Investigating Social Media Influencers' Impact on Brand Equity of Electronic Retailer Brands in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Social media has emerged as one of the revolutionary technologies of the 21st century, ushering in a new era and providing users with the capabilities to connect, share and interact diversely. Beyond connectivity and sharing, social media platforms host a variety of content, including text, images, and videos, consequently, social media content has become a driving force behind increased social media usage and engagement. In this landscape, social media influencers (SMIs) play a significant role, contributing to the dynamic and engaging nature of social media. As social media adoption and usage continue to rise, brands are strategically leveraging these platforms to connect with their customers and potential audiences. Notably, the utilization of influencers as channels to deliver brand messages has become a prominent trend. Social media influencers, with their audience-fit content, large follower numbers, and established parasocial relationships, are instrumental in shaping brand perceptions. Therefore, this study delves into the role of user-generated content (UGC) by social media influencers in shaping qualitative brand equity among mature cohort consumers of electronic brands in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the research focuses on social media influencer contributions to brand perception among users aged between 28 and 45, comparing their behaviour with that of other user groups. While existing literature predominantly concentrates on influencers targeting younger age groups, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the influence on mature cohort consumers, a demographic experiencing growing engagement with social media.

To address its research gap, the study utilizes qualitative brand equity by employing Keller's customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model and Lavidge and Steiner's hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model steps, demonstrating the evolution of qualitative brand equity as a systematic process. Concentrating its focus on Saudi Arabia, the research based its context on the contribution of social media influencers' content sharing (UGC) on customer brand perception of three electronic retailers: Xcite, eXtra, and Jarir. The research employed a quantitative research method, involving a cross-sectional survey completed by 477 Saudi participants, with 262 participants aged between 28 and 45, the focus of the study.

This research underscores that the majority of Saudi Arabia's social media users fall within the age range of 28 to 45, surpassing other age groups. Utilizing structural equation modelling, the study found the pivotal role of parasocial relationships as critical motivators for trust and

engagement between social media users and influencers. The results highlighted the substantial presence of social media users aged 28 and above in Saudi Arabia. Notably, the research observes the significant relevance of influencer-fuelled interactions on social media, particularly among mature users aged 28-45. Importantly, this is significant as mature social media users are shown to be more affluent and responsive to user-generated content by social media influencers. It also notes that influencers wield a considerable impact on the brands they endorse and promote, leveraging pre-established connections with users. Therefore, the findings from this research are anticipated to help organizations in managing digital marketing efforts by enhancing brand value, especially within mature demographics of social media consumers.

Declaration of Authenticity

"I, Ibrahim Alibrahim, declare that the PhD thesis entitled "*Investigating Social Media Influencers' Impact on Brand Equity of Electronic Retailer Brands in Saudi Arabia*" is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Ethics Declaration

'I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures'

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (Application ID: *HRE22-087*).

Signature: *Ibrahim Alibrahim*   Date: *28/02/2024*

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List of Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Symbols

Abbreviation	Meaning
AVE	Average variance extracted
BE	Brand equity
CBBE	Customer-based brand equity
CBE	Customer brand engagement
CCA	Confirmatory composite analysis
CEB	Consumer engagement behaviour
CGC	Consumer generated content
CR	Composite reliability
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EBBE	Employee-based brand equity
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
eWOM	Electronic word of mouth
FBBE	Financial-based brand equity
FEBE	Firm-based brand equity
GoF	Goodness of fit
HOE	Hierarchy-of-effects
HTMT	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio
IMC	Integrated marketing communication

KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin
MGA	Multiple group analysis
PR	Parasocial relationship
PCA	Principal component analysis
PLSc	Consistent PLS-SEM
P.R	Public relations
Q^2	Predictive ability
R^2	Coefficient of determination
RII	Relative importance index
RM	Relationship marketing
SAR	Saudi Arabian riyal
SEM	Structural equation modelling
SM	Social media
SMEs	Small and midsize enterprises
SmartPLS	Partial least squares structural equation modelling
SMI	Social media influencer
SNS	Social network services
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
SRMR	Standardised root mean square residual
UGC	User-generated content
USD	United States dollar
VIF	Variance inflation factor

List of Definitions

Brand equity (BE) - According to Aaker (1991), BE encompasses the collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand's name and symbol, which contribute to or detract from the value of a product or service. It represents the intangible value that a brand possesses in the perception of consumers.

Brand resonance (BR) - Described by Keller (2009) as the engagement by customers and their reaction toward a brand. Resonance contributes to brand equity depending on the intensity and how it is supported by the relationships between people sharing on SNS.

Consumer engagement behaviour (CEB) - The actions and interactions that consumers have with a brand, product, or service, demonstrating their interest, involvement, and loyalty. This includes activities such as social media interaction, feedback, content creation, repeat purchases, and advocacy (Dessart et al., 2015; Badenes-Rocha et al., 2019).

Customer brand engagement (CBE) - According to Hollebeek et al. (2014), CBE is defined as the psychological state representing a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural attachment to a brand. It involves the customer actively participating, identifying with, and interacting with the brand.

Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) - The main output measured in this study. It is the value that a brand adds to a product or service by creating a positive image in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993). Kotler (1991) defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (p. 442). Brand equity, according to Aaker (1991), encompasses the collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand's name and symbol, which contribute to or detract from the value of a product or service. It represents the intangible value that a brand possesses in the perceptions of consumers. Brand equity is an integral component of customer engagement, as illustrated by Kotler (2002).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) - The communication of information through modern SNS platforms involving advocacy of brands, products, events, or promotions by customers, discussed by Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) and Gulamali & Persson (2017).

Employee-based brand equity (EBBE) - The version/orientation of brand equity that is focused on the employees' perspective of the brand. Like customer-based brand equity, its value comes from the innate nature of the brand (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

Financial-based brand equity (FBBE) - A measure of the financial value that a brand contributes to a business. It takes into account the revenue benefit obtained by the brand as an asset on its own. In other words, FBBE represents the total revenue obtained from a brand as a distinct asset (Baalbaki, 2012).

Firm-based brand equity (FBBE) - A measure of the value that a brand contributes to a business, both financially and internally, through the perception of the brand by its customers. It is an important concept in marketing research and can help firms build a strong brand identity (Alakkas et al., 2022; Shieh & Lai, 2017).

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) - A strategic approach that combines brand activities to foster lasting relationships with consumers. It serves as an organizational framework for brands to communicate with customers, prospects, and the public. IMC campaigns curate messages to create a sustained impact, influencing consumers towards brand loyalty (Blakeman, 2023; Broderick & Pickton, 2005; Barger & Labrecque, 2013).

Parasocial relationship (PR) - Horton & Wohl (1956) propose this concept, which refers to the one-sided relationship between a viewer and a media figure. Phua et al. (2018) apply this concept to examine the relationship that develops between an individual and a media character, in this case, a social media influencer.

Social media user engagement - According to Phua et al. (2017, p. 414), on social media platforms there are six actions that create gratification: "passing time, showing affection, following fashion, sharing problems, demonstrating sociability, and improving social knowledge." These actions, when concerning a specific brand, contribute towards the engagement and responsiveness that customers have towards a specific brand, whether caused by influencers, paid promotions, or spontaneously.

Social media influencers (SMIs) - Lampeitl & Åberg (2017) define a SMI as "An individual that attracts an audience beyond their immediate friends and family through their online content

creation, and have the power to influence the behaviour, opinions, and values of others through their valuable narrative" (p. 15).

Social media/social network services (SM/SNS) - Social media refers to computer-based technology that allows users to easily share ideas, thoughts, and information by creating virtual networks and engaging in fast electronic communication of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

User-generated content (UGC) - Defined by Smith et al. (2012) as any form of content that is posted on online platforms (such as social media) by users, relating to a product, brand, or service. UGC guides the consumer when relating to a brand, product, or service image. UGC sharing is important in creating and strengthening the connection between a consumer and a brand (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Hollebeek et al. (2014) argue that interactions influence the nature of consumers and how they relate to brands and products. Smith et al. (2012), add that UGC in brand communication systematically affects the overall user perceptions of the particular brand.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and examines the research background, research justification, and study gaps. Further, the chapter presents the research question, research objectives, contributions and significance, followed by an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 Contemporary approaches to brand identity

Establishing a positive brand identity in the minds of consumers is of paramount importance to business organizations. Every brand wants to be regarded as the best and preferred over their competitors. To create the right perception with their customers, brands have been improving their tactics and methods of engagement. Social media (SM) platforms (also known as social network services (SNS)) are interactive platforms that connect people through media, text or information sharing. These platforms are avenues for brand promotion, product/service information and customer communication (Bi & Zhang, 2022) and have become a core element in advertising models for businesses because of the increasing importance of applications, connectivity, and sharing, and their resulting psychological impact on life patterns (Bi & Zhang, 2022; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The rise of social media has led to greater efficiency in marketing communication, sharing, and value for both users and brands. Hence, social media platforms are the 'new normal' for brand promotion, with messages focussed on achieving marketing objectives such as customer loyalty and positive attitudes or behaviour (Ghosh, 2022). Some businesses now utilize SNS communications to create behavioural impact, by keeping customers engaged, informed, and influencing consumer trends (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2016). Social media (SM) has decentralized communication between businesses and their stakeholders. This decentralization has improved customer-brand interaction because brands and customers can communicate with each other without the limitations imposed by time, place, or medium (Kim & Ko, 2012).

In the past, according to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), brand messages or customer-perceived experiences with a brand could easily fail to reach a mass audience. Today, social media has improved brand communication efficiency, both for negative and positive brand messages. Hence, social media has provided a channel for integrated brand communication and to drive engagement. Given the availability of social media reporting tools, the impact of brand outcomes can be reliably measured. Social media influencers (SMIs), on the other hand, have been an increasingly important subject of importance to brands considering their large follower or subscriber numbers online and their endearing influence. Enke & Borchers (2021), while researching social media as brand stakeholders, mention that influencer promotion on social media needs to be further scoped and studied, for optimization of brand promotions involving influencers, therefore, this study picks up on that under-evaluated area of research. Currently, the changes in using social media as a digital advertising platform and incorporating brand endorsements and communications via SMIs are gaps in marketing knowledge that need to be investigated. Understanding this phenomenon further can help to give marketers a deeper understanding of how to reach consumers and build brand trust effectively. As such, the present study will help build upon this idea by determining what brand messages and social media marketing tools and techniques are required to create a positive brand image to increase brand equity (BE). Brand engagement is a strategy, as illustrated by Hung (2014), Salo (2017), and many other marketing scholars as an essential subject for investigation that needs to be conceptualized as it has been shown to lead to better economic outcomes for brands.

Traditional marketing methods were often one-sided consumer-brand interactions, with consumers as passive, rather than active, participants (Trusov et al., 2009). However, with the advent of social media, the role of the consumer has undergone a significant change. As a result, there is a demand to adopt integrated marketing communication (IMC), in which communication is two-way and brands seek to create relationships and brand-loyal customers (Blakeman, 2023). Contemporary brands and their followers can engage in more interactive and connected relationships (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Hence, many organizations over the last fifteen years have been adopting social media marketing (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). This is because social media technology has amplified the effectiveness of advertising through traffic and has improved communications through influence, hence playing a significant role in customer psychology. Furthermore, celebrity endorsements using social media influencers have been garnering high influence for consumption and product perception (Phua et al., 2018).

1.2 Identifying the gap in the knowledge

With social media usage comes influential individuals on social media with a huge ability to attract and influence followers known as SMIs. Freberg et al. (2011) define social media influencers as famous social media icons who can attract a huge amount of audience traffic and influence behaviour, opinions and trends. SMIs have become increasingly important to brand success because of their large follower or subscriber numbers and their enduring influence. Influencers have become marketing assets, and this impacts how social media users interact and how organizations monetize social media. Brand images are no longer shaped only by internal marketers, but by consumers' connections, content, and interactions with the brand themselves, as well as by their larger social communities (Tsai & Men, 2013). Indeed, social media interaction has transformed communication between brands and their potential consumers. Social interaction is a key motivator for not only consumer interaction, but for consumers choosing brands (Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010).

Marketing scholars, marketers, and advertisers must understand the positive impact of brand communication and its contribution to brand equity (Lassar et al., 1995), because the efficiency of SNS communications can be maximized by considering more target audience groups. SNS is a more affordable and reliable way to connect to customers (Weismueller et al., 2020). Social media and influencer marketing require new and more effective frameworks to improve the use of SMIs in marketing. Communications media, in particular social media, has a role to play in facilitating access to social networks, revealed by the new ways in which these technologies support social connections (Quinn, 2018). Therefore, this thesis fills a knowledge gap about the contribution to marketing of SMIs using user-generated content (UGC).

Research about social media's contribution to marketing has investigated many variables and elements, however new research gaps keep emerging. Customer psychology models such as Keller's (2001) customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model were conceptualized to redefine customer engagement. These models have become important with the growth of social media, which has enabled digital sectors such as e-commerce to grow. Makki & Change (2015) and Alalwan et al. (2017), for example, illustrate how social media marketing is influential. They explain how SM is used to generate more leads for online sales. Social media marketing and customer engagement techniques create more value than classical marketing methodologies, especially with the exploitation of SMIs (Alalwan et al., 2017). Internet companies such as

Google and Facebook are also revolutionizing ways to engage their users. One of these adaptations involves the inclusion of UGC, which is customized information to engage SM users about a particular product, service, promotion, event, or occurrence.

1.3 Research objective and purpose

The main research objective of the thesis is to analyse the impact of UGC sharing by SMIs on the consumer-based brand equity of retail technology companies, focusing on Xcite, eXtra, and Jarir in Saudi Arabia. The research also investigates the relationship between influencer UGC endorsement sharing and the number of brand engagements on social media. The research analyses customer receptiveness to and perceptions about brand endorsements during social media influencer UGC campaigns. This research is specific to social media users, with a particular focus on a more mature cohort between the ages of 28-45. Much social media design and research focuses on young adults (Usher et al., 2014). Hence, little is known about how mature consumer groups (such as Gen X and millennials) on social media are affected by SMI UGC and how it impacts on their perceptions about brands.

According to Kemp (2019), the age group of 25-34-year-olds (51%) makes up the largest proportion of social media users in Saudi Arabia; followed by 18-24-year-olds (21%), 35-44-year-olds (17%), 45-54-year-olds (5%) and 13-17-year-olds (2%). Correspondingly, Kemp's (2023) report likewise indicates that the average age of a social media user in the country is 35 years old. Saudi Arabia has a large proportion of mature social media users as the primary users. Additionally, it is important to study the reactions of mature consumers in SNS marketing campaigns, as UGC has been found to have a greater psychological influence on conviction towards customer perceptions of mature SNS users than younger SNS users (Wang, 2017). The element of maintaining and improving CBBE using UGC on social media is what is being investigated by the thesis.

Over the past few decades, creating, maintaining, and building brand equity has been a major focus in marketing research. However, the landscape has changed (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is now very important, since social media platforms have garnered a massive user base, with millions of individuals actively engaging on these platforms. The influence of social media on individuals' lives has undergone a remarkable surge, as evidenced by the study conducted by More & Lingam (2019). Social media has given

rise to a culture of influencers, granting them significant power and impact within their respective communities.

SMIs have become important propagators of brand messages given their established associations with users (Arora et al., 2019). The investigation of how a mature cohort of consumers active on social media is affected by UGC is a significant knowledge gap. Influencer marketing and UGC reliability is a resource that some brands use for competitive brand advantage. Online content sharing, such as customized reviews, create intrinsic value for brands. The study measures how UGC by SMIs on brands can influence consumers and help achieve non-monetary value for a brand – in other words, qualitative brand equity. As such, it contributes to the knowledge pool about social media marketing strategies and communications that effectively build relationships with consumers, and which in turn develops brand equity.

1.4 Research questions

The primary research question of this thesis is:

1. What is the impact of social media influencers' user-generated content sharing on the consumer-based brand equity of electronics retailer brands in a mature cohort of Saudi Arabian consumers?

To accomplish the objectives of the present study, the following secondary research questions are proposed:

2. Does influencer attractiveness, credibility and authenticity strengthen SMI parasocial relationship with customers?

3. Does influencer attractiveness lead to SNS influencer generated traffic?

4. Do traffic or parasocial relationships have a stronger influence on attitudinal UGC responses?

5. Do influencer-endorsed user-generated content on social media, traffic or parasocial relationships impact positive customer-brand relationships?

6. Do different age cohorts respond differently to SMIs and brand relationships?

1.5 Contribution to knowledge

Brands use product placement through SMIs or consumer communities in marketing campaigns, taking advantage of a non-commercial association to encourage followers' content co-creation (Ghosh, 2022). Creative marketing campaigns by brands consider the impact influencers can have on traffic, cognitive influence, and relationships with their followers. Marketing research that expounds newer and more effective methods to engage or reach out to new audiences is crucial. For instance, Manyanga et al. (2022) highlight that competitive challenges that increase consumer participation as contemporary techniques used to reinforce brand loyalty. Part of the considerations about influencer marketing in brand promotion is that it should involve a wider target of customer groups, as promotions are more efficient when they reach more audiences (Weismueller et al., 2020). However, demographic data is used to divide consumer groups and one of the most significant demographic units is age.

To date, influencer promotions have rarely considered mature demographic cohorts, since most SMIs campaigns primarily target teenagers and youths (Lajnef, 2023). As illustrated by Usher et al. (2014), social media is interpreted as a platform inhabited by young people, mostly between the ages of 16-25. Young people are believed to be more greatly impacted by social media (Ridou & Campbell, 2018). The case of Saudi Arabia offers a research opportunity that has been overlooked by other parts of the world. Hence, this research seeks to investigate the role that social media influencers may hold for brand marketers in connecting with an unorthodox age group (28-45 years), where little research has shed a light on how they are impacted by social media. This more mature consumer age group, still, is more responsive to social media information from opinion leaders (influencers) according to recent research (Quinn, 2018). In fact, this study proposed that SMIs can be very effective in reaching a more mature consumer age group. This research focuses on CBBE, which is a long-term objective, rather than brand sales (King & Grace, 2009). Considering the highly susceptible mental state of the selected age group for this study compared to that of other age groups, attachments to influencers are developed more easily. This is because the focus age group is more interested in long-term relationships than short-term benefits. Indeed, there is evidence that CBBE-oriented campaigns are more effective for the age cohort selected for this study (Quinn, 2018). Hence, influencer campaigns may be effective in targeting new age groups, such as the age group of the present study.

This research may not be relevant just to Saudi Arabia, but also to other locations/demographics. By placing social media users above the age of 28 as targets for influencer promotions, brands in Saudi Arabia are likely to create more impact. It would appear that even mature social media users, who are key consumers, find that online brand engagement is useful. This insight is at the foundation of what this study is measuring. The study is important because it provides insight into consumer beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about brand content and communications, and how these constructs affect consumer perceptions about a brand and ultimately contribute to brand equity. The research outlines the evolution of SMI communication and how it is an important element in consumer-brand interactions and consumer perceptions. There is both factual and practical evidence (illustrated by Ebrahim (2020) and Phua et al. (2017)) about how social media marketing campaigns have a direct contribution to brand value.

