



Impact of Consumer Empowerment on Satisfaction in an Online Brand Community: Mediating role of the Online Experience Toward the Brand

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ABSTRACT

In a connected world, the consumer has become an actor, informed and has access to all types of information. He can express his opinions, his experiences and seeks to acquire more control and power, which gives him meaning in his consumption (Moussafr and Qmichchou, 2021). According to Pruche (2014), consumer empowerment is associated more particularly with the development of e-commerce, which not only allows access to information but also facilitates the comparison of offers and makes the consumer more autonomous in its decision-making process. Through this academic work, we sought to know the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction while specifying the role of the online experience towards the brand. The results of a survey carried out among 300 Tunisian Internet users subscribed to the online brand community “Mabrouk” reveal that the relationship between empowerment-satisfaction and online empowerment-experience towards the brand is significant, while the relationship between online experience and satisfaction is not significant.

Keywords: Consumer Empowerment, Online Brand Experience, Satisfaction, Online Brand Community

JEL Classifications: M31, Z000

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Akhavannasab et al. (2018), consumers have become more active, participatory, influential, social and supportive in their consumption behaviors than ever before. According to Labrecque et al. (2013), the growth of consumer power is increasingly strong on these platforms thanks to the development of the Internet and the appearance of social media. Due to these new technologies, consumers can easily access online platforms and can participate in the exchange of information and the creation of online content (Akhavannasab et al., 2018). Among these online communities, we can cite brand communities where individuals can share their interests in the brand and can interact to obtain information, share their experiences and foster relationships with the brand and with other members of the community (Hsieh et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the literature agrees to highlight the important role of the rise of the Internet in rectifying the power imbalance between consumers and the company, by giving them access to information, a wide choice of products and decision support tools (Wathieu et al., 2002; Harrison et al., 2006). According to Wathieu et al. (2002), the concept of empowerment is associated with freedom of choice and therefore constitutes an emotional state for the consumer. Pruche et al. (2015) specify that through the mechanism of psychological appropriation, empowerment helps to promote the feeling of satisfaction. On the other hand, research by Anderson and Berdahl (2002), Rucker et al. (2011) and Boyd et al. (2014) consider that consumers with more empowerment are those who have more desire to experience the brand. Indeed, the role of consumers is not only to receive information but also to share and co-create attractive and individual experiences with the brand online (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In addition,

work by Ha and Perks (2005), Janda and Ybarra (2005), Thomas and Veloustou (2013) and Lee and Jeong (2014) showed that consumers who have experienced the brand online are those who will be more satisfied.

In this context, this article aims to enrich the literature by dealing with the effect of consumer empowerment on satisfaction in an online brand community while highlighting the mediating role of the online experience towards the brand. A literature review is first made before presenting the research hypotheses and the results of the empirical study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of brand communities makes the consumer more and more informed by possessing the capacity to collaborate with the company and to co-create value, hence we are talking about producer consumers or actor consumers. According to Makloul and Ouida (2019), these virtual communities constitute real online platforms where individuals share their traditions, rituals and centers of interest around a product or service and whose brand occupies an important place in the sense that it relates to their own personalities and states of mind.

These new skills give consumers more autonomy and control in their purchasing and consumption decisions (Wathieu et al., 2002; Harrison et al., 2006). According to Hunter and Garnefed (2008), this maintenance of power will give them freedom of choice and a positive affective state, which will allow them to derive greater satisfaction and promote the possibility for consumers to have experiences with the brand (Hoffman and Novak, 2009; Boyd et al., 2014).

2.1. Social Networks and Online Brand Communities: Clarification of Concepts

Online social networks are virtual places where people with similar interests come together to communicate, exchange contact details, build relationships, share and discuss ideas (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Michel (2009) identifies these platforms as a set of relationships that may exist between different actors in different environments (political, social, cultural, economic, etc.). These platforms are also considered virtual consumer communities in which consumers come together to interact, share stories in written or visual form or in the form of images and videos (Cheung and Lee, 2010).

According to Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016), a brand community is made up of social micro-relationships created by a theme, product, service or brand. Brand communities help strengthen the relationship between the company and consumers (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997) and ensure brand loyalty by developing experiential value (Holland and Stacey, 2001). Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) consider an online community as a social space on the Internet or as a communication interface such as discussions, instant messaging and discussion forums (Murphy and Laferrière, 2003). These communities offer brands the possibility of monitoring the information exchanged between members, which will increase the company's ability to understand

its consumers (Williams and Cothrel, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). Zaglia (2013) emphasizes the different criticisms between the two concepts. In terms of user orientation, virtual brand communities are more precise. On the relational level, the strength of the bonds between the members of a virtual community and their personal commitment are more pronounced.

