

Introducing Relational Dialectics on Actor Engagement in the Social Media Ecosystem

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To Cite: Rodoula H. Tsiotsou, (2021). Introducing Relational Dialectics on Actor Engagement in the Social Media Ecosystem, Journal of Services Marketing (forthcoming)

DOI: 10.1108/JSM-01-2020-0027

Accepted: October 1, 2020

Abstract

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to provide an in-depth understanding of actor engagement (AE) on social media by proposing a holistic and integrative conceptual framework.

Methodology/Approach. Based on a sample of 118 articles, the paper draws on the service-dominant logic (SDL)-based service ecosystem perspective combined with the tenets of relational dialectics as theoretical lenses to inform AE research in social media.

Findings. The paper proposes a framework of AE in social media called the TASC model, an acronym of Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis-Conflict. TASC introduces the dialectical nature of AE and discusses the contexts and levels of AE in the social media ecosystem as well as their evolving processes.

Practical Implications. Firms can apply the knowledge provided by TASC to gather marketing intelligence and develop marketing strategies to anticipate tensions, motivate the desired AE intensity and valence, and reinforce value co-creation in the social media ecosystem.

Originality. TASC is a comprehensive framework that, for the first time, explains engagement at all levels of the social media ecosystem by combining the SDL-based service ecosystem view with the relational dialectics perspective.

Keywords: customer/actor engagement; social media ecosystem; relational dialectics; brand/brand community engagement; service-dominant logic

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Marketing scholars and practitioners recognize the prominent role of actor engagement (AE) in social media that delivers significant marketing and business outcomes (Dessart, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar and Kumar, 2020). Customers engage in social media by co-creating experiences, contributing to content, providing product reviews (positive or negative), and utilizing their devices in multiple touch-points. Social media are beneficial because they meet customers' needs, desires, and interests and promote interactivity for business promotion and market intelligence. Social media are becoming AE and brand-building channels, thus gathering personal and collective data to provide better experiences and drive business growth (Bowden et al., 2017). On social media, customers engage in various behaviors and interactions with brands, firms, and other customers to (co)create value for themselves and/or others (Baldus et al., 2015). Therefore, social media AE is seen as emotional bonding that extends beyond loyalty and satisfaction (Kumar and Pansari, 2016) and influences value co-creation/co-destruction (Storbacka et al., 2016; Yuan et al. 2020).

Although the significance of AE in social media has been acknowledged in the literature, the majority of the available research sheds light on certain aspects of AE, such as the dyadic interactions that take place at a micro-level (e.g., interactions between customers and the brand page) (Alexander et al., 2018; Bowden et al., 2017), and does not provide a holistic view of all possible interactions. However, the focus of AE is not just singular, but actors engage concurrently in social media with brands, brand community members, other members of social media, firms, and brand managers (Marzocchi et al., 2013). In line with this reasoning, a recent research stream calls for broadening AE research's scope to a more holistic approach that encompasses all possible interactions at multiple levels of aggregation (Alexander et al., 2018). The full spectrum of interactions needs to be examined, as different interactions and contexts may result in distinct AE reactions (emotional, cognitive, and

behavioral) (Dessart et al., 2017), which in turn may influence value (co)creation/destruction and business performance (Bowden et al., 2017; Yuan et al. 2020). Therefore, a genuine need exists to understand AE with different foci objects and contexts (Alexander et al., 2018; Bowden et al., 2017) across all levels of the social media ecosystem.

This paper seeks to address this gap by developing a comprehensive theoretical framework of AE in social media that includes dyadic, triadic, and multi-actor service encounters. Accordingly, this paper aims to propose a conceptual framework that explains a) the different interactions occurring simultaneously at all levels of aggregation of the social media ecosystem and b) how these interactions shape and, at the same time, are shaped by the social media ecosystem. To accomplish these objectives, the SDL-based service ecosystem and the relational dialectics perspectives are deployed to provide the necessary levels, contexts, and dynamics of AE in social media. The outcome of integrating the two views is the TASC model of AE on social media. TASC is the acronym of Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis-Conflict (TASC model hereafter).

The paper contributes in several ways to social media AE research. First, the proposed theoretical framework adopts a holistic perspective that provides new insights and clarifies AE in social media. TASC combines the service-dominant logic (SDL)-based service ecosystem approach with relational dialectics theory (RDT) to shed light on the social media ecosystem's dynamic and evolving nature. Specifically, the SDL-based service ecosystem view expands AE in social media beyond dyadic interactions, by considering the foci objects, levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro), and embedded context. The paper clarifies the levels of analysis when studying AE in social media and explains the dyadic, triadic, and multiple interactions that take place in this context. Specifically, it shows how different social media engagement contexts are interconnected and how different actors within this service ecosystem coordinate their engagement with multiple foci objects at the same time since “one

cannot fully understand the activity at one level without viewing it from another” (Vargo and Lusch, 2017, p. 13). Broadening the analysis level on AE in social media reflects the existence and interconnectedness of multiple value (co)creation processes, embedded in multiple contexts, potentially conflicting.

Second, the paper introduces RDT to elucidate the dynamic and evolving nature of AE in social media. In particular, RDT informs AE in social media by clarifying how individual actors interact with various objects (thesis and antithesis), and in different contexts to co-create (synthesis) or co-destroy value (conflict). TASC underlines the dialectical and evolving nature of AE in social media as an integral component of the social media ecosystem. Third, instead of adopting only a nomological approach to explaining AE in social media as have the majority of previous frameworks (Barger et al., 2016; Dessart, 2017; Santini et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2013), TASC takes a broader perspective to understand and explain the phenomenon in this context. Thus, it responds to calls for broadening the scope of AE research (Brodie et al., 2016; Storbacka et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017).

Fourth, TASC proposes a broader process of AE in social media that shows not only how AE shapes the social media environment (brands pages, online brand communities, and social media institutions), but also how the social media environment shapes AE. Interactions at each level and context shape the social media ecosystem and vice versa. Thus, TASC signifies that AE is not only interactive but also dialectical in nature. Finally, the proposed framework highlights AE's processes and outcomes at all levels of analysis in the social media ecosystem and embedded contexts, providing a holistic view and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Academics could use the proposed framework to understand AE in social media both in the online and offline ecosystem by considering it through lenses that are novel to the literature. Moreover, firms could benefit from this

framework by developing appropriate strategies that facilitate customer interactions in social media and lead to positive AE and value co-creation behavior.

The paper proceeds by presenting first the method used for this paper and then explaining the concept of AE. Afterward, the SDL-based ecosystem view and relational dialectics are discussed. Based on the two perspectives, the proposed integrative framework, TASC, is presented. Furthermore, the various aggregation levels with the main AE dialectics and processes in the social media ecosystem are analyzed. Finally, the paper discusses important theoretical and managerial implications, and provides future research directions.

Method

Developing an AE integrative framework on social media requires identifying the relevant literature, organizing it into groups, and analyzing their compatibility (MacInnis, 2011). The current analysis followed four steps. (1) First, a systematic review of AE's literature in marketing and communications was carried out using 14 related terms (*CE, AE, consumer engagement, brand engagement, brand community engagement, CE and AE on social media, online engagement, consumer engagement on social media, SDL, SDL and social media, dialectics, relational dialectics, and relational dialectics and social media*). Specific selection criteria and procedures were used (e.g., number of citations and journal ranking) for selecting and including the articles of the paper. A final sample of 118 articles was used. (2) Then, the final sample of articles was organized based on two distinct research frameworks, *SDL-based service ecosystem view*, and *relational dialectics*. (3) The sample of articles was categorized based on their context focus in relation to the level of the social media ecosystem. (4) Finally, an integrative perspective of AE on social media was formed by building on the compatible elements of these two frameworks.

The Concept of Actor Engagement on Social Media

The theoretical foundations of AE are rooted in the Nordic school of thought (Grönroos, 2009) and the SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). AE has been considered pivotal in value co-creation and the co-creation of experiences. For example, Grönroos (2009, p. 353) states, “The goal for marketing is to engage the firm with the customers’ processes with an aim to support value creation in those processes, in a mutually beneficial way.” The SDL-based service ecosystem views information technology as central in the formation and functioning of service ecosystems where resources (e.g., information, skills, knowledge) are combined and exchanged in new ways that create value for those actors engaged in the exchange. In line with this perspective, social media is a digital service ecosystem where “value-proposing social and economic actors [interact] through institutions, technology, and language to (1) co-produce service offerings, (2) engage in mutual service provision, and (3) co-create value” (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, p. 185).

