

Professor Gheorghe ORZAN, PhD

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

E-mail: orzang@ase.ro

Teaching Assistant Otilia-Elena PLATON, PhD

“Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest

E-mail: otliapl@yahoo.com

Col. Cristian Dragos ȘTEFĂNESCU, PhD

Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest

E-mail: cristiandragos@hotmail.com

Associate Professor Mihai ORZAN, PhD

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

E-mail: mihai.orzan@ase.ro

CONCEPTUAL MODEL REGARDING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON BRAND TRUST, BRAND AFFECT AND BRAND LOYALTY

***Abstract:** Knowing that nowadays many companies are integrating social media in their online marketing communication strategies, it is important to determine whether its usage has the ability to influence the consumers' perceptions towards brands. Starting from the assumption that social media marketing communication can influence the consumers' trust, affect and loyalty towards brands, this article aims to investigate the relationships between these four main concepts. The research developed for this purpose was conducted on a sample of 314 respondents and in order to validate the proposed conceptual model, the data analysis used structural equation modeling, based on variance method. The results point out that the importance given to the characteristics of social media marketing communications are directly related to brand trust and brand affect, the two main determinants of brand loyalty, as shown in the conceptual model.*

***Keywords:** social media marketing, marketing communication, brand trust, brand affect, brand loyalty, structural equation modeling.*

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

For many companies, the consumers' loyalty towards their brands represents a significant competitive advantage (Nezakati et al., 2013), with strong effects on their commercial success. The researches carried out so far demonstrated that the consumers' loyalty can maximize a company's profits because “loyal

customers are willing to purchase more frequently, spend money on trying new products or services, recommend products and services to others, and give companies sincere suggestions” (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990 apud Khan, 2013, p. 184). Besides that, customer loyalty “creates entry barriers for competing brands, gives the company time to react on competitors innovations, makes it possible to charge higher prices and it also functions as a buffer in times of intense price competition” (Anselmsson et al., 2007 apud Khan, 2013, p. 180). Also, loyal customers generate long term/high customer retention, reduce marketing costs (Nezakati et al., 2013) and lead to a greater market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

In this context, Durukan & Bozaci (2011 apud Khan, 2013, p.178) “asserted that under today’s competitive and difficult business environment, loyal customers are vital for success and continuity of companies”. Nowadays, the longevity of a customer’s loyalty can be considered a key factor for long-term success of companies (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 14). Because of this, brand loyalty came to be compared to “a Holy Grail for marketers” (Kapferer, 2005 apud Nezakati et al., 2013, p. 126). Therefore, the companies are implementing marketing strategies in order to develop, maintain or enhance customer loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994 apud Dahlgren, 2011) using different tools and techniques. It is important to notice that loyalty is like “a double-edge sword” (Nezakati et al., 2013, p. 127) meaning that the companies must act continuously in order to gain and retain their customers (Dahlgren, 2011), otherwise the company’s success can turn into failure.

Ouwensloot & Duncan (2008) consider that marketing communication is a collective term that describes all the variety of planned messages used to build a brand. One of the main marketing communication strategies that are being used nowadays in order to build brands is related to the usage of social media. Social media has gained high popularity among marketers and has been integrated into companies’ marketing strategies due to its special characteristics and advantages. In this virtual environment, companies can create close relationships with their customers, that can lead to a higher consumers’ involvement with their brands. The scientific literature indicates that customers’ loyalty can be enhanced with the help of social media marketing communication strategies. The messages about brands, created by companies and communicated through social media, are developing mainly the brand awareness, which is the first step, crucial in the process of building a brand. Further, the objective of social media marketing communication is to outline the brand image in the consumers’ minds. Using this environment, companies can then strengthen the consumers’ trust in brands and can stimulate the development of consumers’ attachment towards brands, thus enhancing their loyalty (Platon & Orzan, 2015).

Therefore, the research presented in this paper aims to study the influence of social media marketing communication on brand loyalty and its main determinants: brand trust and brand affect. In this respect, it has been developed a quantitative research among Romanian respondents, who use social media for interacting with brands.

2. Brand loyalty

Given its importance, in the specialized literature, starting from Copeland in 1923 (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 12) until today, the concept of loyalty has been treated in various ways. Most of the studies have revealed that loyalty is a complex concept, which involves its approach from various perspectives.

