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Consumer social network brand identification and personal branding. How do social network users choose among brand sites?

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Abstract: Brands' social networking sites (fan pages) are increasingly attracting the attention of scientists and managers intrigued by their potential application for brand value creation. The aim of this research is to understand better how users choose among social networking sites as an act of brand identification. The study presents a new model whose structure of identification drivers for social networking brand sites varies for customer brand identification in the real and virtual worlds. The presented model reveals that personal branding is a planned effect of brand identification and it is crucial for brand value creation in social networks.

Subjects: Brand Management; Consumer Behaviour; Internet/Digital Marketing/ e-Marketing; Marketing Communications

Keywords: CBI; CsnBI; social network; personal branding; brand loyalty; social media; Facebook; fan pages; social network site; brand identification

1. Introduction

Building brand value in hyper-competition conditions is a serious contemporary management challenge (Bogner & Barr, 2000). According to scientists, the Information Era is one of the reasons causing this difficulty. The rise of the Internet has significantly changed the market environment (e.g. network economy, Castells, 2011; Wilson & Gilligan, 2005). In the environment flooded with information, practitioners come across obstacles to reach market goals which not long ago they could obtain with the use of traditional tools (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Companies expect marketing departments, perceived as cost generators, to provide an adequate return on costs incurred on investment and build a certain brand value based on market share, income, and profits generated by the

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Social media appear to have emerged as a logical consequence of changes which take place in the society and business because of broadly using Internet network worldwide. They gained popularity by providing users with an ideal venue for self-presentation. Brands follow their customers and are present in social networks. The purpose of this paper is to understand better reasons why people voluntarily identify with brands in the social network (using Facebook as an example). Presented results point out that personal brand creation is a planned effect of the user's identification with a commercial brand in the social network.

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departments. In the face of decreasing return of resources allocated to traditional media, and searching for new solutions, managers engage resources in activities conducted in social media (Kim & Ko, 2012; McDonald & Wilson, 2012; Park & Kim, 2014; Solis, 2012). Social media appears to have emerged as a logical consequence of changes which take place within the information society. According to the new stream of network economy (Castells, 2011; Mazurek, 2014; Tapscott, 1999), social media seems to contribute to creating value in a substantial way. Marketing practice is to a great extent shaped through the application of new technologies (Maklan, Peppard, & Klaus, 2015). This fact may lead to thinking that social media, being one of new communication channels, constitutes an antidote to the marketing communication crisis (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Grönroos, 2007; Halligan & Shah, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Peattie & Belz, 2010; Solis, 2012) reflected in the decreasing return on activities in traditional media (McDonald & Wilson, 2012; McDonald, Smith, & Ward, 2006).

Successful brand building in social media, by engaging customers in communication with brands through online platforms such as social media sites (fan pages), has become an important object of study for both scientists and practitioners (Köhler, Rohm, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2011; Kuo & Feng, 2013). Getting to know determinants of the CBI (Consumer Brand Identification) in a social network can help us understand key factors contributing to the success of brand value creation. One of the objectives of the paper is to describe key factors which determine how network users identify with brands' social networking websites (fan pages). To achieve this objective, the author used Facebook (FB) as her example because according to www.statista.com (Statista, 2017), Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the world. Naturally, a question arises, "Is CBI in the real world relevantly different from the customer's brand identification in the virtual social network (CsnBI)?" At first, let us think what the essence of identification in the social network is. Identification with a brand's social networking site takes place through "liking" a particular fan page, which means that the user has full access to the content of this particular social networking website. It ensures uninterrupted access to the content connected with that particular brand and gives a possibility to interact with the brand and its community. The logical consequence of that act is the user's identification with the brand in front of friends (i.e. other users of this particular social network). At the same time, the interaction, as well as the information about affiliation with a particular brand, are visible for other users, thus they are a "public" act. To sum up, the main difference between CBI (customer brand identification) and CsnBI (Customer *social network* Brand Identification) is the fact that if a customer wants to identify with a brand in the real world, he/she needs to own (buy) this brand's product. The user does not have to own a product to use its brand image in the virtual world. It is absolutely for free. Based on the facts listed above, the author made two assumptions; firstly, that structures of brand identification drivers are different for the real and virtual world; and secondly, that there is a strong relationship between the personal branding factor and CsnBI. The author used two models as a reference for her own study to prove the assumptions, namely: CBI Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen (2012) model and Jahn and Kunz (2012). Thus, the aim of the research is to fill the gap in understanding how users choose among brands' *social networking websites* (fan pages), which is an act of identification with these brands in a social network environment in the context of personal branding creation.

2. CBI

Works of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), and Elbedweihy, Jayawardhena, Elsharnouby, and Elsharnouby (2016) define CBI as "the primary psychological substrate for deep, committed and meaningful relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their customers." According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), CBI is understood as a kind of cognitive state of self-categorization. Wolter, Brach, Cronin, and Bonn (2016) assert that CBI represents a consumer's decision to define his or her "self" by including a particular brand into their self-concept. In this context, self-definition becomes a significant factor which determines the choice of brand images (Levy, 1959). Based on the Turner & Oakes' social identity theory (1986), which was later developed by Hogg and Abrams (1990), Ashforth & Mael noted that a consumer's image should be defined in the context of a particular reference group. Escalas and Bettman (2005) used McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (1990) to conclude that if a consumer's personal identification takes place in a close relation with a

