



# **How purchase type influences customers' engagement on brands' social media platforms**

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** How purchase type influences customers' engagement on brands' social media platforms

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Our society is currently suffering an urge of keep purchasing new products with hedonic characteristics, which will make us feel happier and more fulfilled. Nowadays, there are almost no customers' decisions that are unaffected by social media, which leads to the increased importance for brands of generating customer engagement via their social media platforms. Thus, it's crucial to understand if different types of brands generate different levels of engagement. In order to fill this gap on the literature, this dissertation investigated whether, on the hedonic brands category, purchase type – material vs. experiential – influences the level of customers' engagement on the brands' social media networks. Furthermore, it was perceived how price and gender affect this relationship. To this end, an online survey with 178 respondents was conducted to identify some patterns of behavior on this subject.

Based on questionnaire results, although experiential products tend to create more user generated content, when it comes to Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) on brands' own social media platforms, material brands take the big win. Moreover, it was accepted a positive relation between the price of the purchase and CBE on brands' social media. Nonetheless, price does not have any moderation effect on the relation between the brand type and CBE. Additionally, it was recognized stronger levels of CBE by females than by males, yet gender also does not moderate the relation between both variables.

**Keywords:** customer brand engagement, hedonic consumption, social media, purchase type

## Sumário

**Título:** De que forma o tipo de compra influencia o envolvimento dos consumidores com as redes sociais das marcas

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A nossa sociedade está atualmente a sofrer de uma urgência contínua da compra de novos produtos com características hedônicas, que nos fazem sentir mais felizes e realizados. Hoje em dia, quase todas as decisões tomadas pelos consumidores são afetadas pelas redes sociais, isto leva à crescente importância para as marcas em gerar envolvimento com o consumidor através das suas plataformas *online*. Desta forma, é importante perceber se diferentes tipos de marcas geram diferentes níveis de envolvimento. De maneira a preencher esta lacuna na literatura, esta dissertação investiga se, em marcas de categoria hedônica, o tipo de compra – material vs experiencial – influencia o nível de envolvimento dos consumidores com as redes sociais das marcas. Além disso, foi testado como é que o preço e o gênero afetam essa mesma relação. Para esse fim, foi realizado um questionário *online* com 178 participantes de forma a identificar alguns padrões de comportamento.

Com base nos resultados do questionário, embora os produtos experienciais tendam a criar mais conteúdo gerado pelo usuário, quando se trata de CBE (*customer brand engagement*) nas próprias plataformas, as marcas materiais saem vitoriosas. Além disso, foi aceite uma relação positiva entre o preço da compra e o envolvimento do consumidor nas redes sociais da marca. No entanto, o preço não tem nenhum efeito de moderação na relação entre o tipo de marca e CBE. Foi também confirmado níveis mais elevados de CBE por mulheres do que por homens, porém o gênero também não modera a relação entre as duas variáveis.

**Keywords:** *customer brand engagement*, consumo hedônico, redes sociais, tipo de compra

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**CBE** - Customer Brand Engagement

**SM** - Social Media

**UGC** - User-Generated Content

**COBRA** - Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and problem statement

The world has changed. We are no longer settling for the simple, basic and ordinary aspects of the human life. Nowadays, we desire more. We want to feel, smell, touch, taste every moment, every product and every experience of our lives. We want to experiment new senses, and more importantly, we want to retain more pleasure from everything we do.

*“Take your pleasure seriously.”*

**Charles Eames**, famous architect and designer

The first original conceptualization of Hedonic Consumption, back in 1982 by Hirshman and Holbrook, is described as *“those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products”*. During the past decades, the topic has been increasing in its importance and discussion, however, there is also an extension on the number of different approaches that researchers have been creating around the concept. Some of them use product-based approaches, distinguishing between utilitarian and hedonic products, while many others chose to analyze a goal-based perspective focusing instead on whether the customer is seeking to achieve hedonic or utilitarian objectives (Alba & Williams, 2013). Both of the approaches will be reflected in the next section of the dissertation.

Consequently, this current urge of purchasing new products and experiences with hedonic characteristics, drive us to the manifold research carried out in the field which acknowledges that buying experiential products brings more happiness, satisfaction and overall well-being to consumers (Gilovich, Kumar & Jampol, 2014). These conclusions are mostly based on three main factors. First of all, experiential products enhance social relations since people tend to feel more connected to humanity in general. Secondly, they decrease the potential for social comparisons considering experiences as more unique and singular. Lastly, but not least important, because experiential products represent a greater significance on people’s lives and self-identity when compared to material products (Gilovich, et al., 2014). Additionally, Bastos and Brucks (2017) stated why experiential purchases have more conversational value compared to material purchases and how this is reflected in people’s buying decisions. The authors define conversational value as *“the likelihood that the consumer talks about a purchase in a social interaction”*. This factor helps to explain why experiential products afford customers’ greater happiness than material ones and confirms previous studies’ conclusions. When analyzing

consumers' buying process, experiential purchases are mostly based on intuition, while material purchases are mostly based on deliberation (Gallo, Sood, Mann & Gilovich, 2017), mainly due to the fact that material products are more easily compared and objectively measured than experiences, so people tend to have the need of analyzing them more analytically while experiences are best handled intuitively. This pattern will in all likelihood influence the level of consumers' engagement on brands' social media accounts. It's also studied that experiential purchases are more likely to get posted on consumers' social media than material purchases (Duan & Dholakia, 2018), but there is still no study about how this difference between products will influence consumers' level of engagement with brands' social media networks. This research will fill this gap by developing research on Customer Brand Engagement (CBE), a concept which has been extensively studied and analyzed in recent years and has been portrayed in many different dimensions and approaches. Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014) wrote a significant paper on the subject which presented us a complete overview of engagement conceptualizations in the marketing literature, concluding by forming its own definition of the term, as *"consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interaction"*. The authors divided CBE by three main dimensions – cognitive processing, affection and activation – each one corresponding respectively to the generic cognitive, emotional and behavioral nature of 'engagement' in brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011a).

More precisely, this study will be based on customer brand engagement on social media, which consists in a group of Internet-based applications built from the foundations of Web 2.0, allowing not only the creation but as well as the exchange of user-generated content (Kamplan & Haenlein, 2010).

## **1.2 Aims and scope**

The main aim of this research is to assess if, on the hedonic brands category, purchase type – material vs. experiential – influences the strength of consumers' engagement on the brands' social media networks. In order to conduct the study, the following research questions must be answered:

**RQ1:** Regarding hedonic brands category, do experiential brands have stronger customer engagement on their own social media networks than material brands?

**RQ2:** Does the price of the product serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?

**RQ3:** Does the gender of the respondent serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?

### **1.3 Research methods**

Until current times, researchers have mostly focused their attention on the different levels of User Generated Content, more known as UGC, and how these differences are created and affected by different purchases types – material vs. experiential products. In this study, a significant gap on this topic's research will be filled since instead of focusing on UGC, I'll study how purchase type influence the customer engagement on brand's own social media accounts.

One important decision to be made is how to assess the problem I chose to study. I opted to do an applied research since the purpose is to improve insights of a specific management problem and, hopefully, manage to bring new finding of practical relevance to marketing teams in organizations. The research will be mainly based on primary data since original quantitative data will be collected throughout an online survey created on the Qualtrics software. The main target of the survey is people who use social media networks on a daily basis, without specific age or gender restrictions. The survey will be spread through social media (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) in order to reach the largest number of people in the fastest way possible. I will use SPSS program to do the correspondent statistical analysis and collect all the data needed to get to sustainable results and generate the research's discussion. The research approach will be mostly based on induction, since only after a careful analysis of collected data, I'll find some patterns on the results, that will conclude in added theory on the field of study.