Lau & Lee (1999, p. 341) mention that, starting from specialists like Day (1969) and Jacoby (1971), in the specialized literature it was submitted the distinction between two brand loyalty approaches, namely: *the behavioral brand loyalty approach* and *the attitudinal brand loyalty approach*. In this context, one of the most important definitions of brand loyalty was given by Jacoby & Kyner (1973 apud Dahlgren, 2011, p. 12) who described loyalty as “a biased behavioral response expressed over time by a decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and being a function of psychological processes”.

The behavioral brand loyalty approach considers that consumer loyalty is a behavioral construct, that is related to the action or intention to repeat the purchase of a product or service (Nam et al., 2011, p. 1011). In this regard, Oliver (1997 apud Pappu et al, 2005, p. 145) defined brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having potential to cause switching behavior”. Tucker (1964 apud Lau & Lee, 1999, p. 343) argues that only “behavior is the full statement of what brand loyalty is”.

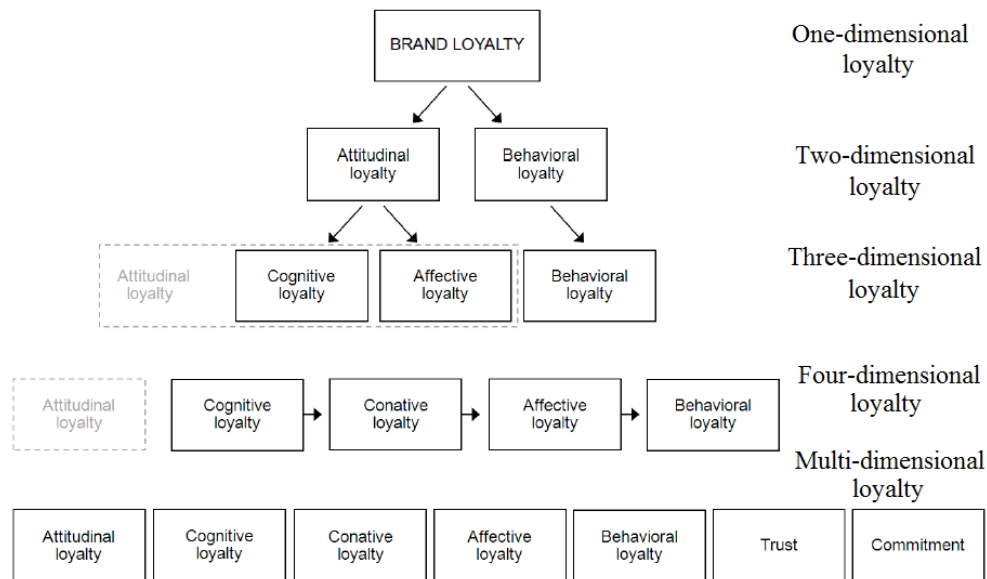
The attitudinal brand loyalty approach reflects the consumer’s psychological involvement towards a brand, without necessarily taking into account the act of repeated purchases over time (Nam et al., 2011, p. 1015). Day (1969 apud Lau & Lee, 1999, p. 342) suggested that loyalty should be seen as “repeated purchases prompted by strong internal dispositions”. Rossiter & Percy (1987 apud Pappu et al., 2005, p. 145) “argued that brand loyalty is often characterised by a favourable attitude towards a brand and repeated purchases of the same brand over time”. Attitude is therefore important for loyalty, as it leads to behavior. In addition, the attitude may explain how and why a consumer’s loyalty develops, issues that are unable to explain by the behavior (Geçti & Zengin, 2013, p. 113). Thus, according to Khan (2013, p. 170; 177), “a richer understanding of the attitudinal component of loyalty is crucial”, since positive attitude is a prior condition for building true brand loyalty.

Pappu et al. (2005, p. 145) consider that the behavioral perspective concentrates on “the consumer’s actual loyalty to the brand as reflected in purchase choices”, while the attitudinal perspective emphasizes the “consumer intentions to be loyal to the brand”.

