

## The impact of brand communities based on social media on purchase brand intention: conceptual framework

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## **The impact of brand communities based on social media on purchase brand intention: conceptual framework**

### **Abstract:**

Relationship marketing, which emphasizes the creation and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers instead of individual transactions, has been presented as a competitive advantage and a strategic resource for companies (Webster, 1992). Digital marketing is becoming more efficient to attract customers which are more and more connected.

The creation of brand communities on social networks has a greater impact than traditional advertising. The digital technology has created the new interactive media.

This new reality of the business environment has led a number to develop new practices to focus more on customers which are more powerful and can easily change their choices, for that, companies should develop their community marketing practices through the development.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the impact of the creation and development of brand communities-based on social media-on business performances, this virtual relationship between the consumer and the product, the brand, the company, and the different consumers, can lead to a strong commitment of the customers towards these brand communities, this commitment is eventually translated by brand purchase intentions.

This research project is based on a theoretical research to extract the most important theories and constructs that explain brand community behavior on social media, and an exploratory study among Moroccan Internet users in order to test the conformity of the theoretical model with Moroccan Internet users.

Through this research process, we prove that social media constitute a platform to engage more customers and consequently create purchase intentions for companies. As a result of this project, we highlight the practices to develop the companies' brand communities on social media to drive business performance.

**Keywords:** Brand community, Digital Marketing, Consumer, Social media, Commitment, Intention, Purchase.

**JEL Classification:** M31,

**Paper type:** Empirical research

## 1. Introduction

Digital technology is changing inter-market relations, customers themselves are being reprogrammed (Trusov & al.; 2009). The cyber consumer clearly illustrates the need for new marketing approaches to meet their changing needs. Digital marketing emerge to attract and satisfy the needs of those cyber consumers, including all digital tools, from websites to blogs, social networks, computers, tablets or smartphones.

Attracted by the large number of users, companies have created and developed brand communities on social media, that's offering both firms and customers new ways to engage with each other. Whilst companies aim at engaging more customers, influencing members' perceptions of the brand, disseminating information, and learning from and about customers (Algesheimer & al., 2005), customers gain value through the variety of practices that they perform online (Schau & al., 2009).

According to the customer-centric model of the brand and social media community defined by McAlexander & al (2000), a community is composed of its entities and the relationships between them". Thus, a brand community based on social media includes entities such as the brand, product, customer, company, and social media, which provides the platform for that community to exist. Other models developed on this basis, treat brand communities according to different study contexts, the model we are going to propose is adapted to the Moroccan context to deal with the issue of brand communities on social networks and purchase intentions.

The main issue of our research is to understand how companies can reap benefits of social media, by creating and developing virtual brand communities. More concretely, we seek to demonstrate how the different links created between brand community's members, between these members and the brand, or between these members and other members can be translated into brand purchase intent.

Thus, we explore the impact of brand communities based on social media, creating a significant competitive advantage for companies. For that purpose our major research problem is: Does the creation and improvement of brand communities based on social media lead to brand purchasing intentions?

In order to answer our main question of our research, our paper identifies sociological, psychological and marketing theories that explain the concept of "brand communities" and customer behavior on social media, hypothesis development and proposition of the conceptual framework, the research methodology adopted for the empirical part, the exploratory study findings, and the latest section to discuss exploratory study results.

## 2. Theoretical framework

To answer our issue, we draw on a large and diversify theoretical study to set up a model research. Thus, we will set out different variables and their basic theories that form our proposed model.

We will present an overview of marketing, sociological and psychological theories that we studied to well understand motivations and behavior of brand communities' members based on social media.

### 2.1. Social identity theory

This theory asserts that in addition to personal identity, the concept of self is also composed of social identity (Tajfel & Turner 1985), the theory of social identity is considered a theory of intergroup relationships. It focuses on relations between social groups rather than on relations between individuals and groups belonging to them. Social identification is then the perception of belonging to a group with the objective of identifying with that group. Identification allows the individual to participate in achievements beyond his or her capabilities (Kartz & Kahn

1966). Based on this reasoning, organizational identification is a specific form of social identification of which the person defines himself in terms of membership in a particular organization. (Hollebeek & al, 2020) findings inside the key role of the brand identification role to engage consumers.