### **1.4 Relevance**

This study will have several contributions to the literature, since it will fill a gap by developing scientific advances on brands' social media engagement and product type. The research will serve to understand if the type of product influences the level of engagement, as well as to verify if there are any factors that can affect that same relationship, such as the price of the purchase and gender differences on the matter.

On a managerial perspective, this will help marketing departments in corporations to better sense why there are different levels of engagement between their products and services and what influences that level of engagement. Moreover, this dissertation will contribute with novel insights to the CBE on social media literature in marketing.

## **1.5 Dissertation outline**

This dissertation is composed by five distinct chapters. The next section, Chapter II, presents a detailed literature review where I will analyze past research primarily about hedonic consumption, material vs. experiential products differences and customer brand engagement on social media networks. After that, on Chapter III, it will be described the methodology applied on the study and explained the data collection process used to answer the research questions previously formulated. Consequently, the followed Chapter IV consists on a deep statistical analysis of the results describing the main findings. Lastly, Chapter V reports the key conclusions of this dissertation, refers the main limitations encountered when carrying out the project and reflects about possible future research on the topic.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter summarizes prior research and literature on the main constructs of this dissertation such as hedonic consumption, differences between material and experiential brands, and not least important, consumer brand engagement on social media networks. This overview includes clarifications on concepts' definitions, measurement and analysis of its distinct impacts on businesses. Moreover, it will draw key conclusions and takeaways in order to rise hypothesis to be tested over the course of the research.

### 2.1 Hedonic Consumption

#### 2.1.1 Conceptualization

When it comes to explore the concept of hedonic consumption, emotions and its range of feelings associated play a major role on the field of study (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982), since the striving of emotional arousal is one of the biggest motivations for the purchases of many product categories (Holbrook, 1980). As previous stated in Chapter I, the most worldwide accepted conceptualization of Hedonic Consumption refers to consumers' three different dimensions when using products – multisensory images, fantasies and emotional arousal (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982). This pleasure on consumption, not only happens on hedonic industries *per se*, such as cosmetics or high-fashion purchases, but also in the most daily and cheap products, as for example, a simple pack of cigarettes.

On a very initial stage of research on this topic, Hirshman and Holbrook (1982) analyzed four different areas where hedonic perspectives can and should be applied, which are mental constructs, product classes, product usage and individual differences. Thirty years later, Alba and Williams (2013) expanded the research about the topic and understood which are the sources and determinants of pleasure. Regarding the product itself, pleasure comes from aesthetics and design, having vs. doing and also from essences; in regard to person-product interactions, pleasure arise from created expectations and overall engagement.

#### 2.1.2 Hedonic Products vs. Utilitarian Products

An adult consumer is exposed, in average on a daily basis, to 35,000 of choices per day (Sahakian & Labuzetta, 2013). Within these decisions, most of them are consumption choices between hedonic and utilitarian alternatives. As already described, the hedonic dimension measures the experiential affect associated with the product – how pleasant are the feelings associated to the purchase. On the other side of the coin, the utilitarian dimension of

instrumentality represents how useful the product is and how the consumer benefits of its attributes' functionality (Khan, Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2005). Both of these dimensions, in different aspects and degrees, contribute to the overall consumer's satisfaction. Moreover, individual differences such as social class, gender, age or ethnic background creates diverse perspectives on how a product is defined and what emotions arouse in a specific consumer (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982). One single product or service, e.g. a gym subscription, can be understood as a utilitarian purchase by a person who only cares about its functional features such as to lose weight or get fit, and at the same time, can be seen as a hedonic purchase by a person who only cares about its hedonic features as feeling the pleasure to feel healthy or simply having the fitness addiction. Lu (2016) exposed consumers' tendency of being more likely to choose hedonic over utilitarian products when deciding for another person than when deciding for themselves, much because consumers' sense of guilt when purchasing hedonic products decreases if the purchase is not going to benefit them directly but others instead. Furthermore, it is also known that gender is one of the most mainstream ways of demographic segmentation used by researchers and marketers, since helps to explain many differences on the field of consumers behavior and are relatively easy to measure (Camilleri, 2018). When it comes to this subject, it is studied that women report higher levels of brand commitment, hedonic consumption and impulse buying than men (Tifferet, 2012).

### **2.1.3 Material Products vs. Experiential Products**

Within the categorization of hedonic consumption, the purchases should be divided between material and experiential products. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) introduced the distinction between these purchases and later, many authors studied and improved their conceptualization. The first type of purchase consists on when consumer's main goal is to get the ownership of a specific tangible object and it stays is one's possession; on the other hand, experiential purchases occur when consumer's final goal is to obtain an experience itself (Kuhn, 2018). The way we choose to purchase from these two types of products influence our lives and well-being every single day (Aknin, Wiwad & Hanniball, 2018). Experiential products bring more happiness, satisfaction and overall well-being to consumers (Gilovich, et al., 2014). The authors explain in detail the three main drivers of this causal relationship. Firstly, experiences make us create deeper and stronger connections with people around us, largely because they have higher levels of "relatedness" with others. Moreover, experiential purchases have more conversational value, that is consumers prefer to talk about their past experiential purchases than material ones since it's more well accepted by our society (Bastos & Brucks, 2017). Secondly, experiences

form a bigger part of an individual's identity, meaning we are the total sum of the experiences we lived and not the possessions we have. Lastly, material purchases arouse more social comparisons than experiential purchases (Van Boven, 2005) e.g. it's easier to compare two different computers than it is to compare two different trips. This higher comparison between material goods requires the consumers' buying process to be based mostly on deliberation, while experiential products are chosen based on intuition since outcomes are vague and hard to handle analytically (Gallo et al., 2017). Another factor that benefits experiential products over material ones is related to the "hedonic treadmill" phenomenon also described as hedonic adaptation, first mentioned by Brickman and Campbell (1971) as the tendency of individuals to quickly return to a stable level of happiness despite previous major positive or negative events happened to them in their lives. This term is also characterized as being the downside of adaptation since it is reflected in the imperative need to achieve more and more in order to receive the same hedonic benefit. Experiential products take advantage on this theory regarding their happiness post-purchase levels since it's studied that an individual accustoms less to their gratifying experiential purchases than their gratifying material purchases, meaning pleasure with their owned material products drop off more quickly than it does for their own experiences (Gilovich, et al., 2014).

## **2.2 Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) on Social Media (SM)**

### **2.2.1 CBE Conceptualization**

Engagement itself, is a complex concept originated from psychology, sociology and organizational behavior fields, many times associated to the ability of an individual to socially interact with its society (Hollebeek, 2011b). The present dissertation adopts the following concept of customer engagement - "*psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object, i.e. a brand*" (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011). This psychological state is crucial to attain superior organizational performance outcomes such as cost reductions, sales growth or even, on best scenarios, improved profitability (Bijmolt et al., 2010) so no wonder why companies are, more and more, assessing new ways to increase customer engagement regarding their brands. Tapering the topic a bit deeper, customer brand engagement, in particular, covers specific interactions between a focal customer and a particular brand (Hollebeek, 2011b). Moreover, CBE is a multi-dimensional concept including cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions and that's why it is so difficult to measure it analytically. Hollebeek understood that these three dimensions of

CBE are directly correlated to three key brand engagement topics that are crucial to explore in order to do a proper conceptualization of CBE. They are ‘immersion’ which corresponds to the level of absorption of a customer in a specific brand interactions; ‘passion’ representing the degree of a customer’s strong and positive brand-related affect in specific brand interactions, and lastly ‘activation’ which reflects the stage of effort/time spent and energy invested on a brand in specific interactions. Even though its relatively brief history in research literature, numerous researches address consumer brand engagement from a different range of perspectives, and this literature encompasses not only conceptual contributions, as well as, qualitative/quantitative studies (Annex 1).