2.2. Consumer Power and Empowerment

2.2.1. Consumer power

According to Schwartz et al. (2012), power is an essential human concern. It influences behaviors and is a fundamental component of social systems and hierarchies (Rucker et al., 2011). According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), the concept of power comes from the discipline of psychology. It refers to the opportunity an individual has to achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others (Weber, 1968).

In sociology, power is the ability of some people to produce desired and intended effects on others (Wrong, 1979). In marketing, consumer power essentially refers to consumers' control over variables that are conventionally predetermined by marketers, such as redefining brand meaning based on their preferences (Wathieu et al., 2002) and all the actions that allow consumers to reappropriate the brand (Muñiz and Schau, 2005).

On their part, Akhavannasab et al. (2018) define power as a personality trait potentially challenging its dynamic and relational nature. It is considered as a general perception of customers regarding their resistance and influence on salespeople (Brill, 1992). For Grégoire et al. (2010), customer power is a one-dimensional construct, it is a perceived ability to influence a company when it communicates directly with it. This definition refers only to the social power of the client. For their part, Huang et al. (2014) focus only on the personal aspect of power, which is the consumer's perception of trust and control over a decision.

2.2.2. Consumer empowerment

From the beginning of the 1990s, the term "empowerment" designated the effect exerted by new technologies on citizens and consumers (Doctor, 1991). For their part, Rust and Oliver (1994) consider consumer empowerment as the way to give them power through resources such as more information or better understanding. According to Anderson and Galinsky (2006), power enables consumers to ensure the processing of information, foster confidence in decision-making (Brinol et al., 2007) and influence actual consumer behavior (Winterich and Zhang, 2014).

According to Hunter and Garnefeld (2008), consumer empowerment is a positive subjective experience characterized by increased control. It allows consumers to control and understand their environment and to be able to play an active role in it (Bonnemaizon et al., 2008). Botti and Iyengar (2004) suggest that perceived choice is one of the important types of control. The ability of consumers to control their own choices has been reported to be an empowering experience (Wathieu et al., 2002). According to Midha (2012), consumer empowerment is a construction psychological related to the individual's perception of the extent to which they can control the distribution and use of their personally

identifiable information. The way to provide the consumer with more choice (Wathieu et al., 2002) and to offer the customer the opportunity to evaluate an offer and suggest improvements (Fayn, 2017) are among the principles of consumer empowerment.

Conforming to Moussafir and Qmichchou (2021), empowerment concerns the strategic actions of a company oriented towards the delegation of power to the customer and as a “result,” it aims to take into account the increasing control of the increasing customer involvement in marketing strategies. During this process, the company supports its customers in controlling their consumption experiences, thus integrating them into the creation of value (Fayn et al., 2019). The power of customers on social media is manifested through the creation of brand-related content by writing articles, reviews, posting blogs or participating in brand conversations, providing comments or videos with the mark (Anber, 2020).

2.3. Online Brand Experience

Several researchers have dealt with the online experience of the brand, including Nysveen and Pedersen (2004), Ha and Perks (2005) and Brakus et al. (2009). It contains the set of internal subjective responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli and which are part of the design, identity, packaging of a brand, communication and its environment (Brakus et al., 2009). Nambisan and Watt (2011) defined an online community experience as the overall experience a customer derives from their interactions in an online community. It results from the interactions between a customer and a brand or a company (Trevinal and Stenger, 2014) and is a powerful factor in shaping the perceptions and expectations of customers vis-à-vis an e-merchant (Pappas et al., 2014).

As part of our research, we are interested in dealing with two important dimensions of the online experience towards the brand, which are social interactions and emotional reactions. According to Bénévent and Evrard (2002), experiential consumption is not limited to the affective dimension but also includes the social component.

2.3.1. Emotional reactions

According to Koelemeijer et al. (1995), emotional reactions can be divided into two types: reactive and goal-directed emotions. According to Fornerino et al. (2008), emotions are considered more or less intense depending on the type of experience. The more intense the shared experience, the more emotions there are (Claudet et al., 2008). On the other hand, Desmet (2003) explains that emotions are apprehended as a complete experience made up of behavioral responses, physiological reactions and subjective feelings.

