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## Social media engagement behaviour: a uses and gratifications perspective

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The proliferation of social media platforms and corresponding consumer adoption in recent years has precipitated a paradigm shift, significantly altering the ways customers engage with brands. Organisations recognise the social and network value of engagement within social media, and practitioners are endeavouring to build engagement through their social media content. However, theoretically based academic guidance concerning marketing practice and engagement in new media social networks is limited. This article provides a theoretical model to explicate the role of social media content in facilitating engagement behaviour within a social media context. Based on uses and gratifications theory, it provides a model for how an organisation can stimulate positively valenced engagement behaviour through social media and dissuade negatively valenced engagement behaviour in this forum. A typology of social media engagement behaviour is proposed and a series of hypotheses exploring the relationships between social media content and engagement behaviour are presented.

**Keywords:** social media engagement behaviour; social media content; uses and gratifications theory

### Introduction

Social media has become a mainstream media platform that connects one-third of the world's population (Nelson-Field & Taylor, 2012). It offers advertisers access to 80% of global consumer expenditures, a \$29 trillion market (Nuttney, 2010). Over 15 million brands globally are registered with the social media site, Facebook (Koetsier, 2013). Customers are inundated with a proliferation of messages and marketers will not succeed in their efforts without an understanding of how to effectively engineer their content to facilitate engagement (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2013). Practitioners have largely been at the forefront of efforts to advise businesses on their social media strategy. Whilst the list of guidelines and strategies for social media marketing efforts appears endless, academic research and empirical evidence in the area remains scarce.

The interactive properties of social media have transformed consumers from passive observers to active participants, with social media platforms serving as an ideal forum for product and brand-related advocacy (Chu & Kim, 2011), customer-led content generation (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012) and customer-created product innovations (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010). Therefore, there is a significant

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amount of social and network value provided to both users and organisations through social media sites, as customers comment, review and share information online.

While recent research has explored both the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement (Gambetti, Graffigna, & Biraghi, 2012; van Doorn et al., 2010), studies that consider engagement with social media are only beginning to emerge. There is a need to develop a theoretical understanding of the nature of engagement behaviour in response to marketing practices within a social network structure (Sashi, 2012). This paper explains the role of social media content in facilitating engagement behaviours within social media platforms. It contributes a deeper recognition of the nature and dynamics facilitating engagement behaviour within social media platforms. The model explores the processes for stimulating positively valenced social media engagement behaviour (SMEB) and/or dissuading neutral and negatively valenced SMEB through the use of social media content. As such, it addresses one of the challenges in the implementation of organisational tactics and strategies centred on the increasing role of non-paying customers, and focuses on a MSI (2014) key topic of interest. Specifically, the MSI (2014) advocate research on customer behaviours in multi-media environments; the role of social media within customer experiences; the conceptualisation, definition and measurement of engagement; and how social media marketing activities create customer engagement (MSI, 2014).

The paper is organised as follows. We begin with a review of uses and gratifications theory (UGT) which explores customers' motivation to engage with specific types of media content, and consequently examines emerging literature within social media marketing that implicitly or explicitly adopts this perspective. This is followed by an examination of the SMEB construct, and we present a typology of SMEBs. We outline a series of hypotheses which demonstrate how differing forms of social media content impact upon these engagement behaviours. The model and hypotheses are discussed and implications for both research and practice are outlined.

### Uses and gratifications theory

UGT is an approach to understanding why and how individuals actively seek out and use specific media to satisfy specific needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Herzog (1944) used the term gratifications to describe specific types or dimensions of satisfaction reported by audience members of daytime radio programmes. Subsequently, researchers became interested in why audiences engaged with various forms of media, such as listening to the radio and reading the newspaper (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). UGT addresses how individuals choose media that satisfies their needs, allowing one to realise gratifications such as knowledge enhancement, entertainment and relaxation, social interaction and reward or remuneration (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). UGT was one of the first approaches to consider the active role of the audience in media choice, suggesting that individuals actively search for, identify with and employ media to fulfil specific gratification needs (Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013). This perspective recognises that consumers are active, rather than passive, recipients of media.

While a UGT perspective has been applied in the context of television and electronic bulletins (Leung & Wei, 2000), the rapid growth of the Internet and social media platforms has created mediums in which a higher level of interactivity from users is required (Ko et al., 2005; Ruggiero, 2000). The well-established theoretical perspective of UGT provides valuable insights into this new medium. As the underlying assumption of UGT is that users are actively involved in media usage, the theory has become

increasingly relevant in studies of media channels that allow for consumer choice and interaction, such as social media (Ruggiero, 2000).

