

Consumers' Social Media Brand Behaviors: Uncovering Underlying Motivators and Deriving
Meaningful Consumer Segments

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Abstract

The current research identifies the range of social media brand behaviors (i.e., brand touch points) that consumers can exhibit on social media, and subsequently queries a representative sample of consumers with regard to such behaviors. The analysis reveals four underlying motivators for consumers' social media behaviors, including brand tacit engagement, brand exhibiting, brand patronizing and brand deal seeking. These motivators are used to derive meaningful consumer segments identified as content seekers, observers, deal hunters, hard-core fans, posers and respectively patronizers, and described through co-variates including brand loyalty, brand attachment and social media usage. The findings are critically discussed in the light of literature on the needs that consumers meet through brand consumption and on the types of relationships consumers build with brands. Not least, the managerial implications of the current findings are debated.

Keywords: Social media, brand behaviors, behavioral motivators, consumer segments, consumer-brand relationships

The social media phenomenon has attracted a great degree of research interest (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2009; Back, Stopfer, Vazire, Gaddis, Schmukle, Egloff, & Gosling, 2010). Academic research in marketing makes no exception (e.g., Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009), a reflection of the fact that people nowadays spend significant time on social media and undertake a high volume of consumption-related acts in this environment. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest or Google + allow consumers to share their lifestyle and consumption choices with online peers, to express their preferences, to communicate their brand affiliation and to stay in touch with commercial organizations.

Importantly, social media has redefined how consumers relate to and behave towards brands. Social media is a space where consumers can use brands to represent and broadcast themselves like never before (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), where deep relationships can be built with brands that become part of an ongoing conversation (Sashittal, Hodis, & Sriramachandramurthy, 2014), or where people can overtly declare their brand endorsement through liking or following (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Existing marketing and consumer research has delved into topics including how brands should communicate on social media to garner consumer engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2014; Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2013; Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013), or what drives consumers' behavior toward brands on social media (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Min-Sook, Jong-Kuk, & Yong, 2015).

The current work provides new insights into consumers' behavior on social media. First, inspired by work advocating a consumer journey view (cf., Edelman, 2010; Macdonald, Wilson, & Konus, 2012; Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014), it identifies the range of brand behaviors that consumers can exhibit on social media. Subsequently, it surveys consumers' actual brand behaviors ("touch points") on social media with respect to their preferred brand

of apparel and analyses these to understand the underlying motivators of consumers' engagement with brands in this environment. This further allows the identification of consumer segments, which are characterized and discussed in terms of covariates including brand loyalty, brand attachment, social media usage and demographic characteristics.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first one to take a 360° view of how consumers engage with brands on social media. Its findings on the motivators of social media brand behaviors and on resulted consumer segments are critically related to insights on the needs catered for through brand consumption (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011) and on the types of relationships consumers build with brands (Fournier, 1998; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). Not least, even though existing research provides segmentations of consumers in a social media context (e.g., Campbell, Ferraro, & Sands 2014; Foster, West, & Francescucci, 2011; Min-Sook, Jong-Kuk, & Yong, 2015), this study is the first one to classify consumers based on the types of interactions or touch points with brands on social media.

The paper progresses as follows: it commences with a discussion of the research done to date in marketing regarding the social media environment, including its particularities, how marketing activities should be conducted and how consumers behave in this space. It then draws on extant research, industry reports and common practice to derive a range of brand behaviors that consumers can exhibit on social media. Subsequently, it presents a survey that queried a representative sample of consumers about the extent to which they undertake such behaviors in relation to their favorite brand of apparel. The data analysis allows the identification of underlying motivators for brand behaviors on social media, which are further used to identify consumer segments based on their social media brand behaviors. The conclusion presents a debate of the findings in light of critical branding literature, and

discusses the work's contribution, its limitations, as well as the avenues it opens for future research.

MARKETING RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The last 10 years have seen a significant amount of marketing research being dedicated to the social media phenomenon. Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009) show that the word of mouth on social networking sites can be significantly more powerful than traditional marketing communication for reaching important marketing goals such as attracting new customers. Their evidence shows not only that the effect of social media word of mouth on new customer acquisition is stronger than that of traditional marketing communication, but also longer lasting. By looking at the case of movie launches, Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, and Feldhaus (2015) provide evidence that word of mouth on microblogging websites such as Twitter has an important effect on early product adoption because of the immediate dissemination of post-purchase quality evaluations. They also find that the effect of Twitter messaging on early product adoption exhibits a negativity bias, meaning that the effect of negative tweets dominates the effect of positive tweets. Schweidel and Moe (2014) look at marketers' usage of social media as an important source of consumer insight ("social media listening"). They demonstrate that, in deriving brand sentiment metrics, marketers should critically take into account the social media venue or channel that marketers are monitoring. In addition, they show that their measure of brand sentiment that takes into account the social media venue is a better predictor of brand stock prices and of off-line brand tracker measures than other available social media metrics.

Attention has also been dedicated to how marketers should tailor their content on social media. Ashley and Tuten (2015) perform a content analysis of the creative strategies

employed on social media by a sample of leading brands, and draw conclusions regarding which social media channels and which message strategies trigger the highest level of consumer engagement. Their study reveals the importance of providing consumers with frequent updates and with incentives for participation. They also find that, whereas most brand content on social media is of a functional nature, the messaging strategies most strongly associated with consumer engagement were of an experiential (i.e., appealing to senses), user image (i.e., bolstering consumer image) or interactive (i.e., consumers directly involving with the campaign) nature. Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2013) perform an analysis of the Facebook wall posts of 98 global brands with a view to determining what content leads to the most brand engagement measured as likes, shares and comments. They find that among the most engaging posts are those that use pictures, those that are topical, those that “humanize” the brand or those that are humorous. They also recommend refraining from posts that diminish consumer engagement, including lengthy written posts, posts related to social causes or posts inviting participation in brand contests. Similar studies have been conducted for the case of Twitter content. The same Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2012) identify characteristics of brand tweets that get retweeted, including brevity, messages that present business accomplishments or that overly grab attention (e.g., WOW!, LOOK!). Based on the analysis, the authors also recommend avoiding tweets that ask questions, that include hashtags or that include links. The work of Araujo, Neijens, and Vliegenthart (2015) concludes that messages that get retweeted are rich in informational content (e.g., product content, links to brand’s website, other social media, photos and videos), and that whereas emotional content does not in itself lead to retweeting, it strengthens the effect of information content when used in the same message.