### **2.2.2 Measuring CBE**

There is some research on the topic of customer brand engagement measurement, however most studies (e.g. Hollebeek, et al., 2014) apply a fixed collection of items that presupposed that all brands can be judged using the same components for scale. These authors are seeking for a single measurement scale that is reliable and valid across all types of contexts in order to ease marketer’s workload. But the truth is that brands and products vary a lot in their characteristics regards to the subject, the focal object and the context itself (Hollebeek, 2011b) - hence, more studies with a context-specific approach are necessary, e.g. Isaac, Calder and Malthouse (2015). From the vast scales of measurement analyzed, this dissertation will focus on Hollebeek et al. (2014), Vivek, Beatyy, Dalela and Morgan (2014) and Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2016), all of which adopted consumers as subject of the research and recognized the key tree dimensions of CBE – cognition, emotion and behavior. Firstly, Hollebeek et al. introduced these dimensions, correspondingly, as cognitive processing, affection and activation on a 10-item scale which had validated with conceptual relationships and a final model. The authors derived consumer brand ‘involvement’ as a CBE antecedent, as well as ‘self-brand connection’ and ‘brand usage intent’ as key customer brand engagement natural consequences. Two years later, Dessart et al. created a 22-item scale of consumer engagement, dividing affective engagement dimension into enthusiasm and enjoyment subdimensions, analyzing them individually. Furthermore, they’ve separated cognitive engagement into attention and absorption, and lastly, behavioral dimension into sharing, leaning and endorsing. Vivek et al. developed and validated a 10-item scale in several contexts, segregating between enthused participation representing behavior dimension, conscious attention in the name of cognition, and consequently, social connections illustrating emotion.

Primary quantitative data will be collected using the first scale as main foundation, since is the only one which apply social media itself as object of the study.

### **2.2.3 Brands on Social Media**

The most cited conceptualization of Social Media belongs to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and is characterized as “*a group of internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content*”. Currently, there are almost no customers’ decisions that are unaffected by social media networks (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2018) and this leads to the increased importance for brands of generating customer engagement via social media platforms (Schultz & Peltier, 2013), since is one of the biggest marketing trends of our current society. Brands are investing more than ever in connecting with their target audiences across a chain of social networks. According to research our average attention span decreased from 12 second in 2000 to only 8 seconds in 2015 (Mcspadden, 2015), meaning that along the last two decades with the intense and aggressive technological advance, it’s becoming harder and harder for brands to catch customers’ attention, mainly online. In recent years, there has been an invasion of new social networks of all kinds, however Facebook, created in 2004, remains as the largest social media network in the world with 2.4 Billion monthly active users, thus considered the most important and necessary network for any brand in the current marketplace (Stout, 2019).

Social media, being part of the most significant Web 2.0 transformations, has modifying and reshaping the way in which consumers communicate, socialize and get into relationships with each other and with their brands; they stopped being mere spectators and began to play a more active role, collaborating and creating value with the brands throughout the many stages of online marketing (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2018). Related to the hedonic treadmill concept stated previously, society is hardly satisfied and quickly returns to stable level of happiness after the latest novelty or achievement. Likewise, people are constantly looking for new favorable brand experiences across multiple domains (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009), and seeking to relieve a never-ending dissatisfaction. Social media has helped brands maintaining consumers’ enthusiasm by providing rich affective, sensory and cognitive experiences (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie & Araujo-Gil, 2018).

#### **2.2.4 CBE on Social Media**

Research (Stuke, 2014) show us that social media networks challenge organizations to adjust the traditional “one-to-one” engagement practices to “many-to-many” networked relationships, thus allowing a wider and faster reach of its consumers’ communities. In social media, consumers’ motivations for engaging in consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRAs) is based on three main stages (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011) – the first level of the pyramid is represented by users who only consume content, which consists on the minimal level of customer’s online activeness; then, the second stage of engagement is expressed by users who help to contribute to page content by interacting with content provided by the brand itself or by other customers, being this the moderate level of online activeness; lastly, the ultimate level of the pyramid consists on UGC, meaning content created by the users themselves that others can consume and contribute to.

Recent studies (Dwivedi, et al., 2018) demonstrate that emotional brand attachment impacts indirectly social media engagement on the level of customer-based brand equity by increasing brand credibility, trust and overall consumer satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research (Hollebeek et al. 2014) which states that emotional engagement with brands’ social media networks may reflect in marketing outcomes as brand usage intentions.

In regard to gender differences in social media usage, women tend to be more active and engaging online however it depends on which type of platforms we are analyzing. Women are more active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, while men are more active in Youtube and LinkedIn (QuickSprout, 2019). Idemudia, Raisinghani, Adeola and Achebo (2017) concluded that women have stronger perceptions of ease of use, relative advantage, compatibility and risk, compared to men. Additionally, results demonstrate that males have a stronger perception of information quality and satisfaction when using social media networks compared to females. Zailskaitė-Jakštė and Damaševičius (2017) reported consistent results, in the sense that inferred women as being more influenced by the interactions with brand seeking motives, while men were mainly influenced by hedonic motives, which affect their participation engagement level. The authors also enhanced the importance of higher engagement levels in order to increase brand equity, represented in the study as awareness and loyalty. Moreover, findings also indicate that male consumers’ brand loyalty intention is highly influence by their engagement level on social media platforms, while for female consumers’ brand trust was the main antecedent of their loyalty to a specific brand (Rialti, Zollo, Pellegrini & Ciappei, 2017). Summing up, gender plays a major role in people’s social media habits, and consequently, in their buying decision that comes from social media interactions (Fogel, 2019).

## 2.3 Conclusions and Research Hypothesis

The findings of this literature review were extremely useful to reach some needed conclusions in order to create structured hypothesis to conduct this dissertation.

Up to front, it's crucial to define hedonic consumption as those aspects of consumer behavior related to the emotional side of product usage experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). With the beginning of a new millennium our society has undergone many changes in its consumption patterns. Choices that were based predominantly on a utilitarian perspective, merely satisfying consumers' basic needs have drifted to a new hedonic mindset. Society is seeking for more pleasure, more happiness and more well-being than ever before and is hardly satisfied, suffering from the hedonic treadmill phenomena.

Furthermore, it's accepted the multidimensionally and complexity of customer engagement, being one of top research priorities of Marketing Science Institute since 2010. The concept gain strength between researchers and marketers regarding brand-customer relationships in social media networks since this is becoming day-by-day one of largest vehicles for communication and connection between brands and their consumers. Brands have realized the importance of their social media networks in keeping their loyal customers engaged, and most importantly in gathering new potential consumers through the right content. Moreover, organizations understood the shift on the role of the consumer, from an ordinary bystander to an active ally in online marketing. Customer brand engagement on social media is based on three different types of consumers (Muntinga, et al., 2011) – the ones who consume content, those who help to contribute to already existing content and finally, the ones who create content themselves. This dissertation will analyze the first and second levels of engagement, leaving the boundless world of UGC to future research.

