

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2019-01-08

Deposited version:

Post-print

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Bilro, R. G., Loureiro, S. M. C. & Marques, M. I. (2018). Online brand communities: when consumers are negatively engaged. In 21st World Marketing Congress of the Academy of Marketing Science. Porto

Further information on publisher's website:

--

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Bilro, R. G., Loureiro, S. M. C. & Marques, M. I. (2018). Online brand communities: when consumers are negatively engaged. In 21st World Marketing Congress of the Academy of Marketing Science. Porto. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Bilro, R.G., Loureiro, S..M.C. & Marques, M.I. (2018). Online brand communities: when consumers are negatively engaged. In John B. Ford and Elizabeth Real (Eds). Proceedings of the 21st World Marketing Congress of the Academy of Marketing Science. 27-29 June 2018 at University Lusitana, Porto Portugal

Online brand communities: when consumers are negatively engaged

ABSTRACT

The goal of the current research is to explore the influence of negative engagement on committing participants in hate online brand communities. To reach this aim, three brands are used to assess this phenomenon (Starbucks, Apple, and McDonald's), and three related hate online brand communities of such brands are involved. An online questionnaire is developed based on previously validated scales and fulfilled by 300 online members of mentioned communities. Findings reveal the importance of Brand influence, Helping, and Self-expression dimensions on participants to be committed to hating brand communities.

Keyword: Online brand community engagement, Hate brand communities, Commitment

INTRODUCTION

Literature starts devoting attention to brand communities since the beginning of this century. In fact, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) are the first ones to define brand communities as specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among brand fans. On this sense, other authors propose brand community as a non-geographically-based group, characterized by an organized structure of social relationships between a brand's admirers (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Regarding online brand communities, the concept of like-minded consumers that engage with a community is first presented by Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann (2005). These authors define community engagement as the intrinsic motivation felt by community members to cooperate and interact with each other.

In social networking brand communities, fans and consumers can create interactions with each other and with the brand, either by 'liking' and commenting on posts made on the page, or by sharing user-generated content (Relling, Schnittka, Sattler, & Johnen, 2016). In this follow-up, and based on previous research, Zheng, Cheung, Lee, & Liang (2015) conceptualize about user engagement in online brand communities by describing user engagement in such contexts as individual participation and promotion behaviour, while trying to analyse the impact of benefit and cost factors on user engagement in online brand communities. The current research explores the influence of negative engagement on committing participants in hate online brand communities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

We may find in literature that consumer engagement goes beyond concepts of involvement or participation. For instance, Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić and Ilić (2011) conceptualize this construct as an active and interactive customer connection with a given engagement object, while involvement and participation fail to reflect the idea of interactive and value co-creation experiences. Other authors conceptualize consumer-brand engagement as consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). From these authors, three dimensions emerge related to this construct: cognitive processing - processing and elaboration in a particular consumer-brand interaction -, affection - positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer-brand interaction -, and activation - the energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction -. Still, the manifestation of this dimensions - cognitive, emotional, and behavioural - depends widely on the engagement objects and contexts (Brodie et al., 2011), including new online media contexts in contrast to traditional advertising media (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009).

The first attempt to conceptualize online brand community engagement is made by Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone (2015), who conceptualize it as the compelling, intrinsic motivations to

continue interacting with an online brand community. In this research, researchers have employed Baldus et al.'s (2015) scale, which comprises 11 dimensions based on previous studies: Brand influence, Brand passion, Connecting, Helping, Like-minded discussion, Rewards (hedonic), Rewards (utilitarian), Seeking assistance, Self-expression, Up-to-date information and Validation (e.g. Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Dholakia et al., 2004).

As mentioned, this research is devoted to exploring the negative side of Engagement, which includes co-destruction of brand value, or impoverishment of value by customers and providers (Dolan, Conduit, & Fahy, 2015). Such damaging behaviour can be generated by consumers' perceived reputation of the brand, self-confidence, product involvement, proximity of others, and attitudes toward the company, and perceived worthiness of complaining (Lau & Ng, 2001). Still, the behaviour of online communities' participants in co-destruction of brand value can also be represented by individuals who are highly motivated in damaging the perception one has of a specific brand, its products or its firm. These individuals – consumers or non-consumers of a specific brand – do not only share negative feelings and messages toward a specific brand, but also become engaged in doing so, which opens new research paths for the understanding and examination of a new concept in the marketing literature (Juric, Smith, & Wilks, 2016).

