



Exploring the reasons why consumers follow a
sports brand on social media and the impact this
has on brand commitment

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Preface

This thesis was written in order to finish my Master's degree Marketing for Economics and Business at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor Drs. Angela Lijmbach. She supported, helped me, and gave me advice throughout the whole process. Hopefully this thesis will meet the expectations of Drs. Angela Lijmbach and the other supervisor.

Abstract

Social media websites play an important role in the life of consumers; companies create brand pages in order to spread information, entertaining movies, photos and stories. Consumers can join these brand pages to gain information, have conversations, buy products, belong to a group or just for entertainment. Consumers and companies can exchange ideas about products or company related issues on these pages.

Social network sites and sharing sites are examples of social media platforms, both with different functional blocks. Due to the fact that many companies have created a brand page, consumers have to select which pages to follow according to their own needs.

Although there are various studies about the impact of social media, this study gives a new perception of the reason for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media. Furthermore this research examines the impact of following the online communities on brand commitment. Brand commitment can result in positive behavior and attitude towards a brand.

With this study it cannot be statistically proven that one of the four needs: functional, social, psychological, and hedonic have a positive effect on the reason to follow sports brand on social media. Despite this fact, functional needs have a positive effect on following a sports brand if a consumer only follows a sports brand on social network sites or sharing sites. The effect of following a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites due to hedonic needs is positive, but not significant.

Brand commitment increases when consumers follow the sports brand on social media, social network sites, or sharing sites. Since functional needs are important for consumers on social network sites and sharing sites, companies can focus on spreading information via these platforms. Based on the results of this study, with all the respondents, the positive effect of following a sports brand with a higher market share on social media, social network sites or sharing sites is larger if you compare it, with a sports brand with a lower market share. The relation between the different variables can be defined as a correlational relationship.

Key words: social media, social network sites, sharing sites, consumer needs, brand commitment, brand community, market share

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1. Introduction

Marketing has existed for many years, and has been done through offline and online channels. The advantages of an online environment, compared to an offline environment, are the multiple opportunities to interact and personalize the marketing content (Wind and Rangaswamy, 2001). The World Wide Web is an online channel, which can be accessed almost everywhere, by everybody, and at any moment. Companies and organizations have started their own website to supply information and to sell to online customers. Social media are an important channel to reach consumers and can be accessed through the World Wide Web.

Social media consists of a wide variety of platforms, for example; social network sites, creativity works sharing sites, user-sponsored blogs, company sponsored websites/blogs, invitation-only social networks, business networking sites, collaborative websites, virtual worlds etc. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Consumers can go to a website for fun, entertainment, to gather information, receive up-to-date promotions, or buy products (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004; Patterson, 2011). The way of collecting recommendations, reviews and opinions from acquaintances and the collective social community via the Internet is ever increasing (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). Companies are able to reach consumers in different ways, with the use of social media. Companies or brands can maintain a community on a social media platform, called brand community. Brand communities can reach vast amounts of people, “over 40 million people worldwide are estimated to participate in some form of virtual community” (Silicia and Palazón, 2008).

Every company has its own strategy regarding online marketing and social media. Many companies and brands are presented online. Although almost every company has a website, not every company is active on social media. Creating a community on social media that consumers can follow can be very interesting for a company. Some sectors have more reason to participate in social media than others. Consumers follow a brand page for a reason. Following a brand page might result in a change of brand commitment towards a brand. In this research I will examine the reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media and the impact of following a sports brand on social media on brand commitment.

1.1 Research question

A brand community can have many followers on social media sites. Every user has his/her own reasons to follow a company or brand on social media, which can be for example: get information, purchase a product, or just for fun and entertainment.

Companies can create a community around their brand, products and services. Besides limiting themselves to spreading information video's, photo's or stories, a company can involve customers with the firm (Kim et al., 2008). Consumers follow a brand to satisfy a specific need. What are the reasons for consumers to use social media and follow a certain brand? And what is the impact of following a sports brand on social media on brand commitment? These questions lead to the following research question:

What are the reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media and what is the impact of following a sports brand on brand?

To answer this question, hypotheses will be formulated based on existing theories of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and Kietzmann et al. (2011). Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) state that a consumer has four needs to participate in a community:

- Functional;
- Social;
- Psychological;
- Hedonic.

Kietzmann et al. (2011) formulate seven different functional blocks of social media websites:

- Identity;
- Conversations;
- Sharing;
- Presence;
- Relationships;
- Reputation;
- Groups.

1.2 Research relevance

The phenomenon of social media is not entirely new; blogs and other weblogs have been around since the nineties, but the expansion of the outreach and increase in usage of the current social media are reasonably new (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Researchers have not published many articles or studies in the field of social media. This research offers a new insight into the reason for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media.

Sports brands are presented on social media. This research will create a perspective between two different sports brands: a brand with a higher market share and another brand with a lower market share. Four needs of following a sports brand on social media will be used. These needs are based on a study of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004); about the needs of consumers' to participate in a Travel community. Also, different functions of social media will be discussed; these functional blocks are based on a research of Kietzmann et al. (2011). Furthermore, the impact of social media on brand commitment will be tested.

1.3 Research goal

According to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) a consumer has four needs to follow a brand on social media: functional, social, psychological and hedonic needs. Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that every social media site has functional blocks. These theories will be explained in the second chapter. The goal of this research is to examine the reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media. Also the aim is to test the impact of social media on brand commitment. Combining the four needs and functional blocks different hypotheses about the reason to follow a sports brand on social media platforms can be formulated and tested with the use of a survey.

The sports brands that shall be used in the questionnaire are Asics and Nike. These brands differ in company size as well as the amount of followers on social media. The difference in size is relevant in order to compare the brands. Due to the fact that the brands are active in the same industry it will be possible and insightful to combine some of the survey results.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis will be divided into five parts. As can be derived from the foregoing, the thesis started with a small introduction on the topic.

The second chapter provides the theoretical framework. Academic papers and literature about social media shall be discussed in this chapter. Social media and theory about online communities will be explained. Four needs for consumers to follow a brand on social media shall be discussed. Also the seven functional blocks and the link with two social media platforms will be elaborated on. The hypotheses and research model formulated in this section are based on existing theory and literature.

Chapter three consists of a description of the research methodology and research tools. Furthermore, chapter four gives the results of the analyses, elaborates on the findings and the interpretation of the outcomes.

The last chapter, concerns the conclusion, implementations and limitations of this research.

2. Theoretical framework

The first chapter dealt with background of social media as well as the research question, relevance and goal are clarified. In the beginning of this chapter social media and online communities are explained. The second paragraph deals with the needs of consumers to follow a brand online. Based on the functional blocks the characteristics of social media social network sites and sharing sites shall be discussed. In paragraph 2.6 there will be an elaboration on the impact of online communities on brand commitment. The last paragraph will take Asics and Nike into account. Asics and Nike are the two brands that will be examined in this study. Both brands are surveyed in the data collection. Paragraph 2.7 explains the reason why Asics and Nike are used in the research and questionnaire.

2.1 Social media

In the 90's everybody was able to share information about their private life through a homepage or another website. In the late 90's, this way of sharing information became very popular, due to the fact that it was easy to create and maintain these platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Every homepage or weblog needs the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web is meant as a platform to facilitate information exchange between users. Social media use the World Wide Web as a source to facilitate information exchange between users. In 2004 the name Web 2.0 was first used. It describes how users can utilize the World Wide Web as a platform where individuals can post and create their own content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. User Generated Content is the sum of all ways in which individuals make use of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Kietzmann et al. (2011) have a slightly different definition of social media: “social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content”.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) emphasize the importance of social media as follows: “it has become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness,

information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation”.

With these three definitions and descriptions the main points of social media can be given: exchange, share, discuss, communicate, purchase, modify and create content. The uniqueness of social media is that it allows individuals to digitally meet strangers that have the same interests, create a personal information profile, send e-mails and messages to each other, and share information with different contents (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.1.1 Brand communities

As mentioned before, consumers and brands are able to create a group on social media sites. These groups are called: brand page, fan page, communities or groups. When a brand community is mentioned in this study, it stands for an online community. In an online community individuals communicate each other electronically in a platform provided by the company (Silicia and Palazón, 2008). The terms brand community, online community, virtual community, and fan or brand page will be interchangeably used in this research.

According to Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001) a virtual community can be referred to as an online community and is about: “combining content and communication, a virtual community that allows people to engage in the exchange of information, and learn from each other and about each other. In the end communities are not solely about aggregating information or resources, but about bringing people together to meet some of their social and commercial needs”. Online communities can create a stronger brand loyalty, gain insights into the nature and needs of their customer base (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996).

Another definition of a virtual community is given by Rheingold (1994): “social aggregation that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feelings, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. A virtual community is a group of people that may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks”. An online community can create brand building and relationship building (Wang et al., 2002). “The brand building process can bring brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand

associations” (Wang et al., 2002). The relationship can be build due to the fact that the community blurs the line between customers, allies, and partners (Wang et al., 2002).

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) give a third definition of a brand community: “a brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand. Brand community’s exhibit three traditional markers for community: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility”. Cova and Pace (2006) add to the definition of Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) the following: “any group of people that possess a common interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe (subculture) rife with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy”.

Jang et al. (2008) define an online community as follows: “a group of individuals engaging in predominantly online interaction in virtual spaces created through the integration of communication with content developed by community members”.

The advantages of online communities compared to offline communities are that an online community is not restricted by geographic, temporal or physical boundaries. Furthermore, online communities are not limited to business transactions. It only provides a platform for information exchange and interaction between the members and companies (Kim et al, 2008). A third advantage is: “the commitment among members of the community that develops through the information exchanged, and the influence exhibited by community members on the attitudes and behavior of each other” (Williams and Cothrel, 2000).

Summarized, the main characteristics of social media and online community are: influencing consumers’ and purchase behavior, exchanging information between people and companies, building personal relationships in cyberspace, it is not restricted by geographic, temporal or physical boundaries, it creates brand loyalty and awareness, and it brings people with similar interest together.

