Drivers for brand-related social media engagement of employees

Results of an explorative case study

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Summary

Nowadays, interactions between consumers and businesses increasingly unfold on social media. In such a climate, the success of corporate branding increasingly depends on employee engagement. Employees can play a key role in creating brand equity via social media, since their messages are more trusted and their distribution is more effective.

In spite of the growing importance of employee engagement on social media, not much is known about the antecedents, although some studies point at the role of commitment. Additionally, they found evidence that some motivations such as 'social expression' or 'self-identity expressiveness' lead to engagement with brand-related social media. The question remains: what motives do employees have to engage in brand-related social media activities?

The aim of this paper is to gain more insight in the antecedents of employee engagement with social media. In literature three main approaches are used to explain social media behaviour: the 'Uses and Gratifications perspective', the 'Self-Determination Theory' and the 'Theory of Planned Behaviour.' In this study aspects from these approaches are incorporated into a new research model to examine employee social media engagement. We expect that 'commitment' towards the brand, and the support of a dedicated 'social media program' could influence employees' engagement. In addition, 'attitude towards brand-related social media' and the 'perceived social pressure' could play a role as well. Furthermore we explore the 'social and professional identity expressiveness' as drivers. Finally, some less well studied determinants such as 'empowerment' and 'remuneration' will be taken into account.

Currently brand-related social media use is a relatively new subject, and therefore this study has been designed in such a way that there is room for yet undefined motivations to surface. We opted for a single-case study design of a business-to-business financial service organization to allow a more in depth approach within the given time frame. The organization selected for this study has a comprehensive social media strategy with employee social media sharing tools implemented and kicked off a brand-ambassador program for selected employees. Therefore, this particular case enabled us to study the

interaction of the employee with social media in a real-life setting. Because the study of motivations or intentions inherently relies largely on self-reporting capabilities, data was collected through semi-structured interviews.

In this study, all motivations reflected in the eight propositions were found to be reflected as motivations for social media engagement, with the addition of one extra motivation 'entertainment'. However, 'commitment' and 'professional identity expressiveness' showed to be the main drivers for employees' to engage in brand-related social media activities. Where 'professional identity expressiveness' appears to be closely intertwined with the 'remuneration' and 'empowerment' motivations, as some employees admit to emphasize their own professional standards or values to the extent of receiving some form of future benefit. These benefits may be for personal gain or more altruistically for the benefit or the company. Furthermore, 'attitude' seems to be a predictor for the social media engagement of employees. Employees who scored as being more positive towards social media tended to be more positive on other domains such as 'social and professional identity expressiveness', 'empowerment' and 'remuneration'. This supports the idea that employees with a positive attitude towards social media are more prone to engage compared to employees with a more negative attitude. Furthermore, some employees clearly indicate that they felt lack of confidence in ones skills to engage on social media by creating blogs or vlogs. Additionally, 'time and effort spent' seems to be a mediator for engaging in brand-related social media activities. These insights into their motivation can subsequently be translated into strategies on how to encourage employees to actively engage in brand-related activities on social media. A customized and comprehensive social media program could support employees to be more effective and efficient in their interactions which could build their confidence and decrease their time spent on social media. Moreover, it seems that employees engage in social media activities with a clear concept of its effects. They indicate to use it in a strategic manner; to aid themselves or the company. They even say it is a part of their job, which implicates that it is intentional and planned behaviour.

Future research should aim to include multiple cases preferably with a larger study population per case. As a larger number of interviewees would allow for a better understanding of the antecedents and mediators found in our study could then be tested. In addition to the interviews a measure of effect should be included. We would

suggest to look at the actual social media output in order to objectivise the actual behaviour. This would also allow for quantification of the social media output especially when combined with a larger study population for more statistical power.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and problem statement

Social Media have rapidly become part of our everyday lives. They can be defined as internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Where "Web 2.0" is mainly about relinquishing control, it's about openness, trust and authenticity (Merholz, 2005). Social media allow users to express thoughts and ideas and interact in a meaningful way with minimal intervention.

Understandably, the rise of social media has had a big impact on marketing in the 21th century. Nowadays, marketers often spend a large proportion of their budget on establishing and maintaining a presence on online social networking sites as the interaction between consumers and businesses increasingly unfolds on social media (Moorman, 2015; Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011). In 2016 approximately 84 percent of Fortune 500 companies had established a presence on Facebook, 86 percent on Twitter and 97 percent on LinkedIn (Statista.com, 2016). So clearly companies are aware of the substantial potential value of social media and as a result invest in ways to involve customers in brand-related activities on social media, as this is likely to increase sales (De Vries et al., 2017).

Moreover, there now is growing evidence that organizations could also benefit from employee engagement on social media (Helm, 2011; Dreher, 2014; Frank, 2015). In such a climate, the success of corporate branding increasingly depends on employee engagement with brand-related activities on social media (Helm, 2011; Van Zoonen et al., 2014b). Employees are on average connected to ten times as many people as their organisations' official channels. Also, brand messages can be shared up to 24-times more frequently when distributed by employees, versus when shared by official brand channels alone. In addition, messages from organizations are less trusted than messages from people; only 15 percent of people trust a message from an organization versus 84 percent for messages from a person they know, including employees (Frank, 2015). The statistics above provide ample reason for companies to encourage employees to engage with brand-related social media activities to engender positive organisational outcomes.

