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Users' Participation in Facebook Brand Pages and Its Influence on Word-of-Mouth: The Role of Brand Knowledge and Brand Relationship

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Abstract

Due to developments in social media, brands have integrated social networking sites (SNSs) as an important part of their communication mix. This change calls for studies that help to understand the role of SNS in the communication mix through further investigating their effects on brands and acknowledging their influencing triggers. Concerning that, previous studies have associated the use of SNS to effects on word-of-mouth (WoM), with SNS contributing as a tool skilled for generating conversations about the brand. The current study focusses on investigating the triggers of these effects. In previous research, WoM was accepted as being triggered by constructs related to the effects of SNS on increasing users' knowledge of the brand and improving perceived relationship value. Despite their relevance, studies in SNS so far have not yet explored these approaches in an integrative manner. So researchers and managers could better understand how these dimensions behave in relation to each other in triggering WoM. The current study addresses this research gap, proposing an integrative perspective that combines brand knowledge and brand relationship constructs while investigating the effects of SNS on WoM. Direct and indirect effects are proposed with mediating relations being supported by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and social exchange theory (SET). Two surveys were implemented, with 203 and 550 valid responses obtained. Results were analyzed using structural equation modelling. Findings support the relevance of brand relationship variables (trust and affective commitment) in influencing WoM, with trust assuming a pivotal role. Moreover, triggers related to brand knowledge also influence WoM, with brand awareness and attitude driving significant effects. Managerial and theoretical implications are discussed.

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Keywords

Social media, word-of-mouth (WoM), brand knowledge, brand relationship, Facebook, participation, brand page, awareness, attitude, trust, affective comitment

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have developed into an important part of the internet experience, with platforms like Facebook and Instagram accounting for more than 50 per cent of the total online population worldwide (Internet Worldwide Statistics, 2019; Statista, 2019). In these platforms, brands communicate with their audiences by means of *brand pages* (BPs), where they regularly post brand-related content and interact with their audiences.

Previous studies have associated brand efforts in SNS to positive outcomes related to firms' performance, with effects on aspects like word-of-mouth (WoM) intentions, purchase intentions, overall brand equity and brand engagement (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, 2016; Schivinsky, Langaro, & Shaw, 2019). In the current study, the focus is placed on WoM. WoM is defined as the process through which informal and non-commercially intended information is exchanged between a communicator and a receiver about a brand, service or organisation (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). In SNS, understanding the triggers of WoM is of crucial interest as, in these platforms, users can more easily broadcast their views and ask for each other's opinions (Hornikx & Hendriks, 2015; Kaplan, 2010; Kimmel and Kitchen, 2013; Sharma & Srivastava, 2017), with potential impact on firms' performance.

Previous studies associated WoM to mechanisms related to the effects of brand communications on improving users' relationship with the brand (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) and their brand knowledge (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, 2016; Schivinsky, Langaro, & Shaw, 2019; Sharma & Srivastava, 2017). Despite the relevance of findings, there is still lacking an integrative perspective that evaluates these dimensions simultaneously and allows a more in-depth understanding regarding their effects. The current study intends to address this research gap. It envisions to explore how SNS impact WoM. For that, it evaluates the effects of brand communications on variables related to brand relationship and brand knowledge. This integrative perspective is of special interest in the context of SNS, as users are impacted by brand activities targeted at conquering their brand page participation (BPP) and while doing that, simultaneously fostering consumers' brand knowledge and brand relationship.

Direct and indirect effects are proposed, with mediating relations supported by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and social exchange theory (SET). TRA states that individuals' behaviors are influenced by all the elements that they are aware of concerning the brand and their attitudes (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). As brand awareness and brand attitudes are influenced by brand communications (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, 2016; Schivinsky, Langaro, & Shaw, 2019), the current study proposes that in the context of SNS, the effects of users' brand page participation (BPP) on WoM intentions are mediated by consumers' brand awareness and attitude. The principles of SET, on the other hand, suggest that WoM occurs as consumers reciprocate for the relationship value they perceive (Bagozzi, 1974; de Matos & Rossi, 2008). As the brand relationship is influenced by brand communications (Laroche et al., 2012), in the current research, it is proposed that the effects of BPP on WoM are mediated by the effects on users' trust and affective commitment regarding the brand, two of the most relevant relationship constructs (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

In summary, the present study intends to understand how the combined perspectives of brand relationships and brand knowledge contribute to influencing WoM among users who are exposed to

brand communications in SNS and participate in brand pages. For that, constructs of BPP, brand awareness, brand attitude, brand trust, affective commitment and WoM are integrated into a comprehensive model and analysed for their structural relations with direct and indirect relations being inspected.

In order to address the research questions, a literature review was developed and hypotheses were proposed and analysed for their results based on data obtained using two online surveys.