Communication is an important element of marketing and has a role in creating brand equity through influencing customer trust (Kim & Kim, 2022). Communication plays an important role in keeping the customer informed about brand information such as products, price, and distribution channels (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). These are important elements that enable a brand to create its image through building brand awareness. Keeping the customer informed is an important role in both customer acquisition and retention (Farquhar, 1990). This is because information leaves an impression in the customer's mind leading to the development of stronger brand attachment which in turn builds brand equity (Siddiqua, 2018). Marketing communication is incorporated into a brand's marketing strategy via contemporary technology, which allows customers to interact in the social media environment. For example, many consumers have become "tech-savvy", because the internet has provided unlimited access to information. The unlimited access to information and interactivity on social media gives the customer power to choose brands and products depending on personalized preferences (Alam & Khan, 2019). IMC provides information and engages the customer to create an impression or perception in the customer's mind. These impressions inspire personalized preferences for a brand by the customer.

1.6 Scope of the research

Theoretically, this research's scope considers two marketing psychology models; Lavidge and Steiner's hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model and Keller's model of customer-based brand equity (CBBE). The rationale for using these models is that the Keller model explains customer-based brand equity in relation to a brand's engagements, with brand resonance as the ultimate brand goal (Keller, 2003). The hierarchy-of-effects model explains the systematic process between a brand's interaction and the customer regarding marketing actions. The hierarchy-of-effects model shows the customer's psychological steps while interacting with the brand (Wijaya, 2015). In this research, this is done via a social media influencers' UGC. These models will be combined in a conceptual framework to reveal how UGC from influencers affects qualitative brand equity.

Developing knowledge of how UGC impacts a demographic can be used by brands to build engagement, purchases, and consumer loyalty towards all elements of brand equity (BE). This study focuses on the effect that social media messages by influencers in Saudi Arabia have on consumer loyalty, brand perception and resulting brand equity. The paper specifically focuses on vertical marketing distinctions by measuring consumer-based brand equity for better theoretical accuracy. As defined by Oliver (2014), vertical marketing are marketing promotion actions that trigger an action from a consumer without considering the consumer's experience with the product or service. On the other hand, horizontal marketing focusses on internally building systems to upgrade the standards of products or services offered by a brand, including product quality and customer service (Oliver, 2014). Vertical marketing involves a brand trying to capture and retain customers as much as possible, including promotions and advertisements (Oliver, 2014). Hence, the research is exclusive to occurrences that are not fuelled by brand resources that involve product or service delivery.

The research explores the concept of brand equity, specifically the development of consumer perceptions through consumer engagement in IMC situations. Customer engagement is multidimensional, and different perspectives can be adopted to measure/define this outcome of marketing actions, highlighted by Razmus (2021) and Santini (2020). The study relies on CBBE, a reliable and valid measurement developed by Keller (1993; 2009) and Oliver (2014) among other authors, who offer different definitions and associated sub-forms. This thesis considers consumer engagement behaviour (CEB), which represents the voluntary contribution made by consumers as a behavioural response in consumer-brand interactions. The study

considers engagement in the dimension of CEB, which illustrates the interactions between a consumer and a brand exceeding purchase intention. Considering the importance of customer interaction in consumer behaviour, the study adopts the definitions and considerations of Badenes-Rocha et al. (2019) who state that engagement does not primarily consider incentive or profitable motives. With these considerations, this research establishes considerations that allow the analysis of influencers as key contributors to adopted perceptions. By considering consumer engagement, SMI have an antecedent role to play in brand engagement, positive perception, and product involvement, which are some of the marketing outcomes.

Demographically, this research possesses a unique consideration in its scope, which is the focus on a mature social media user cohort. Hence, the research scope includes a special consideration of consumer behaviour of Saudi Arabians aged between 28 and 45 years old. Social media is a technology originating from the West and adopted in other parts of the world (Salem, 2017). According to Salem, social media is considered to be for youthful groups and teenagers aged between 15-24 (65%), as these are the main user groups for whom social media was created. Social media promotions appear to often share this assumption, because they appear to be aimed at young audiences. However, compared to younger social media users, individuals over the age of 28 are not the primary targets of marketing campaigns on social media, except in China, where social media influencers (also referred to as Key Opinion Leaders) guide the purchase decisions of customers across all age groups (Zou & Peng, 2019).

The upper age limit defined in Kemp's (2019) report suggests that social media life expectancy (how active a person is on social media compared to their age) ranges from 18 to 44 years old. The upper cohort of social media users is perceived to be less active, making them less targeted by brands' SNS marketing campaigns. However, Quinn (2018) and Phan et al. (2011) claim that mature age groups pay more attention to online advertisements and are more responsive to UGC. Therefore, this study focuses on social media users between the ages of 28 and 45 based on an expectation of a higher anticipated return on investment from social media marketing. Salem et al. (2014) report that in 2013, over half of the 135 million Internet users in the Arab region were already utilizing SNS. Salem's (2017) projection was that by 2021, approximately 160 million internet users in the Arab region would be actively engaging with SNS.

Findings from statistics reports such as Salem (2017) and Kemp (2019) highlight the significant growth and adoption of social media platforms in the region. Nearly two-thirds of these social media users were male, and nearly half were under the age of 25 (GO-Gulf, 2017). In Salem et

al.'s (2014) report, Facebook was the most popular social networking service in the Arab region, with 91% of those surveyed having an account. This was followed by Google+ (70%), YouTube (60%), Twitter (57%), LinkedIn (37%), and Instagram (22%). However, it's important to note that having an account doesn't necessarily indicate active usage. Similarly, Kemp (2023) finds that the median age for social media users in Saudi Arabia is 35 years old. However, as marketing platforms they continue to be focussed on audiences that are young (Stanger et al., 2017).

A mature cohort (28-45) has a considerable proportion of the social media usage, more than any other age cohort, as per Kemp's demographic report (2022). Kemp (2022) specifically states that "individuals aged 25 to 34 constitute 17.5% of Saudi Arabia's population, while those in the 35 to 44 age group make up 19.6% of the country's population." This constitutes 37.1%, which is the highest percentage of social media users per age cohort. In Kemp's (2019) earlier report, 25-34-year-olds (51%) make up the largest proportion of social media users in Saudi Arabia, followed by 18-24-year-olds (21%), 35-44-year-olds (17%), 45-54-year-olds (5%) and 13-17-year-olds (2%). The visual representation by Kemp (2022) provides a more revealing representation (Figure 1.1):
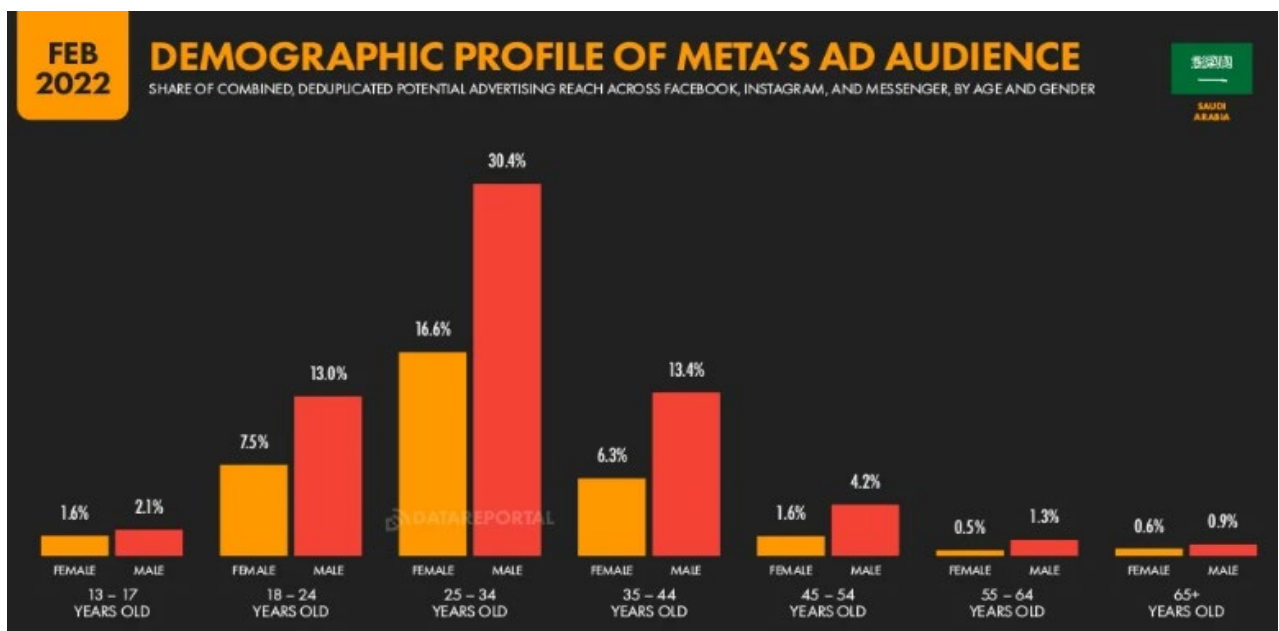
Figure 1.1: A visual representation of users' age across Meta's social networks in Saudi Arabia (Kemp, 2022)

1.7 Research context, overview of Saudi Arabia, and its social media and electronic retail industry

1.7.1 Contextual demographic considerations

The research is focused on Saudi Arabia, where social media usage is prominent. Saudi Arabia is the author's country of origin and is a suitable location for the study with the right population dynamics to test the research's theme. The primary focus of this study is to examine the behaviour and preferences of social media users in Saudi Arabia, which has a dynamic and rapidly growing online community. This high digital engagement is part of Saudi Arabia's dynamic landscape, strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Middle East and Western Asia on the Arabian Peninsula. Ehteshami (2018) notes that this geographical advantage profoundly influences its marketing strategies, shaping trade relations and aligning marketing approaches with both regional and global trends. As a nation actively participating in international affairs, including its membership in the Group of Twenty (G20), Saudi Arabia's economic prosperity is intricately linked to its geographical location, creating a dynamic and influential business environment.

1.7.2 The electronic commerce market

Electronic devices are one of the highly penetrated products among a wide range of technical consumer goods in households (Fortune Business Insights, 2024). The electronic commerce market consists of fast-moving electronic consumer goods such as mobile phones, computers, televisions, electronic kitchen items and electronic accessories. The consumer market size for electronic retail on e-commerce platforms was estimated at USD $773.40 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow from USD 815.16 billion in 2024 to USD $1,467.94 billion by 2032 (Fortune Business Insights, 2024). Companies are focusing on developing high-performing and convenient-to-use devices due to increasing demand. Similarly, e-commerce is growing and it keeps incorporating more consumer groups by improving ordering, shipping and delivery methods. This has influenced the adoption of e-commerce as a method of shopping, especially for electronic goods. The current market position of the electronic retail option has also been affected by the amount of influence and content. With social media influencers doing reviews and informative content, consumers can know what to expect from online purchases.

Globally, the revenue obtained from electronic sales through e-commerce platforms was recorded at a staggering USD $1,046.0 billion (Statista, 2024). These statistics show electronic commerce as one of the leading niche in consumer purchases in terms of monetary value. Similarly, consumer electronics is a field that is filled with plenty of information on products and their usage, as each person contributed approximately USD $135.00 to the total revenue market in the field as of 2024 so far (Statista, 2024). Growing research and development activities lay the foundation for betterment in terms of product quality, delivery and accurate pricing. A large global market also warrants diversity in consumption options, which allows different producing or supplying companies to have a market share. Globally, the electronic retail market is one of the largest and the most rapidly growing, making it an appropriate focus for the study.

In Saudi Arabia, demographic factors such as fast internet and developing ICT systems support a growing consumer base in electronics (Modor Intelligence, 2024). Revenue from electronic sales in Saudi Arabia is expected reach USD $2.32 billion in 2024 (Statista, 2024). The robustness of Saudi Arabia's economy, fuelled by extensive oil reserves and ambitious economic diversification efforts under the Vision 2030 initiative (Nurunnabi, 2017), plays a defining role in shaping consumer behaviour and market dynamics. Hence, in the electronic market, the number of users is expected to amount to 19.1 million users by 2029 (Statista, 2024). This economic backdrop not only influences the purchasing power and preferences of consumers but also provides opportunities for businesses to cater to a growing and affluent consumer base. Saudi Arabia also leads in online consumerism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Kemp, 2022), with top electronics retailer brands. As predicted by Statista, (2024), ecommerce user penetration in the electronics sector will be 24.3% in 2024 and is expected to hit 48.8% by 2029. Within this active market, electronics retailers selected for this research, Xcite, eXtra, and Jarir, are highly regarded and reliable brands with frequently visited e-commerce platforms.

1.7.3 Social media and influencer marketing in Saudi Arabia

The role of social media extends beyond national borders, amplifying its digital footprint as a focal point for interactions in the broader Arab world. This interconnectedness, facilitated by social platforms, transcends national boundaries and presents marketers with unique

opportunities to reach diverse audiences. However, this also demands an acute awareness of the region's cultural nuances. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of Saudi Arabia's geographical position, economic landscape, and the evolving dynamics of marketing and social media is integral to navigating this rapidly changing and promising business environment. Encompassing a vast geographical expanse, Saudi Arabia's landscape, marked by urban centres and a diverse population, contributes to a rich tapestry of consumer behaviour and preferences (Alqahtany & Aravindakshan, 2022). This intricate landscape, with deep cultural and social nuances, forms the socio-cultural fabric of Saudi Arabia, and significantly influences marketing strategies. Hence, advertisers navigating this dynamic environment must delicately balance the embrace of global marketing trends with profound respect for cultural sensitivities. Societal values wield considerable influence over consumer choices and brand perceptions. Additionally, the political structure, along with regulatory dynamics, further impacts marketing practices, with government initiatives actively shaping the landscape for both local and international marketers (Nurunnabi, 2017). Saudi Arabia's consumer activity is reliant on social media information. This is especially applicable to technical niches such as the electronics retail sector.

Saudi Arabia has the highest ratio of social media users in the MENA region and ranks seventh globally in terms of people having individual social media accounts (ArabNews, 2015). In 2019, Saudi Arabia recorded a population of 33.85 million, which in 2023 rose to 36.68 million. Remarkably, 89% of the population were active internet users in 2019, but by 2023, the figure was 99%. Social media trends also evolved during this period, with 68% being active users in 2019 and a significant increase to 79.3% in 2023 (Kemp, 2019; Kemp, 2023). In 2019, Saudi individuals used their phones for social media, dedicating an average of two hours and 50 minutes daily to these platforms (Kemp, 2019). By 2023, social media usage in the country had surged with an average daily usage of three hours and one minute (Kemp, 2023). In this evolving marketing landscape, social media emerges as a transformative force within Saudi Arabia. The country's high levels of digital literacy, catalysed by the Vision 2030 initiative (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016), have seamlessly integrated social media platforms into daily life, catalysing substantial surges in online engagement.

Social media platforms are not merely marketing channels, but also function as forums for social and cultural discourse, amplifying their role in shaping public opinions and influencing consumer behaviour. This makes Saudi Arabia an appropriate target population for the study. The country's commitment to revolutionizing its economy through the Vision 2030 strategic

plan aligns with transforming from an oil-based to a knowledge-based economy focused on science, technology, and sustainability (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). UGC stands out as a particularly influential aspect of the social media landscape. Saudi Arabia experienced a 93% surge in social media-induced shopping (Chesalina, 2023), showing the significant input of influencers and social media engagement on behaviour. Active user participation in creating and sharing content adds authenticity to brand interactions and fosters community engagement. As Saudi Arabia positions itself as a hub for innovation and digital transformation (Nurunnabi, 2017), businesses must recognize the influential role of UGC in shaping brand perceptions and driving consumer trust. Understanding the intricate interplay between marketing strategies, social media dynamics, and the economic landscape, including the impact of UGC, becomes imperative for researchers and practitioners alike to navigate this multifaceted and dynamic business environment successfully.

Influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour and driving brand engagement, especially within the Saudi Arabian market. According to a report by Statista, influencer marketing expenditure in Saudi Arabia is projected to reach USD $85.09 million by 2024 (Statista, 2024). This substantial investment underscores the increasing recognition of influencers as potent catalysts for brand awareness and consumer engagement in the country. Furthermore, research by Brightery found that 57% of consumers in Saudi Arabia have made purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations (Brightery, 2023). This underscores the importance of influencer marketing in influencing consumer behaviour and driving sales within the Saudi Arabian market. Additionally, their study revealed that 70% of social media users in Saudi Arabia follow influencers to discover new products or services.

This highlights the role of influencers as trusted sources of information and brand recommendations among Saudi consumers. The importance and impact of influencer marketing in the Saudi Arabian market are emphasized by substantial investments, consumer behaviour trends, and data on influencer engagement and influence.

1.7.4 Electronic brands scoped by the research

In the investigation, the research meticulously employs consumer electronic retail brands, considering them as the primary target subjects for comprehensive data analysis. The electronic retail brands were investigated in terms of how social influencers promote user-generated

content and influence consumer perceptions of these brands to target customers. The targeted electronics retailer brands are Xcite, eXtra, and Jarir - three competing consumer electronics retail brands that are prominent in Saudi Arabia (see Appendix 7).

Xcite, owned by Alghanim Industries, is an electronics store chain operating four outlets in Saudi Arabia. Notably, the company was among the first companies to launch an e-commerce portal in Saudi Arabia, an action that earned the company 'The Best Retailer' and 'Best Retail IT Executive' in the 2011 and 2012 Middle East Retail Academy Awards. Xcite is one of the leading e-commerce platforms in Saudi Arabia. The company employs celebrities and SMIs endorsements in some of its promotions.

The second company is eXtra, owned and managed by United Electronics, a Saudi Arabian-based electronics shop founded in 2003. The company is one of the few electronics commerce corporations that publicly trades its stock. The company has over 12 million shoppers and is one of the leading electronics retailer brands in Saudi Arabia.

The third company is Jarir, established in 1974 and recognized as the largest online store in Saudi Arabia. The company has evolved into electronics retailing in Saudi Arabia to become the Middle East's market leader for consumer electronics, books and office supplies.

These three companies have a robust online presence that has made the brands identifiable to the target population selected for this research. The reasons for selecting these three prominent electronics retailer brands not only acknowledges their industry significance, but also serves to streamline the study's focus, enhancing the effectiveness of the research process. This deliberate selection enables a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dynamics between UGC, influencer endorsements, and consumer perceptions within the electronics retail sector in Saudi Arabia, thus contributing to a more profound examination.

1.8 Method

The research employed a quantitative approach, specifically through the development of a cross-sectional survey. Quantitative research can represent an essential step that moves beyond description to test assumptions against the attitudes of participants (Riffe et al., 2019) and as such, it is appropriate for this thesis which aims to study the relationships between the variables to verify hypotheses or theories (Yan, 2020). Therefore, the research was able to determine whether feelings, actions, perceptions, and behaviours could be statistically and mathematically validated the proposed relationships between the study's constructs.

The research focused on three brands in Saudi Arabia namely; Xcite, eXtra, and Jarir, which were picked for referencing by participants about analysing brand communication, resonance, and how customers perceive the brand. The questionnaire was distributed to 477 participants, 262 from the focus age group and 215 from other age groups. The two target sample groups were compared against each other, especially how brands are perceived. The data analysis employed a comprehensive multivariate approach, integrating various statistical methods using SPSS v. 29 and SmartPLS 4. This includes descriptive statistics analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory composite analysis (CCA), and structural equation modelling analysis (SEM).

1.9 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, each with a specific purpose and structure, outlined below:

- **Chapter 1 - Introduction** is the foundation for the rest of the research paper. It provides a summary of the research background and discusses the theoretical underpinning. The introduction situates the research problem, as well as the research aims and objectives, by emphasizing the research rationale and the importance of the research. It also introduces the research question, its significance, and intended purpose, which helps to provide a clear roadmap for the rest of the thesis. Furthermore, the introduction presents a brief overview of the research methodology, which outlines the procedures and methods used to collect and analyse the data.

