Consumer brand engagement, satisfaction and brand loyalty: a comparative study between functional and emotional brand relationships

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to understand differences in consumer brand engagement (CBE) according to the functional or emotional nature of consumer–brand relationships and its direct and/or indirect impact on brand loyalty (BL). Additionally, the study aims to compare CBE and satisfaction as predictors of BL, considering the two types of consumer–brand relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional survey was applied to two independent samples. Respondents of one of the samples were asked to recall a brand with which they had a functional relationship, while the other respondents were asked to consider a brand with which they had an emotional relationship. To test research hypotheses, a causal model using SEM was developed.

Findings – Results validate CBE as a three-dimensional construct, stronger for emotional than functional brand relationships and show its significant direct and indirect impact on BL. Through a comparative analysis, findings also prove that the effects of CBE on BL, directly or indirectly through satisfaction, are stronger for emotional relationships, while satisfaction is a stronger direct predictor of BL for functional brand relationships.

Originality/value – Addressing calls to focus on the impact of specific brand types on engagement, this study allows a better understanding of the moderating role of functional and emotional relationships on CBE. This study further adds to the existing body of knowledge by establishing the mediating role of satisfaction and comparing the contribution of CBE and satisfaction to BL according to the nature of consumer–brand relationships. Overall, our findings enhance knowledge on how consumers engage with and become loyal to brands, offering important implications for brand managers.

Keywords Satisfaction, Consumer, brand engagement, Functional brands, Emotional brands

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Brand loyalty, the core of brand equity (Keller, 1993), is a driving force of competitive advantage, as it helps firms develop long-term relationships with consumers (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Defined by Oliver (1999, p. 34) as:

A deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.

Loyalty is commonly acknowledged in the literature as a dimensional construct (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001), categorized as behavioral, attitudinal or a combination of both.

For several decades, researchers have considered perceived quality, switching costs and especially satisfaction, fundamental to brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009a, 2009b; Kandampully et al., 2015). According to Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001), this perspective reflects a psychological orientation of the literature (Fournier and Yao, 1997), more concerned with cognitive decision-making processes and less focused in a sociological view of brand loyalty (BL). But given the new role of consumers as co-owners and co-creators of the brand (Kandampully et al., 2015; Gong, 2018), the emphasis shifted, and brands started to focus on a more relational perspective (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005), where much of a brand’s value is a result of external relationships (Keller, 1993), namely brand–consumer relationships. As such, today loyalty paradigms encompass fresh concepts (Kandampully et al., 2015), with recent studies identifying other potential determinants, such as brand trust (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001, 2005), brand love (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009) and, particularly from 2014 onwards, brand engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dessart et al., 2015).

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) has been defined as a consumer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, co-creative brand-related activities related to specific interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and is expected to have a significant role in building increasingly experiential relationships with consumers, namely brand relationships (Dessart et al., 2015). CBE implies a deeper, relationship-based level and, thus, may be a better predictor of loyalty-related outcomes than other...
conventional constructs such as quality or satisfaction, which fail to capture the depth of consumer–brand relationships (Hollebeek, 2011). Satisfaction is conceptualized as a transaction-specific, cognitive judgment, linked to the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), while engagement refers to a broader relational, multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions” (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 260). As such, CBE has significant and growing importance for the management of brands (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and can help companies create an emotionally loyal customer base (Kandampully et al., 2015). However, research corroborating the dominant contribution of CBE to loyalty is still missing and is mainly exploratory, with the few existing quantitative studies (Dwivedi, 2015; Calder et al., 2016b; So et al., 2016a) focusing on very specific contexts and adopting not only a narrow perspective of the loyalty concept, but also very different operationalizations of CBE. Therefore, additional efforts to validate the impact of CBE over BL are still needed.

Additionally, consumers tend to feel more loyal to what they feel connected with, attached to and love (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012), so consumer–brand relationships may influence BL (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Fournier’s (1998) seminal work highlights the diversity of consumer–brand relationships, which can be conceptualized according to several criteria, including functional and/or symbolic benefits (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Primarily utilitarian-based relationships value the brand for its functional role, associated with objective benefits and inherent characteristics of brand attributes. Emotional considerations focus on symbolic benefits, that satisfy consumer’s high-level needs and engage them in additional meaningful ways (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Keller, 2012).

The brand relationship paradigm has been successful given its relevance for understanding BL (Albert and Merunka, 2013). It is also reasonable to expect that the different nature of consumer–brand relationships may lead to different levels of CBE (Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Simon et al., 2016). However, research so far has been inconclusive on which type of brands are more conducive to CBE: though some brands may have limited potential to engage consumers (namely functional brands), CBE may not be limited to high-involvement, emotional categories (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). Though in general people only feel emotionally attached to a few brands, if any (Ahuvia et al., 2014), these may also include low or moderate involvement brands (Bagozzi et al., 2016). Yet to the best of our knowledge, no quantitative study regarding the different nature of consumer–brand relationships and its impact on CBE has been developed. Hence, the purpose of our study is to understand differences in CBE according to the functional or emotional nature of consumer–brand relationships and its direct and/or indirect impact on BL. Additionally, the study aims to compare CBE and satisfaction as predictors of BL, considering the two types of consumer–brand relationships defined in this study.

2. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses
2.1 The concepts of engagement and consumer brand engagement
Consumer engagement is receiving increasing attention in the broader academic marketing literature as having a significant role in building increasingly experiential relationships with consumers, namely brand relationships (Dessart et al., 2015).

In one of the most comprehensive definitions in the literature, Brodie et al. (2011) consider engagement as a highly context-dependent psychological state, comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions, that plays a central role in the process of relational exchange. Furthermore, engagement reflects motivation, having varying intensity and a valence (Brodie et al., 2011) and results from an individual’s (the “engagement subject”) interactive experiences with a focal object (the “engagement object”), which may include product offerings, organizations or a focal brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Several authors (Dessart et al., 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016; Bowden et al., 2017) also stress the multi-dimensional view of engagement.

Engagement has gained significant attention in the branding literature, following a recent scholarly emphasis shift towards a broader, relational orientation (Vivek et al., 2014), centered on the importance of establishing interactive consumer–brand relationships (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Within this emerging research stream, which encompasses other concepts such as brand trust, brand experience and brand love (Brakus et al., 2009; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005), CBE is gaining momentum since it more comprehensively reflects the dynamics of focal brand relationships when compared with traditional concepts (Dwivedi, 2015). Early conceptualizations of CBE (Hollebeek, 2011) emphasize the relationship between the consumer and the brand (France et al., 2016). Focusing on brands as objects of engagement, Hollebeek et al. (2014) validate three CBE dimensions: cognitive processing (cognitive CBE), affection (emotional CBE) and activation (behavioral CBE). Regarding consumer–brand interactions, cognitive processing is defined as “a consumer’s level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration”; affection refers to “a consumer’s degree of positive brand-related affect”; and activation to “a consumer’s level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand”. In their study on online brand communities, Dessart et al. (2015) further deepen this conceptualization by presenting sub-dimensions of CBE, namely enthusiasm and enjoyment (affective), attention and absorption (cognitive) and sharing, learning and endorsing (behavioral), thus corroborating CBE as a multi-dimensional concept (Bowden et al., 2017; Vivek et al., 2014). Table I provides an overview of the main conceptualizations of CBE.

2.2 Consumer brand engagement, satisfaction and brand loyalty
CBE has a significant role and growing importance for the management of brands (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and can help companies create an emotionally loyal customer base (Kandampully et al., 2015). In his seminal work, Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines loyalty as “a deeply held commitment” to repatronize a preferred brand, “despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior”. Therefore, in the context of consumer–brand relationships, loyalty encompasses not only repeated purchases, but also positive internal dispositions towards the brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Conceptual work claims that since CBE generates positive attitudes towards the brand, it may make consumers feel more loyal.
(Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012) through interactive brand experiences beyond purchase and an enduring psychological connection (Brodie et al., 2011). Because of its interactive and immersive nature, CBE leads to intense relational bonds with a brand, which consumers may wish to sustain in the future (Dwivedi, 2015) through loyalty intentions such as repatronage and advocacy (Vivek et al., 2012). As such, the “commitment and connection of the highly engaged customer is expected to be influential in their loyalty behavior” (France et al., 2016, p. 127). However, though CBE is expected to predict BL (Dessart et al., 2015) and to generate increased brand retention (Hollebeek et al., 2014), the literature is mainly conceptual or qualitative, and limited empirical evidence exists about the role CBE plays in loyalty development (So et al., 2016a). France et al. (2016) investigated the impact of CBE upon BL, and So et al. (2014) showed that engagement affects loyalty toward tourism brands. In a social media context, Jahn and Kunz (2012), Hutter et al. (2013), Dessart (2017), and Carvalho and Fernandes (2018) concluded that consumer’s active engagement positively impacts BL and other loyalty-related outcomes. Therefore, to corroborate the results gained by extant studies in the field, considering a wide range of brands, it is expected that:

**H1.** CBE has a positive direct impact on BL.

As CBE implies a deeper, relationship-based level, it may be a better predictor of loyalty-related outcomes than other conventional constructs such as satisfaction (So et al., 2016a), which fail to capture the depth of consumer–brand relationships (Hollebeek, 2011). Satisfaction is defined as “a customer’s overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to-date” (Gustafsson et al., 2005, p. 210) or as “a global evaluative judgment about product usage/consumption” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 260) and relates to a transaction-specific, cognitive judgment, linked to the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006). Researchers generally agree that satisfaction consists of an overall post-hoc evaluation, following consumption, arising after brand interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). CBE, contrary to satisfaction, is a highly personal and motivational state (Calder et al., 2016b) that focuses on consumer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral dynamics during specific brand interactions. Hence, satisfaction has been considered an engagement consequence, with an expected positive relationship between the two (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The “historically dominant customer satisfaction paradigm” still prevails in the literature as the most effective predictor of marketing outcomes such as loyalty (Bowden, 2009b, p. 574), limiting a more complete understanding of how consumer–brand relationships and CBE may also play a role. Yet some researchers suggest that satisfying consumers may not be sufficient to explain certain behaviors (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), as satisfaction is a mere fulfillment response (Oliver, 1999), that only measures a post-purchase rational assessment, based on prior expectations, without considering the psychological meaning of consumption experiences and brand interactions. As such, traditional metrics as satisfaction alone should not be considered as a proxy for enduring loyalty (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2004), which further demands emotional depth and “a different conceptual plane […] that transcends satisfaction” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). According to Bowden (2009b, p. 591):

A reliance on generalized satisfaction metrics […] at the expense of a more detailed examination of customers’ consumption responses, which is inclusive of measures of affect, may therefore be misleading at best and completely inadequate at worst.