particular reference group, then it is stronger in contrast to a situation when the identification is built independently of the social group. Namely, consumers affiliated with a group are less radical in rejecting brands than individuals who are independent from a social group. Escalas and Bettman (2005) justify this fact by a strong need for independent individuals to stand out. The significance of group reference for buying or rejecting brands grounded in the transfer of meaning was also discussed by Bearden and Etzel (1982). To conclude, the symbolic function of a brand is analyzed in the context of the user expressing a desired self-image. A factor which needs to be taken into account is a proper identification of a chosen imagery (brand) within a society or its part so that the applied symbol can be properly decoded in a particular cultural environment (reference group) and it can create the image intended by the user. Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger (2011) noted that brand imagery is defined by the imagery of a brand category. Adapting brand imagery for purposes of a user's self-expression has been developed in the concept of a user's identification with a brand—CBI (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). It is worth emphasizing that before creating the CBI model (2012) Stokburger-Sauer conducted research on the level of social integration of brand users in relation to brand loyalty (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). The results of the research prove a stronger relationship between the two in real life than in virtual reality. These results contributed to creating the mentioned CBI model (2012) for real life only (and not for virtual reality) because their results pointed to a weak correlation between the sense of belonging in virtual communities and brand loyalty. Thus, in reference to the Stokburger-Sauer et al. model (2012), the research gap is filled by the CsnBI model created for social network communities. Although the CBI construct in virtual reality was examined by Luo, Zhang, Hu, and Wang (2016), Marín and Ruiz de Maya (2013), Jahn and Kunz (2012), and Enginkaya and Yılmaz (2014), their virtual models focused on the effect of fan pages on the customer-brand relationship. They also examined a different set of CBI determinants than Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen who used a more comprehensive set of variables. Moreover, neither of the models included the construct of personal branding. In reference to the presented social identity theory and McCracken's theory of meaning transfer, the author assumed that including this construct can, to a great extent, explain the social network users' motivation to identify with brands. The author referred to the Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, which will be discussed more comprehensively in the further part of the paper.

Although Jahn and Kunz (2012) refer to virtual reality, it assumes the existence of a bond between a fan page user and a brand which is a result of fan page participation. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) assume customer brand-self similarity as one of the determinants. Lack of bonding is typical of "generation Z," that is why the postulate of eliminating bonding for the sake of brand identification is understandable and justified (Boyd, 2014). Because the Jahn and Kunz (2012) studies a self-concept factor as the determinant of engagement for active users of fan pages only, the author postulates that it does not give a complete picture of the process of brand value creation in social networks. The presented CsnBI (Customer social network Brand Identification) model of social network consumer-brand recognition assumes the existence of identification but not a bond and refers to fans identifying with the fan page regardless of the level of involvement in commercial brand communication.

The CBI construct might be considered as sufficient if the virtual reality of a social network was a reflection of a real social network. In order to build one's image with the use of a brand in the real world, an individual has to use it; ergo, to own it, that is to buy branded products or be their beneficiary. Possession and using are key factors in the process of self-identification with the use of brand imagery (Belk, 1988). The relationship a brand craves for is built upon the act of using and purchasing. In a virtual world, possessing a branded product is not necessary for its image to be used successfully. Thus, it is reasonable to envisage that in this context, a symbolic character of a brand is more meaningful than functional for consumer behavior. Similarly, a reference group will probably determine the identification to a greater extent because each activity of a consumer in the network, which is somewhat related to the brand, is a "public" act. It is visible for all users of a given network; hence, always taking place in the context of a particular reference group and never outside it. It is

Table 1. Idea of CsnBI: key definitions	
Construct	**Definition**
CBI—Customer Brand Identification	CBI represent a consumer's decision to define his or her self by including a particular brand with self-concept (Wolter et al., 2016)
CsnBI—Customer social network Brand Identification	CsnBI represent a particular social network user's decision to define his or her self by including a brand present with virtual self-concept in a particular social network (author's definition)

Source: Authors own study based on Wolter et al. (2016).

quite the opposite in the real world, where the act of using a product does not always have a public character. Table 1 contains definitions connected with the idea of CsnBI.

Therefore, the drivers of consumer-brand identification in the network may significantly vary from the drivers in a real life. General knowledge regarding factors affecting consumer identification allows us to optimize the process of value creation in a social networking environment and take advantage of resources in a better way. This knowledge is extremely important for managerial efficiency and effectiveness. Thanks to understanding the phenomenon of consumer social network brand identification in the context of personal branding creation, especially when it is accompanied by a lack of identification with the brand's virtual community, it is possible to optimize the process of commercial brand value creation in a virtual environment.

3. Personal branding

The personal branding construct was invented by Peters in the late nineties of the XX century (Peters, 1997). The crux of personal branding is a planned process of self-marketing (Karaduman, 2013; Khedher, 2014). In the beginning, the self-marketing idea seemed to apply mainly to celebrities (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2007), politicians, business leaders (Schawbel, 2009; Shepherd, 2005), or even non-profit organizations' leaders (Nolan, 2015). Over time, it turned out to have importance to all managers (Evans & Hempstead, 2017; Kang, 2013), scientists, higher education teachers (Gander, 2014), and knowledge workers in general, for example: project team members (Kucharska & Dąbrowski, 2016), librarians (Ahmad, Hashim, & Harun, 2016), students who are about to enter the labor market (Lee & Cavanaugh, 2016; Merdin, 2011), and all average social media users regardless their profession (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Lampel & Bhalla, 2007; Schawbel, 2009; Vitberg, 2009). Dutta (2010) suggests that since all of us are marketing professionals involved with own self-branding, we all need a personal social media strategy today.

With regard to the already mentioned idea of "prosumerism" by Alvin Toffler (1981), one can hypothesize that there is a certain degree of probability that personal brands in the network economy, e.g. in professional networks, collaborative networks or even in the social media, predominantly constitute an opportunity for self-presentation.

