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Developing social brand engagement model: insights from diverse consumers

Muhammed Naeem and Wilson Ozuem

Abstract

The evaluation and understanding of user generated content, social influence, and social brand engagement through social media have become a topic of major interest for both academics and marketers since the birth of online networking. The study looked at social media interactions involving user generated brand-related content and how this generates social brand engagement in a fashion retail context. The study followed an interpretivist approach based on qualitative design using thirty-two non-directive and semi structured interviews from the customers of top fashion brands in UK. These respondents were chosen using purposive sampling and thematic analysis was then performed using NVivo 11-Plus software. This study proposes a holistic conceptualisation of “UGC social consumer brand engagement” by considering (1) the identification, (2) the internalization and (3) the compliance of the social influence of UGC between user’s content creators and UGC consumers. The proposed framework contributes to research about UGC and brand engagement with a theoretical, generalizable interpretation of the phenomenon. Despite significant levels of public and private research, however, little consideration has been given to role of user-generated content (UGC) as a tool for enhancing social brand engagement in fashion industry. The contribution of this research is that this research divided social influence into three categories: compliance, identification, and internalization. Therefore, marketers can analyze social influence types in the context of their fashion brands, for example, if any brand already has enough social proof in the form of identification and internalization then it can create social engagement using social media platforms.

Keywords: social media user (SMU), user-generated content (UGC), social influence of UGC, internalization, identification.

Introduction

Social media platforms exert social influence, not only in the form of referrals from friends and family, but also through celebrity endorsement (Kim & Lee, 2017). People acknowledge the opinions of their friends and family as well as their favourite celebrities on issues and topics which matter to them. These topics include brand choices (Maecker et al., 2016; Renton & Simmonds, 2017). It is therefore important to explore why some SMUs trust celebrities while others are more influenced by close friends. Many studies suggested that celebrities generate content on social media and thus exert more social influence on fashion customers (Jin & Phua, 2014; Hanukov, 2015; Carroll, 2009; Keel & Natarajan, 2012; Thomas & Johnson, 2017). Wu et al. (2017) indicated that UGC emanating from celebrities on social media sites has more social influence in the context of fashion luxury brands as a unique social setting. Other studies suggested that content created by close friends is more trusted by SMUs than brand-related content, including celebrity-generated content (Chiou et al., 2014; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; Liu et al., 2012). The need for peer validation most likely stems from a rise in online “likes” and “followers” that many SMUs strive towards. Many are used to reading user-generated reviews before making a purchase (Nash, 2019; Marchand et al., 2017). Indeed, Gordon (2018) found that 71% of people are more likely to make an online purchase if the product or service has been recommended by SMUs. In addition, some 84% of millennials are likely to be pushed towards making a purchase based on UGC produced by strangers who have experienced the product or service (Gordon, 2018). With this in mind, it is no surprise that so many fashion brands are centring much of their marketing strategy around Instagram and other digital avenues that demonstrably generate sales among SMUs (Jin & Ryu, 2019). Even fashion luxury brands that once shunned social media for fear of cheapening their image are adopting social media (Vasiliu & Cercel, 2015).

This research takes its orientation from Ramirez et al. (2018) by contemplating UGC as a source of social factors to enhance word of mouth (WOM) and brand engagement

among SMUs. Previous research has highlighted that future studies must explore why SMUs are interested in creating UGC and how UGC can provide pre-purchase information to different SMUs as per their needs (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Poch & Martin, 2015; Verhellen et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is a need to appreciate how consumers' experiences and thoughts can enhance SMUs' interest and social motivation and strengthen their interpersonal relationships with brands. According to Ramirez et al. (2018), the social factors of UGC, consumers' motivation to share their experiences and consumers' brand engagement are not well understood. Moreover, Ramirez et al. (2018) highlighted in their study that there is a need to understand what the different social factors of UGC and SMUs' brand engagement are. Furthermore, Ramirez et al. (2018) also recommended looking at social motivational causes of UGC that can create brand stories and WOM as key sources to create and enhance social influence in terms of SBE. Therefore, there is a need to explore who exerts social influence and how they exert social influence through the social interaction of UGC. Present study aims to develop social brand engagement model which highlights what are social motivational causes and influencers that can engage SMUs with fashion brands.

Most of the previous literature explored the impact of social media platforms from a marketing perspective: customer relationship and purchase intention (Kim & Ko, 2010), customer equity, marketing and public relations (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012), marketing communication frameworks (Valos et al., 2016), promotional strategies (Thackeray et al., 2008), customer purchase intention (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015), and user interactions and their impact on buying decisions (Hutter et al., 2013). However, there is little understanding regarding the various reasons SMUs create, share and exchange UGC on social media related to fashion brands. Most of the existing literature investigated the relationship between social media and fashion brands in a more general context, such as: social media impact on customer decision making (Bilal et al., 2014), personality, quality and prestige-related factors (Erdoğan & Budeyri-Turan, 2012); usage of social media for brand-related content; and power of consumers (Kim & Johnson, 2016). This study intends to extend the literature by uncovering the motives to create, share and exchange UGC among famous and top-rated fashion brands in the UK. It also explores

which UGC participants can create social influence, which is a significant predictor of SBE on social media platforms. This study focuses on retail fashion because the industry has seen frequent changes and high competition over recent years. The study will be helpful to fashion brands that wish to devise their online marketing strategies in the light of findings on the effects of UGC on SBE among SMUs.

Literature Review

Some consumers use social media platforms to share their personal experiences and that product users exert more influence than other SMUs (Naeem, 2019a, 2019b). Previous studies have mentioned that disheartening customer experiences are the starting point of UGC on social media and they lead to the further generation of UGC (Grosser et al., 2019; Micu et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2017; Gavilanes et al., 2018; Çınar, 2018; Zhao et al., 2017). Customers preferred to see content that answered their questions related to a brand in which they are interested, but their interest is socially created through everyday life and the social media interactions of SMUs. It is found that people do not necessarily trust all the sources of brand-related content because of the quality of UGC, sources of UGC, friends' experience and their own experience with that brand (Young, 2011). For example, Henderson and Lyons (2005) indicated that opinion leaders who generate eWOM have unique characteristics and influence which are not necessarily possessed by non-leaders. Kim et al. (2012) stressed that a high volume of brand reviews does not mean that other consumers will buy the product or perceive the information to be credible. Therefore, it is important to find which sources of content are more credible among SMUs.

Estrella-Ramón and Ellis-Chadwick (2017) indicated that negative UGC damages brand engagement and has an impact on level of trust in brands. Many other studies indicated that negative comments are trusted by SMUs and these negative comments also create reliability of UGC in a consumer's mind (Haigh & Wigley, 2015; Goh et al., 2013; Jin & Phua, 2016; Xun & Guo, 2017). The limitations of such studies are that they do not focus sufficiently on the context of social influence. There is, therefore, an opportunity through research to explore the reasons behind the positive and negative social intentions of SMUs and the social impact on SMUs. It is worthwhile exploring why SMUs create

negative content on social media and how UGC is differently perceived by various SMUs. For example, previous studies highlighted that different SMUs perceive UGC influence differently; close social connections, such as friends, are considered more useful than other sources (Sparks et al., 2013; Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). There is a need to explore the extent to which SMUs trust UGC and how UGC influences on the social interactions of SMUs to create further content.