- **Chapter 2** - **Literature review** explores the previous literature and theoretical contributions from highly regarded authors and scholars. Additionally, the chapter expounds on previous processes and approaches to understand and measure key research points like UGC, parasocial relationships and BE.

- **Chapter 3** - **Conceptual model and hypothesis development** responds to the literature review chapter. It highlights the selected constructs for the study, as identified in the literature review. The chapter establishes the relationships between the variables through an illustrative conceptual framework.

- **Chapter 4** - **Methodology** outlines the procedures and methods to be used to collect and analyse the data for the study. It explains the rationale behind the chosen data methods and their effectiveness in achieving the research aim. The chapter also emphasizes the significance of population parameters in influencing the data collection process. Furthermore, it elaborates on the measurements implemented for the study, which enhance the validity of the research instrument.

- **Chapter 5** - **Results** explains the process of cleaning, breaking down, and scrutinizing the data. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the collected data using statistical techniques to uncover patterns and relationships between variables. Additionally, the chapter summarizes the findings and valuable insights derived from the analysis.

- **Chapter 6** - **Discussion** relates the insights drawn from the collected and analysed data to the literature review. It compares the insights obtained to the literary statements and arguments presented in the literature review. The chapter interprets the results of the study, relating them to the research questions and objectives. It also compares the results of the study with previous studies, highlighting similarities and differences. The chapter presents the implications of the results for theory and practice, as well as any limitations of the study.

- **Chapter 7** - **Conclusion and future research** rounds up the thesis and produces statements to sum up the research aims, obligations and achievements. The conclusion chapter discusses theoretical contributions and implications for practice, as well as the research limitations and recommendations for future research.

The thesis structure is designed to offer a clear and comprehensive overview of the research project, covering key aspects from the introduction to the final conclusions. The thesis

represents a substantial contribution to the field of study, demanding a high level of academic rigor and attention to detail.

1.10 Chapter conclusion

UGC on social media is an important element in customer engagement, especially how it impacts SNS users. This chapter introduced the context surrounding the impact of SMIs' UGC on qualitative brand equity in Saudi Arabia. The chapter expounded on the research title, its scope, and its significance and emphasized the importance of social media usage, specifically in Saudi Arabia. The impact of UGC on customers is a value-creation opportunity when properly exploited. As proposed by this study, UGC has an impact on customer perception of a brand. Therefore, this study investigates a field of research that can improve IMC by brands.

The study's methods analysed significant forces that affect user engagements driven by SMIs. Social media marketing campaigns can be optimized by a greater understanding of how engagements on these platforms affect brand value. The digital and social media sharing culture in Saudi Arabia is an opportunity to breed consumer-based brand equity. With the proposed scope, the thesis creates a focus on specific variables that can be adjusted to optimize campaigns on social media marketing, with qualitative brand equity as a target. The research, therefore, serves an important role in analysing how influencers on social media can promote brands and create value through UGC. The next chapter analyses literature and theoretical arguments on brand equity, social media influencers and parasocial relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of this research and how it fulfils the knowledge gap about SMIs and UGC. To grasp the theoretical context of this research, this chapter reviews the relevant literature. The chapter delves into marketing concepts and theoretical arguments that illustrate how SMIs contribute toward BE through UGC. The chapter starts by defining BE as a goal in outbound marketing action. The chapter then explains the role of SM as a contemporary channel for advertising, an SNS role specific to this study. The chapter then explains influencer marketing by looking at the variables involved, such as attention, awareness, shared relationships, influence, and perception. The chapter highlights existing research that supports the application of influencer marketing for building consumer perceptions.

In the modern age, social media is one of the channels for brand engagement and marketing because of its traffic, affordability, and the number of hours people spend on it (Hudders et al., 2021). Hence some of the arguments, theories, and concepts that validate the impact of influencer marketing on qualitative brand equity are featured in this literature review. Using SM, influencers affect how people perceive information; news, events, promotions, product updates, or feelings (Saima & Khan, 2020; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017). Social influence is an opportunity for brands to showcase their product, service, event, or promotion on SM. As explained by Martínez-López et al. (2020), the influencer fan base is a space that doesn't just have traffic but influence as well. Influencers can pave the way for brands to maximize marketing strategies. However, there are also some critics of its application. For example, Goldsmith et al. (2000), illustrate the sensitive variables that impact the efficiency of influencer marketing. The literature review considers the combined knowledge from different authors about SMIs marketing.

2.2 Brand equity: The marketing goal for a successful brand

Brand equity (BE) is the main goal for marketers seeking to establish a successful brand. Kotler (1991, p. 442) defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." According to Romaniuk et al. (2012), BE is a progressive process that involves creating a notion of the brand being understanding and caring. BE has also been defined as "the enhancement in the perceived utility and desirability a brand name confers on a product" (Lassar et al., 1995, p. 13). Vázquez et al. (2002) mention that brand equity is the utility that the consumer associates with the use and consumption of the brand. These definitions illustrate BE as the positive impression caused by a brand. In this thesis, BE is the summed perception that is carried by a consumer regarding a certain brand (see Keller, 1993; 2003; Kotler, 1991; Aaker, 1996, and Romaniuk et al., 2012).

Companies like Nike, Starbucks, Coca-Cola, and HP have shifted to social media as the primary media channel for promotion and customer communication. Over the past couple of decades, as digital platforms have evolved, firms' marketing strategies have focused on creating unique brand experiences through interactive multimedia environments (Paruthi & Kaur, 2017). These experiences are not just focussed on profit through sales, but on attitudinal considerations, making customer engagement an intrinsic motivation, as the psychological states of customers adds value to the performance of the firm (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). Therefore, BE is a construct that combines multiple dimensions, encompassing relationship formation, brand engagement, positive emotions, trust and loyalty. Hence, companies need to understand how they can measure the effectiveness of their implemented influencer marketing campaigns and optimize them.

When considering the modern spaces and channels of consumer-brand interaction, it is important that the outcome considers what is best for the brand. Aaker (1996) explains the measurement of brand equity and establishes its value. Aaker (1992) defines BE as a combination of four elements: brand loyalty, perceived quality, associations, and awareness. These elements are supported by other sub-elements of the marketing mix, such as price and competitive advantage (as illustrated in Figure 2.2). The study also emphasizes the focus on brand equity, that is, the customer having a positive mindset about a brand is a core value to a

business. Although many marketing actions focus on sales and revenue, the thesis concurs with Aaker that brand equity has a valuable role in business success.

Aaker (1996) describes brand equity as an asset. The perceptions and attitudes toward established brands tend to be very stable. Farjam & Hongyi (2015), after looking at different contexts of BE, define BE as the combination of positive impressions and perceptions held by an audience about a brand. Kim & Hyun (2011) clarify that brand value or equity is an important goal in marketing that is often downplayed, as brands are just intangible internal assets presented to the customer. Al-Msallam & Alhaddad (2016), Chow et al. (2017) and Weiger et al. (2017) maintain that building BE is one of the most important activities that a brand can foster, though also one of the most difficult ones.

BE is an integral component of brand success and an important objective for brands to foster. Companies that possess substantial BE tend to exhibit exceptional performance, characterized by long-term price premiums, low price sensitivity, significant market share, successful diversification into new ventures, efficient cost structures, and robust profitability, all of which contribute to their competitive advantage (Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Vázquez et al., 2002; Atilgan et al., 2009). As these authors state, there is value in positive brand imagery and perception, and this has benefits to a brand, such as loyalty. The corporate brand image is also defined by the internal organization (Baalbaki, 2012). Baalbaki (2012) and Farjam & Hongyi (2015) highlight that BE can be seen from three distinct perspectives: the financial perspective, the employee perspective, and the customer perspective (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: BE perspectives (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015)

More details of these three perspectives were set in the following subsequent sections. This detailed examination aimed to provide a nuanced understanding, shedding light on the intricacies and implications associated with each perspective.

2.2.1 The financial perspective: Financial-based brand equity (FBBE)

Financial-based brand equity (FBBE) explores a brand as an asset that creates financial gain through its existence. According to Baalbaki (2012), FBBE refers to the total revenue obtained from a brand as an asset on its own. Simon & Sullivan (1993) back up the definition by mentioning "the incremental cash flows which accrue to branded products over and above the cash flows which would result from the sale of unbranded products" (p. 29). Thus, a brand can be an asset and generate financial benefits. Supporters of FBBE use the example of Turkish beverage brands to define FBBE. For example, Atilgan et al. (2005, p. 238) claim that BE as the "total value of a brand which is a separable asset – when it is sold or included in a balance sheet."

2.2.2 Employee perspective: Employee-based brand equity (EBBE)

Employee-based brand equity (EBBE) provides insight into how employees perceive a brand. As noted by Farjam & Hongyi (2015), employees are influenced by the brand's image, shaping their perceptions. EBBE shares similarities with Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), treating employees as a distinct environment within the brand. Both EBBE and CBBE are intrinsic values derived from the brand's inherent nature (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Given that employees form part of the internal environment, EBBE, as defined by King & Grace (2009), reflects the employee's perspective on the brand based on the effect of brand knowledge on their responses. In essence, EBBE encapsulates the distinctive impact the brand has on the internal organization.

2.2.3 Customer perspective: Consumer-based brand equity (CBBE)

This study acknowledges that firm-based brand equity (FBBE) is focussed on consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). This is because while the financial and employee perspectives of brand equity, known as FBBE, which address the financial and internal value of brands, are important, they have not received as much recognition in the marketing literature as CBBE, which focuses on consumer responses to brands (Alakkas et al., 2022; Shieh & Lai, 2017).

CBBE is the value that a brand adds to a product or service by creating an image in the minds of consumers (Baalbaki, 2012). This study adopts the CBBE viewpoint, however, all perspectives of BE are important to a brand. Farjam & Hongyi (2015) also believe that CBBE is the dominant perspective and one that has been preferred by many academics and practitioners in marketing research. Hence, many definitions of BE are oriented toward the consumer and bear the consumer perspective.

According to Aaker (1991), CBBE is the collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name, and symbol. These assets and liabilities either enhance or diminish the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or its customers. Aaker (1991, 1992, 1996) and Aaker & Biel (2013) explain that CBBE encompasses measures grouped into five categories, which are brand loyalty, perceived quality, associations, and awareness, and a fifth category which includes two sets of market behaviour measures derived from market-based information rather than direct customer feedback (Aaker, 1996). Figure 2.2 below shows the framework designed by Aaker (1992) to represent BE.
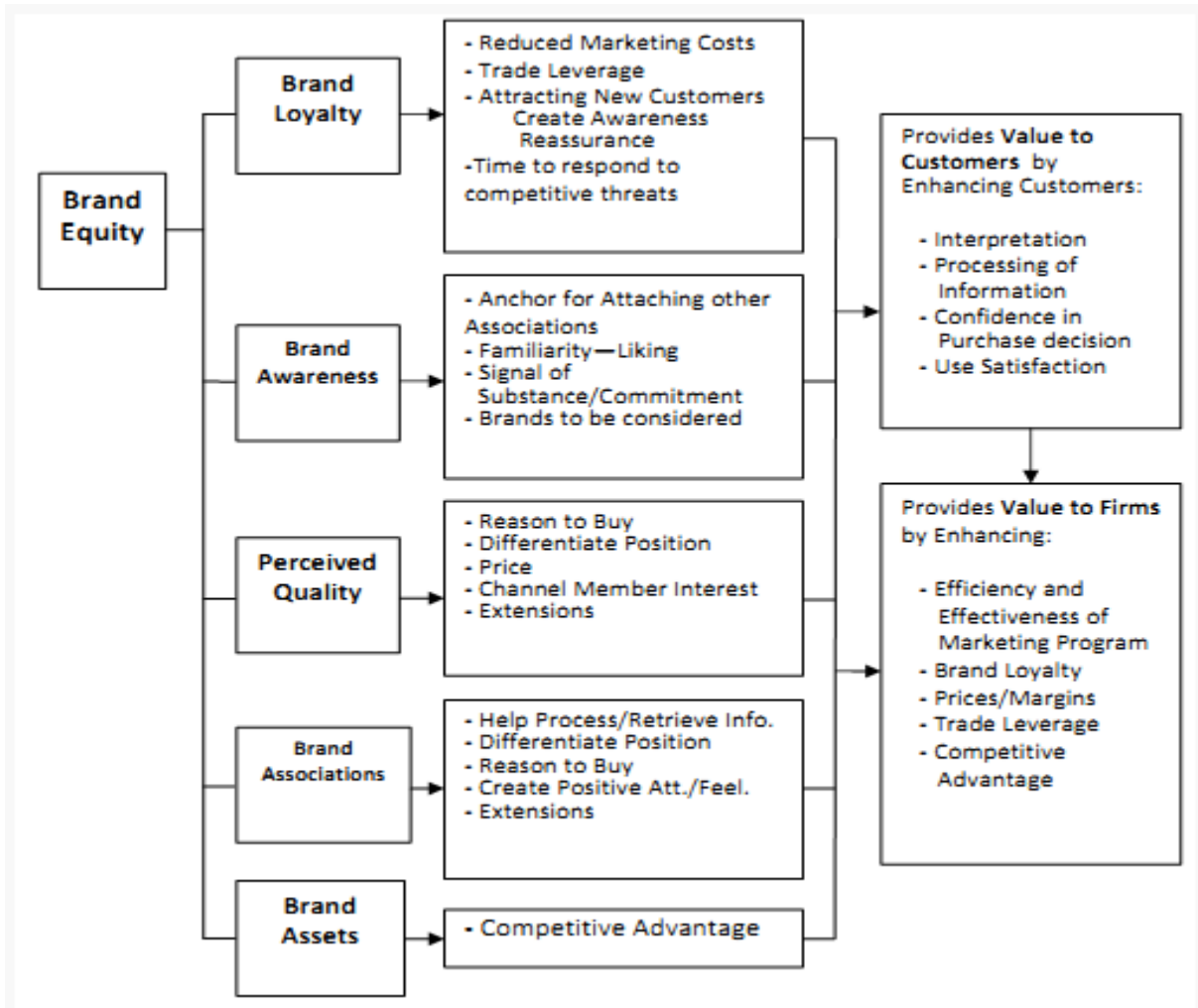
Figure 2.2: Aaker's brand equity framework (Aaker, 1992)

Aaker arranges these arguments into a framework to define the value that businesses gain due to a positive brand image, which results in better customer impressions of its respective products and services. The framework is comprehensive and incorporates the background behind the brand value. This model has the advantage of presenting brand loyalty as a source of value creation for a brand, and Aaker & Biel (2013) assert that brand awareness is an essential element in ensuring customer loyalty through an excellent brand image. These arguments validate the claim of this thesis that BE is the final goal of influencer-endorsed consumer-brand interactions, even though other research, models, and business implementations consider sales/purchases.

2.2.4 Consumer-based brand equity: A literature review (CBBE)

Much of the literature has dwelled on the importance to BE of early relationship marketing (RM) and building trust for commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This study focuses on IMC and consumer-brand communication as an input that cultivates relationships between a brand and its respective consumer. Instead of primarily just focusing on sales, the interaction between a brand and its audience can create commitment. SMIs seek to use the trust between them and their followers to build commitment to the brands that they promote (Abidin, 2017). With influencers, commitment results from creating a psychological bond that compels consumers to associate themselves with usefulness through a brand's products or services (Kim & Kim, 2022).

Razmus (2021) develops the concept of customer brand engagement (CBE) to portray three outcomes that place emphasis on relationships as founding elements of firm value (see Figure 2.3). These elements are linked to CBBE by Keller (2001) and Hollebeek et al. (2014), and are accepted by the current study, because they emphasize the role of CBBE in driving brand success.
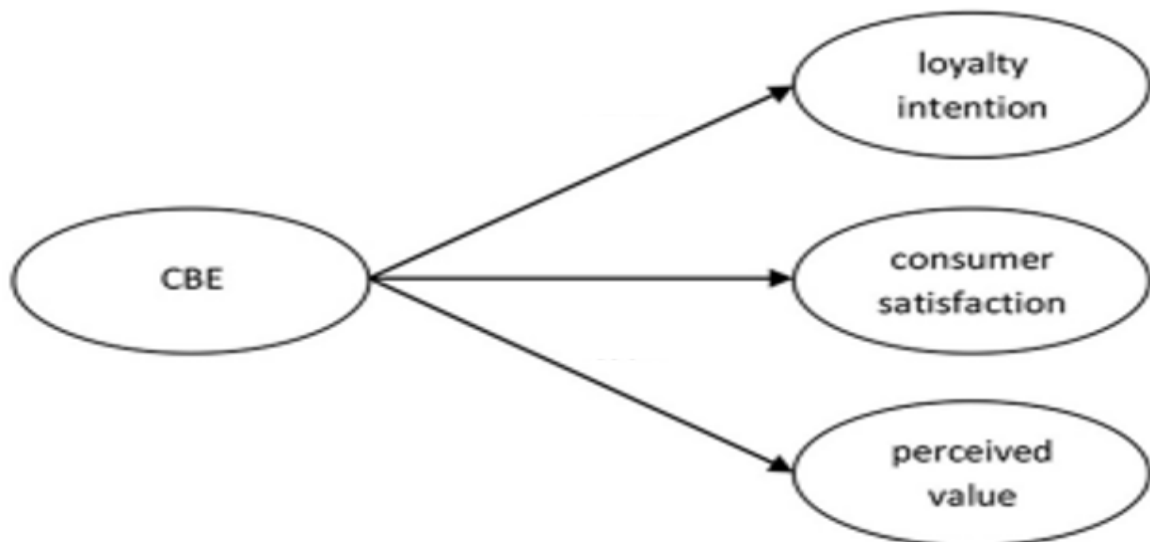
Figure 2.3: Nomological net of selected CBE conceptual relationships (Razmus, 2021)

Contemporary literature about social media often represents CBBE as a psychological outcome, however, various terminology is used to express these constructs. For instance, Park & Ha (2021) mention CBBE as a three-dimensional construct that embodies cognitive, affective, and behavioural engagement. These dimensions are the intrinsic motivation for brand communication (Fatma et al., 2024). Other authors such as Sijabat et al. (2022) mention that CBE positively influences customer brand perception, with social media as the main channel for customer-brand interactions, which is similar to this study. Therefore, it is important to understand the conceptualization of brand equity as originally depicted by Keller.