Developing a personal brand in the social media is now a rapidly growing trend. The idea of online personal branding was broadly discussed by Lampel and Bhalla (2007), Vitberg (2009), and Karaduman (2013). They argue that social media have led to an era of consumer-to-consumer driven information which creates consumer's personal branding. Labrecque et al. (2011) imply that people today use social media actively in order to create their personal brands. Seidman (2013) claims that self-presentation is the second major motivator for using Facebook. Also, Orehek and Human's (2017) findings suggest that social media platforms can be an effective outlet for self-expression of personality.

A self-expression is a form of affirmation of one's self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kim, Han, & Park, 2001; Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014). Consumer engagement with self-expressive brands: brand love and WOM outcomes always takes place in a social context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989;

Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), meaning that so-called "reference groups" have an influence on both the self-image and the act and ways of an individual's self-expression. Referring to Erikson (1956), who described identity in a less volatile era as "an individual's link with the unique values," we can say that the expression of a personal identity, and particularly personal values, has a strong influence on personal brand recognition.

The awareness of personal values and advantages, next to the formulation of an extended self, is crucial for personal brand creation. According to Belk (2013), personal branders manage an extended self. Sociologists Vallas and Cummins (2015) pointed out that the discourse of personal branding results in a narrative of the "incorporated self" which requires an internalization of market-based logic.

According to Brooks and Anumudu (2016), personal identity was developed and supported in a social context of reciprocal human relationships of recognition and responsibility. She claims that Personal Branding is the deployment of individuals' identity narratives for career and employment purposes.

Table 2 contains definitions of key constructs connected with the idea of personal branding. Figure 1 presents the graphical summary of Personal Branding Framework based on the presented literature review.

Table 2. Idea of personal branding: key definitions		
Term	**Definition**	**Source**
Brand	A name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of them, intended to identify goods or services of one seller or group of sellers to differentiate them from those of competitors	Kotler and Keller (2006)
Branding	An act of creating a brand	Moore and Reid (2008)
Personal brand	A brand called YOU	Peters (1997)
	A particular real person name connected with all notions intended to identify this person and to differentiate from others	Author's own definition
Personal branding	Managing an extended self	Belk (2013)
	Planned process in which people make efforts to market themselves	Khedher (2014)
	Is the deployment of individuals' identity narratives for career and employment purposes	Brooks and Anumudu (2016)
Personal brander	Professional advisor on how to create a personal brand	Talwar and Hancock (2010)

Source: Author's own study based on Brooks and Anumudu (2016), Peters (1997), Kotler and Keller (2006), Moore and Reid (2008), Talwar and Hancock (2010), Belk (2013), Khedher (2014).

Figure 1. Personal branding framework.

Source: Author's own study based on Erikson (1956), Belk (2013), Brooks and Anumudu (2016), Ashforth and Mael (1989), Bearden and Etzel (1982), Escalas and Bettman (2005), Vallas and Cummins (2015), Kim et al. (2001), Wallace et al. (2014).
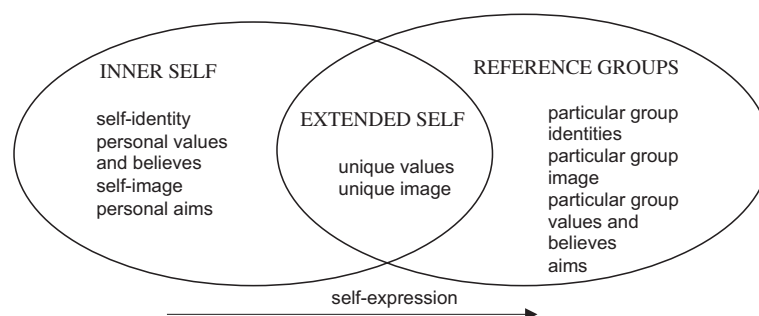
4. Conceptual framework

Labrecque et al. (2011) imply that people use social media actively in order to create their personal brands today. According to the idea of co-branding (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Leuthesser, Kohli, & Suri, 2003), drawing from the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991), and referring to Shepherd's (2005) and Khedher's (2014) definition of personal branding as a planned process in which people make efforts to market themselves, an assumption has been made which says that a personal brand shares a communication channel with the commercial brand by giving it recommendation and creating a positive WOM within its own network of mutually cooperating personal brands. On the other hand, a commercial brand grants a personal brand its image, a fact also pointed out by Muntinga, Smit, and Moorman (2012). The co-branding construct is often used in the context of cooperation between commercial brands or celebrities (Ilicic & Webster, 2013). However, in the context of network economy and based on the essence of personal brand as a planned process of self-marketing, a hypothesis has been developed which discusses a conscious identification with a commercial brand in order to create an own personal brand of a particular social network user. Namely, the more a FB (Facebook) user identifies with a fan page of a particular brand, the more strongly in his/her opinion it affects a positive attitude of other users towards his/her personal brand. A significant determinant creates a positive attitude of other social network users towards the user's personal brand, which is a result of the social network user's identification with a commercial brand. Identification with a commercial brand fan page affects a positive attitude of other users towards a personal brand of the identifying user. Therefore, it may be presumed that Customer social network Brand Identification (CsnBI) creates a personal brand. CsnBI is a construct which reflects the construct of CBI created by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), and next Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) for consumers in a real life.

> H1: CsnBI affects a positive attitude of other users towards a personal brand of a self-identifying user.