If engagement between brands and consumers occurs through social interactions, based on the experiences (both personal and physical) of SMUs, then SBE is an entirely unique social setting (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). According to Hollebeek et al. (2014) and Altschwager et al. (2018), social acts encompassing values, language, meaning and culture create SBE. Scholars studying engagement acknowledged that service systems include social interactions by proposing a construct of social engagement (Calder et al., 2009) that encompasses a social dimension within the wider construct of engagement (Vivek et al., 2012). Recent developments in the literature offer a wider view of engagement and suggest that engagement is not limited to a dyadic communication between a person and a brand. Rather, it includes a network of interactions with others, and all of these aspects can socially influence brand engagement (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; Storbacka et al., 2016). The existing literature is not consistent when it discusses SBE-related dimensionality; there are different approaches which present both a uni- and a multidimensional perspective. Authors such as van Doorn et al. (2010), Sprott et al. (2009) and Verhoef et al. (2010) considered a single dimension of engagement, focusing on the behaviour shown most often by the customers. On the other hand, some studies provide a wider perspective that involves cognitive and affective dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011a). However, there is inadequate understanding regarding the social aspects of SBE especially in the presence of social media interactions.

Research was conducted to investigate firm generated content on social media and consumer behaviour (Kumar et al., 2016; Poulis et al., 2019; Pan et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). These studies, however, did not focus on the social context of SMUs to generate, share, respond, ignore, and consume UGC. The social context of UGC therefore remains unexplored through research in the context of SBE. As Kumar et al.

(2016) noted, further research is needed to explore how SBE is affected by responses to the UGC of other SMUs (e.g. transformative and informative). Therefore, this study aims to determine the social motivational causes that can motivate SMUs to create, exchange and foster UGC that can stimulate SBE. By understanding the social motivational causes, the study can offer fruitful insights to brands on ways to improve their services and quality that can socially inspire SMUs to create, share and exchange positive brand stories, brand recommendations, brand reviews, brand ratings, brand shopping experiences on social media platforms that would lead to increased brand engagement through the social influence of SMUs. Also, this study intends to identify different social media users which can create social brand engagement. By understand the types of different social media users, fashion brands managers can know which are social influencers which helps to develop social engagement with fashion brands. It is important to identify which social influencers have more influence for social brand engagement.

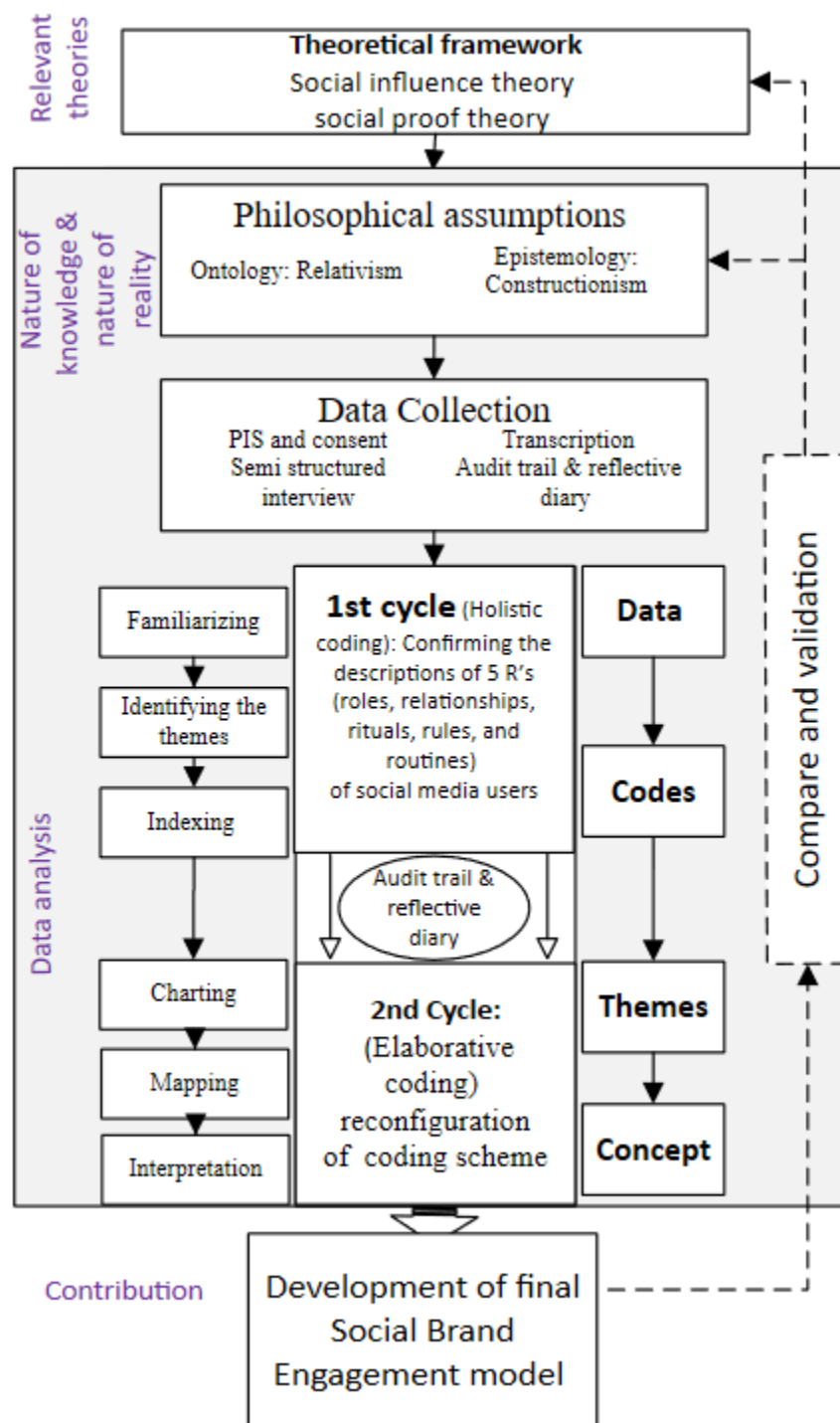
Research Methodology

Research philosophy

The subjectivist view attaches supreme importance to the views of those who are affected by the situation being studied. This means that the actions of social actors are of paramount importance based on a subjectivist view (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017). These social phenomena are constantly being revised as a result of a continual process which is taking place, as the views and actions of those affected by it are constantly being recorded or observed (Bradbury, 2015). Moreover, Margolis and Pauwels (2011) believed that it is imperative to take into account the views of social actors to make sense of the situation in which they find themselves (Williams et al., 2011). This idea is associated with the social constructionist approach whereby it is believed that reality is best constructed by those affected by it (May, 2002). Social constructionism is aligned with exploratory research design (Crowther & Lancaster, 2012). The research design enables the researcher to collect evidence and data for the sake of research with little available time and money.