In addition to this view, which has already become traditional, Dahlgren (2011) notes that the brand loyalty approach has evolved over time and considers that there are five major perspectives defining its dimensions (Fig. 1), namely:

- *one-dimensional loyalty*: it reflects the prevailing conception until 1970, which considers that loyalty is related to the share of total purchases, buying frequency, buying pattern or buying probability;
- *two-dimensional loyalty*: it was developed along with Day’s (1969) opinion that loyalty should be evaluated from two perspectives, attitudinal as well as behavioral, in order to understand what consumers feel and do for the brand;
- *three-dimensional loyalty*: it considers that a two-dimensional approach is not sufficient for understanding the consumers loyalty and proposes a combination of cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral responses, that reflect the consumer’s thoughts, feelings and actions towards a brand (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1997; Worthington et al., 2009 apud Dahlgren, 2011, p. 22);
- *four-dimensional loyalty*: it proposes four phases of loyalty, mainly the cognitive, affective, conative and behavioral phase, where the last two stages make the distinction between the commitment to buy and the action of repeatedly purchasing the brand (Oliver, 1999 apud Dahlgren, 2011, p. 24);
- *multi-dimensional brand loyalty*: this perspective considers that loyalty is a multidimensional concept, influenced by all of the above factors and also by trust and commitment.

Figure 1. Conceptualizations of brand loyalty dimensions



Source: Dahlgren, 2011, p. 32 (adapted).

Therefore, the multidimensionality of loyalty shows that focusing only on the behavioral component can not provide a complete understanding of the concept.

Besides mere conceptual understanding, loyalty must be assessed and measured in order to be turned into a real competitive advantage for companies. Since the brand loyalty significance is heterogeneous, the measurement of this concept is characterised by the same feature. Mellens et al. (1996, p. 512) propose a classification of brand loyalty measurements into four categories, which are presented as opposing, namely:

- *behavioral* versus *attitudinal* measures;
- *individual-oriented* versus *brand-oriented* measures.

The main difference between behavioral and attitudinal measures arises from their emphasis on the actual purchase behavior or on the cognitive component of loyalty. Although each of them has specific advantages and disadvantages, the attitudinal measurement may have a lower accuracy, implying that its validity depends on the strength of the attitude-behavior relationship (Mellens et al., 1996, p. 514). Individual-oriented and brand-oriented measures assume that brand loyalty is the result of the consumer's mental processing of brand's features or is a property of the brand's features. However, for a more complete understanding of brand loyalty, it is useful a interweaving of all these measurements. In this regard, by combining all the measurements listed above could be developed brand-oriented attitudinal measures, individual-oriented attitudinal measures, brand-oriented behavioral measures and individual-oriented behavioral measures (Mellens et al., 1996).

Another important aspect regarding brand loyalty is related to the antecedents of loyalty. Day (1969) suggested that loyalty is prompted by strong internal dispositions. Therefore, two internal dispositions that act as antecedents of consumer loyalty are: *brand trust* and *brand affect* (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 81; Halim, 2006, p. 1; Geçti & Zengin, 2013, p. 111).

3. Brand trust

O'Shaughnessy (1992 apud Lau & Lee, 1999, p. 342) believes that "underlying loyalty is always trust". Brand trust can be defined as "a consumer's willingness to rely on the brand in the face of risk because of expectations that the brand will cause positive outcomes" (Lau & Lee, 1999, p. 344). In order to build trust, products or services must always meet or even exceed the consumers' expectations. According to Dahlgren (2011, p. 28-29) "brand trust leads to brand loyalty because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued". In this respect, it is important to focus on building and maintaining brand trust since it represents "the basis for long-term customer relationship" (Burmam et al., 2009, p. 391).

4. Brand affect

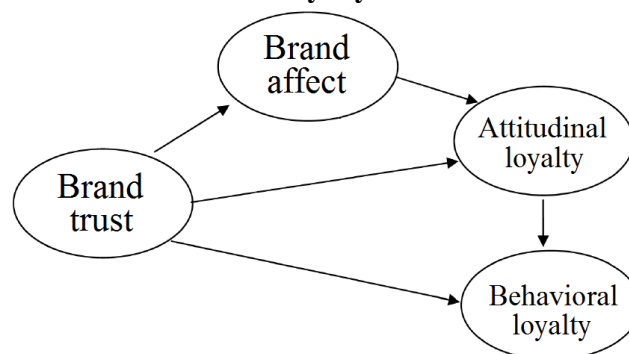
Brand loyalty is a measure of "the attachment that a customer has to a brand" (Aaker, 2005, p. 50). Brand affect is a concept that reflects the consumer's emotional involvement towards a brand, due to the fact that "the brand acts as an

important reflection of self-identity or is an important symbol of something meaningful to the consumer” (Goldsmith, 2012, p. 121). Consumers develop an attachment towards brands because they trust them and consider them close to their lifestyle and values. In this respect, Park et al. (2008, p. 5) define brand attachment as “the strength of the cognitive and affective link between a consumer and a brand”, which has the capacity to lead towards developing long-term relationships between these parts (Dahlgren, 2011 p. 19). Also, a positive consumer affection towards the brand leads to a consistent repurchase of it (Mellens et al., 1996).