Self-expression is a form of affirmation of one's self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kim et al., 2001) and always takes place in a social context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), meaning that so-called "reference groups" have an influence on both self-image as well as the act and ways of individual's self-expression. The need for self-expression defined by Bhat and Reddy (1998) has made it possible to formulate a hypothesis regarding the relationship between self-expression of network users with fan pages of commercial brands. In the opinion of a FB user, the greater are the chances of his/her self-expression created by the content of a fan page, the stronger his/her identification with the fan page is. The result of such a correlation leads to a transfer of meanings between a brand and a user. Self-expression of a user has a subjective character, whereas the transferred content—objective.

> H2: User's self-expression positively builds identification with brand's fan page.

Based on the analogy of consumer-brand identification in the real world and CBI model referring to identification with a brand in the real world (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), it can be presumed that the same factor may also affect consumer-brand identification in a virtual world. This is where a new hypothesis originated which looks at the relationship between characteristics of a brand perceived by a network user as distinguishing and his/her propensity to identify with such a brand. Paraphrasing: the more characteristics of a given brand a FB user views as distinguishing, the stronger his/her identification with the brand's fan page is. This presumption is consistent with the Meaning Transfer Model by McCracken (1990).

> H3: Brand distinctiveness positively affects one's propensity to identify with a fan page.

The next hypothesis is also based on the CBI model, referring to consumer-brand identification in the real world (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). The determinant described by this model is "social interaction" with other users related to the brand. The presumption that the determinant is also

reflected in a virtual world has made it possible to formulate a hypothesis referring to the influence of the need of interaction with other users in a social network. Paraphrasing: if in a FB user's opinion the fan page gives him/her more possibilities to develop social contacts, the stronger this user's identification with the fan page is. Such dependence may be assumed to be probable in social networks which, from the definition, are used for making contact with other people.

H4: Possibility to develop social contacts positively affects one's propensity to identify with a fan page.

Determinants drawn from Stokburger-Sauer et al.'s (2012) offline model and the Jahn and Kunz (2012) are: "fan page utility" and "hedonic functions of a fan page." They are also reflected in presumptions presented by the team of Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), which constitute a framework for theoretical assumptions of the research presented in this chapter. In light of all the arguments presented above, the following has been assumed: the more useful or entertaining in a FB user's opinion the content of a fan page is, the more strongly the user identifies with the fan page.

H5: Utility of a fan page positively affects user's propensity to identify with it.

H6: Hedonic/Entertaining function of a fan page positively affects user's propensity to identify with it.

According to Kim et al. (2001), Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012), and Elbedweihy et al. (2016), the CBI construct is a predictor of loyal brand behavior in the real world; thus, analogically, it can be envisaged that CsnBI construct is a predictor of loyal brand behavior in the virtual social network world, as claimed by Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013) and Greve (2014). It has been assumed that: the stronger user's identification with a fan page of the brand is, the more loyal to the brand that user will stay.

H7: CsnBI positively affects brand loyalty

In order to verify the developed hypotheses, appropriate tests have been conducted.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework.

Source: author's own study based on Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012), Jahn and Kunz (2012), Shepherd (2005), Lampel and Bhalla (2007), East et al. (2013).

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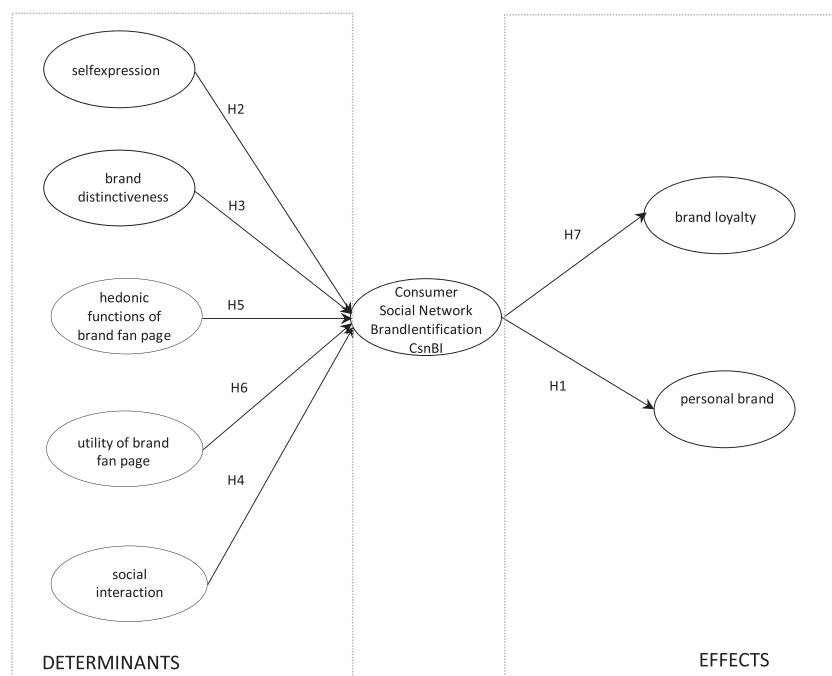
5. Method

The study was conducted based on the data originally collected among Polish users of the social networking service—Facebook (FB), with the use of a questionnaire. The service was chosen for its leading position among the Internet websites in Poland. FB comes third in popularity in Poland after Google and YouTube (GEMIUS, 2015). The questionnaire's design was based on measurement scales and their sources presented in Appendix 1. The respondents reacted to statements based on a seven-point Likert scale, which goes starting from 1 – definitely NOT, through 4 – neither YES nor NOT, until 7 – definitely YES. The questionnaire was preceded by a short introduction which explained the purpose and subject matter of the study. The first qualifying question directly referred to the subject matter of the study and regarded the respondent's affiliation to any fan page on FB. The subsequent part of the structure of the questionnaire led from general to detailed questions which required more precise answers. The proper study was preceded by a pilot study (40 persons). The pilot study made it possible to optimize statements and eliminate constructs present in CBI model (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), whose nature was unclear for the respondents, for example the "brand-self similarity" construct, which was a part of CBI model (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). The respondents also did not see a difference between "memorable brand experiences" and its "distinctiveness," arguing that the identified characteristics were a result of the experience. In effect, for the benefit of the study reliability, such problematic constructs have been eliminated. Data collection took place electronically, mainly through the social networking portal Facebook, using a "snowball method." The data were collected from March to June 2015 among students of Gdańsk University of Technology and University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, their families, and friends.