2.2.3.1 Keller's CBBE model

Keller (1993; 2009) illustrates BE from a non-monetary perspective by discussing the relation between brands and customers as being reliant on brand resonance. Keller's (2001) pyramid model illustrates CBBE as a composition of several consumer-related variables and arranges these variables consequentially. This study looks at the psychology of feelings and emotions and how they influence the judgement and perception of a brand. This makes Keller's (2001) definition stand out as one that illustrates the many elements that contribute toward BE as a process, where some actions precede others. Some of these elements, like attitudes and feelings, have a direct application to this thesis' variables. Keller's CBBE model explains the components of a strong brand and the importance of judgment and feelings in managing customer perceptions (see Figure 2.4). It also highlights the importance of customer perceptions on convictions.
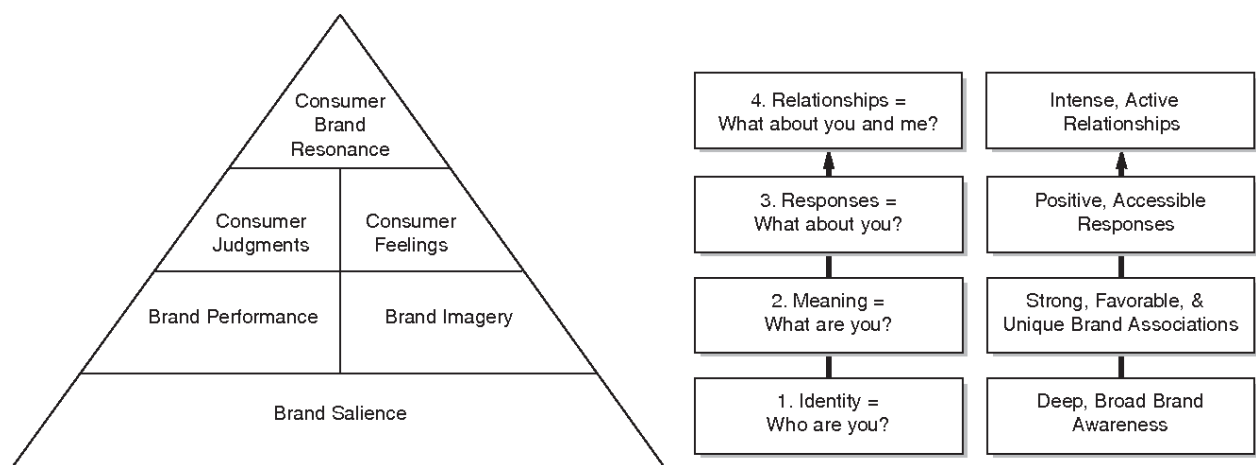
Figure 2.4: Keller's CBBE model (Keller, 2001)

Keller's (2001) CBBE model is represented by a pyramid that illustrates the impact of a strong brand and how it shapes the experience of a customer. The model implies that creating a good brand image is important in attaining a strong brand. The model considers four stages of customer interaction with the brand. These stages are subdivided into six building blocks that represent considerations for developing a successful brand. Brand success is related to this thesis by the term brand equity, which is adapted from the model.

The first step involves creating an identity for the brand, termed by Keller as "brand salience". A brand must make a move on its customers, which is the outward-bound process of reaching out to new customers. This process has been supported by the development of social media. Influencer traffic is an element in outbound marketing procedures because campaigns are designed to reach as many people as possible (Buil et al., 2013). Brand awareness is an important stage in customer outreach (see Berry, 2000; Sadek et al., 2018), and for this study, is an initial step towards attaining qualitative BE. The efficiency of this process can be improved by target marketing, which divides the market into different market segments with different relationships and needs related to the brand.

The second step of Keller's model is to communicate an image to the target market. This stage involves developing the brand meaning through communication. Keller (2001) also highlights the element of performance, which consists of five categories: primary characteristics and features; product reliability, durability, and serviceability; service effectiveness, efficiency, and empathy; style and design; and price. Performance is a horizontal distinction in marketing, illustrated by Zehir et al. (2011). Given that this thesis is focussed on vertical distinctions in marketing, imagery is considered more than performance. The imagery presents how customers see the brand, and how they relate to it.

The brand's image is also influenced by the communication between customers. This makes electronic word of mouth (eWOM) an important channel in marketing. As discussed by Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) and Gulamali & Persson (2017), eWOM plays an important role in creating a brand image. A good example is 'Supreme', a brand that creates a perception of luxury through electronic sharing.

2.2.3.2 How elements of Keller's CBBE model fit in the study

2.2.3.2.1 User responsiveness

The emotional response evoked by customers or potential customers is a fundamental consideration in IMC theory. As highlighted by Oliver (2014) and Ozuem et al. (2023), the type and intensity of emotions evoked from users, customers or the public should fall within the targets of a brand's IMC campaign. User responsiveness is subdivided into two categories: judgments and feelings. Customers are responsive to the brand because of the way it makes them feel. Keller's model also explains the feelings that are evoked when a customer interacts with a brand: fun, excitement, security, social approval, warmth, and respect (also see Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). The responsiveness of a customer towards a certain brand is based on the judgment of the customer about the brand and his or her feelings. Customers judge how relevant a brand is based on an assessment of their unique needs and the process of a brand pertaining to that need, compared to competing brands (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Customers' responsiveness to brand content is the responsibility of the brand, and consumer-brand interactions play an important role in making a consumer responsive to the brand. Keller's model looks at the management of the perceptions of consumers towards a brand, and this perception is related to the way it makes them (consumers) feel. Hence, the feelings that are evoked when a customer interacts with a brand are important.

The perspective of brand consumers is influenced by how he/she perceives the content of the brand, or content about the brand (Dewnarain et al., 2019). The content surrounding the brand has a differential effect of the brand knowledge and on the response that consumers have towards the brand (Kostyra et al., 2016). With influencer marketing, the engagement and relationships customers have with promoters (SMIs) play an important role in how influencer content is responded to. The reaction to shared content is an observable/measurable output in promotions, and Keller's model matches this to resonance and feelings created towards the brand.

2.2.3.2.2 Brand resonance

The last step at the top of Keller's (2001) pyramid is brand resonance, which is the vital goal in Keller's BE model. Brand resonance is attributed to brand loyalty and is an attitudinal attachment to the brand. This is reflected in the relationships that a brand has with its followers and how it influences their judgment and feelings (Keller, 2001). Influencers are brand co-creators, and through UGC they can influence how other consumers view a brand, and how they mentally respond to it. This thesis' literature review additionally explains communication and its role in BE, highlighting how it creates brand resonance. This resemblance is also supported by Ajiboye et al. (2019), who explain that customer engagement can influence the judgments and feelings of customers. The judgment and feelings of a customer support brand resonance, according to Keller's CBBE model (2001). This research uses brand resonance as a variable in the framework. Through the literature review, the definitions of brand resonance relate to consumer-brand relationships and communication.

Keller's CBBE model focusses on the opinions, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions of the customer, emotional variables that are highly influenced by SMIs. The model illustrates the importance of feelings and perceptions in communicating to the customer. Keller (2001) explains the importance of the relationship that influences feelings and judgment, causing the customer to behave positively towards the brand, which means the brand has achieved brand resonance. Brand resonance is a springboard for good consumer-brand interaction and leads to brand loyalty. Keller defines BE as the value premium created for the customer through influencer SNS engagements with a brand, compared to a generic equivalent. This proves the contribution of SMIs, who have a better potential to increase the noticeability of brands.

Demonstrating BE requires a process-oriented approach such as that presented by Keller (2001) to meet the objectives of this study. Aaker's (1992) model illustrates the importance of explaining BE as a composition of different entities surrounding a brand's identity. The strong evidence about how to attain BE creates a sturdy conceptual framework for this thesis, considering how well the goal of BE has been defined. As Keller (2001; 2009) illustrates, brand resonance is comprised of an attitudinal attachment and loyal behaviour towards a certain brand. Consumer reactions to brands have become more personalized, considering the high regard that consumers have for brands which follow-up using social media. Brands that have more social media connections and communications are perceived to be more reliable. Brand resonance is influenced by social media engagements, which influences how customers

connect and engage a brand (Phua et al., 2017; Chahal et al., 2020). Additionally, Keller (2009) and Erdoğmuş & Cicek (2012) explain that the contribution of communications and influence affects how other users feel towards the brand.

2.2.3.2.3 Brand perception/imagery

According to the CBBE literature, the brand image is a resulting construct from the developed relationships between a brand and consumers. Brand image as defined by Islam & Rahman (2016) as the perception of a brand or an organization that is held in the consumers' minds. This explanation reinforces Aaker's model of BE, by illustrating that the value of a brand lies in the consumer's mindset. Consumers respond to brands differently, and the response contributes to the regard that they hold for brands. Corporate brands have different brand values. These values are held within the minds of consumers, and they affect their decision-making (Balmer & Gray, 2003). A brand perception creates a foundation for customer decision-making (Kim & Phua, 2020), hence a strong corporate brand image or a positive perception of a brand by a customer offers companies a competitive advantage against their rivals.

The contemporary literature backs up Keller's (2009) concept that brand imagery is a result of consumers' interactions, such as buying (direct effort), referring, influencing, and giving feedback (indirect effort). They experience the influence of distinct forms of consumer engagement (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). Hence it is important to recognize the value of brand perception/imagery when looking at marketing, and as other elements such as influencer relationships arise in this thesis, brand perception/imagery needs to be considered.

According to Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh (2016), a brand image is how customers perceive a particular organization based on its products, services, customer care, consistency, and leadership, and it greatly influences the overall image of the organization (p. 262-270). Brand perception is defined by Kotler (2002) as the feeling evoked by any element of the business environment about the brand, which includes internal organization, customers, and the public. Brand perception/imagery is an important element in the marketing mix, as the imagery and feelings are the desired output for consumer-brand interaction. A positive brand perception by the customer has value, because according to CBBE, consumer perceptions favour brands more (Menon & Kahn, 2003). Brand perception is cumulative, as it is reliant on public concern and

social influence (Kim & Phua, 2020; Hung, 2008). The presence of contemporary media channels mean brands can increase the ability of businesses to build long-term relationships and establish emotional bonds with customers (Lim & Rasul, 2022).

Menon & Kahn (2003) and Hung (2008) examine the benefits of philanthropic and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities for brand perception and imagery through analysing consumer perception of brands that participate in external public relations (P.R) and CSR activity. They identify that besides CSR and P.R, brands have participated in various actions to create a positive brand image. However, the paper uses CSR and P.R to illustrate how important brand imagery can be. Menon & Khan's (2003) insight shows how important customers' perceptions and imagery are to a brand. A brand must look good to perform and generate business value.

Kotler & Mindak (1978, p. 17) also support the importance of brand perception by stating that "carefully planned publicity can create great visibility and interest in a product or brand." The way a product is viewed by customers is an important element, and the manipulation of this image relates to business value. What the customer sees affects the value of a brand. Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh (2016) argue that different businesses have different values, and they are influenced by what the customer perceives instead of the products/services. Considering the value of brand perception/imagery, it makes sense to conclude that how a brand is perceived influences customers' choices. Ramiz et al. (2014) and Kim et al. (2008) argue that in the digital era, consumers' purchase decisions are influenced by their perception of a brand, regardless of availability or pricing. In support of this finding, Shaw's recent research (2023) indicates that more than 90% of consumers take brand perception into account when making purchase decisions. This highlights the significant impact of brand imagery on business revenue, making it a valuable factor for businesses to control.

2.2.3.2.4 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is another important variable in this thesis, according to CBBE. Within the brand equity models that were developed by Aaker (1991, 1992, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2001, 2009), brand loyalty is mentioned as a goal for attaining CBBE. Developing a strong positive brand

perception is a vital strategy that should be adopted by businesses, especially to gain a competitive edge, maintain market position, and ensure high customer retention rates.

Customer loyalty, as defined by Na et al. (1999), plays a pivotal role in the management of brand perception. It is a crucial goal for brands, allowing them to exercise control over how their brand is perceived by customers. However, some brands are focused on sales and revenue output. Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh (2016) discuss that brand loyalty plays an important role, even in revenue generation. A business should be constantly trying to convince its customers; brand loyalty, therefore, is an important element to be in control of when considering enduring value.

The appeal of a brand for a consumer affects their preference that brand over another and is known as brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Uncles et al., 2003; Yoo et al., 2000). Oliver (2014) goes further to describe brand loyalty as being influenced by vertical and horizontal distinctions. Horizontal distinctions, such as customer service and product quality, play a role in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty towards a brand. Brand loyalty is interpreted by Shieh & Lai (2017) as a mechanism to engage the buyer and the seller in a long-term relationship based on the customers' experience. In the realm of consumer behaviour, Yoo et al. (2000) provide a comprehensive definition of brand loyalty. They describe it as the customer's perception and affirmation of loyalty to a specific brand, where the brand becomes their preferred choice, and they exhibit a willingness to forego other brands if the preferred brand is available.

This definition emphasizes the psychological aspect of brand loyalty and the strong commitment that consumers develop towards a particular brand. Yi & Jeon (2003, p. 231) define loyalty as the "repeated purchases of particular products or services during a certain period of time." The consumer's purchase frequency and purchase possibility sum up brand loyalty, which is influenced by the consumer's perception, imagery, and feelings for the brand. This thesis focuses on attitudinal brand loyalty that influences someone to consider one brand over another, taking other brand variables not related to marketing such as product quality and customer service as constants. This study only considers the vertical distinctions that affect brand loyalty, which are related to how customers perceive the brand.

2.3 The role of SNS communications in customer-brand interactions

After the thorough overview of BE, it is important to explore how this goal is attainable through the marketing channel studied in this thesis, namely social media. Social media has caused a significant increase in the success of brand marketing strategies by tightening the relationship between brands and consumers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The integrated communication technology within social media has enabled brands to obtain information, analyse it, and then create strategies that respond to customer demands (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Social media has been adopted by both large and small businesses. This is because social media is communication-oriented, and it allows both the consumer and the brand to communicate (Roma & Aloini, 2019). Exchanging information in social media between brands and customers has the important role of developing compassion while serving the mutual benefit of information exchange.

A brand's ability to connect to their customers creates brand engagement, emphasizing the establishment of an emotional relationship with the customer (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). Social media has simplified the development of business tactics through analytic tools for businesses on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Likes and preferences can be figured out and influenced through social media, as well as the latest trends adopted by the public. With social media, the brand engagement strategies of companies have evolved, with a consideration oriented toward customer communication (see Weismueller et al., 2020; Phua et al., 2017, and Dwivedi et al., 2021).

However, there are not many publicly available studies of the quantifiable impacts of social media on marketing in the present literature. Authors such as Pöyry et al. (2019) argue that strong brands will still be strong brands, even as marketing evolves. Dolan et al. (2016) criticize the impact of social media on customer brand perception because it takes more factors than promotion and advertising to attain brand loyalty. However, the impact of social media on advertising, coupled with the influencer marketing model, is positively mentioned by authors such as Ilicic & Webster (2016); Zhu & Chen (2015), and Godey et al. (2016). Indeed, the positive impact of integrated marketing campaigns on social media outweighs the negative assessments in the literature. By shifting communication between brands and consumers, social media has also shifted the structure of marketing. Present-day marketing has a more customized

approach, partly because of brand co-creation, which allows the customers to take part in the business value process (Hudders et al., 2021).

The growth of social media in marketing has been constructive in creating input for customer communication. Nam & Kannan (2020) categorize social media as a revolution because it has improved the consumer journey. Developments in social media over the years have also seen an orientation towards adopting new technologies that favour business (Agarwal, 2020). A good example is the Facebook and Instagram shop. Social media technology has become personalized by taking advantage of market data. Sivarajah et al. (2020) illustrate how data science has simplified advertising and promotion on Facebook. It has also increased engagement on social media. With advertising being the main source of revenue, the evolution of social media has grown globally to a value of 21.1 billion USD in 2023 (Dencheva, 2023). Furthermore, new platforms are set to come into existence, with social media being decentralized from the more established social media platforms. This shift in decentralization is expected to reshape the landscape and dynamics of online interactions and content dissemination.

2.3.1 Communication and consumer engagement

2.3.1.1 Consumer engagement behaviour (CEB)

CEB is the orientation of action that governs and surrounds a consumer as they interact with a brand. Dessart et al. (2015) define this from a behavioural perspective as the voluntary contribution made by customers towards a brand. Badenes-Rocha et al. (2019) mention that CEB is a behavioural response that governs the perception of customers of a brand. Customer behaviour towards a brand is an important variable that should be inclined toward positivism (Keller, 2009; Hollebeek, 2010). Badenes-Rocha et al. (2019) mention that "customer engagement behaviour considers only actions and behaviours that do not involve monetary incentives made by the brand" (p. 341). The different illustrations and analyses of customer engagement behaviour describe it as a spontaneous reaction towards a brand.

Authors such as Hollebeek (2010), Keller (2009), Aaker (1991), and Oliver (2014) assert that the value of a brand results in positive behaviour observed in customer actions. Badenes-Rocha et al. (2019) and Santos et al. (2022) support this by discussing that negative behavioural

orientations manifested through unfavourable cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal perceptions are dangerous, contagious and viral. Hollebeek & Chen (2014) also highlight that significant challenges arise from negative behavioural perceptions. Hence, it is important to establish proper control and align communication to achieve the objective of positive behavioural brand perceptions. Yielding positive brand engagement is an important goal for businesses. For a brand, it is important to be in control of what governs consumer behaviour when interacting with a brand, and how it is impacted by influencer marketing.

2.3.1.2 Communication

To understand CEB, interactions between brands and users are important. According to Hutter et al. (2013), these interactions occur through communication channels. Zhu & Chen (2015) divide social media interactions into two groups: profile-based and content-based. Profile-based social media interactions occur via the connection between a social media user and a profile (in this case, a SMI). Zhu & Chen (2015) include content-based social media interactions like discussions, interests, and reactions based on the content posted (UGC). According to Phua et al. (2017), social media-based dialogues are more effective when the drivers of interactions - information, identification, entertainment, and social interaction - are in consideration. UGC is the message form that is used in communication between a brand and a consumer. The impact of UGC sharing has a valuable contribution toward positive customer perceptions.

Günay (2019) uses "hedonic value" to illustrate the strength and importance of communication in customer engagement behaviour. A hedonic value is the value perceived by the customer that influences the customer to visit the brand page more often (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Günay, 2019). The hedonic value indicates how much communication is considered to be one of the key elements of online interactions between a consumer and a brand. This thesis, hence, adopts Stojanovic et al.'s (2018) argument that CBBE marketing involves properly sharing information within the right setting.

Stojanovic et al. (2018), Quinn (2018), and Godey et al. (2016) emphasize customer dialogue on SM. These authors conceptualize a link between social media communication and brand equity. Zhu & Chen (2015) and Phua et al. (2017) additionally acknowledge the positive

relationship between social media user activity and content based SNS communications. As discussed in the preceding section(s), the parasocial relationship is a strong foundation for attaining impactful SNS consumer-brand interactions with influencers. This sets the stage for user- based SNS communications. With properly curated UGC, brands can have more impact on promoted interactions and generate positive customer behaviour.

Interactions and engagements promote new occurrences of brands in a customer's mental space, including factors such as product/service quality and pricing (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). According to promotional factors/vertical distinction in marketing, establishing a positive regard during customer-brand communication creates an impact of awareness and imagery. Therefore, influencing a perception starts with creating a connection, and communication plays a huge role (Matsumoto, 2009; Sundar, 2012). However, authors such as Pöyry et al. (2019) and Gensler et al. (2013) also mention other factors, including authenticity and product relevance, need to be in place for IMC on SM to have an impact on brand success. These are studies that consider sales and FBBE, however, their claims also apply to this thesis. As indicated in Godey et al's. (2016) framework, brand awareness and imagery lead to preference and loyalty (see Figure 2.5).
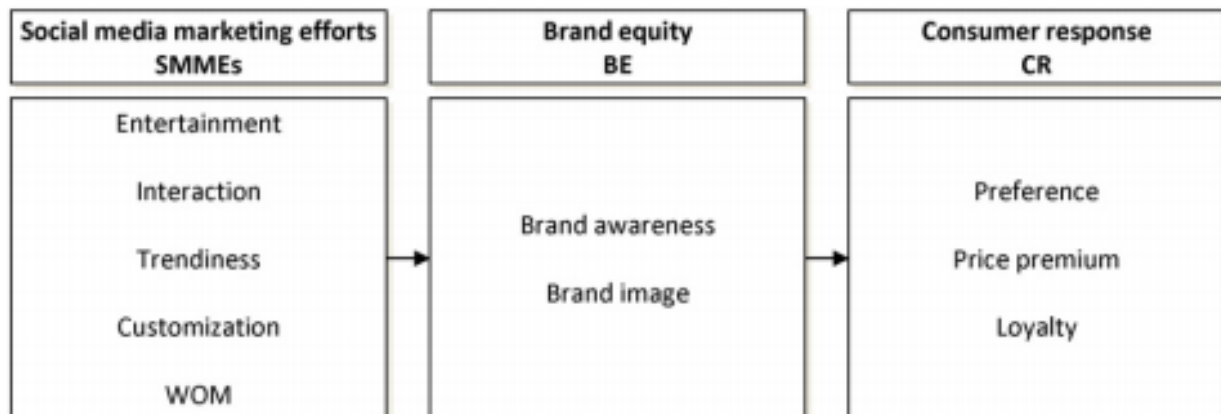
Figure 2.5: Social media interaction framework for influencing consumer behaviour through IMC (Godey et al., 2016)

Persuasive and informative communication are key inputs throughout the customer journey, because of how much they influence consumers (Wijaya, 2015). This thesis borrows from

Wijaya's argument (2015) that communication strengthens the relationship between a consumer and a brand. Psychologically, people feel better sharing with fellow humans, even on websites and on web pages (Sundar, 2012).