2.2 Four needs of consumers

Every person, and every consumer, has different needs and interests. Due to the different characteristics of people and the nature of the communities it is possible to differentiate various needs for following a brand. Examples of reasons to follow a brand on social media are: “I have become a fan of brands like Nike, Ryanair, Mariah Carey, Italy and Coke. This allows me to receive up-to-date promotions, products or contests and, to be honest, I am one of the consumers that likes to catch up with such promotions”, or “I am actually a big Oasis fan, having seen them in concert twice and going to my third concert this June, so I actually click the link and read the news story” (Patterson, 2011). Both quotes consist of different reasons to follow a certain brand.

According to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) members and followers of a community have different driving factors to participate, follow and like an online Travel community. These needs will be applied to sports brand communities and pages. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) give three fundamental needs and one additional need. The fundamental needs are: functional, social, and psychological. Hedonic need is the additional need in the theoretical framework of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004). Every need has other measuring attributes:

- Functional need: information, efficiency and convenience;
- Social need: communication, relationship, involvement and trust;
- Psychological need: affiliation, belonging and identification;
- Hedonic need: entertainment, enjoyment, amusement and fun.

In the upcoming paragraph there will be an elaboration on the needs as mentioned before and hypotheses will be presented. At the end of every need the measuring attributes are given, these attributes will be used in the questionnaire.

2.2.1 Functional needs

When a consumer goes online to fulfill specific activities it is considered as a functional need. These activities are not only gathering information, but also include transactions where consumers buy and search for decision making purposes and firms sell products or services (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996). An advantage of the Internet is the ability to search useful

information on products and services without having concerns about time and geographical limits. Nowadays, more users of social media are willing to spread information, because they expect to receive information. The exchange of information is useful, and the information spread by consumers is mostly considered as correct. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) consider three measuring attributes for the functional needs:

- Information;
- Efficiency;
- Convenience.

H1: Functional needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social media.

2.2.2 Social needs

To define social needs Wang and Fesenmaier use a definition based on a book of Preece (2000): “the social needs are defined by the purpose of online communities based on the tasks members are involved in, such as providing help and support, socializing informally through synchronous and asynchronous communication, discussing and exchanging ideas, forming relationships and getting involved with other members”. A reason that social needs are based on trust is, because members share their personal information, get involved with each other, deal with personal issues, and exchange ideas to help and support other people. This need is used in a community of interest and has a high degree of interpersonal communication (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996). When the online member becomes more sophisticated and familiar with the page, they will start communicating with other online members and start connecting with users of a specific product or service. The measuring attributes for the survey of social needs are:

- Communication;
- Relationship;
- Involvement;
- Trust.

H2: Social needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social media.

2.2.3 Psychological needs

Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) base psychological needs on the book *Community of Commerce* of Bressler and Grantham (2000). According to these authors people join a group, offline or online, to meet basic psychological needs. “These basic needs include: a sense of belonging to the community, identity expression through the community, and a sense of affiliation with other members in the community” (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). People want to identify themselves with other people and groups that have shared interests. Online pages, communities and groups are a vital source for belonging to the community. Measuring attributes of psychological needs are:

- Affiliation;
- Belonging;
- Identification.

H3: Psychological needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social media.

2.2.4 Hedonic needs

The hedonic need is an addition to the three fundamental needs (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). People want to enjoy themselves and are entertained by other users and companies that post movies, pictures or stories online. If a company focuses only on the consumers who search information, and ignore the recreational customers, they are at risk of losing a group of consumers. Everybody wants to be entertained during their information search. The added value of being humored during a search for information can lead to increased sales as the experience of consumption becomes more satisfactory (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). According to Hoffman and Novak (1996) hedonic consumption on the Internet is a form of emotive stimulation: positive emotions that are closely affiliated with feeling good, enjoyment, excitement, happiness, and enthusiasm. Measuring attributes of hedonic needs are:

- Enjoyment;
- Entertainment;
- Amusement;
- Fun.

H4: Hedonic needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social media.

Table 1 gives a schematic overview of all needs and the measuring attributes of the needs used in the questionnaire.

Different needs	Measuring attributes
Functional	Information Efficiency Convenience
Social	Communication Relationship Involvement Trust
Psychological	Affiliation Belonging Identification
Hedonic	Entertainment Enjoyment Amusement Fun

Table 1 Measuring attributes of the four needs of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004)

2.3 Seven functional blocks of social media

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011) social media has seven functional blocks. Every social media site has, at least, one of the seven functional blocks. The functional blocks comprise: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. The functional blocks of Kietzmann et al. (2011) are explained in this paragraph and completely based on the study of Kietzmann et al. (2011).

2.3.1 Identity

The first block, identity, is concerned with what information users reveal in a social media setting. This can be age, gender, name, profession and photos. In the identity block the need of users to share their interests and identity is important. Every single user has developed their own

identity strategy (real identity versus virtual identity) and focuses on self-promotion or self-branding.

2.3.2 Conversations

The second block deals with conversations of users and to what extent they communicate with other users of the social media site. Reasons for communication can be: to meet new like-minded people, exchange information, and discuss ideas or news topics. Every channel has its own way of communication: messages can differ in length, in the form of a dialogue, or there can be discussions and questions about certain topics. It can be very useful for companies to research the frequency and content of a conversation in order to gain information about their brand and product (McCarthy et al, 2010). Companies can influence the conversation by giving input to discussions, but must be aware of the fact that dominating the dialogues too much, can work out negatively (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

2.3.3 Sharing

When users exchange, distribute and receive content of other users in a social media setting it is called sharing. The term 'social' can be seen as exchanging information between people. Two fundamental implications are crucial for the sharing block for all firms with ambition to participate in social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The first implication is the need to evaluate what the users have in common, especially on the social aspect, and to know what new objects can be shared with the consumer. The second implication deals with items that can or should be shared. Because of copyright issues and possible infringement of intellectual property rights, not all items can be shared freely.

2.3.4 Presence

“The block presence represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible” (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This includes the notion of users where other users are and if they are available. Companies should pay attention to the availability and user location as they can use this information for their marketing campaigns. Companies should investigate if users have a desire for selective presence. When a user has a higher level of presence; they are more likely to influence the conversations (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.3.5 Relationships

The relationships block is about the relationship between users. If users are friends on a social media site and they share information or converse, they can be seen as related to each other. The different types of relationships also have different types of influence. Users with a large and dense network, and with a central position within the network, have more influence in their network. For companies relationships with consumers are very important. So companies should therefore investigate how they can maintain and build relationships with (influencing) consumers.

2.3.6 Reputation

“Reputation is the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting” (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Reputation can be measured in different ways. The website Social Mention searches how many times a brand or individual is mentioned or checked on social media, this is a way to indicate the reputation. Negative and positive reactions, how often users talk about a brand, and how many people you reach can be traced through these mentions. Another way of measuring reputation is counting the likes or views of a post. More likes and views might indicate a good reputation. A combination of all these numbers ends up as the ‘reputation’ of a brand.

2.3.7 Groups

The extent to which users can form communities and sub communities represents the groups block. Dunbar (1992) theorized that people have a limited number of friends, the limit is about 150 persons, but on social media people tend to exceed this number greatly. There are two types of online groups: one group is where individuals place buddies, followers or fans in different created groups. The other type of group is where groups are the same as in the offline world and these groups can be; open to anyone, closed, or secret. Members of a certain group have more or less the same interests and ideas. Groups and communities are important for companies to study. If a company knows the interest of the community they might be able to increase the engagement of consumers.

2.4 Social media platforms

Multiple social media platforms have been mentioned in the introduction. For this research four conditions are important:

- Interaction between companies and members;
- Interaction between members and members;
- Ability to follow a personal/company page;
- Members and companies should be able to create and edit content.

Only two social media platforms mentioned by Mangold and Faulds (2009) meet these conditions: social network sites and creativity works sharing sites. These two social media platforms will be explained in the upcoming paragraph. The functional blocks shall be allocated to the two social media platforms.

2.4.1 Social network sites

There are multiple definitions for social network sites. “Social network sites can be defined as web-based services that allows individuals to: construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define: “social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, invite friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending-emails and instant messages between each other”. Facebook, Google+, Hyves, LinkedIn, and Netlog are examples of social network sites (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Steiner, 2012).

Social network sites are not only accessible and useful for consumers; companies are using the sites as well for different purposes: it supports the creation of brand communities or for market research and brand positioning (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2002).

The main functional blocks of social network sites are:

- Identity;
- Conversations;
- Presence;
- Relationships;
- Groups.

2.4.2 Creativity works sharing sites

The other social media platform that will be used in this research are creativity works sharing sites, or content communities. Creativity works sharing sites (hereafter sharing sites) can be defined as a web-based service where people are able to post and react, upload movies, pictures or other material in order to share the content with anyone who has access to Internet and is able to download or stream it from a website (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Examples of sharing sites are: Flickr, Pinterest, Vimeo, Twitter and YouTube (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The most important functional blocks for sharing sites are:

- Sharing;
- Conversations;
- Reputation.

2.5 Combining needs and functionalities

The theory of the four needs of consumers on social media of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and the seven functional blocks of Kietzmann et al. (2011) have been discussed. The functional blocks are linked to the two social media platforms:

- Social network sites: identity, conversations, presence, relationships and groups;
- Sharing sites: sharing, conversations and reputation.

The four needs, defined in theory of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004), have different measuring attributes as can be seen in table 1. In the upcoming part the theories will be combined. The functional blocks of Kietzmann et al. (2011) are linked with the needs of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004), in order to connect the social media platforms to the needs. Table 2 represents a combination of the theory of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004), Kietzmann et al. (2011) and the two social media platforms. Every combination will be discussed separately. Based on the combination of these theories hypotheses 5 to 8 are formulated.