## 2.2. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

This theory is theorized by researchers such as Russel Belk, Craig Thompson Eric J Arnould (1990)<sup>1</sup>. The fundamental principle of this theory is that consumption is not a purely commercial phenomenon but also a cultural one with its myths, rites and narratives. Thus Individuals use consumption as a factor of social integration; therefore they will develop attachment relationships with products and brands. More broadly, consumer objects serve as a vector for the communication of signs and symbols between individuals. Consumer societies have an anthropological significance. They offer their members structures through which they can exchange and produce meaning together. This social integration is represented as a consumer brand engagement. Based on an online brand community study (Yuan D & al, 2020) fostering customer engagement in the brand's online communities can offset the negative consequences of brand scandals on social media.

## 2.3. Theory of Sense of community

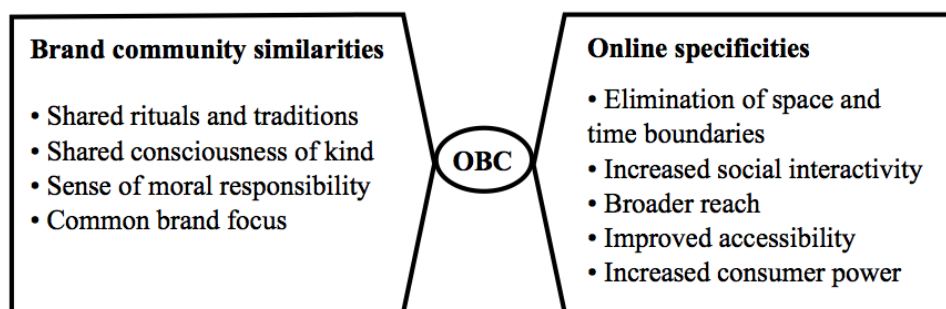
According to the concept of the brand community (Muniz, M. A. & O'Guinn, C. T): A brand community is not considered as a geographically attached community, but rather based on a structured set of social relations among brand admirers. Moving beyond a common brand interest, three practices are undertaken to define this sense of community: assessing member similarity, respect towards the community, and member participation desire to brand community attitudes (M Hook, & al, 2020).

This is indeed a concept founded in both classical and contemporary sociology as well as in marketing precisely the research of consumer behavior.

### 2.3.1 Online Brand Communities OBC

OBCs share a number of characteristics with offline brand communities, but also have specific characteristics related to their virtual nature.

**Table 1:** *OBC similarities with brand communities and online specificities*



**Source :** *Dessart, Laurence, consumer engagement in online brand communities, 2015.*

## 2.4. Social pratique theory

The “theory of practice” is a social theory that has been sketched by authors such as Bourdieu (1960), Giddens, Taylor, Foucault and others.

Schatzki (1996) underscores how practices create and perpetuate both collective identity and individuality. To engage in practices, people must develop shared understandings and

<sup>1</sup> Cited by: Arnould E J., Thompson C J.

demonstrate competencies that reinforce social order while allowing them to distinguish themselves through adroit performances.

Following Schatzki (1996), Warde (2005, p. 137) asserts that consuming is “a moment in almost every practice.” Thus, consumption follows from practices, rather than vice versa, because practices dictate what is essential for the competent and meaningful engagement of social actors in a particular consumption setting (Schatzki 1996).

A focus on practices emphasizes the routine, collective, and conventional nature of consumption while accommodating the internally differentiated (across participants and groups; see our subsequent discussion of staking) and dynamic nature of consumption (see Cheng & al. 2007). As Warde further observes, “practices” are the principle steering device of consumption because they are the primary source of desire, knowledge and judgment... recruitment to a practice becomes a principal explanatory issue.

