Know Me Well, or I Could Disengage and Hurt You: The Influence of Personality Traits on Harmful Consumer Engagement and Potential Brand Sabotaging

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Resumo

Studies about consumer engagement have become more relevant in the last twenty years, in line with the increase of Internet-use, and researchers are interested in changes in the way people relate with brands and how consumers? traits may interfere with those relationships. New concepts have emerged in the last few years to assess how consumers react in extreme cases of dissatisfaction, such as using Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS). We analysed the influence of personality on consumer engagement and how that engagement affects consumer brand sabotage. This research clarified the impact of personality on consumer engagement and its effect on CBS with an explanation power of over 49%. This work also illustrates the role of failure severity as moderating the relationship of consumer engagement and CBS, finding a negative effect.

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Abstract: Studies about consumer engagement have become more relevant in the last twenty years, in line with the increase of Internet-use, and researchers are interested in changes in the way people relate with brands and how consumers' traits may interfere with those relationships. New concepts have emerged in the last few years to assess how consumers react in extreme cases of dissatisfaction, such as using Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS). We analysed the influence of personality on consumer engagement and how that engagement affects consumer brand sabotage. This research clarified the impact of personality on consumer engagement and its effect on CBS with an explanation power of over 49%. This work also illustrates the role of failure severity as moderating the relationship of consumer engagement and CBS, finding a negative effect.

Keywords: consumer engagement, brand sabotage, personality, service failure

1. Introduction

The Gallup institute developed a Customer Engagement survey that would help understanding the outcomes of engagement that consumers demonstrate. The 3-item survey led Gallup to offer some insights on how a pure emotional link translates into results for companies: banking customers who are fully engaged bring 37% more revenue than their actively disengaged counterparts; the same groups of customers for consumer electronics display a 29% difference in spending (Gallup Inc, 2017).

Recent article reviews have concentrated on grasping the relationships between Customer Engagement and its antecedents and consequences, while still in search of a concept definition (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016; Islam & Rahman, 2016b; Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2015). Authors also still discuss (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016) whether Customer Engagement is a context-specific (i.e. Dessart, 2017) or universal phenomena (Calder, Malthouse, & Maslowska, 2016). As a result of such thorough investigation, the scientific community has suggested a number of conceptual frameworks to try and explain how Customer Engagement interacts with these variables, regardless of the domain and context (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Marbach, Lages, & Nunan, 2016; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, some scientific outlets have dedicated special issues to the matter, as pointed out by Dessart *et al.* (2015), including the Journal of Service Research in 2010, the Journal of Strategic Marketing in the same year, and the Journal of Marketing Management in 2016 (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016).

In addition to understanding negative engagement effects, there are antecedents of Customer Engagement that relate to individual traits and demand further understanding. These characteristics work as a basepoint for consumers to get involved with brands, communities, and other individuals (Barger *et al.*, 2016).

However, research about the influence of personality on consumers has been scarce, calling for further investigation of the impact of individual traits on the consumer field (Baumgartner, 2002). Marbach and her colleagues (2016) focused on delineating the relationship of personality traits and consumer engagement, as exploratory research. The authors suggest using structural equation modelling to test how, and how strongly, the constructs relate with each other. Further studies tested the quantitative causal relationships of how the traits impact consumer engagement (Islam, Rahman, & Hollebeek, 2017), but the construct of consumer engagement was operationalized in an unidimensional form, rather than the more accepted multidimensional form (Brodie *et al.*, 2011).

Additionally, there are new concepts arising that could be connected with failures in how companies deal with consumers, leading to other consequences of poor engagement such as Consumer Brand Sabotage (Kähr *et al.*, 2016), in which consumers deliberately harm the brand. Finally, due to its impact on consumers' feelings, when a brand fails, the severity of the issue

could lead the consumer to get angry. Such emotions enhance the chances those consumers will engage in retaliation (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2009), so it is important to consider those possible effects.

This study's objective is to understand the relationship between personality traits and Customer Engagement (CE), its consequences on negative word-of-mouth, and whether personality traits contribute to Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS). We also consider the influence of failure severity on the CE-CBS relationship. As specific objectives, we collected information about individuals' personality traits and their way of engaging with their favourite brands and products in social networks, such as Facebook, as well as understanding whether they have negatively recommended any of those brands or products or even sabotaged them. The relationship between consumer engagement and consumer brand sabotage is also subject to moderation given how intensely the consumer experienced the negative impact.

2. Theoretical Review

In this chapter we present the literature review for each of the topics in this investigation, as well as the conceptual model.

2.1. Customer Engagement

Despite last decade's discussion about Customer Engagement (hereafter CE), its first appearance in business literature is attributed to a white paper (Appelbaum, 2001) for a research company. The concept started to populate academic and business professionals' minds in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The current concept of CE involves different perspectives from the marketing literature. First, changes in recent CE could be attributed to a simple change in the way brands relate to consumers, resulting in different customer-brand connections (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). The most recent change is due to the increasing use of the Internet, as it permeates households (ComScore, 2014), contributing to a change in the way brands connect with consumers. Changes in the customer-brand relationship did not start with the Internet, or even in the last few years. Offline brand communities are as much an example of how the relationship with customers has evolved. Brand identification directly influences community engagement and, hence, impacts consequential behaviour within the community. That same relationship holds true in different studies in online settings (i.e. Dessart, 2017).