5. The relationship between brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty

In order to highlight the connections between trust, affect and loyalty, Geçti& Zengin (2013) defined a conceptual model that demonstrates the direct and mediated effects between these three elements (Fig. 2). The model includes both the attitudinal and the behavioral loyalty and considers that “behavioral loyalty is a result of attitudinal loyalty” (Bennett & Thiele, 2002 apud Geçti& Zengin, 2013, p. 113).

Figure 2. The relationship between brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty



Source: Geçti&Zengin, 2013, p. 116.

The model presents trust as the result of a well-thought and examined process (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001 apud Geçti& Zengin, 2013), which has a significant impact on consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Brand trust directly influences brand affect, which is considered to manifest as a spontaneously and immediately reaction and as a result of a less structured process. The brand affect has a mediating effect between brand trust and attitudinal brand loyalty.

6. The conceptual model and the research hypotheses

In order to gain consumers’ loyalty, companies can develop marketing strategies that may influence the consumers’ internal dispositions and choices regarding brands. As it was presented above, many companies are nowadays successfully developing social media marketing strategies. De Pelsmacker et al.

(2007) consider that one of the marketing objectives that can be pursued in social media is related to the creation and development of brand loyalty. Macy & Thompson (2011) consider that companies that decide to integrate social media into their brand communication strategies, will discover that social media is one of the strongest brand power accelerators because it supports consumers' retention and engagement and brand loyalty.

Social media marketing communication needs to follow a brand strategy in order to strengthen brand loyalty. The most important aspect to note is that the mere presence of a brand in social media will not be able to provide benefits unless it is accompanied by the consumers' involvement. In social media, consumers should be able to identify themselves with the brand and develop a long-term relationship with it. In this way, "in time, trust develops, and people become loyal to brands" (Gunelius, 2011, p. 155). Also, in social media, consumers must be connected to a source of emotions and feelings about the brand, which facilitates the establishment of long-term bonds between consumers and brands (Platon & Orzan, 2015, p. 145). Berry & Parasuraman (1991 apud Kabadayi & Koçak Alan, 2012, p. 80) stated that "relationships are built on the foundation of brand affect". Developing continuous interactions with the brand "can add a level of emotional involvement that ties a person to a brand irrevocably" (Gunelius, 2011, p. 170). According to Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2002 apud Kabadayi & Koçak Alan, 2012, p. 81) "favorable and positive emotions are associated with high level of brand loyalty". Based on these aspects, consumers can develop trust and can become emotionally attached to brands. In other words, "building relationships on the social Web is practically a guaranteed way of deepening brand loyalty" (Gunelius, 2011, p. 170).

Based upon all the theoretical aspects presented above, it was developed the conceptual model regarding the influence of social media marketing communication on brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty. The conceptual model was defined based on the following hypotheses (Fig. 3):

H1: There is a direct and positive effect between social media marketing communication and brand trust.

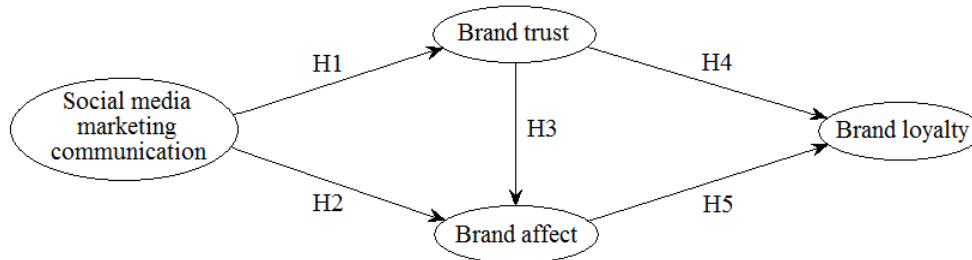
H2: There is a direct and positive effect between social media marketing communication and brand affect.

H3: There is a direct and positive effect between brand trust and brand affect.

H4: There is a direct and positive effect between brand trust and brand loyalty.

H5: There is a direct and positive effect between brand affect and brand loyalty.