Although there is a vast research on these topics, little is studied yet about how purchase type (material vs. experiential) influence customer engagement on brands' social media, specifically in hedonic brands category. Further, there is few research on how gender and prices influence this relationship between brand type and customer engagement on social media. The goal of this study is to discover some new findings in this untapped subject. Thus, the following five hypotheses are the main research object of this dissertation.

**H1:** Experiential brands have higher customer engagement on their social media networks than material brands.

**H2:** There is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer brand engagement on brands' social media.

**H2.1:** The price of the purchase moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.

**H3:** Females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media networks than males.

**H3.1:** The gender of the respondent moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the methodological approach used in this dissertation in order to test the previously mentioned hypothesis in Chapter II, as well as, to answer the research questions raised in Chapter I. In the first place, it is described a detailed description of the adopted research approach, followed by the sampling process and data collection methods. To conclude, data analysis tools will be specified.

### **3.1 Research Approach**

There are two distinct types of research approaches – deductive and inductive research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2013). This dissertation is based on theory-building, thus considered as inductive research – it is supported by new data and insights from consumers which led to a pattern of opinions, testing the hypothesis and adding theory to earlier research on the subject. Collected data will help to answer the formulated research questions, confirming or refuting my previous stated hypotheses, being a practice-driven research. On the other side of the bridge, deductive research seeks to test if a theory already established is either accepted, rejected or revised.

Every research has a specific purpose and it is designed to fill that goal. It can have an exploratory purpose, meaning it aims to identify and extensively characterize a new phenomenon, usually using qualitative research in order to understand the problem. It can be a descriptive study which has as main purpose using quantitative research and secondary data in order to provide a detailed picture of an already known phenomenon. Finally, it can be an explanatory research as this dissertation is described. The final goal is to test the causal relationship underlying a phenomenon, in this specific case, the relationship between brand type and customer brand engagement on social media platforms.

Regarding data collection, this dissertation is based on primary research since original data was collected by me through an online survey which gathered quantitative data specific to the needs of this study. Although primary data usually takes longer to collect, benefits such as controlling the quality of the information overlap time disadvantages.

### **3.2 Online Survey**

#### **3.2.1 Population and Sampling**

The main statistical target of this online survey is people from Generation X and Millennials – thus, population from 20 to 50 years old, which have their own available income to spend in

hedonic purchases and are accustomed to the concept of Social Media, using it on a daily basis. The survey is not limited to this age interval, since it will be interesting to understand how Generation Z, which don't have their own disposable income, and Baby Boomers, whom are not so involved with social media platforms, interact with brands' social media networks. Respondents were asked to fulfill the survey via Facebook and Instagram, to ensure that all of them use social media to some extent. A total of 302 responses were obtained. However, 118 responses were left incomplete, leaving the survey link before finishing the questionnaire, not being suitable for statistical analysis. Moreover, from these total, 6 responses were also left out of account given that represent respondents whom chose 'Social Media Avoider' in the first screening question of the questionnaire, and for that very reason, do not matter in order to conduct this research. Hence, the survey achieved a final sample of 178 valid observations. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the socio-demographic characteristics as regards to survey respondents.

*Table 1 - Socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents (N=178)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	100	56.2
	Male	78	43.8
<b>Age</b>	<18	1	0.6
	18-30	158	88.8
	31-40	15	8.4
	41-50	0	0
	+50	4	2.2
	<b>Profession</b>	Student	117
Employed		55	30.9
Unemployed		2	1.1
Retired/Senior		0	0
Others		4	2.2
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	161	90.4
	Married	9	5.1
	Divorced	6	3.4
	Widowed	2	1.1
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>	<1000€	70	39.3
	1000-2500€	48	27
	2501-5000€	33	18.5
	5001-7500€	15	8.4
	>7500€	12	6.7
<b>Nationality</b>	Portuguese	136	76.4
	Others	42	23.6

### **3.2.2 Design**

The survey was designed through Qualtrics software and it was active for 5 days, from November 5<sup>th</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It was done a pre-testing on the November 4<sup>th</sup> to understand the validity of the survey in terms of question content, wording, sequence, layout and ease of instructions. After some last adaptations the survey was launched online. The questionnaire (Annex 2) is composed by three blocks of questions – an initial part designed in order to collect general information regarding social media usage of the respondents; a second part dedicated to answer my research questions and to test my five formulated hypotheses; and lastly, a third part to collect the socio-demographic information about each participant.

On the beginning of the second block of questions, it is stated the definitions of three crucial concepts for completing the rest of the questionnaire which are Hedonic Consumption, Material Purchase and Experiential Purchase. After these conceptualizations, the respondent is asked the only open-question of the survey which is to write his/hers last significant hedonic purchase, namely the purchase itself and its correspondent brand. Furthermore, within the second block, Question 11 is based on an adaptation of Hollebeek et al. 10-item scale of measurement of customer brand engagement, dividing engagement into three distinct dimensions – cognitive processing, affection and activation. As stated previously, it was opted to use this specific scale since is the only one which applies social media as object of study.

Moreover, Question 7 elucidate us which type of brand each respondent is associated with (material vs experiential), Question 8 asks the participant to specify the price of his/hers referred purchase and in Question 14 the respondent choose the corresponding gender – these questions' analysis will be essential to answer study's research questions.

### **3.2.3 Key Variables**

In the following Chapter IV, it will be analyzed the data collected through the online survey but firstly, it's necessary to understand which variables are at stake in this dissertation.

The most significant independent variable is represented by 'Brand Type', meaning the difference between brands which sell material products - already characterized by a specific tangible object that stays in consumer's possession - and brands which sell experiential products – consumer's final goal is to obtain the experience itself (Kuhn, 2018). Furthermore, there are more socio-demographic independent variables such as age or nationality that will help to build a more detailed analysis of the subject, although not being associated with any specific hypothesis.

The main dependent variable is Customer Brand Engagement on Social Media which is analyzed through the multidimension 10-item scale of measurement of Hollebeek et al., with just small adaptations (Annex 3). To this end, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with all of the 10 items composing the scale, rating them on a 7-point Likert type of response (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). This variable is originally a non-metric variable since has an ordinal background, however it will be created a new variable by averaging the 10 corresponding items transforming it into a continuous metric variable, in order to ease the analysis of the relations at stake. This new created variable, *CBE* showed a good reliability index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .934$ ), indicating that the construct has great internal consistency.

Besides the relation between the main independent and dependent variable of the study, it was studied how this relationship is influenced by two different moderating variables. Up front, how the price of the purchase itself influence CBE on brands' social media in both types of brands, material and experiential, aiming to accept (or refute) H2, which state there is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer engagement on brands' social media networks. Secondly, how the dichotomous variable gender (male vs female) of the respondent affects the direction and strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, addressing H3, stating that females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media platforms than males.

Summing up, the proposed framework considers the influence of the independent variable "Brand Type" (material vs experiential) on the dependent variable "Customer Brand Engagement" on social media, as a function of two variables serving as moderators – the "Price" of the purchase and the "Gender" of the respondent.

### **3.2.4 Data Analysis**

The data collected was compiled into an SPSS dataset and later analyzed through statistical tests in order to accept or refute all five hypotheses.

**RQ1:** Regarding hedonic brands category, do experiential brands have stronger customer engagement on their own social media networks than material brands?

**H1:** Experiential brands have higher consumer engagement on their social media networks than material brands.

Regarding the first hypothesis stated, the variables at stake are one independent variable which is categorical and therefore non-metric, corresponding to the type of brand where the respondent's purchase was made - material vs experiential – and one dependent variable which corresponds to the average of the 10 items of CBE, being a continuous value and so, considered as a metric variable. Thus, the most adequate statistical test to apply is an independent sample t-test, typically used to assess and compare the means of two distinct populations.