According to Brodie et al. (2011), AE may be considered a multidimensional concept, reflecting a psychological state resulting from interactive customer experiences with focal points within service relationships. A more recent definition of AE views it as “psychologically based willingness to invest in the undertaking of focal interactions with particular engagement objects” (Hollebeek et al., 2016, p. 2). A body of literature considers engagement only a behavioral manifestation because taking action is what differentiates actors who engage from those who do not (Kumar et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2002). However, some scholars view the concept as emotional (Catteuw et al., 2007) or cognitive in nature (Guthrie and Cox, 2001), whereas several researchers argue for a three-dimensional approach (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2016). Thus, it has been supported that AE consists of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Brodie et al., 2011). Cognitive engagement refers to the overall mental activity of focusing on something,

involving attention and absorption. Emotional engagement involves enthusiasm and enjoyment concerning a focal object, while behavioral engagement denotes the active manifestations of the concept, such as sharing, reviewing, learning, recommending, advocating, and endorsing behaviors in social media (Dessart, 2017; Sweeney et al., 2020).

Nowadays, the tremendous popularity of social media signifies its importance in the marketplace. According to Statista (2020), there are 3.6 billion social media users worldwide (half of the world population), which will reach 4.4 billion in 2025. The emergence of new technologies and social media has empowered consumers and their position in the marketplace while providing firms with new communication and interaction tools. Customers engage with social media by co-creating experiences, contributing to content, providing product reviews, and utilizing their devices in multiple touch-points (Dessart, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar and Kumar, 2020). Thus, AE on social media has become an important topic in marketing for both academics and practitioners.

Actor engagement on social media may be considered an individual's state of mind, or disposition (Storbacka et al., 2016), reflecting the extent of their interactions with a particular focal object (Alexander et al., 2018) beyond transactions. In other words, engagement behavior in social media reflects actors' voluntary investments of resources, such as effort, time, and energy, into interactions with a focal engagement object to create value (Alexander et al., 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sweeney et al., 2015). The "object" of engagement in social media might be a product or a brand page, a post, or an advertisement or an advertiser. Emotional engagement refers to, for example, the emotional reactions to a video of child trafficking on YouTube, whereas cognitive engagement concerns, for example, information processing and articulation after reading a post on Facebook. Behavioral manifestations of actor engagement in social media may include sharing content, recommending brands or content, customer-to-customer interactions, blogging, and writing reviews (Dessart, 2017;

Sweeney et al., 2020). The user-friendliness and popularity of social media have led to a significant increase in AE with businesses and other actors. The new ways and tools social media provide to actors to engage with firms, and their brands call for a better understanding of the concept in this context. In this paper, the three-dimensional approach is embraced and adopted regarding the social media environment.

Social Media as a Service Ecosystem

The SDL-based service ecosystem view provides an ideal conceptual framework for a holistic perspective on social media engagement, where interactions and exchanges of service occur among various stakeholders (e.g., brands, brand communities, firms, advertisers, and customers) at various levels of the social media service ecosystem (micro, meso, and macro). *Service ecosystems* are “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchanges” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 11). Value must be understood in the context of complex networks that are part of dynamic service ecosystems, comprising not only firms and customers but also their contextual communities (e.g., brand communities) and other stakeholders (e.g., advertisers) (Lush and Vargo, 2014; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). As part of the online ecosystem, social media are vast ecosystems with complex networks of relationships and a multiplicity of social nets and levels of interactions (Dessart, 2017). Social media engagement is a context-specific event of AE (Brodie et al., 2013) worth considering since engagement varies across the various levels of the social media ecosystem. Chandler and Vargo (2011) proposed a three-level conceptualization of context based on the exchange scheme: a) the micro-context, referring to direct service-for-service exchanges between actors; b) the meso-context, denoting the triadic indirect service-for-service

exchanges between dyads of actors, and c) the macro-context, concerning complex and simultaneous direct and indirect service-for-service exchanges among triads of actors.

AE is interactive and, therefore, context-dependent. However, it can be fully comprehended by examining not only the context (Brodie et al., 2011) but also the level of analysis within which it takes place in the social media ecosystem. Previously, social media engagement has been mainly considered dual-level engagement, including brand community engagement and brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, 2017), whereas, in the TASC model, it is considered three-level engagement as the SDL-service ecosystem perspective denotes. Thus, it is proposed that actors might become engaged (a) with the brand – micro-level, where direct exchanges take place between the actors (e.g., customers interact with the Samsung page on Facebook), (b) in a brand community – meso-level, where triadic indirect exchanges take place between dyads of actors (e.g., customers interact with other customers and non-customers at the Samsung community on Facebook), and (c) in the social media community – macro-level where complex direct and indirect exchanges take place (e.g., advertisers interact with the managers of Facebook and Twitter to follow their rules of advertising to communicate with their customers who are also connected with other businesses and advertisers) (Figure 1).

"Please insert Figure 1 here."

The social media ecosystem is part of the broader online ecosystem that includes websites of various types and purposes (e.g., firms' websites, advertisers' websites, retailers' websites, suppliers' websites, metasearch engines, and competitors' websites). At the same time, the online and social media ecosystems are not in isolation from the offline ecosystem. For example, a brand might have a Facebook page (social media ecosystem) and a website (online ecosystem) and simultaneously be present at various physical stores (offline ecosystem). This approach is in line with the conceptual framework of AE proposed by

Alexander et al. (2018), in which actors can be engaged in all of the levels of a service ecosystem (e.g., visit a store and try on a brand, visit the website of the brand and gather information, and become a member of the brand community on social media to interact with advertisers or other customers). The study of Li et al. (2017) is the only empirical evidence that shows the relationship between the offline and the online-social media ecosystems and how the two systems evolve. Specifically, their case study shows how offline dyadic engagement (offline ecosystem) can lead to online-social media engagement where initially, dyadic and triadic interactions lead to the creation of networked relationships, both offline and online. The findings of their study confirm the dynamic nature of AE. However, this level of aggregation (offline) is beyond this paper's scope and, therefore, not analyzed further.

Institutions, structures, and social norms shape AE in these ecosystems while, at the same time, AE influences them and, thereby, shapes the service ecosystem. Customers may enter the social media ecosystem at the same or different levels, integrate resources with other social and economic actors to co-create value (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), and at some point of time, disengage and exit the evolving network (Alexander et al., 2018; Chandler and Lusch, 2015). Actors, their dispositions, and engagement platforms provide the engagement conditions, which form the context where interactions occur (Storbacka et al., 2016). This context-dependent level of engagement refers to the focal object of engagement, which might be broader and more complex when it involves social media platforms and/or other entities (e.g., direct and indirect interactions of advertisers with influencers and customers on YouTube and Twitter). However, it might be narrow when the focus of engagement is the members of a brand community (e.g., Sony brand community members on Facebook) and even narrower when the focal object of engagement is the brand (e.g., Sony brand page on LinkedIn). Often, the three levels of AE on social media are used interchangeably in the literature. However, the level and focus object of engagement differ, and one level does not

necessarily include another (e.g., one can be engaged in his/her LinkedIn group but not follow any brand community on this social media platform). While actors engage in various contexts at the different levels of the social media ecosystem, “it is not possible, feasible, or necessary to accept all value propositions” (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, p. 6), especially when those propositions are related to, or reflect, different or potentially conflicting beliefs and social and cultural norms of the actor. Therefore, conflicts and tensions can arise as a result of AE in different contexts and can be understood through the lenses of dialectical theory, and specifically from RDT.

AE in Social Media as Relational Dialectics

The notion of dialectic was used by ancient Greeks thousands of years ago, while its more recent versions continue to emphasize the relational, processual, and contradictory nature of the creation of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 1990). The SDL-based service ecosystem view (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2017) is in line with the dialectical perspective, which asserts that "phenomena cannot be meaningfully understood by reducing them into single levels of description or by assuming a metaphysical independence between levels of description" (Bolis and Schilbach, 2020, p. 522). In this light, individuals cannot be considered in isolation from their social interactions, but both as a cause and result of reciprocal adjustments. In other words, dialectics suggest that actors should be seen through the lenses of their interactions within the social media ecosystem and not in isolation. This is due to the reciprocal relations developed over time, where actors shape the social media ecosystem with their interactions, and at the same time, the social media ecosystem shapes their interactions.

In dialectics, this process is characterized as an internalization and externalization process, and it can explain the co-construction of AE and the social media ecosystem.

Internalization refers to the active reconstruction and synthesis of incoming information and past experiences, while externalization is the tool (a broad term encompassing "intellectual objects" of communication) that translates inner processes into collective transformations (Dafermos, 2002; Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2004). In other words, actors change themselves and their engagement through changing the social media ecosystem in a "socioculturally mediated procedure of mutual adjustment" (Bolis and Schilbach, 2020, p. 524). Through the lenses of dialectics, the evolution of social media and AE should be considered as dynamic, reciprocal, and cumulative processes (Levins and Lwontin, 1985). Thus, the development of AE and social media cannot be regarded as static, but as the interplay of dynamic and reciprocal interactions.