A valuable method is to turn them into 'brand ambassadors' that show brand citizenship behaviour. This entails behaviour by employees that is non-prescribed or "above and beyond the norm", yet consistent with the brand values of the organisation (Deluga, 1994; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; King & Grace, 2012). However, knowledge of how organizations should use social media and how these communication channels can and should be utilized most effectively is lacking (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

So in spite of the growing importance of on employee engagement in brand-related activities on social media, not much is known about the antecedents of this phenomenon. What drives this type of employee engagement? Some studies point at the role of commitment. Employees that are committed to a brand are more likely to elicit brand building behaviours (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Burmann et al., 2009; King & Grace, 2012; King et al., 2012). However, current research has predominantly been focussed on motivations for individuals and customers to contribute to, or create, brand-related content (De Vries et al., 2017; Muntinga et al., 2011). To our knowledge, very few studies have directly examined the motives of employees to engage in brand-related social media use. One study found that employees' work-related social media use is largely unintentional and impulsive, and driven by a need to express ones identity to others (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a). In another study by the same group, it was found that employees use their personal social-media accounts selflessly to support the collective goals of the organization rather than for personal branding (Van Zoonen et al., 2014b).

Accordingly, our problem statement reads: what are the antecedents of employee engagement with social media? In this master thesis, we aim to gain insight in these antecedents. This research has practical implications as well. We can translate the knowledge of these antecedents into strategies on how to encourage employees to actively engage in brand-related activities on social media.

1.2 Research design

As previously stated, in this study we will explore the antecedents of employee engagement with brand-related activities on social media. Due to the exploratory nature

of this study, we will conduct a single case-study of a global financial service organization with a high level of employee engagement with branding on social media. This method supports to gain in-depth knowledge of employee behaviour in relation to social media.

This paper aims to define motives for employees to become engaged with brand-related social media. In the next chapter, we build a theoretical research model of propositions in which concepts are defined and explored by further in-depth research of existing literature about employee citizenship behaviour and motivations for social media use. Based on the outcome we describe the choice of research in the methodology.

2. Literature research

2.1 The definition of brand-related social media engagement

First of all, we define brand-related social media engagement as 'the use of personal social media accounts to communicate about brand-related issues'. Moreover, our definition of the use of social media comprises "contributing" and "creating" brand-related content. Although there are other ways employees can engage in brand-related social media, these two activities are of greatest relevance to brands because these activities require high or moderate levels of engagement on the part of the employee. (e.g. Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014; King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Kumar et al., 2010; Van Doorn et al., 2010). These activities require a higher degree of cognitive effort, emotional involvement, and behavioural proneness (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). In our study, we define 'contributing' to brand-related content as 'responding to brand-related messages' on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) using a personal social media account. This includes commenting on brand-related content, sharing brand-related messaging or performing any other interaction with brand-related content that has been initially generated by others. For example, contributing may also include "liking" brand-related content, since this action results in making a contribution to reach someone's network and therewith make impact in social context (John et al., 2016).

Furthermore, we define "creating" brand-related content as posting, tweeting or otherwise publishing brand-related messages on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) using a personal social media account. This type of use is most relevant to companies and may for example include activities in which people create original brand-related content.

2.2 The value of employees on social media

Employees are becoming the driving force behind successful service brands (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006). Moreover, when employees have a 'feeling of belonging' or

feel psychologically attached to the organization, they are more likely to exhibit behaviours that go beyond the formally articulated requirements of their job (Castro et al. 2005). For example, employee branding programs are often used by employers to create more employee commitment and loyalty (Edwards, 2010; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This commitment is considered to be the pinnacle in external brand building and is essential for the creation of brand equity (King & Grace, 2012; Keller, 2001).

*Proposition **1***
Commitment has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

Additionally, to aid the process of external brand building on social media, a growing number of organisations offer a framework of clear policies and guidelines, thorough training, editing services to guide and assist employees, and comprehensive monitoring of social media content (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). For example, Dreher (2014) describes eight key steps for organisations to better manage risks and leverage the benefits of their employees' participation online: research, internet access at the workplace, a strong commitment from the C-suite, the establishment of social media teams, the implementation of guidelines and policies, training and education, integration, as well as goal setting and measurement. Whilst a very coarse framework, these steps can provide a foundation on which an organization can build the essential 'commitment' of its employees in the creation of brand building behaviours.

*Proposition **2***
A dedicated social media program has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees.

2.3 Motivations for social media use

In literature there are mainly three approaches that explain social media use behaviour. These approaches aim to explain why people use social media, what satisfaction they receive thereof and which incentives drive their selection and use of media and media content (Rubin, 1984, 2002). Also, these motivations are explained to predict a variety of

behaviours in various contexts (Ajzen, 1991). There are several differences and similarities between the three perspectives; to come to the best approach for our specific research question it is critical to understand the different approaches.

The first theory, the uses and gratifications perspective [U&G], has been developed to examine how and why people use media (Katz et al., 1974). The most frequently used gratification-categorization is that of McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972). This categorization distinguishes four motivations: entertainment, integration and social interaction, personal identity, and information. Based on previous studies in relation to social media, this four-category classification of motivations for general media use has been found relevant and applicable also to modern media use. Hence, Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) used this theory to explore consumer's motivations to engage with brand-related activities on social media. Based on the results of relevant social media studies, they have extended the four-categorization of McQuail (1972) with two motivations: remuneration and empowerment (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Muntinga et al., 2011). They have reported motivations for most consumers' online brand-related activities [COBRA]: consuming, contributing and creating content. The results indicate that consuming brand-related content is mainly driven by the three motivations: information, entertainment and remuneration. Secondly, the study indicates that contributing and creating brand-related content are driven by three other motivations: personal identity, integration and social interaction and entertainment. Finally, only one extra dimension motivates people to create content, namely empowerment. Interestingly, interviewees who articulated this motivation, are recognized as brand-ambassadors (Muntinga et al., 2011).

