory job of fulfilling my needs.	1.3%	6.3%	16.6%	62.8%	13.0%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

#### 4.1.5 Commitment

Concerning commitment and the 3 items that measure the construct, these had a lower level of agreement from respondents when compared with the previous variables. According to the percentages, most respondents had a neutral position when asked if they felt emotionally connected to those brands (35.4%). Yet, half of them considered to strongly fell identified with brands. In overall, respondents showed to not be as committed as they are satisfied and as they trust the brand.

**Table 6: Distribution of responses (%) to the Commiment Scale**

	Disagree totally	Disagree	Neither Agree, or Disagree	Agree	Agree totally
I feel emotionally attached to these brands.	10.8%	21.5%	35.4%	28.7%	3.6%
I feel a strong sense of identification with these brands.	5.8%	14.3%	29.6%	46.6%	3.6%
These brands have a great deal of personal meaning for me.	10.8%	18.8%	33.2%	34.1%	3.1%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

### 4.1.6 Loyalty

The dependent variable was evaluated with 4 items concerning loyalty manifestations has prioritizing the brand, repurchase intention and more resistance to competitors offers. Here respondents did not have the same position for all of the items. There were high percentages of agreement with having the brand as a first choice and repurchasing the brand, with 83% and 90% of agreement respectively. Opposing, 45.70% disagreed when asked if they would not buy other brands in case those were available. In addition, 48.4% had a neutral opinion when asked if they would be loyal to those brands in the future. It is evidenced that respondents do not see themselves as loyal to the brands and won't disregard others. Despite that, for respondents these brands are on top of their consideration set of options and they even have intention to repurchase the brand.

**Table 7: Distribution of responses (%) to the Loyalty Scale**

	Disagree totally	Disagree	Neither Agree, or Disagree	Agree	Agree totally
These brands will be my first choice in the future when buying clothes.	3.6%	5.4%	8.5%	<b>57.0%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>
I will buy from these brands again.	2.2%	1.8%	6.3%	<b>62.3%</b>	<b>27.4%</b>
I will not buy clothes from other brands if these are available for sale	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>30.5%</b>	26.5%	21.1%	6.7%
In the future, I will be loyal to these brands.	6.7%	14.8%	<b>48.4%</b>	23.8%	6.3%

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS output

## 4.2 Data Analysis

### 4.2.1 Reliability

In the present section, the measurement scales were tested for reliability by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. High values of reliability will enhance the study results. Reliability measures the extent to which the variables under analysis measure the same thing for different persons, circumstances and moments (Drost, 2011).

Following this, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient were calculated for all constructs as presented in Table 8. All constructs obtained high Cronbach's Alpha values attesting the reliability of the chosen measures. The Alpha values ranged from 0.726 to 0.934, belonging the highest value to trust. This variable was followed by Average brand page participation (0.884), Commitment (0.878), Satisfaction (0.874) and Perceived social media Activity (0.873) respectively. Loyalty obtained a lower value of 0.726. However according to the literature, values superior to 0.7 are still considered satisfactory values that evidence internal consistency. Satisfaction and loyalty are the only variables that would benefit with the deletion of one of the items. Concerning satisfaction, if S3 was remove the alpha value would increase from 0.874 to 0.885. Similarly for loyalty the removal of L3 would increase the alpha value, in this case from 0.726 to 0.746. Once the alpha value improvement would be small and the Reliability is already on acceptable values, all the items of the proposed scale were kept.

**Table 8: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted</b>
<b>Active Brand Page Participation</b>	0.884	ABPP1	0.873
		ABPP2	0.811
		ABPP3	0.822
<b>Perceived Social Media Activity</b>	0.873	PSMA1	0.857
		PSMA2	0.864
		PSMA3	0.855
		PSMA4	0.845
		PSMA5	0.862
		PSMA6	0.848
		PSMA7	0.852
<b>Trust</b>	0.934	T1	0.916
		T2	0.908
		T3	0.915
		T4	0.917
<b>Satisfaction</b>	0.874	S1	0.825
		S2	0.824
		S3	0.885



		S4	0.818
<b>Commitment</b>	0.878	C1	0.809
		C2	0.870
		C3	0.798
<b>Loyalty</b>	0.726	L1	0.638
		L2	0.662
		L3	0.746
		L4	0.618

Source: Own elaboration based on SPSS

### 4.3 Simple and Multiple Linear Regression

The main objective of this study is to understand if fast fashion brands presence on Facebook influences customers relationships with those brands and even lead to loyalty. The chosen method to evaluate such influences was linear regression modelling. Subsequently simple linear regression was performed to assess the relationship between PSMA and loyalty antecedents. Similarly, a multiple linear regression model was used to evaluate the relationships that directly affected loyalty. Previously scores for each construct in the model were computed as a sum of the responses to items of each scale.