Hollebeek and Chen (2014) argue that when in positive-valenced consumer engagement, consumers displaying high commitment towards an engagement object (often, a brand). These consumers are perceived as brand apostles, revealing a strong connection to the specific brand and deeply engaged in co-creating value. However, in the same conditions arises the brand opponents, also with high commitment, but representing a negative valence consumer engagement. These are also connected consumers with the focal object, but with the intention to destroy or damage the focal object (i.e., product/brand). This supports the argument that positive and negative brand engagement are two opposite sides of the same coin (construct).

Literature also unveils knowledge regarding constant incongruence between consumers' expectations and brand behaviour, which can be measured through the level of regularity and severity of negative engagement behaviours (Chylinski & Chu, 2010). Consumers driven by revenge and desire to feel less anxious behave toward the focal engagement object through diverse ways: since the use of negative and even malicious and vindictive word-of-mouth (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008) connected to dissatisfying experiences, to the proactivity in attempting to damage the brand (Juric et al., 2016).

Additionally, the nature of the relationship between consumer and brand is also relevant when predicting the intensity of the interactive actions (Juric et al., 2016). Some consumers may absolve brands easier, depending on the associated risk of harm. Others, for their part, become gradually irritated as the level of harm tends to rise (Mattila, 2004). Loyal consumers expressing stronger and deeper attachment towards a brand may feel deceived and respond more intensely than other less loyal consumers, as they are not deeply connected with the brand (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008).

Nevertheless, previous research does not clarify why consumers respond with variable levels of negative engagement behaviours (Juric et al., 2016). This is increasingly relevant as the large number of possible events and contexts that motivates this type of negative behaviours towards the focal object (i.e., product/brand). Additionally, the knowledge regarding the consequences of

brand engagement is still reduced, namely about the effects of a negative engagement on commitment.

Commitment has been pointed out by the literature as a potential consequence of brand engagement (e.g., Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Madupu & Cooley, 2010). The commitment construct considers the psychological, emotional, and economical connection between consumers and brands (Evanschitzky, Iyer, Plassmann, Niessing, & Meffert, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, Park, & Whan Park, 2005). Consumers committed to brands are more motivated to remain in the relationship, and to preserve their relationship actively. In the current study, we explore the effect of being negatively engaged with an online brand community on commitment proposing the following hypothesis:

H1: The dimensions of online community engagement are related to members' commitment in hate brand communities.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected in three negative or anti-brand online communities. The total of brands studied is three, namely: Starbucks, Apple, and McDonald's. The selection of those brands meet the following criteria, by order of importance: (1) the brand has to have an official or/unofficial online brand community that mostly displays negative engagement; (2) only consider online brand communities outside official brand pages or official social media platforms; (3) the brand's online communities should reveal activity (i.e., posts, comments, reviews); and (4), if possible, the total amount of brands in study should represent no less than two industries.

The questionnaire was prepared in English based on previously validated scales. The dimensions for online brand community engagement were adapted from Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone (2015), given its unique characteristics and applicability. Nevertheless, specific modifications for negative engagement were made that allowed for context and valence adaptation, although preserving the essence and reasoning of the original item in the transformation (from positive to negative). In order to measure commitment, we employed a three-item scale adapted from Johnson, Herrmann, & Huber (2006) (I want to continue my relationship with the brand community; the community is interested in my views and opinions about the brand; I give feedback about my evaluations of the brand, regularly).

Before launched, the questionnaire was pre-tested using 10 consumers, and only a few adjustments were made. After that, the questionnaire was made available in the brand communities contacted by the authors (permission to collect data was asked and the purpose explained). All scale-items were evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7). This questionnaire comprises also a socio-demographical part, and a participant description regarding number of hours spent on the internet per week, number of posts/reviews per week, and participant feeling toward the focal object (i.e., the brand) through the answer to the question: "What do you feel about the brand x?", which is measured on a scale from 0 (I hate it) to 10 (I love it).

RESULTS

A total of 300 fully completed and usable questionnaires (after excluding those with missing values, inconsistent responses or extreme multivariate outliers) were collected from hate brand communities (anti-brand communities) for the three brands in the study. Of the participants, 22.70% are female, and 77.30% are male. Most participants are between 21 and 30 years old (59.00%) (M=29.35, SD=7.66) and have several different nationalities, such as USA, UK, Canada, Australian, South Africa, India, Belgium, Philippines, Argentine (mainly from USA and UK). The average number of hours using Internet per week is 34.24 (SD=11.27). The average number of posts/reviews per week and per participant is 2.53 (SD=4.62).