The origin of CE might be tracked along different paths. However, one path has gained relevance in the scientific community and points out a 'theory addressing the marketing relationship and interactive service experience to examine the conceptual foundations of the emerging CE concept' (Brodie *et al.*, 2011, p. 253). Hence, investigating the ways consumers and companies relate to each other, the inherent characteristics of how these relationships hold, and the effects brought to both brands and their community, are usually involved in empirical studies concerning customer engagement (Brodie, *et al.*, 2011a; Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Islam & Rahman, 2016a; Verleye *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the first theory that dealt with relationship marketing and served as a base for the emergence of CE as a concept was the Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). As pointed out by Brodie *et al.* (2011), what Vargo & Lusch (2004) were proposing was a new perspective that recognized some outputs of the relationship with consumers and their interaction with organizations. Those interactions lead to co-creative experiences that shape new domains in the link between consumers and organizations. Vargo and Lusch (2004) especially highlighted in foundational proposition #6 that proposes that the consumer is a co-producer of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Authors later updated this proposition to state that consumers are always co-creators of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This concept underlines the 'collaborative nature of value creation' (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 7).

However, it was not until the end of the last decade that authors began to fully understand the concept. On an issue dedicated to papers that dig deeper into CE, the Journal of Service

Research came out with papers that link service-dominant logic to CE in 2010. As an example, Kumar *et al.* (2010) investigate the concept of CE value and suggest it has four components: customer lifetime value, customer referral value, customer influencer value, and, finally, customer knowledge value. The latter refers to the 'value added to the firm by feedback from the customer' (Kumar *et al.*, 2010, p. 297), which was primarily linked by the authors with the co-creation concept of Vargo & Lusch (2004, 2008).

There are several dimensions of CE that have been studied over the last decade, including the emotional dimension, the cognitive dimension, and the behavioral dimension. Each dimension has influence and predictive value when examining CE. The emotional dimension of CE has evidence to sustain its existence coming from the way people describe their relationship with brands or other consumers, while cognitive CE is more linked with gaining consumers attention in the online environment (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). Finally, the behavioural aspect has more to do with effectively spending time in actions related to the object of engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Moreover, Brodie *et al.* (2011) highlighted the presence of the behavioural dimension more often in the business academic literature.

2.2. *Personality*

Personality has been researched since the early 1900's (Mischel, 1968). An early attempt to measure personality is attributed to Spearman (1904), although his intentions were not to understand how personality effects our behaviour. It was not until three decades later that the scientific community recognized Spearman's advances in factor analysis and its benefits for science (Thurstone, 1934).

Cattell proposed different approaches to studying personality factors, although he was not convinced about the five factors and spent years trying to disprove it, unsuccessfully (Cattell, 1943, Goldberg, 1993). According to Goldberg (1993), several subsequent studies confirmed the five-factor structure – or, Five-Factor Model (FFM). Authors named the five factors: Factor I, Surgency (or Extraversion); Factor II, Agreeableness; Factor III, Conscientiousness; Factor IV, Emotional Stability; and Factor V, Culture – which would be later corrected to Intellect (Goldberg, 1993).

Fiske's (1949) work corroborated what Cattel proposed. Fiske's studies arrived at a similar five-factor model, but he did not demonstrate or explore the implications of his research, aside from using personality inventories to understand and predict performance in a Doctoral program (Lowell & Fiske, 1951). If Fiske had one innovation, it was his collection method. Instead of working with self-ratings (McCrae & Costa, 1991) or with an external rater (Cattell, 1943; Norman, 1963), Fiske decided to compare three kinds of data gathering: self-rating, peer evaluation, and staff evaluation (Fiske, 1949). Although his experiment was important for the study of personality (Goldberg, 1993), it was only another example of applying statistics to a new field.

A decade later than Fiske's study, Tupes and Christal were intrigued by the variation in different personality studies and by the impossibility of comparing factors that emerged in each attempt. Tupes and Christal designed a thorough comparative study, assembled in a technical report for the U.S. Air Force (Tupes & Christal, 1961). In terms of their motivation, the authors stated that it was difficult to understand if the difference between Cattell and Fiske's factors derived from the statistical procedures chosen by each author, their samples, the rater groups, or the fact that Fiske's investigation missed thirteen trait items (Tupes & Christal, 1961). Their objective was to isolate the trait factors based on an analysis of eight different studies, thousands of subjects, and diverse rating methods. As a result, Tupes and Christal also propose five factors: Surgency, Agreeableness, Dependability, Emotional Stability, and Culture.

Goldberg (1993) suggests that the domains take into consideration thousands of traits. Factor I (Surgency or Extraversion) incorporates behavioural traits (e.g. talkativeness) and more

static ones (e.g. reserve). Factor II (Agreeableness or Pleasantness) contrasts positive (e.g. kindness) with more dark side traits (e.g. selfishness). Factor III (Conscientiousness or Dependability) also shows some dual-valence clashes (e.g. thoroughness versus carelessness). Factor IV (Emotional Stability versus Neuroticism) and Factor V (Intellect or Openness to Experience) follow the same path of contrasting traits (Goldberg, 1993).