The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on SNS by offering a clear and integrative understanding concerning how the effects of SNS on firms´ performance occur.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses Development

In *Facebook*, *brand*s offer utilitarian and hedonic value for acquiring new followers (Muk & Chung, 2014) and captivating their participation in BP. Users' participation in brand pages takes place by means of consuming content that is shared by the brand and other followers (e.g. reading posts), contributing with opinions (e.g. liking and commenting posts) and creating new content (e.g. sharing posts with their own network of friends) (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Schivinski et al., 2016). Thus, our study assumes the perspective that users who participate in BP represent the audience who is exposed to brand communications efforts (Chu & Kim, 2011; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Wang et al., 2012), being, therefore, the target considered for the expected effects on WoM.

Users' Participation in Facebook Brand Pages, Brand Knowledge and WoM

Based on the existing literature in brand management, brand knowledge has many dimensions (e.g., Keller, 1993, 2003), such as awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and experiences. Among these, brand awareness and attitude are central concepts. The pivotal role of brand attitudes is related to their synthetic and abstract nature, allowing information to be stored and more easily retrieved from memory than the attributes and benefits that underlie them (Keller, 2013). Moreover, the relevance of brand awareness is associated to the fact that it captures the availability of a brand in the mind of the consumer, being created through consumer's repeated and memorable exposure to brand elements, for example, the name, slogan, logotype or packaging (Keller, 1993, 2003).

In SNS, most users who join *Facebook brand pages* have some previous brand experiences (Nelson-Field, Riebe, & Sharp, 2012). As these users participate, they have more chances to be exposed to the brand name, to the logotype and other contents that are brand related. This increased frequency and scope of consumer–brand contacts are expected to affect brand awareness (Buil, Chernatony, & Martinez, 2013; Graham & Havlena, 2007; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Niederhoffer, Mooth, Wiesenfeld, & Gordon, 2007). Previous studies on Facebook BP have supported these effects (Bruhn et al., 2012; Langaro, Rita, & Salgueiro, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015; Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016).

Moreover, previous studies acknowledge that consumers tend to recommend the brands they can more easily retrieve from memory (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Niederhoffer et al., 2007). Thus, it is expected that as users' brand awareness is impacted through their BPP in Facebook, the intentions to recommend the brand are also influenced (Langaro et al., 2015). The following hypotheses postulate these relations:

H1: Brand page participation in Facebook has a positive and direct effect on brand awareness.
H2: Brand awareness has a positive and direct influence on WoM intentions.

Users who participate in *Facebook brand pages* are exposed to brand-related information regarding the product portfolio, related attributes and benefits (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Specifically, this information can be textual and pictorial (e.g., Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012) and can be posted by the firm or by other users of the Facebook brand page (e.g., Naylor et al., 2012). This exposure contributes to creating over time functional, emotional, social and epistemic brand associations in the consumers' minds. Keller (2003, p. 596) used the term *brand attitude* to refer to the summary of judgements and overall evaluations derived from these brand-related associations (Keller, 2003, p. 596). Therefore, it is expected that users' participation in *Facebook brand pages* positively influences brand attitude.

Else, social psychological theories (Ajzen, 1985; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) postulate that attitudes affect behavioural intentions. Based on this strand of research and also on brand-related marketing literature, brand attitude can be recognised as being able to influence the intention to recommend the brand to others (e.g., Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Brand page participation in Facebook has a positive and direct impact on brand attitude.
H4: Brand attitude has a positive and direct impact on WoM intentions.

It is widely accepted that brand awareness is a necessary condition for developing an attitude (Keller, 2003). Brand awareness influences brand attitudes in two ways. First, it elicits a greater sense of familiarity and warmth towards the brand, thus influencing users' evaluations (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Second, the fact of being aware of the brand activates the users' memory and affects brand associations by means of, reinforcing the strength of linkages (Keller, 1993). Hence, in the context of Facebook BPs, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Brand awareness has a positive and direct impact on brand attitude.

Users Participation in Facebook Brand Pages, Brand Relationship and WoM

In the literature, it is widely accepted that consumers and brands can relate to each other, which is usually referred to as brand relationship (Fournier, 1998). The augmented brand experience associated with users' BPP in Facebook sets the ground for consumer–brand relationships to evolve. In BP, users enjoy unique social, emotional and functional values associated with their participation (Fueller, Schroll, Dennhardt, & Hutter, 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012), experience the brands through more humanised lenses and get involved in co-authoring brand stories (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013).

Hence, it is reasonable to propose that the more users participate in BP, the more value they receive and the higher will be their intentions to offer WoM in return. These effects build on the principle of mutual reciprocity, which implies that consumers who perceive positive rewards from brands return good for good (Bagozzi, 1974).

Several dimensions influence the *returning* effects, among which are brands' ability to ground consumer–brand exchanges on strengthening brand trust and affective commitment (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom, 2007).

In online contexts, trust is accepted as an important enabler that influences people's online behaviour (Eastlick, Lotz, & Warrington, 2006; Urban, Amyx, & Lorenzon, 2009). Trust can be defined as the belief in the trustworthiness of the partner and the willingness to rely on him/her in a situation of vulnerability (Shankar, Urban, & Sultan, 2002). Previous research has shown that online channels exhibit

their trustworthiness in a variety of ways depending on the content (Gefen, Benbasat, & Pavlou, 2008). According to Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol (2002), credibility and benevolence are the two main dimensions of trust (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Credibility refers to consumers' beliefs that sellers can deliver their promises effectively and reliably. Benevolence refers to consumers' beliefs on sellers' good intentions towards privileging consumers' interests in a situation of vulnerability (Shankar et al., 2002).