2.3.2. Social interactions

Social interaction is appreciated as two-way communication between two people (Labrecque, 2014). It is explained by the ability to address an individual, to collect and memorize his response (Deighton, 1996). For his part, Ladwein (2004) specifies that the interaction between the consumer and the environment is what will give meaning to the experience. Blattberg and Deighton (1991) are essentially considered to be among the researchers who

have treated interactive marketing by perceiving it as the ability to develop interactive relationships through the “addressability” of individual consumers allowing the establishment of databases and to promote dialogue.

2.4. Satisfaction

Researchers like Kotler (2000), Hoyer and Macinnis (2001) and Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) identify satisfaction as a customer’s overall attitude or behavior towards a service provider or an emotional reaction towards the difference between what the customers expect and what they receive in terms of fulfilling some want, need, or goal. It constitutes a positive psychological state expressing, explicitly or not one’s contentment (Lehu, 2004). According to Vanhamme (2002) and Kotler and Armstrong (2010), satisfaction refers to a psychological state or the customer’s feeling of pleasure based on a process of comparison between the perceived performance of the purchasing and consumption experience as well as its expectations over time. For Tsoukatos and Rand (2007), customer satisfaction is a key factor in the success of any long-term business relationship. Based on the work of Anber (2020), satisfaction can be explained by customer personnel and emotional interactions, since these interactions induce significant outcomes such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bitner et al., 2000).

In marketing, consumer satisfaction is a key concept (Pontevia, 2003). Indeed, it is a determinant of loyalty (Anderson et al., 1994) and profits for companies (Rust et al., 1995). It is influenced by expectations, perceived service and perceived quality (Hu et al., 2009). It refers to the customer’s overall evaluation of the product or service after purchasing it (Choi et al., 2013) and results from the customer’s experiences during the purchase process (Kotler, 1997). As part of our research, we are interested in dealing with the consumer’s online satisfaction relationship with the brand. Szymanski and Richard (2000) consider that to ensure online satisfaction, customers must feel comfortable throughout their navigation on websites. It is then a matter of maintaining a positive attitude and response during their experiences (Muylle et al., 2004). In a virtual community, member satisfaction is the positive gap between individual expectations and the experience actually obtained with the community or services (Wu et al., 2010). It is expressed by Cheung and Lee (2009) as an affective state resulting from the overall evaluation of a user’s experiences with a virtual community.

3. ASSUMPTIONS AND RESEARCH MODEL

The conceptual model of our research studies the impact of consumer empowerment in an online brand community on satisfaction while highlighting the role of the online experience towards the brand. All of these relationships are expressed by the following assumptions:

3.1. Consumer Empowerment Positively Affects Satisfaction

Several researchers have dealt with the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction, including Pruche et al. (2015), Castillo (2018), Berraies and Hamouda (2018) and Anber

(2020). Pruche et al. (2015) explained this relationship by the fact that empowerment promotes internal attribution which will lead to increased satisfaction. This is explained by the mechanism of psychological appropriation. Indeed, Nuttin (1987) considers that this state generates a positive evaluation of the considered object, whether tangible or intangible. For their part, Ramani and Kumar (2008) point out that consumer empowerment leads to collaboration which is explained by the set of interactions expressed by the links between customers and companies. This led us to propose the following hypothesis.

H₁: Consumer empowerment has a positive effect on satisfaction

3.2. Consumer Empowerment has a Positive Effect on the Online Experience of the Brand

By referring to the marketing literature, several researchers have been interested in dealing with the relationship between consumer empowerment and online brand experience. Boyd et al. (2014) explain that consumers who have more power are those who want more cognitive, affective or behavioral experiences. Others like Anderson and Berdahl (2002) and Rucker et al. (2011) point out that empowerment makes it possible to release the resources of individuals from the constraints that can limit their actions and motivate them towards experiments. Keltner et al. (2003) and Fast et al. (2009) explained this relationship by the fact that the feeling of control among consumers associated with an increase in power favors the way of managing their environment rather than focusing on themselves and their own interests. Based on this research, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₂: Consumer empowerment has a positive effect on the online experience toward the brand.