#### 4.3.1 PSMA impacts on Trust, Satisfaction and Commitment

To analyze PSMA impacts on loyalty antecedents three simple linear regression model were fitted. The simple linear regression models between trust, satisfaction and commitment, dependents variables, and PSMA, independent variable, can be translated in the following fitted regression equations, in a standardized solution (see output from the simple regressions models on Appendix F, G and H):

$$\text{Fitted E-trust} = \mathbf{0.554 \text{ PSMA}}$$

$$\text{Fitted E-satisfaction} = \mathbf{0.499 \text{ PSMA}}$$

$$\text{Fitted E-commitment} = \mathbf{0.455 \text{ PSMA}}$$

As one can infer from the regression equations, PSMA positively influences the considered loyalty antecedents as all standerdized beta values are positive. The impact of PSMA ranges between 0.455 and 0.554. However not all antecedents are influenced to the same extend. The antecedent that PSMA influences the most is trust once this variable

presents the highest standardized beta value (0.554). On its turn, trust is followed by satisfaction (0.499) and finally commitment (0.455). In other words, if a user PSMA score increases a unit, the variable that would benefit the most would be trust.

#### 4.3.2 PSMA, Trust, Satisfaction and Commitment impacts on loyalty

The Multiple Regression Analysis was performed to test if e-trust, e-commitment and e-satisfaction joined influence brand loyalty. The Multiple Linear Regression Model obtained was valid (sig of ANOVA test equals 0.000, presented on Appendix I). Hence the dependent variable loyalty is explained at least by one of the independent variables.

However, in some cases the model is valid but not all explanatory variables are significant and should be removed from model. In order to know which variables, explain the dependent variable one should look to the sig value from the multiple regression model summary. If a variable is needed in the model and is for that useful to explain the dependent variable, the sig value should be lower than 0,05. From the estimated multiple linear regression model it is possible to conclude that trust does not significantly influence loyalty (sig t-test = 0.2).

**Table 9: Multiple Linear Regression Model Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.967	.960		3.090	.002		
ScorePSMA	.101	.038	.170	2.643	.009	.641	1.560
ScoreTrust	.090	.070	.099	1.285	<b>.200</b>	.444	2.255
ScoreSatisfaction	.308	.085	.278	3.627	.000	.452	2.213
ScoreCommitment	.264	.067	.252	3.953	.000	.653	1.531

Source: SPSS Statistics output

For that reason, a new multiple regression model was estimated without trust as an explanatory variable of loyalty. As presented in the Table 10, now all the variables used are helpful to explain brand loyalty as all have Sig. lower than 5%.

**Table 10: Multiple Linear Regression Final Model Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.921	.961		3.040	.003	1.027	4.815		
ScalePSMA	.115	.037	<b>.194</b>	3.158	.002	.043	.187	.702	1.424
ScaleSatisfaction	.366	.072	<b>.330</b>	5.075	.000	.224	.509	.629	1.591
ScaleCommitment	.275	.066	<b>.262</b>	4.140	.000	.144	.405	.663	1.507

a. Dependent Variable: ScaleLoyalty  
Source: SPSS Statistics output

In this case the  $R^2$  value is 0,418, meaning that Satisfaction, Commitment and Perceived Social Media Activity will explain about 42% of loyalty’s variance. From the Summary Model important information can be drawn as the extent to which each variable can influence loyalty.