Our study proposes that trust is affected by users' participation, with this effect being influenced by the extended exposure to brand-related information with an impact on reducing uncertainties and information asymmetries, increasing brand social presence and perceptions towards brand benevolence. These aspects are further discussed in the following paragraphs.

As proposed by Hudson, Huang, Roth, and Madden (2016), while interacting with the *Facebook Brand Page*, users can gather more information that can help to address uncertainties and information asymmetry between parties (Schau, Muniz Jr., & Arnould, 2009; Lewicky and Bunker, 1995; Porter & Donthu, 2008), which in return makes the brand page more credible and trustworthy (Ba, 2001). Moreover, positive effects are also expected to evolve as brands position themselves as knowledgeable entities in their *Facebook brand pages*, sharing information, giving advice and guiding best practices regarding the product category (Shankar et al., 2002).

Second, the repeated interactions that take place are expected to increase brands' social presence, with community managers voicing the brand and customising interactions which, in turn, influence consumers' level of trust (Beldad et al., 2010).

Third, *Facebook Brand Pages* offer entertainment, information and rewards (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Sung, Kim, Kwon, & Moon, 2010) with no monetary costs being charged from consumers. These initiatives may trigger a sense of brand altruism and reciprocity with an impact on users' perceptions towards brands' benevolence (Bhattacherjee, 2002).

Furthermore, based on the previous literature, it can be argued that the intention to recommend a brand is higher when consumers trust the brand and the information it delivers (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). This could be explained by arguing that, under these circumstances, consumers do not perceive to be risking their reputation in recommending a brand (Mazzarol et al., 2007). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Brand page participation in Facebook has a positive impact on brand trust.
H7: Brand trust has a positive impact on WoM intentions.

Brand affective commitment occurs when the *Facebook Brand Page* is able to provide meaning to the person who engages with it (Smit et al., 2007). Specifically, it implies that users feel positively motivated to keep relationships with brands that they feel emotionally attached to and identified with (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Fullerton, 2005). Consumers' identification with the brand derives from the fulfilment of consumers' self-identity needs, (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Emotional attachment refers to feelings of 'joy' and 'love' towards brands, which bind consumers through affective nurturing (Bergamini & Bagozzi, 2000).

Previous studies in the context of traditional online brand communities argued that the interactions among community members are predominantly positive, being expected to influence users' identification and emotional attachment with the brand (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliu, 2008; Fueller et al., 2012; Naylor et al., 2012).

Moreover, in the specific context of *Facebook Brand Pages*, identification and emotional attachment are also expected to be influenced by users' experiences towards more humanized brand personalities

(Fournier, 1998; Gensler et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2016; Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2013). In *Facebook Brand Pages*, community managers approach consumers directly and at a personal level, facilitating meaningful interactions and sustaining the relationship with users. According to Hudson et al. (2016, p. 29), 'when the brand interacts with followers by replying to comments, solving problems and inviting participation, consumers generate a feeling of connection and thus experience a higher level of relationship quality … and foster an emotional attachment and feeling of intimacy'.

Moreover, previous studies found that affective commitment is positively related to WoM activities in general (Harrison-Walker, 2001) and also in the contexts of online brand communities (Cheung & Lee, 2009; Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011). Two reasons help justifying the effects of affective commitment on WoM. First, consumers tend to support the brands they like, offering positive recommendations (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Second, WoM is often offered as a mechanism of self-enhancement, with consumers expressing themselves through the brands they support (Brown, Barry, Dacin & Gunst, 2005; Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2012). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Brand page participation in Facebook has a positive impact on brand affective commitment.
H9: Brand affective commitment positively and directly influences the intention to recommend the brand

Also, several studies devoted to relationship marketing highlighted that brand trust is one of the significant determinants of consumers' commitment towards a brand (e.g., Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Despite that this idea is widely accepted in relationship marketing literature, the impact of brand trust on brand affective commitment has not yet been investigated in the specific context of *Facebook Brand Pages*. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H10: Brand trust directly and positively influences the brand affective commitment.

The Mediation of Brand Knowledge and Brand Relationship on the Effects of BPP on WoM

The relation between BPP and WoM is expected to be mediated by the constructs of brand knowledge. This proposition is based on previous branding research (Keller, 1993 and 2003), which finds support on TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA states that behaviours of individuals are consistent with their attitudinal anteceding components (Shimp and Kavas, 1984). In social media, TRA has proven as useful to explain consumers' intentional behaviours due to exposure to brand communications (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, 2016; Schivinsky, Langaro, & Shaw, 2019).