Swanson (1987) advocated the need to understand the role of message content within UGT research. Early research in this area indicated audience members seek and find different gratifications within media content, affecting consumption of the content. For example, entertainment and information gratifications, derived through the content of television programmes contribute to substantial increases in television viewing levels (Rubin, 1983). Similarly, a UGT perspective has more recently been used to predict specific behaviours as a result of consumers' motivations for using social media sites (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). In social media, a brand's overt goal is to attract an audience by providing value, or gratification, through its content (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013). Content must therefore be designed in a way which creates value for individual consumers to build a stronger level of engagement and facilitate value outcomes (Malthouse et al., 2013). Constructs based on the theoretical underpinnings of UGT, such as the need for social interaction, the need for entertainment, information seeking and sharing needs, and the desire for reward or remuneration have all been explored in recent literature that has investigated consumer choices of online and social media.

We posit that social media content can be categorised into four main groups, based on its level of *information* (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeftang, 2012; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), *entertainment* (de Vries et al., 2012; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011), *remunerative* (Lee et al., 2013; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013) and *relational* (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011) content. Delivery of these varying forms of content will gratify customer motives for social media use, therefore, resulting in expressions of SMEBs.

### ***Informational content***

The informational construct of UGT represents the extent to which the social media content provides users with resourceful and helpful information (Chen, Clifford, & Wells, 2002). The relationship between the ability of an advertisement to provide information to viewers and advertising acceptance has been well documented (Bauer & Greyser, 1968). Further, attaining various forms of information has been suggested as the most important reason consumers use the internet (Maddox, 1998) and levels of information and attitude to the website have been found to be positively related (Chen et al., 2002). Whilst the importance of delivering information through advertisements has been recognised for traditional media (Rubin, 2002), the role of informational content in the online, social domain has only recently received attention. Searching for and receiving information about a brand is one of the main gratifications of consumer participation in online brand communities (Muntinga et al., 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The desire to seek information directly from brands is a motivating factor for consumers to use social media (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Lin & Lu, 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

### ***Entertaining content***

The entertainment construct of UGT refers to the extent to which social media content is fun and entertaining to media users (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). The value of entertaining media is embedded in its ability to fulfil user needs for escapism, hedonistic pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment and emotional release (McQuail, 1983). The concept of

entertaining advertising has been discussed extensively in the literature, with empirical evidence demonstrating that an entertaining advertisement leads to positive attitudes toward the advertisement (Taylor et al., 2011) and a desire to return to the website (Raney, Janicke, & Tamborini, 2013). Entertaining advertisements are said to cause users to consume, create or contribute to brand-related content online (Muntinga et al., 2011). Through the application of UGT in the context of online brand communities, authors have shown that consuming entertaining content is an important factor for participation (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The entertainment value of a social media platform can be an important reason consumers adopt it (Dholakia et al., 2004; Lin & Lu, 2011; Park et al., 2009).

### ***Remunerative content***

The level of remuneration offered to the consumer through social media content has been studied as a driver of consumer decisions to contribute to online communities (Muntinga et al., 2011). Consumers engage in social media use as they expect to gain some kind of reward such as an economic incentive, job-related benefit or personal wants (Muntinga et al., 2011). Social media content that offers a reward or remuneration includes monetary incentives, giveaways, prize drawings or monetary compensations (Füller, 2006). This type of content is expected to gratify users' needs for remuneration and rewards within social media.

Whilst managers often believe that social media content offering monetary incentives such as bonus points, prize draws or sharing product success are important, they are often mistaken. Rather, factors such as the ability to learn something new, the possibility to get exclusive content, and the ability to gain acknowledgement and support from other consumers have a far greater impact on consumers' motivation to engage and contribute to virtual communities (Füller, 2006).

### ***Relational content***

Consumer needs for integration and social interaction and their desire for social benefits have been identified as key motivations for users to access the internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Motivations for social media use include gaining a sense of belonging, connecting with friends, family and society, seeking support, and substituting real-life partnership (Muntinga et al., 2011). Users find the internet a comfortable place to reveal their feelings, share views and experiences, and to let their family and friends know about their latest information (Leung, 2009). Internet users expressed that through the online content generation process, they would have the opportunity to be recognised, publicise their expertise, learn more of the world, socialise with friends and be entertained (Leung, 2009). Socialising involves motivations such as gaining peer support, meeting interesting people, belonging to a community and staying in touch with friends (Park et al., 2009).