The second often cited theory, the Self-Determination Theory [SDT], distinguishes human motivations depending on the degree to which they are autonomous, ranging from fully intrinsic to fully extrinsic motivations. This model has been divided into five levels of autonomy with additional motivation: Fully autonomous (i.e. entertainment), highly autonomous (i.e. self-expression), moderately autonomous (i.e. socializing), slightly autonomous (i.e. obtaining information) and non-autonomous (i.e. remuneration) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By way of example, De Vries et al. (2017) used this theory to explain consumers' behaviour on social media for brand-related activities that

are most valuable for firms: contributing and creating content. This study indicates that the motivations for self-expression and socializing play primary roles in leading people to create one's own content and collaborating with others to contribute to content.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour [TPB] is the third and final commonly used approach to explain motivations of social media use and has been applied extensively to predict a variety of behaviours in various contexts (Ajzen, 1991). According to the theory, human behaviour is guided by three kinds of beliefs: attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Following this theory, the intention to perform behaviour predicts behaviour performance (Ajzen, 1991). The theory has been used extensively to explain technology related behaviours in work-related contexts (Baker et al., 2007; Van Zoonen et al., 2014a). Van Zoonen, Verhoeven and Elving (2014a) used this theory to examine motives for employees to engage with work-related social media use because employees work-related social media use may be considered intentional and would therefore be best explicated by this approach. In this study the model of planned behaviour is extended according to the identity expressiveness theory, which is specifically aimed at social media use. Interestingly, traditional TPB determinants seem to have lower power compared to the added identity expressiveness determinants, both the social- and self-identity expressiveness, when explaining motivations for social media engagement (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a).

These three approaches describe the same set of key motivations, but differ in some aspects. However, they all seem to agree that socializing and self-expression or personal identity in the context of social media is a key predictor. The extended versions of the SDT and U&G approach describe similar motivations from different angles. The SDT categorizes the determinants into the levels of autonomy whereas U&G adds one extra determinant: empowerment. In essence, the motivations can be understood as similar to each other, which provides more evidence to build further on these theories. However, the traditional TPB study focusses on different determinants and therewith distinguishes from the other two studies. TPB predominantly focusses on the technology-related behaviour and argues that work-related social media use is intentional and planned. Based on existing literature about the strategic management

approaches of organizations to turn their employees into socially engaged brand ambassadors, it is valid to take some of these behavioural aspects into account.

2.4 Understanding employees' motivation in brand-related social media use: the research model

Considering the three models, and the different determinants they describe, we will build on a well-studied foundation, incorporating aspects of all three models. We will extend the models by adding additional key driving factors from recent literature, which will help understand employee social brand behaviour.

2.4.1   Antecedents for employee behaviour on social media

The attitude towards social network sites or other technologies predicts intentions to use these (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a; Pelling & White, 2009, Baker et al., 2007). Attitude can be explained as "the degree to which a person has a favourable evaluation or appraisal of the target behaviour" (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a).

Proposition 3
A favourable attitude towards brand-related social media has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

Moreover, the perceived social pressure or subjective norm of employees to engage with brand-related content by their organization or colleagues may affect their tendency to do so. This perceived 'psychological pressure' to engage is illustrated by the rapidly increasing focus on programs and strategies employed by companies to motivate employees to be active on social media.

Proposition 4
Employees' perceived social pressure to engage with brand-related content by their organization has a positive impact on their tendency to do so.

2.4.2   Motivations to engage with brand-related social media

The same set of motivations to engage with social media is described throughout literature. As previously stated, the extended version of the U&G approach (Muntinga et al., 2011) is the most comprehensive as it includes the most important and overarching antecedents that might affect social media engagement. There is a large body of evidence for the power of the existing motivations to predict social media engagement. These overarching motivations include: entertainment, integration and social interaction, personal identity, information and knowledge, and the additional 'remuneration' and 'empowerment'. All these motivations will be taken into account in our study. However, we will focus on four of these motivations: integration and social interaction, personal identity, remuneration and empowerment. As these motivations are more likely to appear in the context of employees and brand-related social media behaviour. This has also been described in previous work on this subject, "integration and social interaction" and "personal identity" are important motivations for employees. (Van Zoonen et al. 2014a). The "integration and social interaction" motivation refers to the connection of a person to his or her peers in a group. In the context of our study, we speak of "social identity expressiveness" when employees emphasize their embeddedness into an organisation and focus on other in-group members, like colleagues as a motivation for engagement. This feeling of belonging to a group is an essential part of 'organizational identification', which can be defined as the 'cognition of membership of a group and the value and emotional significance attached to this membership' (Tajfel, 1978: 63). It is recognized that the degree of organizational identification "affects tenure and intensity of commitment to the organization" (O'Reilly et al., 1996). Recent research showed that organizational identification is influenced by the perceived employer branding therewith also positively influencing commitment to the organization (Akuratiya, 2017).

Proposition 5
The motivation "social identity expressiveness" has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

In addition to the social identity mentioned above we discern 'professional identity expressiveness'. In literature a myriad of partly overlapping descriptions are being used

for the same concept. However, in general 'professional identity' can be understood as the degree to which employees convey their own identity and values through work-related social media use (Van Zoonen et al., 2014). Therefore it includes the extent to which an employee feels that his or her personal role, responsibilities, values and ethical standards are consistent with practices accepted by their organisation (Goltz et al., 2014). In this study there is no meaningful difference, in terms of motivations to engage in brand-related social media use, between self-identity expressiveness, personal identity and professional identity. Brand-related social media use can help convey a favourable image and is therefore considered an important antecedent for engagement.

Proposition 6
The motivation "professional identity expressiveness" has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

Furthermore, the motivations, "empowerment" and "remuneration", are generally considered to be of value in explaining engagement with brand-related social media activities. As previously stated, organizational commitment leads to employees that are more likely to exhibit behaviours that go beyond the formally articulated requirements of their job. Additionally, "empowerment" is a well-studied determinant for employees' behaviour. Empowerment can be understood as employees who share their enthusiasm for a brand and in doing so convince others that the brand is worth using or purchasing (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003).

Proposition 7
The motivation "empowerment" has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

Also, "remuneration" has been described as motivation for people to engage in social media use when they expect some kind of reward, for example job-related benefits (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Nov, 2007). This motivation can be categorized as non-autonomous, or a full extrinsic motivation.