2.3. *Personality x Customer Engagement*

There have been many attempts to understand how personality traits relate to different variables connected to consumer reactions. Not surprisingly, given the absence of consensus about the descriptions of the traits (McCrae & John, 1990), papers involving personality traits in the consumption context were not abundant before this century. This is part of what Baumgartner highlighted on his call for a personology of the consumer (2002).

When it comes to personality traits and social manifestation, there was interest in understanding the role of personality traits as antecedents of positive word of mouth in the past (Ferguson, Paulin, & Bergeron, 2010). The conclusion draws on how the service-dominant logic context is not enough to explain consumers' loyalties, by recognizing the role of the 'idiosyncratic nature of the individual customer' (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010, p. 25). Instead, personality traits may be able to explain loyalties more readily. Agreeableness and extroversion, two of the five personality traits, were positively correlated with consumers' loyalty for a medical service. Introversion was once demonstrated to be affected by the new order of virtual interaction, as introverts can present as socially apt, something they may not accomplish offline (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000).

However, investigating the effects of personality on word of mouth is no longer enough in terms of understanding how more complex constructs are affected by people's traits, as individual differences are already the object of study for consumer engagement (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Moreover, research on the relationship between individual factors and their consequences around how consumers engage with brands, especially online, have sensibly evolved (Marbach *et al.*, 2016). The attempt now is to understand the impact of each trait on CE. We hope to add to previous investigations of personality traits that either investigated them versus effects other than CE (i.e. Ferguson *et al.*, 2010) or that did not take the multidimensionality of CE into account and built the relationship with personality traits based on an outdated single-dimension CE (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Islam *et al.*, 2017).

As discussed previously, CE is a multidimensional concept (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). Our social behaviour is a consequence of our emotions, mediated by our cognitions that relate to that emotion. Emotion is the base for people to balance their thoughts and actio. Hence, in order to assess whether the sequential dimensions of CE are in line with previous literature, we suggest:

Hypothesis 1: The emotional dimension of CE is positively associated to the cognitive dimension of CE.

Hypothesis 2: The cognitive dimension of CE is positively associated with the behavioural dimension of CE.

Attempts to connect personality traits with Facebook usage found partial validation that some traits affect the way individuals engage with that social network (Ross *et al.*, 2009). As it would be expected, individuals with high Extroversion are part of more groups than individuals with low Extraversion. However, research failed to corroborate that Extroversion is related to how many online friends people have, or even how much time they spend online and, finally, how much they use Facebook features. Neuroticism also failed to explain the latter and also failed to explain the likelihood of posting personal information, such as address and phone number. Neuroticism did explain how individuals post on their timeline or photos. Lastly, neither Agreeableness nor Openness to Experience were related to any kind of Facebook usage and Conscientiousness was not significant in any analysis (Ross *et al.*, 2009). According to the

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study, what explains the fact that individuals scoring high on measures of Extroversion behave only partially as expected is the fact social networks do not work as a substitute to real life. Findings related to Openness to Experience were harder to explain (Ross *et al.*, 2009, p. 582), but Ross and colleagues suggest it would be because of the extent to which such group's (highly open to experience) have broader interests and desire to try new things.

The role of individual personality traits on customer engagement has been recently empirically validated, by directly relating each trait to self-reported engagement on online brand communities (Islam *et al.*, 2017). Extroversion was found to be the strongest driver of customer engagement, with Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, and Agreeableness also positively correlated with that factor. Conscientiousness, on the other hand, was negatively correlated with CE. The alleged reasons for the positive correlations of the first four factors involved inherent interactive, acceptance, and relationship characteristics of those traits, which are part of how online brand communities work. The negative effect coming from the Conscientiousness trait was explained by its own trace of interpersonal relationship versus the lack of meaning of interacting in an online community (Islam *et al.*, 2017).

Hence, the following hypotheses directly relate each personality trait with the emotional dimension of CE (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Each hypothesis was based on the research propositions offered by Marbach *et al.* (2016), in line with Islam *et al.* (2017) conclusions and adapting for the sequential nature of CE. Marbach *et al.* (2016) showed in an exploratory study the interactions between personality traits and each dimension of CE, and the CE sequence of adaptation. Thus, this research's propositions are:

Hypothesis 3: Extraversion is positively related to the emotional dimension of CE.
Hypothesis 4: Agreeableness is positively related to the emotional dimension of CE.
Hypothesis 5: Conscientiousness is negatively related to the emotional dimension of CE.
Hypothesis 6: Openness to Experience is positively related to CE's emotional dimension.
Hypothesis 7: Neuroticism is positively related to the emotional dimension of CE.

Based on previous research and in line with Vivek *et al.* (2012) research proposition #7, which inherently considers the behavioural aspect of CE culminating into an actual behaviour, we also elaborate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 8: The behavioural dimension of negative CE is positively associated with negative word-of-mouth activity regarding the object of engagement focus.

2.4. *Consumer brand sabotage*

With the expansion of online conversations about brands, the power of the consumer to comment on a brand has expanded and granted on-line WOM a much greater impact for brands and judgement about the products (Bone, 1995). Simply condemning a brand via the usual negative commenting is now not the only way to express a negative opinion. The usual negative behaviours of consumer boycotts (Friedman, 1991) and customer retaliations (Gregoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009) are direct responses of the consumer towards companies.