The sample size is 641 respondents. Five hundred and eighty-nine cases were accepted for further analysis, after rejecting faulty and incomplete questionnaires. The author used a non-probability sampling method, whose structure was distorted in comparison to the population of Facebook users in Poland by an overrepresentation of the 18–24 age group, which accounted for 69% of all respondents. The analysis was conducted with the structural equation modeling method after positive normality sampling assessment. For the theoretical model presented in Figure 2, a measurement and later a structural Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) models have been developed. The evaluation of the model quality was conducted based at first on tests such as Average of Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha. The model was then estimated and assessed. Estimation was conducted according to a maximum likelihood method (ML). The evaluation of the model quality was conducted based on tests such as RAMSEA, CMIN/DF, RMR, GFI, and HOELTER, with the use of SPSS AMOS 23 software. Table 3 presents test results of the model's goodness of fit.

Appendix 2 includes all results of tests applied in the evaluation of CsnBI model together with their reference values and sources. Based on the readings, CsnBI model may be considered as well fit in relation to the data. Model reliability level 2.51 can be viewed as high, with the reference ≤5. Model fit to the data, based on approximation average error RMSEA, at 0.051 also meets the reference values. Measurements of the goodness of fit came close to 1, which confirms the mentioned above quality. Hoelter's coefficient exceeded 200, which also corroborates the above statements. AVE (Average of Variance Extracted) exceeds 0.53 for all constructs, which is acceptable. Hair, Anderson, Babin, and Black (2010) suggest that an AVE of 0.5 or higher indicates adequate convergence. Cronbach's Alpha test was used to confirm consistency of the constructs measurement model. The alpha coefficient is higher than 0.81 for all constructs, which is correct (Francis, 2001; Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991). CR (Composite Reliability) is higher than 0.82 for all loadings, more than the required minimum 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). Appendix 1 presents more details connected with used scales and their reliabilities. The positive evaluation of the model allows us to proceed to the presentation of test results.

CMIN/DF	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI	AGFI/CFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	HOELTER 0.5
Table 3. Test results of the model's goodness of fit												
2.51	0.051	0.149	0.897	0.878	0.754	0.92	0.914	0.904	0.946	0.940	0.946	262

Source: Author's own study developed with SPSS AMOS 23.

Figure 3. CsnBI structural model CFA.

Source: Author's own study developed with SPSS AMOS 23. *Statistically significant results for $p < 0.001$; RAMSEA = 0.051 χ^2/df = 2.51; 0.53 < AVE < 0.77; 0.82 < CR < 0.93; Cornbach Alpha > 0.81.
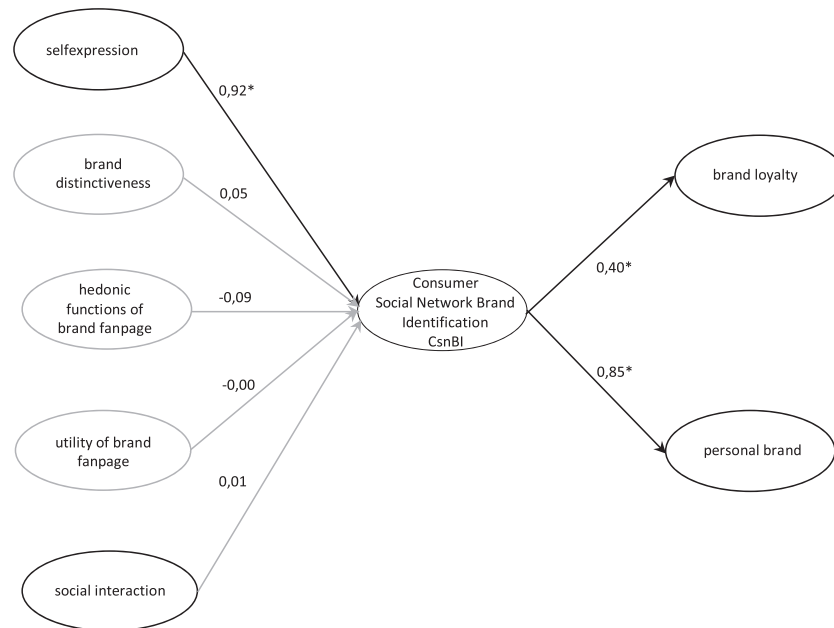
6. Results

The results of the model estimation are shown in Figure 3. In the case of this model, a significant direct effect on brand identification has been noted only for one determinant; that is "self-expression." All other determinants in this model, statistically, do not have any significant influence on the studied relationship. The results of the research show that the structure of determinants is different for the virtual and the real world, referring to Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) CBI model. The relation which deserves our closer attention is "CsnBI" to "personal brand." The path coefficient in the relationship "CsnBI-personal brand" equaled 0.85 ($p < 0.001$), whereas "CsnBI-brand loyalty" equaled 0.4 ($p < 0.001$). Both of them are statistically significant, but it is worth noticing that CsnBI relation to "personal branding" variable is strong. The results imply that personal branding is a crucial, planned effect of the customer social network brand's identification. It may bring interesting practical implications and lead to a reflection and a discussion on how consumers choose among brand websites and what is the essence of fan pages of commercial brands in social networks for consumers in the context of brand value creation. Appendix 3 includes main estimates generated for CsnBI model presented in Figure 3. Table 4 presents a verification of the hypotheses based on their measurements.