Understanding consumer social media behavior

Existing research sheds light on several important aspects regarding consumers' behavior on social media. Consumers discuss many different brands and products in day-to-day life, but Berger and Iyengar (2013) show that written communication including the one on social media makes consumers discuss more interesting products and brands compared to oral communication. This happens as written communication allows consumers more opportunity to construct and refine what they say, and also allows them to mention more interesting things for the purpose of self-enhancement. Using Twitter as a social media environment, Liye, Baohong, and Kekre (2015) debate that consumers' company-related compliments and complaints are a function of both their underlying relationships with the company and of other factors such as redress seeking. One of their findings is that consumers' messages on social media display a pattern of "error-correction", where consumers compliment or complain as a result of others' voicing opposite opinions. Naylor, Lamberton, and West (2012) look into consumers' usage of social media to learn about brands, and find that the decision that brands make to reveal or not the demographic characteristics of their current supporters can significantly influence a target consumer's brand evaluation and purchase intention. Specifically, consumer responses when brand supporter profiles are absent or ambiguous are just as positive as the case when the brand displays the identity of supporters the consumer perceives as similar to the self, and significantly better compared to the case when the brand displays the identity of supporters the consumer perceives as dissimilar. The authors show however that keeping brand supporter identity ambiguous should be avoided when the brand is evaluated in the presence of competitors rather than in isolation (cf., Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012).

Several studies look into the motivation for consumer behavior on social media. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) rely on multiple qualitative research methods to investigate

the issue of whether consumers use brands on Facebook to represent their actual selves or their ideal selves. They find that the veridical representation of the self (i.e., actual self) through brands is seldom done, and that consumers often integrate their actual and their ideal self through different brands that they relate to on Facebook. These findings diverge from previous ones in psychology (Back et al., 2010) according to which consumers represent their actual rather than their ideal self through Facebook profiles. Toubia and Stephen (2013) look at consumers' motivation for contributing content to Twitter, and find evidence for consumers being both intrinsically-motivated (i.e., interested in communicating information) and image-motivated (i.e., interested in how others see them), with the latter motivation being often more important.

Kabadayi and Price (2014) discuss about consumers displaying two interaction tendencies on social media, namely broadcasting and communicating, where "broadcasting" entails consumers promoting themselves to a large network of people and "communicating" involves more focused and less visible conversations with a restricted number of closer contacts. They find that these tendencies are significantly related to personality traits including extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience, and that in turn broadcasting and communicating predict Facebook behaviors such as liking brands and commenting on brand's fan pages. Further, Saenger, Thomas, and Johnson (2013) propose an actual scale for consumption-focused self-expression word of mouth, which they define as communication about one's consumption activities for the purpose of expressing one's self-concept and attracting attention to oneself. They show that the developed scale significantly predicts the quantity of consumption-related word of mouth on social media, as well as the content of this communication (e.g., the number of brand mentions or the mentions of hedonic products).

To offer insights into how to address different consumer profiles on social media, segmentations are proposed by different scholars. Foster, West, and Francescucci (2011)

forward a segmentation of consumers based on their general social media behaviors (i.e., not necessarily consumption-specific). Based on the dimensions of interactive participation and information needs, they distinguish between social media technology mavens (high interactive participation, high information needs), information seekers (low interactive participation, high information needs), socializers (high interactive participation, low information needs) and minimally involved (low interactive participation, low information needs). Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, and Sashittal (2015) use qualitative research to identify four segments in terms of the general Facebook behaviors of content creation (e.g., status update posts, posting pictures and comments) and content consumption (e.g., browsing and liking posted content): devotees (high consumption, high creation), connection seekers (high consumption, low creation), attention seekers (low consumption, high creation) and entertainment chasers (low consumption, low creation).

Min-Sook, Jong-Kuk, and Yong (2015) focus on social media users' general tendencies for social surveillance (i.e., the degree of tracking others' behaviors on social media) and self-surveillance (i.e., the degree of controlling one's own behavior on social media), and distinguish between pass-along users (high on both types of surveillance), introvert users (high only on self-surveillance), versatile users (high only on social surveillance), and self-expression users (low on both types of surveillance). They also characterize these segments in terms of product/company related information sharing, social presence, purchase intentions toward offers on social media and the emotionality of shopping on social media. Not least, Campbell, Ferraro, and Sands (2014) deal less with what motivates consumers to socially interact online, and more with how consumers respond to social media marketing in terms of brand engagement, purchase intention and generating word of mouth. They arrive at five segments characterized as Passive, Talkers, Hesitant, Active, and Averse. The authors describe and analyze these segments in terms of covariates including information

motivation, convenience motivation and entertainment motivation alongside socio-demographic variables.