Grounded on dialectics theory, Baxter (1990; 2011) proposed RDT. RDT, a communication theory, views relational life as constant progress and motion, where interactional, contextual, and public and private dialectics take place. *Interactional dialectics* refers to tensions resulting from and constructed by communication (e.g., customer–brand interactions), whereas *contextual dialectics* results from the place of the relationship within a culture (e.g., a social media brand community). *Public and private dialectic* is a contextual dialectic resulting from a private relationship and public life (West and Turner, 2010).

According to RDT, individuals try to balance the effects of forces, acting to simultaneously bring them together and pull them apart (dialectics). As people communicate in relationships, they try to reconcile these conflicting forces (e.g., needs and desires), but they never eliminate the need for both sides of the opposition (West and Turner, 2010). For example, customers try to balance between their privacy and freedom of use in social media, or between their online and offline friends. This assumption differs from the SDL perspective, which considers actor interactions as the integration of resources to co-create value.

According to RDT, value co-creation in actor interactions is the outcome of reconciled conflicting forces and the positive outcome of the continuous struggles of social actors.

RDT supports that relationships are not linear (assumption 1), but are changing (assumption 2) due to contradictions/tensions (assumption 3) that are organized and negotiated through communication (assumption 4). “Changes and transformation are the hallmarks of relational interactions” (West and Turner, 2010, p. 204). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) assert that “social actors give life through their communicative practices to the contradictions that organize their relationships. The social reality of contradictions is produced and reproduced by the communicative action of social actors” (p. 59). Contrary to the SDL view, in RDT, social reality is the outcome of constant contradictions between actors. Thus, RDT supports that any social interaction is, by nature, contradictory, and conflicting. The contradictions that arise from actor interactions go through a continuous negotiation process to create value for the actors involved. Dialectics take place internally (within dyadic interactions – “RDT 1.0”) and externally (between social groups and their social networks – RDT 2.0”) and are evolving continuously. This categorization resembles the dyadic, triadic, and multiple interactions in the social media ecosystem described above under the SDL-based ecosystem view. The “goal of RDT is to show how particular meanings are socially constructed and sustained through everyday communicative activities..... and understand particular, situated communication” (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008, p. 350).

Previous research applying RDT on social media has focused on social networking sites (Kim and Yun, 2008; Li et al., 2008) and on explaining romantic relationships in that context (Fox, Osborn, and Warber, 2014). Due to its flexibility, openness, and focus on discourse in interpersonal and social processes (Fox et al., 2014), RDT is deemed suitable to explain AE in the social media ecosystem. RDT supports three main propositions (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008, p. 350):

1. Meanings emerge from the struggle of different, often opposing, sources (*contradictions*). Thus, for actors to engage in social media and (co)create value, they must, to some extent, fuse their perspectives (affective and cognitive) while at the same time sustaining the uniqueness of their perspectives (Bakhtin, 1984).
2. The interpenetration of discourses is both synchronic and diachronic (*motion*). In other words, the interactions between actors in the social media ecosystem are occurring over time (diachronic) and one moment in time (synchronic).
3. The interpenetration of competing discourses constitutes social reality. RDT supports that interactions form identity (communication) and are "constitutive of the social world" because they make it meaningful.

To deal with the emerged contradictions, actors use different coping mechanisms. According to Baxter (1988), there are four strategies used to cope with dialectic tensions: *cyclic alteration* (choosing different poles for different times – changes over time), *segmentation* (choosing different poles for different contexts), *selection* (choosing one pole and acting as though the other does not exist - prioritizing), and *integration* (synthesizing the oppositions). *Integration* can take three forms: *neutralizing*, which refers to compromising between the oppositions, *disqualifying*, which refers to exempting certain issues from the general pattern, and *reframing*, which refers to transforming the dialectic so that it no longer contains an opposition (West and Turner, 2010). The above mechanisms for dealing with dialectical tensions share three characteristics: they are improvisational (the continuous nature of the tension does not change over time), they are affected by time (communication choices are affected by the past, enacted in the present, and filled with anticipation for the future), and they are complicated by unintended consequences (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996; West and Turner, 2010). The inclusion of coping mechanisms/strategies and their various types, proposed by RDT, inform the SDL service ecosystem view and provide useful

insights on how AE may lead to value co-creation. This phase of value co-creation was missing from the SDL literature and, therefore, it offers new directions for research.

The TASC Model of AE in the Social Media Ecosystem

In the present paper, based on the main tenants of RDT and the above discussion on the SDL-based service ecosystem approach, a conceptual model is developed and proposed, named TASC (Figure 2). The TASC model underscores the dialectic and evolving nature of AE in the social media ecosystem. TASC reflects the role of AE at different levels of the social media ecosystem in synchronously and diachronically creating/re-creating or destroying/re-destroying value. Value is seen here as a jointly created/destroyed phenomenon emerging through interactions and (thesis–antithesis) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) and the emerging dialectics. Co-created value refers to the mutual benefits that all involved actors (e.g., customers, firms, brands, and other customers) derive from sharing in joint activities.

"Please insert Figure 2 here."

In line with the RDT perspective, AE on social media refers to sociocultural discourses/interactions of varied intensity. The intensity of engagement denotes the amount, duration, and frequency of customers' interactions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) at all levels of the social media ecosystem (macro, meso, and micro). Thus, engagement may be either voiced by the relationship actors (active engagement) or unexpressed by taking the form of intra-personal communication – internal dialogues (passive engagement) (Baxter, 2011; Malthouse et al., 2013; Muntinga et al. 2011; Tsiotso, 2016a; 2016b). These inner dialogues may represent the psychological state (affective and cognitive) of AE that has been characterized as passive or parasocial (Tsiotso, 2016a; 2016b), while the “voiced discourses” represent the behavioral aspect of engagement known as *praxis* or active

engagement (Malthouse et al., 2013; Muntinga et al. 2011). In *praxis*, the dialectics are created and re-created through active participation and interactions which, in turn, create, re-create, and change the nature of the relationship between the actors (e.g., the customer and the brand). Thus, the passive and active engagement notion is in line with RDT, which supports that meaning-making is the outcome of the interplay of competing discourses between related parties. “Discourses” are systems of meaning that are uttered whenever we make intelligible utterances aloud with others (or in our heads when we hold internal conversations) (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008, p. 349). Thus, actors might be active (e.g., evaluate brand performance or post comments on a brand community on social media) or passive consumers of social media brand content (e.g., read other customers’ reviews or just view comments and uploaded brand material) by engaging in intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues negatively or positively (Tsotsou, 2016a; 2019).

Value co-creation/co-destruction emerges during interactions and as a result of AE. Value co-creation is then a process of dialectical flow between different, often conflicting, interactions/discourses in the social media context. Thus, AE is characterized by two opposite forces: theses and antitheses, which are deemed pivotal in the value creation/destruction process in social media (RDT-Proposition 1). The theses and antitheses of the actors involved in the social media ecosystem, if resolved, will lead to synthesis (value co-creation) or conflict (value co-destruction). However, value co-creation/co-destruction is not stable and may change in the next interactional moment. Thus, in subsequent interactions, actors may co-create/co-destroy value to reproduce the old value or co-create/co-destroy new value. Creation and re-creation of value are seen as a continuous process resulting from different, often competing interactions (RDT-Proposition 2). Moreover, relationships are established or destroyed through the ongoing competitions of daily interactions between actors, and between actors and their social network (RDT-Proposition 3).

Following, the application of TASC at the three levels of the social media ecosystem, and the dialectics involved are analyzed through the lenses of RDT and by taking a broad approach (from micro to macro-level).

Actor–Brand Engagement. Actor–brand engagement includes dyadic interactions (micro-level) and refers to the psychological behavioral manifestations “that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (Verhoef et al., 2010, p. 248). AE with a brand on social media refers to “a customer's level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, pp. 565). Through the RDT lenses, AE with a brand concerns interpersonal discourse/interaction reflecting the more idiosyncratic meanings negotiated within the actor-brand relationship (Baxter, 2011). Fournier and Avery (2011) argue that "when brands crash the social media party, they can generally expect a fight," indicating the dialectical nature of the social media ecosystem. Baxter (2011) argued that three main dialectics exist in interpersonal relationships (Table 1), *the expression-privacy* (i.e., openness-closeness–protection), *the stability-change* (i.e., predictability–novelty), and *the integration-separation* (i.e., autonomy–connection) dialectic. *Expression-privacy* refers to the fundamental opposition between what is said and what is not said (e.g., should I comment on the brand's new ad or not?). *Stability–change* captures the struggle between continuity and discontinuity of the relationship (e.g., should I continue following the brand page on Facebook or not?), while *integration–separation* captures the struggle between interdependence and individuation (e.g., should I have an expected customer profile and behave accordingly or be authentic in the social media brand page?) (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). These three dialectics “demonstrate the ongoing and opposing influences where acceptance of and resistance to social norms derive meaning from each other” (Reeden and Way, 2017, p. 33). All three dialectics emerge from the dyadic interactions between the actor/customer and the brand in social media (micro-level) and

provide several implications. For example, expression and privacy are necessary for building effective relationships in this context. Actors and brands must balance expression and privacy because differing privacy practices and expectations may harm their relationship and lead to conflicts (value co-destruction). Marketing studies have shown that dialectics between a brand and a customer can emerge from *value conflicts* (e.g., unethical brand behavior) (Grappi, et al., 2013), *poor service performance* (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012), *power and control struggle*, *fake vs. authenticity*, and *ambiguity vs. transparency* (Fournier and Avery, 2011).