In the current study, the attitudinal components of TRA are considered, suggesting that users who are exposed to brand communications in SNS and engaged in BPP have their intentions to recommend the brand (behavioural intentions) positively affected due to the effects on brand attitude (attitudinal).

Moreover, the effects on brand attitude are influenced by the increased brand accessibility in consumers' memory as captured in brand awareness (Fazio et al., 1989).

Regarding the mediating effects of brand relationship, the current research draws upon the literature in consumer–brand relationship, which explores SET to explain how consumers relate with brands (Fournier, 1998), and their web representations (e.g., brand page in SNS) (Alexandrov and Babakus, 2013; Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007;).

In this context, WoM is positioned as a currency of exchange that allows the person who is voicing their recommendations to reciprocate towards brands that have offered a relationship value (Anderson, 1998; Bagozzi, 1974; de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Previous studies have established that relationship value

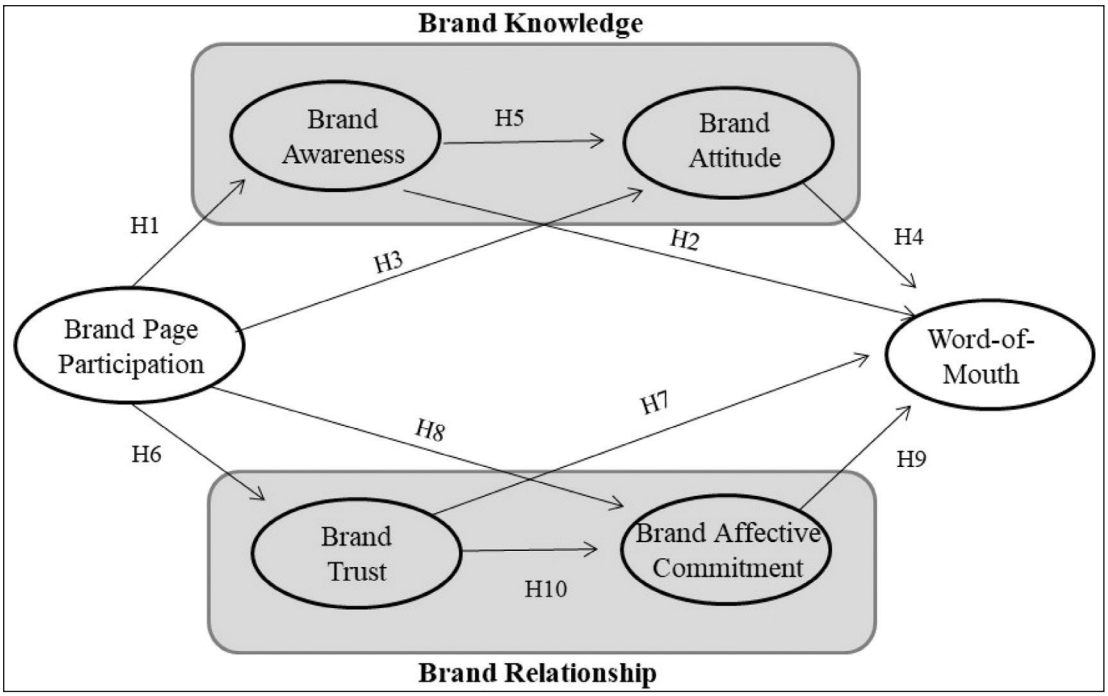

Figure 1. Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

Sources: The authors.

is captured through its effects on brand trust and affective commitment (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). In the context of SNS, it is expected that as users participate in BP, they have their trust and affective commitment positively impacted. As such, the mediating effects of these constructs are expected to occur as hypothesised:

H11: The effects of brand page participation on WoM intentions are mediated by brand awareness, brand attitude (brand knowledge), brand trust and brand affective commitment (brand relationship).

Figure 1 depicts the overall structure of the direct and indirect relationships proposed in this study.

Methodology

Measurement Scales

For the study, a questionnaire was built based on prior literature. BPP was measured based on Langaro, Rita and Salgueiro (2015), which captures the activities performed in Facebook BPs, associated to users contributing and creating content ('Click "like" to posts, photos or videos in the brand page'; 'Comment the posts published in the brand page'; 'Share with friends the contents published in the brand page'). Complementarily, measures regarding users' content consumption were further incorporated in order to capture the multiple components of users' participation (Muntinga et al., 2011). The items were generated

based on findings from a qualitative research (Muntinga et al., 2011) and read as follows: 'Read brand posts', 'Read others' comments to brand posts' and 'Access video and music links that are posted'.

The brand attitude was measured with items aimed at capturing the users' evaluations towards the brand (as in Table 1) (Langaro et al., 2015). The items aimed at measuring *brand awareness* were extracted from Langaro et al. (2015), conciliating measures that captured brand recall and recognisability (see Table 1 for the complete wording of all the items). *Brand trust* was measured using five items, capturing brand benevolence and credibility.

