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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2021-07-19

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Davcik, N., Langaro, D., Jevons, C. & Nascimento, R. (2021). Non-sponsored brand-related user-generated content: Effects and mechanisms of consumer engagement. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*. N/A

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/jpbm>

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**Non-sponsored brand-related user-generated content: Effects and
mechanisms of consumer engagement**

Nebojsa S. Davcik

EM Normandie Business School, Métis Lab
Oxford, UK

davcik@live.com

Daniela Langaro

**Instituto Universitario de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Business Research Unit (BRU-IUL)
Lisbon, Portugal**

daniela.langaro@iscte-iul.pt

Colin Jevons

Monash Business School, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

colin.jevons@monash.edu

Rita Nascimento

Studyportals, Eindhoven, the Netherlands
rita.nascimento.24@gmail.com

Non-sponsored brand-related user-generated content: Effects and mechanisms of consumer engagement

Abstract:

Purpose – The current study investigates whether users' engagement with the social media platform is affected as they engage in non-sponsored brand-related user-generated content (UGC). The concept of non-sponsored brand-related UGC encapsulates various social media patterns in which individuals choose how to consume, contribute or create brand related content with no formal brand incentive or control.

Design/methodology/approach – The study focuses on the question of how users engage with non-sponsored brand-related UGC on Instagram and assesses the influence of UGC perceived value. The variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) approach using partial least squares (PLS) was applied.

Findings – The research shows significant and positive effects of UGC on Instagram users' intentions to engage with the platform and the influence of UGC perceived value on UGC uses. The findings deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying non-sponsored brand-related UGC in consumer engagement marketing, with significant implications for brand managers and the future development of Instagram and other social media platforms.

Originality – The UGC functional, social and emotional values are evaluated for their effects on generating the three distinct patterns of consumer online brand related activities (consumer, contribute and create) in the non-sponsored brand-related UGC context.

Keywords: User-generated content; non-sponsored branding; social media; user engagement; perceived value

1. Introduction

Brand-related user-generated content (UGC) is common on social media, with consumers using of UGC to express themselves, share their experiences, be entertained, informed, or socialize with others. It is vital for both scholars and managers to understand UGC as a behavioral expression of consumer engagement and the consequent impact on business (e.g., brand attitude, brand awareness, brand equity, purchase intentions) (Langaro *et al.*, 2018; Hutter *et al.*, 2013). This is evidenced by the fact that firms are increasingly involved in customer engagement¹ marketing, working to motivate, empower, and measure consumers' voluntary engagement with brand related content in social media (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Matute *et al.*, 2019).

The literature recognizes two types of involvement in brand-related UGC: *sponsored* and *non-sponsored* (Burmam, 2010). As the names indicate, sponsored brand-related UGC is created by people who are paid by the brand, implying that some creative control may be exerted. In non-sponsored UGC, people create material independently with no formal incentive or control by the brand. In the current research, the authors focus on *non-sponsored brand-related user-generated content*, advancing the consumer engagement marketing literature where brand content occurs independently of the brands' direct control. The current study explores the triggers, uses and implications for brand continuity of non-sponsored brand-related UGC.

Previous studies in this research stream have focused on exploring brand-related UGC as a general pattern of behaviors that reflect users' enjoyment of the value they perceive in online interactions (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn and Kunz, 2012). Later, it was found that rather than a general pattern of behaviors, brand-related UGC involves three distinct behavioral dimensions that represent specific patterns of engagement that varied in the degree to which consumers interact. As a minimum level of engagement, users *consume* when they view content that is created by brands and other users. At a medium level of engagement users contribute their opinions when liking, commenting or sharing content, and at a high level of engagement users create new content (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016). This means that the same person may act as a consumer, contributor and creator for the same focal brand depending on the context and triggers (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the same

¹ Throughout the article, we use the terms Consumer / Consumer engagement, instead of Customer / Customer engagement, because of the non-paid nature of non-sponsored brand-related UGC. Users are consumers of the online content, not necessarily paying customers. Much of the literature on customers is nevertheless applicable to consumers, and *vice versa*.

person may contribute a viewpoint to one brand and only consume the content of another. Despite not following a fixed hierarchy, these patterns correlate with each other (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016).

This perspective challenges academics and managers to revisit and explore how perceived value relates to the specific behavioral patterns associated with non-sponsored brand-related UGC. Further, the effects of non-sponsored brand-related UGC on users' engagement with the social media platforms themselves, such as Facebook and Instagram, still remain largely unexplored. Engagement with the social media platform can predict users' intentions to continue adopting non-sponsored brand-related UGC behaviors in the future through staying with the social media platform and recommending it to others (Keller, 2013; Hussein and Hassan, 2017; Kennedy and Guzman, 2017). Previous studies showed that users engage with social media in search of gratifications associated with a social, functional and emotional value (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Leiner *et al.*, 2018); collaboration (Hanna *et al.*, 2011) and trust (Pasternak *et al.*, 2017). However, these studies only considered UGC behaviors in general and did not explore how perceived value may differentially impact users' involvement in the specific UGC activities of consuming, contributing, and creating new content.