Proposition 8

The motivation "remuneration" has a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees

2.4.3 Research model

To summarize, our theoretical research model is based on eight antecedents that influence employees' brand-related social media usage. We will consider this set of eight antecedents as the foundation on which we will expand, with room for yet undefined motivations.

Figure 1. Research model
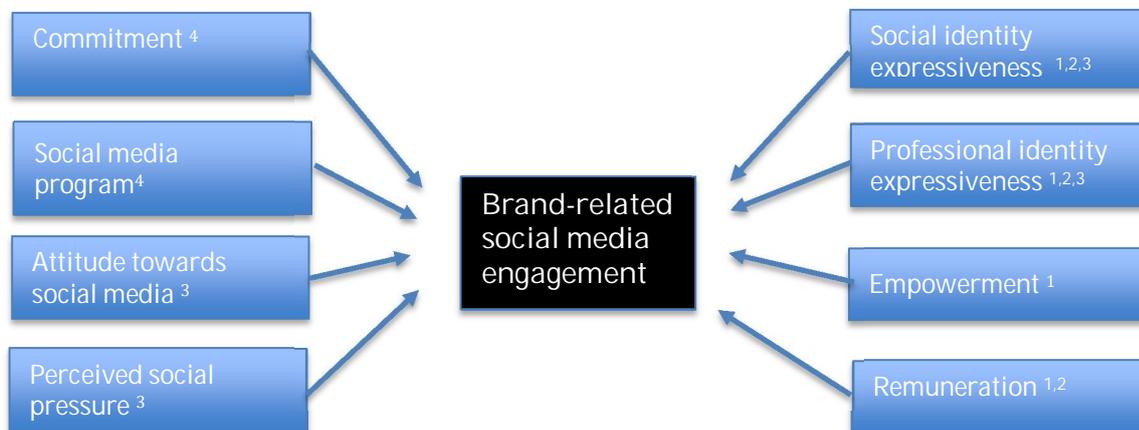
Figure 1. Model depicting the different antecedents contributing to employee brand-related social media engagements. Superscript numbers indicate the origin of the antecedents. [1] = Uses & Gratifications perspective (adapted according to: Muntinga et al., 2011)); [2] = Self-Determination Theory (adapted according to: De Vries et al. 2017); [3] = Theory of Planned Behaviour (adapter according to: Van Zoonen et al; 2014a); [4]= Other studies.

3. Methodology

The previous chapter developed the theoretical research model that serves as the foundation for this study. Based on the existing literature, a set of eight propositions was defined to test expected relationships. For this study we chose to conduct a case study. We will further elaborate on study design, data collection and operationalisation in this chapter.

3.1 Research design

We have opted for a case study design of a business-to-business financial service organization. This approach best suits the explorative nature of our study and is especially appropriate in new topic areas (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). In general, case studies provide "unique means of developing theory by utilizing in-depth insights of empirical phenomena and their contexts" (Dubois, 2002). In addition, case studies are the preferred research method when "how" and "why" questions are being posed and in uncontrolled environments (Yin, 2009). In this study we chose the single case research design because of its characteristic nature (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.2 Case and data collection

We conducted a single case study of a global financial service organization. We chose an organization that met predetermined criteria: an active presence on the large social media platforms, an active social media program focussed on employee engagement and sustainable investments in a brand ambassadorship strategy. The organization selected for this study met the criteria due to its comprehensive strategy which has been in place for more than five years, with employee social media sharing tools such as "*Smarp*" implemented. The organization shares a weekly social media newsletters globally, and kicked off a brand-ambassador program for a selected employees. Therefore, this particular case enabled us to study the interaction of the employee with social media in a real-life setting. The aim of this study is to explore motives behind brand-related social media behaviour; therefore we specifically targeted employees with the highest

probability of performing the target behaviour (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a). Moreover, we chose to focus on a single 'best case' because this organization allowed close inspection of internal documents and rationale behind their strategy whereas large international financial services organizations generally do not provide access to internal documents to non-employees. Furthermore, due to the explorative nature of this study we opted for the single case approach because a single case allows for a more in-depth view of the case within a given time frame. A discussion of the advantages of a multiple case study over the single case study can be found below.

We opted for interviews as the preferred manner of data collection as this allows for a better understanding of the motivations of the employee. Only employees were included in this study with a personal account on, at least, one of the relevant social media platforms; LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook. Also, we used organizational data provided by '*Smarp*' and the company's 'brand-ambassadors program' to pre-select ten employees that actively participate in the process of sharing and creating brand-related messages on social media with diverse rankings and roles. By carefully including the participants we were able to obtain a study population that adequately reflects the employee base of this organization.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This data collection method allows for theory-driven, hypotheses-directed questions to be asked (Flick, 2009). The open questions were used to reveal potential hidden motivators for employees' to engage with brand-related activities on their personal social media account. They allow researchers to explore 'the reasons behind the reasons' (Gengler et al., 1999, p. 75) of specific conducts and gives room to reveal other factors that could be of influence.

3.3 Operationalization

The operationalisation of qualitative research is used for structuring, observing and analysing of data. While the study is explorative of nature and open for modification during the process, we built the following research model (see Figure 1) as guiding principle for our research. Because people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report

or recognize their interests and motives in particular cases, we believe that we could gain, through in-depth and semi-structured interviews, existing and new insights into employees' motivations to engage with social media in the work-related context (Katz et al., 1973).

The interviews were conducted with preselected members of the case organization. The interview data were acquired through a purposive sampling strategy. Respondents received an e-mail invitation to partake in this study and if reacting positively, we planned a meeting to take the in-depth interviews.

