Brand building through consumer-brand engagement and co-creation in Brazil: the role of social media marketing

ABSTRACT

Consumer-brand engagement (CBE) and co-creation is a rapidly growing trend in the current competitive market. Extant literature emphasizes benefits of CBE and co-creation, with limited empirical research focusing on the role of social media marketing (SMM) in the process of creating CBE and co-creation. Drawing from marketing literature, this study proposes a holistic framework to examine the influence of SMM elements, including entertainment, customization, interaction, electronic word of mouth (EWOM) and trendiness on CBE, along with co-creation and repurchase intention as behavioural outcomes. A self-administered, online survey was used to collect the data from 187 experienced Brazilian users of social media as indicated by their consumption of a durable technology product, a smart-phone. Partial least squares – structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is used to test the influence of social-media-marketing elements on CBE, co-creation and repurchase intention. The findings indicate that trendiness and EWOM are the key elements directly influencing CBE. The results also indicate that CBE is influential in strengthening consumers' intention to co-create brand value and repurchase. These findings have significant theoretical and managerial implications for academics and marketers.

Keywords: Social media marketing; Engagement; Co-creation

Introduction

In the current customer-centric world, consumer-brand engagement (CBE), conceptualized as "consumers' brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity related to focal brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 149), stands out as critical mechanism for building firms' competitive advantage (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). This altered setting brings CBE to the forefront of marketing, being considered as key research priority (Tier 1) in marketing (MSI, 2018). While there is substantial growth in theoretical discussion of CBE, the need to understand and manage CBE remains to be recognized (Chiang et al., 2017). Marketers have sought to better understand how CBE is formed, nurtured and sustained (Calder et al., 2016), incorporating its possible behavioural outcomes (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Given the nomological network CBE is enmeshed is still in its nascent stage of development (Dwivedi, 2015), this paper thus seeks to contribute to furthering conceptual development in this area.

Crucially, from the perspective of brand management, co-creation is understood as a

behavioural response of CBE, involving consumers' potential to shape the brand (France et al., 2015) and hence being critical for brand success (Ind & Coates, 2013). Despite its importance, academic research exploring co-creation has a major bias to its conceptualization and outcomes, leaving a gap relating to marketing planning (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Ind et al., 2013), particularly around how to use marketing tools to strengthen consumers' psychological engagement with the brand and hence their co-creation behaviour (France et al., 2018; Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012).

Inextricably linked to CBE, social-media marketing (SMM) is playing a considerable role in building consumer-brand relationships (Schultz & Peltier, 2013), and deemed to be more influential in strengthening consumers' repurchase intention than traditional marketing communications (Frank & Watchravesringkan, 2016). Reportedly, 74 percent of online consumers use social-media platforms (Duggan et al, 2015), with 73% using more than one (Smith & Anderson, 2018) and over 50 percent of these obtain brand-related information by following brand pages (Ismail, 2017). However, SMM is still regarded as a relatively new marketing tool, with limited understanding of how it influences CBE and co-creation in turn (Dessart et al., 2015; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). As interest in the brand-building benefits of SMM use grows, more research is needed to guide marketers in a digital world (Hudson et al., 2016).

Given the identified deficiencies in understanding, the current research addresses these literature gaps by focusing on the role of social-media marketing (SMM) elements on CBE, along with co-creation and repurchase intention as consequences. The remainder of the paper is as follows: the literature underpinning the conceptual model (Figure 1) is reviewed, followed by detailing the methodology used. Next, the results are presented followed by their discussion, with the implications, limitations and future research directions concluding the paper.

Consumer brand engagement

CBE is conceptualized as a psychological state that involves consumers' passion for the brand, arising from the strength of consumer-brand relationship (Brodie et al., 2011). Arguably, the concept of CBE focuses on consumers' specific level of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014), which are deemed to be critical in affecting consumer behaviours (Bowden, 2009), including self-brand connection, purchase intention and brand loyalty (France et al., 2016; France et al., 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017). Given its importance, numerous studies have examined CBE's antecedents and consequences, including the potential impact of social-media brand communication on CBE and subsequent behaviours (Barger et al., 2016; De Vries et al., 2012; Swanu et al., 2013). The marketing literature conveys the notion that organizations can enhance CBE by strengthening their consumer-brand relationships through using social-media platforms (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Dessart et al., 2015). The leading view of CBE in the marketing domain argues for the importance of consumer-brand relationships in building CBE (Bento et

al., 2018; Habibi et al., 2014), along with encouraging marketers to create brand experiences by utilizing different forms of SMM (Barger et al., 2016). The following section will discuss the influence of five SMM elements on CBE.