"Please insert Table 1 here."

Brands and actors use various strategies to cope with the dialectics that emerged (Table 1). To deal with the power and control struggle, some companies *hand over control* to their customer (e.g., Skittles). Others *share control* of their social media pages (e.g., Facebook pages of Nutella and Coca Cola) while some *hand over power to their fans for specific brand decisions and tasks* (e.g., product names and package or logo design decisions) (Fournier and Avery, 2011). On the other hand, actors/customers (especially younger ones) may *exchange their privacy with brand benefits* to deal with this dialectic (Fournier and Avery, 2011). However, there is no data available on coping strategies customers use to deal with dialectic tensions on brand pages.

At the micro-level of the TASC model, the dialectics of AE take place internally within dyadic interactions ("RDT 1.0") between the customer and the brand (Baxter, 2011). The two actors interact with each other through their thesis and/or antithesis and, if there is a resolution (synthesis), co-create value. The dialectics that emerged in the customer-brand interactions in social media are integrated communication resources imperative to create meaning for both actors involved. Liking, commenting, posting online reviews (Kabadayi and Price, 2014;), sharing content, and endorsing brands and brand-related content are

manifestations of resolved conflicts that may lead to value co-creation such as collaborative innovation activities (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016). For example, co-developing a new product (value co-creation) is the outcome of a *dialogic/dialectic creativity* interaction between the customer and the brand (Baxter, 2011). This notion is also in line with the SDL-based service ecosystem perspective.

However, if the dialectics between an actor and the brand is not resolved, conflict is created, and value is co-destroyed. Research shows that at the early stage of their interactions with the brand in social media, poor experience with the brand can lead to conflicts expressed as negative AE in the form of negative WOM or brand sabotage or even blackmailing (Kahr et al., 2016). Recently, Azer and Alexander (2018) identified three cognitive (service failure, overpricing, and deception) and two emotional (disappointment and insecurity) triggers of negative AE behavior on social media. The identified triggers indicate customer antithesis to brand practices that have not been resolved and lead to conflict expressed as indirect (discrediting, deriding, and expressing regret) and direct (endorsing competitors, dissuading, and warning) negative AE behavior (value co-destruction). Thus, unresolved conflicts influence the valence of engagement (negative engagement) and may harm the reputation and credibility of the brand (Fisk et al., 2010), while they may lead to customer withdrawal behavior (Adjei et al., 2016). Positive and negative AE due to conflicts resolved or unresolved, respectively, support the valence of engagement identified in the literature (Dolan et al., 2016; Naumann et al., 2020). The valence of engagement is considered here as the emotional and cognitive orientations along with the behavioral manifestations expressed on a continuum (from positive to negative) that actors hold concerning specific interactions based on their intrinsic or extrinsic motives.

Based on a study of six Facebook brand pages, Dineva et al. (2017) identified five strategies companies use to manage conflicts: three verbal (informing, bolstering, and

pacifying) and two non-verbal (censoring and non-engaging). As a result of coping with conflicts, some companies have succeeded in transforming customers' complaints and negative evaluations "into learning opportunities that strengthen the equity of the brand" (Fournier and Avery, 2011, p. 200) and positive changes. For example, an 11-hour delay at the JFK airport during a winter storm prompted JetBlue to use YouTube as a mean to monitor and respond to customers' comments/complaints, which in turn lead to the declaration of the Customer Bill of Rights regarding customer compensation for flight cancellations and delays via the same social media platform (Jaffe, 2007). JetBlue's social outreach resulted in a significant increase in customer satisfaction scores illustrating the dialectical nature of actor-brand engagement in social media and how value co-destruction can re-shape their relationships and, through a new thesis and antithesis, can lead to value co-creation.

Actor-Brand Community Engagement refers to the meso-level (triadic interactions) of the social media ecosystem and includes consumer-to-consumer communications about the brand. Thus, this level includes brand communities in social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube), where actors, as members, can interact with other members of these communities and be engaged cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. A brand community is a collective (subculture) of customers with a shared interest in a specific brand with its values, myths, hierarchy, rituals, and vocabulary (Cova and Pace, 2006). Online brand communities emerge from brand fans' initiatives but also by firms as part of their brand management strategies (Arnone et al., 2010). Online brand communities are embedded on social media, where one key engagement object is the community, representing the other customers in the group (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2017).

RDT supports that the relationship between the actor and the social self is dialectical, in that each constantly creates, modifies, and transfers meanings to the other in a reciprocal

way. However, there is an inherent conflict between how each interprets the symbols (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998) and meanings of interactions. Therefore, the notion of RDT 2.0 is applicable at this level of analysis, where dialectical/dialogical processes take place internally and externally, between members of a brand community, and are continually evolving. The concept of *totality* introduced by RDT is relevant in this context because it signifies the interdependence in relationships. *Totality* refers to the influence of the social and cultural context in the process of AE in social media. Interacting in relationships “involves the constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individuals, interpersonal, and social factors” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7). In other words, the dialectics (thesis and antithesis) of the discourses in a brand community develops the relational culture, which is a mini-culture crafted between the relationship parties (Baxter, 2011). Thus, AE in brand communities is a negotiation process of the brand meaning between its members (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010) that, when agreed upon (synthesis), may co-create value, but when not agreed upon (conflict), may lead to value co-destruction.

Baxter (2011) has proposed two major discursive dialectics of integration in communities applicable to brand communities. The first is the struggle between actor *autonomy and relational connections* that reflects the cultural discourses of individualism and the brand community. The second is the struggle between *inclusion–seclusion* that addresses actors' independence from and integration with the brand community.

Research on offline brand communities indicates that other dialectics might be present as well. In the literature, four groups of dialectics in community groups have been reported: *group–individual, ordered activities–emergent activities, inclusion-exclusion, and acceptable behaviors–unacceptable behaviors* (Kramer, 2004; West and Turner, 2010). Kramer (2004) reported the dialectics of *group commitment vs. commitment to other life activities*, and *tolerance vs. judgment of other group members* that may also be applicable in the context of a

brand community. For example, the group vs. individual AE dialectic in brand communities requires decisions about what and when to share online and with whom (e.g., the brand or the brand community). Moreover, individuals may experience contradictions regarding their identity expressed in online communities (multiplicity vs. consistency of identity) (Putnam, 2015). In their study, Black and Veloutsou (2017) examined the triadic relationships (brand – brand community – customers) and the dialectics between customers and brand communities in creating brand identity online and offline. Their study confirmed the existence of the dialectic "*maintaining an individual identity vs. adopting the identity of the brand community*". In sum, a dialectical perspective reminds us that actors are both brand community members and individuals and that the intercultural interactions taking place in brand communities involve both.

There has been no published research on the dialectics of AE in social media brand communities. At this level of analysis, dialectics are usually identified in the form of conflicts (unresolved dialectics) in online brand communities. Thus, either they assign conflicts as characteristics of a particular group member type such as the “activists” who always complain and are very critical about the brand (Ozboluk and Dursun, 2017) or explain their existence due to the heterogeneity of group membership (De Valck, 2008) or as an inherent element of the relationships developed in online brand communities (Schembri and Latimer, 2016). Although not explicitly recognizing AE's dialectical nature in online brand communities, De Valck (2008, p. 272) and Schembri and Latimer (2016, p. 637) support the inherent nature of dialectics in brand community interactions. Specifically, De Valck (2008, p. 272) states, "As much as members' 'togetherness', conflict needs to be accepted as an inherent part of community life". According to De Valck (2008), online brand communities are filled with competition, conflict, and clashes among their members due to variances in demographics, preferences, and practices. The internal conflicts within a brand community

lead to the formation of tribes that are not stable but are reorganized based on discourses (thesis –antithesis). By inference, it can be argued that the dialectics emerging in brand communities are about the “*right*” or “*ultimate*” *social norms of the group*. At the individual level, actors struggle between belonging to the brand community (and a tribe within it) and differentiating themselves from each other (e.g., in brand expertise), indicating the existence of the *individual (self-promotion) vs. collective identity (collective belonging)* dialectic (De Valck 2008; Schembri and Latimer, 2016). The intra-tribes dialectics reveal the dynamics of shared consumption meanings and practices. Thus, the dialectics of the member-brand, brand community-brand, and member-member interactions illustrate how meaning and value are co-created/co-destroyed and how brand culture is created in social media brand communities.