However, corroboration of the contribution of CBE to BL beyond satisfaction is yet to be undertaken through causal research. To the best of our knowledge, only Dwivedi (2015), Calder et al. (2016b), and So et al. (2016a) have investigated related topics. Dwivedi (2015) draws on a conceptualization of CBE bases on the organizational psychology domain and empirically investigates the influence of CBE on loyalty intentions when compared with the explanation attained jointly by perceived value, quality and satisfaction. The study concludes that CBE exerts a strong direct effect on loyalty intentions, after controlling for the effects of those three key judgments. Specifically, results suggest CBE as the strongest predictor among the specified antecedents, explaining significantly more variation in loyalty intentions. Calder et al. (2016b) define engagement as “a multilevel, multidimensional construct that emerges from the thoughts and feelings about one or more rich experiences involved in reaching a personal goal” and develop a flexible engagement scale based on five broad categories of experiences: interaction, transportation, discovery, identity and civic-orientation. The authors then compare the explanatory power of this scale with a fixed-scale measure of satisfaction and

### Table I: Overview of the main conceptualizations of CBE in the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sprott et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Brand Engagement in self-concept</td>
<td>An individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollebeek (2011)</td>
<td>Customer Brand Engagement</td>
<td>The level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollebeek et al. (2014)</td>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>A consumer’s positively valence brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwivedi (2015)</td>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>Consumers’ positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind, that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calder et al. (2016a)</td>
<td>Brand Engagement</td>
<td>Psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object, under a specific set of context-dependent conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
conclude that not only did engagement incrementally explain consumption beyond satisfaction, but was also a superior predictor of consumption. Finally, So et al. (2016a) conceptualize engagement as a higher-order reflective construct comprising five first-order factors based on the organizational psychology domain and explore its linkages with traditional antecedents of BL. Beyond providing insight into the process of loyalty formation, the study compares the explanatory power of BL using three constructs (brand evaluation, trust and engagement) and concludes that engagement was the strongest predictor of BL, representing superior explanatory power.

Hence, increasingly marketers are moving beyond satisfaction (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006) and focusing on engagement as a complement or even an alternative to satisfaction (Calder et al., 2016b; So et al., 2016a). Therefore, this study tests the potential dominant role of CBE over Satisfaction in explaining BL. Furthermore, this study addresses not only the direct effects of CBE on BL, but also the indirect effects, mediated by Satisfaction. As such, it is expected that:

H2. CBE is a stronger direct predictor of BL than Satisfaction.

H3. CBE has a positive indirect impact on BL, mediated by Satisfaction.

However, besides the different definitions of engagement adopted, the three studies previously mentioned strictly focused on very specific product categories, namely telecommunication providers, newspapers and tourism brands, respectively, thus potentially incurring in context specificity bias. Further, these studies mainly adopted a limited, behavioral approach to BL, did not account for different brand categories or compared the moderating role of consumer-brand relationships. Yet these relationships may lead to different levels of CBE (Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Simon et al., 2016) and, hence, different impacts on BL. However, research so far has been inconclusive on which type of brands are more conductive to CBE: though some brands may have limited potential to engage consumers (e.g. functional brands), CBE may not be limited to high-involvement, emotional categories (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). As such, this remains an important, yet under researched, facet of brand management.

### 2.3 The functional versus emotional nature of consumer-brand relationships

Part of today’s brand success lies on the development of relationships between brands and consumers (Veloutou and Moutinho, 2009), and in the past three decades, an influential research stream has emerged associated with the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2014). However, the early academic literature (Grönroos, 1996) did not recognize the role of brands as relationship builders, particularly in consumer markets. The traditional approach focused on the marketing mix elements alone, based on the original need of individuals to make transactions (Veloutou, 2007; Bansari and Kumar, 2017). Only later on researchers recognized that the brand relationship is a long-lasting bond between the brand and the consumer, and that brands (including product brands) are entities with their own personality, with which consumers can relate to (Veloutou and Moutinho, 2009). Consumers therefore engage in certain types of relationships with brands (Veloutou, 2007), similar to personal and intimate relationships they form with other people (Esch et al., 2006; Fourrier and Alvarez, 2012): some people we are passionate about, some we just like, and some we are indifferent to (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). One of the first studies on the topic was the seminal work of Fournier (1998), according to which a brand can be treated as an active contributing partner in a dyadic relationship that exists between the person and the brand. The brand-consumer relationship might take several forms, depending on the manner in which individuals develop relationships: Fournier’s (1998) study identifies 15 forms of relationships, ranging from arranged and convenience marriages to friendships. The association can be “voluntary versus imposed, long term versus short term, public versus private, formal versus informal, distant versus close and symmetric versus asymmetric” (Veloutou and Moutinho, 2009, p. 316), which highlights the diversity of consumer-brand relationships.