Building on the research insights highlighted above, the following section positions the current study and discusses how this study advances the work on consumer behavior on social media.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Looking at the current research in the aggregate, it becomes apparent that existing studies focus on a range of brand-related behaviors that consumers undertake in the social media space. Several studies look at how consumers react to brand messages on social media in terms of sharing brand messages (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2012, 2013; Araujo, Neijens, & Vliegenthart, 2015; Min-Sook, Jong-Kuk, & Yong, 2015), liking brand messages (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2012, 2013; Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015) and commenting on brand messages (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2012, 2013; Liye, Baohong, & Kekre, 2015; Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Other behaviors that have been investigated are posting brand-related content (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015; Toubia & Stephen, 2013), liking a brand (Kabadayi & Price, 2014) and browsing brand content (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015).

Consumers exhibit however other ways in which they behave towards brands and interact with them on social media, as revealed by common practice and industry reports. Bosker (2013) cites research according to which consumers commonly look for brand discounts and coupons, read updates from liked brands, engage in brand contests or research brands on social media. Dyer (2011) quotes another industry report showing that receiving brand discounts and promotions, learning brand information and accessing brand content are

prevalent behaviors on social media, and even more so than sharing brand messages or posting about the brand. A report by the Internet Advertising Bureau (2010) discusses consumers' visiting brand pages, getting brand information and getting special offers. However, existing academic research has considered such brand behaviors (i.e., touch points) to a lesser extent.

This work aims to survey a comprehensive range of brand-related behaviors on social media in order to understand the motivators behind such behaviors and determine how such motivators may discriminate between consumers. Taking a holistic perspective on how consumers behave on social media is guided by work advocating the importance of understanding consumers' journeys (e.g., MacDonald, Wilson, & Konus, 2012; Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson 2015; Solomon, Ashman & Wolny, 2015; Edelman, 2010; Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014; Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2009), where the consumer/customer journey is "a description of customer experience where different touch points characterize customers' interaction with a brand, product, or service of interest" (Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014, p. 319). Drawing on such a rationale, the current study looks at the multitude of possible touch points consumers can have with a brand in the social media environment. The behaviors listed below are informed by existing research, industry reports and common practice. As this work is exploring consumers' social media brand behaviors, the list below only represents those brand behaviors that are actively initiated by consumers, and leaves out those brand touch points that consumers are incidentally exposed to (e.g., incidentally attending to a brand-related conversation on social media or being exposed to a brand ad). Inspired by Liye, Baohong, and Kekre (2015), the list also discriminates between making negative vs. positive brand comments:

- Looking for brand coupons and discounts
- Actively searching brand-related information
- Getting brand information from others
- Using social media as channel to directly communicate with the brand
- Engaging with brand interactive content (e.g., games, apps, lotteries, contests, videos, etc.)
- Commenting positively on the brand
- Commenting negatively on the brand
- Displaying information (e.g., written posts, pictures, videos) about own brand experience
- Getting involved in discussions/threads about the brand
- Visiting brand fan page(s)
- Following the brand news and updates (i.e., reading, liking, commenting on them)
- "Liking" or following the brand
- Sharing information about the brand

The following section presents the methodology and looks at the extent to which a representative sample of consumers exhibit such behaviors in relation to their favorite brands of apparel, with a view to identifying the underlying motivators for brand behaviors on social media and to understanding and profiling consumers based on these dimensions. Whereas this investigation is exploratory in nature, its results are critically related to existing research on consumer behavior on social media and to the broader branding literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Sample, and Data Collection

This study followed a descriptive cross-sectional design and surveyed consumers to measure to what extent and how they engage in brand-related social media behaviors (i.e., as per the types of behavior identified above). In particular, it asked participants about their behaviors on social media with respect to their preferred brand of apparel. The rationale for this choice was that participants would be more likely to exhibit social media behaviors toward a brand they prefer, also originating from a high involvement category such as apparel (cf., O’Cass, 2004; Khare, 2013) that consumers commonly share information about and use to express their personal identity (Easley & Kleinbeg, 2010; Gu, Park, & Konana, 2012; Lin, Lu, & Wu, 2012; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Participants were also requested to report their degree of loyalty and attachment toward this brand, as well as their social media usage, age and gender, all to be used as covariates.

The researchers accessed a sample of consumers in the United States through Amazon’s crowdsourcing service, Mechanical Turk (for simply, MTurk). MTurk is recognized as a valid and convenient source of participants for studies of similar nature (e.g., Gershoff & Koehler, 2011). A major benefit of this service is that samples tend to be more representative of the population and more demographically diverse than traditional Internet samples based on convenience or judgement (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). In addition, MTurk maintains the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, provides them with a modest compensation, and applies validity checks to make sure that only attentive respondents are part of the final sample (Fleischer, Mead, & Huang, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). All these features of MTurk ensure a good quality of the data being collected. A potential

limitation of MTurk is that participants have the ability to lie about their demographic background in order to participate in more studies and receive extra payments. However, there are mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of such a problem occurring. These include the screening of participants and the offering of modest payments that do not encourage such deceit (Smith et al., 2015).

A total of 1,006 people completed the full survey by clicking the link on the Mechanical Turk website. The survey took on average 2.5 minutes to complete and those participants who nominated non-apparel brands (e.g., Sony or Apple) or who took less than one minute to complete the task were eliminated. The analyzed sample consisted of 959 participants, all of them living in the United States of America, with a representation of 48 different states. The geographic spread by region – as used by the US Census Bureau – is the following: West (21.6%); Midwest (21.4%); Northeast (19.0%); and South (38.0%). In terms of demographics, 56.6% of respondents were men and 43.4% women, with an average age of 32.97 (standard deviation of 9.69 years). The sample's break-down by age bracket was the following: 25 or less (23.3%); 26-35 (46.3%); 36-45 (19.6%); 46-55 (7.5%); and 56 or more (3.3%).