Through individual and collaborative efforts, social media brand community members can create and co-create value for themselves, other members, non-members, and the brand (Brodie et al., 2011). Thus, at the meso-level of the social media ecosystem, AE is extended beyond dyadic interactive experiences (Van Doorn et al., 2010) to social experiences (Brodie et al., 2013) where members both consume and produce content. The members of brand communities are interested in helping other members, sharing experiences with them, participating in joint activities, and acting volitionally in ways that the community embraces to enhance the community value for themselves and others. This "social" type of engagement can benefit brands and firms in value co-creation. Social media brand community engagement can assist in disseminating information through e-WOM, in the acquisition of new customers or in influencing other customers’ perceptions and, thus, lead to increased brand reputation and profits (Brodie et al., 2013; Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016; Kumar et al., 2010).

Dessart (2017, p. 377) has argued that brand community AE in social media “reflects consumers’ positive individual dispositions towards the community and the focal brand as

expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations.” However, this view considers only the positive aspect of AE and disregards the negative side (value co-destruction). For example, anti-brand communities (e.g., anti-Wal-Mart, anti-Nike, anti-McDonald's, and anti-Bayern FC communities) or "hate brand communities" formed due to negative dispositions toward specific brands (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010) may be the outcomes of unresolved dialectics (conflicts) that resulted in organized actions of value co-destruction (negative engagement). The brand is still at the center of the brand community members' attention; however, in a negative way. The formation of anti-brand communities is a manifestation of a group's antithesis to a brand and the unresolved conflict between them (value co-destruction). Although there is some available literature from the actor/customer side, there is no data available on the dialectics from the brand managers' side concerning brand communities in co-creating or re-creating value (e.g., brand identity).

Actor–Social Media Community Engagement refers to the macro level of the social media ecosystem that includes complex and multiple direct and indirect interactions among actors (e.g., AE with other customers, brands, advertisers, and influencers in different social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram). Thus, this level includes all the social media platforms (e.g., social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, and content platforms) and related entities where actors can interact with other actors (e.g., customers, firms, social media platforms and moderators, influencers, and advertisers) and be engaged cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. It is essential to study AE at the social media community level because this macro-level of analysis includes complex networks of relationships and interactions that influence the (co)creation of experiences and value. Moreover, this level of the social media ecosystem might be the initial step customers need to take in the social media world before they go downwards to the next levels of AE (meso

and/or micro). Institutional arrangements shape this broader level of the social media ecosystem (e.g., social media rules and country regulations and cultural norms) “where each engagement context and its associated set of institutions are embedded in” (Alexander et al., 2018, p. 338). In this sense, AE represents “complex interactions and negotiations with the social, economic, political, and cultural contexts into which they emerge” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 371).

From a dialectical perspective, this social media ecosystem-level emphasizes the relationship between personal and contextual communication. Although the available literature is marginal, research has identified several dialectics at the macro level of the social media ecosystem (Table 1). Redden and Way (2017) used focus groups to identify the dialectics emerging in social media among teenagers. They found that teens have multiple accounts in various social media platforms and the central dialectics emerged in this age group are: *staying connected online vs. disconnecting*, *desire freedom/autonomy vs. oversight and constraint*, *carefully curating an online persona vs. carefree authenticity*, *the balance between online vs. offline identity*, and *participating vs. resisting online culture and rituals*. For example, the *desire freedom/autonomy vs. oversight and constraint* dialectic was manifested when teens indicated that they were puzzled over wanting to post certain content, such as strong language and suggestive photos, but knowing they 'shouldn't' because of parental rules, the audience (sensitive older relatives), or to avoid hurting friends. The study also showed several strategies teenagers are using to cope with the above dialectics. For example, a girl switched to another social media platform with moderated connectivity (*selection coping strategy*) to cope with the dialectic *staying connected online versus disconnecting* after witnessing 'cyberbullying' from other social media group members. Others posted only certain material to specific social media groups, excluding sensitive issues (*desire freedom/autonomy vs. oversight and constraint dialectic - disqualifying coping*

strategy). To deal with the *carefully curating an online persona vs. carefree authenticity* dialectic, several teenagers made fake accounts or accounts with avatars or nicknames to protect their identities and reinforce anonymity (*segmentation coping strategy*). In addition, Kim and Yun (2008) identified the dialectics of *openness vs. privacy* and *connection vs. autonomy* among the Korean social network site members, Cyworld. They also found that the *openness vs. privacy* dialectic was present at the early stages of Cyworld membership, while its members resolved it using the dialectical strategies of *segmentation and disqualification*.

From the brand side, scholars (Bair, 2019; Ibert et al. 2019) have identified the dialectic of *association and dissociation* as the two sides of value creation. Association refers to the companies' efforts to build a good reputation/image through positive associations. In contrast, dissociation refers to companies' efforts to avoid being identified or associated with problems such as harming the environment or child labor or racist behavior and deal with trade unions, activist groups, anti-brand communities online and offline. In other words, "dissociation denotes practices of weakening or obscuring negative links between a branded commodity and other entities to let the desired associations overrule undesired ones" (Ibert et al. 2019, p. 43).

Research on how AE takes place on the macro-level of the social media ecosystem provides some useful insights into how value is co-created in the networked relationships embedded in this context. Heinonen (2011) studied five social media platforms and found that customers mostly consumed content (passive engagement/internal dialogues) and rarely contributed or produced content in social media (praxis). She also identified three types of input behavior (consumption, participation, and production of media content) to value co-creation. In her study, most customers engaged in consumption and participation behavior, and very few engaged in production behavior. Tsotsou (2016a) studied the parasocial (passive engagement/internal dialogues) and social relationships developed on Facebook and

considered AE an indicator of social relationships developed over this social media platform. She found that parasocial interactions (inner dialogues) precede active AE (praxis) and value co-creation when customers identify with the Facebook group (meaning that the *personal vs. collective identity* dialectic is resolved) and their behavior has been accepted/approved by a reference group (e.g., friends). However, all the above studies focus on AE on specific social media platforms and do not simultaneously examine direct and indirect interactions among actors in the social media ecosystem.

Conclusions

Theoretical implications. The purpose of this paper was to broaden our understanding of AE and its role in the social media ecosystem. To this end, the paper draws on the SDL-based service ecosystem view and RDT. The former allows us to take a holistic view of the social media ecosystem by broadening the concept of AE to multiple levels (micro, meso, and macro) and contexts (dyadic, triadic, networks of relationships). The latter considers the dialectic relationship between AE and the various levels and contexts of the social media ecosystem and how they shape each other. In other words, SDL informs and broadens the context of analysis, while RDT sheds light on AE processes that take place in the social media ecosystem that lead to value co-creation/co-destruction. The integration of the two perspectives, referred to as the TASC model of AE in social media, provides a holistic view of AE in social media and highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of the concept.

The TASC model demonstrates that, depending on the level of analysis of the social media ecosystem, researchers should alter their research foci and identify the different dialectics that emerge. This paper and the discussion on the various levels of the TASC model suggest that AE's dialectics in the social media sphere have not been adequately

addressed in the literature. As a result, a number of research propositions have been developed to argue the need to study AE beyond the dyadic and triadic interactions but to multiple parallel contexts. At the same time, by identifying the AE dialectics that emerge at each level and context of analysis, research could deliver a better understanding of the intensity (passive and active) and valence (positive and negative) of AE and their outcomes (value co-creation/co-destruction). Below, the theoretical contributions of the TASC model are presented, and the managerial implications are discussed.

First, the TASC model of AE contributes to the literature by introducing and highlighting the role of dialectics at each level and context of the social media ecosystem, an issue that has received marginal attention in the marketing literature. Therefore, this paper proposes that:

P1: AE is dialectical in nature, whereby it shapes the contexts of engagement at the different levels of the social media ecosystem while at the same time, it is shaped by them. In short, AE is shaping the social media ecosystem and vice versa.

The TASC model signifies that engagement is not only interactive as previously supported (Brodie et al., 2011) but also dialectical in nature. Opposing tensions/conflicts (dialectics), such as beliefs, desires, and values, are connected but also remain independent, shape relationships, and are evidenced and negotiated through interactions in the social media ecosystem. Since AE is inherently dialectic, it should be seen as the interplay of dynamically and reciprocally interacting actors. Therefore, AE is both the result and the cause of reciprocal adjustments (Bolis and Schilbach, 2018) in the social media ecosystem. Moreover, AE encompasses relational dialectics qualities. That is, engagement is dynamic, reciprocal, and cumulative. AE shapes the social media ecosystem synchronously and diachronically (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008), while at the same time, it is framed by the social media ecosystem and the embedded contexts (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). In other words, the

TASC model demonstrates that AE refers not only to the interactions taking place at the different levels and contexts of the social media ecosystem but also to what these interactions entail (dialectics) and their outcomes. Specifically, it is argued that AE refers to the dialectics inherent in social media interactions, the outcomes of which may lead to either value co-creation (synthesis) or co-destruction (conflicts). Thus, a relational dialectics-centered approach directs scholars 'attention to the ongoing and contradictory process of constructing social reality, foreshadowing tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes, all common features of the social media ecosystem.