Regarding the respondents' feelings toward the brand (measured from 0 - I hate it - to 10 - I love it - the average value is 0.91 (SD=1.10). Regarding data, we first analyse the assumptions for multiple linear regressions (such as normality, multicollinearity, autocorrelation) and then we conducted the regressions (using SPSS23). The hierarchical multiple regression is selected as it allows us to specify a fixed order of entry for variables to control for the effects of covariates or to test the effects of certain predictors independent of the influence of others.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables, as well as the convergent validity and reliability. The values of AVE (Average Variance Extracted) above 0.5 shows that most of the variance of each indicator (item) is explained by its own construct (Kleijnen, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2007). All Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.7.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and reliability

Construct				Cronbach
	Mean	SD	AVE	Alpha
Commitment	4.82	1.16	0.67	0.85
Brand influence	3.86	1.45	0.65	0.88
Helping	4.79	1.51	0.82	0.95
Rewards(hedonic)	4.68	1.52	0.63	0.94
Rewards(utilitarian)	3.71	1.52	0.64	0.95
Up-to-date information	3.60	1.35	0.86	0.96
Brand passion/Brand aversion	6.32	0.83	0.79	0.92
Connecting	3.62	1.03	0.57	0.80
Like-minded discussion	4.17	1.70	0.88	0.97
Seeking Assistance	4.94	1.47	0.78	0.93
Self-expression	5.31	1.17	0.80	0.94
Validation	4.72	1.53	0.88	0.97

Note. SD Standard deviation

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2 shows that Connecting, Like-minded discussion, Up-to-date information and Rewards(utilitarian) are not statistically significant while explaining online community engagement in hate brand communities. Brand influence (8.9%), Helping (13.4%) and Self-expression (14.9%) account for an extra 22.1% of the variance in Commitment. In fact, Brand influence ($\beta=.15, p<.001$), Helping ($\beta=.50, p<.001$) and Self-expression ($\beta=.40, p<.001$) are the most significant predictor of Commitment in hate communities.

Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Commitment

Construct	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	-0.83	0.48		1.00	0.38	
Brand Aversion	0.32	0.06	.23***	-0.06	0.05	-.04ns
Connecting	0.06	0.09	.05ns	-0.12	0.06	-.10ns

Like-minded discussion	0.10	0.06	.14ns	-0.02	0.05	-.04ns
Rewards(hedonic)	0.16	0.04	.21***	0.06	0.03	.08ns
Seeking Assistance	0.27	0.04	.34***	0.06	0.03	.07ns
Up-to-date information	0.06	0.04	.07ns	0.00	0.03	.00ns
Validation	0.14	0.06	.18*	-0.03	0.04	-.04ns
Rewards(utilitarian)	0.01	0.03	.02ns	-0.05	0.02	-.06ns
Brand influence				0.12	0.03	.15***
Helping				0.39	0.05	.50***
Self-expression				0.40	0.05	.40***
R ²		.53			.75	
Adjusted R ²		.52			.74	
ΔR ²		.53			.22	
ΔF		47.40***			98.80***	

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$, ns not significant

Source: Own elaboration

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The preliminary findings of the current study put in evidence the strength of the different dimensions of negative engagement on commitment to hate online brand communities, as the hypothesis are partially supported. In fact, we may find three different dimensions as the core triad driving participants to be committed with a hate brand community: Brand influence, Helping, and Self-expression.

Brand influence, or the degree to which a community member wants to influence the brand, appears to be important for those who hate the brand. Helping, somehow related to the previous, reveals that a community participant wants to help fellow community members by sharing knowledge and experience. These two dimensions are reinforced by Self-expression, as the hate community provides a forum where they can express true interests and opinions. Thus, the appealing to contribute to the knowledge about the brand (which could also help the brand to improve its products) seems to be the driving force to be committed to a hate community. The topic of social influence of brand communities has been developed in other studies (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2005; Dholakia et al., 2004) but, as far as we know, this is the first attempt to associate this dimension for those who participate in hate brand communities.

These dimensions of Brand aversion, Rewards(hedonic), Seeking Assistance and Validation are only significant when the above-mentioned dimensions are not considered. The results seem to express the importance given by participants in hate communities to ‘spread-the-word’ about the brand, and also to contribute to its improvements. Participants tend to be less committed to receive hedonic rewards or to be directly involved in brand aversion.