The above discussion illustrates that UGT provides a framework through which we understand the motivations of individuals seeking a specific type of media. In a social media context, users are not passive in their media selection or their use of specific media. Social media is constructed to enable customer interaction and engagement. Therefore, it is imperative that we expand the application of UGT to determine the engagement behaviour that results from the selection of, and interaction with, different types of social media content.

### Social media engagement behaviour

With the growing prevalence of social media, there has been an emergent focus from both academics and practitioners on the concept of engagement in social media platforms (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Social media is one of the more prevalent channels through which customers engage with a brand or firm, and businesses are recognising the need to engage where current and potential customers are paying most attention (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Social media platforms provide users with an interactive avenue to create value and engage with the firm (Brodie et al., 2013; Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012). Users create social media content through their contributions, comments and likes. Subsequently, their input facilitates the engagement and interaction of other members. Therefore, companies want to encourage their followers to not just passively consume content, but actively exhibit SMEBs in such a way that they comment and create new content (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012).

The notion of engagement has been studied in many fields, including psychology (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006), education (Baron & Corbin, 2012) and management (Saks, 2006). A recent focus in marketing has centred on customer engagement with a brand (Hollebeek, 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). Customers engage with a firm or brand through multiple touch-points and service encounters. Examples of this engagement include interactions with staff, use of products, physical retail spaces, social media pages and other forms of communication. Authors recognise that there are various focal objects of customer engagement, including product or service offerings (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011), activities and events (Vivek et al., 2012) and media (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). Together, these interactions constitute the brand experience of the customer. Engagement is interactive and therefore context dependent and can only be properly understood through an examination of each of these service experiences (Brodie et al., 2011; Calder et al., 2009; Gummerus et al., 2012). However, there is little research that examines customer engagement at this focused level. Our examination of social media engagement focuses attention on a singular touch-point in the service experience. It therefore does not reflect customer brand engagement in its entirety, but rather a singular component of that engagement. Consistent with calls from previous researchers (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012), it is argued that this in-depth examination within a context-specific environment (e.g. social media) will provide greater insight into the behavioural manifestations of engagement.

Extant literature contains several definitions of customer engagement (see Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, & Morgan, 2014), including the perspective that customer engagement constitutes cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Brodie et al., 2013). Whilst we recognise the role and importance of cognitive and affective engagement, this paper focuses on the examination of the behavioural manifestations of engagement consistent with previous examinations of engagement in a social media context (e.g. Gummerus et al., 2012; van Doorn et al., 2010). We adapt the definition of customer engagement from van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) to reflect social media engagement:

Social media engagement behaviours go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a *social media focus* [adapted], beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.

Importantly, this definition reflects that engagement behaviours are a result of motivational influences, consistent with the theoretical underpinning of UGT.

### ***Typologies of SMEB***

In order to provide a deeper understanding of the behaviours consumers' exhibit when they engage with social media, this paper proposes a typology of behaviours. The SMEB construct identifies and explicates the different types of engagement behaviours that users exhibit in social media platforms. It demonstrates that SMEB consists of seven distinct types; *co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution and co-destruction*. While *co-creation, positive contribution, negative contribution* and *co-destruction* represent active engagement behaviours that potentially impact on other social media users, *consumption, dormancy* and *detachment* are more passive and/or individualised forms of engagement.

While the majority of current literature concerning customer engagement has focused on positively valenced engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010), the engagement concept can be extended to capture negatively valenced engagement (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). The construct of SMEB highlights the critical role of negatively valenced engagement behaviour within social media platforms. Negatively valenced SMEB includes *detachment, negative contribution* and *co-destruction*, exhibited through consumers' unfavourable brand-related behaviours during interactions (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). Comparatively, positively valenced SMEB involves particular favourable or affirmative behavioural brand-related consumer dynamics. Positively valenced SMEB includes *consumption, positive contribution and co-creation*. In addition, the potential for an inactive, neutral state of engagement (termed dormancy) from the social media platform is recognised (Brodie et al., 2013).

Previous research has suggested that engagement behaviour may occur at varying levels, such as high and low (Malthouse et al., 2013; Muntinga et al., 2011). However, such interpretations fail to clearly define the specific actions undertaken by users within these high and low engagement levels. Our construct provides discrete engagement behaviour levels that vary in intensity and valence as presented in Figure 1 and described in Table 1.