In addressing these research gaps, the authors argue that engagement with non-sponsored brand-related UGC is affected by UGC perceived value and has positive implications on users' engagement with the social media platform. This argument is supported by engagement theory (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), which states that the value perceived in the experience of brand engagement influences its continuous adoption (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Meire *et al.*, 2019), with tangible and intangible consequences for the brand (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Building on these research foundations as well as on the work of Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012) and Hussein and Hassan (2017), the current study investigates whether users' engagement with the social media platform is affected as they engage in non-sponsored brand-related UGC. Further, the current study investigates the role of different types of brand-related UGC on triggering users' engagement with the social media platform. In that sense, the main research question is how the use of non-sponsored brand-related UGC by consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content affects users' engagement with the Instagram platform and how it relates to the perceived value of non-sponsored brand-related UGC.

Instagram will be used as the context for research as it represents a large base, with more than 1 billion active users (Statista, 2019a) who get involved in a higher level of engagement

with brands than users of Facebook or other leading platforms (Elliott, 2015). Instagram's reported revenue for 2019 was approximately US\$20 billion (Frier and Grant, 2020), a large increase from US\$6.84 billion in 2018 and US\$ 3.64 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2019b).

A variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) approach using partial least squares (PLS) have been applied because (i) the study is exploratory rather than (theory) confirmatory; and (ii) methodological prerequisites of the data distribution and sample requirements are more appropriate for the use of variance-based SEM (Davcik, 2014; Hair *et al.*, 2017).

The study is organized into five sections. The conceptual background and hypotheses development are formulated in section two. Section three describes methodological underpinnings of the sample profile, modeling procedures, and measures. Results and the use of structural model analysis applying PLS are described in section four. In the fifth section, the authors conclude by proposing theoretical and managerial implications for further development of the UGC research stream.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

Engagement occurs as consumers' relationship with brands extends beyond transactions (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. In the context of social media, engagement is a multi-dimensional concept (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Ferreira *et al.*, 2020) that incorporates involvement, interactivity and behavioral participation (Ksiazek *et al.*, 2016). Keller (2013) describes engagement with social media as active engagement, in which it is assumed that individuals are engaged when they commit their resources (e.g., time, energy and money) to the brand, going beyond the resources expended in the purchase of its products.

From a behavioral perspective, consumers' involvement in brand-related social media activities is largely accepted as an expression of engagement (Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Yousaf *et al.*, 2020). In these contexts, consumers engage as co-creators of brand messages (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Iglesias *et al.*, 2019; Guzel *et al.*, 2020; Merrilees, *et al.* 2021), as part of the digital ecosystem (Morgan-Thomas *et al.*, 2020), as contributors in offering their viewpoint, and as followers (Dessart *et al.*, 2015).

2.1. Brand related UGC uses as a behavioral expression of consumer engagement

A generally-accepted definition of UGC is still missing (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Malthouse *et al.*, 2016) and as a consequence different conceptualisations co-exist. Christodoulides *et al.* (2012) define UGC as public content that reflects some degree of creative effort and is created for free outside professional routines and practices. Munar (2011, p. 292) takes the perspective of users as creators of content, and UGC is defined as “information that is digitalized, uploaded by the users and made available through the internet”. In contrast, Smith *et al.* (2012) conceptualize UGC as user activities expressing their individuality while socializing online. In their definition “UGC is what is produced in the moment of being social, as well as the object around which sociality occurs” (Smith *et al.*, 2012, p: 102). In the current study, Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) very broad definition is adopted, with UGC being understood as “the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media” (p: 61). This definition captures a macro perspective of UGC, encompassing the many and varied uses of social media.

Previous studies have shown that the wide range of consumers’ brand-related UGC activities can be classified into three types of uses: content *consumption*, *contribution*, and *creation* (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Muntinga *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016; Hussein and Hassan, 2017). Content consumption is the passive enjoyment of published content without interaction (e.g., reading, watching, accessing links, viewing photos). User contribution involves active participation with existing content (e.g., liking or commenting a post) (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016), a multi-actor engagement that goes beyond the traditional organization and customer relationship (Shawky *et al.*, 2020). Creation is the most interactive individual use as it involves publishing user-generated brand-related content (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016; Shao, 2009). These three patterns of uses co-exist and correlate (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016) as it is by means of *consuming* content that users find opportunities to expand their brand knowledge and relational bonds (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Langaro *et al.*, 2019) fostering cognitive and emotional engagement (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Therefore, it is by means of *non-sponsored brand-related UGC* consumption that consumers find the motivation and opportunity to engage in *contributing* and *creating* brand related content (Shao, 2009; Muntiga *et al.*, 2011; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016).