The measures for the constructs used in this study are presented in Appendix A. New scales were proposed for *brand behaviors on social media* and participants were asked to report the extent to which they engage in twelve social media behaviors on 5 point-interval scales, labelled as: 1= 'never', 2= 'seldom', 3= 'occasionally', 4= 'frequently', and 5= 'always'. The behavior of liking/following the brand was measured as a dichotomous variable ('yes' / 'no'), and was treated as a covariate as it normally represents a one-time action (i.e., liking/ following a brand) that cannot be measured as a matter of degree. The scale for *brand loyalty* was adopted from Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009), while the measure of *brand attachment* was based on Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010).

These scales proved to be reliable: the Cronbach Alpha was .83 for brand loyalty and .96 for brand attachment. As a further covariate, social media usage was measured as the estimated number of hours spent per day on social media; gender and age were also captured for classification purposes.

Data Analysis

The first stage of the analysis intended to explore the overall level of consumers' social media brand behavior, as well as the ways by which this happens. To that end, the average engagement on each of the 12 social media behaviors included in the study was computed. Then, the sample was divided in two groups: those 'engaged on SM' (participants who, on average, exhibited a value of at least 2.0 on the 1-5 index of their average social media brand behavior) and those 'not engaged on SM' (those with average scores of less than 2.0 on the 1-5 index of their average social media brand behavior). These two groups were compared in terms of brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand follows/likes, social media usage, age and gender; to that end, analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests and cross-tabulation tables were used.

The second stage of the analysis was performed only with the 'engaged on SM' group (345 participants). First, to identify consumers' underlying motivators for their brand-related social media behaviors, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with the 12 behaviors to summarize the information in a few meaningful dimensions. Principal components analysis was used as the method of extraction, and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was utilized as the method of rotation to ease the interpretation of the results. Then, a K-Means cluster analysis was conducted using the factor scores of the resulting underlying dimensions of social media behavior. By doing this, the study identified relevant

segments of consumers that vary in how they behave on social media. Finally, these segments were characterized in terms of brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand follows/likes, social media usage, age and gender by using ANOVA tests and cross-tabulation tables.

RESULTS

Stage 1: Consumer Engagement in Brand-Related Social Media Behaviors

A first purpose was to explore to what extent consumers engage in brand-related social media behaviors. Across all the 12 identified behaviors, the average for the sample of 959 participants was 1.72, which indicates that on average the participants had a limited degree of engagement on social media with the nominated brands. Figure 1 shows the average response for each of the 12 behaviors.

Figure 1

Based on the figure above, the behavior that participants exhibited most strongly is that of looking for brand coupons and discounts (mean of 2.63). Actually, 69.6% of the sample of 959 participants indicated they engage in such a behavior at a very least on a rare basis (i.e., scores of at least 2.0 on the measure). At the other end, the least exhibited behavior was that of making negative comments about the brand (mean of 1.21). Even with this behavior, 12.1% of the sample indicated they engage in making negative brand comments at least on a rare basis (i.e., scores of at least 2.0 on the measure).

The original sample was then divided in two groups - those ‘engaged on SM’ (345 respondents) and those ‘not engaged on SM’ (614 respondents). A comparison of these two groups shows that the ‘engaged on SM’ participants had significantly higher levels of brand

attachment, brand loyalty, brand follows/likes and social media usage than those in the ‘not engaged on SM’ group. Table 1 shows these results.

Table 1

Even though all participants were requested to report on their preferred brand of apparel, engaging with the brand on social media appears to be correlated with consumers’ degree of brand attachment and brand loyalty: as Tables 1 portrays, the average scores for the “engaged on SM” group were significantly higher than those for the “not engaged on SM” group. Not surprisingly, the “engaged on SM” participants used social media more and were on average younger than the “not engaged on SM” participants. The following stages of the analysis refer exclusively to the “engaged on SM” part of the sample.

Stage 2: Underlying motivators for social media brand behaviors and consumer segments

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Table 2 shows the results of the EFA analysis, using the principal components method of extraction and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation. Each item achieved a loading of 0.5 or more on just one factor, and Table 2 presents these highest factor loadings with the associated factors while suppressing all loadings below 0.5.

Table 2

This solution of four factors explains a good level of 65% of the variance in the original variables. The eigenvalues for the four factors are 4.82, 1.24, 0.9 and 0.84 respectively. Besides providing a good degree of variance explained, it was decided to keep

the solution with factors 3 and 4 due to their conceptual meaningfulness and in spite of these factors having eigenvalues slightly below 1.0. All the communalities are above 0.5, and the solution is adequate based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion, with a value of .89. The Bartlett's test of sphericity is also significant (Chi-square of 1336.41 with 66 degrees of freedom, $p < .01$). The four factors, to be thoroughly debated in the discussion section, can be summarized as:

- Factor 1: *Brand tacit engagement*. This dimension refers to brand behaviors that are not publicly visible on social media, where consumers either look for brand-related information or consume the brand-related news, updates or content.
- Factor 2: *Brand exhibiting*. This second factors includes behaviors that are publicly visible on social media, including sharing brand information and one's own brand consumption, making positive comments about the brand or involving in brand discussions.
- Factor 3: *Brand patronizing*. Interestingly, the third dimension covers behaviors that mean consumers can hold a tight grip on the brand and even denigrate it, including making negative brand comments and using social media to directly contact the company behind the brand.
- Factor 4: *Brand deal seeking*. This final dimension is assigned the behavior of searching for brand coupons and discounts on social media.

Cluster Analysis. Using the normalized factor scores from the previous analysis, a K-Means cluster analysis was conducted. After considering both statistical and practical considerations, a solution with six clusters was selected. From a statistical perspective, the six-cluster solution has an adequate CH quotient between the external and the internal average distance (with a value of 1.78, and a change of 3.4% relative to a 5-cluster solution). This speaks of a solution that adequately balances high levels of heterogeneity among segments and high homogeneity

within segments. Also, from a practical perspective, the 6-cluster solution is adequate as the resulting segments are easily interpretable and the relative sizes of all clusters are relevant, the smallest one representing 13% of the sample.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the cluster analysis: the size of each cluster, the centroids of each factor in each cluster, and the average values of age, social media usage, brand loyalty, brand attachment, and the gender percentages in each cluster. Across all these variables, the differences among segments are statistically significant.