Wang and Fesenmaier (2004)	Kietzmann et al. (2011)
Functional needs	
- Social network sites	Conversations
- Sharing sites	Sharing
	Reputation
	Relationships
	Groups
Social needs	
- Social network sites	Identity
	Conversations
	Presence
	Relationships
Psychological needs	
- Social network sites	Identity
	Relationships
	Reputation
	Groups
Hedonic needs	
- Sharing sites	Sharing
	Reputation

Table 2 Wang & Fesenmaier (2004) with Kietzmann et al. (2011) and social media platforms

2.5.1 Functional needs and functional blocks

Functional needs are met when: “community members go online to fulfil specific activities” (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). By starting or becoming involved in a conversation, customers can gain information about a product, service or brand. This enables a consumer to increase their efficiency in finding relevant information and a consumer might be more inclined to purchase that specific brand item. Sharing is important in order to gain information about consumers. Sharing is mostly done in groups with people who have the same interests. Relationships within these groups are important. Users will answer more frequently to a question when they have a relationship with the person that asks the question. Reputation of a member or community is important because the receiver has to value the gathered information. Without a good reputation the receiver might value the information less trustworthy compared to information of a sender with a good reputation. The functions of conversations, sharing, reputation, relationships and groups are important for social network sites and sharing sites, which results in the following hypotheses:

H5a: There is a positive relationship between the functional needs and following a sports brand on social network sites

b: There is a positive relationship between the functional needs and following a sports brand on sharing sites

2.5.2 Social needs and functional blocks

Interpersonal communication is important to social needs. Members go online to provide help and support, socialize, discuss, build relationships, create trust, and get involved in conversations with other members. Conversations are very important for this need. In conversations members can discuss, help and support each other. Relationship is one of the functional blocks of social media and is a vital one for social needs. Being present in an online environment enables users to exchange ideas. Trust is a crucial factor for a relationship between members-to-members and members-to-companies.

These four functional blocks are present in social network sites. Due to the fact that these blocks are more important for social network sites compared to sharing sites the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H6: The positive relationship between the social needs and following a sports brand on social network sites is larger compared to following a sports brand on sharing sites

2.5.3 Psychological needs and functional blocks

People join a community, physical or online, in order to satisfy their psychological needs (Bressler and Grantham, 2000). The measuring attributes: belonging, connection and identification can be linked with some functional blocks. Clearly, identification can be connected with the identity block. Belonging covers two functional blocks. Only when a customer is presented online with a good reputation, he can belong to a group; otherwise other members might refuse his membership. The relationship between the psychological needs and following a sports brand on social network sites shall be larger compared to sharing sites. This results in the following hypothesis:

H7: The positive relationship between the psychological needs and following a sports brand on social network sites is larger compared to following a sports brand on sharing sites

2.5.4 Hedonic needs and functional blocks

Hedonic needs only focus on the pleasure of the consumer (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). Two functional blocks can be placed into the additional need; sharing and reputation. Sharing content is an important pillar for pleasure on social media channels. “The extent to which users know the social standing of others and content” (Kietzmann et al., 2011) makes reputation meaningful as well. Especially the content in the reputation definition: consumers will return to the same page if they like the content and are confident the site will fit their interest and needs in the future. Members are able to share information on sharing sites. Sharing is important for hedonic needs. Brands, and also individuals, can create a positive reputation with the content of their post. This results in the following hypothesis:

H8: The positive relationship between the hedonic needs and following a sports brand on sharing sites is larger compared to following a sports brand on social network sites

2.6 Impact of online communities on brand commitment

Online communities can play an important role in the life of a member. In this paragraph the impact of a brand community shall be discussed. Keller (2001) mentions the importance of building brand equity to create brand commitment. Communities play an important role to create brand equity. The level of brand resonance creates brand equity and exists of four categories:

- Behavioral loyalty;
- Attitudinal attachment;
- Sense of community;
- Active engagement.

Brand resonance is the link between the customer and his commitment towards a brand (Keller, 2001). The third and fourth categories are important for the impact of online communities on brand commitment. The third category is about identifying yourself with a community. “Identification with a brand community may reflect an important social phenomenon whereby customers feel a relationship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand” (Keller, 2001). The fourth category, active engagement: “perhaps the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty occurs when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money or other resources into

the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand” (Keller, 2001). An online community creates an interface for the communication and interaction between brands and customers.

Members interact in a community with each other by sharing beliefs and ideas. “One direct outcome of the interaction and communication among community members is the development of a common language, the establishment of community and status relationships, and the development of commitment to members of the community” (Kim et al., 2008). When members have an exchange relation there is a degree of commitment in the relation (Cook and Emerson, 1978). If customers or members are more committed to an organization or community they are more likely to interact with others and they shall share and identify the community’s goals and values.

Jang et al. (2008) took several definitions of commitment and formed a broad description: “commitment is treated as an attitudinal factor that appears when the members of a community feel that the continuing relationship between their community and themselves is valuable”. This commitment to an online community might result in positive behavior of an individual towards the brand (Kim et al., 2008). The following hypotheses can be introduced based on the brand commitment:

H9: Following a sports brand on social media will increase brand commitment

H10: Following a sports brand on social network sites will increase brand commitment

H11: Following a sports brand on sharing sites will increase brand commitment

2.7 Asics and Nike

Asics and Nike are active in the sport branch and have a division focused on running. Although they perform in the same industry there are differences between them. Nike is 25th most valuable brand of the world (“Interbrand”, 2012). Asics had net sales of 2,929 million U.S. dollars and 140 million U.S. dollars net income, where Nike had net sales of 20,862 million U.S. dollars and 2,133 million U.S. dollars net income in 2011 (Asics Corporation, 2011; Nike inc, 2011). Nike is world leader in market share with sport attributes. Asics on the other hand is the most popular shoe of the world in the running market. However, Nike has the highest market share in athletic

shoes (“Looptijden”, 2011; “Rubbersoles”, 2010). Both brands are presented on social media and try to create a whole running experience.

Next to shoes, clothes and other attributes, Asics and Nike have other elements in order to create a real ‘running-experience’. Members of their communities can gather information, build relationships, get a feeling of belonging to a runners club, and watch amusing videos and photo’s on social media sites.

Asics and Nike also have an application for mobile devices. This application is a free service for runners and can be downloaded by anyone with a mobile device. With this ‘app’ customers can create a customized training plan, keep a logbook and analyze their performance possibly in combination with social media.

Consumers can find conversations, movies, photos, upcoming races and much more information about running on the social media sites of Asics and Nike. Asics and Nike are presented on various sites. Nike, in general, has more members on the different social media sites. In table 3 some social media sites are showed with the amount of followers.

Social media sites	Asics	Nike	Ratio Asics/Nike
<u>Social network sites</u>			
Facebook	296,737	9,475,934	3.13 %
Hyves	- ¹	438,145	N/A
<u>Sharing sites</u>			
Twitter	24,719	486,714	5.08 %
YouTube	2,637,360 ² /3,161 ³	17,920,188 ² /31,769 ³	14.72 % / 9.95 %

Table 3 Social media sites and the amount of followers of Asics and Nike

Asics and Nike both started as a corporation doing business in footwear. Asics developed as a specialist in running attributes, not only in footwear, but in clothing as well. Nike explored the whole sport market. Nike entered, among many others, the football, soccer, golf, basketball markets. This distinguishes the two brands. Asics kept its core business and focuses on running and create products that enable runners to increase their performance. Nike became a broad brand with the believe that: “if you have a body, you are an athlete”.

¹ On Hyves multiple channels are managed by a private person

² Video views

³ Subscriptions

2.7.1 Impact of market share on brand commitment

Every company or brand has a certain market share. Danaher et al. (2003) made a comparison of online and offline consumer brand loyalty. Especially their conclusion about the online environment is useful for this study. Their results were based on grocery shopping, but in this study the results shall be used to test sports brands. The conclusion of their research was: “greater brand loyalty is observed for brands with high market share, and vice versa for low share brands” (Danaher et al., 2003). This outcome is in line with Degeratu et al. (2000). A ‘strong’ brand did better in an online environment compared to a ‘weak’ brand. In this case ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ is parallel to high and low market share. Higher brand commitment results in more purchases (Degeratu et al., 2000).

In summary, Nike has a higher market share compared to Asics. Asics focuses mainly on the running market. Based on the fact that brands with a higher market share have will have a greater brand commitment (Danaher et al., 2003) the following hypotheses are formulated:

H12: Following a sports brand on social media with a higher market share will increase brand commitment

H13: Following a sports brand on social network sites with a higher market share will increase brand commitment

H14: Following a sports brand on sharing sites with a higher market share will increase brand commitment

The reason that Nike and Asics were chosen for this research are:

- They are (more or less) active on the same social media sites
- They actively focus on the athletic market and running industry
- Either of them are known in The Netherlands
- Due to the differences in market share and company size comparisons can be made

2.8 Structural model

Below the structural research model is given.

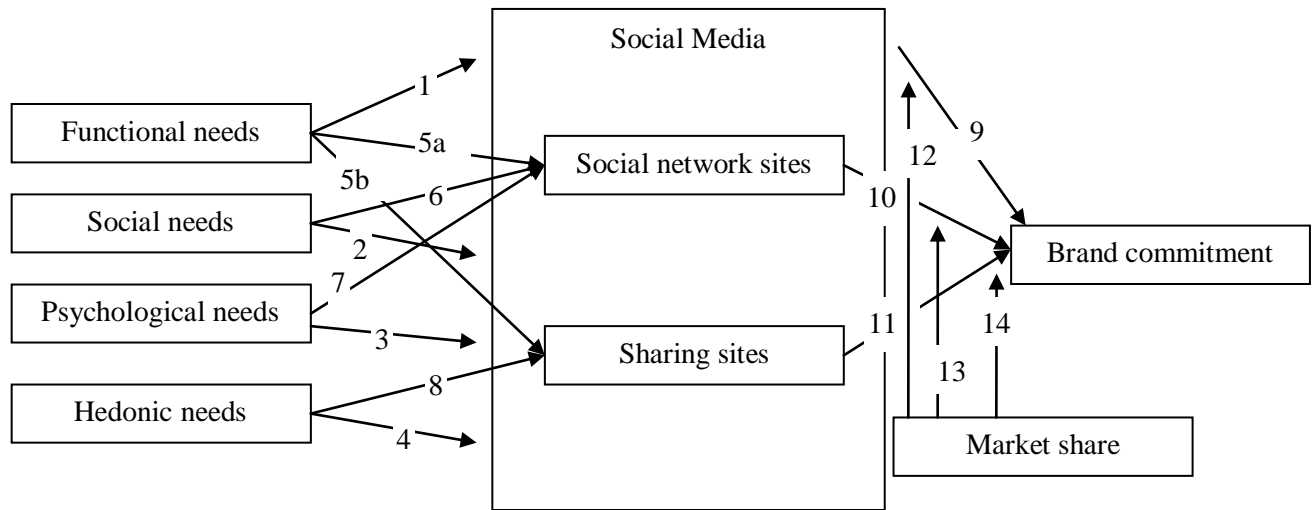


Figure 1 Research model

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology. The data was collected through a questionnaire placed on the Internet. First the data collection and target group are dealt with. The second part of this chapter is about the questionnaire.