Throughout the interviews, we asked specific questions in relation to the target behaviour, mainly using open questions and conversational techniques that allowed the interviewee to share their motivations whilst minimizing confirmation bias.
The target behaviour 'social media engagement' was operationalised using three main questions asking on which social media platforms they are actively engaging; which platforms also brand-related; and what kind of activities they tend to do. Furthermore we asked open questions on which social media platforms a specific activity, like contributing or creating to brand-related social media activities, took place. Employees were successively asked for examples and their idea behind their interaction. This open conversation allowed us to determine the motivations behind brand-related social media use, supporting the propositions 'social and professional identity expressiveness', 'remuneration' and 'empowerment.' Furthermore, the other antecedents were operationalised using questions about the social media tools and the social media program of the organisation and how these potentially changed their behaviour. Also, open questions were asked about their opinion on brand-related social media in general (e.g. pleasant, beneficial) to examine the 'attitude towards social media' and the degree of 'social pressure'. Finally the antecedent 'commitment' was operationalised using questions about how important brand success is for the employee personally, combined with questions that examine perceived benefit of social media engagement for the organization.

Before conducting the interviews, we wish to access organizational documents to support the information given by the interviewees as part of triangulation of the data.

The documents should provide information about the social media strategy and internal branding programs. Additionally we aim to observe and analyse social media profiles of the interviewees the gain an understanding of their social media engagement.

3.4 Data analysis

In this study we use an abductive approach to analyse our data because of the explorative nature of the study. In studies relying on abduction, the original framework or research model is successively modified, partly as a result of unanticipated empirical findings, but also of theoretical insights gained during the process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This allows for other variables and relationships to be discovered and then described in an appropriate theoretical framework or research model. This approach is close to an inductive approach, however the continuous interplay between theory and empirical observation is stressed more heavily than in an deductive approach.

Collection of non-standardized data requires classification, and therefore an approach for condensing and structuring the data derived from interviews. In the first phase interview data was coded. Based on our problem statement, propositions and abductive approach, all interview transcripts were carefully tracked on motivational statements. Each statement was then coded according to its correspondence to the motivations that have been described previously. When motivations did not correspond to any of the existing categories, they were labelled as new. For the second phase, we related the data to the propositions and draw our conclusions.

3.5 Methodological issues

For this study we interview people about motivations. This topic is something that people usually do not consciously think of or reflect upon, so we rely on interviewees' memory and self-reporting capabilities.

Another issue in this case study is most likely to relate to socially desirable answers by employees of the case organization.

The study population is another limitation, in our study we have to limit the amount of subject included in the cohort because of the time intensive nature of the research method. Ideally, we would have liked to include a larger number of subjects as this generates more data to analyse.

Additionally, multiple cases may have generated a different set of motivations. However since we had access to only one such organisations detailed social media program information and employee database we opted to confine to a single case study

Finally, the interview time spend per subject affects the outcome. Understandably we had to limit time spend per interview to a reasonable time. Of course we tried to mitigate this limitation by a semi structured interview technique and by carefully preparing each interview.

4. Results

During the ten semi-structured interviews we have looked at the aforementioned eight propositions in a theoretical research model. We will continue to discuss the results per proposition below.

4.1 Commitment

With the first proposition we propose that the brand-related social media engagement of employees is positively impacted by commitment. During the interviews, all subjects showed strong feeling of belonging to the organization. This is reflected in the following sayings: "When the company fails, I fail too" and "You need to work at a company where you can identify yourself with, otherwise it's better to leave" and "I am proud of the company I work for". Therefore this is one of the two most strongly felt motivations in our cohort. In the context of 'their feeling belonging to the organization' employees did more often describe the effects in daily practise in terms of social media engagement instead of describing a 'feeling of belonging'; "With my social media activities I am endorsing my firm" and "When employees share content, the value of the company increases in my opinion". Together with their feeling of proudness of the organization they work for, they are likely to exhibit behaviours that go beyond the formally articulated requirements of their job. And in this sense, their social media engagement.

4.2 Social media program

A lot of effort and budget is allocated towards the creation of the commitment we described in proposition one. To aid this process of external brand building on social media, the case organization offers a framework of guidelines, thorough training for brand ambassadors, in some cases editing services to guide and assist employees, and for the overall employees a sharing-tool in which content has been created and described to make sharing easy and efficient for employees. How such a 'social media program' is perceived and whether it is a motivation to employees is less well described in current literature. With proposition 2 we aimed to investigate whether a dedicated social media program would perceived to have a positive impact on brand-related social media engagement of employees. From the interviews we can conclude that most of the

employees felt a strong positive effect of such a program. They perceive the program as facilitating: it makes them more conscious of the impact of their online behaviour and helps them to improve their online effectiveness. A mediating factor in this relation is the time or effort spent on the social interaction. Most of the interviewees clearly indicate that the *Smarp tool* facilitating their engagement and led to an increase of effectiveness and thereby an increase of their interaction. One employee also stated that the *Online Brand Ambassadors-program* increased knowledge on social media engagement on a meta-level; by providing feedback on useful and effective interaction and thereby increased awareness. In turn this employee indicated that being more aware about ones social media engagement, instead of mindlessly copy-pasting your employers preferred social media output, gave this employee a feeling of being able to put his engagement to better use, making him more prone to interact. This agrees with other statements that when employees were to receive assistance in writing, for example a blog, they would be more prone to create content instead of sharing. A mediating factor here may be time or effort spent but it may also be due to lack of skill as is more comprehensively discussed below. Moreover, all social media activities should in one way directly benefit peers connected in the social media network of the employee, if not it could not only be ineffective but also cause harm in the way that it could be viewed as irrelevant or 'spam' by peers. One interviewee even stated to 'remove peers from his own network who post too many irrelevant information'. Only one of the employees stated that although a social media program improved consciousness about the importance of social media engagement it would never influence his or her social media behaviour. Concluding, for most employees a dedicated social media system that also provides feedback on the interaction not only led to an increase in their social media engagement, but to an increase in the effectiveness and efficiency of that interaction.