We position SMEB on a continuum of intensity, from low (passive) to high (active) activity (Muntinga et al., 2011). Additionally, the intensities of engagement vary in valence. Positively valenced engagement levels are low (consuming), medium (positive contribution) and high (co-creation). Negatively valenced engagement levels are low (detaching), medium (negative contribution) and high (co-destruction). A neutral, dormant state of engagement exists. Each of the engagement behaviours are discussed in the following sections.

#### *Co-creation*

Co-creating customers represent the highest level of positively valenced SMEB. Co-creators act as co-developers of the content on the social media page, through the initiation of positive, active contributions and subsequent interaction with the brand, and other members. These members create various forms of content in order to disseminate their resources, knowledge and experience to the focal firm and other consumers (Brodie et al., 2013; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Activities engaged in by co-creators reflect interactive creation behaviours including learning, sharing, advocating, socialising and co-developing (Brodie et al., 2013).

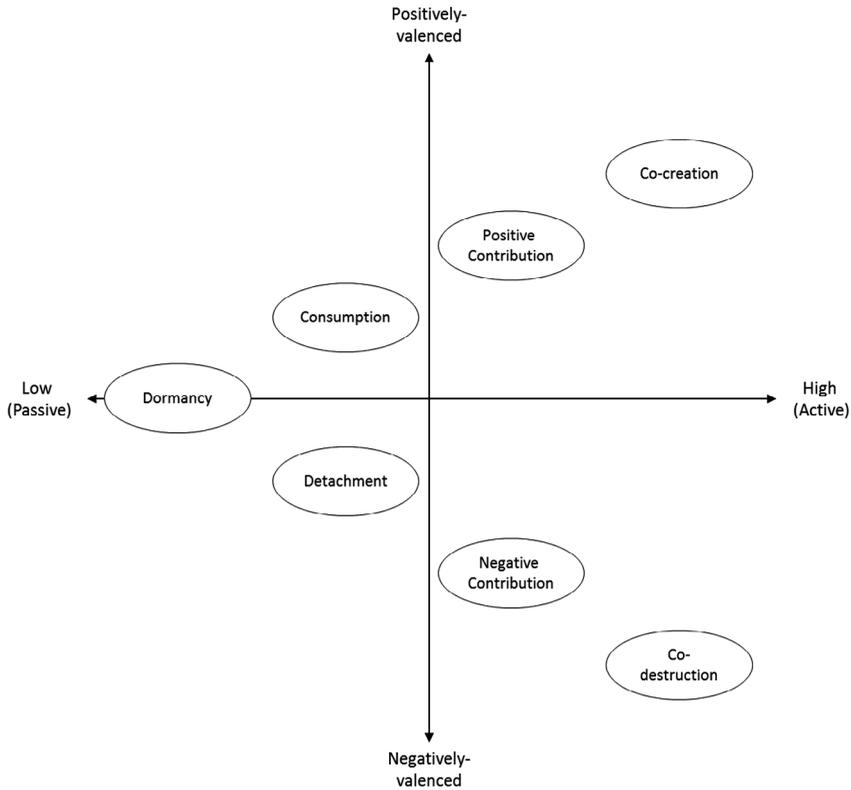


Figure 1. Social Media Engagement Behaviour Typologies.

#### *Positive contribution*

Positively contributing customers represent a moderate level of positively valenced SMEB. Social media users engage in this form of behaviour through making positive, active contributions to existing content on the social media brand page. Customers also contribute to the popularity of social media content by indicating their preferences through the 'Like' function on Facebook and Instagram, or the 'Favourite' function on Twitter. Through these actions, customers become message senders for the focal brand, passing on content to actors within their own networks. When users like, share, retweet or favourite content, they become endorsers of the focal brand, increasing the likelihood of friends to also engage with the content (Chu, 2011).