3.1 Data collection and target group

The data for this research was collected with an online questionnaire. The survey was published in Dutch and English. The reason for publishing the survey in both languages was, because it was posted on Dutch and international online channels. The questionnaire was placed on the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages of Asics and Nike. Emails were sent in order to reach as many respondents as possible. Furthermore, followers of Asics and Nike got personal messages via Facebook and Twitter with the request to answer the randomly created questionnaire. I have sent almost 1,000 tweets and over 800 personal messages on Facebook. The reason to distribute the questionnaire randomly will be explained in the next paragraph. In case a respondent did not follow the sports brand on social media I asked the participant to imagine why they would follow a sports brand on social media. The reason to ask to imagine why they would follow a sports brand was, because it was hard to collect data with respondents that actually followed the brand on a social media website. The target group consisted of people who were active on social media, and followed a sports brand on social media, preferable Asics and/or Nike. Furthermore, no restrictions were made on educational level, income, age, and gender.

3.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was created in order to gain primary data for this study. An online questionnaire can be spread easily, it is low cost and it is possible to reach people without having geographical boundaries and time restrictions. Thesistools was used for the online questionnaire (“Thesistools”, n.d.).

First of all, it should be mentioned that two different surveys were created. The questionnaires were not completely different, only the brand name differed in the surveys. A respondent got

questions about either Asics or Nike. Asking about both brands in one survey might influence the answers about the brands. Another reason why I chose for one brand in a survey was because I wanted to keep the questionnaire as short as possible. Sending out the questionnaire randomized prevented the survey to become skewed distributed.

The survey consisted of three parts. The demographic part was the start of the survey with general questions. This part was followed by introducing Asics or Nike into the survey (according to which survey was done) and continues with questions about the four different needs and the social media platforms. The last part is about brand commitment, word-of-mouth, and participation in the community and purchase intention of one of the brands. All the questions were based on researches of other authors in order to expect to have a good Cronbach's Alpha. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 1.

As pointed out in paragraph 3.1, personal messages were sent out to Asics and Nike followers. Due to the fact that the link of the survey was random, I did not send out the Asics questionnaire to Asics followers, and the other way around for Nike.

The demographic part contained questions about gender, age, education, questions on whether the respondent practices sports, if the respondent is active on social media and if they follow a sports brand on social media.

The second part included questions about the reasons to follow a sports brand on social media and about what social media site(s) the sports brand is followed. Again, because not every respondent follows a sports brand on social media, I asked to imagine why they would follow a sports brand on social media, and on what social media website(s). The reasons to follow sports brand and questions about it were taken from studies of: Wang and Fesenmaier (2004), Baird and Parasnis (2011), Cho (2008), Dholakia et al. (2004), and Hanson and Haridakis (2008). In table 4 the statements used in the questionnaire are presented. Respondents had to indicate if the given statement could be a reason to follow the sports brand on social media, and, if so, on which specific social media site. If the respondents answered yes, the output in Excel would be 1, if the answer was no, the output was 0. The data became binary.

The third part consisted of brand commitment, word-of-mouth, participation in a community, and purchase intention regarding Asics or Nike. Statements about these variables were given and the participant had to indicate if they agreed or disagreed. This section was based on a five point likert-scale, 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). The different statements in the survey for this part can be found in table 5. The statements are taken from studies and articles of: Dessart (2010), Keller (2001), and Kim et al. (2008). The value indicates the level of brand commitment, the intention to spread word-of-mouth, the purchase intention, and the willingness to participate in the community. The closer to 5, the higher these intentions are.

A five point likert-scale was chosen to decrease the options for the participant. The studies used for the questionnaire also applied a five point likert-scale. The option for respondents to choose between a larger likert-scale with somewhat (dis)agree, (dis)agree, totally (dis)agree is so close it can confuse the participants, what results in less valuable results.

There has been chosen for Facebook, Hyves, Twitter, and YouTube in the Dutch questionnaire, because these channels are most frequently used in The Netherlands (“Marketingfacts”, n.d.). For the English survey the Dutch social media site Hyves was left out.

In tables 4 and 5 the different statements and scales are presented. The statements in tables 4 and 5 are used for the questionnaire.

Statement	Scale
<u>Functional needs</u>	
To keep updated of discounts	yes or no
It is an efficient way to gather product information	yes or no
It is an easy way to get product information	yes or no
<u>Social needs</u>	
The brand page provides a good interface for members to communicate	yes or no
To build a relationship with other members on the brand page	yes or no
To exchange information with other members	yes or no
To ask/provide help to other members	yes or no
<u>Psychological needs</u>	
To belong to the brand group, which members have the same characteristics	yes or no
To identify myself with the brand	yes or no
Because my friends follow the brand page as well	yes or no

Hedonic needs

I have fun using it and it relaxes me	yes or no
There are funny movies, photos, and stories on the brand page	yes or no
It is entertaining	yes or no

Table 4 Statements and scales of variables for part II

Statement	Scale
<u>Brand commitment</u>	
I want the brand to stay successful	1= disagree, 5=agree
The brand is important to me	1= disagree, 5=agree
I am a loyal customer of the brand	1= disagree, 5=agree
I buy as much products of the brand as I can	1= disagree, 5=agree
I really like the brand	1= disagree, 5=agree
<u>Word-of-mouth</u>	
I would like to introduce the brand to others	1= disagree, 5=agree
I would like to recommend the brand to others	1= disagree, 5=agree
I really like to talk about the brand with others	1= disagree, 5=agree
<u>Purchase intention</u>	
I will (keep) buy(ing) products of the brand	1= disagree, 5=agree
I would mainly buy products of the brand instead of its competitors	1= disagree, 5=agree
I prefer to buy products of the brand compared to other brands	1= disagree, 5=agree
I would like to suggest new ideas for the product or services to the company	1= disagree, 5=agree
I would like to actively participate in customer research	1= disagree, 5=agree
<u>Participation brand community</u>	
I would like to provide my opinion on product-related problems and improvement methods	1= disagree, 5=agree
I would like to be an actively participating member of the brand page on social media	1= disagree, 5=agree
I have a sense of belonging to the brand page	1= disagree, 5=agree

Table 5 Statements and scales of variables for part III

4. Results and analyses

The results of the questionnaire were collected and coded in Excel by the program Thesistools. This chapter presents the results of the empirical research done in SPSS. It starts with the presentation of the amount of respondents and their demographical statistics. Next there will be an explanation of how the dataset has been prepared for answering the hypotheses. The last part of the chapter deals with the analyses that has been used in order to collect results that could answer the hypotheses stated in chapter 2.

4.1 Demographical statistics of the respondents

As mentioned before the survey was spread via email and posted on different social media sites. The questionnaire was available for seventeen days. I actively sent people that followed one of the two brands personal messages or tweets via respectively Facebook and Twitter. After these seventeen days I had collected 487 respondents. Incomplete questionnaires and people who were not active on social media were deleted. The reason to delete the latter group was, because this group had to imagine on what social media site they would be active and why they would follow the sports brand. Imagine these two things might result in invalid information.

I also deleted the English results. The reason for deleting the English results is that only 30 respondents answered an English questionnaire, and only four respondents actually followed the surveyed brand. Even without the English results I had enough data. In the Dutch questionnaire participants could indicate if they followed a sports brand on the social media site Hyves, a Dutch social network site. Only 30 respondents were active on Hyves, and only 1 person followed the surveyed brand on Hyves. For this reason I decided to take Hyves out of the dataset. Respondents who were active on Hyves were also active on Facebook. The dataset ended up with 302 useful responses, which constitutes a 38 percent drop-out rate.

Out of the 302 responses, 156 participants answered the Asics survey and 146 participants answered the Nike survey. Education will not be mentioned in this research, because almost 85 percent of the respondents had at least a HBO or university. The average age of all respondents was almost 30 years old, the youngest person was 17 years old and the oldest person was 65

years of age. The biggest group with 144 respondents had an age between 23 and 27 years old. Over 86 percent of the respondents practice sports. Twenty participants were not born in the Netherlands. Demographics about the gender of the respondents are stated in table 6.

All respondents*	N	Percentage**
Male	163 (88 / 75)	54.00 (29.14 / 24.83)
Female	139 (68 / 71)	46.00 (22.17 / 23.51)
Total	302 (156 / 146)	100.00 (51.66 / 48.34)

Respondents that follow a brand*	N	Percentage**
Male	67 (24 / 43)	22.18 (7.90 / 14.24)
Female	45 (15 / 30)	14.90 (4.97 / 9.93)
Total	112 (39 / 73)	37.08 (12.91 / 24.17)

Table 6 Demographical statistics

** In brackets Asics/Nike, ** percentage of all respondents*

4.2 Data preparation

To answer the hypotheses some changes and adjustments had to be made in the dataset. The data can be divided into nine different groups, as can be seen in table 7. Only the groups that matter will be presented in the tables with the results.

Groups		Description in text
All respondents	Mix of the respondents that do follow and do <u>not</u> follow the brand got in the randomized questionnaire	All respondents
	Everybody that does follow the brand they got in the randomized questionnaire	Respondents that follow
	Everybody that does <u>not</u> follow the brand they got in the randomized questionnaire	Respondents that do not follow
Asics	Mix of the respondents that do follow and do <u>not</u> follow Asics and got Asics in the randomized questionnaire	Asics respondents
	Everybody that does follow Asics in the Asics questionnaire	Asics followers
	Everybody that does <u>not</u> follow Asics in the Asics questionnaire	Asics respondents that do not follow
Nike	Mix of the respondents that do follow and do <u>not</u> follow Nike and got Nike in the randomized	Nike respondents

questionnaire	Everybody that does follow Nike in the Nike	Nike followers
questionnaire	Everybody that does <u>not</u> follow Nike in the Nike	Nike respondents that do not follow

Table 7 Different groups of the dataset

The first part of the questionnaire was about personal details of the respondent. Questions about age, gender, educational level, practicing sports yes or no, following a sports brand on social media and other general items have been asked.