Figure 3. The conceptual model regarding the influence of social media marketing communication on brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty



The conceptual model includes four variables. The variable *social media marketing communication* was defined as a formative variable and it was measured through 10 items, using a 7-point semantic differential, from 1-completely unimportant to 7-extremely important. The variables *brand trust*, *brand affect* and *brand loyalty* were defined as reflective variables and were measured through 5 items each, evaluated on 7-points Likert scales, from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree. The measures used were individual-oriented attitudinal measures. All the brand-related measurements were created taking into account the influence of social media marketing communication on consumers’ perceptions. The measurements were oriented towards the category of electronic products brands.

The items used to measure social media marketing communication characteristics were created especially for this research taking into account the most important elements of the communication process. The items used to measure brand trust were adapted from the scales developed by Halim (2006), Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003 apud Zarantonello, 2008) and Geçti&Zengin (2013). The items used to measure brand affect were adapted from the scales developed by Halim (2006), Thomson et al. (2005 apud Zarantonello, 2008) and Geçti&Zengin (2013). The items used to measure brand loyalty were adapted from the scales developed by Yoo & Donthu (2001), Halim (2006), Khan (2009 apud Dahlgren, 2011) and Geçti&Zengin (2013)(Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement scales of the variables

Variable	Type	Items
Social media marketing communication	Formative	The reputation of the company Consumer’s trust in the company The credibility of the message The informative value of the message The attractiveness of the message The promotional nature of the message The frequency of transmitting the message Consumer’s trust in the social media platform used to transmit the message

Conceptual Model Regarding the Influence of Social Media Marketing Communication on Brand Trust, Brand Affect and Brand Loyalty

		The relevance of the message The interactivity of the message
Brand trust	Reflective	Matching with the brand Fulfillment of needs High quality Safety Confidence
Brand affect		Sympathy Appreciation Closeness Affinity Connection
Brand loyalty		Preference Prioritization Selection Purchase intention Recommendation

7. Research methodology

The research aimed to identify the characteristics of social media marketing communications that have the ability to influence the consumers' trust, affect and loyalty towards brands. In order to achieve this purpose, it was developed a quantitative research based on a sample survey. The data were collected using an online self-administered questionnaire. Oriented sampling technique was used to select the participants. The research was conducted during the period April 27 – May 31, 2015, on a sample of 314 respondents, represented by Romanian consumers that use social media platforms in order to interact with brands of electronic products. The data were analysed using structural equation modeling through variance method and partial least squares technique. Choosing this method was determined by its many advantages, including: the ability to test models composed of both reflective and formative latent variable, the analysis of databases with abnormal and asymmetric distributions and the ability to assess both the properties of measurements and of complex relations of latent variables (Macovei, 2014). The softwares used to analyze and test the model were IBM SPSS Statistics 20 and WarpPLS 5.0.

8. Research findings

The sample used in this research was composed of 53.8% women and 46.2% men, 19.4% were aged between 18-24 years old, 61.1% were aged between 25-34 years old, 15.3% were aged between 35-44 years old and 4.1% were aged over 45 years old. Regarding their level of studies, 15% were high school graduates, 0.6% were post secondary graduates, 40.1% were bachelor studies

graduates and 44.3% were postgraduates. In terms of monthly income, 21% had up to 1500 lei, 59% had between 1501 and 4500 lei, 11.1% had over 4501 lei and 8.9% had no personal incomes. As to the residence, 96.2% of respondents lived in urban areas while 3.8% in rural areas.

The social media platforms used by the respondents to interact with brands of electronic products were: Facebook (78.34%), reviews and ratings sites (61.46%), YouTube (59.23%), forums/newsgroups (49.36%) and blogs (39.49%). The most frequently mentioned brands with whom consumers are interacting were: Samsung (63.69%), Apple (31.21%), Canon and Nikon (29.61% each) and Braun (27.38%).

In order to develop the SEM analysis, it was necessary to evaluate the accuracy of the measurements. In this regard it was conducted a reliability analysis based on the internal consistency of measurements, using Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability coefficients. As shown in table 2, all the values of Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability coefficients are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Macovei, 2014). The Cronbach Alpha coefficients are ranging from 0.828 to 0.932 and the composite reliability coefficients are ranging from 0.866 to 0.948, proving a very good reliability.