The relationship process can generate cognitive benefits as well as positive affect and emotions that result in a bond between the brand and the consumer (Fourrier, 1998). As such, consumers may relate with brands not only for their utilitarian values, but also for their symbolic benefits (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018), which viewed broadly may correspond to the archetypal constructs of reason and emotion (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002). Among several criteria, it is thus possible to conceptualize consumer-brand relationships according to their functional and/or symbolic benefits (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). This distinction is drawn from social psychology research (Clark, 1984), where two types of relationships are asserted, namely exchange and communal relationships. Though not necessarily mutually exclusive, exchange relationships focus on economic factors and offer primarily utilitarian benefits, while communal relationships mainly involve feelings about other people and transcend self-interest (Esch et al., 2006). This framework, with appropriate adjustments, has also proven powerful for understanding brand relationships (Fourier and Alvarez, 2012). As such, adapting this framework to a commercial setting, primarily utilitarian-based relationships can be seen as valuing the brand for its functional role, associated with objective benefits, such as efficiency or reliability and inherent characteristics of brand attributes (e.g. price, design and quality). In a similar vein, emotional considerations focus on symbolic benefits, on the social desirability of the brand and its self-expressive value, that satisfy consumer’s high-level needs and engage them in additional meaningful ways (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Keller, 2012). This emotional dimension of the bond is an important part of the relationship. It can grow to a level where consumers may form a passionate emotional attachment to brands, which can be characterized as brand love (Bagozzi et al., 2016; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). A strong emotional bond inspires “loyalty beyond reason” and becomes more crucial as differentiation solely based on functional benefits (stronger, newer, cheaper) loses ground.
with increasing technological advances (Pawle and Cooper, 2006).

The nature of consumer–brand relationships may lead to different levels of CBE (Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Consumers who develop primarily a functional-based brand relationship do so for its utilitarian value, which mainly relates with purchase and performance. Conversely, consumers who develop primarily an emotional-based brand relationship do so mainly for its symbolic value, beyond purchase and are thus expected to be highly involved and to develop a psychological bond with the brand. Hence, these consumers will be more willing to invest time, effort and affection on brand-related interactions beyond consumption (Keller, 2012) and are more likely to exhibit CBE regarding thoughts, feelings and behaviors, than those establishing functional, commercial relationships. Accordingly, it is expected that:

**H4.** CBE (i.e. its cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions) is stronger for emotional consumer–brand relationships when compared to functional consumer–brand relationships.

Moreover, consumer–brand relationships may lead not only to different levels of CBE, but also to different impacts on BL. Yet, empirical knowledge on the contribution of brand relationships to loyalty development is still very limited and recent (Veloutsou, 2015). The few existing research attempts have analyzed the impact of brand relationship strength on the linkage between BL and engagement (So et al., 2016b) and brand experience (Francisco-Maffezzoli et al., 2014), as well as the effect of brand relationship strength on the linkages of trust, satisfaction and brand evaluation with BL (Veloutsou, 2015). However, these studies have only analyzed the mediating role of brand relationships and have not considered the nature of those relationships (namely, functional versus emotional relationships), beyond their quality and strength. Hence, there is no research investigating if the nature of consumer–brand relationships may act as a moderator. Yet, it is reasonable to expect that their functional/emotional orientation will change the nature and strength of the relationship between variables such as CBE or satisfaction, and BL. Namely, as emotional relationships are expected to lead to higher levels of CBE, these should influence BL to a greater extent when compared with functional relationships. As such:

**H5.** The (direct and indirect) impact of CBE on BL is stronger for emotional than for functional consumer–brand relationships.

Accordingly, Figure 1 depicts the research framework.

### 3. Research methodology

A cross-sectional survey was applied to two independent convenience samples, a justifiable approach, utilized in most engagement research. Respondents were invited by mail and through social media to participate in a web-based self-administered survey about the relationships established with brands. To get meaningful results (Fetscherin et al., 2014), brands were self-selected: respondents of one sample were asked to recall a brand with which they had a functional relationship, while the other respondents were asked to consider a brand with which they had an emotional relationship. The survey included a definition of both types of consumer–brand relationships according to the literature (Bhat and Reddy, 1998; Fournier, 1998; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Keller, 2012). Accordingly, when the consumer primarily values the brand for its functional role, associated with objective benefits, such as efficiency or reliability, and inherent characteristics of brand attributes (e.g. price, design, quality), the consumer–brand relationship was characterized as “functional”. Conversely, when the consumer primarily values the brand for its symbolic benefits, for the social desirability of the brand and its self-expressive value, which satisfy consumer’s high-level needs and engage them in additional meaningful ways, the consumer–brand relationship was considered as “emotional”.

Though acknowledging that some relationships may incorporate both components (functional and emotional), it is the relative balance between the two that matters (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002), and thus, this research distinguishes between primarily functional or emotional relationships. Respondents then completed the questionnaire with reference to the brand they had identified.

The survey included questions about CBE, considering its three-dimensions, Satisfaction and BL, which was examined in terms of repeat purchases and willingness to recommend the brand (Oliver, 1999; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), incorporating both attitudinal and behavioral measures (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001). All variables were measured using scales adapted from the literature (Table II), measured with a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”. A causal model was developed using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS 22.0.