Brand affective commitment captures users' identification ('I see the brand as a sort of friend to me'; 'I have a strong sense of identification with the brand') and emotional attachment with the brand ('I like

Table 1. Results from Confirmatory factor Analysis

		Standardized Factor Loading	CR	AVE
	Brand Page Participation (BPP)		0.87	0.54
E1	Read brand posts on the brand page	0.62		
E2	Click ´like´ to posts, photos or videos on the brand page	0.67		
E3	Acess video and music links that are posted on brand pages	0.72		
E4	Comment the posts published on the brand page	0.86		
E5	Share with friends the content published on the brand page	0.81		
E6	Read other´s comments on the brand posts	0.71		
	Brand Trust		0.93	0.74
T1	I rely on the quality of brand´s products	0.86		
T2	I rely on brand´s efforts to help me	0.86		
T3	I recognize brand´s good intentions	0.88		
T4	I recognize brand´s large experience in its area	0.83		
T5	I rely on the brand´s promisses	0.87		
	Brand Affect. Commitment		0.85	0.65
C1	I see the brand as a sort of friend to me	0.71		
C2	I have a strong sense of identification with the brand	0.87		
C3	I like the brand a lot more	0.82		
	Brand Awareness		0.93	0.72
A1	I recognize its characteristics	0.83		
A2	I recall its advertising	0.81		
A3	I remember the brand more often	0.77		
A4	I easily describe the brand to a friend	0.90		
A5	I feel familiar with its products	0.92		
	Brand Attitude		0.96	0.82
AT1	More favorabe	0.90		
AT2	More appealing	0.87		
AT3	Better	0.92		
AT4	More pleasant	0.93		
AT5	More likable	0.92		
	Word-of-mouth (WOM)		0.91	0.76
W1	I mention the brand to others quite frequently	0.88		
W2	I will recommend the brand more often than any other brand in its category	0.85		
W3	I will talk positively about the brand	0.89		

Sources: The authors.
Note: All items were measured on a seven-point scale. The construct of BPP was measured based on frequency.

the brand a lot more') (Fullerton, 2005; Johnson, Bruner II, & Kumar, 2006). Finally, *WoM* was measured with items sourced from Harrison-Walker (2001).

The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and then translated into Portuguese by bilingual researchers. In the following phase, it was translated back to English by other bilingual researchers (e.g., Brady et al., 2005). This was done to check for linguistic and functional aspects.

Study Settings, Sampling and Data Collection

Portugal was chosen as the research market based on its outperforming penetration regarding Facebook (73 per cent of the online population) (Internet World Stats, 2019). Location was used as a filter question. Data were collected among female users of *Facebook BPs* from beauty and personal care type of products. The focus on a specific brand segment aims to avoid potential influences related to combining evaluations and future intentions of distinct categories (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). This specific sector was chosen because it is considered to be among the most expressive categories in Facebook (Social Bakers, 2019) as it has penetration of 30 per cent in the overall population of *Facebook Brand Pages* users, and it is characterised by a higher engagement rate when compared to other categories of consumer product goods. The choice of collecting data only from female users aged 18 to 44 years old is justified by the fact that this segment represents 80 per cent of the overall population of active users present in the *Facebook Brand Pages* used in our study (Facebook, 2019).

Two online surveys were conducted, and two different samples were obtained. The first study was a pretest and was carried out with the primary objective of evaluating the appropriateness of the scales and items used. Cronbach-alpha values were computed to assess the constructs' reliability. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted (using IBM SPSS 22) to assess constructs' dimensionality. Moreover, Harman's single factor test was used to discard common method bias, as proposed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Lee (2003). Indeed, according to these authors, bias exists and is problematic if EFA indicates a single-factor best represents data.

The second study was meant to validate the measurement properties of the scales and to test the proposed research hypothesis, thus validating the conceptual model represented in Figure 1. The structural equation modelling (SEM) framework was considered, allowing for the simultaneous estimation of direct and indirect effects between latent constructs. LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006) was used. Manifest variables were treated as ordinal, and polychoric correlations were computed. The robust maximum likelihood estimation procedure implemented in LISREL was used to deal with the ordinal nature of the variables and estimate all models. Confirmatory factor analysis was first used for estimating the measurement model. Following Fornell and Larker (1981) and Hair et al (2009), the constructs were then validated for reliability (assessed though composite reliability [CR] values larger than 0.7), convergent validity (evaluated by average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5) and discriminant validity (assumed when the square root of the AVE for each construct is larger than the correlation between that construct and all the others).

Results

Pretest

A valid sample size of 203 respondents was obtained and considered. Measures were validated for their reliability. Indeed, computed Cronbach Alpha values surpass the minimum required level of 0.7 (Nunnally

& Bernstein, 1994) for all constructs, namely BPP (0.86), brand attitude (0.96), brand awareness (0.89), brand trust (0.89), brand affective commitment (0.91) and WoM (0.90).

To assess the dimensionality of the constructs an EFA, with principal component analysis as the method of extraction, was conducted. A six-factor solution was considered, accounting for 74 per cent of the variance of the 27 initial variables. The estimated factor loadings were inspected: all factor loadings were higher than the minimum recommended values, ranging from 0.64 to 0.84. Each item has loaded according to what was expected.