Table 3

The resulting clusters are described below, with a label added to each profile to represent its core characteristics:

- Cluster 1: *Brand content seekers*. Consumers in this segment display a high level of brand tacit engagement, with behaviors not visible to other social media users. They also display the highest degree of deal seeking of all segments. At the same time, they engage little in brand exhibiting and do not attempt to patronize the brand. Consumers in this segment are the youngest in the sample, with a smaller proportion of men, and spend less time per day on social media compared to the average consumer. Most of them follow/like the brand on social media, and they exhibit levels of brand loyalty and brand attachment that are very close to the sample mean. They represent 13.6% of the sample.
- Cluster 2: *Brand observers*. This segment is the least involved in social media behaviors, with an average degree of tacit engagement, reduced tendencies for brand exhibiting and brand patronizing, and with the lowest degree of deal seeking of all segments. With an age close to the sample average and a higher proportion of men, these consumers are on social media fewer hours per day and have a lower tendency to follow/like the brand

compared to all other segments. They exhibit less-than-average levels of brand loyalty and brand attachment. This group represents 20.9% of the sample.

- Cluster 3: *Brand deal hunters*. Consumers in this cluster most prominently engage in deal seeking. They have an average tendency to “patronize” the brand (possibly related to brand promotion issues), and low scores on brand tacit engagement or especially brand exhibiting. Compared to the average consumer in the sample, “deal hunters” are older, with the highest representation of women, spend less time on social media, and exhibit the lowest levels of both brand loyalty and brand attachment. However, a significant proportion of them follow/like the brand, possibly to aid them learn about brand deals. They represent 16.5% of the sample.
- Cluster 4: *Brand hard-core fans*. With a high level of brand social media behaviors, the hard core fans have the strongest degree of brand exhibiting and at the same time a high score on brand tacit engagement. Meanwhile, they also score higher than average on brand patronizing and brand deal seeking. They are the oldest group in terms of age, and spend more time on social media than the average consumer. By far, this segment shows the highest levels of brand loyalty and brand attachment, and significantly higher than all other segments. Almost all members of the cluster follow/like the brand on social media. They represent 13.0% of the sample.
- Cluster 5: *Brand posers*. This segment is the largest in terms of numbers. They display a relatively strong tendency for brand exhibiting, while they also look for brand deals and are actually not interested in brand content or information (i.e., they have the lowest brand tacit engagement score of all segments). However, they are also less likely than average to patronize the brand. The consumers in this segment are very close to average in terms of age, brand loyalty, brand attachment, and brand follow/like score. They spend more time

than average on social media, with a higher proportion of men. They represent a 22.0% of the sample.

- Cluster 6: *Brand patronizers*. This segment has by far the strongest inclination to patronize the brand (i.e., making negative brand comments, staying in close touch with the brand and contacting it via social media). Their level of brand tacit engagement and brand exhibiting is around average, and they have a lower than average deal seeking tendency. Relative to the other segments they are younger and have the highest level of social media usage. Their brand attachment and brand loyalty scores are close to the mean of the sample. They represent 13.9% of the sample.

DISCUSSION

The current work contributes to the existing body of research on consumers' behavior on social media by taking a comprehensive view of the range of ways in which consumers interact with brands in this environment. Specifically, inspired by a consumer journey approach (cf., Edelman, 2010; Li & Kannan, 2014; Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014) and based on insights from existing research, industry reports and common practice, it identifies brand-specific behaviors (i.e., touch points) on social media. It subsequently queries a representative sample of consumers about such brand behaviors, which allows the identification of several underlying motivators for consumers' social media brand behaviors. Whereas brand exhibiting and brand tacit engagement are related to similar concepts in existing research (e.g., Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015), the current approach allows uncovering the behaviors of brand patronizing and brand deal seeking. Using the four underlying motivators, the study presents a meaningful

segmentation of consumers in the social media environment. The subsequent section discusses the findings on the underlying motivators for social media brand behaviors and on the resulted consumer segments. Important parallels are drawn to existing insights on what needs are catered for through brand consumption (e.g., Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011) and on the types of relationships consumers establish with brands (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014).

The underlying motivators for brand social media behaviors

The predisposition for *brand tacit involvement* encompasses social media behaviors that are not publically visible, such as searching brand information, getting such information from others, visiting the brand fan page(s) or following the brand news and updates. Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) discuss that consumers rely on brands to cater for functional needs (i.e., solving consumption-related problems), for symbolic needs (e.g., needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership or ego-identification) or for experiential needs (e.g., needs for sensory pleasure/variety and/or cognitive simulation). Whereas certain studies (e.g., Foster, West, & Francescucci, 2011; Campbell, Ferraro, & Sands, 2014) acknowledge that consumers can use social media functionally to search for brand information, others discuss its experiential role of providing consumers with entertainment (Campbell, Ferraro, & Sands, 2014; Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015). Besides offering access to brand information and brand entertainment, brand tacit involvement might also mean that consumers cater for symbolic needs. This may happen as the identity and self-concept can be expressed by consumers without trying to present these publicly to others, but rather privately to themselves in order to reaffirm the kind of persons they are (Fournier, 1998; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). By visiting the brand fan page or by following brand news and

updates some consumers might be doing precisely that. However, no matter whether it is driven by functional, experiential or symbolic needs, brand tacit engagement entails active behaviors that are not publically visible on social media.