**RQ2:** Does the price of the product serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?

**H2** There is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer engagement on brands' social media.

The second hypothesis consists on analyzing the relation between the independent variable which is the price of the product purchased by the respondent – a continuous metric variable – and the dependent, also metric variable, that is customer engagement with the correspondent brand. To do this, the preferable test to use is a linear regression between both metric variables so that it can be determined if there exists, in fact, any association between them.

**H2.1:** The price of the purchase moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.

To analyze if the price of the purchase has a moderation effect on the relation between the type of brand and CBE, it will be created a new variable, which is the interaction between both variables – brand type and price of the purchase – and only then, it will be performed a moderation analysis, running a multiple linear regression, using CBE as dependent variable and brand type, price and the interaction between them, as independent variables.

**RQ3:** Does the gender of the respondent serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?

**H3:** Females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media networks than males.

In order to analyze the third hypothesis, it was taken into consideration the categorical dichotomous variable – female vs male – as independent non-metric variable and the level of CBE as dependent metric variable, once again, using a simple independent t-test to analyze it.

**H3.1:** The gender of the respondent moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.

Moreover, to understand if there are any differences when it comes to CBE on social media between material and experiential brands having gender as moderator factor of this relation, it was applied a two-way univariate ANOVA statistical test between the three variables, using once more, CBE as dependent variable and brand type and gender as fixed factors with two levels each.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following chapter reports the main findings and results gathered from the statistical analysis of the valid primary data collected through the online survey. This analysis will provide the answers for the initial research questions and will test the formulated hypothesis.

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the questionnaire's participants, we can observe from Table 2, that the survey had higher adherence by females (56.2%). Moreover, most of the respondents belong to the desired age range – people from 18 to 30 years old (88.8%), who are active social media users. An ordinary consequence of this young target, is the fact that 65.7% of the respondents are students, followed by employed participants with 30.9% of the total valid responses. By the same token, 90.4% of the respondents have single as the current marital status situation, highlighting as main target of this analysis, generation Y - better known as Millennials -, people with digital resources to embrace the concept of Customer Brand Engagement on social media platforms. Concluding the brief demographic analysis, when regarding to the average monthly household income, answers were extremely fragmented, and as regards nationality, most of the participants were, as expected, Portuguese (76.4%).

Respecting the first section of the survey with reference to respondents' social media usage and habits, it was left very clear that most of them considered himself/herself as medium (60.3%) or even heavy (29.9%) social media users. To understand better how much, in time, is considered a medium and heavy consumption of social media per day, I run a cross tabulation test between both variables, using as independent variable – the number of hours the respondent spends on social media, on average, per day –, and as dependent variable – how the respondent classifies himself/herself in terms of SM usage. The results were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) which means that there is a clear significant association between the number of hours spend on SM and how the respondent classify himself regarding its usage. Most of the medium users of SM spends, on average, 2 hours per day on these platforms, while a heavy user allocates on SM, on average, at least 3 hours of his/her day. Additionally, it was analyzed, also though cross-tabulation, if age and gender would influence how the respondent classify himself/herself in terms of SM usage. Different age ranges do not influence SM usage ( $p > .05$ ), however gender have a significant importance in the dependent variable ( $p < .05$ ). Female respondents considered themselves as heavier users of SM networks than males.

With respect to which kind of brands do respondents engage the most on SM, the participants had five hedonic industries to choose from (maximum 2 answers per respondent) – Fashion, Food/Drink, Cosmetics/Self-care, Sport/Fitness, Technology. The most recalled was Fashion, with 39.1% of the total sample choosing it, followed by Food/Drink and Sports/Fitness with 34.8% each. Cosmetics/Self-care was the least chosen industry (24.5%). Following this analysis, it was important to understand what type of content is more valued, by respondents, on brands' social media accounts. Some conclusions were attained – informative content ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), such as price and features, is definitely the most important type of content for a brand page on SM; followed by entertainment content ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) such as engaging sentences, jokes or pictures, and only then feedback from previous consumers ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ) and giveaways/contests ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ), by order of preference.

Furthermore, it was conducted a descriptive analysis to better understand respondents' habits and preferences regarding CBE on social media networks. Some findings were reachable, such as Instagram ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) being preferable by customers to engage with brands comparing to Facebook ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). Most of the respondents stated that they don't actively engage with brands on SM brands' accounts ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ), however people strongly believe that brands should invest on SM as a marketing tool ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ).

When analyzing the second block of the questionnaire, the first important result to highlight, is the fact that material purchases were more times recalled than experiential purchases, when asked which type of brand respondents did their last hedonic significant purchase, 55.4% of the participants shared a material purchase. In regard to respondents' relation with the brand on SM platforms, the majority of the population don't follow the brand in any network (62%), 28.3% was already following the brand before the purchase was made, and only 6.5% of the participants began to follow the brand on SM after the purchase.

Another crucial result of this research is to verify the differences between the three main stages of customer brand engagement on SM following the conceptual framework of Muntinga, et al. (2011). In two different questions on the questionnaire, respondents were demanded to choose between two sentences regarding their overall engagement with brands on SM. In the first question, they had to choose between "I engage more with experiential brand on their SM than with material brands" and "I engage more with material brands on their social media than with experiential brands". The results were representative, 104 (58.4%) respondents engage more with material brands and only 74 (41.6%) respondents stated to engage more with experiential ones. However, on the second question, participants had to choose between "I share more of my own material products on my SM accounts than my own experiences" and "I share more of

my own experiences on my SM accounts than my material products”. The results were intriguing, since this time the disparity in responses was extremely significant, with only 12.9% of the respondents stating to share more of their own material products than their experiences and 87.1% of them stating the exact opposite. These results show us that, when analyzing hedonic purchases, material brands receive more engagement in their SM platforms by customers – representing a stronger first and second level of the Muntinga et al. (2011) framework -, while experiential brands create a heavier trend of user-generated content, the ultimate stage of engagement. Additionally, it was performed a cross-tabulation between both questions to understand if there is a relationship between them and the result was significant ( $p < .05$ ), being able to reject the null hypothesis.

As already mentioned on Chapter III, the main dependent variable of this research is Customer Brand Engagement on a social media context. This variable is analyzed through the 10-item scale of measurement of Hollebeek et al. (2014), which is divided in three key dimensions - cognitive processing, affection and activation. In order to ease the analysis process, four new variables were created - *CBE*, *EMOTION*, *COGNITION* and finally, *BEHAVIOR*. These variables are averages of the total CBE of each respondent and averages of the three distinct dimensions, which will help to achieve a more detailed analysis of the hypothesis of this dissertation. The initial descriptive analysis was done in order to find out differences in the overall rating of Customer Brand Engagement on a 7-point Likert Scale and ratings of each individual factor insert within the concept. The new main dependent variable *CBE* has a mean value of 3.48. *COGNITION* has the highest value of all the three dimensions ( $M = 3.98$ ) and *BEHAVIOR* has the lowest value ( $M = 2.78$ ), while *EMOTION* has an intermediate value ( $M = 3.64$ ). These results clearly prove us that this sample’s population has expressed cognitive processing as the stronger dimension of CBE and activation as the weakest of them.

## 4.2 Hypothesis 1

This dissertation has as first main hypothesis the following statement – “Experiential brands have higher consumer engagement on their social media networks than material brands”.