The current study is the first to theoretically conceptualise “user-generated content social brand engagement” through a social constructivist epistemological and relativist ontological approach within the context of UK fashion retailing. It can therefore help fashion brands to understand SBE through influencing SMUs. The social context of UGC is explored to answer why, when, who and how SMUs create and consume fashion brand related UGC on social media. Additionally, it explores how the social exchange, creation, and consumption of UGC create social influence for SBE. Moreover, the level of SMUs’ involvement through UGC in fashion is currently a major talking point (Halliday, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2018); therefore, the exploration of the social involvement of fashion brand-related UGC is timely. As such, this study explores users’ perspectives and lived experiences to understand the complex social phenomena of creating UGC. The study also sets out to understand the social impact of involvement on fashion brands. The study views the social phenomena of UGC creation and consumption from the perspectives of SMUs to explore the impact of UGC on SBE. The methodological process is explained in figure 1.

Figure 1: Methodological process of research



Population and sampling

In this research, purposeful sampling was employed as participants were chosen on the basis of their buying experience of fashion products (homogenous sampling). Purposive

sampling is being used for the selection of the participants and the following inclusion and exclusion criteria have been employed for the selection of the participants. Patton (1990) indicated that there are no universal rules for selecting sample size for qualitative research. Sample size is based on what the researcher wants to know, the reason behind conducting the research, what the researcher believes is useful, what would be contributory towards credibility, and what can be done with the resources and time available (Patton, 1990).

The participants in the current study expressed their personal views about multichannel brand engagement and buying in a fashion context. The data are collected from different professional and non-professional sources. For example, this study included marketing consultants, business owners and professional employees who shared the social context and views for brand engagement. Furthermore, the study also included non-professionals such as housewives, mothers, and some students. Therefore, it can be argued that data are collected from multiple sources and this contributes to the creditability and validity of results as suggested by Aslam et al. (2018). This research also follows certain ethical protocols to enhance the quality of research.

Instrument

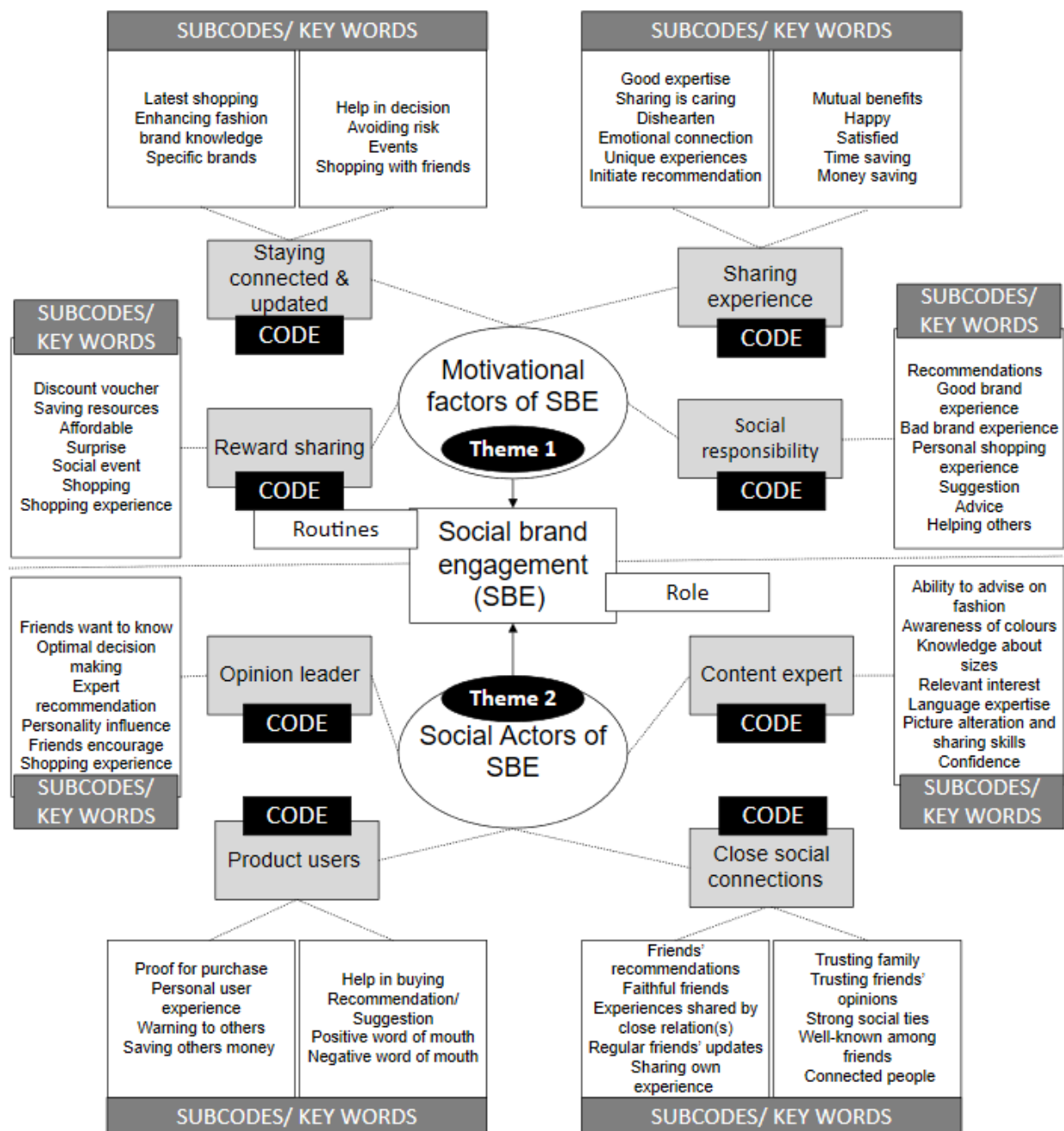
Semi-structured interviews were conducted because they are considered to increase conversation as compared to structured interviews (Adams et al., 2014). Since the aim of the researcher was to gain in-depth understanding about the impact of fashion-related UGC on consumers, the choice of semi-structured interview is justified. The average duration of interviews was between 25 and 45 minutes. The interviewees were informed that the interviewer would be recording the interview. Moreover, notes were also collected to summarise key statements. The researcher also observed the body language of the interviewees during the interview process.

Thematic Analysis

The guidelines presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to conduct data analysis with the aim of recognising the data collected through interviews. The author generated initial codes after successfully carrying out nine interviews. Repeatedly used words were filtered through NVIVO software and were grouped in thematic codes. Once 32 interviews had been conducted, it became necessary to thoroughly read the interview transcripts in order to gain a better understanding of the contexts within which certain words were used by the participants. After revising the preliminary codes, they were grouped, based on a thematic map. A total of 57 terms which seemed relevant to this study were identified, based on the respondents' comments. Themes that were developed in the next phase were then checked for both external heterogeneity and internal homogeneity (Patton, 1990). It was revealed during this procedure that there were different terms that participants had used related to UGC (such as friends' feedback, likes, WOM, experiences or views) as well as to brand engagement. Themes were generated for each of the UGC elements, user perspectives and user types. Ultimately, the interpretation of the respondents' reviews on UGC social influence on fashion brands generated four major themes: motivational factors for generating and exchanging brand-related content on social networking platforms (SNPs) and types of social media users. Each theme has been supported with existing literature that would strengthen the validity of the concept. The theme details are set out in the form of the following figures (See figure 2 to 3).