#### *Consumption*

Consumption reflects the lower level of positively valenced SMEB. This behaviour is passive, denoting a level of participation without actively contributing to or creating content. Although individual value will be extracted from the consumption of social media content, consumption behaviour is individualistic and will not impact on other members. Scholars have suggested that reading discussions (e.g. to find information) is a form of passive participation, whereas posting comments is active participation (Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006). Research supports the notion that users access social

Table 1. Social media engagement behaviour (SMEB) construct.

| Label                 | Definition  | Supporting literature                          | Examples   |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Co-creation           | The highest possible level of positive, active SMEB whereby users initiate un-prompted, positive and active contributions to social media communities | Muntinga et al. (2011)                         | Publishing a brand-related weblog<br>Uploading brand-related video, audio, images<br>Writing brand-related articles, reviews and testimonials  |
| Positive contribution | A moderate level of positive, active SMEB whereby users make positive and active contributions to existing content on social media brand pages        | Muntinga et al. (2011)<br>Brodie et al. (2011) | Rating products, brands<br>Contributing to brand forums<br>Comment positively on posts, blogs, videos and pictures<br>'Like' and share brand-related content<br>Inviting a friend to like the page<br>Tagging friends in brand-related content<br>Viewing brand-related video                          |
| Consumption           | The minimum level of positive, passive SMEB whereby users consume content without any form of active reciprocation or contribution                    | Muntinga et al. (2011)                         | Listening to brand-related audio<br>Viewing pictures and photos posted by the brand<br>Reading brand posts<br>Reading product/brand reviews  |
| Dormancy              | A temporary state of inactive, passive SMEB by users who have previously interacted with the social media community                                   | Brodie et al. (2011)                           | Brand-related content is delivered to the user but the user has no response  |
| Detachment            | The minimum level of negative, active SMEB whereby users temporarily or permanently conclude their membership   | Brodie et al. (2011)                           | 'Unliking' or 'unfriending' social media brand page<br>'Unfollowing' a brand on social media<br>Terminating a subscription for further updates and content from the brand  |
| Negative contribution | A moderate level of negative, active SMEB whereby users make negative contributions to existing content within the social media community             | Hollebeek and Chen (2014)                      | Conversing negatively on brand-related content<br>Making negative contributions to brand forums<br>Publicly rating products and brands negatively  |
| Co-destruction        | The highest possible level of negative, active SMEB whereby users initiate unprompted, negative contributions to the social media community           | Hollebeek and Chen (2014)                      | Writing a public complaint, negative product reviews and testimonials<br>Publishing a negative brand-related blog<br>Initiating adverse social media brand pages for fellow community members to join (e.g. 'I hate Apple Facebook Page')<br>Reporting the brand for misconduct of use on social media |

media to consume content as a source of information, without contributing through likes, shares and comments (Gummerus et al., 2012). We define this form of SMEB as the passive consumption of brand-related content. This consumption is achieved through reading reviews, discussions and comments, in addition to viewing photos, watching videos and clicking on content and links.

#### *Dormancy*

Dormancy reflects a temporary state of inactive, passive engagement by consumers who may have previously interacted with the focal brand (Brodie et al., 2013). Social media users exhibiting a state of dormancy are often referred to as 'lurkers', defined by criteria such as making zero contributions, or fewer contributions than other users (Muller, Shami, Millen, & Feinberg, 2010). We define dormant users following the first definition; a dormant user is a consumer who has made zero active or passive contributions to the social media brand post. They do not engage with social media through the consumption, contribution to or creation of any content. Similarly, dormant customers do not undertake any forms of active negatively valenced SMEB, such as detachment or co-destruction.

#### *Detachment*

Detachment represents a low level of negatively valenced SMEB. Detached customers privately remove themselves from the social media page and related content through selecting to hide all future content, or 'unlike' or 'unsubscribe' from the page. This reflects a termination of the interaction, meaning there is a temporary or permanent conclusion to the consumers' behavioural engagement with the social media page. The detachment of individual users does not impact on other users of the social media site. Detachment from a brand relationship or brand community can be observed in previous scholarly research through the concept of relationship ending, explored more commonly in interpersonal relationship literature (Duck & Perlman, 1985). Other terms related to the concept have included termination, withdrawal, dissolution, discontinuation, uncoupling and break-up (Stewart, 1998). Bowden, Gabbott, and Naumann (2015) provide a comprehensive review of relationship ending and disengagement literature. They define disengagement as:

A process by which a customer-brand relationship experiences a trauma or disturbance which may lead to relationship termination; which involves a range of trigger based events; which varies in intensity and trajectory; which occurs within a specific set of category conditions and which is dependent on prior levels of customer engagement. (Bowden et al., 2015, p. 6)

Concurring with Bowden et al. (2015), detachment within social media can be referred to as 'termination', representing a state of more perpetual disengagement and referring to the end of a customer's engagement with the focal brand page (Brodie et al., 2013). This view suggests a permanent state of detachment, however, it may be posited that detachment with a social media brand page may be temporary in nature, as users may choose to rejoin at a later date.