The theory of social practice leads to the process of collective value creation between brand community members (Schau H J, & al), consumers are active creators of value. Traditionally, companies have produced products and services while media have acted as messengers. Today, value is created collectively by many different stakeholders, for example via social media and brand communities (Alexander & al. 2018; Hook & al. 2018).

## **2.5. Planned Behavior Theory**

Setting up by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein, the theory shown that the success of social behavior depends on a person’s degree of control over internal and external factors that may interfere with the performance of a planned action. When factors exert a negligible influence on the successful performance of behavior and the possibility of failure is not an important factor, the behavior can be said to be under voluntary control; the only and immediate determinant of such behavior is the intention to execute it.

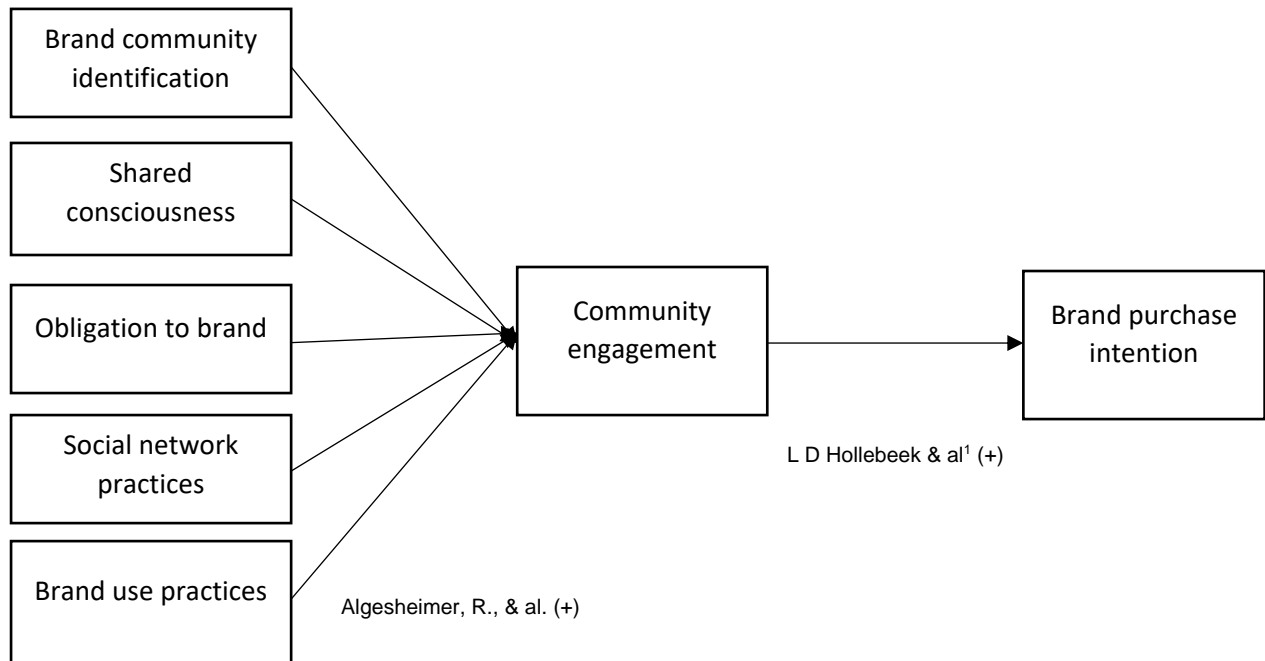
## **3. Hypotheses development and conceptual framework.**

### **3.1. Conceptual framework**

Our research model is an outcome of a wide literature review composed of psychology, sociology and marketing theories.

The aim of our proposed model is to find the logical process to adopt by companies on social media in order to achieve more purchase intentions using their brand communities based on social media, which are used more and more rather than traditional communication supports.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



*Source:* Author's processing

### 3.2. Hypothesis development

#### 3.2.1 Relation between community engagement practices and brand purchase intention.

The purchase intentions and use of the brand is a key marker of community engagement.

Draw on the theory of planned behavior there is a direct relationship between intentions and behavior, In conclusion, purchase intention leads to actual purchase action, which is the ultimate aim of companies.