Data collection sorted 655 valid answers (320 for functional brands and 335 for emotional brands). The most represented brand categories include soft drinks, fashion and apparel, technology and grocery shops, corresponding to a large spectrum of categories and industries, enhancing external validity and generalizability of results. Respondents declared having an emotional relationship with brands such as Apple (7 per cent), Nike (6 per cent), Coke (3 per cent), Samsung (3 per cent) and Adidas (2 per cent), while functional relationships were identified with, for example, Apple (7.5 per cent), Zara (4 per cent), Nivea (2 per cent), Nestlé (2 per cent) and a couple of local supermarkets (3 per cent to 4 per cent). Overall, brands reported on the two samples were different, but there were also similarities (e.g. Apple was the most referred to in both).
highlighting that classifying a brand as emotional or functional is a highly subjective matter, subject to multiple interpretations (Hollebeek, 2013). Though consumers are expected to form stronger relationships for some product categories than for others (Fetscherin et al., 2014; Veloutsou, 2007), their attitudes towards brands vary mainly due to their subjective perceptions about the self-concept role of the brand, with self-expressive brands resulting in more powerful emotional responses (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Respondents were predominantly women (72 per cent), young (16-24 years old: 50.7 per cent; 24-34: 28.2 per cent; 44-64: 21.1 per cent) and had a bachelor’s (40 per cent), master’s (28.4 per cent) or PhD (9.4 per cent) degree (while the remaining 22.2 per cent only completed high school). Respondents profiles were similar in both data sets, as required for comparability of functional (72.5 per cent women; mean age: 28; bachelor’s degree: 41.9 per cent) and emotional (62.7 per cent women, mean age: 29; bachelor’s degree: 38.2 per cent) groups.

4. Research findings

4.1 Measurement model evaluation

Composite measures of identified factors were unidimensional and demonstrated good scale reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Two items (COG5 and BEH5) reduced scale reliability because of weak factor loadings and were removed. Internal reliability tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model constructs</th>
<th>Full Sample**</th>
<th>Functional Brands**</th>
<th>Emotional Brands**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COGNITIVE CBE</strong> (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dwivedi, 2015)</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.81$; AVE = 0.64; CR = 0.88</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.83$; AVE = 0.67; CR = 0.89</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.79$; AVE = 0.61; CR = 0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG1: I think a lot about [brand]</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>0.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG2: [Brand] stimulates my interest</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>0.794</td>
<td>0.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG3: When I use [brand] I forget everything</td>
<td>0.793</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>0.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG4: Time flies when I interact with [brand]</td>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG5: It’s difficult to detach myself when using [brand]*</td>
<td>––</td>
<td>––</td>
<td>––</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFFECTIVE CBE</strong> (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dwivedi, 2015)</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.89$; AVE = 0.71; CR = 0.92</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.90$; AVE = 0.72; CR = 0.93</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.89$; AVE = 0.69; CR = 0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF1: [Brand] inspires me</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF2: I am proud of using [brand]</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF3: I use [brand] with total dedication</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF4: Using [brand] makes me happy</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td>0.844</td>
<td>0.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF5: I feel enthusiastic about [brand]</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEHAVIORAL CBE</strong> (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dwivedi, 2015)</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.83$; AVE = 0.61; CR = 0.86</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.81$; AVE = 0.64; CR = 0.88</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.75$; AVE = 0.61; CR = 0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEH1: I spend a lot of time using [brand]</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEH2: [Brand] is one I often use in [category]</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>0.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEH3: Within [category] I always use [brand]</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEH4: I feel like using [brand]</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEH5: I’d like to stick with [brand] despite some problems with it*</td>
<td>––</td>
<td>––</td>
<td>––</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRAND LOYALTY</strong> (Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Dwivedi, 2015)</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.86$; AVE = 0.66; CR = 0.91</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.88$; AVE = 0.69; CR = 0.92</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.85$; AVE = 0.64; CR = 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY1: I would recommend [brand] to friends</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>0.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY2: I will buy [brand] again</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>0.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY3: I will not buy another brand if [brand] is present in the store</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY4: I am faithful to [brand]</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>0.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY5: I am committed to [brand]</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SATISFACTION</strong> (Dwivedi, 2015)</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.90$; AVE = 0.77; CR = 0.93</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.91$; AVE = 0.79; CR = 0.94</td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.89$; AVE = 0.76; CR = 0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT1: I did the right thing when I bought [brand]</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>0.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT2: I am satisfied with [brand]</td>
<td>0.864</td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT3: [Brand] meets my expectations</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT4: My choice was a wise one</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>0.852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *Items removed due to weak factor loadings; **all standardized factor loadings are significant ($p < 0.000$); full sample: $\chi^2(142) = 417.738, p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.942$, CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.958, RMSEA = 0.054; SRMR = 0.053); functional brands: $\chi^2(142) = 356.357, p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.510$, CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.941, RMSEA = 0.068; SRMR = 0.064); emotional brands:  $\chi^2(142) = 308.186, p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.170$, CFI = 0.968, TLI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = 0.048).
showed strong Cronbach’s alpha (ranging from 0.81 to 0.90), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variances Extracted (AVE), with estimates above recommended minimums of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Overall fit indices indicate the robustness of the resulting first-order measurement model (Table II) according to accepted standards (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007; Hair et al., 2017).

Convergent and discriminant validity were demonstrated by factor loadings and pairwise correlations between factors, respectively. All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), supporting convergent validity. Moreover, estimated pairwise correlations between factors:

- did not exceed 0.85 and were significantly less than one (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988); and
- the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than the correlations between them (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), supporting discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), except for Satisfaction and BL (Table III).