Moreover, Harman's single factor test was used to assess common method bias. The unrotated single-factor solution was examined to determine the number of factors that is necessary to account for most of the variance of the initial variables. Since the obtained *one* general factor only accounts for 38 per cent of the variance, it is possible to conclude there is no evidence of a substantial amount of common method bias. Recall the maximum recommended value is 50 per cent (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Lee, 2003).

Main Study

A valid sample of 575 respondents was considered and used in the main study. A measurement model with six correlated factors measured by 27 items was estimated, with the structure previously identified in the pretest and described in detail in Table 1. An acceptable model-data fit was obtained: $\chi^2 = 525$; df = 309; RMSEA = 0.035; CFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.99; RFI = 0.99, (the minimum values recommended in the literature for model-data are presented in Table 2). The obtained factor loadings, in a standardised solution, presented in Table 1, support the constructs' unidimensionality, with loadings above 0.60 for all constructs (Klive, 1997). CR and AVE values were computed and are also presented in Table 1. Results all above the minimum recommended values were obtained, indicating reliability and convergent validity of the six constructs in the model.

Table 2. Minimum Recommended Values for Model-data Fit Measures

	Min.	Description
Criteria for global structural model and CFA		
CFI	>0.95*	Comparative Fit Index
RMSEA	<0.08*	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
NFI	>0.95*	Normed Fit Index
IFI	>0.95*	Incremental Fit Index
RFI	>0.95*	Relative Fit Index
Criteria for constructs		
CR**	>0.70**	Compositive of reliability
AVE***	>0.50***	Average variance extracted
$\sqrt{AVE}$	>correl. between one construct and all others	Discriminant validity
Criteria to evaluate the effects		
t-value	>2	Level of significance
SC	Closer to 1	Standardized Coefficient
Others		
R^2	Closer to 1	Coefficient of determination

Sources: *Schumacker and Lomax, 2010; **Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2009; ***Fornell and Larker, 1981.

Table 3. Inter-construct Correlations and square Root of AVE

	Awareness	Attitude	Trust	Affect. Commit.	WOM	BPP
Awareness	**0.85**					
Attitude	0.78	**0.91**				
Trust	0.31	0.38	**0.86**			
Affect. Commit.	0.32	0.39	0.76	**0.81**		
WOM	0.55	0.67	0.70	0.72	**0.87**	
Brand page participation (BPP)	0.50	0.61	0.63	0.65	0.71	**0.73**

Source: The authors.

Moreover, constructs were analysed for discriminant validity. The results are presented in Table 3. It is possible to conclude that there is discriminant validity among constructs since, for each of the six constructs, the square root of AVE (on the diagonal) is larger than the correlations between that construct and all the others (off-diagonal elements).

Hypotheses Testing

Following the measurement model tested in the main study, the global SEM presented in Figure 2 was estimated. An acceptable model-data-fit was obtained, as detailed in Table 4. The coefficient of determination R^2 suggests that the proposed model explains 72 per cent of the variability of WoM.

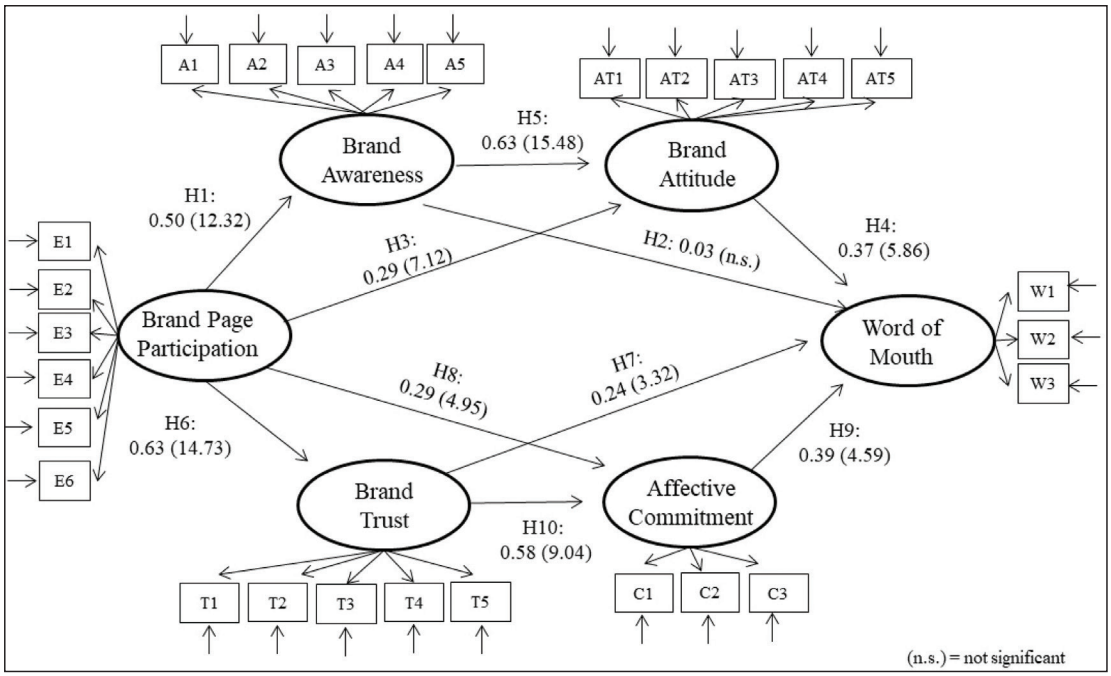

Figure 2. Estimates for the Direct Effects in a Standardised Solution (t-values)

Sources: The authors.