3.3. The Online Experience with the Brand has a Positive effect on Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a result of the online experience with the brand. According to Petr (2002) sharing, interaction, exchange with friends, family and the creation of a group identity are considered to be sources of satisfaction. On the other hand, Thomas and Veloustou (2013), Lee and Jeong (2014), Pratomo and Magetsari (2018), Quan et al. (2020) verified the positive relationship between online brand experience and satisfaction. Similarly, Brakus et al. (2009) and Khan and Rahman (2015) focused on the impact of brand experience on satisfaction in retail or internet marketing fields of application (Ha and Perks, 2005).

E-satisfaction is based specifically on the online experience, representing consumers' perceptual fluency in exploiting online information that subsequently informs their cognitive efforts as well as their selection decisions in the virtual environment (Tran et al., 2018). Satisfaction is an evaluation based on past similar experiences of service consumption (Fang et al., 2014). This assume that customer satisfaction depends on past experience and a result-oriented perception emphasizing the end of consumption (Ren et al., 2016). According to Kotler and Keller (2006), customer satisfaction is a consequence of customer experiences during the buying process and plays a crucial role in future customer behavior (Pereira et al., 2016). Based on this research, the relationship between online experience and satisfaction is presented as follows:

H₃: Online experience toward the brand has a positive effect on

consumer satisfaction.

The Figure 1 shown below illustrates the conceptual model.

4. METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The objective of this empirical study is to analyze the impact of consumer empowerment on satisfaction while highlighting the role of the online experience towards the brand. This part is also devoted to the presentation of the methodology that made it possible to carry out our study as well as to the presentation and discussion of the results obtained.

4.1. Methodology

In this part, we will give an overview on sample and data collection, measurement of variables and data analysis tools.

4.1.1. The sample and data collection

After drafting the questionnaire, we considered it important to submit it to a pre-test. As Igalens and Roussel (1998) specify, the questionnaire can only be used after ensuring the facial validity of its content. We gave friends the opportunity to visit the facebook page "Mabrouk" and mention "I like" for the social network and then answer the online questionnaire sent to them by private message. The final version of the questionnaire is translated into French. It is distributed to 310 members of the "Mabrouk" online brand community, from which 300 responses were collected. Note that the sampling method used is the snowball method. The average age of respondents is between 20 and 29-years-old, which represents 53.7% of respondents. Our sample is composed mainly of women (60.3%), the rest are men (39.7%). Respondents are mainly students (74.7%).

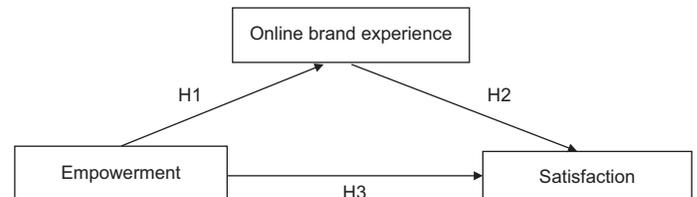
4.1.2. Measurement of variables

To measure empowerment, we referred to the Spreitzer scale (1995) which is built on three dimensions (competence, autonomy, impact). Each dimension is made up of three items. To measure online brand experience, we adopted the scale of Fornerino et al. (2008) who treat this variable based on two dimensions, which are emotional reactions and social interactions. Satisfaction on an online social network is measured by referring to the scale of Ha and Stoel (2012) composed of three items.

4.1.3. Data analysis tools

First, we started with an exploratory analysis (ACP) to reduce the information contained in a set of observable variables into a reduced set of components (Akrouf, 2010). We then carried out a confirmatory analysis to test the convergent and discriminant

Figure 1: Conceptual model and hypotheses



validity of the measurement scales. We ended with the method of structural equations to test the research hypotheses. SPSS 21 software is used for exploratory analysis and AMOS 18 software for confirmatory analysis.

4.2. Search Results

4.2.1. Treatment of measurement scales

The Table 1 illustrates the results of the exploratory and confirmatory analysis of the measurement scales.

4.2.1.1. Consumer empowerment

The KMO (0.726) and the Bartlett test ($\chi^2 = 1063.530$, dof=36, P = 0.000) lead to an average predisposition of the data to be factored. Therefore, the variable factorization conditions are verified. The null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation in the data matrix is rejected. A PCA makes it possible to extract three factors which explain 68.596% of the total variance. In accordance with the theoretical approach, the results obtained in the Tunisian context with Internet users correspond well to the three dimensions described and measured by Spreitzer (1995).