Therefore, a chi-square test was performed (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) to examine whether a restricted model (where the correlation was fixed to 1 for the pair of constructs under examination) was significantly different from the freely estimated model. The difference was significant ($p = 0.000$), indicating discriminant validity. Moreover, the correlation between the two constructs was within two standard errors (SE) of unity (SE = 0.012, $p = 0.001$), offering further support for discriminant validity between the constructs (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

After establishing the strength and psychometric properties of the scales underpinning the first-order model, a second-order factor analysis was performed to test the higher-order factor measurement model, considering the model dimensions as first-order indicators of CBE. The overall index score has a standardized Cronbach’s alpha of 0.870. The second-order standardized factor loadings were all positive, higher than 0.50 and significant ($p < 0.01$). The affective dimension (0.923) emerged as the most important dimension of CBE, followed by the cognitive (0.897) and behavioral (0.834) components. Overall indices suggest a good fit of data (Figure 2), supporting a reflective measurement model.

### 4.2 Predictive validity of consumer brand engagement

The predictive validity of CBE regarding BL ($H1$ to $H3$) was examined in two steps. First, a base model was estimated,

---

**Table III** Means, reliabilities and correlations of model constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model constructs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive CBE</td>
<td>3.653</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective CBE</td>
<td>4.346</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral CBE</td>
<td>5.252</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.613</td>
<td>0.586</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>0.783</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>5.565</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.549</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>5.240</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>0.712</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Diagonals are the square root of AVE of each factor. Correlations on the off-diagonal; $p < 0.01$ for all correlations.

---

**Figure 2** Results for the higher-order model of CBE

Notes: All standardized coefficients are significant ($p < 0.05$); $\chi^2(39) = 100.965$, $p = 0.00$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.589$, CFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.976, RMSEA = 0.049, SRMR = 0.026)
Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) recommend the from CBE to BL (Figure 3). The augmented model indexes suggest a good fit (Model 2, Figure 3). Model 2 explains 93.3 per cent of BL variability and 44.4 per cent of satisfaction variability, with a significant total effect of CBE on BL ($\beta = 0.634$). Results further show satisfaction as an outcome of CBE ($\beta = 0.576$), with satisfaction having in turn a positive impact on BL ($\beta = 0.896$). The results of a bootstrap analysis (Preacher and Hayes, 2004) based on 3,000 samples suggest that satisfaction mediates the CBE to BL path (indirect effect = 0.516; 95 per cent CI = 0.434 to 0.604; $p = 0.001$). Yet, though failing to provide support for $H2$, results also show there is still a significant direct path from CBE to BL ($\beta = 0.118$), even when satisfaction is included in the model. Hence, findings suggest both a direct and indirect positive impact of CBE on BL, with satisfaction partially mediating the relationship between both constructs, providing support for $H1$ and $H3$.

**Figure 3** Results for the predictive validity of CBE regarding brand loyalty

- **(a)** Satisfaction = 0.067
- **(b)** Satisfaction = 0.0896

**Notes:** All standardized coefficients are significant ($p < 0.01$): (a) Model 1: $\chi^2(94) = 284.998$, $p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2$/df = 3.032, CFI = 0.975, TLI = 0.960, RMSEA = 0.056, SRMR = 0.047); (b) Model 2: $\chi^2(155) = 429.902$, $p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2$/df = 2.774, CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.053)

### 4.3 The moderating role of the nature of consumer-brand relationships

To test the moderating role of the nature of consumer brand relationships ($H4$ and $H5$), multi-group analysis was used (Byrne, 2004). Before conducting comparison across groups, a factor analysis with each data set was performed separately (Table II). In both groups, factor loadings exhibited a similar pattern, were significant, demonstrated good internal consistency and scale reliability (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Overall indices for both subsamples suggest acceptable fit to data.

#### 4.3.1 $H4$ testing results

To verify $H4$, a latent mean analysis (Byrne et al., 1989) was conducted to determine whether significant differences between CBE dimensions means exist according to the functional or emotional nature of consumer-brand relationships. Three types of invariance (i.e. configural, metric and scalar invariance) required for latent mean analysis were assessed (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

First, a baseline, unconstrained measurement model was specified based on both data sets. A good fit to data ($\chi^2(254) = 664.547$, $p < 0.00$ ($\chi^2$/df = 2.340, CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.943, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.070) indicates configural invariance. When compared with a fully constrained model, the quality of model adjustment was not significantly different ($\Delta\chi^2(177) = 21.868$, $p = 0.190$), suggesting metric invariance. Through a similar procedure, scalar invariance was also assessed. The $\chi^2$ difference was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(39) = 100.498$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting evidence of variance. However, in these cases, Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) recommend the assessment of changes in other fit parameters. A comparison of these indices indicated that they were virtually identical to those of the unconstrained model (CFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.940, RMSEA = 0.047, SRMR = 0.070), suggesting scalar invariance.

As the three invariance tests were satisfied, the latent mean analysis was conducted (Table IV). The analysis was performed by constraining the latent means of the emotional group to zero, so that the estimated latent means of the functional group represent the mean differences between the two groups. Results based on $z$-tests show statistically significant differences, with all CBE dimensions (particularly, affection) being less intensive for functional over emotional relationships. Thus, though functional brands are also able to generate CBE, consumers tend to feel more engaged with brands with which they have a primarily emotional connection.