Social media marketing (SMM)

Acknowledging as an interactive platform enable participatory, collaborative and knowledge-sharing activities with a greater capacity and lower cost to reach the community than traditional media, such as print, TV and radio (Iankova et al., 2018), social media refers to online applications, platforms, web tools or technological systems that facilitate collaboration and content sharing between community members (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), such as Facebook, Instagram, Linkedln, Blog and Twitter (Tess, 2013). Given its effectiveness in influencing consumers' brand knowledge and behaviours, how to build consumer-brand relationships in a social-media setting has become a key issue for business (Hudson et al., 2016; Ismail, 2017). One first step in addressing this issue is to realize that SMM can involve several tactics depending on which elements are deployed, namely: entertainment, customization, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and trendiness (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Tugrul, 2015). The literature dealing with each of these five elements is discussed below.

Entertainment

Entertainment occurs when marketers create experiences, such as games, video sharing and participation in contests, that are perceived as fun and playful when using social-media platforms (Agichtein et al., 2008; Manthiou et al., 2013). This ultimately builds a sense of intimacy with the brand and strengthens consumers' purchase intentions (Dessart et al., 2015). Accordingly, marketers can use social-media communication as a means for entertaining consumers, such as Facebook brand pages with video clips, pictures and stories, which can effectively encourage consumers' to exert greater cognitive effort to understand more about the brand (Barger et al., 2016; Gummerus et al., 2012; Merrilees, 2016). Notably, brand pages' entertainment value is deemed to translate into positive consumer experiences, thus building consumers' affection toward the brand (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Merrilees, 2016), and thereby strengthening consumers' intention to consider the brand as their primary choice (France et al., 2016). This provides the basis for hypothesis 1:

H1: The level of entertainment in SMM is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Customization

Customization refers to the extent to which services are customized to satisfy consumers' personal preferences (Godey et al., 2016). Customization is achieved by tailoring services, marketing efforts and messages to create value for a specific consumer or consumer group (Zhu & Chen, 2015), facilitating effective reach and strengthening consumers' perceived value of the brand (Ko & Megehee, 2012; Dehghani & Tumer, 2015; Martin & Todorov, 2010). Arguably,

consumers are more willing to read relevant information available on social-media platforms (Schulze et al., 2015). Thus, when brands offer customized services according to consumers' preferences, this can have a positive impact on the perceived benefits of the brand, along with enhancing their affection for the brand (Phan et al., 2011). Accordingly, when consumers' cognitive experience and affection is enhanced, they are more willing to consider the focal brand as their primary choice, as reflected in their activation (Harrigan et al., 2017). This leads to hypothesis 2:

H2: SMM customization is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Interaction

Interaction occurs when marketers offer opportunities for two-way opinion exchange and information sharing on social-media platforms (Dessart et al., 2015; Kim & Ko, 2012), allowing consumers to exchange their ideas with like-minded others about specific products or brands (Muntinga et al., 2011). Interactivity can be enhanced by providing a link to the official brand website, along with encouraging the sharing and dissemination of brand-related information amongst consumers (Manthiou et al., 2014), ultimately improving consumers' cognitive understanding of the product attributes and brand benefits (De Vries et al., 2012; Hudson et al., 2016). Consumer-brand interaction provides a common interest between consumers and firms, which results in higher levels of enthusiasm and subsequent development of affection (Vivek et al., 2012; Leckie et al., 2016). Such affection ultimately strengthens consumers' activation and subsequent development of CBE (Chen et al., 2011; Harrigan et al., 2017; Laroche et al., 2013). This leads to hypothesis 3:

H3: SMM interactivity is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Electronic word-of-mouth

EWOM refers to communications made by potential, actual or former customers about a product, brand or company using social-media platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Due to EWOM's perceived trustworthiness, consumers increasingly generate and share unconstrained brand-related information with other social-media users, including friends, peers and the general public (Cheung et al., 2008; Reza Jalivand & Samiei, 2012). Arguably, EWOM has a positive effect on consumers' evaluation of goods and services, which assists in attracting consumers to invest more cognitive efforts in reading EWOM (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). The creation and sharing of EWOM amongst consumers build a sense of closeness and emotional relationship between brands and their consumers (Brodie et al., 2013; Chae et al., 2015), generating positive feelings amongst consumers (De Vries et al., 2012), which is useful in strengthening the consumer-brand relationship. This leads to hypothesis 4:

H4: EWOM availability on social media is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Trendiness

Trendiness refers to the extent to which a brand communicates the latest, up-to-date and trendy (i.e. 'hot topics') information about the brand (Naaman et al., 2011). Trendy information includes updates of brand-related information and novel ideas about brands initiated by both marketers and consumers (Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010). This increases consumers' motivation to search for the latest information on brand pages, thus strengthening consumers' cognitive presence in brand-related interactions as well as assisting in developing positive brand perceptions (Chan et al., 2014; Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010). Therefore, the trendier the information carried by social-media brand pages, then the more effective they are in engaging consumers (Dessart et al., 2015), which leads to hypothesis 5:

H5: Trendiness-focused social media is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Consumer brand engagement and co-creation

Co-creation is an emerging concept in the marketing literature, originating from the proposition that consumers are no longer regarded as a passive receiver of branded information and a purchaser of the brand, but rather considered as active participants in creating brand experiences as well as brand value (France et al., 2018; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Arguably, with the emergence of a customer-centric logic, consumers are regarded as good co-creators of brand value when they engage in interaction activities with brands, hence being considered as one of the most important sources of a firm's competitive advantage (Tajvidi et al., 2018). Notably, brand value is co-created when a consumer shares their brand experience with other consumers, either directly or indirectly (France et al., 2015), or, for example, participating in the new-product-development process through the co-creation of new product ideas (France et al., 2018) or co-creating the design of products (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Hsieh & Chang, 2016). In short, co-creation represents a process for consumers to be an active partner working with a brand, playing a considerable role in determining brand success (France et al., 2015; Tajvidi et al., 2017).

It has been conceptually argued that relationship exists between engagement and co-creation (France et al., 2015), whereby the process of CBE positively influences the consumer-brand relationship (Hollebeek, 2011). Emerging empirical findings show that engagement is a relational antecedent with a direct impact upon a customer's propensity to co-create, which strengthens the consumer's perceived brand value in turn (France et al., 2018). Indeed, highly engaged consumers have a strong and positive brand attitude, being motivated to participate in co-creative activities (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). This leads to hypothesis 6:

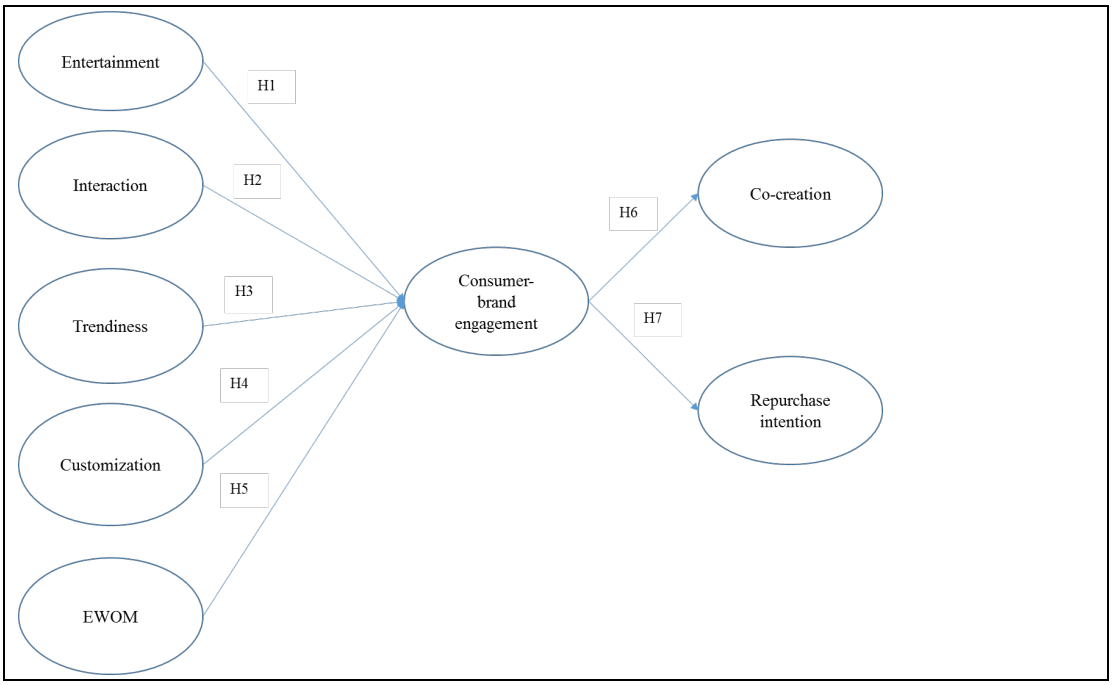
H6: Consumer-brand engagement is related to co-creation.