The confirmatory analysis of the empowerment scale shows that the multinormality test has a Mardia coefficient $< |3|$ (1.588) so it follows the normal law. The student test has a value which is equal to 0.977 so this normality is significant since i is < 1.96 . The confirmatory factor analysis carried out on this scale shows an unsatisfactory quality of adjustment. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of this scale are acceptable.

4.2.1.2. Satisfaction

The KMO (0.693) and Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 430.484$, dof = 3, P = 0.000) indicate a satisfactory predisposition of the data to be factored. A PCA extracts a single factor that explains 77.055% of the total variance. The confirmatory factor analysis does not give indices of adjustment because it is a just identified model which is composed of three items. The convergent validity for this scale is good since it exceeds 0.5 (0.670). This scale indicates a very good internal consistency of 0.857.

4.2.1.3. Online experience with the brand

The KMO (0.762) and the Bartlett sphericity test ($\chi^2 = 1673.776$, ddl = 45, P = 0.000) indicate a satisfactory predisposition of the data to be factored. The null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation in the data matrix is rejected. The online experience measurement scale has very good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.887$). A first PCA makes it possible to extract two factors which explain 61.677% of the total variance. A second PCA was conducted and

resulted in an improvement in the explained variance of 71.567% of the total variance. The confirmatory factor analysis carried out on this scale shows an unsatisfactory quality of adjustment. A second confirmatory factor analysis led us to add a relationship between the strong emotion and communication items which are strongly correlated.

After adding this relationship, another confirmatory factor analysis was performed that shows the improvement in model quality fit indices. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of this scale show that all the relationships are significant since the Student test is well above 1.96 with a probability P = 0.000. The two dimensions of the scale have very good reliability, as does the convergent validity which exceeds 0.5. The discriminant validity for the online brand experience scale is verified since the squared correlation coefficient between constructs is lower than the Rhô of the convergent validity for the reaction and interaction dimensions. The second-order conditions are also verified since the correlation between the two dimensions is > 0.5 (0.572). The TCI exceeds 0.9, it is equal to 1.

4.2.2. Overall structural model

Finally, we performed an analysis of the overall measurement model to ensure its good quality of adjustment (Table 2). As shown in the Table 3, the fit indices are satisfactory. The RMR and RMSEA values are within the standards.

The structural model presents a good fit given that the indices generated exceed the thresholds generally adopted in the research works.

4.3. Validation of Hypotheses

The empirical results concerning the validation of the different research hypotheses of the conceptual model are presented in the Table 4.

Thus, we can interpret the results as follows:

There is a positive and significant relationship between empowerment and online brand experience. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of our structural model give a structural link between the two variables which is significant and positive with a regression coefficient which is equal to 0.729 and c.r. = 9.454 and P = 0.000. These results therefore support the hypothesis of a positive and highly significant relationship between empowerment and online brand experience. Thus, hypothesis 1 is validated. We want to verify the existence of a positive and

Table 1: The results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis

Scale	Purification		Factors	Fiabilité	Validité	
	PCA	FCA			convergente	Discriminante
Empowerment	KMO=0.726 Bartlett=0.000 Variance explained=68.596%	χ^2 /ddl=2.236 GFI=0.955 AGFI=0.896 RMSEA=0.088 (9 items)	Skill Autonomy Impact	0.794 P=0.759 0.743 P=0.623 0.670 P=0.798	ρ vc=0.613 ρ vc=0.461 ρ vc=0.664	The validity discriminating is verified
Satisfaction	KMO=0.693 Bartlett=0.000 Variance explained=77.055%	-		0.850 P=0.857	ρ vc=0.670	-
Online brand experience	KMO=0.762 Bartlett=0.000 Variance explained=71.567	χ^2 /ddl=1.177 GFI=0.990 AGFI=0.971 RMSEA=0.024 (5 items)	Reaction Interaction	0.782 P=0.783 0.822 P=0.831	ρ vc=0.644 ρ vc=0.559	The validity discriminating is verified

Table 2: Global measurement model fit indices

X ²	Absolute indices			Incremental indices			Parsimonious indices		
	GFI	AGFI	RMR	RMSEA	TLI	CFI	X ² /ddl	BIC	CAIC
1729.933ddl=250 P=0.000	0.729	0.620	0.08	0.06	0.729	0.762	2.175	2326.015Ms 2000.020	243015Ms 2300,010

significant correlation between online brand experience and satisfaction. The structural link between these two constructs is 0.380 and the results relating to this hypothesis give a value of *c.r.* = 2.581 and *P* = 0.059, therefore above the recommended threshold indicating the existence of a positive correlation. However, this correlation remains insignificant. This hypothesis is therefore rejected. We formulated the hypothesis of a significant and positive link between empowerment and satisfaction. The structural link between these two variables is 0.203, the latter being non-significant with (*c.r.* = 1.575 < 1.96 and *P* = 0.115 > 0.05). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