Building on these definitions, in the current research *non-sponsored brand-related UGC* is understood as a broad expression of consumer engagement based on consumers’ online brand related activities associated with consuming, contributing and creating the non-sponsored brand content.

2.2. Value as an antecedent to non-sponsored brand-related UGC uses

There are numerous academic studies underlying the concept of perceived value, especially differentiating between the advantages and disadvantages of an offering (Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The relation between perceived value and use is well-established in the study of value-motivating behaviors (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Hollebeek and Macky, 2019) and predicting luxury consumption (Kautish et al., 2020). The same relationship has been validated in the specific context of social media, with consumers adopting uses that reflect the value they perceive (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

In these contexts, functional, emotional and social perceived values are frequently considered (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn and Kuntz, 2012; De Vries *et al.*, 2017; Hollebeek and Macky, 2019; Thakur, 2018) as they capture motivations largely present in media platforms according to studies employing uses-and-gratifications (U&G) perspective (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019; Phua *et al.*, 2017). Functional value reflects the perceived utility of the value-delivering attributes or characteristics of offerings (Smith and Colgate, 2007). It may involve different types of characteristics: (a) aesthetics, quality, customization or creativity; (b) reliability, performance quality, or service-support outcomes; (c) strategic value, effectiveness, operational benefits and environment benefits (Woodruff, 1997); d) price/value for money; and (e) performance/quality (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Emotional value reflects the value perceived as a result of offerings' ability to "arouse or perpetuate feelings or affective states, such as comfort, security, excitement, romance, passion, fear or guilt" (Smith and Colgate, 2007, p: 8), with types of responses changing according to the context (Smith and Colgate, 2007). Lastly, the social value represents the utility obtained through the offering's capability to improve individuals' social relations, self-concepts (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) and social self-identities.

In the context of social media, functional value is provided by informative content (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019; Meire *et al.*, 2019), including learning about the brand and category, its uses and first-hand news (Langaro *et al.*, 2019). These aspects impact consumers perceptions of the objective value of non-sponsored brand-related UGC (Schivinski *et al.*, 2020) perceived as convenience (Jensen *et al.*, 2008), ease of use (OECD, 2007; Ryu *et al.*, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2012), practicality, helpfulness, and usefulness (De Vries and Carlson, 2014).

In the current research the authors hypothesize that as consumers acknowledge obtaining functional value in using non-sponsored brand-related UGC (e.g., accessing information about the brand or its usage) they tend to use it more often by consuming (e.g., watching a tutorial for obtaining product information), contributing (e.g., liking or offering opinions through commenting) or creating content (e.g., reviewing a product) on the social media platform. This proposition finds support in previous studies which validated the role of perceived functional value in driving social media use (Jahn and Kuntz, 2012; De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Jahn and Kunz, 2012), with users expecting to obtain good information when engaging in non-sponsored brand-related UGC (Islam and Rahman, 2017). Hence:

H1: The functional value perceived in non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects on users' a) consumption, b) contribution, and c) creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC.

Emotional value reflects the value perceived as a result of offerings' ability to "arouse or perpetuate feelings or affective states, such as comfort, security, excitement, romance, passion, fear or guilt" (Smith and Colgate, 2007, p: 8). In the context of social media, emotional value is related to the feelings evoked by the experience of the exposure and its aesthetics (Katz *et al.*, 1973; Khan, 2017). While characterizing Emotional value is driven by emotional and sensory appeal and ability to foster consumer arousal Meire *et. al.* (2019); often perceived as entertaining, fun, exciting (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Langaro *et al.*, 2019; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020), transcendent and relaxing (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). For example, watching a video can be amusing, reading a review about a product can generate anticipation and excitement (e.g., related to consuming content), liking or creating an Instagram post can be entertaining (e.g., related to contributing or creating content) (OECD, 2007; Shao, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Langaro *et al.*, 2019).