Consumer boycotts are 'an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace' (Friedman, 1985, p. 97). So, boycotts are a way consumers have found to become actors in the marketplace, with objectives that could be either instrumental (e.g., union recognition) or expressive (e.g., venting frustrations) (Friedman, 1991). Studies about customer engagement have shown that negative engagement was directly linked with boycotting (Bowden *et al.*, 2017). Such behaviours could involve customers stimulating other customers to boycott retail stores (Peeroo, Samy, & Jones, 2015). Customer retaliation is related to customer revenge and avoidance, usually manifested in online public complaining contexts (Gregoire *et al.*, 2009) and could be verified in direct antagonistic behaviours towards brands (Bowden *et al.*, 2017).

As those dimensions did not fully describe extreme behaviours of deliberate attempts of harming brands, Kähr and colleagues proposed a new concept in the consumer behaviour

literature: Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS, Kähr *et al.*, 2016). CBS manifests itself from an aggressive stance, based on a conscious wish to harm the brand. In situations of CBS, consumers do not foresee any possibility of re-establishing their relationship with the brand and they do not expect any sort of compensation. Consumer boycott, customer retaliation, and negative WOM are constructs of a major novel construct (Kähr *et al.*, 2016). Hence:

Hypothesis 9: Negative WOM is positively associated with CBS.

The authors proposed the definition of CBS as 'deliberate behaviour by customers or non-customers who have the dominant objective of causing harm to a brand through the impairment of the brand-related associations of other consumers' (Kähr *et al.*, 2016, p. 26). In terms of how CBS takes place in the consumer environment, a conceptual framework that summarizes the factors and psychological drives of the construct is proposed. Despite the empirical evidence presented by Kähr *et al.* (2016), the conceptual framework per se and its relations with other constructs are yet to be tested. According to the authors, the process of CBS begins with any kind of brand deception, such as a service failure. That stimulus is assessed and, if contrary to consumer's values, elicits cognitions and emotions, namely an appraisal. By reassessing those emotions and cognitions, consumers may not be satisfied and may ruminate which could trigger CBS. Finally, the CBS response could be either performance-related or value-related.

The way participants participate in a community is known to affect other members' participation (Langerak *et al.*, 2003), and previous opinions could affect subsequent evaluations of products (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). Thus, consumers have the power to affect each other's thoughts in an online community. In addition, online brand communities are a way for brands to open a communication channel with consumers (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). However, brand communities could attract negative comments, with participants using that space to vent their frustrations with the brand, generating the opposite effect than the one desired (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 10: The behavioural dimension of negative CE is positively associated with consumer brand sabotage.

2.5. *Failure severity*

Smith, Bolton, and Wagner (1999) were probably among the first to organize service failure and recovery in a framework and empirically test the various dimensions and effects of that relationship in different contexts. It was clear for the authors that the more severe the failure, the smaller the effect of any recovery attempts (Smith *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, service failure leads to the customer's perception of loss or harm inflicted by the failed situation, regardless of whether or not that loss is financial (Smith *et al.*, 1999). Among the possible outcomes of a failure, there are a few that are more often observed. Feeling harmed (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012) or perceiving a loss (Nikbin & Hyun, 2015) are in line with Smith *et al.*'s (1999) model. In terms of the emotional responses consumers will give when a service failure occurs, there are a few aspects that could influence them. For example, customers from an airline would demonstrate more moderate emotional responses if they realize justice is being done properly (Nikbin & Hyun, 2015).

The tipping point of customers being emotional is described as customers' rage, which includes all kinds of negative emotions being vented by customers, leading them to engage in all sorts of potentially harmful behaviours against the company (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2009). As service failure is a process starter for CBS (Kähr *et al.*, 2016), there is a clear path of consumers getting exceptionally angry or outraged by companies' failures, leading customers to sabotage the brands. In addition, failure severity is clearly a trigger of higher and stronger emotions and effect consumers' reactions to brands, and the original experiments of CBS indicate that severe episodes are needed to instigate CBS. Hence, we also propose there is a moderation effect in place for the way failure severity will impact CBS:

Hypothesis 11: Failure severity moderates the relationship of Behavioural CE with CBS.

Concluding this section, we present the theoretical model and indicate the hypotheses of this study.
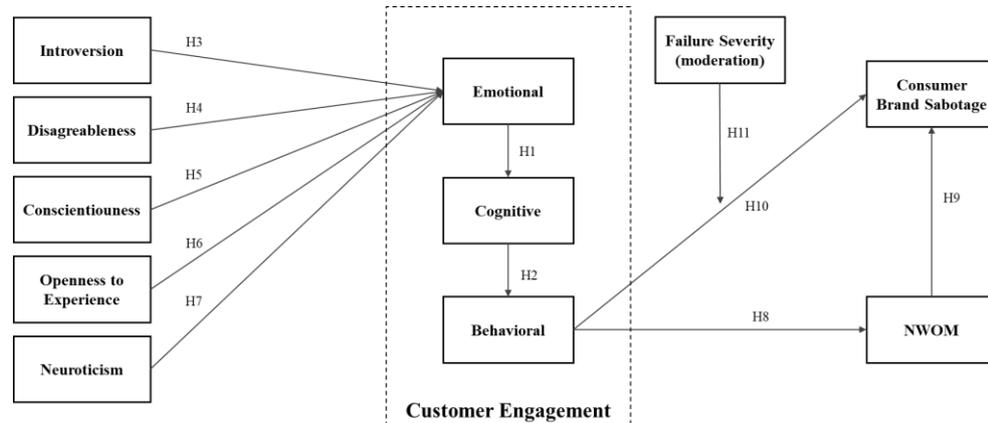

Figure 1 - Theoretical model

3. Methodological Procedure

In this section, we briefly describe the procedures of data collection and analysis.