4.3 Attitude

An important predictor for social media engagement is the general attitude of an employee towards social media. It is easily comprehended that someone with a negative attitude towards social media who is reluctant to engage, will be harder to influence in order to change behaviour for example by a social media program. This employee will generally be more negative towards its perceived benefits, therefore we aimed to

analyse the general attitude towards social media of an employee and see how this relates to actual behaviour with proposition three. While some employees were very positive towards social media, a larger group appeared to be at least neutral as they emphasized both positive and negative effects in equal measure. They often expressed it as something they did not feel an intrinsic motivation to do, but described it as an obligatory part of the job, as they often acknowledged the positive effects. However, employees who scored as being more positive towards social media tended to be more positive on other domains such as social and professional identity expressiveness, empowerment and remuneration. This supports the idea that employees with a positive attitude towards social media are more prone to engage compared to employees with a more negative attitude. Additionally, as stated above some employees clearly indicate that they felt incompetent for certain types of social media interaction such a creating blog post. This lack of confidence in ones skills to engage clearly forms an easy target for a social media program.

Additionally most subjects emphasized to keep private and business related social media usage strictly separated. Brand-related content does only belong to LinkedIn (and Twitter). Facebook is seen as strictly private platform only to be used for non-business related content. This may of course be due to the fact that the financial service organization included in this study targets strictly the business-to-business market. This idea is clearly indicated by employees who state that this line is less strict for example a restaurant owner. This may then also have its implications for the effectiveness of a social media program, where a program of a business-to-business organization may be more effective when it aims for LinkedIn instead of Facebook.

4.4 Social pressure

The subjective norm created by an organization or by colleagues to engage with brand-related content may affect an employee's tendency to do so in a positive way. All but one employee acknowledged to feel a certain level of social pressure to engage in brand-related social media content. This pressure was often seen as part of the job description. They feel that the company they work for, clients and other business-related stakeholders expect a certain degree of online presence, and therefore perceive it as an essential asset in business. Additionally, some employees said that they did not want to come about as being 'unmodest' in the way that they felt social for example sharing a

vlog featuring themselves would put them in a spotlight. This may be attributable to an individual's culture, but was endorsed by several interviewees.

4.5 Social identity expressiveness

The fifth proposition assumes that the connectedness of a person to his or her peers in a group positively influences an employee's brand related-social media engagement. In the interviews we scored the employees that emphasized their embeddedness into the organisation and focused on other in-group members, like colleagues as their motivation for engagement. The majority of employees emphasized to some extent their embeddedness into the organization as a motivation for engagement. However, often they expressed that they liked to show what they had achieved as a team or what colleagues had achieved, but never indicated this to be their main motivation for engagement. However, all employees who expressed a strong social identity expressiveness also expressed a strong social pressure as motivation. It may be difficult to discern between social pressure and social identity expressiveness. Given the fast and instantaneous nature of social media it may be hard for an individual to truly determine whether the true motivation for sharing content in a social context is intrinsic or extrinsic. In our current effort we can discern only one employee who admitted to build his online profile also to show other colleagues about his passion for certain topics as his primary motivation.

4.6 Professional identity expressiveness

In addition to the 'social identity expressiveness' in proposition five we discern 'professional identity expressiveness' in the sixth proposition, together with commitment this was the most strongly expressed motivation, all employees indicated that this was a strong motivation for them. All employees that participate in this study mainly engage with brand-related activities on LinkedIn due to its strong and in depth network character. When engaging on LinkedIn, they tend to share only content they feel their network is interested in and topics where the subject has been associated with. A majority of the employees admits to share this content to show their expertise and

therewith profile themselves as go-to person. Also when they share content from others, they tend to personalize the message associated in order to emphasize the relevance of the message where this may not be apparent from the title or description. The professional identity is closely intertwined with the 'remuneration' and 'empowerment' motivations described below, as some employees admit to emphasize their own professional standards or values to the extent of receiving some form of future benefit. These benefits may be for personal gain or more altruistically for the benefit or the company. Both have been expressed by the employees in the interviews conducted in this study.

4.7 Empowerment

By proposing the seventh proposition we aimed to discover whether enthusiasm for the brand, or the aim to convince others that the brand is worth using, was a motivation for employees to engage in social media. However, none of the employees expressed this as a primary motivation for their social media interactions to any extent. One employee was surprised how easy it is to change other people's perspective with social media activities. Three of the employees indicated he or she did hope to generate leads by their social media engagement. And finally another employee admitted she wanted to be the 'go-to person' for a specific part of the business. To some degree these aims convey a certain degree of enthusiasm for the brand, but perhaps even more the goal to convince others that the brand and its service is worth using.

4.8 Remuneration

In the final proposition we proposed that the outlook of a reward can be a motivation for some employees. A small number of employees did admit that a possible future reward played a part in their engagement. They for example acknowledged that building a strong network and online profile, could support to find a new job in the future. One employee mentioned that he had found "previous jobs via his social media presence". As stated above the 'remuneration' motivation may be closely related to 'professional identity expressiveness' as a motivation. Also, the subjects who expressed 'remuneration' as a strong motivation for engagement did not express 'social identity expressiveness'.

4.9 Other

Because of the explorative nature of this study we left ample room for the interviewees to express motivations other than the eight proposition derived from previous literature. One subject indicated that 'entertainment' was an important motivation for his or her brand-related social media engagement. The subject regularly stated during the interview to experience social media activities as enjoyable. Interestingly, this subject was the only person who felt no social pressure to engage with social media. Also 'competition' via the *SMARP* employee advocacy tool was an important motivation for one subject to share brand-related content. The combination of entertainment and competition would create possibilities for the 'gamification' of social media where game-design elements in the context of a structured social media ecosystem would create an extrinsic motivation for employees to engage. We will discuss this further below. Finally a very clear mediator that became apparent during the interviews that was not explicitly brought forward as a proposition was 'time or effort spent in the interaction. Nearly all subjects emphasized the high pressure environment they were in, and how little time this left them for interaction. Some of them endorsed the idea of an inverse relationship, where less time spent on the interaction led to more engagement. Figure 2 summarizes the results of the study.