Firstly, all variables present positive Beta values, meaning that loyalty is positively influenced by the independent variables. As evidenced the variable that influences the most loyalty is Satisfaction with a Standardized  $\beta = 0.330$ , followed by Commitment (Standardized  $\beta=0.262$ ) and finally PSMA (Standardized  $\beta=0.194$ ). The fitted model can be translated by the following Equation, in a standardized solution:

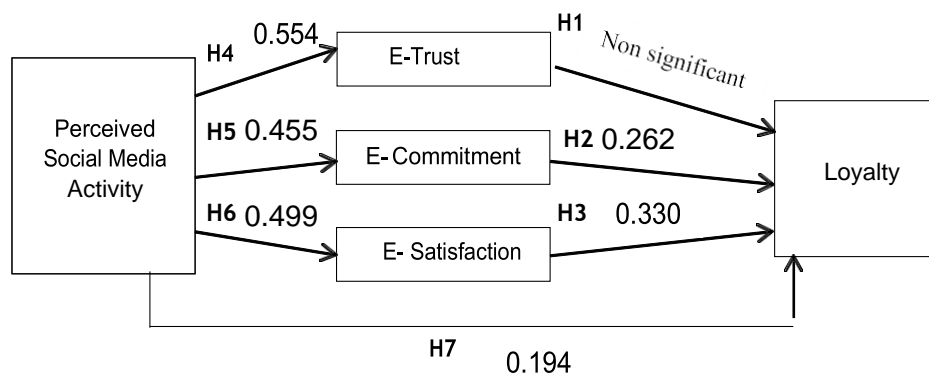
$$\text{Fitted Loyalty} = 0.330 * \text{Satisfaction} + 0.262 * \text{Commitment} + 0.194 * \text{PSMA}$$

It is still necessary to verify if the model holds the multiple linear regressions assumptions. The assumption that the residual terms aren’t correlated with the independent variable holds, has the residual component of the model is 0. Additionally, the mean of the residual component of the model should be 0, which happens in this case. Hence, the residuals are assumed to be independent among them because the Durbin-Watson value is 1.975, close to 2. Regarding the explanatory variables, one can conclude that the constructs aren’t redundant once the collinearity among the independent variables

is low. The Tolerance value higher than 0,1 and the VIF value inferior to 5 prove that the explanatory variables aren't correlated among themselves (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011).

Summarizing, all proposed hypotheses are supported to the exception of H1. The next chapter will analyze such findings and their main implications in the light of the literature review.

**Figure 3: Final Framework**



Source: Authors' elaboration

## 5 Conclusions and Implications

### 5.1 Conclusions

The social media marketing advantages and impacts on brands has been widely discussed in the literature. Apart from transactional outcomes, relational outcomes have been mentioned as desirable benefits of doing social media marketing. For its wide number of users and for the rapid proliferation of social media platforms, these represent a great tool to reach customers.

In the case of fashion brands, social media is seen as a force shaping the industry. For its nature, social media allows brands to relate with customers in a different way. Customers can now participate and interact directly with the brand whenever and wherever they want to and can access content created by the brand itself or others. In other words, brands have now a channel that makes it more easy, fast and simple to relate with customers. On the other hand, customers are now more empower, have access to

more information and are more exposed to competitors marketing efforts. For that reason, using social media the right way becomes even more important.

Previous research shows that social media marketing can be used to manage long term relationships and lead to loyalty. Most of the researches suggests that the way brands present themselves can influence relational outcomes like trust, commitment, satisfaction and even loyalty (Zhang, Benyoucef & Zhao, 2016; Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu, 2013; Park, Chung, Phillips&Anaza, 2016; Hsiao et al, 2010; Barreda, Bilgihan and Kageyama, 2015; Kim & Ko, 2012). The way users interpret and perceive such presence impacts these outcomes.

Despite that, no research has previously approached user's perceptions of brands in social media and the mentioned outcomes. Consequently, this research proposes a framework to test the formulated hypothesis based on the literature review. The chosen approach to do so was a quantitative method through the mean of a questionnaire.

This section will then present the findings regarding the statistical analysis of the data in accordance to the literature review used as a base to formulate the proposed framework.

### **5.1.1 Relation between PSMA and Satisfaction, Trust, Commitment and Loyalty**

The first construct proposed in the framework is perceived social media activity. The scale was based on Kim and Ko (2012) and Ismail (2017) construct that translate important social media characteristics such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and WOM. These aspects have been mentioned as reasons to lead to many outcomes. For that reason, PSMA is presumed to impact loyalty antecedents, being them Satisfaction, Trust and Commitment. Each hypothesis is supported by previous research. Thanks to statistical analysis it was possible to test the hypothesis through Simple Regression Analysis.