Conversely, *brand exhibiting* consists of behaviors through which consumers can publically assert their social media presence and brand affiliation. In a similar vein, Kabadayi and Price (2014) discuss ‘broadcasting’ on social media as the tendency of consumers to promote themselves publicly and visibly to a large network of people. Brand exhibiting includes behaviors such as sharing brand information, making positive brand comments, involving in brand-related discussions/threads, or communicating one’s own brand purchase, consumption or experience. Through such brand affiliation symbolic needs for self-enhancement or for associating oneself with a desired self-image, role or social group (cf., Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986) are reflected publically on social media. This parallels the traditional notion of conspicuous consumption (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). As noted above, however, the public signaling of the self might also serve the purpose of consumers concomitantly reaffirming to themselves what kind of persons they are and what they stand for. In the context of Twitter, Toubia and Stephen (2013) discuss that consumers contribute content to achieve either intrinsic utility (i.e., to provide others with information) or image-related utility (i.e., to influence how others perceive them), and they find that the latter is often a more important driver of contributing content to Twitter. Therefore, while brand exhibiting might serve a functional role (i.e., information provision), it most likely serves a symbolic or image-related role.

In addition, the analysis has uncovered *brand patronizing* as an underlying motivator for social media behaviors, including making negative comments about the brand and using social media to contact the company/brand either directly or through taking part in brand-sponsored interactive activities (e.g., games, lotteries, contests). The current finding, derived

from participants' reports about their favorite apparel brands, can also reflect that making negative comments and directly contacting the company might be a result of consumers' negative experience with the brands' interactive material. Irrespectively, this behavior epitomizes the risk companies take by co-creating and engaging consumers on social media: customers can be the source of negative word-of-mouth and can even denigrate and poke fun at the brand (cf., Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012; Verhoef, Beckers, & van Doorn, 2012). As a starting point, a brand patronizing behavior can be due to functional considerations (e.g., redress seeking, cf., Liye, Baohong, & Kekre, 2015), however it might also have a symbolic role of asserting one's image or of self-enhancement.

Not least, the study has found *brand deal seeking* to be a separate behavioral motivator. The specific behavior of looking for brand coupons or discounts appears to characterize a significant number of consumers. While this aspect has largely been ignored in the extant literature on consumers' brand behavior on social media, it suggests that brand deal seeking can be a determinant for an ongoing engagement with brands in this environment, as it has also been revealed to be for consumers' decision to "like" or "friend" a brand (cf., Bosker, 2013). Whereas brand deal seeking can have the functional role of gaining access to branded products, it can also be a means of facilitating one's association with the brand (i.e., a symbolic end).

Consumer segments based on their social media brand behavior

The analysis further identified consumer segments based on the four underlying motivators for brand social media behavior. These segments are: brand content seekers, brand observers, brand deal hunters, brand hard-core fans, brand posers and brand patronizers. Some of these segments mirror consumer profiles previously discussed in the literature, while others

represent newly identified consumer profiles. The *hard-core fans* segment, with high levels of brand exhibiting and brand tacit involvement, parallels the ‘devotees’ that Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy & Sashittal (2015) describe as having strong levels of content creation and content consumption on social media. The *posers* are hereby identified as consumers with a high level of brand exhibiting (but a low level of tacit involvement) who also engage in deal seeking, a description that fits what Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy and Sashittal (2015) identify as ‘attention seekers’. Likewise, the *observers*, with average levels of brand tacit engagement (and reduced tendencies of brand exhibiting, brand patronizing and especially brand deal seeking) mirror what Campbell, Ferraro, and Sands (2014) call ‘passives’ and describe as consumers little involved in brands’ social media marketing and who engage with brands on social media for entertainment. However, previous research has not revealed the existence of brand *deal hunters* or of *brand patronizers* on social media, hereby found to be characterized by strong tendencies of brand deal seeking and brand patronizing, respectively.

A closer examination of the consumer segments derived in the current research reveals interesting parallels to several types of relationships identified in the consumer-brand relationship literature (e.g., Fournier, 1988; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). In drawing such parallels, one has to take into account that the current study looked at participants’ favorite brand of apparel, and that therefore any consequent consumer-brand relationship would be of a closer rather than of a more distant nature. The *hard-core fans* meet what Fournier (1988) calls ‘best friendship’, a type a relationship characterized by honesty, intimacy, revelation of the true self and common personal interests. In the current study, *hard-core fans* displayed the highest levels of brand loyalty and brand attachment out of all segments, and almost all of them followed/liked the brand on social media. The *observers* can be classified as ‘buddies’, who have a less intimate relationship with the brand, a more sporadic engagement, and lower expectations for reciprocity or reward (cf., Fournier

1988; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). Indeed, *observers* are characterized in this study by average tacit engagement, with lower than average brand exhibiting or brand patronizing, and with an extremely low tendency to engage in brand deal seeking. Further, the *content seekers* are likely to maintain ‘secret affairs’ with brands, which are defined as privately-held relationships that allow consumers to indulge brand consumption and feel playful (cf., Fournier 1988; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). Based on the results of this study, *content seekers* display a high degree of brand tacit engagement, and are unlikely to exhibit their brand affiliation on social media. Not least, *brand patronizers* fit the description of ‘master-slave’ relationships, where consumers act as masters to brands they consider servile, and where they expect that the company listens, anticipates needs, satisfies demands and does not ask questions (cf., Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). Also, consumers engaging in ‘master-slave’ relationships with brands seek to intensify their feelings of self-worth, which provides credibility to the above observation that brand patronizing might serve a symbolic, self-enhancement role.