Major theme 1: Social motives to create, share and exchange UGC among famous and top-rated fashion brands

Figure 2: Core category and its emergent properties as the Social Brand Engagement Framework



Sub-theme 1: Social responsibility and social brand engagement

People usually love to create posts or exchange product information in the sense of support of others.

A 35-year-old housewife when interviewed about why she was interested in creating and exchanging UGC related to fashion brands commented:

“My social group always takes an interest in sharing their views about what they have experienced with apparel brands of their choice. If someone wants pre-purchase information about a brand, they are always ready to share the reasons why to purchase it or not. They believe that it is our social responsibility to help all others in order to save their resources and time”.

A 25-year-old female professional stated:

“Once I experienced a famous apparel brand differently from what they have promised at time of purchasing. Though that sub-standard product was taken back from me by store manager with great apologies, I felt that it is my social responsibility to share my bad experience to help others with this apparel brand on Facebook, particularly my friends, to protect their interest. I felt that I should advise my friends to not waste both their resources and time to purchase and return sub-standard products”.

A 40-year-old female marketing consultant shared her thoughts:

“Universally, it is known that failure in the provision of services is unavoidable. Even the world's best service providers sometimes make serious mistakes while delivering services. Social media has made it possible for consumers to share their good and bad experiences with others. If people share their unsatisfactory experiences on social media, this can badly damage the sales growth and reputation of a brand. However, I can save costs and time due to shared experiences of people on social media”.

A 27-year-old housewife spoke about motivational cause to generate UGC:

“I always take a deep interest in reading experiences of online communities from comments section of YouTube and Facebook. These comments act as a true direction, as people voluntarily share their experiences with the intention of fulfilling their social responsibility to protect others' interests. You can make an accurate purchase decision based on shared experiences”.

The above 28-year-old male student also added:

“I believe that sharing product information is kind of caring of others”.

According to the points of view of the participants above, the first important factor to generate brand-related content is social responsibility. Participants believe that they are socially responsible in helping each other. Therefore, social networking users ask for fashion brand recommendations, such as which brand is in trend, appropriate, affordable, durable and accessible easily. Other SMUs share their experiences such as the pros and cons of a brand or what a certain brand promised and what consumers experienced. Most of the participants think that they are socially responsible by sharing their brand

experiences with others because it can save time, money, journeys and other resources. Furthermore, creating brand stories about good and bad experiences may be useful for optimal decision making. A few participants argued that bad brand experiences can identify how a specific brand are unable to deliver the promised quality and it can save others from the purchase of that specific brand. When SMUs share and exchange information, they may modify the existing message by using their personal fashion brand experience.

Sub-theme 2: Sharing experience and social brand engagement

People share their bad or good brand-related experiences.

A 46-year-old professional male worker argued:

"I think we are sharing is caring and I believe that as customers our advice is helpful to help others".

A 35-year-old male business consultant stated in the context of inspiring factor for exchanging UGC:

"I usually visit the official pages of my favourite brands on Facebook to get information about their products. They immediately responded to my post and provided me with valuable pre-purchase information. I share these experiences with my local communities and friends so that they also come to know how to make purchases".

A 45-year-old male marketing consultant said:

"Modern customers are so busy that they have no time to explore information for selecting the best brand. That is why they tend to socially connect with others to get latest information about brands of their interest. Online groups on social networks act as the best platforms where people can connect and exchange information with each other without time and physical restrictions".

A 28-year-old male marketing consultant had the following views:

"Currently, social media has become the most appropriate tool for customers to acquire the latest information about a particular brand or product. I used to post my comments on Facebook to get local community groups' recommendations whenever I want instant help. Through exchanged information, I can increase my social connections both with community members and brands".

The same 47-year-old female IT professional also revealed an experience regarding how an apparel brand deceived her on Black Friday:

"I purchased many deals on Black Friday from some of my favourite brands of apparel. But I was really shocked and got panicked to find that these products were substandard, and they took a long time when I returned these products to that brand store. Filling in the claim application also took a lot of my long time. This experience was really bad for me and I shared it on Facebook with my social community".

These emotional experiences such as happy, satisfied, or disheartened motivated them to create brand stories with the purpose to share their experiences. Findings reveal that people usually love to get information from those who have good expertise or experience related to fashion brands. A participant revealed that sharing is caring because it created a sense of responsibility with the purpose to highlight information about those brands which meet expectations for many years. While another participant revealed that sharing is caring because it is helpful to know the good and bad experiences of customers. Other respondents highlighted that they usually share their experience because they are emotionally attached and engaged with fashion brands. Furthermore, it creates the sense in society that information sharing is caring. For example, if customers are dissatisfied with the customer service, quality, price, and brand features, then they are more likely to create a story with the purpose of informing others about how a brand played on their hopes and how the brand failed to deliver. Negative experiences on social networking platforms can inversely influence the brand engagement of existing and future consumers as well as fashion brands' profitability rates. On the other hand, those consumers who are satisfied with a brand can share their satisfaction among family members, friends, friends of friends and virtual communities.

Sub-theme 3: Staying connected and updated

People exchange information and they feel connected through social media.

A 24-year-old male student said:

"I am more likely to ask my friends and even friends of my friends about pre-purchase information on WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook groups. Based on the information my friends provide me, I can decide the best purchase within my circumstances such as travelling, time etc., like budget and other things".

A 40-year-old female marketing consultant responded thus:

“My connection with my beloved brand is very strong. I frequently post my comments and views in online advertisements and address others’ concerns. I love to follow online ads and official page as they act as a source of learning about people's likes and dislikes and new fashion. This also increases pre-purchase information and social engagement among the targeted audience”.

A 25-year-old professional woman said:

“I use social media for updating my knowledge about luxury brands as per my job, so it helps me in buying decision”.

A 35-year-old housewife argued:

“I prefer to share WOM, experiences, recommendations and service reviews about clothing brands. Through this, I can generate more social connection to engage and information on interesting brands. People sometimes share how to save money, time and effort by buying favourite brands at economical prices from the nearest store”.

A 24-year-old housewife said:

“Many times, I collect info about latest sale event and children’s clothes, so it enhances my information for buying decision”.

A 28-year-old male marketing consultant had the following views about how UGC helped him to make an optimal decision:

“In my opinion, shared information can increase knowledge about making the right selection. I have observed on Facebook that the majority of the people ask which fashion brand should be selected within available price range. After reading such information, I tend to purchase that product even though I had no intention of buying it”.

The third reason to share brand-related content is to stay connected and updated about those fashion brands which are receiving attention on social networking platforms (i.e. maximum likes, positive brand reviews, personal recommendations to others, and positive WOM on the brand’s official pages). It has been revealed that connected participants more frequently share their activities (latest shopping trends, events, new fashion deals, friends gathering and shopping together). Social media platforms are famous for creating, sharing and exchanging fashion brand-related information. For example, there are many virtual communities such as open and private groups which share information (i.e. the best deals and special sales) related to fashion brands. Therefore, participants believe that social media is the best platform to stay connected regarding those fashion brands which attract an individual, a group and celebrities.

