Tik Tok hashtag challenge: a new digital strategy for Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

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Abstract

This paper analyses the Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) in Social Media and its effect in generating interest towards a company and its products. This research focuses on McDonald's digital strategy launched in TikTok for celebrating 20 years of one of its product. This research proposes a conceptual model based on CBE scale, tested through a quantitative survey, by administering a questionnaire to 181 TikTok users. The PLS approach was employed to test the model for assessing the adequacy of the measurements and for evaluating the structural model. The hypotheses have been confirmed, thus theoretical and managerial implications are provided.

Keywords: Consumer brand engagement, Social media, Digital marketing strategy

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1. Introduction of Paper

The rise of platformization of video entertainment leads companies to appropriately exploit social media and constantly update their digital marketing strategy. Social media becomes a crucial tool for managing relations with consumers, and companies need to quickly discover new applications that are in line with trend and consumer needs.

Consumers become active participants, engaged in the creation and consumption of valuable offerings (Obilo et al., 2021). Brands need to adapt to the digital environment that represents the place in which consumers use to spend their time for leisure or entertainment activities. In this environment the consumers become co-creator of contents, even supporting companies success and promotion. A rising platform is Tik Tok, an app for short video making and sharing, that provides visual effects for creating contents (Su et al., 2020). An higher number of companies start to exploit this app for encouraging users in creating contents and, in case of competition/challenge, there could be also economic or reputational rewards. Tik Tok social media has acquired a strong position in breeding ground for new digital strategies, trough the so-called 'hashtag challenges': the platform provides an ad hoc space to companies for launching a competition among their consumers and potential ones. Due to the viral nature of these campaigns, this competition usually involves a wider community of users, allowing to acquire new consumers. Moreover, on the basis of number of likes, comments, and shares, these videos are able to become 'trending topic', acquiring higher visibility (Zhang, 2021). On this purpose this paper builds on consumer brand engagement (CBE) applied in digital environment and particularly in TikTok social media. In this regard, we propose a conceptual model that applies the CBE scale of Hollebeek et al. (2014) to a TikTok challenge proposed by McDonald's company. The main objective of this paper is to empirically examine whether the involvement in digital entertainment activity promoted by a company is able to stimulate, as a consequence, interest towards a brand and its products. This enlighten the ability of social media challenge in transferring the interest from the digital environment to the brand and its products. This research adopts quantitative method (questionnaire administration) and the PLS-SEM approach to test the hypotheses.

The paper is organized as follows: a literature review with hypotheses to be tested, methodology explaining constructs and the research approach, results, and finally, conclusion and implications.

2. Literature review

This section illustrates the relevant literature that represents the foundation of our proposed model applied to Mc Donald's TikTok digital strategy.

Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on technological foundations of Web 2.0, and which allow to create/exchange user-generated content'. The emergence of social media has changed the communication paradigm (Morra et al., 2018), implying a switch from a passive consumers - as receivers of product/brand information - to an active one that seeks information and co-create contents (Kozinets et al., 2010; Batra & Keller, 2016; Whitelock et al., 2013; Thevenot, 2007). The relation between companies and their consumers evolves and businesses are losing full control over communication on social media (Bruhn, et al., 2012).

Generally, consumers use social media mainly for socialization, entertainment, self-status seeking, information searching, discovering new brands, comparing alternative, reading comments/reviews (Yang et al., 2016; Gomez et el., 2019). Currently, TikTok is the top social media platform that has been adopted by marketers to reach and engage with their target audience, thus fostering consumer 'engagement' (Hollebeek et al., 2014; de Valck at al., 2009; Van Laer, et al., 2013). The community of users can create videos or being engaged in 'challenges' implying various activities (i.e. dancing, lip-synching, duplicating other users, etc.).

The consumers' engagement is defined by Brodie et al., (2011) as a psychological state that occurs during interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal products/brands, and it is a consequence of the users' active role in digital environment.

Building Brand Engagement through Social media is a pivotal interest of companies (De Vries et al., 2012) since the activities on it allow to extract new metrics for improving brand performance (Bowden 2009; Kumar et al. 2010) due to its consequences on consumers' behaviour and firms financial performance (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010).

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) has been studied from multiple perspectives and disciplines (Gomez et al., 2019) representing an important topic for marketing and decision-making (Leckie et al., 2016). Following Hollebeek et al. (2014) definition, CBE is composed of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral that concurrently reflect the nature of the engagement. The cognitive processing refers to "a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction". The affection is "a consumer's degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction". The activation is defined as "a consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction".

Even though this is a high debated topic, there is scarce research with empirical validation (Gomez et al., 2019), especially in focusing on social media brands as objects of consumer engagement (Leckie et al., 2021); this is particularly relevant since social media brand engagement can likely be translated in interest towards products by potential consumers. Hence, consumer engagement needs to be further explored as a strategic business resources (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018).

This research aims at filling the gap by analysing the effect of CBE in digital environment (hashtag challenge) in increasing the interest towards brand/products.