In order to accept or refute this idea, it was performed an independent sample t-test with a view to compare the means of two different populations – on one hand respondents who referred material brands (*MB*) and, on the other hand, respondents who mentioned experiential brands (*EB*) – regarding their level of customer brand engagement on social media networks. On average, and contrary to what was previously predicted, material brands showed higher mean

rates ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) than experiential brands ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ), meaning that material brands have an overall stronger engagement on brands' social media platforms. These notorious differences between *CBE* means ( $M_{diff} = 0.79$ ,  $SE_{diff} = 0.21$ , 95% *CI* [0.37585; 1.19495]) from material and experiential brands conclude in a significant result ( $p < .05$ ) for this research question, meaning we do reject the null hypothesis which states that the means of the two groups are equal. However, we favorably cannot reject that the variances of the two samples are equal ( $p > .05$ ). This happens as well for all the three dimensions of *CBE*, as can be analyzed in Table 2. Affection (*EMOTION*) was the variable with the biggest mean difference between both types of brands ( $MB = 4.03$ ;  $EB = 3.12$ ), while cognitive processing (*COGNITION*) was the one with the smallest mean difference between them ( $MB = 4.28$ ;  $EB = 3.59$ ). Activation (*BEHAVIOR*) demonstrates some differences as well, however presenting the lowest mean values of this analysis in both type of brands ( $MB = 3.08$ ;  $EB = 2.37$ ).

To conclude, the first hypothesis of this dissertation cannot be accepted since the exact opposite it's proved, material brands receive higher customer brand engagement in their own SM platforms by consumers, than experiential brands. Although experiential products tend to create more user generated content and have more conversational value, when it comes to *CBE* on brands' own social media platforms, material brands take the win.

Table 2 - Independent Sample t-test and Levene's test regarding brand type differences

Created Variables	Levene's Test		Independent Samples t-test		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.
<i>CBE</i>	0.669	0.415	3.785	176	0.000
<i>EMOTION</i>	0.520	0.472	3.783	176	0.000
<i>COGNITION</i>	3.534	0.062	2.936	176	0.004
<i>BEHAVIOR</i>	0.320	0.572	2.983	176	0.003

### 4.3 Hypotheses 2 & 2.1

Thenceforth, the second main hypothesis of this research is as follows – “There is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer brand engagement on brands' social media.” In spite to ascertain if there is any significant relationship between these two variables, it was performed a linear regression, choosing the Enter method, since there is only one independent variable. Although the model reached statistical significance,  $F(1, 176) = 14.34$ ,  $p = .000$ , the price of the purchase helped to explain only 7.5% of the total variation of *CBE* on

brands' social media platforms ( $R^2 = 0.075$ ), manifesting that it is not a strong predictor of CBE levels.

Moreover, to test the validity of H2.1 - “The price of the purchase moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.” – it was performed a moderation analysis, running a multiple linear regression, using *CBE* as dependent variable and brand type, price and the interaction between them, as independent variables. The results, presented in Table 3, show us that the price of the purchase does not have any moderation effect on the relation between the brand type and CBE on brands' social media ( $p > .05$ ).

*Table 3 - Coefficients of the moderation analysis for CBE*

Dependent Variable	Brand Type		Purchase Price		Interaction	
	Beta	T-test (P-value)	Beta	T-test (P-value)	Beta	T-test (P-value)
<i>CBE</i>	-0.205	-2.639 (0.009)	0.204	2.552 (0.012)	-0.002	-0.031 (0.976)

#### 4.4 Hypotheses 3 & 3.1

The third main hypothesis of this research is related to gender differences – “Females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media networks than males”. The statistical test used to conduct this analysis was an independent sample t-test, once again comparing the means of two different population, in this specific case, male respondents versus female respondents.

In this analysis, on average, women showed higher mean values of customer brand engagement ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) than men ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ). The same pattern happened in all three components of CBE concept. Levene's test concluded that the variance of the dependent variable of the female group is significantly different from the male group, thus violating the assumption of homogeneity of variances ( $p < .05$ ). More importantly, the t-test p-value is also statistical significant ( $p < .05$ ), revealing the rejection of the null hypothesis of this analysis. Once again, we deny that the means of the two groups are equal, accepting our third hypothesis that females indeed have higher customer engagement with brands' social media platforms, comparing to the opposite gender. This result is constant in all the four variables, except on the Levene's test for *BEHAVIOR* ( $p > .05$ ) which tell us that we cannot reject that the variances of both groups in that construct are equal. Results are presented in Table 4.

Adding up to this finding, it's crucial to understand if the relationship between brand type and CBE is influenced, in any way, by the gender of the respondent. That gap is filled by analyzing H3.1 – “The gender of the respondent moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands’ social media.” To test this, a two-way univariate ANOVA was conducted, entering *CBE* as dependent variable and as fixed factors – gender and brand type. For a significance level of 0.05, Levene’s test indicate us we cannot reject the null hypothesis of equal variances ( $p > .05$ ). Regarding the tests of between-subject effect, there is a significant main effect for gender ( $p < .05$ ) and brand type ( $p < .05$ ), as previously proved in this Chapter, both variables affect the level of CBE on brands’ social media platforms. However, there is no significant interaction effect for gender and brand type on customers’ brand engagement ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 4 - Independent Sample t-test and Levene’s test regarding gender differences

Created Variables	Levene’s Test		Independent Samples t-test		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.
<i>CBE</i>	7.207	0.008	-3.840	176	0.000
<i>EMOTION</i>	5.076	0.025	-3.470	176	0.001
<i>COGNITION</i>	10.793	0.001	-3.652	176	0.000
BEHAVIOR	0.314	0.576	-2.861	176	0.005

**4.5 Discussion**

The main goal of this dissertation was to understand if, on the hedonic brands category, depending on what type of product the brand sells – material or experiential – customers would engage differently with the brand’s social media accounts. Does a surf school have more social media engagement on their accounts than a brand that sells surfboards? Does a Spa brand have more followers and likes on social media than a brand which sells body lotions? In order to discover the answers to these questions, it was formulated H1, stating that experiential brands have higher CBE on their social media. However, this dissertation found the exact opposite, as much as people indeed share more their experiences on social media, when analyzing CBE on social media brands’ networks, brands that sell material products create significantly more customer engagement on their platforms than brands that sell experiences. This goes against what the existent literature makes us believe, since it is studied and tested how experiences create more conversational value than material goods (Bastos & Brucks, 2017) and also that

experiential purchases are more likely to get posted on consumers' social media than material purchases, creating more user generated content (Duan & Dholakia, 2018). All this research about how experiential purchases makes us, as consumers, so much happier and fulfilled than material purchases (Gilovich, et al., 2014), ended up on the creation of the first unidirectional hypothesis. Once already proved the opposite, we can state that when analyzing COBRAs types, distinguishing the three main degrees of engagement on social media, we perceive that experiential brands come out victorious when considering the ultimate CBE level correlated to consumers who create content by themselves (UCG), however, material brands take the win when examining the two stages associated to consumers who only consume and contribute to brands' content.

I believe this happens for a couple of strong reasons. Firstly, because as seen on Chapter II, on a practical perspective, material goods are easier to compare between themselves as their features and attributes are concrete and objective, meaning that the buying process a consumer has to do is mostly based on deliberation (Gallo, Sood, Mann & Gilovich, 2017) regarding which product is more suitable in order to fulfill consumer's specific need. Social media will help consumers to be aware of new options of their favorite brands and to keep them updated of e.g. discounts, partnerships and product launches. The exact opposite happens with experiential products, which are usually more abstract and difficult to compare (Van Boven, 2005). This fact results on the consumption process being mostly based on customers' intuition about which experience fits better in their circumstances. Consumers' intuition can be awakened by brands' social media networks which are crucial to keep consumers informed about brands' offers, however does not foster ongoing customer brand engagement, making it difficult for brands that sell experiences to build brand ties with its customers.