We tested the relationship between empowerment (independent variable) and satisfaction (dependent variable). The influence of empowerment on satisfaction is around 0.467, the relationship between these two variables is positive and very significant (*c.r.* = 6.466; *P* = 0.000) (Table 5).

Subsequently, we analyzed the relationship between empowerment (independent variable) and the online experience with the brand (mediator variable). The results show that empowerment contributes 0.569 to online brand experience with *c.r.* = 10.572 > 1.96 and *P* = 0.000. Therefore, there is a positive and very significant effect between these variables.

The third step is to examine the effect of the online experience towards the brand (mediator variable) on satisfaction (dependent variable). Analysis of the results shows that online experience with the brand contributes 0.113 to satisfaction with *c.r.* = 1.556 > 1.96 and *P* = 0.120, which shows that the effect between these two variables is not significant.

Finally, we examined the influence of empowerment on satisfaction in the presence of the mediating variable which is the online experience with the brand. The analysis of the results indicates that the empowerment on satisfaction is of the order of 0.417 and that the effect between these two variables remains positive and very significant (*c.r.* = 4.841; *P* = 0.000).

We can therefore conclude that the online experience with the brand does not mediate the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction because according to Baron and Kenny (1986), for this effect to exist, both relationships *a* and *b* must be significant. Therefore, the second proposition is rejected.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Impact of Consumer Empowerment on Satisfaction

The examination of several studies has enabled us to observe that empowerment makes it possible to strengthen the effect of satisfaction. Indeed, researchers such as Thomas and Tymon (1994),

Table 3: The structural model adjustments indices

Index	Chi-square	GFI	AGFI	RMR	NFI	CFI
Value	96.365	0.910	0.803	0.110	0.912	0.920

Chebat and Kolias (2000) have specified that in the organizational context employee empowerment has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Thus, empirical studies show that a strong correlation exists between empowerment and satisfaction (Spreitzer et al., 1997; Snipes et al., 2005). As part of our research, these results are also verified. Several researchers in the literature, including Ramani and Kumar (2008), Hunter and Garnefeld (2008), O’Cass and Ngo (2009), Berraies and Hamouda (2018) and Anber (2020) have explained that consumer empowerment contributes to their satisfaction. For Pruche et al. (2015), this is explained by the fact that the feeling of satisfaction which results from empowerment is due thanks to the mechanism of psychological appropriation which favors an internal attribution “the decision belongs to me” consequently, the feeling of satisfaction increases.

Contrary to the results of previous studies, we found that consumer empowerment has no significant effect on satisfaction. In the Tunisian context, this insignificant effect is explained by the subjectivity of the answers collected from the Tunisian Internet users interviewed who are members of the online brand community “Mabrouk”. It can also be explained by the fact that the competence, autonomy and impact of Tunisian Internet users belonging to this virtual community do not necessarily express their satisfaction. In other words, the personal efficiency of these Internet users in the accomplishment of certain tasks such as the co-creation of services with this company, the capacity to influence other members of the community by way of giving their opinions with regard to the purchase of certain products or giving reviews of the content of the online community. In addition, this is explained by the fact that the freedom of choice and the feeling of control that the members of this community express do not necessarily lead to ensuring their satisfaction with the brand and that this feeling is not connected to the maintenance of power by the online brand community.