The second part of the survey was about the different reasons for consumers to follow sports brand on social media. From the data we conclude a consumer followed a sports brand on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube for the first four hypotheses. Only following a sports brand on social media counted. If a respondent answered with yes the output was 1, and 0 for no. The sum of every need had been calculated for every specific social media channel. Twitter and YouTube, both sharing sites, have been combined. With these outcomes it was possible to run different analyses which will be dealt with in paragraph 4.3.

The third part of the survey consists of statements with a five point likert-scale. The respondents had to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with these statements. The statements were to measure four different items: brand commitment, word-of-mouth, participation in sports brand communities and purchase intention. Brand commitment and participation in brand community had five items, word-of-mouth and purchase intention only three. The averages indicate the value of every item, the items were based on a scale of 1 to 5. The number 5 indicates that a respondent was in example highly brand committed. In table 8 you can see the mean of brand commitment for every group.

Group	Mean
All respondents	2.88
Respondents that follow	3.56
Asics respondents	2.71
Asics followers	3.64
Nike respondents	3.05
Nike followers	3.52

Table 8 Mean of brand commitment for different groups in this research

As you can see in table 8 the mean of followers is higher compared to other respondents. On average the brand commitment of followers is rather high, namely; respondents that follow (3.56), Asics followers (3.64) and Nike followers (3.52).

The next step for data preparation was a reliability test: the Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is a method that checks if the items measure the same variable. The coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha is situated between 0 and 1 and should be at least 0.70 in order to be reliable. Cronbach's Alpha between 0.70 and 0.80 is acceptable, from 0.80 to 0.90 is good and above 0.90 is excellent. In table 9 you can see that all items have Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of at least 0.806, which means all variables are reliable. In appendix 2, the coefficients of Cronbach's Alpha for other groups is presented.

Group	Cronbach's Alpha
All respondents	0.874
Respondents that follow	0.809
Asics respondents	0.876
Asics followers	0.821
Nike respondents	0.861
Nike followers	0.806

Table 9 Cronbach's Alpha, reliability analysis, brand commitment variable

After analyzing the reliability of each variable according to Cronbach's Alpha, the factor analysis was conducted. Factor analysis examines the interdependence among all p variables (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2010). The factor loading is the impact of an item on the latent factor. The loading should be between 0 and 1: the closer to 1, the higher the influence of the variable on the factor will be. The loadings of group all respondents can be found in table 10.

Items	Loadings
I want the brand to stay successful	0.718
The brand is important to me	0.869
I am a loyal customer to the brand	0.887
I buy as much products of the brand as I can	0.847
I really like the brand	0.746

Table 10 Factor analysis, loadings, group all respondents

All loadings are at least 0.718, which is a valid and sufficient value. A loading should be at least 0.50 to be considered as valid. With these results the items of each variable can be combined and used for further analyses.

4.3 Analyses and results

In this paragraph different analyses will be explained and discussed. All the variables are reliable, based on Cronbach's Alpha. As mentioned before, all the incomplete and invalid responses have been deleted. For each hypothesis the type of regression will be explained, and the independent and dependent variables shall be given, followed by the results and conclusions. In appendix 3 all the formulas used for the hypotheses can be found. Hypotheses 1 to 4 focus on the specific needs and following a sports brand on social media. Hypotheses 5 to 8 deal with social media platforms separately. The last hypotheses, 9 to 14, focus on the effect of following a sports brand on social media (platforms) on brand commitment. Hypotheses 12 to 14 also take market share into account.

4.3.1 Hypotheses 1 to 4

Hypotheses 1 to 4 state that consumers have four different needs which positively influence the reason to follow a sports brand on social media. With SPSS logistic regressions have been run. Logistic regressions should be run when the independent variable is continuous, in this case the sum of needs of following a sports brand on social media. The dependent variable is binary, consumers follow or not follow a sports brand on social media. All different needs have been put together in one regression. In this case the different needs were able to affect each other in the output. Table 11 presents the results.

Specific need → social media	B coefficient	Exp (B)	P (significance)	Nagelkerke R ²
<u>All respondents</u>				0.021
Functional needs	0.103	1.109	0.258	
Social needs	-0.052	0.950	0.523	
Psychological needs	-0.156	0.856	0.139	
Hedonic needs	0.100	1.105	0.189	
<u>Asics respondents</u>				0.052
Functional needs	0.024	1.024	0.860	
Social needs	0.249	1.282	0.050	
Psychological needs	-0.120	0.887	0.484	
Hedonic needs	-0.137	0.872	0.265	
<u>Nike respondents</u>				0.127
Functional needs	0.276	1.318	0.074	
Social needs	-0.315	0.730	0.011	
Psychological needs	-0.262	0.769	0.077	
Hedonic needs	0.229	1.257	0.047	

Table 11 Logistic regression: needs and following a sports brand on social media

The results present that functional needs have a positive effect on following a sports brand on social media for every group. The Exp(B) is also above 1 (at least 1.024), which means that the chance of following or not following a sports brand on social media, because of functional needs is 1.024 times higher for following a sports brand compared to not following a sports brand. The Exp(B) is a output from SPSS, and is the chance in odds ratio attributed to the independent variable. For a positive effect the value of Exp(B) is larger than 1, for a negative effect the value is between 0 and 1.

Based on the results, it can be said that social needs have a positive effect on following a sports brand on social media for Asics respondents (B= 0.249). Nike respondents show a negative effect for social needs and following a sports brand on social media (B= -0.315). If you combine these results for all respondents there still is a negative effect. A possible argument is that the negative effect of Nike respondents is larger compared to the positive effect of Asics respondents.

Psychological needs have a negative effect on following a sports brand on social media, for all respondents (B= -0.156), Asics respondents (B= -0.120), and Nike respondents (B= -0.262). The effect for hedonic needs differ for each group: all respondents and Nike respondents show a

positive effect respectively B= 0.100 and B= 0.229, where Asics respondents show a negative effect (B= -0.137).

Not all of the results were significant, only social needs for Asics respondents (p= 0.05), and social (p= 0.011) and hedonic needs (p= 0.047) for Nike respondents are significant. The reason of insignificant results can be due to the fact that more variables, besides the four needs, affect the reasons to follow social media. In example socio-economic situation of people, or age of the respondents can affect the reason to follow a sports brand on social media. As mentioned in demographical statistics, some groups are over-represented. As can be seen in the last column, the Nagelkerke R² is not high. The Nagelkerke R² measures the goodness of fit of variables for the logistic regression. The closer to 1, the better the measurement is. A low Nagelkerke R² indicates a low goodness of fit of the variables. In case of the group all respondents, the needs fit only 2.1 percent of the dependent variable.

The table 12 presents the relationship of needs and following Asics or Nike on social media. The dependent variable was if the respondent had the Asics or Nike questionnaire. In case of the Asics survey the dependent variable was 1. Only respondents that follow the surveyed brand are used for this logistic regression.

	B coefficient	Exp (B)	P (significance)	Nagelkerke R ²
<u>Asics followers versus Nike followers</u>				0.221
Functional needs	0.015	1.016	0.941	
Social needs	0.485	1.624	0.005	
Psychological needs	0.080	1.084	0.674	
Hedonic needs	-0.575	0.563	0.002	

Table 12 Logistic regression: needs and following Asics or Nike on social media

The result of the B coefficient, shows that functional, social and psychological needs are more important for Asics followers compared to Nike followers, to follow the sports brand on social media. Hedonic needs are more important for Nike followers than for Asics followers. The chance that an Asics versus Nike consumer follows the brand on social media because of social needs is 1.624 times higher for Asics consumers. The chance that an Asics versus Nike consumer follows the brand because of hedonic needs is 0.563 times smaller for Asics consumers than for

Nike consumers. A note should be placed; only social and hedonic needs are significant, respectively 0.005 and 0.002.

Summarized, based on the results given in table 11 hypotheses 1 to 4 cannot be supported.

4.3.2 Hypotheses 5 to 8

For hypotheses 5 to 8 logistic regressions are used. The independent variables, the specific needs, are continuous, the dependent variables, following a sports brand on social network sites or sharing sites, are binary. For these types of variables a logistic regression is needed. To answer the hypotheses comparisons have to be made. The conclusions are all based on the outcomes of the dataset and tested on different groups. Only the results of important groups will be shown in the table. For social network sites the dependent variable is if respondents follow a sports brand on social network sites, the independent variable is the sum of every need separately. For sharing sites the same logistic regressions have been run. All different needs have been put together in one regression for every group and social media platform. Table 13 presents the results.