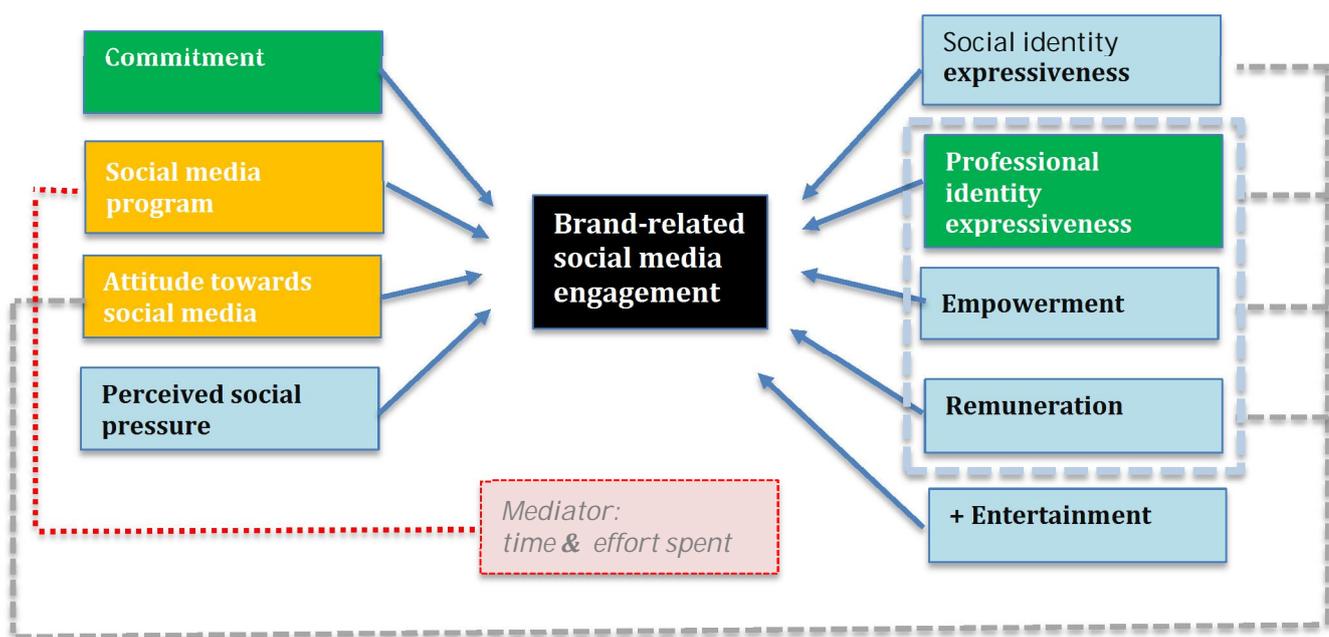Figure 2. Graphic summary of the research.

Figure 2. Model depicting the results of the different antecedents contributing to employee brand-related social media engagements. Green: strongly reflected, Orange: often reflected, Blue: sometimes reflected. Dashed lines (grey) indicate interrelationship between the antecedents. Dotted line (red) indicates the found mediator.

5. Conclusions, discussion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

In this study we aimed to gain more insight in the antecedents of employee engagement with brand-related social media by proposing eight propositions derived from literature. Therefore, we explored motives to engage in brand-related social media activities by interviewing employees in a semi-structured manner.

From these interviews two main motivations became apparent: 'commitment' and 'professional identity expressiveness'. Firstly all subjects showed a strong feeling of belonging to the organization and expressed this with their social media engagement as an important medium for the organization's success. Secondly all subjects indicated "professional identity expressiveness' as a strong motivation to engage with brand-related social media activities. They mainly use LinkedIn due to its strong and in-depth networking character, and aim to show their expertise and profile themselves as go-to persons in their profession. 'Professional identity expressiveness' is closely intertwined with the 'remuneration' and 'empowerment' motivations, as some employees admit to emphasize their own professional standards or values to the extent of receiving some form of future benefit. These benefits may be for personal gain or more altruistically for the benefit or the company.

From the remaining propositions, all motivations reflected in the propositions were recognised at least to some extent as motivations for social media engagement, with the addition of one extra motivation 'entertainment'. However, interestingly the antecedents 'attitude towards social media' and 'social media program' were quite strongly expressed. Based on the interview results, 'attitude' seems to be a predictor for the social media engagement of employees. Employees who scored as being more positive towards social media tended to be more positive on other domains such as 'social and professional identity expressiveness', 'empowerment' and 'remuneration'. This supports the idea that employees with a positive attitude towards social media are more prone to engage compared to employees with a more negative attitude. Additionally, most employees described social media as an obligatory part of the job for which they did not

feel an intrinsic motivation to engage. Also some employees clearly indicate that they felt lack of confidence in ones skills to engage on social media by creating blogs or vlogs, which is a clear and easy target for a social media program. Additionally time and effort spent in interactions seems to be a mediator to the extent in which employees engage in brand-related social media activities. A customized and comprehensive social media program could support employees to be more effective and efficient in their interactions which could build their confidence and decrease their time spent on social media.

Moreover, it seems that employees engage in social media activities with a clear concept of its effects. They indicate to use it in a strategic manner; to aid themselves or the company. They even say it is a part of their job, which implicates that it is intentional and planned behaviour.

5.2 Discussion

The present study provides a comprehensive understanding of employees' motivations for engaging in brand-related social media activities. Firstly, it adds to existing evidence that 'commitment' is a strong motivation for employees to engage with brand-related social media activities that endorse the organization. The motivation 'commitment' has been found in earlier studies on motives for employees that elicit brand building behaviours (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Burmann et al., 2009; King & Grace, 2012; King et al., 2012). Unlike these studies, that focus on the role of commitment for brand building behaviours in a broader sense, our study focussed specifically on antecedents of the brand building behaviour 'social media engagement'. Thus our study confirms that 'commitment' is an important antecedent for social media engagement. All employees showed 'commitment' as an motivation even if they had a negative attitude towards social media or showed no other motivations. However, the current study design did not allow us to investigate the underlying moderators of mediators in this relation. Other studies (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a) show that value alignment can lead to increased brand-related social media use, it could be hypothesized that personal and professional value congruence elicits commitment and thus social media use.