#### *Negative contribution*

Negatively contributing customers represent a moderate level of negatively valenced engagement behaviour. These social media users can make negative, active

contributions to *existing* content posted on social media brand pages. These contributions may be directed toward either the brand, or members. Users exhibiting this form of negatively valenced SMEB may do so with the aim of influencing other actors' perceptions, preferences or knowledge regarding the focal firm (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Negative contributions made within social media are comparable to the concept of negative word of mouth (WOM). The significance of WOM in influencing consumer decision-making has been well recognised in marketing and advertising literature (Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998). Social media platforms offer an ideal tool for negative WOM, as customers freely create and disseminate brand-related information in their established social networks (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Negatively discussing focal brands and service experiences through WOM behaviours may affect the purchase behaviour of focal as well as other customers (van Doorn et al., 2010).

### Co-destruction

Co-destructive social media users display high level of negatively valenced SMEB. Co-destructive customers actively create negative content on social media brand pages, interacting with the brand, other customers and the general public. Scholars have recently distinguished between the destruction of value during interactive value formation, and the co-creation of value. While co-creation refers to the process in which providers and customers collaboratively create value, co-destruction refers to the collaborative destruction, or diminishment of value by providers and customers (Plé & Cáceres, 2010). This form of content is created within social media platforms, with the aim to vent negative brand-related feelings causing a destruction of brand value (Bowden et al., 2015; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

### Social media content and engagement behaviour

Building on the previous discussion, we propose an integrative model of social media content and SMEB (Figure 2). The model suggests that social media content facilitates

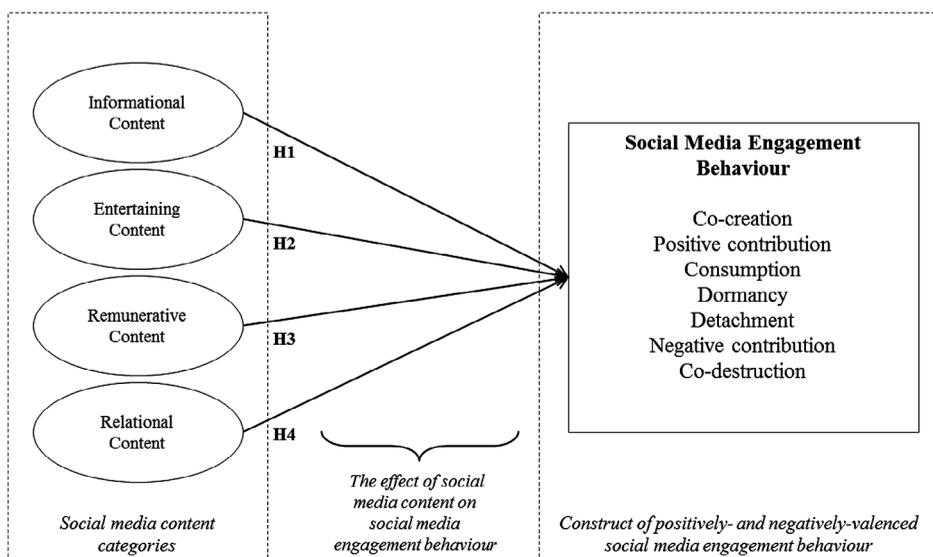


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Social Media Content and SMEB.

SMEB. There are seven discrete types of SMEB exhibited by users. The following paragraphs detail the emerging hypotheses.

### ***Engaging with informational content***

Scholars have demonstrated that consumers engage when motivated by informational needs (Ko et al., 2005). This behavioural engagement manifests through actions such as clicking on links, staying on websites longer, reading details and threads and using multimedia features. This denotes passive engagement with the brand, rather than active engagement in the form of commenting, or contributing to online communities (Ko et al., 2005).

In the social media context, de Vries et al. (2012), Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) and Lee et al. (2013) have empirically demonstrated a relationship between informative content and customer engagement. Informative content has been found to negatively impact levels of user engagement in the form of likes and comments, when compared to persuasive content such as emotional and philanthropic content (Lee et al., 2013). Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) found that posts which contain information about the brand cause a lower level of engagement compared to entertaining content. Comparatively, no significant relationship was found between the provision of information within a brand post and the number of likes or comments obtained (de Vries et al., 2012). This could be explained by the fact that highly informational brand-related content may be considered as specific to the brand page on which it is posted, and hence it may lose its significance when shared by fans on their own walls. Further, informational content is often not designed to appeal to engagement behaviours that elicit interaction with other users in the same way as entertaining or relational content. Hence,

H1: Informational content facilitates passive, positively-valenced social media engagement behaviour.