3.1. Data Collection

This research starts off with consumers who have had a relationship with brands or products in an online environment. That means that consumers who did not have any online involvement were not part of the study, as they failed to fulfil one of the research filters: an online relationship with the brand before a problem or failure could affect their relationship with the brand (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998).

Respondents were recruited through an online Brazilian panel that uses the snowball technique to acquire new respondents. The answers were collected in February of 2018 using SurveyMonkey for online programming of the questionnaire. The scales were randomized, so that every respondent would see a different order of questions each time they opened the link. Another randomization was used in the order of the items of each scale included in this research. Respondents were screened through a series of filter questions, which aimed at guaranteeing the participant had the appropriate profile for the research. Participants whom failed to fulfil any of the conditions were screened out at the end of the filter section.

After the screening phase, participants began answering the questions for each one of the scales involved in this study, starting with the Consumer Brand Sabotage scale, followed by a scale for Negative Word-of-Mouth. Next, the questionnaire included an open-ended question for respondents to describe what issue they had with the brand and what their relationship with the brand was like before the problem occurred. The reason behind including that question was to prime consumers on their engagement level, hence enabling them to more easily think about the next questions. Next, participants filled out their answers about their engagement on social networks with the brand. In the last part of the questionnaire participants responded to fifty sentences about personality traits and completed the final profiling questions.

3.2. Variables and research instruments

The Five-Factor Personality instrument used was the 50-item IPIP representation of the Costa and McCrae's NEO-PI-R domains instrument (Costa & McCrae, 1992; "NEO Domains Key," n.d.), translated into Portuguese by Pontarollo (2008).

For Customer Engagement, we used Dessart *et al.*'s scale (2015), which is indicated when more discriminant validity is needed and when one aims at understanding the interaction of CE's constructs with other variables (Ferreira, 2017). Thus, CE was assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, already translated into Portuguese by Ferreira (2017). The dependent variable Word of Mouth was assessed using Maxham and Netemeyer's scale of intention to recommend (Maxham III & Netemeyer, 2002), with only three items collected using a 7-point Likert scale.

Consumer Brand Sabotage was measured using its own authors measurement instrument, which was also used in the studies that were carried out when proposing this construct, with fifteen items rated on a 7-point Likert-scale (Kähr *et al.*, 2016). Failure severity was assessed using a 10-point scale in which consumers indicated how serious they found the issued to be.

3.3. *Data Analysis*

For data analysis, we used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), as it allows for assessing latent variables and their composition, the measurement model, and their intercorrelation between one another and the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2012). We calculated Partial Least Squares (PLS) as the method of application of analysis, using SmartPLS 2.0M3 software for assessing the model. PLS' path model involves an inner and an outer model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The former concerns how each one of the unobserved variables relate to each other (i.e. Consumer Engagement and Negative Word-of-Mouth), while the relations of the observed variables (or items) connect with the latent variables, regardless of them composing a reflexive or a formative model.

4. Results

In this section, we will present the empirical results of this research

4.1. *Exploratory Factorial Analysis*

First, we checked all the variables included in this study for their adherence to normality and none of them were adherent to the normal curve. Next, each variable was submitted to an Exploratory Factor Analysis, starting with Consumer Brand Sabotage, composed of 15 sentences. The CBS construct reached a KMO of .906, surpassing the .700 threshold for validating the sample's distribution (Hair Jr. *et al.*,2014). The sphericity test came back significant, hence the factorial analysis worked. This first run had only 40% of the Total Variance Explained by the first factor. As CBS is a single-construct theory, it would be important to reach the .60 threshold (Hair *et al.*, 2012) for Total Variance Explained. After assessing the communalities for each one of the variables, three of them (CBS6, CBS7 and CBS14) showed values below .5 and should be extracted in order to improve the model. As Total Variance Explained reached only 43%, the next step was excluding the variables that loaded on more than one factor in the rotated component matrix. The first one was CBS15 and the Total Variance Explained reached 47%. Next, CBS12 was withdrawn for the same reason, followed by CBS13. As there was no significant change in the Total Variance Explained, CBS10 was also excluded from the model, as it was the only variable with a higher load on Factor 2. That decision raised Total Variance Explained to 53% and finally made the model possible with only one factor, since the second factor's Eigenvalue was below 1. The final construct was composed by variables CBS1, CBS3, CBS4, CBS5, CBS8, CBS9 and CBS11.