5.2. Impact of Consumer Empowerment on Online Brand Experience

In the research hypotheses formulated, we expected that consumer empowerment would have a positive and significant impact on the online experience with the brand. As such, the research conducted by Anderson and Berdahl (2002), Hoffman and Novak (2009), Rucker et al. (2011) and Boyd et al. (2014) reveal for the most part a significant and positive relationship between these two variables. For the case of our research work, we arrived at a result consistent with those of the aforementioned works. Our quantitative study only revealed a significant and positive relationship between consumer empowerment and online brand experience. This explains why Tunisian Internet users who participate in the online brand community “Mabrouk” and who have experience with this

Table 4: Direct effects test

	Liens de causalité	Structural link standardized	CR	P	Significance
H1	Online empowerment experience	0.729	9.454	***	Significance
H2	Satisfaction Online experience	0.380	2.581	0.059	Non significative
H3	Satisfaction empowerment	0.203	1.575	0.115	Non significative

Table 5: Result of the link between consumer empowerment and online brand experience

Etapes	Liens	Estimate	CR	P	Signification
Etape 2 (X----- >M) a	Experience en ligne <--- empowerment	0.569	10.572	***	Significant
Etape 3 (M----- >Y) b	Satisfaction<--- experience en ligne	0.113	1.556	0.120	Not significant
Etape 4 (X----- > Y) c'	Satisfaction<--- empowerment	0.417	4.841	***	Not significant

brand are really those who maintain power in this community.

In other words, when the members of the virtual community “Mabrouk” collaborate with the company by playing the role of actors in the community by the way of expressing their personal skills by participating in the co-creation of values and services in favor of the company or by offering reviews and recommendations on the content of the facebook page of the community. For example: When distributing sufficient information about the products, the promotional offers that are available and also with regard to the purchase and delivery procedures. This is also explained when they express their interest in monitoring the content of the virtual community from time to time, seeking a recent useful dissemination of information. Therefore, it will contribute to creating the online experience with the brand by how to increase the volume of interactions between community members by sharing their past experiences with the brand, giving their criticism in the form of comments about the service provided by the company. It is also a question of expressing their emotions by indicating their feelings with regard to the articles and the offers proposed by the company for example by the way of mentioning “I like” or to put “smiles” for the articles posted on the community page.

5.3. Impact of Online Brand Experience on Satisfaction

Based on previous research, the relationship between online brand experience and satisfaction has been verified by several researchers including Ha and Perks (2005), Janda and Ybarra (2005), Thomas and Veloustou (2013) and Lee and Jeong (2014), Pratomo and Magetsari (2018), Quan et al., (2020) verified the positive relationship between online brand experience and satisfaction. These researchers confirmed the existence of a significant and positive relationship between these two variables. Contrary to what has been mentioned in the literature, we found that the link between these two variables is not significant. As part of our research work, this leads us to express that the satisfaction of Internet users who are members of the “Mabrouk” online community does not depend on the experience they have just co-created with the brand. So, if Internet users interact, discuss and share their opinions about the brand whether with the company or between themselves and tell their own stories with it, expressing their feelings when receiving the first offer or when they share the brand’s novelties by the way of learning about the new collections offered by this brand, it does not actually imply that they are satisfied.

5.4. Online Brand Experience does not Mediate the Relationship between Consumer Empowerment and Satisfaction

This research highlights the impact of the online experience on the brand as a variable likely to mediate the impact of empowerment on satisfaction. The generated results show that there is no mediation effect of the online experience towards the brand between empowerment and satisfaction. Indeed, consumers who maintain more power in the online community are those who will be more satisfied. On the other hand, empowerment makes it possible to promote the online experience of consumers with the brand by allowing them to interact with other members of the community, to tell their previous experiences, to share their opinions about the brand. However, the satisfaction of Internet users in the brand community does not really result from the interaction that takes place between the members or from the emotional reactions they express towards the brand.

6. CONCLUSION

The model of our research proposes to study the mediating role of the online experience towards the brand in the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction. The results of the empirical study showed that the links between empowerment and online brand experience and empowerment and satisfaction are confirmed while the relationship between online brand experience and satisfaction is not significant. Based on the empirical results obtained, we deduced that online brand experience does not mediate the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction. The contributions of this work can be articulated around three categories: theory, practice and methodology.

6.1. Theoretical Cotributions

The results obtained provide theoretical enrichment to the literature on online consumer empowerment. This work also makes it possible to suggest a certain number of recommendations. Our research work contributes in different ways to the development of knowledge on the subject of online consumer empowerment in a brand community. The first theoretical contribution consists in the proposal of an integrating framework of the influence of consumer empowerment on brand satisfaction while highlighting the mediating role of the consumer’s online experience. The second theoretical contribution consists in introducing relations that are little treated in the literature. Indeed, there are gaps in dealing with the relationship between empowerment and online

brand experience. With the exception of a few works carried out by researchers, including (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003; Fast et al., 2009; Hoffman and Novak, 2009; Rucker et al., 2011 and Boyd et al.2014). Our contribution is to enrich the literature by addressing this relationship in online brand communities. On the other hand, we studied the mediating role of the online experience towards the brand between consumer empowerment and satisfaction. To our knowledge, works that have focused on the treatment of this relationship are almost non-existent.