Previous studies have shown that perceived emotional value may drive social media use in general (Jahn and Kuntz, 2012; De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Phua *et al.*, 2017). In the current study, it is hypothesized that consumers will consume, contribute and create non-sponsored brand-related UGC on the social media platform when they perceive emotional value associated with those uses. Hence:

H2: The emotional value perceived in non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects on users' a) consumption, b) contribution, and c) creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC;

In the context of social media, value is strongly shaped by consumers' social needs of connecting, building their self-concept, and social self-identity (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). From this perspective non-sponsored brand-related UGC offers context for user interactions to occur by socializing the content they are exposed to (e.g., sharing it with others) and incorporating it in new stories (e.g. using it in their own posts and fostering conversations as a consequence). Previous studies have shown that when social value is perceived, consumers generally react with higher levels of adoption and usage (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010; Phua *et al.*, 2017) motivated by self-enhancement and self-affirmation (Sabermajidi *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, in the current research it is hypothesized that if consumers perceive social value in using non-sponsored brand-related UGC, they will respond by consuming, contributing, or creating new content on the social media platform. Hence:

H3: The social value perceived in non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects on users' a) consumption, b) contribution, and c) creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC;

2.3. Engagement with a social media platform as a consequence of social media use

Engagement research shows that tangible (e.g., firms' performance) and intangible outcomes (e.g., opt-in communications) are driven by the experience of customer engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In the case of opt-in communications, online content consumers give permission for brands to establish a communication channel and as such voluntarily accept to continue evolving the process of engagement. Pasternak *et al.* (2017) suggest that this type of engagement is beyond a firm's control and is a form of external brand communication that may affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

In the current study, the authors build on this rationale and propose engagement with the social media platform as an outcome of non-sponsored brand-related UGC. Engagement with the social media platform relates to consumers' willingness to commit to staying and using the social media platform where the UGC occurs (e.g., Instagram). The relevance of this is

that non-sponsored brand-related UGC occurs spontaneously, with its continuation depending on consumers' specific willingness to perpetuate behaviors (Scheinbaum, 2016; Bolton, 2011). This content has more authenticity and credibility in the eyes of individuals online because it is created by users and is not driven by brand-controlled marketing communication strategies (Pasternak *et al.*, 2017). Dessart *et al.* (2015) show the importance of user loyalty to the brand that can be activated in various interactive ways through online community members. This is in line with Hanna *et al.* (2011) suggestions that conversations between individual consumers can reach deeper and continue the attention much longer than any brand communication from a firm.

It is proposed that the more individuals are engaged with non-sponsored brand-related UGC, the more they will stay with the hosting social media platform and be willing to support it. This proposition finds support in previous studies where brand-related UGC in social media is associated with positive effects concerning the relationship continuity (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Brodie *et al.*, 2013), being motivated by perceptions of co-creation, community, self-concept associated with UGC (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Sharma *et al.*, 2021), by positive attitudes towards the social media platform (Hussein and Hassan, 2017; Meire *et al.*, 2019), and reciprocation (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). In line with this, Pasternak *et al.* (2017) assert the importance for online users to express themselves, give an opinion, or socialize.

Hence:

H4: Users' consumption of non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects on engagement with the social media platform.

H5: Users' contribution to non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects on engagement with the social media platform.

H6: Users' creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC has positive effects engagement with the social media platform.

The effects proposed above are represented in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample profile

The survey received a total of 402 responses on Facebook and Instagram. The reason to put the questionnaire on the two main social media sites is in the fact that individuals who have a Facebook account commonly also have an Instagram account, facilitated through Facebook owning Instagram. The survey started by asking the respondents whether or not they had an account on Instagram. If “no” the questionnaire would end immediately, if answered “yes” then it would continue. 93.3% (375 respondents) answered yes which showed that only a small percentage of 6.7% (27 respondents) didn't have an Instagram account. The data collection took place in Portugal, which has high Instagram penetration (31% of the online population; Kowalczyk, 2017) and well-distributed demographics (46% are males and 54% are females; 33% are in group ages between 18-24, 26% are between 25-34, and 18% are between 35-44 years old). Given this population profile, the current research focuses on individuals between the ages of 18-34 years old, who commonly use the Instagram platform and are exposed to non-sponsored brand-related UGC.

The survey was developed on Qualtrics with the link being initially made available on the researchers' Facebook and Instagram accounts and then reposted by respondents on their own accounts, thus following a snowball convenience sampling design approach.

3.2. Procedures and measures

For sample validation, individuals were asked about their use of Instagram, with only those saying they used the platform at least once a month being kept in the sample. Respondents were then offered a brief description of non-sponsored brand-related UGC and asked if they had ever encountered this type of content, with only those who answered “yes” being kept in the sample. Only 2.2% answered “no”, confirming the presence and relevance of non-sponsored brand-related UGC on Instagram. The last two sections of questions reflected the perceived value and use of the UGC. To conclude the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide demographic information (gender, age, level of education, employment situation and location).