Variable CBS9 had a sensibly lower mean than other items. As the sentence reads 'I had a strong intention to cause harm to the brand', it seems respondents found that one a little too strong. However, other sentences such as 'I had very hostile thoughts toward the brand' which also sounds extreme, achieved a significantly higher mean (p<.001). Using the same sequence, CE construct had a few variables excluded: Aff4, Aff6, Cog6 and Beh5. KMO was .97 and the sphericity test was significant. Differently from CBS, the three factors from CE covered 76% of the Total Variance Explained by the model. For the personality variables, as the five-factor model has already been assessed in a variety of studies (Islam *et al.*, 2017; Marbach *et al.*, 2016), including its translation and validation in Brazil (Pontarolo, 2008), I did not run the exploratory analysis for the five factor scale.

4.1.1 *Convergence Validity Analysis*

The next step meant extracting each indicator with a factor loading (λ) below .70, as the AVE is the result of average of the factor loads squared, in an attempt to raise the respective construct's AVE above the threshold (Ringle, Da Silva, & Bido, 2014). The procedure began with variable Extroversion. Following recommendations of Ringle *et al.* (2014), we extracted

each variable and evaluated the change in the AVE, stopping when it reached .50. After extracting those five variables, the resulting AVE for Extroversion was .52, hence it was approved for convergence validity. Following the same procedure, resulting AVE for Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience were .524, .535 and .53, respectively. The Neuroticism construct was the most problematic, as not only it was necessary to eliminate seven out of its 10 items, but it also failed to fulfil the minimum AVE of .50 (it reached .439).

4.1.2.   Structural Model Analysis

Results for the Behavioural and Cognitive portion of Consumer Engagement, as well as CBS were strong, while the Emotional dimension of CE and Negative WOM were somewhat moderate. On one hand, CE seems to be mildly impacted by the personality types of consumers and to also mildly impact their negative WOM. The effect of the latter on CBS, on the other hand, is quite strong. Further discussion will be offered in the next chapter.

Results show some of the paths are non-significant, remarkably on the relation of three of the personality traits with CE. All model relations are positive, except for one. The exception is the moderation of the relationship between CE and CBS by the intensity of the failure severity, which is also only mildly significant (t=1.811; Γ=-.554, p<.10). Three of the relationships between personality traits and CE came out non-significant (H1, H3 and H5), while another was only mildly significant (H4: t=1.713, Γ=.090, p<.10). Other paths, despite significant, had weak effects, such as the impact of the behavioural aspect of CE on negative WOM (t=3.143, Γ=.141, p<.001). The full assessment on the impacts of such results will be further assessed in the next chapter.

5.   Discussion of Results

The results show a rather strong influence of emotions on cognitive processes (H1; t=38.140, p<.001). The R^2 for the cognitive dimension of consumer engagement was .62, which means that the emotional dimension accounts for nearly two thirds of the cognitive variation. Those results are in line with decades of research that started with the proposal of the attitudes-behaviour link (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), followed by the mediation rule of intentions, introduced by Bagozzi (1981). After those seminal papers, researchers pursued the confirmation of how such findings could affect various fields. In marketing studies, the literature has focused, for instance, on understanding the role that emotions have on cognitive processes and decision making (Schwarz, 2000). Based on that line of research, a specific emotion, for instance, a negative emotion, could lead to negative thoughts and, subsequently, a negative behaviour against a brand or a product.

So far, to our knowledge, no paper has treated CE as a sequence of constructs that lead to an action. In fact, in one of the rare occasions where the three constructs were not assessed as isolated parts of a whole, Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) proposed an alternative model to their scale, that had the affective and cognitive constructs leading to a behaviour. Their model, however, aligned worse than the proposed one, with three separate and parallel constructs.

Next, the same sequential rule applies for how much the cognitive dimension influences the behavioural construct (H2; t=37.302, p<.001). The R^2 of .56 is not only in line with studies on the attitude-intention-behaviour link (Bagozzi, 1981), but it is also aligned with much of the research about CE. Since Brodie *et al.*'s (2013) proposition of the multidimensional model of CE, authors have constantly sustained that the behavioural aspect – or the action per se – is one of the pillars of how CE comes alive (Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Hollebeek, 2011b; Marbach *et al.*, 2016). The way CE occurs would not be originated outside, but rather inside the consumer, as the basis for the individual manifesting the behaviour would be emotions and cognitive attention.

There was no significant relationship between Introversion and the affective construct of CE (H3; t=1.593, n.s.), which contradicts what previous researchers have found. Most research

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demonstrates that extroverts play their parts online more intensively (Ross *et al.*, 2009). In fact, researchers have been interested in relating personality traits and internet usage, but the first studies were only enough to show a weak, but existent, relationship between who we are and how we use the internet. At that point, there was no relationship known as to whether introverts or extroverts would have longer or shorter journeys online. However, studies rapidly evolved to demonstrate how people behave in social networks. Early personality studies showed the effect of extroverts being part of more Facebook groups, for example (Ross *et al.*, 2009). Nonetheless, the same study could not relate the number of friends or time spent on Facebook with introversion/extroversion. So, when numerous aspects of engagement are considered in order to relate social media usage to personality traits, they did not all make sense in terms of demonstrating the relationship between personality traits and engagement (Ross *et al.*, 2009).