Separate simple regression analysis were conducted to assess the relations mentioned above. From these there is evidence that PSMA positively influences Trust, Commitment and Satisfaction, validating hypothesis H4(B=0.554), H5(=0.455) and H6(B=0.499). The validation of H6 supports previous studies that mention social media

ability to affect customers satisfaction for its interactive nature (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Zhang, Benyoucef and Zhao, 2016; Pinto, 2015; Parrott, 2017).

Equally, findings from H4 support the idea that it is possible to create a trustworthy environment and lead trust by using social media marketing (Barreda, Bilgihan Kageyama, 2015; Hsiao et al, 2010; Porter and Donthu, 2008; Dessart, 2017). Moreover, from the models it was evident that PSMA not only impacts trust, but it is also the variable at this stage most impacted by PSMA. Concerning commitment, the results from H5 verify the assumption that social media can be used to enhance this variable as referred in the literature review (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Dessart, 2017; Smith, 2014; Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu, 2013).

In general, there is statistical evidence that perceived social media activity based on entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and WOM can lead to trust, satisfaction and commitment, in line with previous studies in other industries.

### **5.1.2 Relation between Trust, Satisfaction, Commitment and PSMA and Loyalty**

Many researchers believe that social media can influence loyalty (Asperen, Rooij & Dijkmans, 2018; Harris & Goode's, 2004; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Hsiao et al, 2010; Luarn & Lin, 2003; Martín-Consuegra, Faraoni, Díaz & Ranfagni, 2018). Following these, the hypothesis H1, H2, H3 and H7 were proposed and analyzed through a multiple linear regression analysis.

The first finding regards Trust and its influence on Loyalty. From the initial multiple linear regression model, trust was excluded from the analysis as it obtained a sig higher than 0,05%. In other worlds, trust doesn't influence loyalty and for that there isn't statistical evidence that trust can lead to loyalty. The non-validation of H1 meets other researches that suggest that trust by itself can not lead to loyalty. Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán (2001) mention that trust can lead to outcomes by affecting commitment. Additionally, Watson IV. Beck, Henderson and Palmatier (2015) defend that trust and commitment together give customers the sense that the relationship is pleasurable and more than simply a transaction. In the present case there is evidence that trust doesn't impact loyalty directly.

As a consequence, a new linear regression model was estimated containing only the variables that influence loyalty, PSMA, Satisfaction, and Commitment. The new model explains about 42% of loyalty's variance. The obtained results give evidence that loyalty is positively impacted by the mentioned variables.

Concluding, the empirical findings and the literature review led to the acceptance of the hypotheses proposed, except for H1. Therefore, affirming the relations portrayed in the framework. These findings sustain the following theoretical implications.

First, this study contributes to the validation of social media as a relational channel. The study reinforces the believe that social media can influence customer/brands relationships by providing a framework through which social media influences loyalty and its antecedents. Not only that, the proposed framework analysis multiple antecedents at the same time. Since most of the previous studies focused individually on each antecedent, the present study is for that a relevant addition to the existing literature.

Even though many studies mention customers' perception of social media activity as influential (Zhang, Benyoucef & Zhao, 2016; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Dessart, 2017; Barreda, Bilgihan & Kageyama, 2015; Martín-Consuegra, Faraoni, Díaz & Ranfagni, 2018; Kim and Ko, 2012), there are very few that approach its impacts on relationships. For that, this dissertation is the first to approach perceived social media activity impacts on loyalty and its multiple antecedents simultaneously.

Moreover, once perceived social media was based on entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and WOM this study gives a more insightful and complete look to social media by combining all these aspects. This consideration of perceived social media brings social media uniqueness as a channel. Not all channels allow such a wide spread of content and direct interaction at the same time.

Finally, the present study extends Kim and Ko (2012) conclusions from the luxury to the fast fashion segment of the fashion industry. Both segments can for that benefit from a proper social media activity.

## 5.2 Managerial Implications

The literature review jointly with the examination of the data, led to relevant implications that need to be counted to better understand the effects of social media marketing. In view of the results, an influence of perceived social media on trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty was established. Additionally, a relation was shown between satisfaction, and commitment fostered on social media and loyalty. Consequently, marketers should be cautious when using social media marketing.