#### Table IV Comparison of latent mean scores by the nature of brand relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CBE Dimensions</th>
<th>Mean difference Estimate (F-E)</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Z*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>$-0.601$</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>$-6.620^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>$-1.055$</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>$-10.867^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>$-0.747$</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>$-6.883^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** *Significant at $p < 0.000$; F(E): functional (emotional) group; SE: standard error; Z: critical ratio; $Z_{0.975} = 1.96$
4.3.2 H5 testing results
To test H5, moderation tests were conducted to determine whether the strength of the hypothesized paths were different between functional and emotional brand relationships. Cross-validation of the causal model was achieved by testing three types of invariance (i.e. configural, metric and factor variance) following Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) recommendations. Unconstrained models based on both the functional and the emotional brands data sets were specified. Results for Model 1 show a good fit to the data (χ²(190) = 507.766, p < 0.00 (χ²/df = 2.672, CFI = 0.964, TLI = 0.942, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.062), indicating configural invariance.

After specifying a fully constrained model, the quality of model adjustment was not significantly different when compared with the unconstrained model (Δχ²(14) = 14.270, p = 0.430), suggesting metric invariance. Factor invariance was also established (Δχ²(18) = 17.978, p = 0.457). Next, both models at path level were compared by constraining the CBE to BL path to be equal for both sample. The χ² difference (Δχ²(1) = 3.928, p < 0.05) indicates that the direct path between CBE and BL is significantly higher for emotional brands (β = 0.698) when compared to functional brands (β = 0.645), partially supporting H5.

The same procedure was developed for Model 2. After specifying the unconstrained model (χ²(112) = 732.910, p < 0.00 (χ²/df = 2.349, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.943, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.065), which again indicates configural invariance, metric (Δχ²(17) = 21.015, p = 0.226) and factor invariance (Δχ²(23) = 24.165, p = 0.395) were also established. Next, both models at path level were compared (Table V) by constraining each of the path models (the CBE to Satisfaction path and the Satisfaction to BL path) one at a time. The χ² difference (Δχ²(1) = 5.459, p = 0.019) indicates that the direct path between CBE and Satisfaction is significantly higher for emotional brands (β = 0.697) when compared to functional brands (β = 0.634). Furthermore, given the χ² difference (Δχ²(10) = 4.862, p = 0.027), the direct path between Satisfaction and BL is significantly higher for functional brands (β = 0.893) when compared to emotional brands (β = 0.854).

A bootstrap analysis based on 3,000 samples suggests that Satisfaction mediates the CBE to BL path, both for functional (indirect effect = 0.495; 95 per cent[CI] = 0.393 to 0.612; p = 0.001) and emotional brands (indirect effect = 0.538; 95 per cent[CI] = 0.410 to 0.696; p < 0.001). Though there is also a significant direct path from CBE to BL (β = 0.107 and β = 0.113, p < 0.05, respectively), there is an indirect impact, mediated by Satisfaction, stronger for emotional brands.

Table V Causal moderating effects: functional and emotional brand relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural paths</th>
<th>Functional brands</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Emotional brands</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBE → Brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.645</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.698</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>1.998*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBE → Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.697</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>2.349*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction → Brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>2.170*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *Significant at p < 0.05; β: path coefficient; SE: standard error; Z: critical ratio; ^Z_{0.025} = 1.96
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Teresa Fernandes and Mariana Moreira

construct, comprised of its cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. While assessing CBE’s predictive validity, findings show a significant impact of CBE on BL. (Figure 3, Model 1), even when Satisfaction is included as an antecedent in the analysis (Figure 3, Model 2). Though Satisfaction, traditionally regarded as fundamental to BL, plays a major role, the direct effect of CBE on BL was still globally significant. These results are at odds with previous studies developed in very specific contexts which supported a dominant contribution of CBE to BL (Calder et al., 2016b; Dwivedi, 2015; So et al., 2016a). Yet, they corroborate other researchers (Bowden, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), who are moving beyond satisfaction and focusing on the contribution that CBE also has to BL. Notably, in addition to this direct impact, results suggest that CBE significantly influences Satisfaction, which in turn leads to BL (Figure 3, Model 2), establishing Satisfaction as a significant mediator and supporting the positive indirect impact of CBE on BL.

Furthermore, while analyzing the differences in CBE according to the functional or emotional nature of consumer–brand relationships, this study concludes that CBE is stronger for emotional than functional relationships in all its dimensions (Table IV). Thus, though CBE can be extended to “mundane” brands (Vivek et al., 2014), consumers tend to feel more engaged with brands with which they have a primarily emotional connection (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Moreover, through a multi-group analysis, the effect of CBE on BL proved to be stronger for emotional brands (Table V, Model 1). Again, when Satisfaction was included as an antecedent in the analysis (Table V, Model 2), the direct effect of CBE on BL was still significant for both brands, with the impact of Satisfaction on BL proving to be significantly stronger for functional brands. The study also concludes that CBE is particularly impactful on Satisfaction for emotional brands, while Satisfaction has a stronger role in the development of BL for functional brands (Table V, Model 2).