Tabel 2. Latent variable coefficients

	SM marketing communication	Brand trust	Brand affect	Brand loyalty
Cronbach's alpha	0.828	0.932	0.908	0.919
Composite reliability	0.866	0.948	0.932	0.940
AVE	0.399	0.786	0.732	0.757
Q-squared	-	0.191	0.612	0.685
R-squared	-	0.190	0.612	0.688

The validity of the measurements was tested using predictive, convergent and discriminant validity. Predictive validity was measured through Q-squared coefficients. As shown in table 2, the values of Q-squared coefficients are ranging from 0.191 to 0.685 and are all above the threshold of 0.1 (Macovei, 2014), proving that the scales used for measuring brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty have a good predictive capacity.

The convergent and discriminant validity were determined based on the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Before running the factor analysis, were conducted the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests. As shown in table 3, the the KMO test has a very good value (0.885), above the threshold of 0.5. Also, the significance value of Bartlett's test is under the threshold of 0.05, proving that the data are suitable for factor analysis.

Conceptual Model Regarding the Influence of Social Media Marketing Communication on Brand Trust, Brand Affect and Brand Loyalty

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.885
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6298.609
	df	300
	Sig.	0,000

The convergent validity was determined based on the factor loadings, that are presented in table 4. All factor loadings for brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty have values above the threshold of 0.5 and the p values associated with the loadings are under the threshold of 0.05 (Hair et al., 2009 apud Kock, 2014), fulfilling the conditions of convergent validity. In case of the formative variable, this rule doesn't have to apply (Kock, 2014).

Table 4. The factor loadings

Items	Factor loadings	P value
The reputation of the company	0.630	<0.001
Consumer's trust in the company	0.661	<0.001
The credibility of the message	0.431	<0.001
The informative value of the message	0.467	<0.001
The attractiveness of the message	0.761	<0.001
The promotional nature of the message	0.688	<0.001
The frequency of transmitting the message	0.662	<0.001
Consumer's trust in the social media platform used to transmit the message	0.660	<0.001
The relevance of the message	0.599	<0.001
The interactivity of the message	0.684	<0.001
Matching with the brand	0.869	<0.001
Fulfillment of needs	0.857	<0.001
High quality	0.915	<0.001
Safety	0.894	<0.001
Confidence	0.894	<0.001
Sympathy	0.812	<0.001
Appreciation	0.804	<0.001
Closeness	0.941	<0.001
Affinity	0.876	<0.001
Connection	0.839	<0.001
Preference	0.909	<0.001
Prioritization	0.856	<0.001
Selection	0.898	<0.001
Purchase intention	0.829	<0.001
Recommendation	0.856	<0.001

Analysing the values of average variance extracted (AVE) presented in table 2, it can be seen that all the AVE values registered by the reflective variables are above the threshold of 0.5 and are under the values of the composite reliability coefficients. This also proves that the measurements have a good convergent validity.

The discriminant validity was determined by analysing the correlations among latent variables with squared roots of AVEs, presented in table 5.

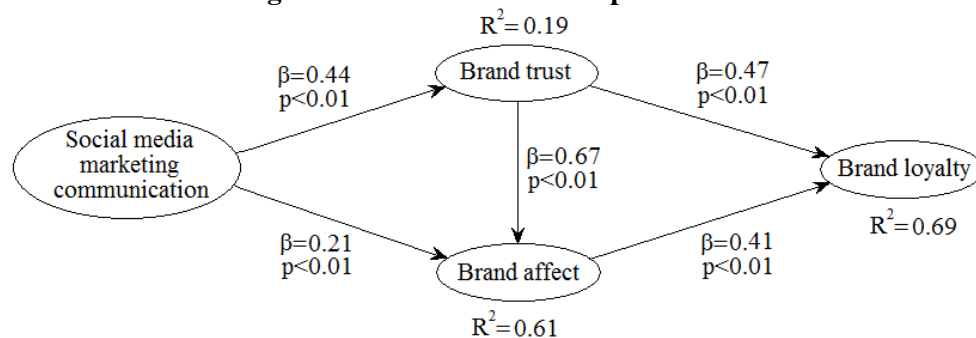
Table 5. Correlations among latent variables with squared roots of AVEs

	SM MarCom	Brand trust	Brand affect	Brand loyalty
SM MarCom	(0.632)	0.404	0.461	0.405
Brand trust	0.404	(0.886)	0.755	0.764
Brand affect	0.461	0.755	(0.856)	0.754
Brand loyalty	0.405	0.764	0.754	(0.870)

As it can be seen all the values of squared roots of AVEs are higher than any of the values above or below them, in the same column (Kock, 2015), proving a good discriminant validity. In conclusion, all the measures used in this model are reliable and valid.