Secondly, in my point of view, consumers do more recurrent purchases from the same single brand with material products than with experiential ones, which favors once again, material brands to create stronger brand loyalty, and consequently, to attain and hold higher consistent levels of customer brand engagement on their social media platforms on the long run. CBE and brand loyalty are two constructs many times associated between them, as having a positive relationship (Bowden, 2009). Moreover, Gilovich, et al. (2014) stated that we are the total sum of experiences we live, being a significant part of our own individual identity. And for that same reason, I believe people desire to try as many different experiences as they possibly can, varying in the type of experiential purchases they make, and hence, varying in the brands from which they do the purchase. Unlike the material products, which people tend to have their

favorite specific brands in each industry and category, creating a steady connection between the company and the customer.

Regarding the second research question of this dissertation, it was found that the price of the purchased hedonic product itself explains 7.5% of the level of customer brand engagement, having a significant positive relation between them, as predicted in H2. However, contrary to expected in H2.1, this variable does not serve as moderator on the relationship between brand type – material vs experiential – and CBE, meaning that the price does not affect the direction or strength the relation between both variables.

There is a gap on the literature of this specific issue about the influence of price on engagement levels, which makes it difficult to compare my findings to previous studies. Nonetheless, findings are easily understandable since more expensive purchases usually require more consideration and reflection time, as well as an increased overall attachment with the brand itself, and consequently, higher levels of engagement offline and online.

The same phenomenon was observed when analyzing the third research question, with reference to gender differences, H3 was confirmed forasmuch as women engaging significantly more with hedonic brands' social media platforms than men, on an emotional, cognition and behavioral way. Nevertheless, gender does not serve as moderator on the relation between the overall level of engagement and the type of brand where the purchase was made. This finding refutes H3.1, meaning that gender also does not affect in any type of way the relationship between CBE and brand type. These results follow the same line of reasoning from Tifferet (2012) research stating higher levels of brand commitment and hedonic consumption by female population.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation presents the main conclusions and managerial recommendations for organizations, as well as it explains study's major limitations and suggestions for future research on the topic.

### 5.1 Conclusions and Recommendation

Our society is evolving by becoming increasingly technological, and thus, brands have to keep up with major online marketing trends. In hedonic industries, the business environment becomes even more competitive, with companies always trying to be one step ahead of their competition, by meeting customers' needs and desires quicker and more efficiently. On an organizational level, social networking has been seen as a challenge, and at the same time, as an opportunity for brands to raise their level of customer engagement online, and as natural consequence, offline. The main goal of this research was to understand how brands' CBE on social media platforms would depend on the type of product which the brand trades, and how this relation is moderated by the price of the purchase and the gender of the customer. As already discussed in Chapter 4, main conclusions are summarized in Table 5.

After a careful interpretation of these findings, some managerial recommendation should be taken into account. Up front, whereas brands that sell experiential products are typically less able to generate customer engagement on their platforms, they should invest more time and dedication on their social networks in order to reach consumers' attention. This can be done by improving their online content, e.g. investing in the first place in informative posts, since it was analyzed consumers' preferences for information such as price, features and promotions over more engaging content. Another suggestion as regards to the type of social media platforms that brands usually use to connect with their customers, considering that Instagram was clearly preferable to Facebook, companies must follow this trend of preference and focus on their Instagram accounts' content. Likewise, companies that commerce less expensive products should invest an extra mile on their platforms in order to not be left behind on their levels of online engagement.

Moreover, since it was verified lower levels of engagement by male respondents of the sample, companies should endeavor to understand what is failing in their communication, in order to create content strategies that focus on a more masculine target. These strategies must take into account the existing gender differences on social media, e.g the fact that men are mainly influenced by hedonic motives (Zailskaitė-Jakštė & Damaševičius, 2017), contrary to women.

Thus, if a specific brand profits from targeting men with its platforms, it should invest in content which arises more ideas and adventure (Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2012).

Furthermore, this study can be useful for big organizations which have many brands belonging to one single main company; e.g. SONAE, which is a multinational company with a vast portfolio of brands, trading both type of products - material and experiential. This research assists to explain how different types of purchases contribute to different levels of engagement on brands' social media networks.

*Table 5 - Summary of research questions, hypotheses and key findings*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>RQ1:</b> Regarding hedonic brands category, do experiential brands have stronger customer engagement on their own social media networks than material brands?	<b>H1:</b> Experiential brands have higher customer engagement on their social media networks than material brands.	<b>F1:</b> Material brands have higher customer engagement on their social media networks than experiential brands.
<b>RQ2:</b> Does the price of the product serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?	<b>H2:</b> There is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer brand engagement on brands' social media.	<b>F2:</b> There is a positive relation between the price of the purchase and customer brand engagement on brands' social media.
	<b>H2.1:</b> The price of the purchase moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.	<b>F3:</b> The price of the purchase does not moderate the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.
<b>RQ3:</b> Does the gender of the respondent serve as moderator on the relation between brand type and customer brand engagement?	<b>H3:</b> Females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media networks than males.	<b>F4:</b> Females have higher customer engagement with brands' social media networks than male.
	<b>H3.1:</b> The gender of the respondent moderates the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.	<b>F5:</b> The gender of the respondent does not moderate the relation between brand type and customer engagement on brands' social media.

## 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Nevertheless, during the course of the present research, some key limitations were disclosed, which must be considered when interpreting study's outcomes.

Firstly, in relation to the sample itself, there are a few aspects that could have been more gainful to improve analysis' validation. Although I believe the sample size is considerably satisfactory, it is evident that the larger the sample, the more credibility the study reflects. Additionally, the

fact that one of the main analyzes of the study inferred gender differences, the number of responses from each group (male vs female) should have been as similar as possible; in this research, there was a slight asymmetry, with more female respondents (56.2%) to the online survey. Moreover, all of the reasoning was mostly based on Portuguese consumers (76.4%), reflecting our habits and patterns, which cannot be taken for granted in other geographical parts of the world, as consumer behavior changes a lot between different cultures. Likewise, even the target of the questionnaire being younger generations, from 18 to 30 years old (88.8%), this is another factor that decreases the power of generalization of the present study, since other age groups will naturally behave in different ways on this subject.

Concerning the study itself, another crucial concern is the fact that it was not performed an observational analysis of brands' social media platforms, meaning that results were self-reported, and thus, there is an inevitable gap between what people say they do and what they actually do. Even because this dissertation's main construct, Customer Brand Engagement, used as dependent variable in most of the study's statistical tests, it is an extremely abstract concept which hampers its measurement scales. Although this scale was used and validated in previous researches, as reported in Chapter II, the complex and nonconcrete definition of the concept itself and of the chosen scale, bears some barriers difficult to overcome, since respondents differ in the way they interpret the scale, e.g. in a 7-point Likert Scale, for one specific respondent a 4 may be considered as a significant level of engagement, while for another participant only a 7 can be translated into a high level of CBE.

Along with these limitations, there is an essential aspect to consider when evaluating the outcomes, which has to do with the brands themselves. Undoubtedly, all brands are distinct in their size, team, profit and resources, making it difficult to do fair and legitimate comparisons between them. In the present study, brands that sell material goods were split from the ones which sell experiential goods, however findings can only be considered as an engagement bias or tendency, not being accurate to claim that a specific brand just because it sells experiences won't get high levels of CBE on their social media platforms. We must not generalize without taking into account so many others factors that will affect the relationship between the brand and its consumers. Not to mention that there are some brands that trade both type of products, e.g. telecommunication companies such as NOS, despite selling experiential products as their main core business, also commerce tangible products such as televisions; in these cases, the study is not well applicable.