Table 4. Hypotheses verification					
Hypothesis	**Content**	**C.R.**	**p**	**B**	**Verification**
H1	CsnBI affects a positive attitude of other users towards the personal brand of the identifying user	17.75	<0.001	0.852	Sustained
H2	User's self-expression positively builds identification with the brand's fan page	15.56	<0.001	0.92	Sustained
H3	Distinctive brand characteristics positively affect propensity to identify with its fan page	1.38	0.163	0.055	Rejected
H4	Possibility to develop social contacts positively affects propensity to identify with the fan page	0.745	0.444	−0.013	Rejected
H5	Utility of a fan page positively affects propensity to identify with it	0.047	0.962	0.001	Rejected
H6	Hedonic/Entertaining functions of a fan page positively affect propensity to identify with it	−2.143	0.032	−0.086	Rejected
H7	CsnBI positively affects brand loyalty	8.63	<0.001	0.406	Sustained

Source: Author's own study, note: RAMSEA = 0.051 χ^2/df = 2.51; 0.53 < AVE < 0.77; 0.82 < CR < 0.93; Cornbach Alpha > 0.81.

7. Discussion and conclusions

According to the findings of this analysis, it can be assumed that consumer brand identification determinants for real and virtual worlds are not the same. All determinants included in this model directly affect CBI; whereas, in the virtual reality of FB, a significant influence on identification has only been noted for one determinant—"user's self-expression."

The leading determinant of the CsnBI model is the "users' self-expression," which determines their identification with a brand in a social network, and whose goal is to build users' personal brand. It means that a commercial brand is very much a tool to create one's personal brand in a social network. Interestingly, the influence of the "distinguishing brand characteristics" determinant on identification has not been marked as statistically significant, which might indicate that in a virtual world it is not significant "what a brand is like" but "what message it sends." The message does not have to be "entertaining" or "useful;" however, it should strongly affect the reputation of the "personal brand." Other determinants, such as: "fan page usefulness" and "entertaining function of the fan page" also do not have a significant direct influence on user's identification with this fan page, and thereby with the brand. Likewise, non-significant influence has been noted for the "social contacts" variable. It leads to a conclusion that brands in social networks do not form communities. Network users do not look for any type of relationship with other users of the same brand. Fan pages of brands gather "audience," but do not create bonds; therefore, they do not build communities of users.

The aim of the research was to understand how consumers choose among brand websites in the social network, as a modern way of value creation in the network economy. In light of presented results, a commercial brand is a tool for creating a personal brand, which makes personal branding a key motivator of CsnBI, and in effect a key determinant in creating commercial brand's value. In other words, considering the fact that a personal brand's reputation is the desired effect of identification with a commercial brand's fan page, a deliberate creation of a personal brand's reputation by users determines values created by the commercial brand in the communication channel. It is worth pointing out that users' self-expression, to a great extent, takes place through the content generated by brands. This fact can result from, e.g. users' low level of creativity or easy access to ready-to-use content. As pointed out in the introduction, with regard to the studies by Stokburger-Sauer (2010), brand fan pages do not build communities of people who feel connected with one another. Similar results were achieved by Jahn and Kunz (2012). Fan pages gather users who are mutually interested in one another, without creating a bond between them. An interesting research question arises, namely, "Does a collective of users without any connection to the brand or other users have any value to the brand?" Such a group constitutes an audience rather than a community. A certain limitation to the results may result from the fact that only one social network, namely Facebook, has been included in the studies. According to Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian (2012), there is a serious difference between various forms of social media. Nonetheless, because of FB's leading position, not only among social media users but the Internet users in general, it may be concluded that making assumptions regarding social media based on FB is fully justified. From a practical point of view, when planning activities based on conclusions from a conducted study, one needs to take into account the specific nature of each form of the social media. For a scientist running the CsnBI study based on other leading social portals, such as Twitter, Google+, or Badoo, and then comparing the results would be quite compelling. The study was conducted in Poland, so its participants were very much culturally homogeneous. Comparing CsnBI study results conducted among culturally different populations would constitute a fascinating research question. Likewise, conducting studies on CsnBI among FB users in different populations and taking into account their level of education would round up the subject in an interesting way. Such studies would also make it possible to more boldly predict the direction in which personal brand construct will develop. The factor of communication quality in social networks, right next to the leading determinant of "personal brand," must also affect the value of a commercial brand. This dependence would be possible to observe in a "long-term study." An interesting example of a highly qualitative study, as opposed to the quantitative approach to brand value creation in the environment of social networks, is an implementation of a novel product inspired by communication with fans of a brand. Perhaps research on communication in social networks ought to be notably

qualitative, in the context of co-creating brand value based on the intellectual capital of users. Personal branding, as a relatively new phenomenon, requires being studied more thoroughly to understand it better and determine how it operates in a social, cultural, and economic context.

Therefore, the answer to the question: "How do social network users choose among brand sites?" is that they look for the content which presents value to them. Valuable content helps the users create their personal brands. As Carpenter (2012) suggests, there is a positive association between narcissism and Facebook usage.