Furthermore, SMUs can search likes, enquiries, consensus, and consumer interests related to fashion brands which may increase brand engagement and emotional attachment.

Sub-theme 4: reward sharing and social brand engagement

People usually exchange information about promotional deals on those brands which they usually cannot afford in normal days.

A 34-year-old housewife described the motivational role of discounted vouchers for her and others:

“When I get a reward like a discount voucher for online shopping, I quickly share it with my family and friends on social media – that would ultimately create more discount vouchers for my friends”.

A 33-year-old mom shared:

“We have a shopping WhatsApp group to exchange shopping experiences of trusted friends that help to buy good kids’ clothes”.

A 26-year-old female student shared why she is motivated to shared brand-related content:

“Many times, I have created recommendations for my friends with the purpose to share which brands are at economical prices and become affordable for them”.

A 40-year-old female marketing consultant shared her unique experience about UGC:

“Sometimes, any offer or social event can enhance the intensity to create posts and share with social network through social media. For example, many times I have seen on social media where people shared that they went shopping and surprisingly got a special discount. They were so excited after receiving that discount therefore they shared these stories with their social network”.

A 40-year-old mom stated:

“My friends share discounted sales like 50% or 70% off for shopping. These discounted deals help to take best buying decision for children’s shopping”.

The fourth motivational reason for generating and exchanging brand-related content is because reward sharing can multiply the level of information about shopping experiences as well as special sale days (e.g. Black Friday and Boxing Day), special sales offers (e.g. 50% and 70% off) and affordability as per financial resources. The participants have shared that the use of social media helps to gather information about best affordable

brands, which can save their resources and help select the best buys for them. It is found that when people created posts for sharing experiences, sometimes other SMUs, who had no intention to purchase, purchased that brand due to information shared with them. Sometimes, people created posts when any brand was at discount and it has become affordable for their friends. The findings of this study highlight the fact that participants shared UGC on social media because their friends also shared fashion trends, shopping tips, discount vouchers and other activities. Furthermore, sales, discount vouchers or special deals can enhance affordability for those who cannot afford these fashion brands with their average incomes. By exchanging shopping experiences, they want to guide their friends regarding how they can save their resources and time.

Major theme 2: types of social media users and their role for social brand engagement

Sub theme 1: Close social connections and social brand engagement

People usually perceived brand-related content to be highly trustable and valuable for decision making when it is shared by their faithful friends and family members rather than by brand channels of advertisements on social media platforms.

A 35-year-old housewife shared her experiences:

"I tend to rely on the recommendations of my friends, particularly about shopping for my kids. I have a group on WhatsApp of my friends which include nine of us. So, when we are going to buy something, we share our experiences with each other and exchange information. This helps us save time and money for my own shopping and for my kids, especially because now we are more concerned about the kids".

A 47-year-old female IT professional worker stated:

"I love to get friends' recommendations because close and true friends recommend only those brands which are best for us. I do not believe other influencers which are not known to me".

A 26-year-old female student explained about friends' information in brand-purchasing decisions:

"I only trust my close friends and I like friends who give an honest opinion about fashion brands on social media. You know some people don't give much attention to your needs so there is not point to getting their opinion. My close friends mean the friends with them I have very close physical interaction, like we see each other once or twice a week, so I think physical connection is a connection of trust and reliability of shopping advice".

Here follow the views shared by a 34-year-old housewife regarding why she prefers to accept brand recommendations from already known sources:

“I personally believe that an advertisement of a brand is created by the brand itself, so it has less influence on me and people. Therefore, I only consider advertisements to be a source which provides information. However, recommendations are only perceived when the information comes from trustable friends or family through social media because they know me and we know them; or information coming from those who have experienced the product by paying for it from their wallets”.

A 45-year-old housewife said:

“I don’t have trust in brand information which is shared by other than my close friends because there are paid influencers too”.

A 40-year-old mother has the following point of view:

“When I plan to buy something new for my kids, because kids require more than us, I first check recommendations from my friends, or I go to purchase items produced by the brand from which my friends have already purchased because I can trust only my close friends, more than friends on Facebook. Because my close friends are very honest with me and I believe that, especially my family friends”.

People trust the brand-related information they receive from their social circle, such as close friends and family members, compared with the information they come across from different channels of brand advertisements. Brand information from a close friend is recognised as more faithful and credible compared with that from social media friends. Additionally, it is also apparent that friends shared brand content considered reliable and credible compared with brand-generated content. The brand-related information received on social media from friends and family is also believed by the receiver in comparison with the information received from advertisement channels. Participants said that they usually prefer those brand recommendations which they receive from their friends and family using social media platforms. They believe that the brand information which SMUs receive from their close friends who have brand experience is considered more authentic and reliable than the information provided through brand advertisements.

Sub-theme 2: content expert and social brand engagement

People usually more influenced by content from experts because experts are expert at generating attractive content.

A 25-year-old male professional clarified why a friend’s expertise is more trustworthy:

“Fashion for me like product and not about the appearance and the quality of the product as it feels on my skin. This is the reason that I make the effort of sharing my experience with my friends. I also like to take and keep the recommendations of my friends who possess a strong sense of brand compression, colour selection and price. Therefore, I am keen to follow recommendation of X and Y friends before I go shopping for a new brand”.

A 34-year-old housewife had this to say regarding uploading and sharing fashion brand content:

“Although I personally feel shy about displaying my pictures in different clothes on social media, a friend of mine (X) is really good at uploading her pictures on social media in different dresses”.

A 39-year-old male business owner said:

“I think the expertise of sharing and making things for different friends is something special. My friends A, B and C are more active and competent customising the pictures along with well-written description. Therefore, their shared things always get more likes and comments than my posts”.

A 35-year-old office worker argued that:

“I always take pictures of the events I attend but I don’t share those pictures online on social media because I am not as skilled as my friend X with sharing pictures in a way to attract friends and family. Therefore, I always share in a group of close friends, who then give their views on that fashion brand”.

A 55-year-old male office worker remarked:

“I really like to take advice from X, one of my friends, because he is really close to me , also same like, and he knows best what I need and how much I can spend so I really like his sharing fashion posts on Facebook and Snap-Chat”.

According to the participants, some people are not only recognised among their friends and family, but also in the eyes of other SMUs, because of their rising popularity due to their content generation expertise which engages and attracts others. The views of the participants showed that some friends on social media may have high levels of influence among their groups of friends as well as being regarded as content experts by these friends. These friends commonly take pictures with fashion dresses and share with their social network through social media. Therefore, their expertise and experiences may not only influence their friends and family but also other people on social media. For example, expertise including the selection of brand colour, price, size and trend are the most

common aspects mentioned by participants. In the light of the interview responses cited above, it can be stated that housewives prefer to stay connected through social networking sites so that they do not face a bad experience while shopping. Furthermore, they tend to seek each other's brand recommendations in selecting children's garments with the purpose of saving time and money when shopping. It is found that the friends of participants have taken, edited and uploaded pictures of themselves in different dresses and shared these with their friends on social media platforms.