On the basis of the above literature, here following the hypotheses and the conceptual model are illustrated:

H_1: CBE is a second order construct measured by Cognitive Processing, Affection and Activation
H_2: CBE positively influences the interest towards brand and its products
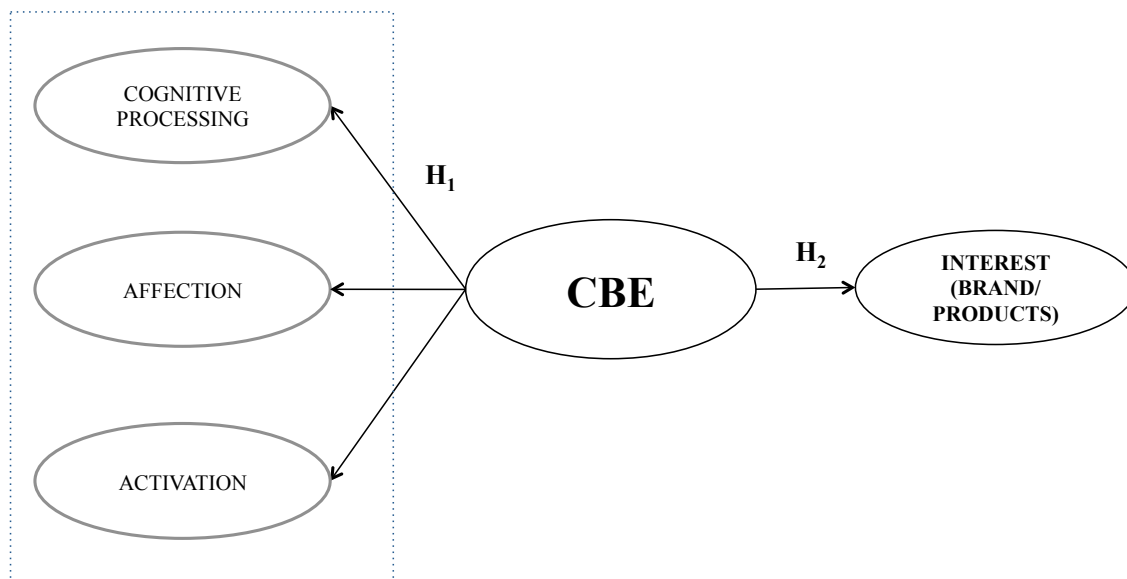
3. Research method

This study adopts a quantitative method by administering a questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on the case of Mc Donald's TikTok hashtag challenge. The case of Mc Donald's has been chosen because of the great success of this challenge: it lasts 8 days and results in 228 millions of views and 193 thousand of video created by 75 thousand of TikTok users.
The hashtag challenge concerns vaiours activities (especially dancing/action associated with music/sound) that people can carry out on TikTok. Users look at this challenge and are inspired to create specific video contents.
Mc Donald's launched a hashtag challenge along with strategies that ensured wider visualization, inviting as many users as possible to participate.
This challenge was launched for celebrating the anniversary of one of its well-known product.
The questionnaire structure follows the CBE scale proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014) since this scale is the most widely acknowledged and adopted in this topic (Algharabat et al., 2018; Halaszovich & Nel, 2017; Leckie et al., 2016). CBE is composed of three dimensions measured on seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree): cognitive processing, affection and activation. One single item has been included for measuring the interest towards the brand and its products. The sample has been randomly selected with the requirements of being users of TikTok app. A pilot survey has been conducted on 30 respondents in order to improve the comprehension of each question and the questionnaire structure. During the survey a video has been shown about the challenge proposed by Mc Donald's to TikTok community.
The PLS approach was employed to test the model and it is analyzed and interpreted in two stages. First, the adequacy of the measurements has been assessed by evaluating the reliability of the individual measures and the discriminant validity of the constructs. Then, the structural model is appraised to test the hypotheses.

4. Results

The sample is composed of 181 respondents (41% male and 59% female) that use TikTok platform. It is composed mainly of young people of the following age: 18-25 (69%), 26-35 (24%), 36-50 (3%) and over 50 (4%).

The PLS approach was employed to test the model. The PLS model is analyzed and interpreted in two stages as explained in the Research Method section.

Measurement model was analyzed to assess reliability and validity of the constructs. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha, CR and AVE of the reflective constructs.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, CR and AVE of the reflective constructs.

	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Composite Reliability
Cognitive	0.805	0.720	0.885
Affection	0.912	0.919	0.958
Activation	0.850	0.869	0.930

The Cronbach's Alpha values and the Composite Reliability values for each construct are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978; Chin and Marcoulides, 1998). Average variance extracted (AVE) values for convergent validity is above the 0.5 acceptable threshold (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All the items have item loading values higher than 0.7. VIF values for all the items of the reflective constructs were below 5, thus multicollinearity is excluded (Hair et al., 2011).

At a later stage, in order to assess the discriminant validity, a double test was performed: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015). Concerning the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, the square root of AVE is higher than the correlation between the two constructs in the model, as suggested. Moreover the HTMT is ratio is below 0,90, thus discriminant validity is established. Thereafter, the structural results are presented in Table 2 and 3. All path coefficients are significant (at the 0.05 levels).