Acting as a proxy for purchase behaviour (Morwitz et al., 2007), repurchase intention refers to consumers' intention to buy the same product or service from the same firm on more than one occasion (Hellier et al., 2003). The reason for repurchase intention is primarily based on consumers' past consumption experience with (Kuo et al., 2009) and perceived value of the

product (Wu et al., 2014). Previous studies have demonstrated that CBE affects brand-loyalty outcomes, including repurchase intentions (Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016; Suetrong et al., 2018). This leads to hypothesis 7:

H7: Consumer-brand engagement is related to repurchase intention.

Figure 1: The theoretical framework for this research



Methodology

A self-administered, online survey was used to collect the data. The target population for this study comprised a convenience sample of consumers with a Facebook account in Brazil. As with recent studies on branding and engagement (e.g. Hsu et al., 2018; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017), we used smartphones as the focal product in this study. The survey questionnaire featured 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), using measurement items adopted from previous studies. For SMM, 19 items covering five SMM dimensions (Entertainment, Customization, Interaction, Electronic WOM, Trendiness) were adapted from Kim & Ko (2010), whilst 10 items from Leckie et al. (2016) measured CBE, five items from Nysveen & Pedersen (2014) measured co-creation and three items from Wu et al. (2014) measured repurchase intention.

We received 187 usable responses. Respondents were Brazilians, who were over 18 years old and social-media users. The sample comprised 43% male (55% female) respondents, with ages ranging from 18 to over 66 (mean = 36-40 years) and the majority aged between 18 and 40 (57.2%). Respondents were typically engaged in full-time employment (55.9%). Additionally, all respondents (100%) owned the focal product at the time of data collection.

Results

The analysis featured partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS v2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005), using the 5,000-bootstrap procedure. Data analysis featured two stages: assessing the (1) measurement (outer) model and (2) structural (inner) model. For the measurement model, all item loadings were > .74 and significant, and the results confirmed a satisfactory level of internal consistency for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (see Table 1). The convergent validity of the model was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all AVE scores greater than the recommended .50 threshold. Discriminant validity was satisfied using the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion, with the AVE square roots larger than the corresponding correlations (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 1: Construct correlation matrix and AVE

		V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	CR	Alpha	AVE	Square root of AVE
1.	Entertainment	1							.926	.893	.76	.87
2.	Customization	.78	1						.916	.884	.69	.83
3.	Interaction	.74	.82	1					.952	.933	.83	.91
4.	Electronic WOM	.67	.63	.59	1				.926	.881	.81	.90
5.	Trendiness	.66	.72	.76	.56	1			.942	.901	.84	.92
5.	CBE	.49	.50	.44	.51	.58	1		.952	.944	.67	.82
6.	Co-creation	.48	.42	.42	.60	.51	.60	1	.926	.900	.71	.84
7.	Repurchase intention	.28	.37	.31	.28	.44	.70	.51	.942	.906	.84	.92

Inner (structural) model results

The hypotheses were assessed using the inner (structural) model results, by examining the *t*-values, standardized coefficient beta values and coefficient of determination (R^2 value). The results support four of the seven hypotheses. Regarding the relationship between SMM elements and CBE, the impact of trendiness on CBE was the strongest ($\beta = .476$, $p = .000$), followed by EWOM ($\beta = .250$, $p = .004$). Thus, H4 and H5 were supported. However, the impact of interaction on CBE was negative ($\beta = -.242$, $p = .025$), rejecting H3, whilst the effects of entertainment ($\beta = .089$, $p = .346$) and customization ($\beta = .126$, $p = .270$) on CBE were non-significant, and thus, H1 and H2 were not supported. Lastly, the influence of CBE on co-creation ($\beta = .602$, $p = .000$) and repurchase intention ($\beta = .700$, $p = .000$) was strong and significant, supporting H6 and H7.