The experiences of a user with a particular brand involve an order of events. Sharing plays a huge role in brand perception because it influences consumer brand perception (Wijaya, 2015). Social media has offered consumers a virtual world of expression, which can be exchanged for business value (Agarwal, 2020; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Through influencer marketing, the dynamic virtual world provides many opportunities for businesses to improve interaction and hence brand value. Consequently, social media usage has had a psychological influence on conviction on customer perceptions, and this is what is being investigated by the thesis. Figure 2.6 from Wijaya (2015) provides solid backing for the arguments about the impact of communication on a brand.
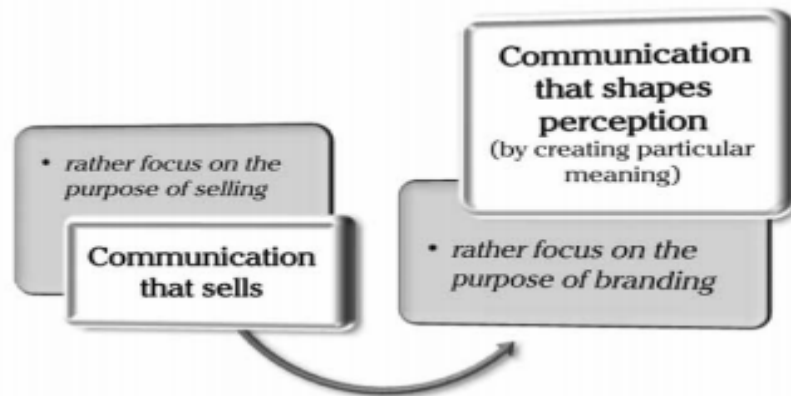
Figure 2.6: The role of communication in advertising and influencing brand perception (Wijaya, 2015)

2.4 Influencers as contributors to consumer behaviour through social media marketing

2.4.1 Social media influencers "SMIs"

Social media platforms often feature famous individual users who possess distinct identities and personas, and who garner considerable admiration and high regard from their extensive followers. These individuals are employed by brands to shape customer perceptions in alignment with specific brand or product objectives (Martínez-López et al., 2020) and in this way improve BE. When considering their classification, criteria, and contribution, SMIs offer two primary value elements: traffic, referring to the audience they attract, and influence, which pertains to their ability to sway opinions and behaviour.

An SMI is a person on social media with the ability to attract an audience outside their normal social circles of connection and sharing through their stature, image, attractiveness, and content calibre or authenticity, and therefore has the ability to influence opinions, feelings, behaviour and perceptions (Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2022). There is a myth that influencers are people with a large social traffic or follower count. However, SMIs are not only required to attract a large audience on social media but must be focused on contributing to the brand (Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Different individuals make different contributions to the creation and propagation of messages and content on social media (Zhang et al., 2017). Park et al. (2021) and Conde & Casais (2023) argue that mega and macro-influencers are preferred for brand campaigns due to their large social traffic. Mega-influencers are influencers who have over 1 million followers. In most cases they are celebrities and famous people. According to Park et al. (2021), they are useful for influencing a large mass of people for specific brand awareness. Macro-influencers, on the other hand, have between 100,000 and 1 million followers, and are more focussed on growing an audience towards a specific brand target (Park et al., 2021; Conde & Casais, 2023). Macro influencers are specific to brands because they know their audience in and out. Influencer marketing has been rising because influencers are able to generate interest about various topics.

SMIs create value as a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media (Freberg et al., 2011). The exponential brand benefit through customer engagement by SM-active consumers is growing, and brand

engagements are amplified via SMIs. Brands have been incorporating SM marketing with other marketing methods and strategies. Influencers have become important people in social media marketing as they create value by attracting more traffic. Influencers also engage potential customers with their high degree of influence (Phua et al, 2017).

SMIs gain influence by presenting content attractively. This makes them a likely digital channel to supplement a brand's digital presence, which may include websites, online stores, and other digital assets (Sari et al., 2024). Brands already spend a large part of their marketing effort engaging consumers in the digital space, and SMIs provide greater reach (through followers and attractive content), enhancing the trustworthiness of consumer brand. Hence, brands have been able to use SMIs to communicate brand messages and to keep their customers hooked on the brand (Sari et al., 2024). Thus, influencers can make a fundamental contribution to BE considering the pre-established influence they have with their followers and content attractiveness.

One of the key determinants in selecting an influencer for brand campaigns is traffic, that is, the number of followers an individual influencer has acquired (Freberg et al., 2011; Phua et al., 2017; Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). More social traffic is attributed to higher levels of communication and therefore a larger ability to contribute to brand communication through UGC sharing. However, as previously mentioned, traffic alone does not demonstrate the impact of SMIs on consumer brand perception.

Keller (2001) argues that the noticeability of a brand (salience) is the base variable in BE. Brand salience is how much a brand is noticed or comes to mind when consumers think about a particular product category (Keller, 2001). Influencer communication is more considerate on the engagement and responsivity, and this reflects brand salience. SMIs engage audiences through influencer marketing, defined by Lampeitl & Åberg (2017) as the methods for communicating with customers through the digital content creation by influencers and their valuable narratives that are of interest for customers. UGC from endorsed influencers is brand specific, this creates salience of the brand.

In the age of internet marketing, organizations try to leverage different advertising models with communication a crucial element of the consumer journey (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This has made influencer marketing a common strategy for brands that want to maximize brand engagement. As discussed by Schivinski & Dabrowski (2015), communication is an important element in

BE. With customers connected to the brand, brand objectives can be achieved. Businesses have been adjusting their marketing strategies to focus on customer retention because the customer journey does not stop at purchasing. This makes brand loyalty a crucial goal in many marketing campaigns (Oliver, 1999; Yoo et al., 2000). The value of brand loyalty is in customer preference. To keep the customer "hooked" to a brand, engagement and communication are crucial. This can be achieved through multiple methods such as polls, feedback systems and promotions. Influencers create an image for the customer to identify with. By establishing influence and creating a relationship between the influencer and the customer, connectivity and communication are achievable.

Influencer marketing has been developing to design of better ways for celebrities to engage the audience. Different platforms have also increased a diversity of communication. Given that about half of the world's population is active on social media. (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), with such a large amount of traffic, messages to customers have attained a simpler and more effective way of being transmitted. Also, influencer marketing has enabled some users to stay connected to certain brands because of current social media outreach. Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016) analyse 60 brands across different industries to prove that brands have also been strategizing to improve engagement and traffic through SNS engagement. The authors state that brands must adapt and create effective approaches with influencer marketing, as many dynamics also influence customer engagement and customer perception.

Considering the extent of influence of SMIs, influencer communication has been professionalized to extend value for brands through brand communication. Creating value from influencer communication is reliant on gratification through social media UGC (Phua et al., 2017). Influencers have a huge amount of traffic, which gives them a head start when it comes to initiating brand communication. Platforms such as Twitter have grown as venues for influencer brand communication with technology such as hashtags. SMIs have become participants in the creation of BE through the amplification of brand communication.

Thus far, SMIs have improved the efficiency of integrated marketing communications on SM through traffic and influence (Enke & Borchers, 2021). Consumers have regard, known as a parasocial relationship in this paper, towards an influencer's choice of brands. Consumers tend to respond to a psychological impression created by other people, rather than brands (Goldsmith et al., 2000). A good example is when a consumer skips a YouTube ad so that he

or she can interact with a comedy episode from his/her favourite YouTuber. SMIs contribute to integrated marketing communication that translates into making communication effective as an input towards the overall goal of BE. This is by engaging the customer in a different way through the provision of engaging content.

SMIs can also take advantage of trends by adapting to certain criteria to improve the efficiency of marketing communications (Enke & Borchers, 2021). For example, influencers can create content for different niches, hence selecting the target market. Influencer marketing also has the advantage of linking the demographic of the influencer and the target market, or the language, tone and intonation of an influencer, that is specific to the cohort and that therefore appears more authentic, creating a stronger bond to the audience. IMCs are effective when SMIs are involved because of the advantages of influence, traffic and content adaptability.

2.4.1.1 SMI attractiveness

Influencers, as famous individuals, can captivate and amass a substantial following on social media platforms beyond their immediate social circle (Martínez-López et al., 2020). It is crucial, therefore, to understand the motivations behind users who follow others on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter. These motivations can stem from factors such as friendship, family connections, information consumption, entertainment, business interactions, or reciprocation of following.

However, influencers are not just followed, they are adored and admired. Freberg et al. (2011) and Shoenberger & Kim (2023) explain that influencers inspire large amounts of people through media platforms. Phua et al. (2017) suggest that media icons control trends, habits, attractions and even the reality of information. Psychologists such as Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) explain that our brains identify with people who we think will increase our chances or rate of survival. Dreisbach et al. (2005) explain how dopamine hormone release is a reaction by humans who want to identify with whatever makes them feel good, and associate that with better survival. Hence, attractions to media influencers and the developed relationships with the influencer are a result of users associating with the influencer in a way that the users find favourable.

People have a psychological orientation to the things that excite them, and that is why they spend more time consuming than creating. Lampeitl & Åberg (2017) explain that the media industry takes advantage of people's psychological orientations by showcasing attractive content. SMIs have to attract their followers, either through looks, comedy, information or activity. The parasocial relationship is explained by Reinikainen et al. (2020) who mentions that users conform to how attractive a media icon is (also see Conde & Casais, 2023). Attractiveness can be inspired by multiple factors like physicality or lifestyle; however it plays an important role in a parasocial relationship between a media character and a media consumer.

The brain conforms to attractiveness as attractive information is related to better survival (Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972), for example, great smells, good art or attractive people. Many users have subsequently come to conform to participatory facets about social media sharing with content or people they find attractive (Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017). From a psychological perspective, attractive things, people or information is associated to better survival through social correlation (Stearns & Rodrigues, 2020). Audrezet et al. (2020) discuss that people try to envision themselves in entertaining environments. For instance, content attraction is user-dependent in regard to lifestyle (in the case of sports, comedy and gossip), reproduction (in the case of sexual attraction), safety (in the case of information) and dominance (in the case of competition). Hence, media creations have the key objective of attracting consumers through the content that is produced in integrated marketing campaigns.

2.4.1.2 SMI authenticity

Authenticity is the subjective nature that makes someone, something or an occurrence stand out and differentiates it from counterfeits (Beverland, 2014; Belhassen et al., 2008; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). Originality also makes something, or someone stand out. The classic definition of authenticity is, however, not adequate for explaining parasocial relationships. SMI authenticity is what motivates the gratification for users to interact with SMI content (Yuan et al., 2016; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). Audrezet et al. (2020) illustrate that SMI followers value influencers' intrinsic motivations, which are original and attractive. Many influencers are celebrities because they stand out, either through sports, music, art, comedy, acting, lifestyle, or physicality.

A SMI is a person who has an authentic persona, which is consistently maintained throughout the parasocial relationship. Pöyry et al. (2019) illustrate the importance of an authentic persona for the psychological orientation and loyalty of the audience. Audrezet et al. (2020) conclude that authentic self-branding practices are identifiable to audiences. SMI authenticity is also attributed to niche and category performance. SMIs are able to draw attention to the economic sectors that they relate with, even though some influencers can operate within larger economic structures and draw attention due to their popularity, as mentioned by Glucksman (2017). This orientation by Gallup (2014) distinguishes influence from popularity, by illustrating persona authenticity and niche differentiation. This thesis considers influence rather than popularity, and hence, also considers authenticity as a key variable in an influencer-consumer parasocial relationship. For example, a prominent SMI, Teyana Taylor, is popular, however, her influence lies with her physicality, which makes her stand out. She is better at promoting female sports apparel than insurance subscriptions, because most of her fans identify with her physicality. Hence, brands should consider an influencer's authenticity in brand campaigns as it defines the SMI's impact on different audience niches.

Developing a parasocial relationship with a media character involves the creation of interpersonal perceptions (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Conde & Casais, 2023). Authenticity plays an important role in standing out in contemporary media related activity. Audrezet et al. (2020) explain identifying with personas is commonly associated to feelings. Authenticity has even become a strategy, as explained by Audrezet et al. (2020), who relate creation of media content as an action that works by expressing fun and passion. Authenticity creates an aspiration that supports a relationship, especially for characters that are publicized on the media. On the other hand, consumers romanticize the idea of a precious media character by identifying with the media character.

In today's market, consumers play a pivotal role in determining what is considered authentic. As Beverland (2014, p. 112) states, "authenticity is perceptual—that is, what is real or genuine is in the mind of the consumer." Given that consumers still crave communal connections, brands that facilitate connections with people, time, place, and culture are seen as genuine, and this fosters stronger emotional bonds between customers and brands (Beverland, 2014). This aligns with the significance of communal connections in the consumer-brand relationship. In as much as Beverland (2014) talks about brand authenticity, his definitions of authenticity match this research's scope of SMIs marketing. Authenticity is what differentiates something

or someone people want to identify with. Considering that consumers' desires determine what is authentic and what is not, their responses toward influencer content display an important indication of authenticity. This research considers influencer authenticity, and its role in the development of the parasocial relationship between a consumer and a media character.

Regarding identification, Phua et al. (2017) explain that self-expression through creations such as art and sport develop relationships with media characters. People want to attain an ideal self-identity, and this compels them to indirectly upscale with a sense of social identification to characters who stand out for their originality (Audrezet et al., 2020). Hence, it is important to look at what attracts social media users to an SMI's content. However, in this study, authenticity is more concerned with what attracts users to influencers rather than a variable that influences consumer relationships.

2.4.1.3 SMI relevance/credibility

The extent to which an influencer is relevant and credible influences their attractiveness and the responsiveness to their messages. The theory of source credibility by Hovland & Weiss (1951), illustrates that dimensions of credibility of a source of information can affect users' acceptance and use of the source message. Additionally, Yuan et al. (2016) have content source credibility as one of their variables. They agree with Hovland & Weiss (1951) illustrating that content source credibility influences the reactions that online users have on SNS and affects their identification with the content. Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) also argue that SMIs are persuasive people, and their credibility matters when it comes to their selection for brand campaigns. Conversely, Verwey & Muir (2014) try to disregard Djafarova & Rushworth's (2017) arguments by discussing that what matters is how the audience perceives the brand campaigns, not how they are designed or implemented by brands. Brands take time and consideration to curate campaigns, especially ones that involve influencers. Hence, influencer relevance and source credibility play a part in consumer-influencer interactions.

Pöyry et al. (2019) and Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019) illustrate that influencer endorsements have more credibility than corporate advertising methodologies. This credibility continues to be of interest to researchers, marketers and brand managers. This is relevant to vertical distinctions in marketing. The psychology behind UGC sharing and influencer marketing gives

the brand the advantage of communicating their credibility. Concerning BE, the drivers of social media engagement potentially affect a brand's resonance, judgment, feelings and imagery. This is captured by Wei & Wu (2013), who explain how consumer perceptions are influenced by celebrity endorsements on social media. Similarly, Trivedi & Sama (2020) discuss credibility and trustworthiness as crucial in contributing towards the psychological affinity towards a brand by consumer in influencer campaigns. Hence, influencer credibility plays a role in developed user-influencer relationships and the responsiveness to their content.

2.4.2 Third-party endorsement

Influence is an important part of a customer's life. It affects their thinking, inferences, perceptions, reaction to information, mindset, and behaviour (Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Kim & Hyun, 2011). Influence extends its impact to dress code, taste, belief and culture. Human beings are born blank and empty, and most of their growth and adaptation is based on influence (Sundar, 2012). Psychologists such as Matsumoto (2009) looks at influence as a factor that greatly affects our internal orientations by discussing that human beings are products of their past reactions to the events they came across. The human mind is very adaptable, in the way that it notices the environment and reacts. In many situations, people react to events based on information and knowledge already obtained, and this is shaped by other people. Influence is responsible for many actions, and regardless of their route cause or purpose, emotions make up a considerable part of a human being's life (Matsumoto, 2009; Sundar, 2012).

Considering human psychology, marketing models developed by brands have been improved to involve influence by involving influential media characters. This is called third-party endorsement (described by McCracken, 1989; Erdogan, 1999; and Chen & Xie, 2005). Celebrity endorsement has become a well-known marketing communication technique because it takes advantage of influence during product promotion (Erdogan, 1999). An endorsed third party is usually a celebrity (musician, movie star, or any other public figure who has influence, recognition and a positive image) (McCracken, 1989; Erdogan, 1999). Celebrity endorsements are positive content or comments about the brands that have endorsed them, and this content is fed to and shared among customers (or potential customers) through different media channels.

There have been several positive insights about the characteristics of celebrity endorsement from celebrity endorsement literature. However, Ohanian's (1990) model is the most used model, because it explains the three dimensions of celebrity endorsement, which are: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. These dimensions illustrate the impact of celebrity endorsements in social relationships.

Trustworthiness is associated with a regard for safety and comfort during interactions. With trustworthiness, attaining a consensus about a decision is easier, as it illustrates harmony in intentions (Ohanian, 1990).

Expertise is important for niches involved with corporate branding. Ilicic & Webster (2016) illustrate expertise in celebrity brand endorsements by discussing that the perceived expertise of a celebrity is an important predictor of consumers' purchase intentions, even more than familiarity/identification with the celebrity. For example, a popular mechanic's opinion on which spanner to use would affect customer's perception more than his favourite ice cream brand. This is because there is a greater attachment to expertise when influencing decisions during brand endorsement. Dean & Biswas (2001) concur that contextuality in endorsements has a significant impact due to perceived expertise.

Attractiveness is the appealing impact a celebrity makes on his/her followers. Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) find that, for some users, the perceived appeal of endorsed celebrities has a more positive outcome on the intent of the message to be delivered by the celebrity. Pöyry et al. (2019) back this up by hypothesizing that the perceived attractiveness of a social media celebrity is positively related to followers' attitudes and purchase intentions.

Zhu & Chen (2015) illustrate that good media profiles can increase brand communications and engagements. Influencers can amplify the drivers of social media engagement through UGC sharing (Hughes et al., 2019). The ability to persuade consumers stems from an influencer's ability to build an intimate relationship with their audience as SMIs are people who engage with their following in digital spaces (Abidin, 2017).

Influencer marketing is becoming a reliable method for brands to communicate with their customers and engage a mass audience. However, research has identified that there is inadequate knowledge about how influencer promotions can be optimized for audience age groups, especially in Saudi Arabia. Abidin (2017) concurs that influencer marketing is yet to

be maximized, and most implementations are just complimentary quests for traffic. Razmus (2021) determines that brand equity reaches beyond engagements and post interactions into behaviour-related characteristics, some of which are defined by Keller (2001; 2009). Park & Ha (2021) also state that for brand-hosted social media to be successful, members must make frequent visits to communities and actively engage with brand posts, peer consumers and other members related to the brand. Hence, influencer marketing has the ability to influence the dimensions of BE as is highlighted in this study.