Sub theme 3: product user and social brand engagement

These people usually love to share their own good or bad experience of a specific brand; on the other hand, social media users is also interested to know about actual product users' experience.

A 26-year-old female student shared:

“I share proof on social media so that people know how brands are not fulfilling what they promised and what I experienced”.

A 33-year-old male business owner stated:

“Once I purchased on Black Friday but I was frustrated by the quality of the product, so I shared negative words as advice to others”.

A 47-year-old female IT professional stated:

“I purchased deals on Black Friday, but I lost my money and time, so I returned this product and recommended others to not buy”.

A 33-year-old male office worker said:

“I believe in buying experience if consumer shares proof of purchase and suggestion about either to buy or not”.

A 27-year-old housewife said:

“I believe to get brand use experiences from many close friends as they are always involved in buying those brands which match my style, budget and choices”.

A 33-year-old professional woman said:

“I know there are frauds and fake reviews about many brands but if a consumer shares proof of purchase and discussion then it is helpful for buying”.

A 35-year-old housewife stated:

“I always follow the product user experience because they shared their real experience after spending money, time and cost and these are beneficial for buying”.

In a reply to a question the 35-year-old housewife added:

“I am more likely to get product experiences of my friends because they are fair, loyal and sincere to give best shopping tips which always help me for buying”.

In this theme, participants have shared why they shared their personal brand experience with the purpose to suggest/recommend others for brand buying. Another group of participants told that they are influenced by brand user experience, especially when they shared proof of purchase and made suggestions, because there are large numbers of fake reviews on the internet. Some participants shared that they purchased brands on special deals days, but they were frustrated by the quality of product; therefore, they created negative WOM to advise others as well as saving money and resources. Some of the participants confirmed that they want to take experiences of their multiple close friends because they are known and sincere about advising on the right brand selection. They shared that they follow product user experience because it provides valuable information as well as being helpful in buying decisions.

Sub theme 4: Opinion leader and social brand engagement

Opinion leaders are specific personalities who have a high level of information; their voluntary purpose is to share information; SMUs think they are credible.

A 29-year-old male student stated:

“I have bought from some brands for many years and I love to share my shopping experience because my friends want to know the right brand choices”.

A 23-year-old male student said:

“I always make smart choices about selection of brands, so my friends encourage me to guide them for selecting relevant brands”.

A 31-year-old female business owner shared how she gets brand information from Ms. M.:

“Mostly, I prefer to get information from Ms. M. in a friends WhatsApp group about a specific apparel brand of my interest. As a marketing manager for a famous brand, she always shares good experiences with that brand as she has been wearing it since childhood. The advice and information she provided always useful for my friends and family members”.

A 24-year-old male private business owner shared how Mr G. has influenced his purchase decisions:

“One of my best friends Mr G. has 20 years’ experience in the clothing industry. He always posts discounted prices or new deals of famous apparel brands. He recommends some specific brand with reasons why this brand is best for others. All my friends love to follow, read and exchange his provided information about apparel brands. We consider him as an influencing person in purchase decision making for wearing brands”.

In response to an additional question, the 34-year-old housewife stated:

“While making purchasing decisions, I always prefer to follow different celebrities, opinion leaders, experiences and endorsements of other people. My purchasing intention becomes stronger if I observe a large number of positive reviews, shared information and experiences on social platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook)”.

A 26-year-old male professional worker said:

“We always share best deals, discounted offers which help to buy cheap products and save money”.

The fifth motivational reason to enhance brand-related content is the role of opinion leaders among online social media groups. In this theme, there are two types of

participants: the first type, who shared how they generated posts for others because their social network wants help in buying decisions; and the second type is those who connect to opinion leaders because opinion leaders have expertise and higher levels of knowledge which may be helpful in buying decisions. The first group of people shared that their social network (i.e. friends) encourages them to give their experiences because it helps their social network to make the right brand choices as well as save resources. The second group of people shared that they love to take recommendations from experts or by following the comments of opinion leaders on social media. These experiences are helpful to take optimal purchase decision. People want to access brand recommendations from those who are physically known, trustworthy and have experience of the fashion industry. There are some participants who act as opinion leaders or have leading roles in content-sharing.

Discussion

This study aims to determine the social motivational causes that can motivate SMUs to create, exchange and foster UGC that can stimulate SBE. Muntinga et al. (2011) offered three social motivational dimensions for content generation and exchange: remuneration, entertainment and information. Muntinga et al. (2011) argued that people shared content when they found job-related benefits, emotional connection, and other common interests. Furthermore, they also argued that people asked for advice and recommendations to reduce risk in their routine life decisions. Chi (2011) stated that SMUs' motivation is influenced by various factors such as trust, informative, entertainment, affection, and irritation. Chi (2011) explained these users' motivations in the context of Facebook pages rather than any brand. Tsai and Men (2013) conducted a study and found remuneration, economic incentives, seeking company-related information, job-related benefits and entertainment increased user motivation. However, the present study is focused on the context of fashion-related brands; therefore, the present study extended the existing literature by giving more details and many unique motivational reasons for exchanging brand-related content. For example, SMUs initiate brand content exchange when they feel that it is their social responsibility to share good and bad brand-related experience because it can save financial and non-financial resources; they exchange experiences

because it creates benefits both for the brand as well as for SMUs; SMUs exchange brand-related experiences to increase pre-purchase information because it may be helpful in taking best purchase decision; people share discount vouchers with their family and friends on social media, which ultimately creates more discount vouchers for their social network; people asked questions of influencers, such as opinion leaders, about brands due to their unique knowledge and experience; and people connect with opinion leaders because they have information about new trends, fashion and discounted prices on brands.

Chi (2011) also explored different social motivational factors of UGC but her study only selected female students who were using Facebook pages. Furthermore, another study highlighted social motivational factors (i.e. entertainment, social integration, remuneration, empowerment, personal identity, and information) but their findings are only limited to Facebook pages (Tsai & Men, 2013). However, the present study included professional and non-professional men as well as women and their sources of motivation for UGC across different social networking platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Flickr).

This study has revealed that there are five motivational reasons which can increase fashion brand-related content generation, sharing and exchange among SMUs. These motivational causes are social responsibility, sharing experience, staying connected and updated, reward sharing and opinion leader. In the context of social responsibility, it was found that people generate brand-related content when they have either a good or bad experience because they believe that sharing information can save time, cost and travelling time for others. In fact, information exchange creates a sense of helping each other through using virtual communities. Haigh et al. (2013) stated that corporate social responsibility can be used as a communication strategy on social media because it can positively influence the perception of stakeholders. Furthermore, they argued that corporate social responsibility, public relationship and an organisation's reputation can significantly enhance consumption of the content generated by the organisation (Haigh et al., 2013). Haigh and Wigley (2015) conducted an empirical study and found that when people read more negative posts on Facebook then people perceived that the

organisation has a lack of corporate social responsibility. The present study is more focused on the consumers' perspective rather than the organisation's perspective. The current study revealed that people are socially responsible by sharing their brand experiences with others because it can save time, money, journeys and other resources. Furthermore, when people feel it is socially responsible to exchange their personal experiences, then it helps others to select brands that are appropriate, affordable, durable and easily accessible. These elements increased the sense of social responsibility to generate and exchange UGC related to fashion brands.