Second, the TASC model broadens the scope of AE from dyadic to complex networked relationships by examining the synchronous and parallel engagement of the actors with multiple foci objects in the social media ecosystem. It is proposed that:

P2: Actors balance their engagement with multiple objects and contexts by coping with dialectics and adjusting their interactions according to the relevant institutions and institutional arrangements.

Thus, the proposed integrative framework of the TASC model supports the interplay between actors (e.g., customers, brands, brand communities, advertisers, businesses, and social media platforms), which, through their thesis and antithesis (dialectics), adjust their engagement according to the institutions and institutional arrangements (e.g., social and cultural norms, and rules and regulations) relevant to each context. This is the first attempt that includes all possible interactions (dyadic, triadic, and multiple) and views AE in social media at different levels (micro, meso, and macro). Actors perform multiple roles and behaviors in the social media ecosystem when they engage synchronously with various foci objects and exhibit multiple forms of engagement (negative or positive and passive or active). The valence (positive and negative) and intensity (passive and active) of engagement depend on the coping mechanism they employ to deal with the dialectics that emerge through their

interactions. Thus, actors in social media deal with multiple dialectics that arise from these interactions which, if they are not resolved, they may lead either to value co-destruction (Storbacka et al., 2016; Yuan et al. 2020) or abandonment behavior (Alexander et al., 2018). Thus, the SDL-service ecosystem perspective and the RDT offer a natural theoretical basis for broadening the scope of engagement in social media to include not only the customers but all the engaged actors. Furthermore, this view provides a conceptual framework in response to recent calls for understanding how engagement evolves and spreads among multiple actors (Brodie et al., 2011; Chandler and Lusch, 2015; Li et al., 2017; Storbacka et al., 2016).

Third, the TASC model underscores the dynamic nature of dialectics in AE by recognizing them as value co-creation resources. The dialectic aspect of engagement has been disregarded in the relevant literature, although it provides an in-depth understanding of the dynamic and evolving elements of the concept and its outcomes. The paper proposes that:

P3: Dialectics are resources that dynamically define AE and its outcomes in a particular context of the social media ecosystem.

An RDT perspective encourages scholars to move beyond merely identifying dialectics to consider how dialectics, through their coping mechanisms, become resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, information) to co-create value in social media. Thus, resolved AE dialectics may lead to either value co-creation (e.g., write positive reviews or collaborate with other brand community members to create the brand identity and culture) or value co-destruction (e.g., unfollow brand page or switch social media platform or close social media account). By viewing dialectics as value co-creation/co-destruction resources, scholars can gain a better understanding of both the valence and the intensity of engagement in social media. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of dialectics and AE indicate that we need to consider value co-creation/co-destruction as a process of circular causality among different

levels of organization (micro-, meso-, and macro-level) unfolding over different contexts (dyadic, triadic, and multiple relationships) in the social media ecosystem.

Fourth, the TASC model contributes to the literature by signifying the role of the context within which relational dialectics are embedded during AE in the social media ecosystem. Therefore, it is proposed that:

P4: AE dialectics are context-dependent and constantly evolving.

Previous engagement literature has supported that AE is context-dependent and continuously evolves (Alexander et al., 2018; Chandler and Lusch, 2015). Since relational dialectics are inherent in AE, they should also be context-dependent, reinforcing the SDL-based service ecosystem view. The TASC model supports this argument by providing evidence that dialectics is context-dependent and evolves over time. These notions contribute to the limited available literature on the dynamics of AE dialectics and expand their role from dyadic and triadic interactions to networks of relationships. Therefore, dialectics should be studied at each level of the social media ecosystem while being monitored over time.

In line with the above proposition, the TASC model suggests that actors use various coping strategies to deal with the dialectics emerging during their parallel interactions with various foci objects at the different levels of the social media ecosystem. Here, the fifth proposition states:

P5: AE dialectics coping strategies are context-dependent and should, therefore, be studied at each level of the social media ecosystem.

The TASC model provides evidence that AE dialectics' coping mechanisms are driven by the context of social interactions in the social media ecosystem. Thus, each context's institutions and institutional arrangements are reinforced and, simultaneously, adjusted by actors' coping strategies when engaged in social media interactions. When these coping mechanisms do not successfully resolve the emerged dialectics, actors are either disengaged

or re-direct their attention to other foci objects or exhibit negative engagement. Moreover, since dialectics coping strategies are context-dependent, they are also dynamic and evolve diachronically.

In sum, the TASC model and its propositions signify that the emerging dialectics of AE in the social media ecosystem might prove equally or even more critical than individual customer traits or brand attributes in understanding engagement in the social media ecosystem. Thus, the TASC model guides research in AE to the dialectics and their coping strategies in understanding engagement in different contexts and levels of the social media ecosystem. The social media ecosystem is viewed as a dialectical system in which actors engage in context-dependent interactions governed by institutions and institutional arrangements to co-create/co-destruct value. The TASC model also considers AE dialectics and their coping mechanisms not only from the customer side but also from the brand or firm side and all other actors involved in the social media ecosystem. Thus, it directs attention to the dialectics brands and firms face in their direct and indirect interactions with all actors (e.g., customers, social media administrators, and competitors) in the social media and the strategies they use to resolve them and co-create value. Furthermore, the TASC model might be a useful framework for understanding AE in all other ecosystems, such as the online and offline ecosystems, and could guide research in these contexts.

Managerial implications. The proposed TASC model contributes to the literature by developing a deeper understanding of the nature of AE in different contexts and levels of the social media ecosystem. In addition to its theoretical contribution, the TASC model can assist firms in a) broadening the scope of their social media management, b) gaining a better understanding of AE in the social media ecosystem, and c) developing mechanisms that facilitate the desired intensity and valence of AE to influence value co-creation.

The TASC model suggests that firms, when managing their social media pages and brand communities, need to go beyond the dyadic (micro-level) and triadic interactions (meso-level) and consider the complex and networked relationships developed in the social media ecosystem. Thus, they need to take into account all actors involved directly or indirectly with their firms as well as the institutions and institutional arrangements that influence AE in social media (macro-level). The TASC model directs attention not only to the customers of the firm but also to the actions and interactions of all other actors in the social media ecosystem (e.g., competitors, brands, other firms, advertisers, consumer communities, influencers, and social media platform administrators). These interactions are significant because they may facilitate or impede the firm's activities and interactions with their customers. Moreover, firms need to consider and understand the institutions and institutional arrangements of the macro-level of the social media ecosystem to adjust their behavior/interactions accordingly to reduce tensions and co-create value. Firms need to realize that actors (customers) engage synchronously with multiple (often conflicting) contexts at different levels of the social media ecosystem. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the embedded social and cultural norms that influence customer behavior in these contexts to develop strategies that facilitate engagement with the desired intensity and valence.

Managers are increasingly concerned with how to increase the engagement level of their customers to develop favorable experiences and increase value co-creation. These customer experiences are critical for brands in creating long-term relationships. The TASC model reveals and supports the dialectical nature of AE. Relational dialectics shape AE, and their coping mechanisms are resources for value co-creation or co-destruction. Therefore, managers also need to understand the most important dialectics that emerge through parallel customer interactions in multiple social media contexts. By understanding the AE dialectics

relevant at different contexts, managers could resolve them or facilitate their coping mechanisms to co-create value with their customers. Moreover, the TASC model helps firms understand the process of AE and their role in resolving dialectics (synthesis) to co-create value with other actors. In other words, the proposed model signifies the shared responsibilities managers have with other actors in transforming, through their thesis and antithesis, AE into positive interactions that create value for all the relevant actors.

As actors move from between contexts, dialectics (resolved and unsolved) play a pivotal role in their engagement (intensity and valence) while their coping mechanisms may influence value co-creation/co-destruction in social media. This information and the dialectics invoked at each level of the social media ecosystem provide guidance to brand managers on what brand elements/qualities they need to work on, based on the social media context (brand communities or brand pages or social media platforms) and the type of relationships involved (triadic or dyadic or networks of relationships). By having a better understanding of the role of engagement, firms can then apply this knowledge to make their social media presence more effective.

In sum, marketing managers need to realize that the social media service ecosystem is mostly created and controlled by the interplay of AE dialectics and the embedded contexts rather than marketing developed. The social media ecosystem is a highly dynamic and evolving environment, and marketers have only a certain amount of control over online experiences (e.g., rules for participation in brand communities). Therefore, firms must deliberate themselves from previously used communications (push communications) and learn how to interact with their customers in the social media ecosystem by synthesizing their thesis and antithesis and resolve the emerged dialectics to co-create value.