	B	Exp (B)	P	B	Exp	P
	coefficient		(significance)	coefficient	(B)	(significance)
Social network sites			Sharing Sites			
<u>All respondents</u> (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.108$)			(Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.342$)			
Functional needs	0.437	1.547	0.008	1.139	3.125	0.000
Social needs	-0.141	0.868	0.295	-0.045	0.956	0.780
Psychological needs	-0.104	0.901	0.514	-0.369	0.692	0.154
Hedonic needs	0.486	1.626	0.001	0.845	2.328	0.000
<u>All followers</u> (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.659$)			(Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.559$)			
Functional needs	2.461	11.716	0.000	1.986	7.283	0.000
Social needs	-0.577	0.562	0.125	0.395	1.485	0.284
Psychological needs	0.187	1.206	0.673	-1.273	0.280	0.048
Hedonic needs	1.771	5.876	0.002	1.118	3.059	0.020
<u>Asics respondents</u> (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.054$)			(Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.358$)			
Functional needs	0.139	1.150	0.632	1.024	2.784	0.000
Social needs	0.287	1.332	0.217	0.301	1.351	0.191
Psychological needs	-0.027	0.973	0.928	-0.318	0.727	0.401
Hedonic needs	0.114	1.121	0.671	0.586	1.797	0.063
<u>Asics followers</u> (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.650$)			(Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.581$)			
Functional needs	1.830	6.232	0.010	1.906	6.726	0.044

Social needs	-0.298	0.742	0.486	0.556	1.744	0.363
Psychological needs	0.309	1.361	0.597	-2.043	0.130	0.071
Hedonic needs	1.997	7.366	0.023	1.508	4.516	0.195
<u>Nike respondents</u> (Nagelkerke R ² = 0.206)				(Nagelkerke R ² = 0.404)		
Functional needs	0.756	2.129	0.002	1.657	5.245	0.000
Social needs	-0.393	0.675	0.044	-0.386	0.679	0.149
Psychological needs	-0.120	0.887	0.565	-0.782	0.457	0.065
Hedonic needs	0.559	1.749	0.008	1.110	3.033	0.001
<u>Nike followers</u> (Nagelkerke R ² = 0.736)				(Nagelkerke R ² = 0.551)		
Functional needs	3.760	42.942	0.002	1.990	7.315	0.001
Social needs	0.379	1.460	0.672	0.363	1.437	0.475
Psychological needs	0.428	1.534	0.650	-0.792	0.453	0.366
Hedonic needs	1.188	3.280	0.154	0.946	2.575	0.077

Table 13 Logistic regression: needs and following a sports brand on social network sites or sharing sites

Functional needs have a positive relationship regarding following a sports brand on social network sites or sharing sites. For every group there is a positive B coefficient, and the Exp (B) is larger than one. Because the variable functional needs is significant for every group, except Asics respondents, and for both social media platforms, hypothesis 5, A and B can be supported by the results.

There is no positive relationship between social needs and following a sports brand on social network site based on the results. Four out of six groups on social network sites show a negative effect, an increase of one unit in social needs, will decrease the reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites.

Most of the groups show a positive effect of following a sports brand on sharing sites, because of social needs. Four out of six have a positive B coefficient. The only note is that the results are not significant. The reason to follow sports brand on social network sites has a negative effect for most of the groups and the reason to follow on sharing sites has a positive effect for the majority of the groups. Hardly any group has a significant value for social needs. Even though the results would have been significant, it would be hard to prove hypothesis 6. Based on this explanation and the fact that the results are not significant, hypothesis 6 cannot be supported.

Three out of six groups used for hypothesis 7 show that psychological needs can have a positive effect on the reason to follow sports brand on social network sites. The groups with followers of

the surveyed brand have a positive effect, the groups with all respondents of a surveyed brand have a negative B coefficient. One unit increase in the psychological needs will increase the reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites for followers by at least 0.187.

The effect of following sports brand on sharing sites, because of psychological needs is negative for every group presented in table 13. All the Exp (B) are smaller than one, this indicates that the chance that following versus not following sports brand on sharing sites, because of psychological needs is, at a maximum of, 0.727 times smaller for respondents that follow the sports brand on sharing sites compared to not following the sports brand.

Looking at the groups with followers only, the relationship between following a sports brand on social network site versus sharing sites is for social network sites higher compared to sharing sites for psychological needs. None of the results of the logistic regression for hypothesis 7 are significant. So, based on the results, hypothesis 7 cannot be supported.

Hypothesis 8, about the relationship between following sports brand on social network sites or sharing sites and hedonic needs can be answered based on the results presented in table 13. The B coefficient of all respondents, and Asics and Nike respondents is higher for sharing sites, compared to social network sites. The chance of following versus not following a sports brand on sharing sites, because of hedonic needs is larger when you compare it to the chance of following versus not following a sports brand on social network sites, due to hedonic needs. For groups with only followers it is the other way around.

The groups Asics respondents and Nike followers on social network sites are not significant. On sharing sites the groups Nike followers and Asics followers are not significant. Based on the results hypothesis 8 cannot be supported.

To sum up, hypothesis 5 is accepted based on the results. Hypotheses 6, 7 and 8 cannot be supported. Some of the results are not significant, other results do not show the result that was found in the literature. A reason of not being significant can be the sample size. A larger sample size would increase the significant level of the results. An extra possible reasons of insignificant results can be the influence of other variables, think of education, socio-economic situation, or other over-represented demographical groups in this research.

4.3.3 Hypotheses 9 to 11

The results of hypotheses 9 to 11 shall be presented here. For hypotheses 9 to 11 a linear regression is used. A linear regression can be used if the dependent variable is binary and the independent variable is continuous. These hypotheses tested the influence of following a sports brand on social media, social network sites, and sharing sites on brand commitment. Brand commitment is the dependent variable. Following sports brand on social media, social network sites or sharing sites is the independent variable. The linear regression is run for every group and independent variable separately (every row in table 14). Followers only are not discussed due to the fact that the results are not significant. This might be possible, because the small sample size. In table 14 the results are presented for social media (platforms) and the different groups.

		B coefficient	t-value	P (significance)
Social media → brand commitment	All respondents	1.094	11.001	0.000
Social media → brand commitment	Asics respondents	1.241	7.749	0.000
Social media → brand commitment	Nike respondents	0.940	7.120	0.000
Social network sites → brand commitment	All respondents	1.063	9.374	0.000
Social network sites → brand commitment	Asics respondents	1.468	6.858	0.000
Social network sites → brand commitment	Nike respondents	0.837	6.004	0.000
Sharing sites → brand commitment	All respondents	0.952	7.959	0.000
Sharing sites → brand commitment	Asics respondents	1.152	6.111	0.000
Sharing sites → brand commitment	Nike respondents	0.735	4.788	0.000

Table 14 Linear regression: social media, social network sites, sharing sites on brand commitment

In this linear regression the effect of following the sports brand is measured. As can be seen in table 14, all effects have a positive B coefficient. Following a sports brand on social media, social network sites and sharing sites increases the brand commitment towards the brand. The smallest B coefficient is 0.837, which is the effect of following a sports brand on social network sites on brand commitment for Nike respondents. So, one unit increase in following Nike on social media will increase brand commitment by 0.837.

In the next table, the differences between social network sites and sharing sites are shown. For this linear regression three variables are used, the dependent variable brand commitment, and the independent variables following a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites. By comparing the standardized B coefficient, conclusions about effects of following a sports brand on social network sites on one side, and sharing sites on the other side can be drawn.

		Standardized B coefficient	P (significance)
Social network sites – sharing sites → brand commitment	All respondents	0.365 – 0.265	0.000
Social network sites – sharing sites → brand commitment	Asics respondents	0.373 – 0.308	0.000
Social network sites – sharing sites → brand commitment	Nike respondents	0.354 – 0.221	0.000 – 0.007

Table 15 Linear regression: social network sites and sharing sites on brand commitment

As you can see in table 15, when a respondent follows a sports brand on social network sites there is a larger positive effect towards brand commitment compared to following a sports brand on sharing sites. One unit increase in following a sports brand on social network sites will increase brand commitment for all respondents, Asics respondents and Nike respondents with respectively, 0.365, 0.373, and 0.354 versus 0.265, 0.308, and 0.221 on sharing sites.

In summary, hypotheses 9 to 11 can all be accepted based on the results.

4.3.4 Hypotheses 12 to 14

For hypotheses 12 to 14 linear regressions are used in order to compare the influence of the interaction of following a sports brand on social media, social network sites, and sharing sites and market share. The independent variable, interaction between following a sports brand on social media and market share, is binary. The dependent variable, brand commitment, is continuous. By multiplying market share and following social media, social network sites or sharing sites, the interaction effect, the independent variable, can be created.

Social media * market share → brand commitment, indicates the regression with the interaction effect of social media and market share as independent variable, and brand commitment as dependent variable. The Nike survey is 1, and the Asics survey is 0, because Nike has a higher market share. The group Asics and Nike followers are respondents that follow the surveyed

sports brand of both brands put together. In case of interaction between social network sites or sharing sites on one side, and market share on the other side, only followers on that specific social media platform are taken into account. Table 16 presents the results for every specific group and social media (platforms).

		B coefficient	t-value	P (significance)
Social media * market share → brand commitment	All respondents	0.853	6.915	0.000
Social media * market share → brand commitment	Asics and Nike followers	-0.118	-0.709	0.480
Social network sites * market share → brand commitment	All respondents	0.837	0.339	0.000
Social network sites * market share → brand commitment	Asics and Nike followers	-0.443	-2.179	0.032
Sharing sites * market share → brand commitment	All respondents	0.803	5.301	0.000
Sharing sites * market share → brand commitment	Asics and Nike followers	-0.092	-0.470	0.640

Table 16 Linear regression: social media (platforms) and market share on brand commitment

The regression tests if respondents who got the Nike questionnaire and are following the sports brand, have more brand commitment compared to respondents who got the Asics questionnaire. Only looking at Asics and Nike followers the hypotheses cannot be supported, based on the results. The interactions social media and sharing sites, and market share have a negative B coefficient, respectively -0.118 and -0.092. Both interactions have an insignificant value. The B coefficient for social network sites and market share is negative as well (-0.443), with a significant p value (0.032). For Asics and Nike followers it is hard to draw any conclusions based on these results.

The linear regressions for all respondents have positive B coefficients for social media, and the two platforms. For social media a one unit increase of the interaction of social media and market share will increase the brand commitment by 0.853, the increase for social network sites and market share, and sharing sites and market share is respectively 0.837 and 0.803. All outcomes are significant with a p-value of 0.000.

The negative effect of social network sites and market share for Asics and Nike followers on brand commitment is possibly higher than for sharing sites, and that is the reason that the effect of social media and market share is negative as well (B= -0.118), with a p-value of 0.480.

The fact that the group with only followers in the interaction of sharing sites and market share is not significant could be due to the small sample size. With a small sample size the chance of having insignificant results is higher. Based on this results it is hard to support hypotheses 12, 13, and 14 for Asics and Nike followers.

Focusing on all respondents hypothesis 12, 13 and 14 can be supported. Outcomes for social media, social network sites and sharing sites are significant and have a positive B coefficient. So following a sports brand with a higher market share, Nike, will increase the brand commitment towards the sports brand with a lower market share, Asics.