The second motivational factor is sharing experience. The existing literature has offered scattered evidence regarding why SMUs share their experiences (Naeem, 2019a; Yao, 2014; Verhagen, Nauta, & Feldberg, 2013), especially in relation to fashion brands. These studies are limited to offering information about positive and negative emotions as the main reasons to share personal experiences related to common interests. However, there are many new elements which can increase the motivational causes for sharing experiences specifically related to fashion brands.

The third motivation factor is that the use of social media platforms increases connections and updates between people and fashion brands. According to De-Valck et al. (2009), virtual communities have increased connection and friendship among social actors sharing a common passion. Also, Broeck et al. (2017) found that the use of social media platforms created strong brand preferences and created relationships with brands, people, and organisations. However, there is lack of information available on how social platforms play a role in creating connections and updates about fashion brands. This study found that people connect to get updates about latest shopping trends, enhanced information related to specific brands, help related to brand decisions, to avoid risks and to stay updated about events related to fashion brands in which they are interested.

The fourth motivational factor for brand related UGC exchange is the SMUs' motive of reward sharing. The existing literature has indicated that the use of social media increased interactions, trend identification, customisation, sales events information and WOM; these factors can influence customers' intention to purchase fashion brands (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). However, there is limited information available with respect

to why SMUs are involved in reward sharing from the perspective of fashion brands. The present study revealed that SMUs love to share rewards if they find motivational things which surprise them and others, such as a discount voucher or other special deals on those fashion brands which are not possible to buy on regular days.

This study intends to identify different social media users which can create social brand engagement. According to close connections point of view, if an individual has a close association with a person who creates UGC, the shared content has a more positive influence (Yang et al., 2016), although current literature has suggested that celebrities and opinion leaders may have a positive influence on the purchase intention of customers (Ransbotham et al., 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). It is possible that people who are unknown may not be trusted to initiate brand recommendations compared to those who have been physically known for many years due to their honesty. In this situation, SMUs can show more faith in close friends and family members, who are physically known to them, because of their honesty as well as unique shopping experiences. These sources can initiate brand suggestions and recommendations for their close social circle. A study verified that the sharing of UGC on social media platforms is based on culture, race, gender and social context (Xun & Guo, 2017). Previous studies have also supported the precept that those individuals who are physical known, experienced and credible, such as family members or close friends, can positively influence purchase decisions for various brands (Pinto, 2015; Bacile et al., 2018).

The second social media user type is content expertise: experts who have relevant shopping experience and are able to create, share or exchange brand-related content on social media platforms. Experts are well aware of the features of social media platforms and they use their shopping experiences to engage other SMUs. Most participants revealed that they are highly influenced by close friends who have awareness of colour selection and deals. Participants also affirmed that they love to follow the personal recommendations of close friends who have high levels of brand information, such as appropriate brand colour, price, size, trend and economical prices. These people are considered experts due to several reasons (e.g. written skills; ability to save, edit, modify and upload UGC; better knowledge of colour schemes; high levels of awareness about

sizes available; and high levels of information about prices and upcoming deals); experienced individuals exert a strong influence on others. Also, it has been found that confidence in the experts' brand-related content editing and sharing skills and their ability to effectively convey a message (e.g. language experts) may positively enhance brand engagement among SMUs. A recent study also verified that those individuals who have relevant industry experience may be considered better influencers on social media due to their personal experience or expertise (Naeem, 2019a). However, another study suggested that if consumers have personal expertise, but they are unknown in virtual communities, then they are unable to add social influence to shared UGC (Zhou & Duan, 2015).

The second social media user types are product user. Product users are those SMUs who share their personal brand experience with the purpose of initiating brand recommendations for brand buying. It was found that they are influenced by users' experiences of brands, especially when users shared proof of purchase, perhaps because a large number of fake reviews are available on the internet. Some participants shared that they purchased brands on special deals days, but they were frustrated by the quality of the product; therefore, they created negative WOM to advise others and to save money and resources. They shared that they follow a product user's experience because it provides valuable information as well as being helpful in buying decisions. Previous studies revealed that social media facilitated sharing of brand-related experiences which is helpful to take buying decisions (Dessart et al., 2015; Naeem, 2019a).