### ***Engaging with entertaining content***

Extant studies within the social media context highlighted the importance of entertaining content as one of the antecedents to engagement behaviour. Entertaining content can be found in messages which include small talk or banter, an attempt to gain trust and contain philanthropic content to appeal to a person's emotions (Lee et al., 2013). Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) defined entertaining content as posts that did not refer to a brand or particular product, rather were written in the form of a teaser, slogan or word play. Entertaining content was a significant factor in increasing the number of likes, comments and shares made on social media content (Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013). Conflicting research has shown negative effects of entertaining content. de Vries et al. (2012) found that entertainment is marginally significant and negatively related to social media content popularity (the number of likes on a Facebook post). The study also found that whether the content was entertaining or not, it did not influence the number of comments made on the content.

Consistent with the rationale of UGT, entertaining content is proposed as an antecedent of positively valenced SMEB, such as positive contribution and co-creation. If social media content is entertaining, customers' motivations to engage with the content are met. Hence, customers will exhibit a positive response toward entertaining social media content. Thus:

H2: Entertaining content facilitates active, positively-valenced social media engagement behaviour.

### ***Engaging with remunerative content***

Scholars have suggested that social media content that offers remuneration may cause lower levels of engagement, compared to informative content (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Remunerative social media content includes contests and sweepstakes and was found to be negatively related to the number of likes that a post received, but was a significant factor in predicting the number of comments (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Whilst the study demonstrated the effect of remunerative content on facilitating engagement behaviour through comments, the valence or content of customer comments were not considered or analysed. It is expected that a low level of behavioural engagement would occur as a result of a post containing a reward or offer, for example, consumption behaviour, rather than positive contribution or co-creation (Muntinga et al., 2011). In contrast, Lee et al. (2013) found that social media content which includes economic or remunerative information such as a product mention, price mention or deals and promotions has a negative impact on comments. Further, this form of content also has a negative impact on the number of likes obtained on the post. Thus:

H3: Remunerative content facilitates passive, positively-valenced social media engagement behaviour.

### ***Engaging with relational content***

Brodie et al. (2013) recognise 'socialising' as one of five sub-processes of customer engagement which may occur within a virtual brand community. Socialising refers to two-way, non-functional interactions through which consumers develop attitudes, norms and/or a common language (Brodie et al., 2013, p. 7). Customers with high social interaction motivations are more likely to engage in human-to-human interaction whether in an offline or online context. This interaction includes behaviours such as providing comments, feedback, personal information and participating in online discussion (Ko et al., 2005). These behaviours are reflective of the positive contribution and co-creation levels of the SMEB typology. These studies suggest that social gratification is a significant predictor of SMEB. Based on this reasoning, it can be hypothesised that relational brand content which stimulates social participation and interaction amongst consumers will be successful in facilitating positively valenced SMEB. Thus:

H4: Relational content facilitates active, positively-valenced social media engagement behaviour.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This paper responds to the call for the development of theoretical models describing the roles of customers in online social networks. Through the examination of the role of social media content using UGT, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of engagement behaviour within social media platforms. We explored the influence of informational content, entertaining content, relational content and remunerative content on positively and negatively valenced engagement behaviour. The theoretical model

and corresponding hypotheses address the dynamic nature of how social media content impacts on SMEB.

Further research using the theoretical model will demonstrate how an organisation can enhance, mitigate or neutralise different forms of SMEB through strategic development of social media content. It will provide further understanding of how marketers structure and deliver communication content in such a way that it promotes positively valenced engagement behaviours. Managers of brands that utilise social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be guided by this research in deciding which characteristics of content to place within posts in order to elicit favourable behavioural responses among users. Further research should also incorporate developing a greater understanding of what drives negatively valenced engagement as suggested by Hollebeek and Chen (2014) and Bowden et al., (2015).