The next table presents the comparison between the interaction effect of social network sites and market share versus sharing sites and market share. A linear regression has been run with brand commitment as the dependent variable, and the interaction between social network sites and market share on one side and sharing sites and market share on the other side as the independent variable.

		Standardized β coefficient	P (significance)
Social network sites – sharing sites * market share \rightarrow brand commitment	All respondents	0.255 – 0.152	0.000 – 0.019

Table 17 Linear regression: social network sites, and sharing sites and market share on brand commitment

Table 17 shows that there is a larger positive effect on brand commitment when a sports brand with a higher market share is followed on social network sites compared to sharing sites, with a standardized B coefficient of respectively 0.255 and 0.152. Both results are significant.

In summary, hypotheses 12 to 14 can be accepted for all respondents, for only followers it is hard to support the hypotheses, but this might be because the small sample size, what resulted in insignificant results.

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter four was conducted to demonstrate the analyses of the data and to interpret the results in order to discuss the hypotheses. The demographics of all the respondents were showed. The different groups used in the analyses have been presented. Cronbach's Alpha was used to verify the reliability of these variables. After this, a factor analysis for all respondents has been run. The last paragraph dealt with the analyses and results of the different regressions.

Furthermore hypotheses 1 to 4 were tested with the use of a logistic regression. Some needs had a positive B coefficient and a Exp (B) larger than one, but the results were not significant. Due to this fact it was not possible to accept the hypotheses 1 to 4.

After this, hypotheses 5 to 8 were tested with a logistic regression. This regression shows a significant and positive result that functional needs can be a reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites, so hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6 cannot be accepted, social needs have a negative effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites. For sharing sites, it is the other way around, social needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand. In addition, the results of most of the groups are not significant.

Psychological needs could be a reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites for some groups. Psychological needs have a negative effect for every group on the reason to follow sports brand on sharing sites. Almost every result is not significant, hypothesis 7 cannot be supported by the results.

Some results indicate that hedonic needs have a positive effect on the reason to follow a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites, and it might even be said that the effect of sharing sites is larger. Because it cannot be said for every group, hypothesis 8 is not accepted by the results.

Hypotheses 9 to 11 can be accepted, the results have a positive effect and are all significant, so following a sports brand on social media, social network sites and sharing sites has a positive effect on brand commitment.

For hypotheses 12 to 14 a note should be placed, the results for the group Asics and Nike followers did not have a positive B coefficient and only the group on social network sites was significant. The groups all, Asics and Nike respondents were significant with a positive B

coefficient. To summarize, for all respondents hypotheses 12 to 14 can be accepted, but for followers only, the hypotheses are not supported by the data.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of the research was to examine the reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media, and what the impact of following a sports brand on social media was on brand commitment. The study can be separated into different parts: a theoretical framework, a research methodology, and the results and analyses. This chapter presents a short summary of the study, the main questions, conclusions, and implications of this research. The last part discusses the limitations of this research and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Short summary and conclusions

The theoretical framework is a combination of different studies. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) investigated the needs of consumers in an online travel community. They explored four different needs: functional, social, psychological and hedonic needs. Kietzmann et al. (2011) described functional blocks of social media. Based on the functional blocks social media sites were divided into two platforms: social network sites and sharing sites. The reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media and specific sites are based on a combination of theories of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and Kietzmann et al. (2011). What is the impact of following a sports brand on social media on brand commitment? A combination of reasons to follow a sports brand on social media and the impact of following a sports brand online on brand commitment resulted in the research question stated in chapter one: *What are the reasons for consumers to follow a sports brand on social media and what is the impact of following a sports brand on brand commitment?*. This research takes two different brands into account: Asics and Nike. Both brands are active on social media and are represented in the same industry (athletic market with a focus on running). According to Danaher et al. (2003) a higher market share affects brand commitment in a positive way.

Every hypothesis has been discussed for different groups. Six different groups are used in this research:

- All respondents;
- All respondents that follow the surveyed sports brand on social media;

- All Asics respondents;
- Asics respondents that follow Asics on social media and got the Asics survey;
- All Nike respondents;
- Nike respondents that follow Nike on social media and got the Nike survey.

The first four hypotheses were based on different reasons for consumers to follow a brand on social media: functional, social, psychological and hedonic needs. Although the literature viewed a positive relationship between different needs and following a brand on social media, this relationship did not result from the survey for sports brands. Only between social needs and following Asics on social media a positive and significant relationship has been proved. The positive and significant relationship between hedonic needs and following Nike on social media has been proved as well. Due to the fact that most of the results are not significant hypotheses 1 to 4 cannot be accepted. A reason of being not significant could be the over-representation of some groups: higher educated respondents, a certain age, a special socio-economic environment of the participants.

Social media can be divided into different platforms, i.e. social network sites and sharing sites. For each different platform, a specific reason can have more impact on the reason to follow a sports brand. Consumers mainly follow a brand on social network sites, because of the functional, social and psychological needs. Brands on sharing sites are mainly followed due to the functional and hedonic needs. This theory is applied on sports brands in this research.

The results show that there is a positive relationship between the functional needs and following a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites, hypothesis 5 is accepted. Hypothesis 6 cannot be accepted. Both platforms show an insignificant value and mostly have a negative B coefficient in the test results. Also hypothesis 7 is not supported in this research. Only the result of all respondents that follow a sports brand on sharing sites is significant, but has a negative B coefficient. All other results are insignificant, and mostly with a negative B coefficient.

Most of the results for hypothesis 8 are significant, but the value of $\text{Exp}(B)$ is not always higher for sharing sites, compared to social network sites. All, Asics and Nike respondents have a higher value for the $\text{Exp}(B)$ for sharing sites, compared to social network sites. Looking at

followers only it is the other way around. To sum up, hypothesis 8 cannot be supported by the results.

Hypothesis 9 to 11 can be accepted, based on the results of the survey. Following a sports brand on social media, social network sites or sharing sites does increase the brand commitment towards the surveyed brand. Hypotheses 12 to 14 had an interaction effect of following a sports brand and market share, and tested the impact of this interaction on brand commitment. For the respondents that follow the surveyed brand, this positive effect has not been proven. For all, Asics and Nike respondents there is a positive and significant effect of following a sports brand with a higher market share on social media (platforms) and brand commitment.

Due to the fact that two different questionnaires were spread, several comparisons can be made between Asics and Nike respondents. The results of a logistic regression, needs as independent and the type of survey as dependent, showed that functional, social and psychological needs are more important for Asics followers compared to Nike followers. This does not indicate that Nike followers will not follow the sports brand on social media because of these needs, but the chance that Asics consumers follow the sports brand because of these needs is higher, based on the results.

It is hard to draw any conclusions about the differences of Nike and Asics respondents. Is it reasonable that two different groups of participants, Asics and Nike respondents, answer a little bit different. This can be the explanation of having some variety in the results. In case of surveys of Nike more respondents are actually followers, were most of the Asics respondents had to imagine why they would follow the sports brand. This imagination can result in a different attitude towards the brand. It is hard to explain the differences in another way, because the expectation was that the results of both brands would be more or less the same. Both respondents are people that follow a sports brand, which is active in the running industry, on social media.

Following a sports brand on social network sites has a higher impact on brand commitment, compared to following a sports brand on sharing sites. A possible explanation of this results can be that more respondents actually follow a sports brand on social network sites, or are active on social network sites. The respondents that had to imagine why and on what channel they would

follow a sports brand, indicated that they preferred to follow a sports brand on social network sites.

In summary, not all hypotheses can be accepted, based on the collected data. Not all results are significant and/or have a positive B coefficient. It is not possible to give one specific reason why consumers follow a sports brand on social media. A reason for this, could be the small sample size, or that other variables should also be taken into account why a consumer follows a sports brand on social media, so there is no causal but a correlational relationship.

It has been proven that functional needs have a positive effect on following a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites. Following a sports brand on social media, social network sites and sharing sites does increase the brand commitment towards the brand according the results. The impact of market share and following a sports brand on social media (platforms) on brand commitment is more difficult to support. For some groups a positive effect has been proven.

The research question cannot be completely answered. The answer about the specific reasons why consumers follow a sports brand on social media cannot be answered due to insignificant results. Options for further research to answer the question will be given in the next paragraph. The impact of following a sports brand on social media on brand commitment is positive. When a consumer follows a sports brand on social media the brand commitment towards the sports brand increases. The results are not applicable for every situation, so we should be aware of the limitations of this research. Based on the results of this study, with all the respondents, the positive effect of following a sports brand with a higher market share on social media, social network sites and sharing sites is larger if you compare it, with a sports brand with a lower market share.

5.2 Implications of the research

As mentioned earlier, social media started to play an important role in the strategy of companies. For brands as Asics and Nike is it not only about selling products. Consumers want to have an experience with searching and finding information, buying the product and use the product. This experience can be created through social media.

Based on this study, it can be stated that consumers follow a sports brand on social network sites and sharing sites because of functional needs. Companies should focus on these needs. Nowadays, consumers are looking for more, new and better information, updates and discounts, and opinions of other consumers. A company should focus on providing efficient information through social network sites and sharing sites. Furthermore, consumers are looking for hedonic needs: entertainment, fun, enjoyment on these social media platforms. Therefore companies should focus on providing useful information, in an entertaining way.

Following sports brand on social media can increase the brand commitment of respondents towards the sports brand. If brand commitment of a consumer increases they are more positive about the sports brand. Consumers are able to share information, movies or photos very easily via social network sites and sharing sites. A company should provide the content which can be shared by a consumer. It is not necessarily to focus only on the consumers that already follow the sports brand.

This research has shown that there is more brand commitment when consumers follow a sports brand on social network sites compared to sharing sites. This study also showed that respondents indicate that a higher market share and following a sports brand on social media, social network sites and sharing sites lead to increased brand commitment, compared to brands with a lower market share.

Obviously, we should be aware of the limitations of this research. The results presented in this research are not applicable in every situation and can be directly used by every company. Not all independent variables that can influence the dependent variable are taken into account.

5.3 Limitations of the research

Like other survey researches, this study also has limitations. Due to these limitations, the results are not always relevant and applicable for every company and situation. It is necessary to give notice of the limitations. In this paragraph these limitations are given.