We expect that members' engagement to the brand community has a positive impact on their brand loyalty, therefore this engagement of brand community should impact the consumers brand behavior, in particular, their purchase intentions.

**Hypothesis 1: Community engagement practices lead to brand purchase intention.**

#### 3.2.2 Relation between brand community identification and community engagement.

Based on the theory of social identity, community engagement is a results from the overlaps that members perceive between their own unique self-identity and their group-based identity; group participation is viewed as an expression of personal values (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003).

Also the theory of consumer culture (CCT) considers that individuals use consumption as a factor of social integration.

In our research model, identifying with the brand community has positive influences on community engagement, which is defined as the consumer's motivation to interact and cooperate with community members. Community engagement suggests that members are interested in helping other members, participating in joint activities, and otherwise acting volitionally in ways that the community enhances its value for themselves and others.

**Hypothesis 2: Stronger brand community identification leads to greater community engagement.**

### **3.2.3 Relation between shared consciousness among members and community engagement.**

Drawing on the theory of the sense of community, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) identify three essential components or markers of a community: shared consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility or obligations to society.

For Gusfield (1978), "consciousness of kind" is one important element in a community which is the shared intrinsic connection felt among community members. It reflects a collective sense of difference from other members not in the same community.

Weber (1978) describes it as a shared knowing of belonging. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) found that members of a community felt a strong connection with one another and they termed it as "they sort of know each other" even if they have never met. This is the central facet of a brand community. More importantly, these feelings of oneness exceed geographical boundaries which show that members felt belongingness to a large imagined community. Especially the role of computer-mediated communications such as the World Wide Web is very important.

**Hypothesis 3: The Shared consciousness among members influences positively the community engagement.**

### **3.2.4 Relation between obligation to brand community and community engagement.**

This community marker is a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole as well as to its members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moral responsibility has two main functions in communities which make it very important. First it supports community survival through reasoning and recognizing what is right and what is wrong in the community, which results in integrating and retaining members. Second, moral responsibility makes members seek out help from each other in their consumption behavior by disseminating information. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and McAlexander & al. (2002) found that moral responsibility manifested itself in their communities. Furthermore, reasoning and disseminating information are highly significant in computer-mediated environments in which capabilities of media support sharing information.

**Hypothesis 4: Obligation to brand community influences positively the community engagement.**

### **3.2.5 Relation between social network practices and community engagement.**

Draw on the theory of social practice, the process of collective value creation between brand community members was handled by Hope Jensen Schau, Albert M. Muñoz Jr., and Eric J. Arnould.

These practices focus on creating, enhancing, and sustaining ties among brand community members (Schau & al., 2009). Welcoming, empathizing and governing are different social networking practices, which enhance similarities among members and homogeneity of brand practices as welcoming, empathizing and governing.

**Hypothesis 5: Social network practices have positive effects on community engagement.**

### **3.2.6 Relation between brand use practices and community engagement.**

This relates to the member's tendency to help other members with newer, improved and enhanced ways to use the focal brand. These basically include the information given by one member to another with regards to customizing the product for better applicability to their needs. They also relate to feelings of one member towards helping or assisting other members who are relatively new to the community. Brand use practices include grooming, customizing,

and commoditizing. All these activities results in enhanced uses of the focal brand (Schau & al., 2009).

The stronger the feelings of shared consciousness, and obligations to society, the more members of a community and the company feel united, close to each other and motivated which enhance collaborative value creation practices.

In fact, value creation practices enhanced by capabilities of social media affect brand trust which increase brand loyalty. Thus, brand trust would have a mediating role. All value creation practices increase the level of interaction between consumers and the product, the brand, other customers and marketers, all of which are elements of a brand community (McAlexander & al., 2002 engagement also involves a “calculative process” (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 37) related to the value people receive from their relationships. So if people realize the utilitarian and hedonic values of their brand, their engagement would increase. In brand communities and through value creation practices, people develop close relationships and draw values from their long-term interactions, which make them, trust and love the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Zhou & al., 2011).