All of these constraints associated with a slightly scarcity of information in some sub-topics lead involuntarily to the last stage of this dissertation, which consists in recommendation for future research.

In order to assess the strength of these findings, this subject should be extended and studied further in many ways. One of the specific sub-topics which deserve further research is regarding the influence of products' prices on the level of customer brand engagement, not only online in brands' social networks, as well as offline. It would be interesting to understand the main causes why the price is positively correlated with CBE, when it comes to hedonic products. Does it arise from previous studies' associations between constructs such as brand loyalty or brand trust? Or is it a matter of major hedonic motives such as idealization and gratification for more expensive purchases? To figure out the reasons behind this relationship would add value to the current research.

Furthermore, future studies should investigate what type of content works better in each type of brands – material vs experiential –, in a way that would improve engagement levels and managerial decisions. This could be done by focusing more on a qualitative analysis, using focus groups and in-depth interviews to better perceive consumers' detailed opinion in relation to brands' social media content.

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*Annex 1 - Overview of CBE conceptualization on previous researches*

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Dimensionality</b>
Vivek (2009)	Consumer Engagement	Intensity of the consumer's interactions and connection with the organization's offerings and/or its organized activities.	Enthusiasm, Conscious Participations & Social Interaction
Hollebeek (2011a)	Customer Brand Engagement	The level of an individual customer's motivational state of mind characterized by levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions.	Cognitive, Emotional & Behavioral
Brodie et al. (2011)	Customer engagement	Psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object in specific service relationships.	Cognitive, Emotional & Behavioral
Hollebeek et al. (2014)	Consumer Engagement	Consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity related to a specific brand-consumer interaction.	Cognitive processing, Affection & Activation
Vivek et al. (2014)	Customer Engagement	CE goes beyond purchase and is the level of the customer's interactions with the brand or firm's offerings or activities, often involving others in the social network created around the brand/offering/activity.	Enthusiastic Participations, Conscious Attention & Social Connection
Dessart et al. (2016)	Consumer Engagement	The state that reflects consumers' individual dispositions toward engagement foci, which are context-specific. Engagement is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations.	Affective (Enthusiasm, Enjoyment, Cognitive (Attention, Absorption) & Behavioral (Sharing, Learning, Endorsing))

## *Annex 2 - Online Survey Script*

Hi there!

Thank you for spending around 7/8 minutes of your time on this survey. Today I will gather your thoughts and opinions in order to develop my research on Customer Brand Engagement on social media networks.

I kindly ask you to carefully read through the questions and answer as honestly as possible. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Your answers will be used for my Master's dissertation purpose only. Your data will remain anonymous and confidential.

Thank you! Let's do this!  
Patrícia Lopes

### **Block 1**

**Q1)** How would you describe yourself when it comes to Social Media in general?

- Social Media passionate
- Heavy Social Media user
- Medium Social Media user
- Social Media beginner
- Social Media avoider

*Skip To: End of Survey If How would you describe yourself when it comes to Social Media usage in general? = Social Media avoider*

**Q2)** How many hours per day, on average, do you spend on social media?

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

**Q3)** Which kind of brands do you engage (to follow, to comment, to like, to share, to tag) the most on social media? Please, choose maximum 2 options.

- Fashion
- Food/Drinks
- Cosmetics/Self-Care
- Sports/Fitness
- Technology
- Others, please state which. \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4)** What do you value the most about brands' social media? Please rank according to your preferences. Scale from 1 (most value) to 4 (least value).

- Giveaways and contests
- Informative Content (features, prices, etc.)
- Entertainment Content (engaging sentences, jokes, pictures, etc)
- Feedback from previous consumers

**Q5)** Please indicate to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.  
To engage = to follow, to like, to comment, to share, to tag.

Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

- I follow many brands on social media.
- I only engage with brands on Facebook.
- I only engage with brands on Instagram.
- I follow brands on social media but I don't engage with them.
- I strongly engage with brands on social media.
- I believe brands should invest on social media as a marketing tool.

## Block 2

For the next section, you need to consider these following concepts:

**Hedonic Consumption** → Desirable purchases that allow the consumer to feel pleasure, fun and enjoyment from buying the product/service. Hedonic purchases can be material OR experiential.

Examples: To go on a fancy dinner; To buy a new bag of your favorite brand.

**Material Purchase** → When consumer's main goal is to get the ownership of a specific tangible object and it stays in one's possession. Purchases made from material brands.

Example: To buy a moisturizing body cream; To buy a surf board.

**Experiential Purchase** → When consumer's main goal is to obtain an experience itself. Purchases made from experiential brands.

Example: To buy a massage in a SPA; To buy a surf class.

**Q6)** Please tell us your last significant hedonic purchase.

Hedonic Consumption: Desirable purchases that allow the consumer to feel pleasure, fun and enjoyment from buying the product/service.

- Purchase: \_\_\_\_\_
- Brand: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q7)** In your point of view, and after reading the previous definitions, your referred purchase was made from a material or experiential brand?

- Material Brand
- Experiential Brand

**Q8)** How much did your previous mentioned purchase cost?

0-----20-----40-----60-----80-----100-----120-----140-----160-----180-----200

**Q9)** How is your relationship with the brand on their Social Media platforms?

- I was already following the brand on their social media before the purchase.
- I began to follow the brand on their social media after the purchase.
- I don't follow the brand on their social media.

**Q10)** From 0 to 10 how do you consider your social media level of engagement with the brand? Scale from 0 (no engagement at all) to 10 (maximum engagement possible).

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

**Q11)** Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

- I feel very positive when I see something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media.
- Seeing something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media makes me happy.
- I feel good when I see something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media.
- I am proud when I see something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media.
- Seeing something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media makes me think about it.
- I think about [YOUR BRAND] a lot when I see something related to it on Social Media.
- Seeing something related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media stimulates my interest to learn more about it.
- I spend a lot of time interacting with publications related to [YOUR BRAND] on Social Media, compared to competing brands.
- I usually interact with publications related to [YOUR BRAND] whenever I want similar products / services on Social Media.
- Publications related to [YOUR BRAND] is one of the brands that I usually interact for products / services of the same gender on Social Media.

**Q12)** From these two sentences, which one do you relate the most?

- I engage (to follow, to comment, to like, to share, to tag) more with experiential brands on their social media than with material brands.
- I engage (to follow, to comment, to like, to share, to tag) more with material brands on their social media than with experiential brands.

**Q13)** From these two sentences, which one do you relate the most?

- I share more of my own material products on my social media accounts than my own experiences.
- I share more of my own experiences on my social media accounts than my material products.

### **Block 3**

**Q14)** You're almost there! Please indicate your gender.

- Male
- Female

**Q15)** Please indicate how old you are:

- <18
- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- +50

**Q16)** Please indicate your current profession:

- Student
- Employed
- Unemployed

- Retired/Senior
- Other, please state which: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q17)** Please indicate your marital status:

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed

**Q18)** Please indicate your monthly household income:

- <1000€
- 1000€-2500€
- 2501€-5000€
- 5000€-7500€
- >7500€

**Q19)** Please indicate your nationality:

- Portuguese
- Other, please state which: \_\_\_\_\_

*Annex 3 - Multidimension 10-item Scale of CBE Measurement of Hollebeek et al., with small adaptations*