First of all, a larger sample size would have increased the reliability of the results. The dataset consisted of 302 respondents. Out of 302 respondents only 112 participants followed the surveyed brand, 39 of Asics and 73 of Nike. That being said, this small sample size of followers might result in insignificant outcomes. The questionnaire was sent out randomly, a Nike follower could get an Asics questionnaire. If it would have been manipulated, the distribution could have been skewed.

To collect more respondents for the questionnaire, all the respondents that did not follow the surveyed sports brand were asked the following: *'if you do not follow the sports brand, imagine you would follow the sports brand, and indicate why and on what channels you would follow the sports brand'*. For some respondents it is hard to imagine why they would follow a sports brand. A larger sample size is necessary to create a large dataset with respondents that follow the sports brand. This research tested the hypotheses with a combination of respondents that actually followed the sports brand and respondents that had to imagine they followed the sports brand. Combining the respondents might have resulted in insignificant outcomes. Linked to this drawback, only asking about the brands Asics and Nike can be a limitation as well. Not only the sports brands Asics and Nike are active on social media and act in this industry, but other brands like Reebok or Adidas as well.

The limitation, of a small sample size, brings the research to another drawback. For this research it was almost impossible to use segments with the results. Almost 85 % of all respondents had at least a HBO or university degree, which only represents a small segment of the Dutch citizens. Another drawback is the age of the respondents, 144 respondents are between 23 and 27 years old. The reason for this type of respondents is my network, which I actively approached. My network consists of higher educated and younger people.

A fourth constraint of this research might be the possibility to choose between Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. I decided to only present these social media sites, because these are the most used sites in The Netherlands ("Marketingfacts", n.d.). A next study might also take Pinterest, Vimeo, Flickr and other social media sites into account.

A fifth limitation is about the second part of the questionnaire. With the current survey respondents could only mark the reason why a respondent would follow the sports brand on social media, what resulted in yes or no. For example, “I follow Nike on Facebook to keep updated of discounts”: yes or no. For this part a likert-scale between 1 (disagree) and 5 (agree) would have given the respondent more options. A respondent does not have to totally (dis)agree, but somewhere between, this was not possible in the survey.

The sixth limitation is the insignificance of several outcomes. This is an important constraint, because some of the hypotheses could not be accepted. A reason for this limitation might be that the second part of the questionnaire has only the possibility to answer with yes or no. Another reason might be the fact that the respondents are not only consumers that follow the sports brand. Also the order of the questions in the survey could have mattered. The functional needs were more significant compared to social, psychological and hedonic needs. Participants may get bored during the questionnaire and stopped filling out the questionnaire as concentrated as they did in the beginning. It can also be that not only the needs influence the reason to follow a sports brand on social media, but other variables as well. This might explain the insignificant outcomes.

The last limitation is about the structure of the research model. The variables consist of different values: needs are continuous, following on social media are binary, market share was binary and brand commitment was continuous. It is hard to make a complete analysis from needs to brand commitment with the different variables. Besides the insignificant outcomes, it was hard to give a complete answer on the research question.

To summarize the main limitations, the hypotheses were tested with a group of respondents that follow and not follow the sports brands on social media, people had to imagine why they would follow a sports brands, and the second part of the questionnaire could only be answered with yes or no, instead of a scale. Also the structure of the research model should be changed in order to answer the complete research question. Therefore, we should be cautious with applying the results of this research for every situation and company.

5.4 Further research

As the research has some limitations, further research is recommended in order to get more explainable results. In this paragraph I will shortly discuss possible solutions for some of the limitations, further research, and my thoughts on why further research is necessary.

The sample size of the research can be larger; especially the group of respondents that actually follow one of the sports brands on social media should be increased. Creating a respondent group of only people that follow a sports brand might increase the significance level. By doing so, the people that do not follow a sports brand on social media can be taken out the dataset. This makes the ‘imagine if’ question unnecessary. Another point for further research is creating the second part of the questionnaire with a likert-scale. This may result in a more correlated and significant outcome.

Asking about the reason to follow a sports brand on social media on more social media sites, might also lead to clearer results. In addition of creating a broader research, more brands should be involved in order to make better comparisons. Companies can draw better conclusions with a larger dataset and different sports brands and social media sites. Besides having a larger dataset with different social media sites, there should be more variety between the demographical statistics. This will lead to the possibility for companies to only focus on i.e. 20-30 years old or lower/higher educated people. Expanding the variables can give a better explanation of the reason to follow a sports brand on social media. Probably more variables, besides the four needs, have influence on the reason to follow a sports brand.

A next research can also look at the different types of uses of social media. Does an active user have different reasons to follow a sports brand compared to a passive user. Companies can gather information about consumers, so they are able to understand and meet the needs of consumers with further research. And researching about the behavior of an active user can be interesting. Does an active user spread more positive word-of-mouth or purchases more items of the brand followed on social media.

Another point that should be taken into account for further research can be the weight of every need. Not every need is valued as important as one specific need. Functional needs can be, in example, valued more important as a reason to follow social media compared to social needs. The differences in importance of the needs can be taken into account in further research.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1

The questionnaire below is about Asics, but the brand name Asics is replaceable for Nike.

Page: 1 (introduction)

The purpose of my master thesis Marketing at Erasmus University is to research consumer behavior regarding the reason to follow a sports brand on social media. For this study developed a questionnaire. Answering the questionnaire will take approximately 7 minutes from you time. The responses are strictly confidential and anonymous.

Thank you very much for your cooperation on my research by answering my questionnaire, I highly appreciate your help.

Kind regards,

Boudewijn

Page: 2 (1st part)

There are different channels on social media, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. First there will be some general questions. Next to that some statements will be given, please indicate if you agree or disagree.

Please give an answer for every question with a *

1. What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female

2. In what country are you born? *

3. What is your educational level? *

- No education

- Less than high school
- High school
- College
- Bachelor or Master degree

4. Do you practice sports? *

- Yes, namely
- No

5. Are you active on social media? If yes, on what channels? (Multiple answers possible)

- I am not active
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Other, namely:

6. If you are active on social media, in what frequency? *

- I am not active
- Daily
- 2-4 times a week
- 5-7 times a week

7. If you are active on social media, do you follow any sports brands on social media? If so, which brands? (Multiple brands possible) *

- I am not active
- Yes, namely:
- No

Page: 3 (2nd part)

Several examples of how to follow Asics on social media are: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. Now, there will be some questions about Asics and social media.

8. Do you follow Asics on a social media channel? (Multiple answers possible)

- No
- Yes, on Facebook
- Yes, on Twitter
- Yes, on YouTube
- Yes, other namely:

Can you indicate on what channels you follow Asics, and give the reason(s).

If you do not follow Asics, imagine you follow Asics on social media, and please indicate why and on what channels you would follow Asics.

Please answer the following questions as clearly as possible.

9.

	To keep updated of discounts	It is an efficient way to gather product information	It is an easy way to get product information
Facebook			
Twitter			
YouTube			
Other, namely:			

10.

	The Asics page provides a good interface for members to communicate	To build a relationship with other members on the Asics page	To exchange information with other members	To ask/provide help to other members
Facebook				
Twitter				
YouTube				
Other, namely:				

11.

	To belong to the Asics group, which	To identify myself with Asics	Because my friends follow the Asics page

members have the same characteristics as well

Facebook
Twitter
YouTube
Other, namely:

12.

I have fun using it and it relaxes me	There are funny movies, photos, and stories on the Asics page	It is entertaining
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Facebook
Twitter
YouTube
Other, namely:

Page: 4 (3rd part)

Statements below are about Asics, can you say if you agree or disagree.

1 = disagree (mee oneens)

5 = agree (mee eens)

13.

Disagree - Agree

I want Asics to stay successful
Asics is important to me
I am a loyal customer of Asics
I buy as much products of Asics as I can
I really like Asics

14.

Disagree - Agree

I would like to introduce Asics to others
I would like to recommend Asics to others
I really like to talk about Asics with others

15.

Disagree - Agree

I would like to suggest new ideas for the product or services to the company

I would like to actively participate in customer research
 I would like to provide my opinion on product-related problems and improvement methods
 I would like to be an actively participating member of the Asics page on social media
 I would like to suggest new ideas for the product or services to the company

16.

Disagree - Agree

I will (keep) buy(ing) products of Asics
 I would buy mainly products of Asics instead of its competitors
 I prefer to buy products of Asics compared to other brands

Page: 5 (end)

Thank you very much for your cooperation on my research by answering my questionnaire, I highly appreciate your help.

Thank you,
 Boudewijn

Appendix 2

Cronbach's Alpha of brand commitment for all different groups

Group	Cronbach's Alpha
Respondents that do not follow	0.841
Asics respondents that do not follow	0.848
Nike respondents that do not follow	0.839

Appendix 3

Formulas used for the regressions

- Hypotheses 1 to 4:
 - Social media = B0 + B1 (functional needs) + B2 (social needs) + B3 (psychological needs) + B4 (hedonic needs) + E
- Hypotheses 5 to 8:

- Social network sites = $B_0 + B_1$ (functional needs) + B_2 (social needs) + B_3 (psychological needs) + B_4 (hedonic needs) + E
- Sharing sites = $B_0 + B_1$ (functional needs) + B_2 (social needs) + B_3 (psychological needs) + B_4 (hedonic needs) + E
- Hypotheses 9 to 11:
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (follow sports brand on social media) + E
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (follow sports brand on social network sites) + E
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (follow sports brand on sharing sites) + E
- Hypotheses 12 to 14:
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (Nike market share * follow sports brand on social media) + E
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (Nike market share * follow sports brand on social network sites) + E
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (Nike market share * follow sports brand on sharing sites) + E
- Regression of table 12:
 - Asics survey = $B_0 + B_1$ (functional needs) + B_2 (social needs) + B_3 (psychological needs) + B_4 (hedonic needs) + E
- Regression of table 15:
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (follow sports brand on social network sites) + B_2 (follow sports brand on sharing sites) + E
- Regression of table 17:
 - Brand commitment = $B_0 + B_1$ (Nike market share * follow sports brand on social network sites) + B_2 (Nike market share * follow sports brand on sharing sites)