8. Managerial implications

In light of the results presented in this paper, the audience focuses on their personal brand and treats commercial brands instrumentally. This stands in opposition to the literature which sees social media as an antidote to the marketing communication crisis, the issue which was explained in the introduction to this paper. Therefore, a commercial brand is only a tool for users to create their own brands. Thus, from a practical point of view, in order to build the brand equity of a commercial value on Facebook, it is necessary to issue content which focuses on the users and their self-presentation, and not on the brand. In order to be effective, a commercial brand ought not to be the subject of the content presented on its own fan page, and ought not to be the center of its attention. According to the conducted studies, it is a necessary condition for the content distribution, delivered by the brand through the user's communication channel, to occur in the first place. An interesting question is, "To what extent does non-persuasive content build the brand capital?" The nature of the content may sustain brand awareness; however, managerial experience teaches us that brand awareness itself, in today's conditions of oversupply, is not sufficient to compete successfully (Barwise, 1993).

A fact worth noting and one that ought not to be overlooked is that the studies demonstrated in this paper have been conducted without making a distinction between brands in regard to their sales channel. Talking about industries and sales channels from a practical point of view, it could prove very informative to have knowledge regarding CsnBI in industries where both marketing communication and transactions take place in a virtual world. Study results in these industries may significantly differ from those industries where all transactions happen offline (time and place distance between the acts of communication and purchasing). A prediction of the development of the personal brand concept in the context of the conducted studies is also very interesting. From a scientific point of view, knowledge regarding personal brand awareness in relation to culture, population, but also age, education, sex, or profession is very important. From practitioners' perspective, the growth of brand awareness may launch a new business direction dealing with consulting in the area of personal brand management, but also education or advertising. The studies presented in this paper show that the personal branding construct in the social media has become a new and meaningful element of the virtual space and needs to be taken into account by managers when developing a social network content strategy.

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Appendix 1

Scales of measurement with their sources

Symbol	Scale	Source	CFA constructs validity
CB1	I feel strong sense of belonging to fan page of brand X	CsnBI adapted from Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)	AVE = 0.53, CR = 0.82, Cronbach alpha = 0.81
CB2	I identify strongly with brand X on fan page		
CB3	Brand X on fan page embodies what I believe in		
CB4	Brand X on fan page is a part of me		
CB5	Brand X on fan page has a great deal of personal meaning for me		
SE1	Brand X on fan page helps me to express myself	Self-expressive value adapted from Kim et al. (2001)	AVE = 0.61, CR = 0.86, Cronbach alpha = 0.86
SE2	Brand X on fan page reflects my personality		
SE3	Brand X on fan page enhances my self		
SC2	Brand X on fan page helps me improve the way I am perceived		
SC3	Brand X on fan page helps me present to others who I am		
SC4	Brand X on fan page helps me present to others who I want to be		
D1	Brand X on fan page has a distinctive identity	Brand distinctiveness adapted from Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)	AVE = 0.68, CR = 0.89, Cronbach alpha = 0.89
D2	Brand X on fan page is unique		
D3	Brand X on fan page stands out from its competitors		
SO1	I can meet people like me on Brand X fan page	Social interaction value adapted from Jahn and Kunz (2012)	AVE = 0.71, CR = 0.93, Cronbach alpha = 0.88
SO2	I can meet new people like me on this fan page		
SO3	I can find out more about people like me on Brand X fan page		
SO4	I can interact with people like me on Brand X fan page		
F1	Content of fan page Brand X is helpful for me	Functional value adapted from Jahn and Kunz (2012)	AVE = 0.77, CR = 0.93, Cronbach alpha = 0.93
F2	Content of fan page brand X is useful for me		
F3	Content of fan page brand X is functional for me		
F4	Content of fan page brand X is practical for me		
H1	Content of fan page brand X is funny	Hedonic value adapted from Jahn and Kunz (2012)	AVE = 0.68, CR = 0.88, Cronbach alpha = 0.85
H2	Content of fan page brand X is exciting		
H3	Content of fan page brand X is pleasant		
H4	Content of fan page brand X is entertaining		
CO1	Most people that are important to me think that my relationship with brand X in a social network gives me a good image	Perceived other users attitude towards personal brand based on Ajzen (1991, 2002)	AVE = 0.68, CR = 0.89, Cronbach alpha = 0.89
CO2	I expect that my relationship with Brand X in a social network creates good associations with me		
CO3	The people, whose opinions I value think, that my relationship with Brand X in a social network creates a good attitude towards me		
CO4	Most people that are important to me think that my relationship with Brand X in a social network gives me a good reputation		
LB1	When buying products from the category Brand X belongs to, I usually choose Brand X	Brand Loyalty East, Wright, and Vanhuele (2013)	AVE = 0.60, CR = 0.86, Cronbach alpha = 0.86
LB2	I regularly buy brand X products		
LB3	I am willing to recommend Brand X products		

Source: Author's own study based on Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012), Kim et al. (2001), Jahn and Kunz (2012), Ajzen (1991, 2002), East et al. (2013).