Managerial implications

The current results bear several consequences for the practice of social media marketing and brand management. In the first place, brand managers should be conscious that the average level of consumers’ engagement in social media brand behaviors is low: 64% of the surveyed sample engaged, on average, less than “seldom”. Therefore, companies’ brand building efforts must consider the complete array of media that their target market consumes and not rely only on social media. However this study does reveal that consumers who are ‘engaged on social media’ have higher levels of brand attachment, brand loyalty, and brand following/liking than those who are ‘not engaged on social media’

Also, brand managers should acknowledge that consumers get involved with brands on social media for a variety of motives, including brand tacit engagement, brand exhibiting, brand deal seeking and brand patronizing. Companies should be prepared to respond to such behaviors and plan a strategy to potentially promote or discourage specific behaviors. For example, a brand with a premium positioning may want to find ways discourage brand deal seeking and promote brand exhibiting instead. In the case of brand patronizing, companies should decide the extent to which they want to stimulate a frequent bidirectional communication with consumers, as this endeavor may require investing in extra resources to keep the communication live and updated. In particular, brand managers need to be aware of the potential risk of negative word-of-mouth and of consumers keeping a close grip on the brand on social media (cf., Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012; Verhoef, Beckers, & van Doorn, 2012).

A major finding of this research is that consumers can be divided into six meaningful segments that vary in terms the underlying motivations for social media brand behaviors, and also with respect to social media usage, brand loyalty and attachment, and other characteristics. Managers need to fine-tune their marketing to address such different segments. *Hard-core fans* have a great potential for brand advocacy. Besides sharing brand content, they can be encouraged and incentivized to create and display their own content relating to the brand (e.g., displaying information about their own purchasing, consuming or experiencing the brand). Such consumer-created content can be more powerful than the brand-created one (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015). However, hard-core fans who potentially represent brand ‘best friends’ (Fournier, 1998) also need to be provided with positive rewards such as content that is engaging and that lives up to the brand values, with possibilities of direct brand communication and even with access to brand promotions. Another segment that can spread buzz is made of the *brand posers*, who mainly look to

publicly display their self-image. Companies may help this segment with tools and platforms that facilitate the sharing of information (e.g. discussion forums, polls) and alignment of content between the segment and the brand/company. Both *hard-core* fans and *posers* play an important role in shaping the brand image and equity on social media, given their activity in this environment positions them as salient brand users (cf., Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

Meanwhile, the maintenance of engaging brand content including updates, news, brand information, up-to-date and lively brand pages, alongside with available brand deals, is essential for engaging the *brand content seekers*. Through such activities *content seekers* are given the opportunity to ‘live the brand’ (cf., Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, & Sashittal, 2015) and access it, leading to a strengthening of their brand relationship. The provision of engaging content is also likely to nurture the relationship with *brand observers*, who mostly touch base with the brand in a tacit manner. Brands can in addition analyze what kind of content garners the highest degree of engagement of *observers*, so that such consumers can potentially transition into a profile that is more active on social media.

With *deal hunters* companies may want to be more transactional and tactical in promoting good deals, if such deals are available. This segment has a low potential for brand loyalty, therefore efforts to build brand loyalty with *deal hunters* are not advisable. Finally, brand managers should carefully monitor and respond to *patronizers*, to make sure that their potential for negative word-of-mouth does not affect the brand equity and that such consumers are not considered “mainstream” brand users. However, this segment may also constitute a relevant source of information to identify potential problems with the brand, which can help prevent brand crises.

Limitations and future research

The current study queried consumers about their favorite brands of apparel. This choice was based on the rationale that consumers are more likely to perform social media behaviors toward brands they favor, also coming from a category that consumers can use for self-expression and self-image purposes. In order to validate and generalize the current findings on the underlying motivators for social media brand behaviors and on the derived consumer segments, future research should adopt a similar investigation approach for brands from different categories or for brands consumers do interact with on social media but do not necessarily hold as favorite.

This research relied on existing literature, industry reports and common social media practice to identify a comprehensive range of brand behaviors that consumers are likely to display on social media. The listed behaviors did not include aspects such as brand purchase, which is something that consumers currently do little on social media. Should behaviors such as brand purchase on social media become more prevalent, future investigations might find it useful to survey a wider range of social media brand behaviors than those reported here.

The insights hereby presented are based on consumers' self-reports regarding their social media brand behaviors. Social media behavioral tracking and social media listening (cf., Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012 ; Schweidel & Moe, 2014) represent alternative means of gauging the identified brand behaviors or touch points, which have the advantage of tracking actual behaviors rather than self-reported ones. Even though the challenge resides especially in accurately classifying brand sentiment such as positive/negative brand comments (cf., Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012), such an alternative measurement approach can be adopted to validate and possibly advance the findings reported here.

Not least, the current work debated that plausible parallels can be drawn between the hereby identified consumer segments and the types of relationships discussed in the consumer-brand relationship literature (e.g., Fournier, 1988; Avery, Fournier, & Wittenbraker, 2014). To enrich this literature, future investigations can specifically accommodate the brand interactions afforded by the new technology and especially by social media into our understanding of consumer-brand relationships, or can endeavor to fully develop a theory and typology of consumer-brand relationships in the social media space.