Alternatively, the Agreeableness/Disagreeableness trait showed a significant and rather strong relationship with the Emotional Dimension of CE, allowing for H4 acceptance (t=3.256, p<.001). The investigation of that personality trait and its influence on dependent variables such as WOM was quite fruitful already. Marbach *et al.* (2016) proposed a significant, although negative, relationship between disagreeableness and positive CE, due to less agreeable individuals' wishes to keep a low profile online. Agreeableness was also pointed as a moderator of WOM and impulse buying (Husnain, Qureshi, Fatima, & Akhtar, 2016). This investigation has found a positive effect with the emotional construct of CE, which indicates that more agreeable individuals will more likely to establish emotional connections with others in social networks. On what regards the relationship of Conscientiousness and the emotional component of CE, the object of H5, this research's results do not support H5, as the correlation was not significant (t=1.416, n.s.). This result is consistent with the conclusions of Ross and his colleagues (2009), whom could not find a significant correlation between the Conscientiousness trait and Facebook usage. Other research did confirm the relationship of that trait with social network use, based on the idea that those kind of distractions would be an invitation for the low conscientious individuals to skip their obligations (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011), whereas high conscientious people would avoid using any social network in order to keep on task. Hughes *et al.* (Hughes *et al.*, 2012) collected a set of examples of studies that did find correlations with time spent on Facebook and number of pictures uploaded.

The next trait assessed was Openness to Experience, which composed H6. That relationship with CE also proved significant, corroborating previous research in the field. Due to their novelty-seeking nature, people whom scored higher in the Openness to Experience scale were found to be heavier users of social networks (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010; Ross *et al.*, 2009), although it does not explain the usage of Facebook features (Ross *et al.*, 2009). Individuals more open to send messages to other social media users would have the effectiveness of the message enhanced if it would meet highly open individuals at the other end (Adamopoulos, Ghose, & Todri, 2015).

When it comes to H7, the relationship of Neuroticism and CE, it was not possible to reject the null-hypothesis. The effects of Neuroticism on social media and internet usage were found to be mixed. More neurotic people preferred one-to-one communication to happen online (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002). However, Kabadayi and Price (2014) also failed to find a connection between Neuroticism and one-to-one communication online, although they did find a significant correlation of Neuroticism and 'one-to-many' communication. Other researchers failed to find any relationship between Neuroticism and Facebook usage, specifically on the number of friends, hours spent on Facebook, and a list of behaviours in the social network (e.g., commenting on another person's page) (Gosling *et al.*, 2011).

The justification for the non-correlation between Neuroticism and CE could reside on the fact that there is no mediation of social confidence between Neuroticism and WOM (Wien &

Olsen, 2017). By not needing a social reinforcement, individuals show that interaction through a social network is useless for them to express their opinions. In fact, more neurotic people appear less likely to be able to deal with stress (McCrae & Costa, 1991) and their choice to voice out their complaints in a social network is not a natural consequence.

The first relationship of the consequent variables to be assessed is the effect of the al dimension of CE on NWOM (H8). Results were significant and H8 was accepted (t=3.143, p<.001). Part of the weak relationship could be linked with lower intensity of online WOM via social media, which is mediated by perceived social risk (Eisingerich *et al.*, 2015) or maybe because it is the offline channel of WOM that could overly harm purchase intentions, rather than online conversations (Baker, Donthu, & Kumar, 2016). Other researchers found that same correlation in different contexts (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2015; Verleye *et al.*, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

Next, what Kähr and her colleagues (2016) intended when they proposed the consumer brand sabotage (CBS) concept was to demonstrate that consumers would be able to demonstrate aggressive behaviours toward brands when their emotions peaked in response to any situation, including service failures. Hypothesis 9 aimed at verifying that negative word-of-mouth would lead to such behaviour and it was accepted (t=14.457, p<.001). In fact, there were already a few studies investigating and proposing the relationship of different emotional responses and specific behavioural outcomes, such as WOM (Harrison-Walker, 2012). Those relationships proposed there were different responses across the intensity of the emotional output, with a stronger negative emotion (e.g., anger) leading to a stronger impact than its less strong but related forms (e.g., frustration or irritation) (Harrison-Walker, 2012).

In addition to grading the intensity of the behavioural outcome, NWOM is recognized as an emotional expression, usually influencing one's attitude toward a company or product (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2005), which would then initiate on behavioural consequences (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). NWOM's strength is also inherently stronger than positive WOM (Bone, 1995), which would help explain how NWOM would lead to such harmful and aggressive behaviour as CBS. In fact, NWOM's objectives are usually linked to appeasing negative feelings, as discussed above (Matos & Rossi, 2008), instead of performing deliberate harm towards the brand (Kähr *et al.*, 2016). The anger that leads to specific reactions towards brands are mediated for other mechanisms, such as coping (Strizhakova, Tsarenko, & Ruth, 2012), but ultimately it could cause more violent behaviours. In the first research about ways consumers would seek justice from brands, using boycotts for instance (Friedman, 1991), the intention was to understand which events or triggers would lead consumers to such extreme behaviour. That was in an offline world. In an online world, consumers have found ways to make their voices be heard, which led to various forms of reacting.