The R^2 values were used to evaluate the model's explanatory power. The R^2 values for CBE ($R^2 = .409$), co-creation ($R^2 = .362$) and repurchase intention ($R^2 = .490$), along with an AVA (average variance accounted for) = .42, all of which exceed the recommended criterion

benchmark in being greater than .10 (Chin, 1998), with a value of .20 considered high for consumer-behaviour studies (Vock et al., 2013).

Theoretical implications

An increasing number of empirical studies have examined the theoretical and practical implications of SMM for brand building (Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018). Yet, the influence of different social-media constructs on CBE and its behavioural outcomes remains unclear. This study addresses this important gap in the literature by examining the role of SMM on CBE and its behavioural outcomes, including co-creation and repurchase intention for smartphone brands in Brazil.

Although prior literature has recognized the importance of SMM in the brand-building process in general (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012), our empirical study details the relative importance of individual SMM elements in building CBE, and co-creation and repurchase intentions in turn, thus contributing to the literature by identifying individual brand-building factors amongst the five SMM elements investigated in this study. The results reveal that EWOM and trendiness should be thought as a means of facilitating CBE, justifying the importance of using social media contents with positive EWOM and trendiness posts in brand building process (Harmeling et al., 2017; Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Surprisingly, the impact of interaction on CBE is negative, which suggests that interactive content on social media is not a brand-building factor for smartphone brands in Brazil, which is inconsistent with previous studies' findings (e.g. Hajli et al., 2017; Simon & Tossan, 2018; Smith & Gallicano, 2015). This contrary result can be explained by Brazilians' culture. Reportedly, the level of uncertainty avoidance is high amongst Brazilians (Hofstede, 1980; 2001), indicating that Brazilians tend to be risk averse and prefer comprehensive information, thus their brand attitude is strengthened by detailed information, such as product reviews and updates about brands rather than interaction (Quintal et al., 2010). Similarly, Brazilians tend to be individualistic due to rapid economic development, placing a high value in obtaining detailed information that they need and, hence, their engagement behaviour is less likely to be influenced through consumer-brand interaction (De Oliveira et al., 2016; Podrug et al., 2014). Arguably, given the high level of uncertainty avoidance and individualism, De Oliveria et al. (2016) posit that social enhancement and social presence have a negative impact on Brazilians' intention in online engagement, which may also help to explain that interaction is not significant for the Brazilian respondents in this study.

Additionally, the result reveals that the relationship between entertainment and CBE is non-significant. Although social-media brand communication with entertaining elements is attractive, the entertainment value of reading such social-media brand communication arises from a passive appreciation, which is not effective in building positive conceptions in consumers' minds (Yoshida et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the non-significant relationship found between customization and CBE is inconsistent with the findings in previous studies (Ko & Megehee, 2012; Schulze et al., 2015). This result may be explained by Holbrook's (2000) arguments about customer experience. Holbrook (2000) argues that the impact of customized and standardized experience on consumers' satisfaction is similar, because both are useful in building consumers' positive perceptions in their minds, which could help explain our finding that customized content is not effective in building CBE.

Another contribution of this study is that it finds that CBE has a strong and significant effect on co-creation and repurchase intention, suggesting that CBE is influential in strengthening consumers' intention to co-create and repurchase.

Managerial implications

From a managerial point of view, the results of this study call on marketers to consider the use of SMM in the formation of CBE and, in turn, co-creation and repurchase intention. Particularly, marketers should pay attention to using content that is current and trendy, incorporating encouraging positive EWOM to stimulate consumers' cognitive processing, affection and activation (Chan et al., 2014; Chu et al., 2018), ultimately strengthening consumers' intention to co-create brand value and repurchase the same brand in the future.

Arguably, marketers should utilize social media to create positive brand knowledge in consumers' minds, ultimately strengthening their intention to co-create brand value and repurchase. Therefore, marketers are recommended to focus on using SMM featuring trendiness contents, along with EWOM information in their brand-building process. In particular, marketers should allow consumers to obtain comprehensive information about their interested brands, such as details of EWOM on particular products (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018), incorporating the latest news and updates of their interested brands (Harrigan et al., 2017; Muntinga et al., 2011). These actions would help build consumers' CBE, ultimately strengthening their intention to co-create brand value and repurchase.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has certain limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional in nature and has been conducted in Brazil only, thus limiting its generalizability. Future research should consider longitudinal studies as well as comparisons between countries with diverse cultures to enhance the generalizability of findings. Second, this study focused on smartphones only, a durable technology product, which may limit the findings' applicableness to other industries, such as the service sector.

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