Influencer endorsements are more preferred as content sharing on social media has become an important action in contemporary marketing, as it is likely to contribute to engagement and influencer consumer perceptions. Razmus' (2021) meta-study has a lot of the groundwork in gathering evidence about the approaches taken by researchers in the area of social media effectiveness and concludes that engagement influences the qualitative dimensions of CBBE (also highlighted by Aaker 1996; Keller 2001 and 2009). Hence, like Razmus' (2021) study, contemporary IMC literature complements the psychological impact of relationship marketing (RM) on developing positive psychological commitment. Wei & Wu (2013) illustrate that firm-generated social media content promoted or endorsed by SMIs have a positive impact on brand communication, this is also supported by Zhu & Chen (2015). However, influencers affect the customer/user gratification and how frequently users engage with brands on social media (Phua et al., 2017).

In most cases, influence on social media is quantified by the influencer's social traffic. Social traffic is the number of followers an influencer has on his/her social platforms, website, blog, and other online platforms (Lui, 2015; Conde & Casais, 2023).

2.4.3 Complications and setbacks of influencer marketing

The dynamics of influencer marketing are not simple. While there is literature and research that proves the efficiency of influencer engagement in brand promotion, it is important to specify other factors that determine its efficiency. Creating marketing campaigns involves several factors and attaining a positive brand perception also requires various internal brand factors to be in place (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Hanna & Rowley (2011) discuss these factors and develop a model that illustrates the components of a successful brand promotion campaign

and arranges them in an appropriate order. This subsection discusses some of these factors to create a clearer definition of this thesis' scope and conceptual framework. The scope of the study is focused on vertical distinctions of marketing, however some of the factors identified may be horizontal marketing distinctions. Realizing what impedes influencer marketing is therefore important.

Content attractiveness and authenticity is an important factor in market attraction. Even for influencers, authenticity and attractiveness of the content produced are elements that differentiate their influence (Pöyry et al., 2019; Napoli et al., 2014). Pöyry et al. (2019) identify factors such as authenticity and SMI cost that hold back brands from fully taking advantage of influencer marketing. Napoli et al. (2014) highlight that consumers may be discontented and lack faith in marketing and feel that most of the content brands create is not authentic. Such claims illustrate that some marketing campaigns are weak. There is no scale to measure brand authenticity, which has caused "postmodern markets to be characterized by a brand-dominated hyper-reality where consumers struggle to differentiate between the 'real' and 'fake' (Napoli et al., 2014, p. 2). SNS experiences are diluted with the quest for outreach traffic, a variable that is important, however authenticity may be lost in the process.

Dewnarain et al. (2019) acknowledge that customer relationship management is important for brands, but how much customers value their interaction with brand content is not just defined by the brand, but by the customer. This means that brand attitudes are voluntary, and authenticity helps explain brand attitudes, and how much consumers relate to their respective brands (see Napoli et al., 2014). Bruhn et al. (2012) also discuss that the conceptualization of the perceived authenticity of a brand by a customer is reliant on a deeper action of a brand responding to a customer's needs.

It is evident that the dynamics of a fragmented market in the modern world remains a challenge for marketers. This makes successful marketing campaigns costly in terms of effort, money and resources. As Hughes et al. (2019, p. 7) demonstrate in their research, "there are various differences across social media platforms, a key difference is the rationale or motivation for consumers to engage with platforms." Hence, some customers prefer to interact in platforms that are different from others. Consistency and gradual implementation are key factors in how advertising and brand promotion contribute to the creation of BE, rather than impulsive actions (Buil et al., 2013).

These arguments converge on one problem: marketing costs. Marketing activities, in particular ones that involve influencers, cost a lot of money and finding the right influencer for a specific niche while staying mindful of costs is a challenge for some brands. Influencer marketing was projected to be worth $10 billion USD in 2020 (FinancialNewsMedia, 2020). These figures show the outstanding value of influencer marketing. In as much as it is outright to assume how much value is harvested by brands from influencer marketing, the statistics on the current value of influencer marketing show that there are brands that benefit from influencer marketing endorsements and campaigns. Lui (2015) discusses the value obtained by brands from influencer marketing campaigns, however, they present the setback of cost in a manner that can be overlooked. This thesis needs to inform its audience, and hence, the author sees it important that every element of the argument needs to be looked at.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has immense value for brands, and through advertising, the social media industry is worth a lot of money (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Gulamali & Persson, 2017). eWOM validates the huge cost of efficient advertising. Kostyra et al. (2016) showcase that social media networks have a greater effect on consumer's perceptions, opinions and buying intentions, and hence are worth the investment. The arguments about value obtained versus cost of investment are valid, because there is a proven value obtained from influencer SNS campaigns. Nevertheless, the cost of investment is a factor that cannot be overlooked.

The pursuit of influencer marketing is also risky, as an influencers' image also affects the image of the brand (Gensler et al., 2013). Influencers are unpredictable, considering their social stature, and this puts brands in a risky position. Considering influencers produce content, there are risks associated about how the influencer or the content is perceived. Not all promotional activities are perceived positively, and this may cost a brand. Verwey & Muir (2014) illustrate that brand perception management is complicated and comes with the risk of losing a positive perception. Belanche et al. (2021) provide the example of Chriselle Lim, who promoted an electric toxic-free car cleaner which did not seem authentic considering her lifestyle and audience. The campaign caused a revolt among potential consumers and caused Volvo to suspend the program and regard it as a loss. This instance illustrates the potential risk of UGC promotion by SMIs.

Authenticity, cost, risks and brand alignment are some of the complications associated with influencer marketing. However, these complications are negligible compared to the realized

value of celebrity endorsements. Enke & Borchers (2021) analyse influencer marketing and discern that strategic communication is a crucial requirement when it comes to influencer marketing. Hughes et al. (2019) illustrate the value of influencer marketing on brands, and their inference showcases the high value for brands derived from influencer marketing.

2.4.3.1 Auxiliary factors in influencer marketing

The thesis has acknowledged some setbacks of influencer marketing. Rosengren & Campbell (2021) summarize insights on influencer-induced campaigns on social media, making observations that mention other factors that affect influencer marketing such as inferred motive and the nature of influencer-follower communication. Kacen & Lee (2002) also pinpoint some limitations when trying to establish a relationship between a media character's content sharing and consumer behaviour. The authors reveal other factors that count in promotional campaigns. And some of them are discussed in the remaining parts of this sub-section. Pöyry et al. (2019) also highlight that influencer marketing alone cannot yield positive brand perception and needs to be complemented by the well-being of other factors in the marketing mix. Concepts in brand management illustrate the factors that should be considered in successful marketing campaigns and positive brand perceptions, listed by Hanna & Rowley (2011) as place brand-management components (see Figure 2.7).

Brand management components	Brand evaluation	Brand infrastructure relationships and leadership	Leadership	Stakeholder engagement (management)	Infrastructure (regeneration)	Brand identity	Brand architecture	Brand articulation	Brand commun-ications	Word of mouth	Brand experience
***Holistic Place Brand Management** (proposed model)*	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Relational Network Brand (Hankinson, 2004a)				•	•				•		
City Image Communication (Kavaratzis, 2004)	•			•	•				•	•	
Model of Destination Branding (Cai, 2002)					•	•			•		
7A Destination Branding Model (Baker, 2007)	•			•	•		•	•	•	•	•
City Brand Management (Gaggiotti et al., 2008)			•	•	•				•		

Figure 2.7: Place brand-management components (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

2.4.3.1.1 Brand salience as a pre-existing factor in promotional campaigns

Although influence-based factors contribute to brand resonance, in influencer-fuelled campaigns, influencers are only intermediaries of the messages between brands and customers (Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017). The intermediate communication must be validated and supported by brand factors. A brand perception cannot be changed overnight, even with the best influencer campaigns. Goldsmith et al. (2000) point out that internal factors such as corporate credibility cannot ultimately be changed by celebrity endorsements alone. The judgment of the customer is dependent on whether a brand meets their unique needs, and whether the customer has enough information to be convinced (Goldsmith et al., 2000).

In the preceding section 2.4.3, several brand factors were discussed which are associated with customer responses. Pre-existing value should exist in marketing promotion campaigns. Customers also respond to the significance of a brand in solving their needs (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Customers must be willing to be inclined to the value that the brand projects and how much the interacting brand fulfils that value, in other words, brand salience. Brand salience/relevance is a pre-existing factor that matters in promotional campaign success. Keller (2009) expounds on brand salience as a relevant input in the decision-making process of a customer. Ultimately, brand factors count significantly in establishing BE. For example, if Kylie Jenner (an influential American businesswoman) advertises her lipstick brand to 60-year-old males, there is likely to be very little customer reaction, although she's very influential. This is because lipstick brands have little relevance to such an audience. Hence, promotional efforts are not warranted, considering the relevance of a brand from the consumer's perspective.

Hanna & Rowley (2011) propose a model (Figure 2.8) to align brand factors through marketing campaigns. The model highlights the factors that should be in place for SNS marketing campaigns through influencers to be successful and informs this study about what needs to be considered in attaining brand equity through influencer UGC sharing. The model considers engagement as a contributor to brand infrastructure. Hanna & Rowley (2011) interpret engagement as a part of stakeholder management, indicating that information and information delivery are crucial elements of a brand's identity. The model also considers communication as a crucial part of brand experience. Hanna & Rowley (2011) highlight that consumers make decisions from the information available to them. Figure 2.9 showcases how brand communication is an important factor in shaping brand experiences and defining brand identity.
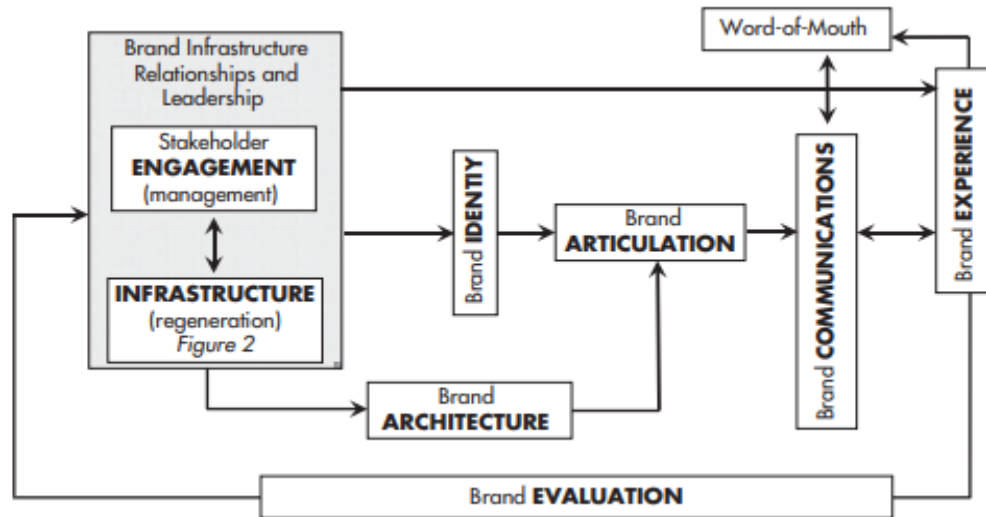
Figure 2.8: Strategic place brand-management model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

To recognize other factors that play a role in consumer-brand interactions, it is important that they properly exploit influencers in SNS brand campaigns. Hence, for this study, it is important to consider some factors that count in a successful influencer marketing campaign. These factors have been pointed out in this section and Hanna & Rowley (2011); conceptualize how they are related in a successful marketing campaign. However, in as much as these factors are tested, there are other ways of attaining brand success (CBBE). This highlight highlights that there are multiple orientations and paths for successful marketing.

2.5 User-generated content (UGC)

User-generated content (UGC) is an essential element of modern marketing strategies. According to Smith et al.'s (2012) definition, UGC refers to any content that is posted on online platforms by users, which relates to a product, brand, or service. SNS publishing activities defined by Ryan (2016) involve posting videos, texts, audios or customized image posts on products, brands or services. UGC has become increasingly important in shaping customer perceptions, as it is often seen as more trustworthy and authentic than traditional marketing messages. UGC is a valuable input in the entire customer journey process, as it provides customers with the information they need to make informed decisions (Smith et al., 2012).

Different forms of UGC have enabled marketers to reach customers they might not have been able to reach through traditional marketing methods. As such, UGC has become a crucial tool for marketers looking to build brand equity and increase customer loyalty. For instance, the use of Google Maps evolved with UGC as a key input in its functionality. When Google Maps was introduced, it was only to enable people to navigate between different areas. However, Google redefined Google Maps to become an app not just for navigation, but also for getting information through pictures, hotel prices, user reviews and suggestions on similar locations for visits. While Google Maps is not a social media platform, the example shows how UGC is a key contributor to consumer insights and how it influences online interactions, especially between consumers.

UGC has enabled users to get to know what they want through interacting with fellow customers. Through social media, customers have also been able to share information between themselves, which is another intrinsic contribution of UGC. The interesting part is when the UGC in itself has a significant contribution in terms of guiding the user when it comes from a high value SMI. As highlighted earlier in this thesis, SMIs simplify the whole complex customer journey by altering the perception of the customer (Xie & Lou, 2020). Therefore, SMIs act as intermediaries who gather information from different sources and present it in a way that resonates with their followers (Enke & Borchers, 2021). They curate content, package it into easily digestible messages, and communicate it in the language and style that their audience understands and relates to. This helps bridge the gap between complex information and the targeted audience, making it more accessible and engaging. Consequently, SMIs play a vital role in shaping customer perceptions and influencing brand equity through their ability to curate and communicate information effectively.

The information shared on social media is the input - content sharing is the primary strategy in influencer marketing. The output is reflected in decisions customers make (Alam & Khan, 2019). These decisions can be vast, ranging from personal choices, perceptions, to product choices. Human beings, in this case customers (during the customer journey) are influenced by their sociocultural variables (Nam & Kannan, 2020). These can be adjusted to yield certain behavioural patterns. UGC is the information (input) that potentially guides the audience depending on engagement variables such as regard, influence and personality. Hence, SNS communications can work with niche interests, so that value is realized through UGC sharing.

Thus, UGC is a crucial driving factor throughout the customer journey in contemporary online marketing channels. Presti et al. (2020) discuss how information can influence the user to the next stage of the customer journey. Various authors including Salo (2017), Chahal et al. (2020) and Weiger et al. (2017) acknowledge that among other factors, user engagement with a brand influences its brand engagement. Salo (2017) mentions the example of user reviews in online shopping, especially in guiding the customer's reaction to a brand. As discussed in previous sections, this sets the stage for effective brand-customer communication.

2.5.1 The role of UGC in big data, analytics and traction reporting

Integrated marketing communications (IMCs) with user-generated content (UGC) on social media have given marketers tools for analysis and measurement. Researchers, marketers and brand managers can understand the perceptions, needs and desires of their customers and reflect these elements in the features of the brand.

Big data is large volumes of data, primarily used for analytics in business contexts (Esfahani et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2024). Big data has been associated with analytics as it is used to measure insights, consumer behaviour and predict likely outcomes. Big data is used to model likely business instances and is applied in social media marketing (Esfahani et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2024).

The development of big data for internet, social media and software companies has also enabled start-ups and small to midsize enterprises (SMEs) to scale and grow through measurement of output obtained from customer communications (Gandomi & Haider, 2015). Big data and analytics have simplified the process of designing marketing communication models (Sivarajah et al., 2020). Hence, UGC in social media communication has greater traction and reporting through the development of analytic tools (Sivarajah et al., 2020). The management of UGC is therefore better as a result of back-end technology tools such as big data and analytics. Big data and analytics have revolutionizing the marketing processes of the present-day by integrating information with customer psychology (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Gandomi & Haider, 2015). Social media data analytics techniques have been very influential in processing advertising strategies and engaging customers, not just to learn about brands, but also to know what products they want and what they would want in a brand advertisement.

Digital customers are connected through communication platforms such as social media, and data is collected through these platforms. Lou & Xie (2021) investigate how UGC improves the quality of social media communications and increases connectivity between customer communities. Considering this connectivity, brands can exploit advanced analytics and big data to create better operations to engage their customers (Gandomi & Haider, 2015).

Other sources of data are also important inputs that govern the creation and management of UGC. UGC can also be customized to suit different social media activities by analysing the input of big data. Analytics has enabled certain adjustments to be made with the creation of customized content for social media communication (Sivarajah et al., 2020). A good example is when a Cartoon YouTube channel is automatically suggested to children below the age of 12 years. Big data enables brands to tune audience requirements while creating UGC and engaging in social media communications.

2.5.2 UGC sharing and its contribution to brand engagement

UGC creates a perception of a brand, product or service image. The best example of UGC is user reviews. UGC sharing is a key contributor to marketing, especially when it comes to informing the market (Ahmad et al., 2016). UGC enlightens a user, and this leads to brand awareness. UGC sharing increases the ability of a brand's target or consumer to identify and belong to the brand (Sadek et al., 2018). Brands have the advantage of taking an upper hand in consumer engagement through content creation. To increase the impact of UGC sharing, influencers become creators of shared UGC. From products, services, and offers to promotions, influencers have become important suppliers of UGC, facilitating user-user communication. High-level consumer awareness favours brand engagement, and this facilitates the speed of the customer through the customer journey.

Presently, the predominant form of UGC is videos and photos, to such a degree that some 44% of adult internet users engage in the creation of such content (Ryan, 2016). This indicates the high fraction of SNS activity that is propagated by UGC sharing. A brand's engagement is based on the content created by its stakeholders, such as customers and internal employees, and this has an impact on the brand and its perception (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). UGC refers to media contributed and shared by people online as defined by Smith et al. (2012), by sharing

the content these people also become stakeholders. According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau's (IAB) suggestion, UGC should be able to capture people's interest and promote conversation (Bowen & Ozuem, 2019). Such imperatives already reflect UGC as a key contributor to brand engagement on social media. Since the target customers are users, UGC is related to terms such as "peer-created content" and "Consumer Generated Content" (CGC) (Bowen & Ozuem, 2019, p. 196). Hence, engagement is constituted by publishing activity, in this case, UGC on social media. The number of SNS engagements are hence positively influenced by the UGC publishing activity.

SMIs play a major role in influencing brand perception through UGC sharing. SNS publishing activities as defined by Ryan (2016) involves posting videos, texts, audios or customized image posts on products, brands or services. Through UGC sharing, influencers are also brand co-creators, hence, this simultaneously contributes to information and positive brand perception (see Sadek et al., 2018). Sadek et al. (2018) consider the wide channel (large traffic) and the deep connection most of the influencers share with their fans. On Snapchat, for example, an influencer can share brand information through his/her snap streaks, in an attempt to influence his/her audience to have a greater brand engagement. These insights inform this research by illustrating the relationship between influencer brand-endorsed content sharing and brand engagements on SNS platforms.

2.5.2.1 The impact of social media traffic on UGC sharing

UGC allows users or customers to connect to other users rather than the traditional consumer-brand communication approach of one brand to many users (Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017). SNS communication has contributed towards value creation through a process of UGC sharing leading to co-creation between brands and their respective customers. Although the numbers do not reveal the impact of campaigns with influencer endorsements (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), internet and social network services come with the advantage of traffic (Messing & Westwood, 2014). Laroche et al. (2013) illustrate how markets are easily accessible in large numbers and are segmented more effectively in SNS networks because of the ability to identify combined interests and topics.