6.2. Managerial Contributions

At the end of the results of our research, we can put forward practical recommendations for companies that invest in online brand communities. Indeed, the study of consumer empowerment in virtual brand communities is an important field of investigation for companies in order to achieve their objectives. The results of our research show that the company must make efforts to ensure the satisfaction of their customers by meeting their needs, offering promotional offers, providing better quality products and services. When the company motivates the members of its virtual community to create an experience with the brand by describing their opinion, sharing information about the offers and items that are available in the community as well as expressing their emotions. This will give them a sense of satisfaction. In addition, the empowerment promoted by the Internet raises important questions for managers, insofar as it suggests a form of emancipation of consumers from the influence and control of brands in their decision-making. On the other hand, the company must motivate the members of its community to collaborate, to participate in the co-creation of value and the sharing of ideas. This will motivate them to live and create their experiences with the brand and allow the company to know their opinions, needs and expectations.

For Ardura et al. (2008), it is also recommended to adopt a cooperative approach that promotes consumer empowerment through the practice of marketing programs that should provide tools allowing the consumer to play a more active role in their relationship with the brand and the company. On the other hand, the development of an online community of participative consumers who are committed to the brand constitutes a powerful marketing tool which will help to build strong relationships between consumers and which in turn increases satisfaction, trust and brand loyalty. On the other hand, the company must motivate the members of its community to collaborate, to participate in the co-creation of value and the sharing of ideas. This will motivate them to live and create their experiences with the brand and allow the company to know their opinions, needs and expectations.

In order to ensure the satisfaction of the members who participate in its virtual community, the company must provide a better assistance service by ensuring a rapid response to their questions, update the content of information by putting recent publications and new information about new offers that will be available in the online community. It must ensure delivery of items that comply with what has been described on the social network page of its community. This will help build members' ability to be more active

and exercise more control. Marketers consider it essential to know the degree of empowerment and personalization that consumers want on the web and to provide them with appropriate offer value.

On the other hand, the development of an online community of participative consumers who are committed to the brand constitutes a powerful marketing tool which will contribute to more solid relations between consumers and which in turn increases trust and loyalty to the brand. Mark. It is advisable for merchants to develop on the one hand the feeling of power and on the other hand personalized messages to improve click-through rates and online purchases (Liu and Mattila, 2017).

6.3. Methodological Contributions

Our first methodological contribution lies in the adoption of a quantitative approach. To our knowledge, the number of quantitative researches carried out in the Tunisian context is very limited. Studies on consumer empowerment such as those conducted by Cova and Pace (2006), Pruche (2014) and Katz and Heere (2015) are essentially qualitative. To this end, our first methodological contribution lies in the adoption of a quantitative approach. The quantitative analysis provided us with a more comprehensive insight into the theoretical field of online empowerment and its effect on brand satisfaction as well as the mediating role of the online experience.

6.4. Search Limits

As with any research performed, this work is not without limitations. In this regard, it is important to take a critical look at our research work. The limits resulting from the conceptual and methodological choices that we made in the context of our study can be highlighted. We have limited our research to dealing with the impact of consumer empowerment on satisfaction, while it is also possible to know this impact on other variables such as trust, loyalty, purchase intention. Another limit concerned that the theoretical foundations of our work focused solely on business operations in an online community.

6.5. Future Avenues of Research

This work presents a step in the process of understanding consumer empowerment in online brand communities. However, following the discussion of our results and taking into account the limitations mentioned, we suggest a number of possible future perspectives. As future avenues of research for this present work, it would be interesting to adopt a longitudinal approach to assess the impact of consumer empowerment via the Internet in the medium and long term, in particular on purchase intention. Thus, to improve the external validity of our results, especially those that are not significant, it would be relevant to test our theoretical model on a larger sample of Internet users. In addition, the study of empowerment should be extended to other brands and other service sectors (e.g. real estate, financial or insurance brokerage, tourism). In addition, it would be interesting to carry out a survey in the real point of sale of the brand and to compare the results obtained from the survey administered online. On the other hand, some variables such as trust, gender, age, familiarity with the brand, consumer involvement could have been introduced into the conceptual model.

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