The findings reveal that perceived social media activity can influence customers loyalty indirectly and directly. In the indirect approach, PSMA influences satisfaction and Commitment that on its turn can influence loyalty. Having in mind the used PSMA construct, many practices advised by researchers are now proved to be efficient to drive loyalty.

As mentioned in the literature review, marketers are advised to use relevant, interesting and UpToDate content (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Dessart, 2017; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019) and foster interaction among and with users (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013; Hsiao, Lin, Wang e, Lu & Yut, 2010; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). Such practices may facilitate identification with the brand and for that lead to commitment (Turri, Smith & Kemp, 2014). Similarly, can facilitate communication between the brands and customers to enhancing satisfaction (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Gu & Ye, 2014 Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott, 2017). Even though results don't support that trust leads to loyalty, trust as an outcome is still relevant. The mentioned practices can make customers want to relate more with the brand (Dessart, 2017) and lead to trust.

Social media marketing can have great outcomes as trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. The way social media marketing is used influences these as customers have a perception of brands on social media. Social media is therefore a powerful channel to impact, reach customers and improve relations. For that brands must be careful when using social media marketing. On the overall, from the concept of perceived social media activity used, marketers are suggested to do content marketing carefully as pages that are perceived as fun, interesting and UpToDate can foster trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty.



### **5.3 Limitations and Further Research**

The present study has limitations that should be addressed to a better understanding of results, which can simultaneously be used as recommendations for further research.

Firstly, even though the sample size is adequate, only 28 % of the male gender is represented. A higher percentage of males respondents would be closer to represent the real percentage of males that follow fast fashion brands online and would allow the study of differences between gender's perceived social media activity impacts. As well, the study of the perceived social media activity according to different generations would be interesting. For that a higher percentage of respondents from an older age range would be needed as 62% were under 25.

Second although social media marketing has been raising a lot of attention, there aren't many studies that use a construct to evaluate users' perception of social media activity. However, the chosen construct was based on previous studies in fashion industry, being for that considered a good fit to evaluate perceived social media activity of fast fashion brands. Further researchers could use instead a different construct based on user's opinions through the means of a qualitative study.

Finally, this study focused on single social media platform. Facebook for being the platform with the highest number of users was the chosen one. Researchers may use a multiple platform approach to access the differences between each platform ability to relate with customers. Furthermore, the comparison of perceived social media activity impacts with other industries could be of interest to comprehend the extent to which social media activities are helpful to generate relations according to the product category.

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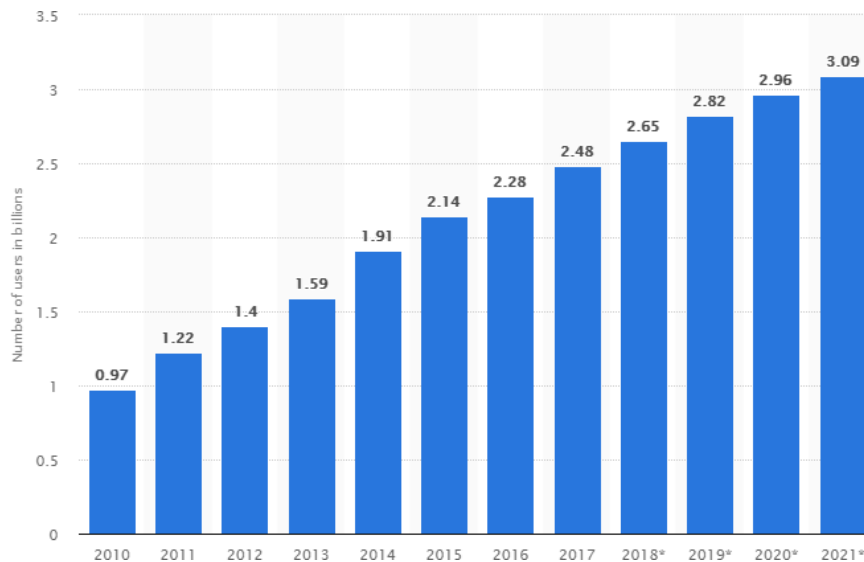
## 7 Appendix