The constructs of functional and emotional value were measured with four items each, taken from Jahn and Kunz (2012) and De Vries and Carlson (2014). The items for measuring the functional value of non-sponsored brand-related UGC on Instagram were: it is practical, it is useful, it is necessary, and it is functional. The items measuring emotional value perceived in non-sponsored brand-related UGC on Instagram were: it is pleasant, it is entertaining, it is exciting and it is fun. The items to measure the social value perceived in non-sponsored brand-related UGC in Instagram were sourced from Kim *et al.* (2012) and were: it helps me to

become close to other people, it encourages my social connections, it helps me to feel at one with people, it affects me socially. To measure these constructs, a 7-point Likert scale was used for respondents to express their level of agreement (1=completely disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 7=completely agree).

UGC uses were captured as developed by Schivinski *et al.* (2016), with items measuring consumption of non-sponsored brand-related UGC in Instagram (I read brand-related posts, I watch brand-related pictures, I read others' brand fan pages, I watch brand-related graphics), contribution (I "Like" graphics related to brands, I share brand-related posts, I comment on brand-related posts, I "Like" brand-related pictures) and creation (I post brand-related videos, I write brand-related posts, I post pictures related to brands).

Finally, engagement with the social media platform was captured using Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010)'s scale: to what extent do you follow news about Instagram, how often do you visit Instagram, would you be interested in buying merchandise with the Instagram name on it, how often do you talk about Instagram to others? This approach is in line with Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) who assert the importance of concepts such as consumer involvement, self-brand connection and brand usage intent. The items were measured on a 7 point Likert scale (1=never, 4=sometimes, 7=always).

The analysis was conducted through SEM using the PLS algorithm. The current research is grounded in theory but also driven by data so that it can be prognostic and supply new information, arguments, and the logic behind a research paradox (Davcik, 2014). Due to the exploratory nature of our study, variance-based SEM was used rather than more common covariance-based SEM that intends to confirm a theoretical rationale specified by the structural model (Davcik, 2014). This methodology was chosen because the predictive connections of a new built model were analyzed such as the one in this study. This approach intends to predict the effects of construct relationships and explain the variance (Davcik, 2014; Hair *et al.*, 2017). This analysis was conducted using the statistical software SmartPLS 3 (Ringle *et al.*, 2015).

4. Results

In total 375 valid responses were obtained, with the sample being predominantly composed of women aged 18 – 25 years old. The predominant age range was 21-25 with 61.2% (246 respondents), followed by 26-30 with 14.4% (58 respondents) and age under 20 12.7% (51 respondents). The age distribution reflects the nature of the sample, students or/and

young adults who constitute the biggest proportion of Instagram users in the country of study. 93.3% (375 respondents) had an Instagram account. 85.6% (321 respondents) use Instagram daily, 10.1% (38 respondents) use it some days a week and 3.2% (12 respondents) use it only occasionally. Respondents indicated that the most common number of followers they had was between 401-1000 (33.9%, 127 respondents), followed by 1001-3000 (20.3%, 76 respondents) and 201-400 (18.9%, 71 respondents). The smallest follower brackets were 3001-5000 (3.2% - 12 respondents) and 5001-10,000 (4.3% - 16 respondents).

They were then presented with two examples of real non-sponsored brand-related UGC posted by users on Instagram. One example was from the Starbucks brand and the other an airline brand. The examples were chosen to purposefully portray two completely different brands and sectors so that respondents wouldn't think a specific brand or market was being analyzed.

4.1. Measurement model

This research analyzed seven constructs. The model was assessed for internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The software, SmartPLS 3, administers three reliability constructs, Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A), Composite reliability (ρ_C or ω) and Cronbach's alpha (α). Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρ_A) is the most valuable measure since it is the only one that measures PLS construct scores. Composite reliability (ρ_C or ω) and Cronbach's alpha (α) reveal a sum score measurement instead of construct scores. Although Cronbach's alpha (α) has a lower bound of reliability and its use has been challenged (see, for example, Davcik 2014), but it has been reported for comparability with other business literature where it is widely used.

The construct reliability and validity analyses are presented in Table 1. The composite reliability results show that all the constructs are reliable since all of them have reliability higher than 0.7 and also exceed the more stringent reliability rule of 0.8 (Nunnally, 1978). In order to minimise systematic measurement error, the factors were analyzed in terms of convergent and discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The method used to check for convergent validity is the AVE (average variance extracted). Table 1 indicates that every construct's AVE is higher than 0.5, which is satisfactory.