The proposed construct of SMEB contributes to the literature, through the development of a deeper understanding of the nature of engagement behaviour. It encompasses a new typology of SMEB; specifically describing co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution and co-destruction behaviour. Whilst previous engagement scholars have explored the customer engagement cycle, a construct for understanding both positive and negative SMEB has not yet been developed. The typology captures both positively valenced engagement behaviours and negatively valenced engagement behaviours and considers the intensity of this engagement, reflected at both ends of the spectrum. Further, the development of the SMEB construct provides clarity to managers who wish to understand not only why, but also how customers engage with a focal brand.

Previous research in customer brand engagement has considered the construct an overarching phenomenon, even when examining specific focal objects such as online engagement (e.g. Mollen & Wilson, 2010) or advertising/media engagement (e.g. Gambetti et al., 2012). Despite recognition that the brand experience consists of multiple interactions with discrete resources, and hence is context dependent (Brodie et al., 2011), there has been little research focused on specific experience settings. This research examines social media engagement; while being a constituent of customer brand engagement, we recognise it does not embody the construct in its entirety. Having a focus on customer engagement with social media content has enabled a deeper examination of the nature of engagement in this context and the behaviours that manifest. This provides greater clarity into the specific expressions of both positively and negatively valenced engagement behaviour in a social media context and what facilitates it.

The application of UGT to examine the influence of social media content on engagement behaviours recognises the interactive nature of the media and extends the use of the theory. Historically, UGT has examined the motivations for seeking specific types of media through recognition that customers are active and not passive. The active nature of customers in their decision-making and selection of media is consistent with the social media context, where customers choose not only to consume but to engage with the media. We seek to understand the impact of this decision-making and therefore it is reasonable that we extend the application of UGT to determine the engagement behaviour.

### Future research directions

The positioning of social media content as an antecedent to SMEB, in addition to the development of a construct typifying seven categories of SMEB, serves as a basis for further exploration. This further exploration would focus on engagement and the role of marketing activities in online, dynamic environments. Whilst we hypothesise that social media content facilitates SMEB, empirical analysis is required to further explore this relationship.

The extent to which SMEB is caused by factors beyond social media content is an important consideration. For example, customer expressions of co-destructive behaviour may arise as a result of a brand-related experience outside of the social media platform. Theoretical and empirical investigation of the factors beyond social media content which may facilitate positively and negatively valenced engagement behaviour will further the understanding of SMEB. For example, antecedents of customer engagement such as identification, trust, involvement, commitment and interaction (Brodie et al., 2011; Gambetti et al., 2012) could be applied to future studies examining the drivers of SMEB. The dynamic nature of the levels of engagement behaviours proposed in the SMEB construct merit further attention. For example, analysis of customer progression through or within the seven proposed categories provides an interesting area for further research. Knowledge of this process will offer substantial managerial value. The extent to which the levels proposed occur in an interactive, cyclical or unpredictable pattern warrants further research. Whilst this model focuses on the specific interactive experiences between customers and the social media content of brands, interactions between customers, business, governments and other agencies merit further examination as called for in Brodie et al. (2011).

This paper investigates one marketing activity; the provision of social media content. Other marketing activities that merit attention include the use of paid and targeted advertising, brand endorsements by influential bloggers or celebrities, and social distribution tools such as the 'Facebook Store'. Further research regarding other forms of marketing activities within social media will enhance our understanding of how users engage in this medium.

Some proponents of customer engagement argue for a three-dimensional construct of customer engagement, with cognitive, affective and behavioural components (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011). This study focused exclusively on the behavioural manifestation of engagement. Future research could theorise and examine the influence of social media content on cognitive and affective engagement. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the engagement attributed to social media content and consequently could be a better predictor of future behaviour.

As outlined in earlier discussions, social media engagement reflects only one customer brand touch-point within the broader brand experience. Customer brand engagement is a broader notion that encapsulates a series of multiple touch-points between the customer and the brand. Future research should seek to consider engagement behaviours across all channels that customer use to engage with a firm. Future research should compare these various customer brand touch-points and seek to understand the synergistic effects of multiple forms of customer engagement with the brand. Embedded within this would be a comparison of online versus offline customer engagement.

An examination of individual customers would likely reveal that some customers have a higher likelihood to actively engage through social media, rather than passively engage, and that some customers would be more likely to engage through negatively

valenced expression, rather than positively valenced expression. Further research to understand the characteristics of these individuals would allow for targeted strategies and responses. By understanding SMEB and examining this in context of a customer profitability analysis, customer segments can be created that may be better targeted and more profitably managed (Gummerus et al., 2012).

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