The next step in performing the SEM analysis consisted in determining the path coefficients and the p values for all the relationships included in the conceptual model. In this manner, it is possible to validate the research hypotheses. The validation of the research hypotheses is possible if the values of the path coefficients are above the threshold of 0.1 and the p values are under the threshold of 0.05 (Macovei, 2014). The path coefficients and the p values are shown in figure 4. As it can be seen, all the path coefficients have values above 0.1, ranging from 0.212 to 0.670 and all the p values are under 0.001. Therefore, the research hypotheses are validated.

Figure 4. The validated conceptual model



The R-squared coefficients reflect the percentages of explained variance associated with each latent variables (Kock, 2015). Therefore, brand

Conceptual Model Regarding the Influence of Social Media Marketing Communication on Brand Trust, Brand Affect and Brand Loyalty

trust is explained by the social media marketing communication variable in a proportion of 19%. Brand affect is explained by social media marketing communication and brand trust in a proportion of 61%. Brand loyalty is 69% explained by brand trust and brand affect.

The SEM analysis allows to determine, besides the direct effects among the variables, also the indirect and total effects. As shown in table 6, social media marketing communication has a direct and also an indirect effect (through brand trust) on brand affect. The values of its total effect is 0.504. Social media marketing communication has a total effect on brand loyalty of 0.413.

Table 6. Direct, indirect and total effects

		SM MarCom	Brand trust	Brand affect
Brand trust	Direct effect	0.436	-	-
	Indirect effect	-	-	-
	Total effect	0.436	-	-
Brand affect	Direct effect	0.212	0.670	-
	Indirect effect	0.292	-	-
	Total effect	0.504	0.670	-
Brand loyalty	Direct effect	-	0.472	0.411
	Indirect effect	0.413	0.275	-
	Total effect	0.413	0.747	0.411

Also, in order to validate the model, fit and quality indices of the model must be analysed. In this case, the values of APC and ARS associated probabilities must be $p < 0.05$ and the value of AVIF is considered acceptable if $AVIF \leq 5$ and ideally if $AVIF \leq 3.3$ (Kock, 2015). As shown in table 7, the model is validated.

Table7. Model fit and quality indices

Indicator	Value	Validation
Average path coefficient	APC=0.440, $p < 0.001$	Yes
Average R-squared	ARS=0.497, $p < 0.001$	Yes
Average block VIF	AVIF=1.806	Yes

9. Conclusions

The most important conclusion that can be drawn is that the proposed conceptual model is validated. The research demonstrated that social media marketing communication has the capacity to influence brand trust and brand affect, the two main determinants of brand loyalty. The model shows that the characteristics of social media marketing communications have a direct effect on

brand trust and brand affect. It also demonstrates that brand trust has a direct effect on brand affect and on brand loyalty. Brand affect has also a direct effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, all five research hypotheses were validated.

Another important conclusion is that all the measurement scales that were used in this research are valid and the measurements have a good explanatory and predictive capacity.

The main limit of this research comes from the fact that the model took into account only the attitudinal aspect of loyalty. Also, the applicability of the model is restricted only to the category of electronic products brands. Another limit comes from the fact that the sample is not representative at a national level.

Therefore, a future research direction could be directed towards analyzing the influence of social media marketing communication on behavioral loyalty. Also, the applicability of the model could be improved by analyzing different types of brands, including brands of services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors have contributed equally to the research and writing of this paper.

REFERENCES

- [1] **Aaker, D. (2005),** *Managementul capitalului unui brand: Cum sa valorificăm numele unui brand*; Brandbuilders, Marketing&Advertising Books, Bucharest;
- [2] **Burmam, C.; Jost-Benz, M.; Riley, N. (2009),** *Towards an Identity-Based Brand Equity Model*; *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 390-397;
- [3] **Chaudhuri, A.; Holbrook, M.B. (2001),** *The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty*; *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 65, no. 2, pp. 81-93;
- [4] **Chi, H.K.; Yeh, H.R.; Yang, Y.T. (2009),** *The Impact of Brand Awareness on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mediating Effect of Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty*; *The Journal of International Management Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 135-144;
- [5] **Dahlgren, S. (2011),** *Brand Loyalty and Involvement in Different Customer Levels of a Service Concept Brand* ; Aalto University, School of Economics, Master's thesis, available online at: http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/en/ethesis/pdf/12534/hse_ethesis_12534.pdf;
- [6] **De Pelsmacker, P.; Geuens, M.; Van der Bergh, J. (2007),** *Marketing Communications – A European Perspective (Third Edition)*; Pearson Education Limited, Essex;