Table 1

Discriminant validity can be determined by the Fornell-Larcker criteria, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) and cross-loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2017; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The Fornell-Larcker criterion is verified because the square root of the factor's AVE is bigger than its variable correlations, as seen in Table 2. The rationale behind this criterion is that each construct should share a higher proportion of variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Table 2

The use of HTMT is advised by Henseler *et al.*, (2016); the smaller the value of HTMT the higher the likelihood that the constructs are indeed distinct. HTMT values should be lower than 0.9 and preferably lower than 0.85 (Henseler, *et al.*, 2016). In this study, every construct demonstrates a value between 0.291 and 0.710 which confirms discriminant validity between the constructs and that they are, indeed, different from each other. The loadings also exceeded the cross-loadings. These data are available in two extensive tables upon request to the authors. In sum, all the reliability and validity measures fit the relevant criteria values which mean that the measurement (outer) model is pertinent, therefore the structural (inner) model can be evaluated.

4.2. Structural Model

This investigation employed consistent bootstrapping, a non-parametric technique commonly used to achieve high levels of accuracy. Five hundred sample sets were created to obtain 500 estimates for each parameter in the PLS model. Each new sample was obtained by a resampling process and replacement of the original data set (Chin, 1998).

Standardized root mean squared residuals were used to test the model fit and show the variation between the implicit model correlation matrix and the empirical correlation matrix (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The structural model has a standardized root mean squared residual of 0.062 for the saturated model and 0.081 for the estimated model, with Chi-square 1.244, a good model fit. NFI is 0.828 and 0.817 for the saturated and estimated models respectively. Further, the structural model has positive Q^2 statistics, showing appropriate model predictive relevance (Chin, 1998; Davcik, 2014). The total construct cross-validated redundancy values show that the model has predictive relevance and observed values are well reconstructed, with all values above zero; consumption (0.146), contribution (0.223), creation (0.086), and engagement (0.098).

PLS models are appraised by identifying and comprehending the path coefficient values and the significance of the R^2 (De Vries and Carlson, 2014). The coefficient of determination (R^2) demonstrates the model's prognostic ability by estimating the amount of variance that can be explained. Our model shows good prognostic ability because Consumption explains 23.7% of variance (t-statistics 5.476, $p > 0.01$), Contribution explains 38% of variance (t=9.564, $p > 0.01$), Creation explains 11% (t=3.529, $p > 0.01$), and Engagement explains 21.8% of variance (t=4.996, $p > 0.01$).

The path coefficients provide a clear view of the model's interconnections. Table 3 shows the path coefficients calculated through the bootstrapping PLS algorithm. Each of the path coefficients was found significant at the 0.05 level except for Creation-> Engagement and Functional value to Creation. The path Social Value to Consumption is significant at the 0.01 level. Furthermore, every path coefficient fits the lower and upper confidence interval (bias-corrected).

Table 3 - Final results and path coefficients

The effect size (f^2) provided results consistent with previously reported analyses. H1a and H1c have strong effects (f^2 are 0.41 and 0.37); H2a and H2b have strong effects (0.36; 0.36), but H2c ($f^2 = 0.2$) has only a medium effect in the model. The hypotheses H3b and H3c have strong effects. However, H1b and H3a have no significant effects.

5. Discussion and conclusions

There is increasing interest from brand managers in understanding customer engagement, with firms acknowledging the contribution of customers in the development of their brands (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). Non-sponsored brand-related UGC represents an important role in this context, with users spending their time voluntarily consuming, contributing and creating brand-related content.

Previous studies have mostly focused their attention on exploring the motivations and consequences of brand-related UGC (e.g., Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Langaro *et al.*, 2018). However, conceptualizing UGC broadly as “the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; p. 61) a more granular understanding of the motivations and consequences of consumer interaction with brands on social media is called

for. In the current research, UGC functional, social and emotional values are evaluated for their effects on generating the three distinct patterns of consumer online brand related activities (consumer, contribute and create). These activities are further evaluated for their specific effects on users' engagement with the social media platform itself. Engagement with the social media platform represents individuals' intentions to stay with the platform and also recommend it to others (Keller, 2013; Hussein and Hassan, 2017). As such, it implies users' intentions to continue adopting non-sponsored brand-related behaviors in the future.

Overall, our findings indicate that engagement with the social media platform is driven mainly by uses associated with consuming and contributing, with all types of perceived value of UGC influencing these uses, especially emotional and functional value. However, content creation emerged as a pattern that does not behave in the same way as the others. Individual paths are analyzed in the following paragraphs.

While evaluating individual paths, our results show that when users perceive non-sponsored brand-related UGC as entertaining, exciting and fun (emotional value) they are motivated to adopt uses like reading the post, watching brand videos uploaded by brand fans, liking, commenting and also uploading their own brand-related pictures and posts. This finding is an advance on previous studies as it unpacks the effects of different types of non-sponsored brand-related UGC, importantly revealing the significant impact of emotional value across all three types of uses.