Future Research Directions - Limitations

So far, the focus of AE in social media research has predominantly been on the micro-level and meso-level, concerned with online interactions between specific foci, such as firms or brands, or other members of brand communities. However, the broader context within which actors operate in social media (macro-level) and their effects on engagement have been largely ignored in the literature. Broadening the level of analysis of engagement research from customers to actors and from dyadic relationships to networks of relationships, and vice versa can help academics and managers better understand AE and how actors interact synchronously in multiple contexts across the social media ecosystem. Moreover, by broadening the scope of engagement, the customer is no longer seen only as an individual economic actor, but also as a social actor who engages in various forms of relationships (dyadic, triadic, and networked) in social media. Thus, all possible relationships are captured, and a more holistic view of AE in social media is achieved. In adopting an SDL-based service ecosystem perspective on AE in social media, all engaged actors are seen to be part of multiple contexts simultaneously.

The RDT perspective highlights the dialectical nature of AE and illustrates the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between AE and the different contexts in the social media ecosystem. According to RDT, all communication is rife with the tension-filled struggle of competing discourses (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008). An analysis of AE framed by RDT seeks to understand the dialectical process at the various contexts of the social media ecosystem by (a) identifying the various dialectics that are directly or indirectly emerged in actor interactions to render understandable and legitimate, and (b) asking how those dialectics interpenetrate one another in the creation (or destruction) of value. Therefore, which, how, and when relational dialectics influence AE constitutes one of the many future research avenues proposed here. Table 2 presents several research questions that have been identified

and includes several research areas such as the social media ecosystem, the antecedents, mediators/moderators, and outcomes of AE dialectics in social media.

"Please insert Table 2 here."

According to SDL, service ecosystems are dynamic and evolutionary in nature and constitute a context where service-for-service exchanges create value. This means that every change in resource integration (e.g., dialectics and their coping strategies) and value co-creation results in changes in the nature of the social media ecosystem to a certain degree; this develops the context for the next iteration and determination of value co-creation (Akaka and Schau, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2019). Thus, future studies could investigate how changes in resource integration, such as the dialectics, syntheses, conflicts, coping strategies, and value co-creation/co-destruction affect AE in social media and its outcomes.

Moreover, the proposed holistic conceptual framework invites further investigation of AE's antecedents and the emerging relational dialectics that occur both in intra- and inter-social media. Future studies are needed to test the proposed framework through large-scale quantitative research into AE's driving factors, the dominant relational dialectics, their impact on active/passive and positive/negative engagement, and related outcomes in various social media contexts. Possible moderators of the relationship between the proposed antecedents and AE relational dialectics should be examined. For example, industry type and product category might moderate this relationship. Moreover, determining how and when passive AE in social media becomes active engagement and vice versa requires further investigation. More research is also needed on the outcomes of AE dialectics in social media, such as company profits and sales, new product development/performance, customer retention/switching behavior, customer lifetime value, and traditional media communications' efficacy. Finally, what intelligence businesses gather from social media AE and how they use it for decision making is another research avenue.

Future studies should also examine AE from a cultural perspective to further increase our understanding of engagement in the social media service ecosystem (Akaka and Schau, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2019). Previous research indicates cross-cultural differences in consumers' use of and engagement in social media (Tsai and Men, 2012; Tsiotsou, 2019). Thus, future studies should focus on cultures and sub-cultures to identify cultural factors that might influence AE and its dialectics in social media. Moreover, another worthwhile research direction is to study the evolution of social media sub-cultures and how AE affects the construction or destruction of value in this ecosystem.

The proposed framework should be understood in light of some limitations. First, although an attempt has been made at the systematic review of the related literature to include the most relevant and seminal AE literature in social media, some publications may not have been identified due to different terminology. Second, the use of strict selection criteria for the reviewed literature may have limited the results (e.g., books, book chapters, conference proceedings, or articles in other languages than English). Despite these limitations, the TASC model, its theoretical and practical implications, and the resulting propositions will help scholars and practitioners gain an in-depth understanding of AE's in social media.

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Level of the Social Media Ecosystem	Research field	Dialectics	Copying Mechanisms/Strategies
<i>Micro-Level Actor – Brand Engagement</i>	Communication	Expression-privacy (Baxter, 2011)	NAL
		Stability-change (Baxter, 2011)	NAL
		Integration-separation (Baxter, 2011)	NAL
	Marketing	Value conflicts (e.g., unethical brand behavior) (Grappi, Romani & Bagozzi, 2013; Haberstroh et al., 2015)	NAL
		Poor vs. good service performance (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012)	NAL
		Power and control struggle (Fournier and Avery, 2011)	- Hand over control (Fournier and Avery, 2011) - Share control (Fournier and Avery, 2011) - Hand over power to their fans for specific brand decisions and tasks (Fournier and Avery, 2011)
		Fake vs. authenticity (Fournier and Avery, 2011)	NAL
		Ambiguity vs. transparency (Fournier and Avery, 2011)	NAL
		Expression-privacy (Fournier and Avery, 2011)	- Exchange privacy with brand benefits (Fournier and Avery, 2011)
	<i>Meso-Level Actor - Brand Community Engagement</i>	Communication	Autonomy and relational connections (Baxter, 2011)
Inclusion-seclusion ((Kramer 2004; West and Turner (2010).			NAL
Group–individual (Kramer 2004; West and Turner (2010)			NAL
Ordered activities–emergent activities (Kramer 2004; West and Turner (2010).			NAL
Acceptable behaviors–unacceptable behaviors (Kramer 2004; West and Turner (2010).			NAL
Tolerance vs. judgment of other group members (Kramer, 2004)			NAL
Marketing		Group commitment vs. commitment to other life activities (Kramer, 2004)	NAL
		Maintaining an individual identity vs. adopting the identity of the brand community (Black and Veloutsou, 2017)	NAL
		Individual (self-promotion) vs. collective identity (collective belonging) dialectic (De Valck 2008; Schembri and Latimer, 2016)	NAL
<i>Macro-Level Actor - Social Media Community Engagement</i>	Communication	Staying connected online vs. disconnecting (Redden and Way, 2017)	Selection coping strategy (Redden and Way, 2017)
		Desire freedom/autonomy vs. oversight and constraint (Redden and Way, 2017)	Disqualifying coping strategy (Redden and Way, 2017)
		Carefully curating an online persona vs. carefree authenticity (Redden and Way, 2017)	Segmentation coping strategy (Redden and Way, 2017)
		Balance between online vs. offline identity (Redden and Way, 2017)	Articulation of local logics of identity (Redden and Way, 2017)
		Participating vs. resisting online culture and rituals (Redden and Way, 2017)	Articulation of local logics of self-protection (Redden and Way, 2017) Relational maintenance (Redden and Way, 2017) Identity management (Redden and Way, 2017)
		Openness vs. privacy	Segmentation and disqualification (Kim and Yun, 2008)
	Marketing	<i>Brand association and dissociation</i> (Bair, 2019; Ibert et al. 2019)	NAL

Table 1 Dialectics and their copying mechanisms at each level of the social media ecosystem (NAL indicates no available literature)

Research Areas	Research Questions
Social media ecosystem (macro-, meso-, micro-level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the role of AE dialectics in the social media community (macro level) in developing brand community-AE (meso level) and brand page-AE (micro level) in social media? ▪ What is the relationship between brand community - AE (meso level) and brand page – AE (micro level)? ▪ What are the dialectical processes used by actors to move across the social media ecosystem from one level to another? ▪ Are there differences in AE dialectics across various social media platforms on the three levels of the ecosystem? ▪ Is AE with other actors in the social media community the first step of AE in the social media ecosystem that could lead to the next level, brand community-AE? ▪ Which and when dialectics influence actors' decision to become members of brand communities and/or get engaged directly with a brand? ▪ How dialectics shape AE in the different levels and contexts of the social media ecosystem? ▪ How the different contexts of the social media ecosystem shape AE dialectics and their outcomes? ▪ Which mechanisms actors use to cope with the dialectics (Table 1) at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level of the social media ecosystem? ▪ Do dialectic resolution strategies differ at the different levels of the social media ecosystem and how?
Antecedents of AE dialectics in social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which are the direct and indirect determinants of AE dialectics in social media? ▪ Which actor characteristics (personality traits, motives, and demographics) influence the dialectics that emerge in AE with the social media community actors (macro-level), the brand community (meso-level) and the brand page (micro-level)? ▪ Which brand-related factors (e.g., brand identification, function, image, and quality) influence the dialectics that emerge in AE with the social media community actors (macro-level), the brand community (meso-level) and the brand page (micro-level)? ▪ What is the role of the online and offline social environment on AE relational dialectics that emerge in social media?
Moderators/Mediators of AE dialectics in social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does product category influence AE dialectics in social media in terms of their intensity and valence? ▪ Do customer familiarity and experience with social media influence AE dialectics at all levels of the service ecosystem? ▪ Does product experience influence the valence and intensity of AE and its dialectics in social media? ▪ How customer experience and expertise influence AE over time? ▪ What is the influence of culture on AE dialectics across the three levels of the social media ecosystem? ▪ How and when firm engagement influences AE relational dialectics in the social media ecosystem?
Outcomes of AE dialectics in social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the outcomes of AE dialectics in social media? ▪ Which dialectics coping mechanisms lead to value co-creation and which to value co-destruction? ▪ How and when positive/negative AE in social media leads to value co-creation/co-destruction? ▪ How and to what degree AE in social media drives brand loyalty, brand advocacy, brand profitability, and customer life time value?