### 7.1 Appendix A - Leading benefits of using social media for marketing purposes worldwide as of January 2019

	Share of respondents
Increased exposure	93%
Increased traffic	87%
Generated leads	74%
Improved sales	72%
Developed loyal fans	71%
Provided marketplace insight	58%
Increased thought leadership	57%
Grow business partnerships	56%

Source: Leading benefits of using social media for marketing purposes worldwide as of January 2019, by Social Media Examiner. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/188447/influence-of-global-social-media-marketing-usage-on-businesses/> Copyright 2019 by Statista 2019

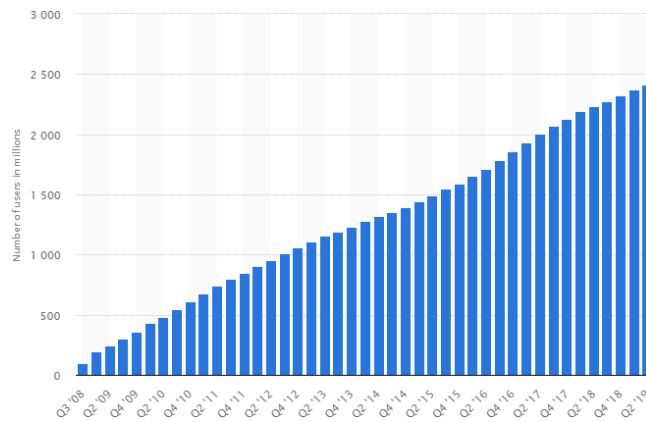
### 7.2 Appendix B - Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 (in billions)



Source: Number of global social network users 2010-2021, by Social Media Examiner. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/> Copyright 2019 by Statista 2019



**7.3 Appendix C-** Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019 (in millions)



Source: Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019 (in millions), by Social media examiner. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/> Copyright 2019 by Statista 2019

**7.4 Appendix D-** Number of daily active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019 (in millions)

	Number of users in millions
Q1 '11	372
Q2 '11	417
Q3 '11	457
Q4 '11	483
Q1 '12	526
Q2 '12	552
Q3 '12	584
Q4 '12	618
Q1 '13	665
Q2 '13	699
Q3 '13	728
Q4 '13	757
Q1 '14	802

Source: Reprinted from Number of daily active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019 (in millions), by Social media examiner. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/346167/facebook-global-dau/?fbclid=IwAR2KJeUAECbBlwFllfN5FkUkVKWJPHLxIiASWp-> Copyright 2019 by Statista 2019

## 7.5 Appendix E - Questionnaire

### Social Media and Fast Fashion Brands

The present questionnaire was developed in the scope of the master's thesis in Marketing of ISCTE. It will take about 5 minutes to complete. You are requested to respond honestly to the questions that follow. The data collected will be used only for academic purposes. All replies will be anonymous. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

\*Obrigatório

**Fast Fashion brands are known as brands that provide the latest trends in fashion with affordable prices. These brands are continuously releasing new collections mainly inspired by the runway designs. Brands like ZARA, Pull & Bear, Bershka, Stradivarius, H&M, Mango, Primark, C&A among others are good examples of fast fashion brands.**

---

1. Keeping this concept in mind, do you follow any fast fashion brand on Facebook? \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- Yes  
 No

2. Have you ever visited any Facebook page of fast fashion brands? \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- Yes  
 No

3. How often did you interact with the fast fashion brands you have mentioned to follow or have visited the page on Facebook: \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.*

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Liked/reacted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Commented/responded to comments/tagged someone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shared content from these pages with friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Based on the Facebook pages of the fast fashion brands (ex: Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, Pull and Bear, H&M, Mango...) you have mentioned follow or have visited, please indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences: \*

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The content shared on these brands' Facebook pages is interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The content shared on these brands' Facebook is UpToDate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On these brands' Facebook pages I can share information with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On these brands' Facebook pages I can share my opinion and have a conversation with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using these brands' Facebook pages to search for information is trendy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is fun to follow/visit these brands' Facebook pages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to share information from these brands' Facebook pages to my friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Having in mind the Facebook pages of the fast fashion brands (ex: Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, Pull and Bear, H&M, Mango...) you have mentioned follow or have visited, please indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences: \*