The results of the effects of functional value on different non-sponsored brand-related UGC uses are less compelling, as although the impact on consumption and contribution are significant, they are not so for the creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC. The practicality and usefulness associated with brand-related UGC motivate users to read and like, but do not motivate users to create new content (e.g., a picture or video on Instagram). A possible explanation for this effect relates to the motivations underlying the use of UGC itself. Previous studies have proposed that the creation of content is associated with users' willingness to express themselves, contributing to the establishment of their social self (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). In this respect, the findings obtained in the current study suggest the idea that creating content based on information on the product (e.g., tutorials or reviews) are not seen as activities that users perceive as contributing to their self-image, and are therefore less effective in stimulating creation of new content.

Concerning social value, our results indicate that when users perceive non-sponsored brand-related UGC as useful in improving individuals' social relations, self-concept or self-identity, they feel motivated to evolve towards contribution and creation. This effect is

intrinsic to the underlying meaning of these uses, with liking, commenting and creating being acknowledged for their socialisable characteristics.

The individual paths from uses to engagement in the social media platform warrant further discussion. In that regard, non-sponsored brand-related UGC uses present some interesting contradictions with expected effects. While consuming and contributing have significant effects on users' engagement with the social media platform, uses related to creation of content do not drive significant effects. This interesting result might be explained by the differences in the role that social media platforms play in enabling different uses. Perhaps it can be conceptualized that while they are consuming and contributing, users are recipients of content and the social media platform itself is intrinsic to those uses. On the other hand, while creating the content users assume emancipatory motivations (Brake, 2014), which extend their creations beyond the limits of the platform itself. Another possible reason might be that creation patterns of behavior are more sporadic which would explain why the variation would drive changes on customer engagement towards the platform.

6. Conceptual contributions

The current research explores the implications associated with customer engagement marketing, evaluating the effects of non-sponsored brand-related UGC uses on users' engagement with the social media platform and analyzing the influence of UGC value. The findings provide important advancements in understanding customer engagement and UGC in more detail. Firstly, studies to date have focused on understanding brand-related UGC in a general, undifferentiated way (e.g., Schivinski et al., 2019; Jahn and Kuntz, 2012; De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). This study identifies differences between the types of behaviors related to UGC and focus specifically on non-sponsored brand-related UGC and providing a richer understanding of the phenomena.

The authors build on previous studies that showed the relevance of UGC perceived value in driving usage of the social media platform (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Jahn and Kunz, 2012) by analyzing the effects of UGC value on specific patterns of brand-related UGC uses, namely: consumption, contribution, and creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC. While evaluating these specific uses, the findings support the proposition that content value significantly affects platform use, however the effects differ among types of uses, with functional value not driving uses related to the creation of content. This finding might be associated with the self-expression motivations that underlay content creation, which tends to undervalue the use of functional content (Muntinga *et al.*, 2012).

Thirdly, the findings identify brand-related UGC consumption and contribution as the types of uses that mostly drive engagement with the social media platform. So the use of social media for linking or commenting brand-related content tends to reinforce users' intentions to stay with the platform and recommend it to others. However, this proposition does not hold for uses related to the creation of new content. While exploring this result, it is proposed that the effect is due to the emancipatory force underlying content creation, which transcends users' relationship with the social media platform

7. Managerial contribution

The findings confirm the positive effects of non-sponsored brand-related UGC on users' intentions to engage with the platform. This is an important result for brands, as drives continued use of the platform, particularly relevant as non-sponsored brand-related UGC is rapidly growing, beyond the control of the brand. Moreover, the findings demonstrate the relevance of functional, social and emotional value in driving brand-related UGC engagement, challenging companies to incorporate and encourage this type of content in their online presence.

This study shows the importance of differentiating between the different uses of non-sponsored brand-related UGC, as the triggers and implications differ between them. Promoting content related to emotional and functional value is more effective at driving UGC related to content consumption, but not social value. Emotional and social value is effective at promoting the creation of new content, but not functional value. As previously mentioned, these three patterns of behavior co-exist and correlate (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016) so promoting only one of them would be an error. It is important that managers are aware of specific triggers to be equipped to decide which route to follow when trying to inspire non-sponsored brand-related UGC. It follows that non-sponsored brand-related UGC content should provide utility related to being useful, practical (e.g., tutorials), entertaining and fun. Consequently, to encourage audiences to develop into creating brand-related content, non-sponsored brand-related UGC needs to evolve towards encouraging social connection of their followers with their friends.

Since the study identified no significant effects of activities related to creation of non-sponsored brand-related UGC on users' engagement behavior with the social media platform, it is possible to conclude that consumption and contribution are the most influential activities on consumers' willingness to continue to use the platform where the UGC is presented. This

helps to position the complementarity of the three patterns of behaviors, with consumption and contribution performing an important role for the continuity of non-sponsored brand-related UGC.