Based on these arguments we hypothesize the last two hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 6: Brand-use practices have positive effects on community engagement.**

## **4. Research methodologies**

### **4.1. Data and methodologies**

The qualitative approach allows for a global representation and interpretation of the problem by taking into consideration the multiple relationships with the environment (Gavard-Perret and al., 2008; Baumard & Ibert, 2014).

Qualitative studies have the property of studying phenomena in their ordinary framework (Geertz, 1973). It allows to explore the research question, to clarify the theoretical concepts and to anticipate the possible problems of the field study (Baumard & Ibert, 2014).

In order to explore the brand communities based on social media, we adopt a positive epistemological position.

The present article, concern the exploratory study with a qualitative approach that is generally a prerequisite for any empirical study. The aim is to test on a specific market the validity of different concepts (variables) outcomes from literature review to construct a homogeneous research model.

There are different methods of data collection in qualitative studies (individual interviews, group interviews, observation, etc.). In our research, we adopt the method of individual semi-structured interviews, these are structured and guided, while leaving some freedom to the respondent (Baumard & al, 2014). All interviews are recorded and transcribed for processing (Baumard & al, 2014).

In qualitative semi-structured surveys, the sample, is generally limited, so we chose a varied sample (Evrard & al, 2009). Our study sample (Appendix 2) is composed of members of different brand communities on social media, representing the ages and profiles that compose these brand communities on social media. The interview was conducted in January 2019. The interviews are analyzed on N'VIVO 11.4 software.



**Table 2:** Sample Descriptive Statistics.

<b>Gender</b>	
Men	30%
Women	70%
<b>Age</b>	
15-25	40%
25-35	50%
35 and more	10%

*Source:* Author's processing

Our sample is composed of members from the 3 generations; generation X, millennials, and generation Z to represent different people who are more connected, 90% of them are Gen Z which is more present on social media.

#### 4.2. The Interview guide

Using the following semi directive questions, we tried to identify during interviews different items fits into our literature review, in order to choose ones that are more adapted to our context and our issue. Through the semi-directive questions, we evaluate the perception of the interviewers as a member of brand communities of each variable.

**Table 3:** the interview guide

<b>Theories</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Semi directive question</b>
Social identity theory	Brand community Identification	How do you identify with this brand community?
Theory of sense of community	Shared consciousness	Do you feel differently towards members of this brand community / compared to other members?
	Obligations to brand community	Are members of this community having obligations to each other?
Social identity theory	Community engagement	What are your motivations to be a member of this brand community?
Consumer culture theory (CCT)		
Social pratique theory		
Social practice theory	Impression managing	Do the members of the brand community maintain in actions to ensure a good impression of the brand on and off line?
	Social network practices	Are community members practice some practices to support other members membership in the community?
	Brand use practices	Are your preferring brand post some posts on social media that facilitate use of brand products?
Planned behavior theory	Purchase intention of brand	Do you will purchase this brand in the future?

The theory of reasoned action	Brand loyalty	Are you loyal to this brand?
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*Source: Author's processing*

## 5. Findings of the research

### 5.1. Descriptive result

The first results reveal that all the variables we have selected from the theoretical study are positively present in communities brand members' behavior. Thus, the proposed Conceptual Framework is adapted to our research context (Moroccan Internet users).

The choice of variables depends on the scores obtained, for example: the purchase intention with a score of 70% as a variable to explain rather than the loyalty with a score of 50%.

**Table 4:** *positive responses*

Variable	Positive responses
Brand community Identification	100%
Shared consciousness	80%
Obligation to brand community	50%
Community engagement	80%
Impression managing	60%
Social network practices	60%
Brand use practices	80%
Purchase intention of brand	70%
Brand loyalty	50%

*Source: Author's processing*

Noted that social network context is a dynamic one, it exceeds by far its basic objectives of communicating and sharing between particulars, and are nowadays the preferred platform for companies to develop their business, because they attract more and more of web surfers. Digital marketing is becoming increasingly important to innovate new tricks in order to develop companies' visibility and have as many followers as possible.