Appendix 2

Tests applied for Model CsnBI quality evaluation

Test	Description	Reference value	Value obtained	Model evaluation
Chi²/df	CMIN/DF model reliability (Wheaton, 1977)	≤5	2.65	✓
RMSEA	Root Mean Error of Approximation, (Steiger & Lind, 1980)	RMSEA ≤ 0.08	0.051	✓
		RMSEA LO ≤ 0.05		
		RMSEA HI [0.1;0.08]		
RMR	Root Mean Square Residual, (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984)	[0;1] the closer to 0 the better fit the model is	0.149	✓
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index, (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.897	✓
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.878	✓
PGFI	Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (Mulaik, 1998)	[0;1] the closer to 0 the better fit the model is	0.754	✓
NFI	Normed Fit Index (Bentler & Bonett, 1980)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.914	✓
RFI	Relative Fit Index (Bollen, 1986)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.904	✓
IFI	Incremental Fit Index (Bollen, 1989)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.946	✓
TLI NNFI	Tucker-Lewis index (Bollen, 1989), Non Normed Fit Index (Bentler & Bonett, 1980)	[0;1 the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.940	✓
CFI	Comparative Fit Index (McDonald & Marsh, 1990)	[0;1] the closer to 1 the better fit the model is	0.946	✓
HOELTER	Hoelter's coefficient defines the sample size for which the hypothesis of model correctness is accessible (Hoelter, 1983)	H .05 ≥ 200	262	✓

Source: Author's own study developed with SPSS AMOS 23.

Appendix 3

CsnBI structural model CFA: estimates developed with SPSS AMOS 23

Unstandardized regression weights: (Group number 1—Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*p*	Label
CsnBI ← self-expression	1.038	0.067	15.568	***	par_21
CsnBI ← distinctiveness	0.070	0.051	1.385	0.166	par_22
CsnBI ← hedonic	−0.104	0.048	−2.143	0.032	par_23
CsnBI ← utility	0.001	0.039	0.021	0.984	par_24
CsnBI ← socialinteract	0.013	0.041	0.325	0.745	par_25
Personalbrand ← CsnBI	0.775	0.044	17.752	***	par_36
Brandloyalty ← CsnBI	0.396	0.046	8.633	***	par_40

Standardized regression weights

	Estimate
CsnBI ← self-expression	0.924
CsnBI ← distinctiveness	0.055
CsnBI ← hedonic	−0.086
CsnBI ← utility	0.001
CsnBI ← socialinteract	0.013
Personalbrand ← CsnBI	0.852
Brandloyalty ← CsnBI	0.406

Covariances: (Group number 1—Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p	Label
Selfexpression ↔ distinctiveness	0.805	0.087	9.275	***	par_26
Selfexpression ↔ hedonic	0.784	0.092	8.504	***	par_27
Selfexpression ↔ utility	0.601	0.083	7.280	***	par_28
Selfexpression ↔ socialinteract	1.053	0.107	9.825	***	par_29
Distinctiveness ↔ hedonic	0.810	0.082	9.833	***	par_30
distinctiveness ↔ utility	0.458	0.070	6.552	***	par_31
Distinctiveness ↔ socialinteract	0.767	0.087	8.800	***	par_32
Hedonic ↔ utility	0.347	0.073	4.751	***	par_33
Hedonic ↔ ocialinteract	0.767	0.093	8.235	***	par_34
Utility ↔ socialinteract	0.709	0.087	8.130	***	par_35

Correlations: (Group number 1—Default model)

	Estimate
Selfexpression ↔ distinctiveness	0.514
Selfexpression ↔ hedonic	0.476
Selfexpression ↔ utility	0.366
Selfexpression ↔ socialinteract	0.550
Distinctiveness ↔ hedonic	0.556
Distinctiveness ↔ utility	0.316
Distinctiveness ↔ socialinteract	0.453
Hedonic ↔ utility	0.228
Hedonic ↔ socialinteract	0.431
Utility ↔ socialinteract	0.400

Variances: (Group number 1—Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p	Label
Selfexpression	1.774	0.166	10.699	***	par_41
Distinctiveness	1.386	0.117	11.839	***	par_42
Hedonic	1.532	0.141	10.836	***	par_43
Utility	1.519	0.117	13.041	***	par_44
Socialinteract	2.067	0.155	13.346	***	par_45
zz34	0.337	0.062	5.409	***	par_46
zz35	0.508	0.063	8.084	***	par_47
z48	1.780	0.162	10.971	***	par_48
z5	1.220	0.084	14.456	***	par_49
z6	1.018	0.073	13.982	***	par_50
z7	1.298	0.090	14.492	***	par_51
z8	1.038	0.077	13.522	***	par_52
z9	0.714	0.051	13.901	***	par_53
z10	0.658	0.050	13.059	***	par_54
z11	0.547	0.047	11.692	***	par_55
z12	0.648	0.050	12.967	***	par_56
z13	0.861	0.075	11.562	***	par_57
z14	0.696	0.056	12.494	***	par_58
z15	0.855	0.071	12.109	***	par_59
z16	1.474	0.102	14.385	***	par_60
z17	0.498	0.038	13.234	***	par_61
z19	0.436	0.035	12.288	***	par_62
z20	0.647	0.045	14.275	***	par_63
z21	1.049	0.075	14.062	***	par_64
e22	0.942	0.068	13.760	***	par_65
e23	0.708	0.061	11.693	***	par_66
e24	1.007	0.073	13.872	***	par_67
z25	0.500	0.057	8.725	***	par_68
z26	0.624	0.056	11.086	***	par_69
z28	0.950	0.067	14.072	***	par_70
z29	1.363	0.097	14.088	***	par_71
z30	1.231	0.088	13.995	***	par_72
z31	1.618	0.104	15.618	***	par_73
z33	1.516	0.096	15.842	***	par_74
z18	0.315	0.029	10.957	***	par_75
z43	1.012	0.091	11.138	***	par_76
z44	1.372	0.105	13.012	***	par_77
z45	1.377	0.105	13.078	***	par_78
z46	1.476	0.108	13.686	***	par_79

Squared multiple correlations: (Group number 1—Default model)

	Estimate
CsnBI	0.850
Brandloyalty	0.164
Personalbrand	0.725

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