Moreover, Rewards(utilitarian) is not statistically significant to commit participants. These findings are in line with previous research from Baldus et al. (2015). Although further research is needed regarding this topic, this dimension is not statistically significant for unengagement. Online communities’ managers should not be concerned in providing utilitarian rewards (e.g., monetary rewards, deals or incentives, merchandise, or others). On the other hand, brand managers should be aware of comments made by participants in hate communities, in order to improve their products.

CONCLUSIONS

As far as authors know, the current study is the first attempt to explore negative engagement in online brand communities. Members of hate online communities want to spread their negative knowledge about a brand, but also contribute to help the brand to change their behaviour, or to improve their product features. In this study, we made the questionnaire available through real members of hate online brand communities, who anonymously provided their relationship towards unengagement and commitment. The questionnaire was created based on previously validated scales, and prepared in order to avoid bias. Even so, the study has limitations, and further studies are needed to confirm or refute our findings, namely in what concerns cultural differences. In fact, hate online brand communities' aggregate participants of different nationalities. That cultural difference may reveal different behaviours towards this research topic, but more data are needed to understand it.

References

- Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2008). When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions. *Journal of Business Research*, *61*(10), 1062–1075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.09.014>
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, *69*(3), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363>
- Baldus, B. J., Voorhees, C., & Calantone, R. (2015). Online brand community engagement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*(5), 978–985. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.09.035>
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing*, *76*(2), 1–16.
- Brodie, R. J., Hollebeek, L. D., Jurić, B., & Ilić, A. (2011). Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research. *Journal of Service Research*, *14*(3), 252–271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670511411703>
- Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(1), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029>
- Calder, B. J., Malthouse, E. C., & Schaedel, U. (2009). An Experimental Study of the Relationship between Online Engagement and Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *23*(4), 321–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2009.07.002>
- Chylinski, M., & Chu, A. (2010). Consumer cynicism: antecedents and consequences. *European Journal of Marketing*, *44*(6), 796–837. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561011032720>
- Dholakia, U. M., Bagozzi, R. P., & Pearo, L. K. (2004). A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *21*(3), 241–263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2003.12.004>

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., & Fahy, J. (2015). Social media engagement: A construct of positively and negatively valenced engagement behaviours. In R. J. Brodie, L. D. Hollebeek, & J. Conduit (Eds.), *Customer engagement: Contemporary issues and challenges*. London: Routledge.

Evanschitzky, H., Iyer, G. R., Plassmann, H., Niessing, J., & Meffert, H. (2006). The relative strength of affective commitment in securing loyalty in service relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(12), 1207–1213. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.08.005>

Grégoire, Y., & Fisher, R. J. (2008). Customer betrayal and retaliation: When your best customers become your worst enemies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(2), 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-007-0054-0>

Hollebeek, L. D., & Chen, T. (2014). Exploring positively- versus negatively-valenced brand engagement: a conceptual model. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(1), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2013-0332>

Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002>

Johnson, M. D., Herrmann, A., & Huber, F. (2006). The Evolution of Loyalty Intentions. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(2), 122–132. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.70.2.122>

Juric, B., Smith, S., & Wilks, G. (2016). Negative customer brand engagement: an overview of conceptual and blog-based findings. In R. J. Brodie, L. D. Hollebeek, & J. Conduit (Eds.), *Customer engagement: Contemporary issues and challenges* (pp. 272–286). London: Routledge.

Kleijnen, M., de Ruyter, K., & Wetzels, M. (2007). An assessment of value creation in mobile service delivery and the moderating role of time consciousness. *Journal of Retailing*, 83(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2006.10.004>

Lau, G. T., & Ng, S. (2001). Individual and Situational Factors Influencing Negative Word-of-Mouth Behaviour. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 18(3), 163. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-4490.2001.tb00253.x>

Madupu, V., & Cooley, D. O. (2010). Antecedents and consequences of online brand community participation: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 9(2), 127–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2010.503850>

Mattila, A. S. (2004). The impact of service failures on customer loyalty: The moderating role of affective commitment. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 15(2), 134–149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564230410532475>

Muniz, A. M., & O’Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412–432. <https://doi.org/10.1086/319618>

Relling, M., Schnittka, O., Sattler, H., & Johnen, M. (2016). Each can help or hurt: Negative and

positive word of mouth in social network brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 42–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.11.001>

Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., Park, C. W., & Whan Park, C. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(1), 77–91. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp1501_10

Zheng, X., Cheung, C. M. K., Lee, M. K. O., & Liang, L. (2015). Building brand loyalty through user engagement in online brand communities in social networking sites. *Information Technology & People*, 28(1), 90–106. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2013-0144>