- [7] Geçti, F.; Zengin, H. (2013), *The Relationship between Brand Trust, Brand Affect, Attitudinal Loyalty and Behavioral Loyalty: A Field Study towards Sports Shoe Consumers in Turkey*; *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 111-119;
- [8] Goldsmith, R.E., (2012), *Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty*; In: *Branding and Sustainable Competitive Advantage: Building Virtual Presence* (editors Kapoor, A.; Kulshrestha, C.), Business Science Reference, pp. 121-135;
- [9] Gunelius, S. (2011), *30-Minute Social Media Marketing*; McGraw-Hill, New York;
- [10] Halim, R.E. (2006), *The Effect of the Relationship of Brand Trust and Brand Affect on Brand Performance: An Analysis from Brand Loyalty Perspective (A Case of Instant Coffee Product in Indonesia)*; pp. 1-14, available online at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=925169>;
- [11] Kabadayi, E.T.; Koçak Alan, A. (2012), *Brand Trust and Brand Affect: Their Strategic Importance on Brand Loyalty*; *Journal of Global Strategic Management*, vol. 11, p. 80-88;
- [12] Khan, M.T. (2013), *Customers Loyalty: Concept & Definition (A Review)*; *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 168-191;
- [13] Kock, N. (2014), *Advanced Mediating Effects Tests, Multi-Group Analyses and Measurement Model Assessments in PLS-Based SEM*; *International Journal of e-Collaboration*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 1-13;
- [14] Kock, N. (2015), *WarpPLS 5.0 User Manual*; ScriptWarp Systems, Laredo;
- [15] Lau, G.T.; Lee, S.H. (1999), *Consumers' Trust in a Brand and the Link to Brand Loyalty*; *Journal of Market Focused Management*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 341-370.
- [16] Macovei, O.I. (2014), *Modelarea prin ecuatii structurale in cercetarea de marketing: Aplicatie practica* ; Universitara, Bucharest;
- [17] Mellens, M.; Dekimpe, M.G.; Steenkamp, J.-B.E.M. (1996), *A Review of Brand-Loyalty Measures in Marketing*; *Tijdschrift voor economie en management*, vol. XLI, no. 4, p. 507-533;
- [18] Nam, J., Ekinci, Y., Whyatt, G. (2011), *Brand Equity, Brand Loyalty and Consumer Satisfaction*; *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 1009-1030;
- [19] Nezakati, H.; Yen, C.P.; Akhoundi, M. (2013), *Antecedents Impact on Brand Loyalty in Cosmetics Industry*; *Journal of Applied Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 126-132;
- [20] Ouwersloot, H.; Duncan, T. (2008), *Integrated Marketing Communications (European Edition)*; McGraw-Hill, London;

- [21] Pappu, R.; Quester, P.G.; Cooksey, R.W. (2005), *Consumer-based Brand Equity: Improving the Measurement – Empirical Evidence*; *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 143-154;
- [22] Park, C.W.; MacInnis, D.J.; Priester, J. (2008), *Brand Attachment and a Strategic Brand Exemplar*; in *Handbook on Brand and Experience Management* (editors Schmitt, B.H.; Rogers, D.L.), Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, UK, p. 3-17;
- [23] Platon, O.E., Orzan G. (2015), *Rolul comunicării de marketing online prin social media în susținerea capitalului marci*; Doctoral thesis, A.S.E, Bucharest;
- [24] Sharma, P. (2012), *Are Strong Brands a Source of Competitive Advantage in the Virtual World?*; In: *Branding and Sustainable Competitive Advantage: Building Virtual Presence* (editors Kapoor, A.; Kulshrestha, C.), Business Science Reference, p. 4-23;
- [25] Touzani, M.; Temessek, A. (2009), *Brand Loyalty: Impact of Cognitive and Affective Variables*; *Annals of “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati*, Fascicle I. Economics and Applied Informatics, no. 1, p. 227-242;
- [26] Yoo, B.; Donthu, N. (2001), *Developing and Validating a Multidimensional Consumer-Based Brand Equity Scale*; *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 52, no. 1, p. 1-14;
- [27] Zarantonello, L. (2008), *A Literature Review of Consumer-Based Brand Scales*; In: *Handbook on Brand and Experience Management* (editors Schmitt, B.H.; Rogers, D.L.), Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, p. 188-218.