The interviews allowed us to maintain variables, which are perceived and applied by interviewers in their recurring behavior on social media.

### 5.2. Exploratory study

The content analysis of our study consists, generally, in counting the units of analysis, a statistical analysis, and an interpretation of the results based on the statistical analyses and the verbatim (Blanc and al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 2003).

Content analysis can be performed using the following steps (Blanc & al., 2014):

- Reading the transcribed text;
- Breaking down the text into units (words, phrases of similar meaning, etc.);
- Development of coding and counting rules;
- Statistical analysis: counting of units, calculation of frequencies, etc;
- Qualitative analysis (verbatim);
- Interpretation and conclusion.

The content analysis of our study via N'VIVO 11.4 software allowed the collection, organization and analysis of the interviews. A mixed method was used, i.e. we established a reading chart based on the literature review, and a qualitative analysis based on selected verbatim.

**Table 5:** *the interview findings*

Variables	Verbatims
Brand community Identification	<p>All the interviewers follow specific brands on social media, for different reasons, and they consider themselves in part of those communities.</p> <p><i>“It allows me to belong to a community that share same passions as me ” Wissal, 15 years</i></p>
Shared consciousness	<p>Shared consciousness is perceived by a lot of interviewers :</p> <p><i>“We are all members who love this brand, each one felicitates himself of his realization” Noura, 40 years.</i></p>
Obligation to brand community	<p>The responsibility has been considered as obligation toward other community members, or toward the brand itself, or toward members that they know outside virtual media.</p> <p><i>“ I have an obligation toward the brand that I wear, I have to show it off ” Youssef, 27 years</i></p> <p><i>“ If I’m not satisfied about a product, I feel the obligation to share my opinion with members on social media or in real life ” Soukaina , 25 years</i></p>
Community engagement	<p>The engagement is felt toward a community as long as it provided a value to their members; we talk especially of attraction than engagement.</p> <p><i>“What attracts me toward the community is its interesting ” Youssef, 27years</i></p> <p><i>“What interest me is the coupon codes, competitions..that post the brand to make purchases” Leila, 26 years</i></p>
Social network practices	<p>There is no special treatment received by members to facilitate their membership to brand on social media either by other members or by the brand.</p> <p><i>“these practices concern especially the quality of brand’ s posts on social media ” Soukaina, 25 years</i></p> <p><i>“ it’s up to members to do efforts to look for information into social media” Nohaila, 21 years</i></p>
Brand use practices	<p>Brands are using social media to facilitate and encourage members to use their products; these practices know a lot of innovation to attract more users.</p> <p><i>“the brand post a lot of tutorials and videos by youtubers that make us want to use and purchase its products” Leila , 26 years</i></p>

	<i>"I use this brand products on my skin thanks to the positive opinions shared by members community on social media"</i> <i>Soukaina, 25 years</i>
Purchase intention of brand	The objective is to test whether the various variables above encourage members' intention to purchase a brand.  <i>"there is coupons codes proposed on social media, it's interesting for me to make online purchases"</i> <i>Leila, 26 years</i>

**Source:** Author's processing

## 6. Discussion

The results of the exploratory study revealed the importance of certain variables in relation to others in explaining the behavior of Internet users in brand communities. These variables integrated in the conceptual framework that we have adopted are adapted to our study context.

The analysis of the results prove that consumers are no longer a simple passive actors in the commercial exchange process. They play an increasingly active role in the co-creation of content, product design, and promotional messages (Berthon, Pitt, McCarthy, & Kates, 2007).

The development of brand communities by companies is proving efficient in engaging consumers and increasing purchase intentions for brands.

### 6.1. Purchase intention of brand

We seek to express by the variable to be explained "purchase intention", the conviction of the consumer to carry out a purchase behavior of such a brand compared to its competitors, these intentions are supposed to come from the cognitive and affective engagement result from the identification and the interaction of the Internet user with the brand community on social media, the aim is to make of social media and effective space of conversion for the brands.