When it comes to consumer engagement becoming negative and leading to behaviours that could harm the brand, power has been shifting towards consumers (Aron, 2016). One of the known reactions is online revenge (Obeidat *et al.*, 2017), through which consumers are relying on the breadth of internet reach to voice their frustrations and try to come to terms with brands, especially if triggered by service failures (Obeidat *et al.*, 2017). Other researchers have attempted to justify harmful actions from consumers as reactions to perceived unethical behaviour (Rotman, Khamitov, & Connors, 2018). The results show that this is not the case, however. The positive effect of consumer engagement on CBS defines that consumers who deliberately act to harm the brand had previous engagement with that brand as a stepping stone to their subsequent behaviour. Hence, H10 was accepted (t=2.641, p<.05). Finally, accordingly to CBS proposed framework, there is a chain initiated by the emotional component (Brodie *et al.*, 2011) that leads to CBS, which is connected with stronger negative emotions (Kähr *et al.*, 2016).

The result of the analysis of the interaction between CE and failure severity found a negative result. That means the effect on CBS will be stronger if the failure severity is higher and the CE is lower. That conclusion makes theoretical sense, as CE will be a driver of some sort of consumer involvement with the brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Higher CE consumers are more involved with the brand and its social media presence, hence they find it more difficult to leave the brand (Leckie, Nyadzayo, & Johnson, 2016). However, the more severe the failure, the more exposed the brand is to those consumers' negative reactions, both due to the likelihood of changing the attitudes towards the brand or due to the emotional impact and higher difficulty to switch consumers back to the brand (Nikbin & Hyun, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This research has put together a few concepts that, to our knowledge, had not been aggregated before, as we attempted to understand how consumer engagement could be predicted by personality traits and how both ultimately affected negative word-of-mouth and the recently proposed concept of consumer brand sabotage. The context of the research was set based on failure from brands towards the consumer, and its severity was assessed through its investigation as a moderator of engagement.

In conclusion, the investigation found multiple contributions to the theories tested. First, this research has contributed to the Consumer Engagement theory by advancing its multidimensionality approach (Brodie *et al.*, 2013) through the demonstration that CE could be assembled sequentially. Second, empirically relating personality traits and their effects on consumer engagement was proposed (Marbach *et al.*, 2016) and achieved, although with limitations of considering an outdated single-dimension customer engagement concept (Islam *et al.*, 2017). The consequence of investigating the relationship of each of those traits with only the emotional component of customer engagement opens a new perspective into how our personality affects our attitudes on a specific context of engaging with brands.

The third and probably more fruitful contribution of this research is to empirically apply Kähr *et al.*'s instrument to assess consumer brand sabotage in a quantitative study. To our knowledge, no other research to date used CBS as part of a relational model to attempt to understand how that concept connects with other consumer-related constructs. By demonstrating how consumer engagement affects CBS suggests that the depth consumers are involved with brands could easily transform into aggressive forms of deliberate harm (Kähr *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, a fourth contribution of this research is adding the strength of failure severity as a moderator of the relationship between CE and CBS. Finding out that there is a negative and significant moderation (a) confirms that the lower the engagement, the more in danger brands are; and (b) the severity of the failure could indeed lead to potentially harmful consequences to brands. That advances previous belief that a failure would only lead to NWOM (McQuilken & Robertson, 2011), making it even tougher for brands to consider reconquering extremely unsatisfied customers (Nikbin & Hyun, 2015). Moreover, this finding offers deeper perspective into the evidence that consumers want to come to terms with the brand after a failure (Obeidat *et al.*, 2017).

In terms of managerial implications, the confirmation that personality traits affect the way consumers interact with brands in online communities could help companies better prepare to deal with their consumers. However, the main contribution probably comes from gaining clarity about consumers' harmful behaviour towards brands. Managers should actively keep track of the level of engagement their brands generate both online and offline, in order to anticipate any harmful movement from the low-engaged clusters. Moreover, it would be highly recommendable for managers to further understand what kind of consumers do not engage with their brands, aiming at attracting those consumers to brands' communities. Finally, once any

sabotage behaviour is identified, managers could leverage on the highly-engaged consumers to help them defend the brand against the attacks from sabotaging consumers.

There are limitations present in this research, as part of its method and its theoretical approach. First, the context set for this research was the social media setting. Although much of the online WOM happens in that context (Obeidat *et al.*, 2017), a significant portion is also found in other settings, such as online forums and communities, as well as one-to-one communication apps (i.e. WhatsApp). Such settings could be part of future studies to assess those and verify whether consumers' online behaviour would present differently.Another limitation comes from the fact that despite participants being asked to report their issue with the brand in order to exclude cases with mild or low-intensity, there could be a difference in what people classify as far as serious issues are concerned. Hence, future studies could opt on manipulating those scenarios through experiments or identifying with previous qualitative research what kind of issues would be accepted as part of the research (e.g., problems with deliveries from e-commerce) and use that as a filter for participation, in order to bring linearity of stories from consumers.

A third and final limitation is linked with local idiosyncrasies from the Brazilian culture not captured in this research. Previous investigation has found differences in failure severity in emerging markets (Barakat *et al.*, 2015), so it is likely that local evaluation and perception of what represents sabotaging the brand is perceived differently by local consumers. Further research could explore that possibility and verify whether the same results from the proponent study (Kähr *et al.*, 2016) hold for the Brazilian consumers.

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