Another managerially important issue is how creation (e.g., user posting videos, creating posts about the brand, etc.) may lead to more sales. How this factor can be assessed as a brand performance outcome is beyond the scope of the current research. Future research could address this important managerial dilemma and put UGC performance issues under further scrutiny. Finally, managers should benefit from this richer perspective on non-sponsored brand-related UGC by incorporating the three types of uses into monitoring customer engagement with their brand.

8. Limitations and future research

Creation of content is rather more sporadic than the other patterns of behavior. So, the forces underlying content creation would be a fruitful topic for further research. The findings are limited by the scope of the current research design. Future studies could further explore the model with other social media platforms and also across a longitudinal perspective, as time might influence users' engagement and behaviors regarding the social media platform (Kumar *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, in exploring the hypotheses that were not supported in the study, it is possible to speculate about the effects on underlying principles of content creation, with self-expressiveness and emancipatory triggers potentially influencing the results. Future studies could further evaluate these propositions and their mechanisms.

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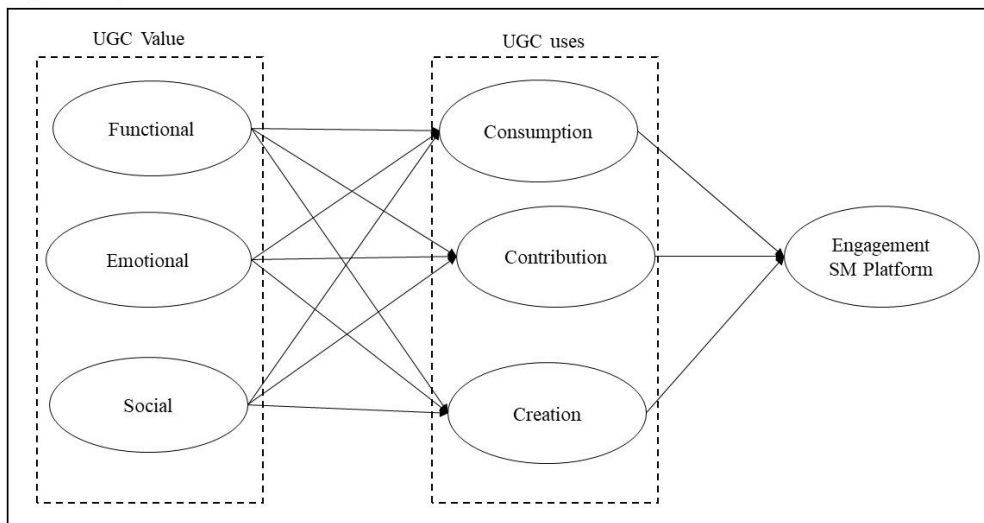
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Figures

Figure 1 - Proposed model framework

Figure 1: Proposed theoretical model



Tables

Table 1 - Construct Reliability and Validity Analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Engagement	0.677	0.68	0.805	0.509
Contribution	0.803	0.836	0.871	0.632
Creation	0.876	0.883	0.923	0.801
Consumption	0.822	0.825	0.882	0.652
Emotional Value	0.948	0.948	0.962	0.865
Functional Value	0.907	0.911	0.935	0.782
Social Value	0.889	0.908	0.925	0.757

Table 2 - The discriminant validity analysis

	Engagement	Consumption	Contribution	Creation	Functional value	Emotional value	Social value
Engagement	0.509						
Consumption	0.338	0.652					
Contribution	0.429	0.471	0.632				
Creation	0.277	0.249	0.501	0.801			
Functional Value	0.32	0.436	0.506	0.236	0.782		
Emotional Value	0.286	0.449	0.53	0.3	0.706	0.865	
Social Value	0.412	0.354	0.534	0.307	0.494	0.575	0.757

Note: AVE is presented with bold values

Table 3 - Final results and path coefficients

	Structural path	Sample mean	Standard deviation	t - statistics	P values
Consumption -> Engagement	0.174	0.179	0.056	3.091	0.002
Contribution -> Engagement	0.307	0.309	0.066	4.666	0.000
Creation -> Engagement	0.080	0.080	0.059	1.353	0.177
Emotional -> Consumption	0.238	0.230	0.060	3.971	0.000
Emotional -> Contribution	0.213	0.214	0.064	3.314	0.001
Emotional -> Creation	0.170	0.169	0.069	2.476	0.014
Functional -> Consumption	0.228	0.235	0.066	3.470	0.001
Functional -> Contribution	0.214	0.214	0.056	3.817	0.000
Functional -> Creation	0.027	0.027	0.064	0.424	0.672
Social -> Consumption	0.105	0.107	0.059	1.775	0.077
Social -> Contribution	0.306	0.306	0.053	5.719	0.000
Social -> Creation	0.196	0.195	0.062	3.134	0.002