The evolution of social media communication has enabled marketers and brand managers to identify areas of traffic, so as to attain more outreach with brand campaigns. Therefore, the numbers are an important element in marketing plans and strategies revolving around SNS campaigns. The definitions of influencers by Freberg et al. (2011) illustrate that the number of followers an influencer has is a key factor in their selection by brands. Influencers have the ability to impact huge crowds, and this is one of the factors that differentiate them. Lampeitl & Åberg (2017) define influencer marketing as an activity that involves customer engagement through digital content creation on social media platforms. The authors illustrate that SMIs have a high follower count, valuable impressions, outlooks, attractiveness, lifestyles, or narratives that interest customers.

According to Weismueller et al. (2020), 82% of people's online activities are dedicated to social media usage, particularly Instagram. Similarly, Khatib (2016) highlights that social media commands the highest traffic, playing a pivotal role in influencing lifestyle, fashion, and purchase decisions. The influencer marketing industry was projected to reach a substantial worth of $10 billion USD by 2020 (FinancialNewsMedia, 2020). Although the figures vary, these analyses highlight how social media sharing and its associated traffic is an important variable for brands. Research on eWOM and its impact by Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) and Gulamali & Persson (2017) illustrate that information sharing about brands creates distinct experiences in the online environment. eWOM has a much larger reach, which supports the argument that user/consumer experiences are improved by eWOM sharing on various social media networks, and that these experiences have a greater effect on consumer's opinions and perceptions of a brand than traditional marketing strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kostyra et al., 2016). Schivinski et al. (2021) illustrate how eWOM manifests through large amounts of traffic. The illustration shows that traffic is a target in campaigns involving eWOM, and that this determines influencer endorsement remuneration.

Highlighted arguments and analyses show how much traffic is an important variable in influencer selection and brand strategy. A study by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) determines that influencer promotions enjoy large traffic among their followers, as the brand is perceived as being of high quality since the influencers endorse and associate with the brand. This illustration, combined with Lampeitl & Åberg's (2017) argument, reveal the difference between influence and popularity. The combination of arguments is relevant for this thesis, because it showcases that the extent of traffic associated with influencers should be mentioned.

Lui (2015) illustrates the importance of statistics to brands that use influencer marketing. Most brands measure the success of campaigns from the number of engagements with their content. Therefore, traffic is measured in terms of the number of engagements obtained from influencer endorsements.

2.5.3 The influence of brand-endorsed UGC from SMIs

UGC shared by influential people increases the user interactivity with the brand. The qualitative values involving user interactivity are important for the success of a brand (Zhu et al., 2015). Zhu et al.'s (2015) bipartite graph illustrates that the extent of a user's interaction with a brand is an important co-efficient of brand success. Influencers have the advantage of numbers and influence, hence, UGC sharing has more impact through influencer marketing.

Glucksman (2017) pinpoints three primary factors that affect followers' reactions to SMI content, which are confidence, authenticity, and interactivity. Followers are very willing and trustful to adopt influencer opinions and habits (Schouten et al., 2020). The psychology of human beings is largely influenced by communication (Sundar, 2012). Communication builds connections, regard, and trust (Matsumoto, 2009). Brand communication strategies should be designed to increase and enhance brand resonance and positive brand perception, from a psychological perspective. Matsumoto (2009) emphasizes that this happens by ensuring that the consumer feels valued and that their relationship with the brand strengthens over time.

Even when advertising is associated with positive consumer responses, there can also be negative responses to corporate advertisements (Ryan, 2016). Dewnarain et al. (2019) state that although online media channels have traffic, responses can be diluted by corporate advertisements which interrupt online experiences. SNS experiences may be interrupted with ads, which weakens how people react to advertisements on SNS. Many influencers are creative content creators, and they get paid through content production. Through producing content, influencers indirectly promote a product via a brand-celebrity endorsement, and since consumers enjoy influencer content, brands get an advertising opportunity.

Literature from authors such as Kotler & Mindak (1978) and Kotler (2002) try to relate BE to the interactions that occur within the brand. The interaction between consumers and between

consumers and a brand is crucial in defining the image of a brand (Kotler & Mindak, 1978; Kotler, 2002), and that is how influencers come in; with the ability to influence consumers, and with a relationship with the consumers. The parasocial relationship as discussed, and its role in this thesis' claims aim to illustrate how influencers achieve a positive brand perception. Consumers tend to place more trust in each other rather than in big brands themselves (Edelman, 2010; Turcotte et al., 2015). A stream of research by Vázquez et al. (2002) and Napoli et al, (2014) demonstrate that when consumers engage with brands on social media, they bear better commitment impressions towards the brands. The statement by Napoli et al. (2014) has also been made by other authors such as Vázquez et al. (2002) and Verwey & Muir (2014). On social media, influencers create content that engages consumers voluntarily, compared to corporate-media adverts. This creates a consumer-brand interaction of free will.

A positive consumer-brand interaction is one of the most important factors for managing a brand and its perceptions (Zehir et al., 2011). However, Influencers spur voluntary engagement (brand communication), at least compares to corporate-media advertisements. Buil et al. (2013) highlight that managers, business owners, marketers, and advertisers must understand how their communications can affect brand loyalty and perception. Influencer-created content on social media can have a voluntary influence when considering engagement and subjects a brand to increased security on social media (Turcotte et al., 2015). The relationship between influencers and consumers creates a different environment for advertising when considering UGC, the voluntary interaction bears better perceptions by consumers on brands.

2.5.4 Parasocial relationships

Brand engagement through social media sharing is intensified by social media influencers due to the relationships they have with their followers. This relationship is defined as the parasocial relationship, which is described by Phua et al. (2018) as a relationship that develops between an individual and a media character, in this case, a SMI. Influencers have a relationship with their followers, and this affects how much they influence them (Hung, 2014; Aw & Labrecque, 2020). SM users follow SMIs' lifestyles because of who they are, and how much they need them or see themselves in them (Phua et al., 2018). SMIs, therefore, create a spurt of influence that affects the emotional orientation of users regarding what they say, do, or use. Fans develop

a parasocial bond with the SMIs they follow, which leads to aspirational and playful motives to engage in celebrity-induced entertainment experiences (Hung, 2014).

How much SM users relate to influencers affects how users/customers emotionally respond to a product. Aw & Labrecque (2020) illustrate the positive effect that the parasocial relationship between a SM active consumer and an influencer has on the emotional regard and credibility of the content shared. Aw & Labrecque (2020) also note that influencers appeal to consumers at different intensities, and this affects the impact of UGC within a specific brand campaign. The parasocial relationship creates an emotional connection between a user and a SMI. Parasocial relationships develop and are maintained through interactions (Dibble et al., 2016; Conde & Casais, 2023); in this case, the interactions are celebrity brand endorsements. SMI relationships influence the regard their followers on social media have to the content they share. When endorsed by brands, SMIs influence the emotional correspondence between their followers and the brand they share UGC for.

The parasocial relationship mirrors the relationship between two people with a personal connection that is bound by mutual interests and benefits. This is a relationship that brands have been taking advantage of in classical media marketing. Reinikainen et al. (2020) discuss how parasocial relationships between users and celebrities in SNS assist in the understanding of SNS user behaviour. Hence, UGC-sharing marketing campaigns can be optimized depending on the target market. In the digital age, the parasocial relationship and regard towards celebrities have an even larger impact on our daily lives (see Ferchaud et al., 2018). With SNS communications, influencer marketing takes advantage of facilitated similarities and trend identification.

The development and impact of parasocial relationships is important in determining the success of influencer marketing campaigns. Who is regarded, why is he/she regarded, by how much and how relevant is it to a brand shape the success of marketing campaigns. According to Lampeitl & Åberg (2017), influence is defined as why some opinions matter more than others. Moscovici & Faucheux (1972) and Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) demonstrate that there is a direct link between how people establish themselves and how they are perceived by others. From a psychological perspective, Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) mention that "persuasion, compliance, conformity, obedience, dissonance and self-attribution, conditioning and social learning,

attitude-behaviour relations, attitude involvement, prejudice, nonverbal communication, and even subliminal influence" are reactions that are oriented towards a better life.

Following from Zimbardo & Leippe's (1991) definition, it would appear that the development of a relationship and the influence that follows it are results of a human being's analysis of what is better for survival. For example, people want to identify more with people who go to the gym, as they associate gyms with physical attractiveness and good health. Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) investigate the roles played by individuals in social relationships and conclude that communication of attractive elements such as wealth or good health play an important role in the creation and sustainability of an influence-based relationship. For this study, however, it is important to come down to what counts in an influence-based relationship, while considering its impact on consumer-brand communication.

2.6 The role of influence from SMIs to the customer's journey and its associated psychology

The consumer' journey is based on a psychological process that involves understanding influence and perception (Wijaya, 2015). The psychology focusses on engaging the customer, caring for the customer and making the customer understand that the brand is there to deliver what they need (this is where psychology models represent processes in consumer-brand interactions). Brand messages have more impact via SMIs, who are already highly regarded and share more with the public (Lou & Xie, 2021). SMIs, hence, play an important role in customer management. Management of the audience is a process that has been made simpler with SM and SMIs.

Predetermined perceptions affect the customer journey and creates value because a customer is informed about a brand (Wijaya, 2015). This value is mutual for both the brand and the customer, through the integrated social media interface as SNS communications create value, for both the customer and the brand (Phua et al., 2017; Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017; Hudders et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). For example, one of the highest viewed genre of videos on YouTube is the product unboxing genre. This is because customers want to know about the product, which creates a demand for unboxing video content. This genre is a good example of the possibility for influencers to becoming informants to the public and relates to CBBE.

Influencer-brand endorsements include trying brand products, testing brand services, checking out tourist destinations, reviewing cars, unboxing mobile phones or gaming consoles. These actions do not just help brands to get to qualitative BE, but also inform customers. Brands capitalize on this opportunity by incorporating influencers into their product development process and creating value.

Influence affects behaviour, reactions, and perceptions. Behaviour can be influenced, and perceptions adjusted, through communication. Social media has also enabled customers to get better perceptions of a product. Social media marketing is oriented to customer psychology and integrates various models for maximum brand value. By simplifying and enhancing communication, social media marketing enables brands to understand their customers (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). UGC makes communication between the user and the brand and vice versa more effective, while influencer marketing takes advantage of the parasocial relationship between the brand and its target user.

Engagement is influenced by the relationship between an influencer and SM users. The fluctuation of emotions is aimed at influencing the perception of followers to the point of affecting consumer behaviour. Brand communication strategies affect the behaviour of customers (Matsumoto, 2009) by ensuring that the consumer feels valued so their relationship with the brand strengthens over time. In other words, emotions have an important role in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviour. The customer journey - from getting to know the brand to being loyal to the brand - is easier with SMIs. Social media has defined the process by learning to understand the customer. Marketing is a very sensitive field, and the contribution of influences and UGC has enabled the process to become strategic and intentional (Shan et al., 2020; Ozuem et al., 2023).

2.7 Analysis of customer journey psychology models

Several models explain customer psychology and how it relates to integrated marketing communication. The evolution of marketing caused the shift from fragmented marketing to integrated marketing communications (IMC) (Blakeman, 2023). IMC is an approach that has been used by brands to organize efforts in communicating with their customers, prospects, and the public (Broderick & Pickton, 2005; Barger & Labrecque, 2013). Different psychological

elements affect brand value or brand success considering the power that social media has in decentralized communication. The primary target behind integrated marketing communications changes depending on a brand's core image and specified goal (Bekmamedova & Shanks, 2014). Models highlighted in this study such as the AIDA model and the hierarchy of effects model illustrate the customer journey, emphasizing on information, influence, engagement and action.

2.7.1 The AIDA model

The AIDA model is a classic model that explains consumer-brand interactions in the simplest form (Wijaya, 2015). This model forms a basis for explaining the role of influence and feelings in propagating consumer-brand interaction. The complex phenomenon of consumer engagement has led to much investigation by marketers and market researchers (Wijaya, 2015). Influence is a key driver of consumer engagement and behaviour, hence, a consideration of models that consider influence in consumer behaviour is important.

The AIDA model was conceptualized by Lewis (1908) in his book *Financial advertising* to describe different stages/instances of customer engagement when interacting with a brand. AIDA stands for attention, interest, desire, and purchase action. Although the model is dated, it offers a strong foundation for subsequent marketing models such as the hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model. Barry (1987), Wijaya (2015), and Chakravarty & Sarma (2018) find foundational links between the AIDA model and the HOE model. Wijaya (2015) argues that the AIDA model summarizes knowledge, feelings, motivation and action. Therefore, although the AIDA model is dated, its role in explaining consumer-brand interaction is still solid and applicable (see Figure 2.9).

	KNOWLEDGES		FEELING	MOTIVATION → ACTION
AIDA (Strong '25)	Attention	Interest	Desire	Action

Figure 2.9: The AIDA model, broken down into knowledge, feeling and motivation (Wijaya, 2015).

Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) explain that AIDA was conceptualized to maximize the impact of buyer-seller interaction. This is important for the present study which is focused on consumer-brand interaction. The study also uses other insights, models, concepts and theories such as Kotler & Keller (2011) to explain knowledge, feelings and motivation in consumer brand interactions. The model has been used to establish a target market and orient customers towards ascertained range of responses, for decades now.

The AIDA model maximizes its explanation of customer experience with its foundation in considering the needs and desires of the customer, thus making the customer respond better to brand communication. In as much as it has evolved and conceived other models, the AIDA model remains effective in summarizing customer communication with specific target markets (Barry, 1987; Moriarty et al., 2009). An example of its application is how automotive advertisements convince their customers that the product is desirable in relation to how it satisfies a specific need.

However, the AIDA model has questionable relevance to this study. Moriarty et al. (2009) describe it as a simple model which is limited to explaining customer journey processes. This study looks at qualitative BE and not just single customer actions. The AIDA model does not explain the role of consistent communication in creating value for a brand. Instead, it is focuses on attention and interest (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) further highlight that the model does not properly illustrate the connection between awareness and interest, a connection that involves communication. The model is focused on the modification of advertisements to convince a customer. Hence, the employment of the AIDA model does not satisfy the scope and objectives of this study. The AIDA model does not entirely explain customer psychology in marketing, instead, it explains how the customer journey can be modified to yield action from the customer (Barry, 1987). From the perspective of this study, social media communications are not just concerned with customer actions, but with the long-term development of brand loyalty.

2.7.2 The hierarchy-of-effects model (HOE)

The hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model represents the psychology that surrounds a customer as they interact with a brand. This model is a significant advance in explaining the steps

contributing to qualitative BE. Koshkaki & Solhi (2016) use HOE to illustrate that relationships and emotions have an effect on decision-making, whether positive or negative, and that influential people's expressions affect consumers' perceptions about a specific brand, for example, using a mechanical tool because it has been endorsed by a renowned engineer. Therefore, through social media endorsements, the experiences of a brand influence the perception of the customer towards the brand, how much the customer subscribes to the brand, and brand resonance, and these three variables contribute to qualitative BE.

The psychology of brand engagement towards qualitative BE involves several steps that consumers undergo as they interact with a brand through SMI engagement. The hierarchy represents a progression of learning and decision-making that consumers experience as a result of advertising (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The HOE is an advanced advertising model that illustrates effective, efficient and easy brand interaction steps. These steps are awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase action. The steps are outlined further in the next paragraphs.

The first step is **awareness** Lavidge & Steiner's (1961), which involves consumer communication. The consumer is made aware of the brand. He/she starts to take interest in the brand. This involves interactions between the consumer and the brand through UGC. Different mediums enable brands to reach out to customers, in this case, SM. Through influencers, brands are able to take notice of new markets, considering the number of followers that influencers have. Influencers also impact how consumers are made aware of a brand because of the parasocial relationship between the consumer and the media characters (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Knowledge is the second stage. It involves brand association, where consumers are getting to know the brand. A SMI's content informs the customer of the brand, its products, services, promotions, offers or announcements. Depending on brand salience (explained by Keller, 2001) from the relationship a customer has with the SMI, and the type of engagement, the consumer develops a **liking** for the brand. This is due to the adoption of knowledge that has created a positive impression of the brand by the customer. This commences the process of establishing brand trust by a customer.

The next stage is that, with brand relevance and influence, a consumer starts to **prefer** the respective brand over others. This is due to the established trust in the respective brand.

Customer preference is largely influenced by the perception the customer has of the respective brand. Influencer parasocial relationships play an important part in influencing brand perception.

Preference yields **conviction**, where the customer is convinced of the brand's ability to satisfy his/her needs. This is the step that involves the conversion of brand trust to brand loyalty. The conviction stage is also dependent on brand relevance (the applicability of the product's functionality and cost to the customer) (Yoo et al., 2000). Marketing efficiency is also dependent on the quality of the item being marketed, and its relevance to customer problems (Martínez-López et al., 2020). In this study, however, the vertical marketing, which do not include product quality, are considered. The final, and crucial step in HOE, is the **purchase action**, which involves the fully convinced perception of a customer in selecting the product of one brand against its competition. In this case, brand equity is achieved.

The HOE model illustrates the interaction between a consumer and a brand. Smith et al. (2008) acknowledge the illustrative contribution of the HOE model in making a brand more known to the consumer. The model is applicable in modern digital marketing strategies considering its cognitive, affective and conative nature in customer engagement (Hazel & Kang, 2018). Regarding influencer marketing, brand association, trust and loyalty are crucial aspects of the HOE model, which is why the model is considered for this analysis. The HOE model represents the psychology that surrounds a customer as he/she interacts with a brand. The model makes a significant contribution in analysing the steps which contribute towards a positive brand perception by a customer.

2.7.3 Relevance of the HOE and CBBE models

Illustrating customer psychology is dependent on the variables that directly affect the whole customer journey. The thesis looks at the contribution made by SMIs in IMC and how they shape consumer perceptions, ultimately leading to positive consumer brand decisions. The study draws upon the HOE model and Keller's brand equity model (CBBE), which provide invaluable insights into consumer psychology and communication.

The relevance of the HOE and CBBE models to the study lies in understanding consumer psychology within integrated marketing communication (IMC) and brand equity (BE), particularly in the context of social media influencers (SMIs). These models shed light on the intricate dynamics shaping consumer perceptions and brand decisions. Through their insights, the study aims to decipher the factors influencing consumer behaviour and the effectiveness of communication strategies. Hence, the models relate to the study's conceptual framework by presenting conceptualized variables and representing how the variables are related. Considering third-party endorsements are an important development in integrated marketing communication, the chosen models, HOE and CBBE, provide a framework for comprehending consumer psychology and guiding IMC strategies to achieve BE goals. Therefore, the models represent entities that showcase interactions between a brand and a consumer, in an integrated marketing concept.

Models of CBBE have evolved over time, dependent on customer behavioural patterns (Sadek et al., 2018). The models considered by this study: Keller's model and the HOE model are some of the consumer-centric models used to understand customer psychology with media interactions. Many variables make a direct contribution to brand value, and the more variables a business can control, the more likely a business is to be successful (Romaniuk et al., 2012). With influencer marketing, the model can explain the importance of influence in customer perceptions (Weismueller et al., 2020), which is a strategic step in gaining a competitive advantage in marketing.

Third-party endorsements are different from other promotion actions because they have the advantage of traffic and influence (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2021; Goldsmith et al., 2000). These factors are considered in the HOE and CBBE models. Targeted consumers are intended to interact with a brand as much as possible. Given third-party endorsements, this is highly likely if it involves SMIs.