Table 2. Future research directions on AE in social media

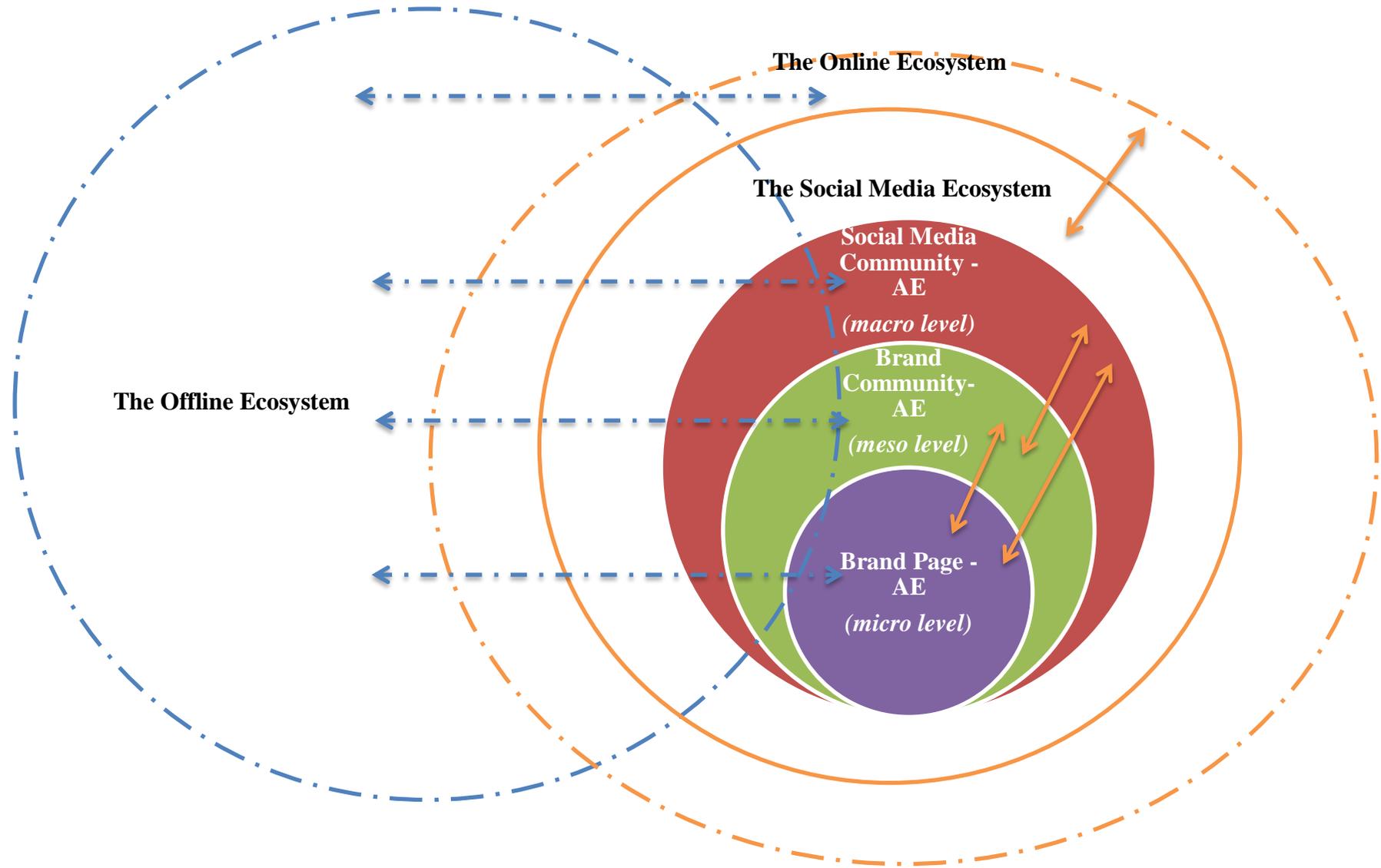


Figure 1. The interconnection of the social media ecosystem with the online ecosystem and the offline ecosystem



Indicates moving interactions from one level to another level of the social media ecosystem

Indicates interactions that take place between the offline and the online ecosystem (including social media ecosystem)

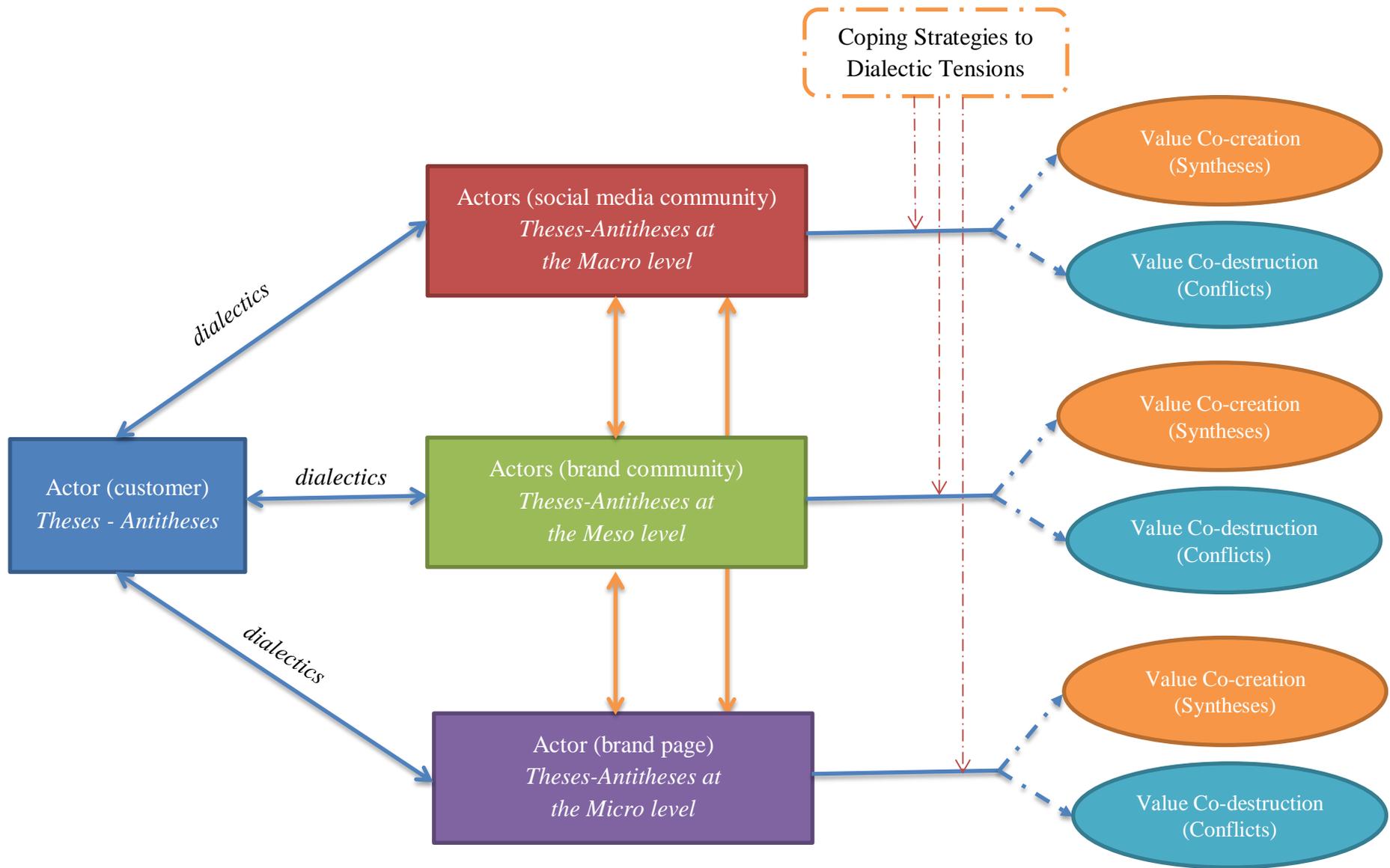


Figure 2 The TASC model of AE and the dialectic process in value co-creation/destruction at the social media service ecosystem

-  Dialectics
-  Indicates moving interactions from one level to another level of the social media ecosystem