As Satisfaction relates to a post-purchase rational assessment and a cognitive judgment linked to prior expectations, it is expected to exert a stronger effect on loyalty to functional, utilitarian-based brands, mainly valued for their performance attributes. When considering emotional brands, primarily valued for their symbolic meanings, CBE, a relationship-based concept that moves beyond mere purchase, is expected to have a stronger impact on BL when compared to Satisfaction. Hence, though significant for both brands, the indirect effect of CBE on BL is overall stronger for emotional brands, leading to a stronger total effect of engagement when compared with functional brands. As such, findings suggest that BL can be strengthened combining both purchase-based (Satisfaction) and beyond-purchase based (CBE) variables, thus expanding existing theory and providing empirical evidence (so far largely lacking) that supports the contribution of CBE to the BL literature.

Overall, our findings enhance knowledge on how consumers engage with and become loyal to brands, offering important implications for brand managers. Though brands are increasingly investing in engaging consumers, uncertainties remain on the return of these efforts. This study suggests that, beyond the dominant role of Satisfaction, CEB can also contribute to enhance BL, thus establishing its managerial value to brands. When Satisfaction is increasingly becoming a basic, minimum requirement of being in the game rather than a driving factor (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), this study shows that not only CBE incrementally explains BL together with Satisfaction, but also impacts Satisfaction as a significant predictor of BL, particularly when brands are able to evoke an affective relationship with consumers. Yet, though to a lesser extent, also functional brands can benefit from engaging their customers, as loyalty to these brands is strengthened not only directly (and strongly) through Satisfaction, but also indirectly through CBE. Hence, for brand managers, CBE may represent a competitive advantage, particularly if focus is given to the symbolic benefits of the brand and to brand “meaningfulness”, instead of merely focusing on price or quality. Beyond primary transactional needs, the exchange process now demands the establishment of relational bonds between consumers and brands, and simply satisfying customers is no longer enough to make them loyal, even for utilitarian products.

Challenged by a highly competitive environment characterized by consumers’ switching behaviors, and by the “increasingly interactive and experiential nature of consumer relationships [...] beyond core purchase situations” (Dessart et al., 2015, p. 28), brands may retain and commit consumers through entertaining, co-creating and stimulating experiences outside core transactions (Merrilees, 2016). These may lead to cognitive, affective and behavioral manifestations of CBE, which in turn may increase Satisfaction and BL. Moreover, and considering the significant impact of social media, brands should use it to complement traditional forms of engagement by promoting online consumer interactions, product information and content sharing; even among individuals who are not actual customers of the brand but nevertheless fell engaged with it. This can be accomplished through, for example, virtual brand communities (Hollebeek et al., 2017; Dessart, 2017; Gong, 2018), together with other connective tools that establish consumers’ psychological ownership and incentivize them to voluntarily contribute to marketing functions (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Moreover, traditionally managers have used marketing research data to measure satisfaction as a key performance indicator. This research shows that, given the role of CBE as a direct and indirect predictor of BL, engagement should also be regularly measured. Through the scale used in this study, brand managers can better examine overall engagement and its dimensions and identify effects of their engagement strategies while monitoring them over time. Managers can further gain insights into consumers’ CBE levels, their cognitions, emotions and behaviors during brand interactions and how they vary across segments. This may then be applied in designing targeted engagement strategies (e.g. to gain their conscious attention, to let them know more about the brand, to elicit enjoyable experiences, to develop reciprocal interactions) to generate enhanced loyalty outcomes. The scale also allows managers to understand the different relevance of each CBE dimension according to the nature of consumer–brand relationships, with the affective dimension being particularly variable (Table IV). Yet, the study mainly proves that, whether brand relationships are predominantly functional or emotional in nature, increasing CBE levels creates value for both the firm and the consumer, enhancing BL directly or indirectly through Satisfaction.
Some limitations and opportunities for future research need to be acknowledged. The study characterized brand relationships according to their primarily utilitarian or symbolic value from the consumer’s point of view. However, other dimensions can be considered to characterize these relationships (Fourrier, 1998; Keller, 2012), as well as other brand outcomes and CBE mediators. Furthermore, brands were self-selected by respondents (and not pre-determined by researchers); however, this implied having no control over the characteristics of selected brands, and may encompass some favorability bias, which can lead to over-estimated measures of CBE, Satisfaction and BL. In addition, data were collected using a convenience sample, which warrants caution in generalizing results and calls for further cross-validation. Moreover, this study only included existing customers of self-selected brands; future studies could also examine potential customers. Another limitation lies in the cross-sectional nature of the research. The study investigates a single point in time and includes consumers from a single, Western European country. Given that culture is expected to play a significant role in determining whether the nature of brand relationships is considered functional or emotional, and in adopting distinctive CBE styles and behaviors (Gong, 2018; Hollebeek, 2018), future research is advised to replicate this study in different countries and cultures. Additionally, given that engagement is a context-dependent construct (Hollebeek, 2011), future research is encouraged to develop a comparative analysis of CBE in, for example, online and offline settings. Finally, though discussions around the conceptualization of CBE seem consistent, its dimensionality and measurement still raise some debate (Dessart et al., 2016), with some researchers questioning its multidimensional (France et al., 2016) and reflective nature (Hepola et al., 2017). Therefore, future research is encouraged to examine different CBE measurement scales.

References


Consumer brand engagement

Teresa Fernandes and Mariana Moreira


Further reading


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