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Table 1. Comparison between ‘Engaged on SM’ and ‘Not engaged on SM’ consumers

Variable	Measures	Engaged on SM	Not engaged on SM	Overall sample	Signif.
Brand attachment	Scale 1-11	7.58	5.59	6.31	0.00*
Brand loyalty	Scale 1-7	5.48	4.89	5.10	0.00*
Follow/like	0/1	81.74%	16.12%	39.73%	0.00*
Social media usage	Hours per day	2.84	1.95	2.27	0.00*
Age	Years	32.23	33.39	32.97	0.08*
Proportion of men	%	52%	59%	57%	

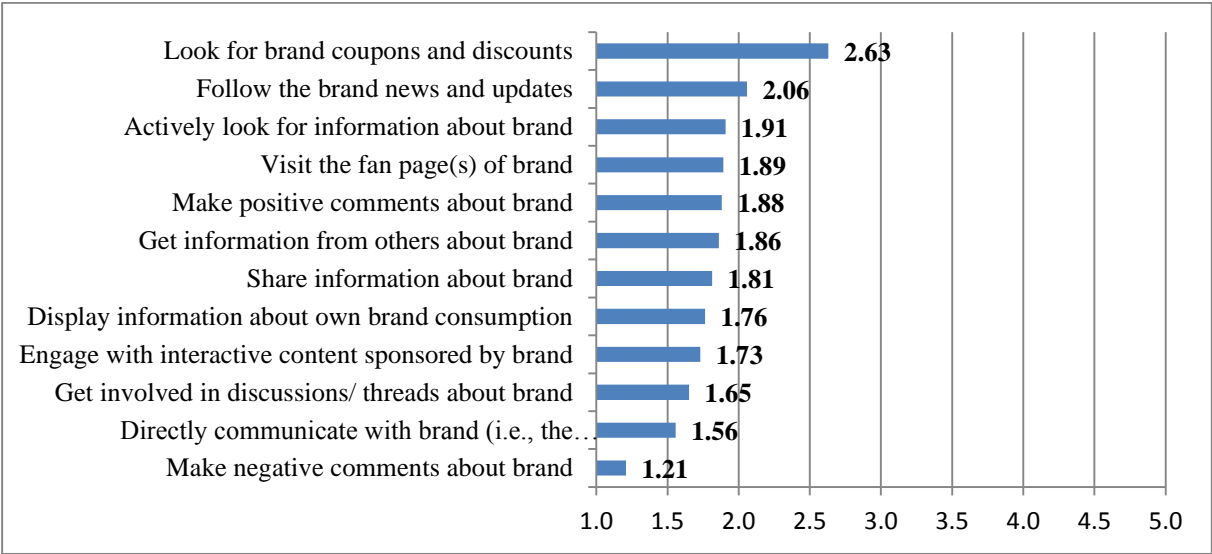
Table 2. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Dimension	Items	Factor Loading	Communality
Factor 1: <i>Brand tacit engagement</i>	Actively look for information about brand	0.79	0.73
	Visit the fan page(s) of brand	0.70	0.56
	Follow the brand news and updates	0.64	0.60
	Get information from others about brand	0.61	0.52
Factor 2: <i>Brand exhibiting</i>	Share information about brand	0.84	0.74
	Make positive comments about brand	0.78	0.70
	Get involved in discussions/ threads about brand	0.52	0.63
	Display information about own buying, consuming or experiencing brand	0.50	0.50
Factor 3: <i>Brand patronizing</i>	Make negative comments about brand	0.81	0.67
	Directly communicate with brand (i.e., the company behind it)	0.68	0.66
	Engage with interactive content sponsored by brand	0.66	0.62
Factor 4: <i>Brand deal seeking</i>	Look for brand coupons and discounts	0.91	0.87

Table 3. Results of the Cluster Analysis

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6	ALL SAMPLE
Size							
Size (%)	13.6%	20.9%	16.5%	13.0%	22.0%	13.9%	100%
Social Media Behaviors							
Brand tacit engagement	1.20	0.02	-0.62	0.88	-0.89	0.10	0.00
Brand exhibiting	-0.68	-0.29	-0.87	1.37	0.63	-0.14	0.00
Brand patronizing	-0.65	-0.49	-0.06	0.38	-0.39	1.70	0.00
Brand deal seeking	0.64	-1.19	0.55	0.27	0.40	-0.38	0.00
Other variables							
Age	29.5	32.0	34.0	35.6	32.4	29.7	32.23
SM usage	2.4	2.3	2.5	3.2	3.1	3.6	2.84
Brand loyalty	5.6	5.3	5.1	6.1	5.6	5.3	5.48
Brand attachment	7.6	7.2	6.7	9.1	7.5	7.8	7.58
Follow/like (%)	89.4%	68.1%	82.5%	97.8%	81.6%	79.2%	81.74%
Gender (% Male)	44.7%	59.7%	36.8%	53.3%	57.9%	54.2%	52.0%

Figure 1. The types and levels of brand-related social media behaviors



APPENDIX A

Measures of the variables

Brand loyalty (Interval scale, from 1=totally disagree to 7=totally agree)

I am loyal to BRAND

I always buy BRAND

I recommend BRAND to others

BRAND is always my first choice for a brand in its category

I do not buy other brands if BRAND is available for me to buy

Brand attachment (Interval scale, from 0=not at all to 10=completely)

To what extent is BRAND part of you and who you are?

To what extent do you feel personally connected to BRAND?

To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward BRAND often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?

To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward BRAND come to your mind naturally and instantly?

Follow/like (Dichotomous variable, yes or no)

Do you follow or “like” BRAND on social media?

Social media behavior (Interval scale, from 1=never to 5=always)

Do you make positive comments about BRAND on social media?

Do you share information about BRAND on social media?

Do you engage on social media with interactive content sponsored by BRAND (e.g., games, apps, lotteries, contests, videos, etc.)?

Do you use social media to directly communicate with BRAND (i.e., the company behind it)?

Do you get involved in discussions/ threads about BRAND?

Do you visit the fan page(s) of BRAND?

Do you actively look for information about BRAND on social media?

Do you make negative comments about BRAND on social media?

When on social media, do you follow the BRAND news and updates?

Do you look for BRAND coupons and discounts on social media?

Do you display information (e.g., written posts, pictures, videos) on social media about you buying, consuming or experiencing BRAND?

Social media usage

How many hours do you estimate to spend on social media per day (use decimals if needed)?

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