Table 2: Structural results: H_1

H_1 *Second order reflective construct*	*First order reflective constructs*	Coefficient Beta	t-value	Hypothesis
CBE	Cognitive	0.911	60.210	H_1 supported (p<0.05)
	Affection	0.906	68.650	
	Activation	0.846	32.624	

Table 3: Structural results: H_2

Path	Coefficient Beta	t value	Hypothesis
H_2 CBE → Interest towards brands/products	0.752	22.409	H_2 supported (p<0.05)

According to Hair et al. (2014), the evaluation of the structural model was carried out observing the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 adj.), the effect size (f^2), the predictive relevance of the model (Q^2), the size and significance of path coefficients.

The adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 adj.) was above 0.4 for all the reflective constructs, highlighting an adequate explanatory power of the model. The effect size was at the large level for all the constructs and they resulted significant after the bootstrapping procedure (1,000 samples). All the Stone-Geisser Q^2 is positive, thus the model has predictive relevance. The path coefficients are high and significant ($p<0.05$). The results reveal a good overall fit of the structural model. Figure 2 illustrates the model.
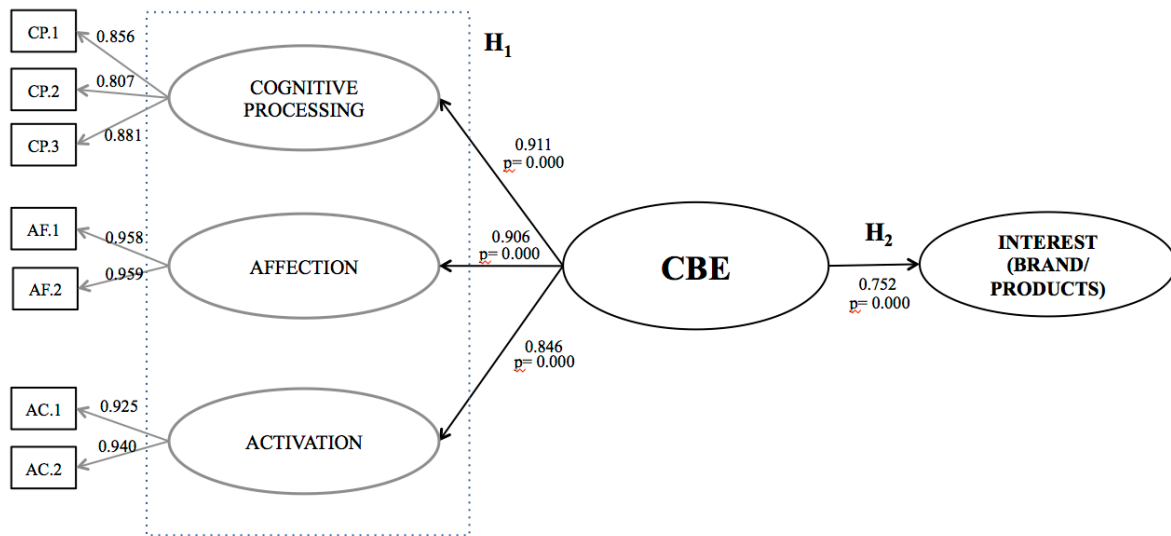

Figure 2. Path coefficients and level of statistical significance

The results confirm Hypotheses H_1 and H_2. CBE related to a TikTok 'challenge' is strongly is measured by the three constructs of Cognitive processing (0.830), Affection (0.822) and Activation (0.716). At the same time the CBE related to the 'challenge' is able to stimulate the interest towards a company and its products (0.752). The results show satisfactory insights about the model design and the questionnaire structure.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results confirm the proposed model and the relations among the constructs. Consumer engagement in an activity (the 'hashtag challenge') proposed by a company is caused by cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. Although the 'hashtag challenge' is not directly inviting consumers to buy products, it will activate/increase the interest towards the products by proposing activities in digital environment. In this way CBE can have an impact also on brand performance due to its ability to increase sales and profitability (Harrigan et al., 2018; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Sawhney et al., 2005). Indeed, on the basis of the so called hierarchy-of-effects notion of loyalty (Oliver, 1999) consumers who engage with a brand are likely to develop favourable attitudes, which, in turn, should lead to increased brand usage intent (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017).

Our study has theoretical and practical contributions for what that concerns marketing strategies in digital environment. This paper is one of the first exploring the CBE related to

TikTok hashtag challenges and the related effect on brand/products in terms of interest generated. This research contributes to engagement field of study, filling the gap by proposing empirical validation applied to social media context. In social media context, and particularly to TikTok hashtag challenges, this research confirms that the consumer engagement towards an activity (the 'hashtag challenges') proposed by a company is shaped by cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. At the same time the CBE related to the 'hashtag challenge' is able to stimulate the interest towards a company and its products. In terms of digital strategy, a company is called to increase the consumers engagement in social media by proposing entertainment activities even though they do not directly intend to promote products sale. The involvement towards this activity will activate/increase the interest towards the products and, as the literature suggests, CBE is linked to brand performance: highly engaged consumers have higher brand commitment and consumer loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Further studies could investigate the actual effects in terms of behaviour caused by the interest generated by CBE.

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