### 6.2. Community engagement

The concept of brand community engagement goes beyond community participation; it is a process of collaboration with partners who share common goals and interests. Indeed, a lot of researchers believe that "being connected", promotes and builds social associations (Dertouros, 1997). In particular, people who use virtual communities to explore their interests are found to be more socially engaged (Shah, Holbert, & Kwak, 1999). Thus we believe that communities in the context of social media have the capacity to foster this engagement.

### 6.3. Brand community identification

Consumer-Company identification (C-C identification) is considered a primary psychological substrate for a deep committed and meaningful type of relationship, which marketers are increasingly seeking to establish with their consumers.

The central assertion of C.B. Bhattacharya & Sankar Sen is that some of the strongest corporate-consumer relationships are based on consumers' identification with companies that help them achieve the satisfaction of one or more self-defined needs (Algesheimer, R & al, 2005). For consumers, such active, selective, and voluntary identification, involves their engagement in favorable behaviors regarding the firm. Support for this confirmation comes from research involving organizations as key components of people's social identity.

### 6.4. Shared Consciousness

Collective consciousness is a shared knowledge of belonging beyond perceived common attitudes or similarities. It is a measure of the community. It is a way of thinking that goes

beyond common attitudes or perceptions and reflects a collective sense of difference from other members who are not part of the same community. Weber (1978) describes it as a shared knowledge of belonging. This sense of belonging transcends geographic boundaries that demonstrate that members feel a sense of belonging to a large imagined community.

### **6.5. Obligation to brand community**

Another marker of brand community is moral responsibility, which is a sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole and its members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Members seek positive support in brand communities built on social Medias and believe that the primary role of social media is to connect people and facilitate the sharing of information and meaning.

### **6.6. Social network practices and brand use practices**

These variables are related to the tendency of members to help other members with recent and improved methods of using the brand concerned. It mainly includes the information provided by one member to another regarding the customization of the product for better applicability to their needs.

It is also related to a member's feelings of help and assistance to other members who are relatively new to the community. Brand use practices include personalization and simplification. All of these activities enhance focal brand use (Schau & al. 2009).

Social media could support these activities by keeping in touch with brand followers and other members and facilitating their exchange of information and resources, thereby enhancing these value-creating practices.

## **7. Conclusion**

Research on social media broadly classifies consumer activities as either contribution (posting) or consumption (lurking or observing) activities (Schlosser, 2005; Shao, 2009); it suggests that most users consume rather than contribute to social media (Jones & al., 2004). For example, about 53 percent of active social media users follow a brand (Nielsen, 2009) rather than actively contribute content about the brand. A minority of users usually accounts for a large proportion of generated content (Bughin, 2007).

Social media offer opportunities to strengthen customer relationships by encouraging customers to engage with their brands by interacting with each other and by fostering online brand or user communities, which can strengthen brand equity and increase CLV (customer lifetime value).

For example, Trusov & al. (2009) have shown that referrals on social network sites have substantially longer carry-over effects than traditional advertising and produce substantially higher response elasticity.

Social media usage behavior is developing and transforming at a rapid rate. Hence, our proposed conceptual frameworks (figure 6) drawn up our literature review and exploratory study will highlight the importance of brand communities on social networks to attract more buyers and increase companies' sales in a very competitive context.

## Appendices

**Appendix 1 :** Respondents' table.

interviewees	Age	Professional position	Date	Duration of the interview
Intervwied 1	25	Financial analyst	06/01/2019	18 min
Intervwied 2	22	Student	06/01/2019	11 min
Intervwied 3	24	Entrepreneur (event agency)	11/01/2019	10 min
Intervwied 4	22	Student	04/01/2019	10 min
Intervwied 5	41	Marketing manager	10/01/2019	20 min
Intervwied 6	16	Student	05/01/2019	8 min
Intervwied 7	24	Engineer	06/01/2019	13 min
Intervwied 8	22	Student	06/01/2019	14 min
Intervwied 9	27	Communication manager	09/01/2019	9 min
Intervwied 10	24	Financial analyst	05/01/2019	15 min

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