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe these brands are honest.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe these brands are safe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rely on these brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust these brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel satisfied with these brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience with theses brand is pleasing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These brands makes me happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These brands do a satisfactory job of fulfilling my needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel emotionally attached to these brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel a strong sense of identification with these brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These brands have a great deal of personal meaning for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Based on the Facebook pages of the fast fashion brands (ex: Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, Pull and Bear, H&M, Mango...) you have mentioned follow or have visited, please indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences: \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
These brands will be my first choice in the future when buying clothes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will buy from these brands again.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not buy clothes from other brands if these are available for sale	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the future, I will be loyal to these brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Age \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- 18-24  
 25-34  
 35-44  
 45-54  
 + 55

8. Gender \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- Female  
 Male

9. Residential area \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- City  
 Suburbs ( near the city)  
 Rural area

10. Nationality \*

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Education \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- Primary school  
 Secondary school  
 Graduate  
 Master's or Doctoral degree

12. Occupation \*

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Student
- Worker
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Outra: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Montly Income \*

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Don't have
- Up to 599
- 600-1000
- 1001-1500
- 1501-2000
- Equal or superior to 2001
- Don't know/ don't answer

7.6 Appendix F- Model Summary Simple Linear Regression Trust

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,554 <sup>a</sup>	,307	,304	2,639	1,707

a. Predictors: (Constant), ScalePSMA

b. Dependent Variable: ScaleTrust

Source: SPSS Statistics output

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5,356	,932		5,749	,000
	ScalePSMA	,365	,037	,554	9,896	,000

a. Dependent Variable: ScaleTrust

Source: SPSS Statistics output

## 7.7 Appendix G- Model Summary Simple Linear Regression Satisfaction

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,499 <sup>a</sup>	,249	,245	2,234	1,711

a. Predictors: (Constant), ScalePSMA

b. Dependent Variable: ScaleSatisfaction

Source: SPSS Statistics output

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8,566	,788		10,864	,000
	ScalePSMA	,267	,031	,499	8,554	,000

a. Dependent Variable: ScaleSatisfaction

Source: SPSS Statistics output

## 7.8 Appendix H- Model Summary Simple Linear Regression Commitment

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,455 <sup>a</sup>	,207	,204	2,432	1,658

a. Predictors: (Constant), ScalePSMA

b. Dependent Variable: ScaleCommitment

Source: SPSS Statistics output

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,803	,858		3,266	,001
	ScalePSMA	,258	,034	,455	7,597	,000

a. Dependent Variable: ScaleCommitment

Source: SPSS Statistics output

## 7.9 Appendix I- Initial Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	765,966	4	191,491	39,918	,000b
	Residual	1045,765	218	4,797		
	Total	1811,731	222			

a. Dependent Variable: ScoreLoyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), ScoreCommitment, ScorePSMA, ScoreSatisfaction, ScoreTrust

Source: SPSS Statistics output

## 7.10 Appendix J- ANOVA TEST Final Multiple Linear Regression Model

### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	758,046	3	252,682	52,518	,000b
	Residual	1053,685	219	4,811		
	Total	1811,731	222			

a. Dependent Variable: ScaleLoyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), ScaleCommitment, ScalePSMA, ScaleSatisfaction

Source: SPSS Statistics output

## 7.11 Appendix K- Multiple Linear Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,647 <sup>a</sup>	,418	,410	2,193	1,975

a. Predictors: (Constant), ScaleCommitment, ScalePSMA, ScaleSatisfaction

**b. Dependent Variable: ScaleLoyalty**

Source: SPSS Statistics output

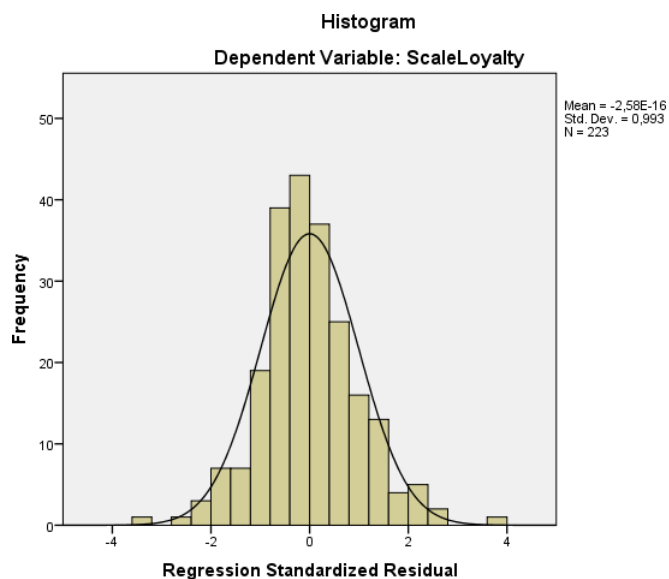
### 7.12 Appendix L- Residual Statistics – Dependent Variable Loyalty