Secondly, 'professional identity expressiveness' also appears to be a strong motivation. In our study we have chosen 'professional identity expressiveness' as denominator, instead of 'self-identity expressiveness' (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a) or 'personal identity expressiveness' (Muntinga, et al., 2011), because the emphasis on the 'professional self': the employee. In prior studies this expressiveness has been found as motivator, and we continue to provide more evidence on this motivator in the work-related setting. Unlike an existing similar study (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a), we found that the professional identity is closely intertwined with the 'remuneration' and 'empowerment', as some employees admit to emphasize their own professional standards or values to the extent of receiving some form of future benefit. Both of these motivations have not been found earlier as antecedents in studies on employee brand-related social media use, but only in general and consumer brand-related social media use (Muntinga, et al., 2011; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Nov, 2007). In contrast with a prior study on employee brand-related social media use (Van Zoonen et al., 2014b) which found that employees use their personal social media accounts selflessly in order to support the collective goals of the organization rather than for personal branding, we found that employees did engage on social media for the benefit of the company, but also had more selfish motivations. For example, one employee state that corporate failure means personal failure. Other employees state to build their online profile to show others their own professional standards or values to the extent of receiving some form of future personal benefit, like job opportunities.

Additionally, when looking at our current study in the existing literary research model several key differences appear. Larger studies looking at motivations for work-related social media use, such as Van Zoonen et al. (2014a) use the 'Theory of Planned Behaviour' [TPB] to explain motivations. They state that the traditional TPB is a weak predictor. They explain this by hypothesizing that the social media use is unintentional and spontaneous and therefore inadequately explained by the TPB. They state that the addition of 'identity expressiveness' adds predictive value to the model. Moreover, employees engage in social media when corporate values align with their personal ones (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a), so they express corporate values by extension of their own. However, in our study we find the social media use of employees to be planned and intentional. Employees clearly state that they engage in social media with clear goals in

mind. These goals vary from personal gain to benefit for the company. Also they seem to have a personal strategy, as they avoid certain media such as Facebook, focus on other LinkedIn and dose the amount of information in order not to overextend the possibilities. All this is done with the 'client' or customer in mind. This difference may be explained by the difference in the population, instead of an online questionnaire we used interviews, which allowed us to select the exact population we intended to study. And thus provides valuable insights for this population. It seems therefore that for employees in a large financial service organization, behaviour is indeed planned and intentional. This may then also explain the positive effect of a social media program.

5.3 Recommendations for practitioners

Our study focusses on a very specific target: motivations for brand-related social media use for employees of a large financial service organization. These insights into their motivation can subsequently be translated into strategies on how to encourage employees to actively engage in brand-related activities on social media.

Firstly, in the case of an application for a job, the antecedents 'commitment' and 'professional identity expressiveness' could be decisive when all other factors are equal. This is because individuals that display these character traits can be expected to be more effective brand-ambassadors. Additionally, from our study it appears that when the personal values and the values of an organization match, this results in a higher level of engagement. Also, according to our study, the social media use of employees seems to be planned and intentional. It is affected by their general attitude towards social media and may therefore be influenced by an effective and well thought out social media program. Such a program would focus on the key moderators found in our current study; time spent, perceived effect and benefit. Furthermore, entertainment was a new and interesting motivation. This entertainment would open new possibilities for the 'gamification' of a social media program. Noteworthy is that such a program should not entice 'spam'-behaviour.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

In the current study we have chosen to explore motivations within a single case. However, a multiple case study would be suited to confirm the results of the current study. Therefore future research should aim to include multiple cases, possibly even from different branches, preferably with a larger study population per case. We suggest that, although it is a quite elaborative research method, such a study would also use semi-structured interviews, since this allows for a better understanding of underlying motivation. Alternatively standardizes questionnaires could be used, as this is less-time consuming and better suited for statistical analysis. By including a larger number of interviewees the moderators and mediators for the found connections in our study could then be tested. In addition to the interviews a measure of effect should be included. We would suggest to look at the actual social media output in order to objectivise the actual behaviour. This would also allow for quantification of the social media output. And it could also investigate for example how a person's personality influences his or her social media behaviour.

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Attachments

I.   Interview schedule

Preparation:

· Share information about the research, in general terms
· Share our definition of brand-related social media activities

Q	*Brand-related social media characteristics*	*P*
	General:	
1	On which social media platforms are you actively engaged?	
2	On which social media platforms are you actively engaged for your organization? Why on these platforms?	
3	What kind of activities do you do? Reacting/sharing/creating	
	Per social medium(Q2) and per answer (Q3)	
4a	On which brand-related posts do you react?	All
4b	And how? + example	All
4c	What drives you to react?	All
	Per social medium (Q2) and per answer (Q3)	
5a	When do you share brand-related content?	All
5b	And how? + example	All
5c	What drives you to share content?	All
	Per social medium (Q2) and per answer (Q3)	
6a	When do you create your own brand-related content?	All
6b	And how? + example	All
6c	What drives you to create content?	All

7	What is your opinion about brand-related social media use? For example do you consider it to be pleasant or unpleasant?	P3
8	Do you consider your activities as beneficial, and how?	P8
9	Do you think that people expect from you to engage with brand-related content in your role?	P4
	Brand questions	
10	How important is the brand's success for you as a person?	P1
11	How do you feel that your behaviour on social media affect brand success?	P1
12	Do you think you can affect people's perspective of the brand with your online behaviour?	P7
	Social media program	
13	Are you familiar with the brands' social media program and tools?	P2
14	Has this program changed the way you look at brand-related social media use and made you more conscious of your role? Please explain further.	P2
15	Has it also impacted the way you are active on social media? Explain.	P2