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing, Total and Indirect Effects and Model data-Fit for the Global Structural Model

Hyphotesis			Standardized Coefficient	T-Values	Hypothesis support
H1: BPP	→	Brand Awareness	0.50	12.32	Accepted
H2: Brand Awareness	→	WOM	0.03	0.54	Rejected
H3: BPP	→	Brand Attitude	0.29	7.12	Accepted
H4: Brand Attitude	→	WOM	0.37	5.86	Accepted
H5: Brand Awareness	→	Brand Attitude	0.63	15.45	Accepted
H6: BPP	→	Brand trust	0.63	14.73	Accepted
H7: Brand trust	→	WOM	0.24	3.32	Accepted
H8: BPP	→	Brand Affect. Commit	0.29	4.95	Accepted
H9: Brand Affect. Commit.	→	WOM	0.39	4.59	Accepted
H10: Brand Trust	→	Brand Affect. Commit.	0.58	9.04	Accepted
Total and indirect effects					
Total Effects BPP → WOM			0.66	14.98	
BPP→Brand-Knowledge (Awareness and Attitude)→WOM *			0.24		
BPP→Brand-Relationship (Trust and Affective Commitment)→WOM **			0.42		
Model data-fit for Global Model $\chi 2$ =746 df= 314; RMSEA=0.049; CFI=0.99; NFI=0.99; IFI=0.99; RFI=0.99					

Source: The authors.
Notes: *the sum of the products of standardised coefficients obtained in brand-knowledge paths; ** the sum of the products of standardised coefficients obtained in brand-relationship paths.

Overall, results in Table 4 indicate that one standard deviation increase in BPP leads to an overall increase of 0.66 standard deviations on WoM. Furthermore, the two dimensions of *brand relationship* explain the most significant part of this effect. More specifically, *brand relationship* effects are mostly influenced by the direct effects of BPP on users' brand trust (standardised coefficient = 0.63) and affective commitment (standardised coefficient = 0.29), accounting for total indirect effects of 0.42. Complementarily, *brand knowledge* captures the remaining effects, with BPP positively affecting brand awareness (standardised coefficient = 0.50) and brand attitude (standardised coefficient = 0.29). These two effects together account for total indirect effects of 0.24. The comparison of these effects is one of the most relevant results to be acknowledged, as it most strongly associates the effectiveness of users' participation in *Facebook brand pages* to brands' ability to foster brand interactions capable of impacting brand trust and affective commitment.

In the following paragraphs, the remaining results obtained are discussed in more detail. Research hypotheses H1 to H5 evaluate the effects concerning the *brand knowledge* constructs. The results indicate that users who participate in *Facebook brand pages* are positively influenced on their level of awareness (H1) and attitude towards the brand (H3), as supported by the previous studies (Buil et al., 2013; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Graham & Havlena, 2007; Niederhoffer et al., 2007). The influence of brand awareness on brand attitude is also accepted (H5), with the effects being potentially related to the impact of awareness on users' brand familiarity and remaining brand associations (Keller, 1993).

Concerning the specific impact on WoM, brand attitude is accepted for its positive effects (H4), derived from attitudes' capacity to energise behaviours (Spears & Singh, 2004). However, the effect of brand awareness on WoM is not significant (H2 is not validated). This result was contextualied in view

of H5, suggesting a hierarchy of effects between brand awareness and attitude while influencing WoM (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Hence, the mediation of brand attitude on the relationship between brand awareness and WoM was further inspected. Two structural models were compared (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In the first model, the direct effects of awareness on WoM were evaluated (removing all remaining constructs) and a significant positive impact was identified (standardised coefficient = 0.68; t-value = 19.85). In the second model, brand attitude was included as a mediator, and the relationship between awareness and WoM was once again inspected. Total mediation was obtained since the direct effects of brand awareness on WoM became non-significant in the second model, with a standardised coefficient and t-value decreasing to 0.12 and 1.70, respectively (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). This result corroborates the hierarchy of effects exerted by brand attitude (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Research hypotheses H6 to H10 evaluate the impact of the *brand relationship* constructs on the relationship between BPP and WoM. All five hypotheses were accepted, corresponding to significant positive effects, as presented in Table 4. Thus, results indicate that users who participate in *Facebook brand pages* are affected by their willingness to rely on the brand (H6) and feel affectively commitment to it (H8). These findings are in line with the previous studies that link users' participation to positive relationship consequences (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Casaló et al., 2008).