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	6,84	18,41	13,88	1,848	223
Residual	-7,528	8,462	,000	2,179	223
Std. Predicted Value	-3,808	2,450	,000	1,000	223
Std. Residual	-3,432	3,858	,000	,993	223

Dependent Variable: ScaleLoyalty

Source: SPSS Statistics output

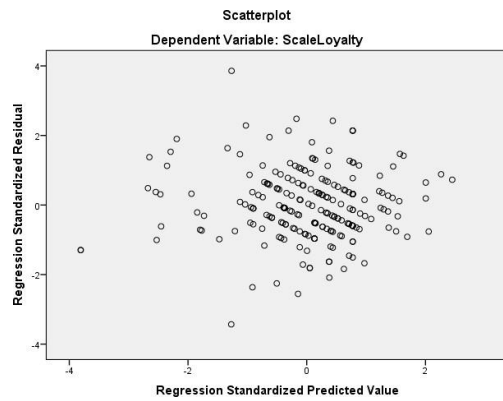
### 7.13 Appendix M- Normality of the Residuals



Source: SPSS Statistics output

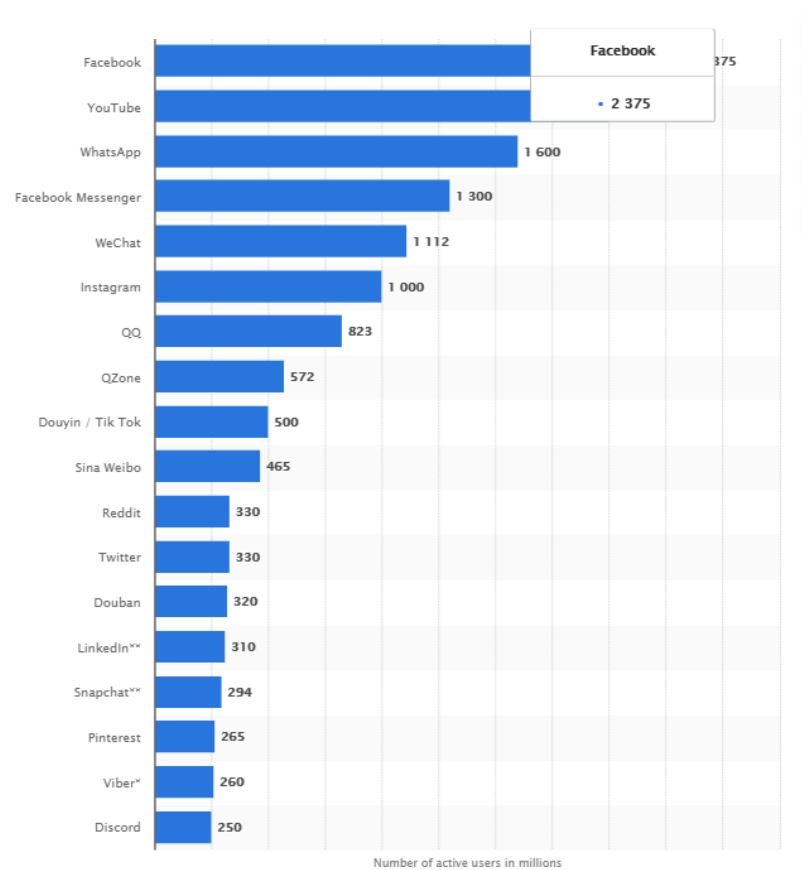


### 7.14 Appendix N- Variability of the residual term



Source: SPSS Statistics output

### 7.15 Appendix O – Most famous social network sites worldwide as of July 2019, ranked by number of active users



Source: Reprinted from (in millions), Most famous social network sites worldwide as of July 2019, ranked by number of active user by Social media examiner. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> Copyright 2019 by Statista 2019