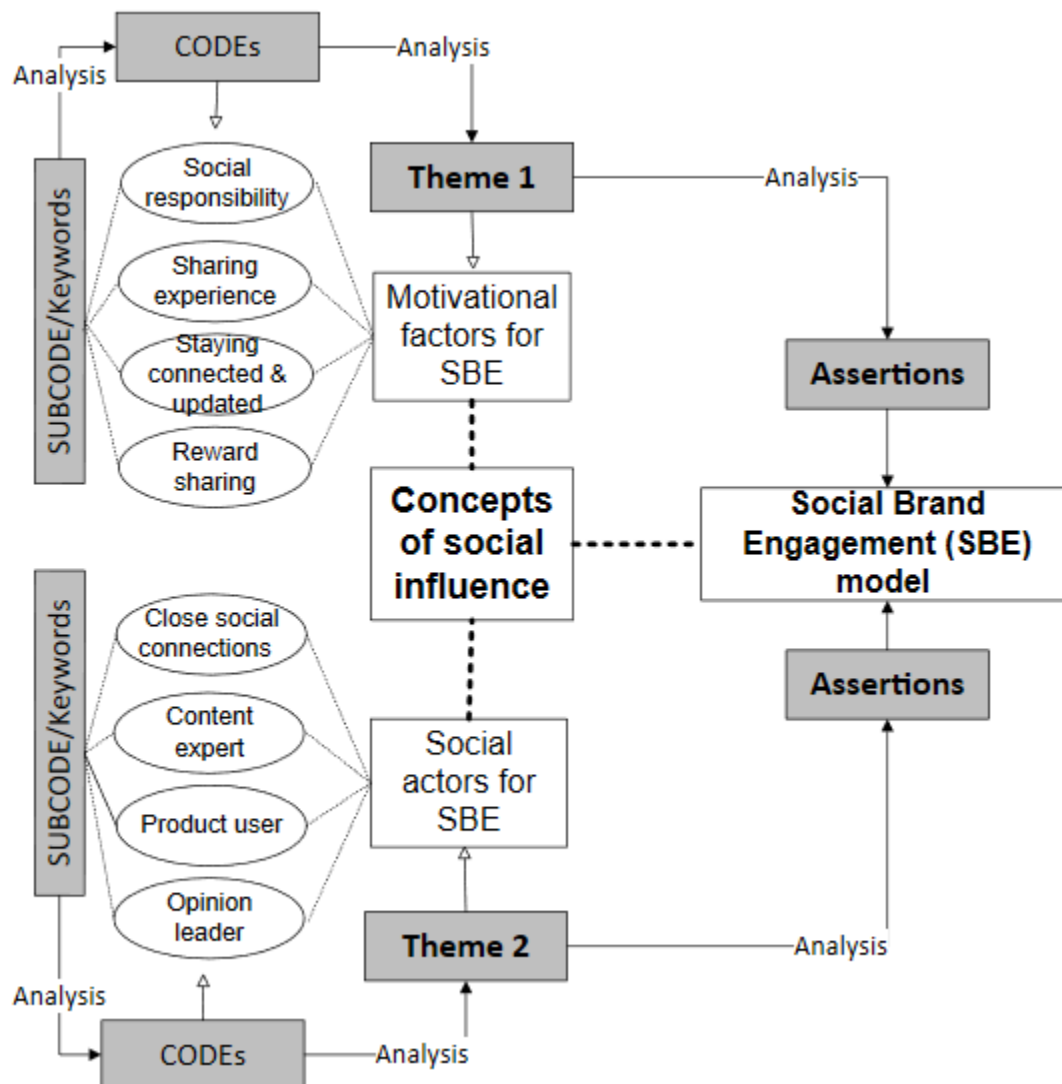
UGC social brand engagement model

Existing studies attempted to answer the question as to how social media helps to create brand engagement; these studies took psychological perspectives of brand engagement (Harrigan et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Pancer et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2016). However, the latest technological advancements completely changed the entire media landscape (Felix et al., 2017; Hammedi et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017),

and the concept of brand engagement shifted from psychological brand engagement to SBE. Moreover, “buzz” by consumers about the usage of social media has transformed firms’ methods of engaging with their consumers; even customer-created brands have emerged because of social media (Karikari et al., 2017). Studies reported that in the previous decade, more than one billion SMUs (Anderson et al., 2016; Karikari et al., 2017) made significant contributions to changes observed in electronic brand engagement, information acquisition, usage, experiences and lifestyles of customers (Brodie et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2015; Kim, 2016).

The outcome of this study is also aligned with current literature because the construction of the final “UGC social brand engagement model” was based on classical social influence theory. Additionally, the current literature is also in agreement with the social proof (wisdom of close friends and wisdom of crowds) of SMUs as identification elements of social influence theory, and on the influence of celebrities, experts’, product users and opinion leaders on consumers’ buying behaviour. The present study constructed the social influence of these individual celebrities, content experts, product users, and opinion leaders as internalisation social influence that influences the crowd on social media. The creation of a link between different social factors and the major elements of classic social influence theory is based on the relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemological position of this research. The figure 3 is presented with the purpose to explain and understand the model development process.

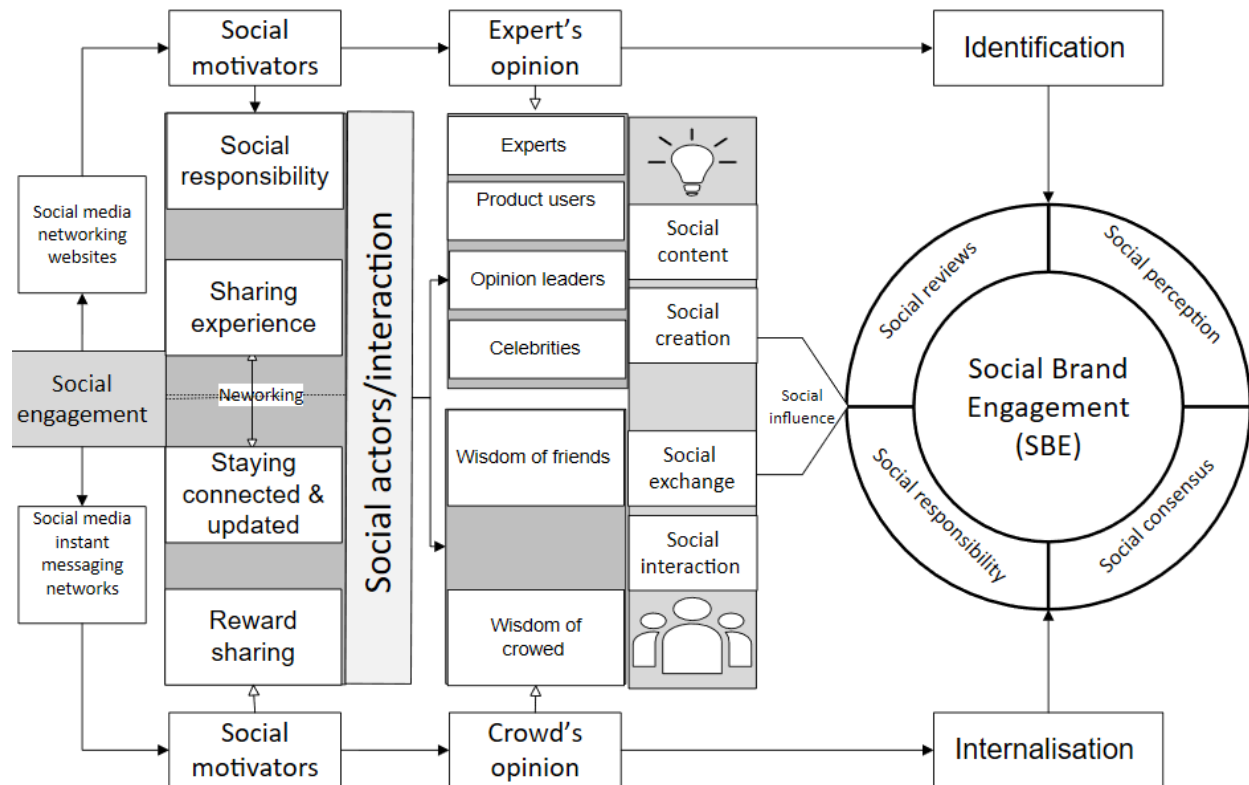
Figure 3: Model development process



The exploration of all social influence factors was based on the social constructionism/subjectivism epistemology and relativist ontology because social constructionist epistemology believes in extracting knowledge from people; therefore, the researcher tried to explore and correlate the different cultural and social meanings attached to the social influences of UGC among SMUs. There are different realities that explore socially and culturally related compliance, identification, and internalisation elements of social influence theory. The creation of connections between different social realities with these three elements of social influence theory was also supported by the current literature and participants' points of view on these social factors. The outcomes of the research contribute to the literature on the differences between SBE and social CBE. Additionally, the role of UGC to create compliance, identification and internalisation

social influences was explored. In this way, a new “UGC social consumer brand engagement model” has been added to the literature, which is linked to the classic influence theory and is aligned with the current literature in the marketing field.

Figure 4: Social brand engagement (SBE) model



Limitations and future directions

As this research was based on social constructionism and subjectivist epistemology, and an inductive research approach was employed, there is, therefore, a chance of weak prediction, which is the major limitation of social constructionist epistemology. The outcomes of this research developed the “UGC social brand engagement model” so that, in the future, positivists could test this theory in the context of brand engagement on social media. Additionally, the structure of this model was based on the identification and internalisation elements of classic social influence theory; therefore, future positivist researchers can test the relationship between these three types of social influence with presented factors of social influence.

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