The analysis also reveals the critical influence of brand trust, as the single most expressive construct accounting for direct and indirect effects of BPP on WoM (H6; H7; H10). The prominent role of brand trust is grounded on the understanding that brand recommendations involve personal risks for those who recommend (Mazzarol et al., 2007).

Finally, hypothesis 11 was tested for inspecting the mediation of brand knowledge and brand relationship on the effects of BPP on WoM. For that, two additional structural models were compared using the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). In the first model, the direct effects of BPP on WoM were evaluated (removing all remaining constructs) and a significant positive impact was identified (standardised coefficient = 0.60; t-value = 13.78). In the second model, the constructs of brand knowledge (awareness and attitude) and relationship (trust and affective commitment) were included as mediators, and the relationship between BPP and WoM was once again inspected. Mediation was confirmed since the effects on WoM decreased significantly (standardised coefficient = 0.14; t-value = 1.99) (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). These results support the mediation proposed.

Moreover, in order to assess that the results obtained were influenced by BPP and not an artefact of brand liking, multiple group analysis was conducted. Two groups were compared, based on the responses to the question 'Why have you joined the brand´s page on Facebook?' The respondents were asked to point out the two most important reasons. In total, 246 respondents have justified 'because I like the brand'.

These were considered to form one group and were compared with the remaining 329 respondents. A chi-square difference test was used to test for the invariance of the proposed SEM in the two groups. The value of the difference in the test statistics that was obtained was not significant ($\Delta\chi 2 = 8$; $\Delta df = 10$), thus suggesting the same model holds for the two groups and that previous brand liking of the respondents do not influence the results.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of users' participation in *Facebook Brand Pages* on WoM intentions, evaluating the triggers that mediate these effects.

Prior studies argued that users' participation in SNS had a positive effect on the intentions to recommend the brand (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Our study, besides confirming these findings, also reveals that these effects are largely explained by the mediation of *brand knowledge* and *brand relationship* and the simultaneous effects of users' BPP.

More specifically, the findings suggest that the effects of users' BPP on WoM occur when brands manage to evoke users' needs for reciprocation, with an impact on trust and affective commitment and simultaneously reinforce brands' associations, with impact on awareness and attitude.

While evaluating the extent of mediating effects, *brand relationship* constructs have a predominant effect on WoM, with brand trust occupying a pivotal role. The prominent effects of *brand relationship* on WoM could initially suggest that *Facebook brand pages* are especially skilled in building relational values with consumers. However, the analysis of the direct paths between BPP and all remaining constructs (brand awareness, attitude, trust and affective commitment) reveals that the direct effects are very much comparable. Therefore, the findings suggest that *Facebook brand pages* are capable of building brand relationship and knowledge simultaneously. However, because the effects of brand awareness on WoM occur exclusively through the mediation of brand attitude and not directly, the effects of brand knowledge on WoM become comparably less prominent. This result finds support in previous studies (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Smit et al., 2007) where brand awareness is acknowledged as not directly affecting the conative stages of consumer decisions.

These findings have several managerial implications, among them is positioning BPP as a critical measure to be pursued by brands in their *Facebook brand* as while evoking participation, brands can simultaneously impact brand relationship and knowledge dimensions triggering WoM.

Furthermore, the pivotal role of *brand trust* challenges companies to position it as a core objective to be pursued in *Facebook brand pages*. In order to maximise the relational values associated to trust, brands may further explore opportunities for improving users' perceptions towards brands' credibility and benevolence, through initiatives associated to (a) clarifying uncertainties towards the product/category, (b) evoking brands' expertise and (c) continuously involving users in the context of brand altruism and generosity associated to the digital brand value offered for free in the brand pages (Anderson, 2010; Bhattacherjee, 2002). Furthermore, given the importance that brand trust assumes in the model, companies other than planning initiates that positively impact brand trust, are also challenged to get equipped with strategies capable of controlling for the potential damages to trust. *Bulletproof strategies* should be designed to guide the organisation on clear ethical principles, to assure that users' privacy is protected, to foster transparency and to provide a clear set of norms and best practices for coping with crisis and stimulating positive interactions.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of the current study need to be contextualised within the limitations imposed by the research design, namely the focus on beauty and personal care categories and the choice of popular brands. In this sense, future studies could expand the analysis through cross-segment studies, with findings being investigated for potential influences related to the brands' segment, their popularity and users' demographics. Furthermore, the current study focusses on the positive effects of BPP, as they reflect the dominant perspective of previous studies in the area of brand communities, social media and SNS. Thus, future studies could profit from exploring the effects associated with users' *negative* WoM and brands' related mismanagements. Another suggestion is that, since brand trust has a key role in WoM, future studies could further the effects of the digital brand values offered (for free) in the brand pages.

Digital brand assets offer. Indeed, very little is known about the implications of brands offering free benefits in SNS. Finally, as our study develops an integrated perspective regarding users who join BPs at Facebook, future studies could compare results with offline relations, regarding users who do not integrate BPs or integrate different social media platforms.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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