Influence is an important element in the customer journey identified by models that explain consumer psychology (Goldsmith et al., 2000), including HOE and CBBE. However, within these two models, communication can be adjusted to increase its effectiveness to amplify the direction of a customer's intention. HOE is a marketing model that explains the customer journey when interacting with information about the brand (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The CBBE model investigates the variables (from the consumers' end) that constitute BE. These

and other models present a psychological framework focussed on getting to understand the customer.

The systematic process from UGC sharing to qualitative BE is propelled by the customer's experience with the brand and an influencer's contribution towards it. This process is best represented by the HOE model. Even after many years, the model remains valid for illustrating the progression of learning and decision-making the consumer experiences as a result of advertising (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Craig et al. (2010) use the HOE model to test the influence of mass communication on decision-making and intuition. They determine that engagement (whether mass, digital or SNS) influences decision-making and intuition. Decision-making and intuition are attitudinal and behavioural concerns that equate to judgment, feelings and cumulative brand resonance in Keller's CBBE model (Keller, 2009). Smith et al. (2008) acknowledge the illustrative contribution of the HOE model in making a brand better known to the consumer, and finally, in influencing how much a brand appeals to a consumer.

2.8 The contribution of SNS engagement to brand resonance

Brand resonance is one important factor for managing a brand and its perceptions (Zehir et al., 2011). According to Keller (2009), brand resonance is how much a brand causes an impression on the potential market or public on social media. Resonance is an element in BE that affects how customers react to products. Brand resonance, therefore, is an important goal for brands, and appreciating brands on SM influences a SM user's engagement with brand information. SNS brand engagements have a larger reach, leading to the theory that sharing opinions by SMIs regarding brands on various social media networks has a greater effect on a consumer's beliefs and judgment about a brand, compared to traditional marketing strategies (Riegner, 2007).

eWOM directly relates to the quantity of SNS brand engagements. This affects brand resonance by guiding the user's interaction with the brand and influencing his/her feelings and judgment. Regardless of who is sharing, UGC affects the impressions that are observed and held regarding a particular brand. In influencer-fuelled promotions, influence by SMIs is important in brand resonance. Considering that UGC sharing by SMIs is a contributor to engagement in brand

endorsed campaigns, UGC sharing is a contributor towards brand resonance (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Considering the number of SNS engagements, brand resonance is a clear outcome of online SNS campaigns. According to a report cited by Ismail (2017), in January 2014, a whopping 74% of online adults worldwide were using various social networking sites. Furthermore, social media plays a significant role in the daily lives of these adults (Duggan et al., 2015).

2.9 The contribution of influence and influencer relationships to customer reactions

The reaction of a customer is what differentiates the quality of online promotional campaigns. A customer's reaction towards content (such as likes, comments and shares) is important, especially with modern communications and engagement channels such as SNS platforms. Phua et al. (2017), Kim & Hyun (2011) and Dwivedi et al. (2021) argue that contemporary people are more susceptible to influence, considering the amount of connectivity and the reliance on online resources. Cialdini (2006) illustrates that influence is a guiding path to decision-making.

Social media is a medium where the impact of influence is particularly evident, with both good and bad effects. For example, fake news spreads quickly online, and people are quickly lured into online scams. From a critical perspective, as discussions and illustrations by Phua et al. (2017) and Kim & Hyun (2011) reveal, a significant portion of users of digital communication platforms are easily swayed or believe in online information without questioning its validity. This suggests that some users are more susceptible to misinformation or manipulation on digital platforms. Influence has a large impact on how people react, and some people, parties or organizations have taken advantage of that.

This thesis considers the positive impact of influence on brands, with previous statements simply emphasizing the power of influence on SNS platforms. Ciasullo et al. (2021) illustrate that online content is more sensitive to and influential on self-directed interests, providing planning functionality and the opportunity for brands to penetrate the market. In regard to brand promotions, influence is, hence, a crucial factor for developing brand perception, and it makes influencer content sharing valuable (Ciasullo et al., 2021).

How consumers appreciate brands on social media influence their perception and reaction towards the brand (see Phua et al., 2017 and Phua et al., 2018). An obvious illustration is that when most people prefer one brand, the remaining cohort of people slowly become inclined to preferring that brand as well. Influence is subjective to stereotypes; humans use previous perceptions and information in making preceding decisions (Cialdini, 2006). The information that is present plays a huge role in decisions and perceptions. In contemporary social media marketing, pre-established relationships and traffic plays a huge role in influencing SNS users. For instance, when someone who is highly regarded in their field recommends a brand to others, the other people are likely to try it out.

Looking at brand interaction and the impact of influence on behaviour, we come to terms with the impact of influencer relationships on brand perception. This paper has already discussed the parasocial relationships between SMIs and social media users, and its impact on influencer marketing. Clearly, sharing and influence have a contribution to overall brand perception. Sharing initiates a perception of trust depending on how information is received, exchanged, and who it comes from (Nambisan & Baron, 2007). Perception affects habits (Matsumoto, 2009). Brands target behaviour by customers that embrace their brand image more positively. In this case, an emotional relationship guides how we respond to messages, and this builds upon a perception that affects the audience. With influencer endorsements, brand resonance has a considerable impact on the responses of a customer towards a brand (Shieh & Lai, 2017).

The emotional influence a SMI has proportionately influences brand perception. Perceptions are highly important to establishing the trustworthiness and willingness to follow the opinions and influence of SMIs (Schouten et al., 2020). The emotional relationship social media influencers share with their followers establishes a potential cognitive influence that affects the behaviour of the followers, considering the amount of social impact social media influencers have (Glucksman, 2017). Depending on the niche, SMIs can build upon brand communication strategies using their relationships and their influence on their followers.

2.9.1 The role of parasocial relationships on customer reactions

The response to content is crucial in communication (Smith et al., 2012). In consumer-brand communications on SM, reactions to UGC shared has an impact on the brand. This impact can

be detected through the amount of brand traffic fan base growth. However, a long-term impact on perception is also evident. Ciasullo et al. (2019), among others, study responsiveness to online content. They state that attention is an important objective in content creation and sharing. Assessment of attention has been primarily focused on the effects of online ratings on consumers' decision-making, satisfaction, and loyalty. Hence, UGC is integrated into schemes that target the best and highest number of reactions from target users/customers.

Influencer promotions play a significant role in increasing the amount of brand exposure. Matsumoto (2009) illustrates that the influence or control of behaviour affects how people embrace what they are told. Behaviour can be cultured into influencing views and perceptions, especially in the context of social media influencer-fuelled promotions. Endorsements increase the number of times potential customers are exposed to a brand and influences customer's views (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). However, how much a customer subscribes to a brand is also influenced by non-promotional factors such as product quality, delivery timelines, pricing and customer service quality, these are horizontal distinctions that are not related to this study. Zehir et al. (2011) include some horizontal distinctions of marketing in their study, i.e., quality of customer service. However, Zehir et al. (2011), Atilgan et al. (2009) and Laroche et al. (2013) argue that brand communication and association have a positive effect on brand trust, which in turn influences brand loyalty. The overall perception caused by brands should be analysed from the perspective of how much a SMI has caused it. This is measured by the margin of impact recorded by SM users caused by contributions by SMIs.

Pre-established parasocial relationships create an aspiration to engage with a brand in a more positive way. Matsumoto (2009) and Cialdini (2006) explain that pre-established relationships have a higher chance of influencing reactions, perceptions and decisions. Additionally, Wei & Wu (2013) find that brand experiences are more influential with social media endorsements. This explains the conclusion that, with endorsements, the experiences of a customer are more likely to make the customer subscribe to the brand considering pre-established influence and attractiveness (one of the thesis' hypotheses is derived from this analysis).

The hierarchy-of-effects model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) illustrates that the experience of the customer is a crucial matter to control. A key part of this is having the right experiences around a brand with the goal being that the consumer will have specific positive thoughts and beliefs (Gulamali & Persson, 2017). Depending on brand saliency, the experiences between a user and

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a brand influence the psychology of the brand engagement (brand resonance). The progression of learning and decision-making from consumer experiences as a result of engagements affect how a consumer subscribes to a brand (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Shieh & Lai (2017) back up this claim by illustrating that with brand experiences, there is a positive relationship between brand resonance and brand loyalty in experiential marketing.

Given the impact of influencer campaigns, it is important to understand the contribution of parasocial relationships to content responsiveness. Matsumoto (2009) illustrates that psychologically, relationships between people influence the level of responsiveness towards their messages. Therefore, someone responds faster to messages from loved ones or family. Although the psychology is quite different for social media campaigns, nevertheless there is a similarity, especially with contemporary arguments on the impact of parasocial relationships. Bi & Zhang (2022) indicate that developed parasocial relationships are imaginary friendships/relationships with media icons. This supports the psychological argument that responsiveness to influencer content is based on the developed regard for these influencers. The formation of an imaginary friendship with a YouTube influencer leads to an increased level of social comparison, resulting in diminished self-evaluation. Consequently, consumers resort to product purchases as a coping mechanism to enhance their self-esteem (Zheng et al., 2020). Hence, there is increased likelihood of positive responsiveness from influencers who have established parasocial relationships with users.

Although responses to brand content is also influenced by factors such as the pricing of the brand's products and brand targeting strategy (Keller, 2001), brand positions do not have an influence on the attractiveness of the content or the parasocial relationships that exist between the customers/potential customers of the brand and the brands (Kim & Kim, 2022). Outstanding content, especially from influencers, is input, as compared to content that comes from the brand (Kim & Kim, 2022). Comparing an advert from a brand to that of an influencer reveals the difference in the psychological process that is fundamental to influencer marketing. The experience of a customer's engagement with a brand can create brand resonance and influences a customer to subscribe to a brand.

2.10 Chapter conclusion

There are several successful strategies and approaches to marketing, and the validation of these strategies is dependent on the success of their implementation. However, SNS platforms have increased the options for engagement, and these include influencer marketing. A study by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) determines that influencer promotions have a high degree of influence on their followers, which means that they are able to engage their followers. Influencers have prowess in engaging their followers and use strategies to engage customers towards brand campaigns using UGC. With brand association standing at the centre of customer-centric innovation (Kaufmann et al., 2016), SMIs modify UGC to increase the positive perceptions of customers about the brand by emphasizing the brand better. Phua et al. (2018) indicate that celebrity endorsements have a direct relationship with the way a product is perceived in the market. Celebrities, as SMIs, influence the imagery of a product, brand, promotion and/or event.

Influence over perceptions and behaviour can be taken advantage of by brands. This proves the significance of influencer marketing as discussed in this chapter. To back this up, Islam & Rahman (2016) reveal that brand perception is an important variable in customer-brand experiences, and influence has a huge impact on it. Brand success does not just involve creating awareness through promotion, but also involves making the consumer-brand relationship understanding and considerate (Berry, 2000). UGC plays an important part in consumer-brand relationships; it acts as the bridge between the consumer and the brand, and vice versa.

Classic marketing methods represent communication as mainly flowing from the brand to the customer. With SNS and UGC, communication flows both ways. Brand communication, therefore, affects how people perceive certain brands, and this, in turn, affects how they relate with them, the concerns they have about them, and how they influence their behaviour (Glucksman, 2017). Recognizing the importance of brand communication is a crucial element in brand success and it can be improved by taking advantage of pre-developed parasocial relationships between social media users and social media influencers. UGC in social media can impact brand perception and consumer action, and SMIs can use traffic and the parasocial relationship to extrapolate the impact. This thesis considers the elements that matter in successfully applying influencer marketing to attain a positive brand perception. This is through making the right selection for a brand's niche, considering the amount of traffic and

how well is an influencer regarded by the target market. The next chapter presents the conceptual framework and conceptual model used by this study, highlighting on selected variables and relationships between the variables.

Chapter 3: Conceptual model and hypothesis development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis and provides a comprehensive roadmap for understanding the interrelationships between the variables. The conceptual model not only represents the relationships between the variables, but also illustrates the process of how BE may be attained through UGC sharing. The conceptual framework presents the key variables of the study informed by the literature review and provides the context for the study.

As introduced in Chapter 2, the thesis combines Lavidge & Steiner's (1961) HOE model and Keller's (2001) CBBE model. It also borrows from other models that analyse the influence of SMIs on customer engagement and customer-brand engagement (CBE) which are important in creating and strengthening the connection between a consumer and a brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Hollebeek et al. (2014) discuss the interactions that influence consumers and how they relate to brands and products. Similarly, Keller & Lehmann's (2003) theoretical framework illustrates that BE involves stages and is more of a process. Hence, this chapter represents the process, steps and constructs that contribute to the development of consumer-based BE via consumer-influencer interactions.

In a diverse range of literature, brand equity (BE) is conceptualized as the outcome of communication and sharing. The conceptual framework proposed for this study complements these interpretations of BE (and its associated constructs) as an outcome of consumer-brand interactions. For example, Naeem & Ozuem (2022) propose a brand engagement target model to illustrate the impact of social media sharing (see Figure 3.1). The models highlighted in this thesis are similar to impact-focused models which measure the impact of consumer-brand interactions and borrow from slightly dated conceptualizations such as the HOE model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), and Keller's (2001) CBBE model. Looking at these models, studies and interpretations, one can identify a similarity of constructs, despite the variable terminology.
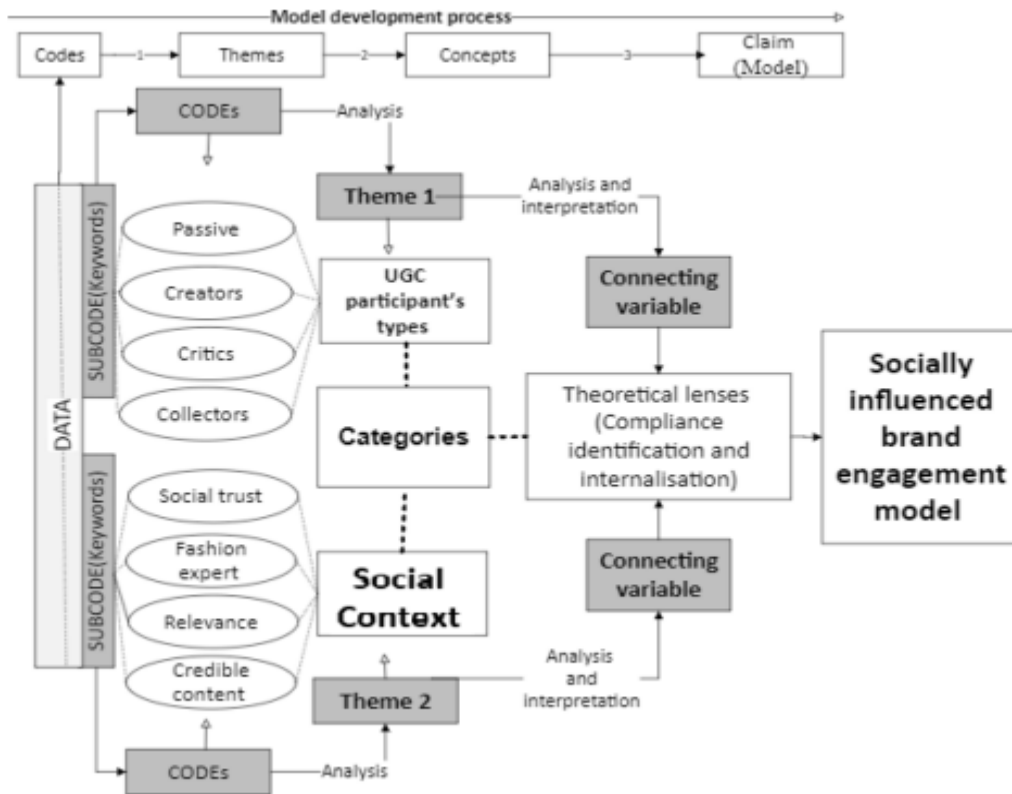
The theory in the literature review argues that brand perception and commitment is influenced by a variety of factors. These factors are represented in models as processes that are fuelled by relationships, trust and engagement. Marmat (2022) argues that conviction about a brand is linked with internalization and bonding. The representation uses process terminology which is similar to the HOE model (see Figure 3.2). Given prior research on the subject and related subject constructs, there is a clear link between SMI UGC sharing and CBBE. BE is a process, highlighting the contribution of pre-established relationships and engagement between influencers and social media users.
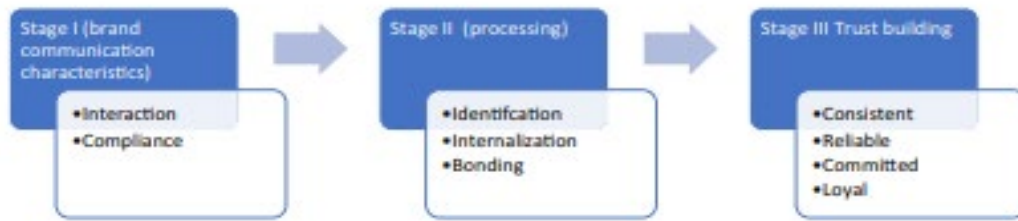
The development of brand commitment, loyalty and trust encompasses a multistep process fuelled by communication (in this case SMI UGC sharing). The research constructs and framework proposed in this study highlight the significant role that influencers play in shaping BE. In the conceptual framework, qualitative brand equity is not merely a sum of SNS brand elements, as depicted by Keller (2009). Instead, it is a dynamic process that involves these elements, as illustrated by the HOE model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The researcher introduces the framework that outlines the key factors contributing to CBBE in influencer-driven campaigns.

3.2 Construct development

The literature review presented an analysis of social media sharing and influencer marketing. The next step is to back up the extrapolation and selection of variables to be used within established and tested research methods. Research in social media sharing and brand value published by Sadek et al. (2018), Yuan et al. (2016) and Schivinski et al. (2021) indicate various strategies for the derivation and establishment of variables. These studies provide standards of feasibility and applicability to the framework, as they consider psychological matters such as attractiveness and willingness to respond to brand-promoting content. Yuan et al. (2016) establish direct and indirect relationships between variables associated with the impact of brand-related content in social media on BE. Schivinski et al. (2021) establish the impact of social media brand communication on the consumer BE dimension.

The conceptual framework has been developed by critically analysing several of the selected constructs and the relationships from a conceptual perspective. Schivinski et al. (2021); Sadek et al. (2018) and Yuan et al. (2016) further inform this study's conceptual framework. The close ties between this research and this thesis validates the conceptual relationships that have been previously established. Schivinski et al. (2021) and Sadek et al. (2018) use a standardized structural coefficient model to examine the relationships according to their framework. This study's conceptualization expounds on the analyses, claims and results of some of these authors. The researcher was able to refine the selection of variables to support this thesis and design the framework.

Table 3.1: Independent variables

Influencer Variables
Influencer attraction
Influencer authenticity
Influencer relevance/credibility
Influencer SNS generated traffic
Influencer consumer parasocial relationship

Table 3.2: Dependent variables

Brand Variables
UGC responsiveness
Brand salience
Brand resonance
Brand perception

3.2.1 Influencer factors

3.2.1.1 Influencer attraction

Influencer attraction has been explained in the literature review as the attraction developed towards an SMI on social media. The previous chapter underlined attraction as one of the reasons for engagement between an influencer and an SNS user. According to Yuan et al. (2016), influencer attraction is the perceived pull and evoked feelings by a person toward an influencer.

A consideration of how attraction is analysed and perceived, as demonstrated by Ohanian (1990), shows that attraction mostly takes physical dynamics into consideration. However, this study was keener on ensuring that it did not just cover physical dynamics, but also consider the nature of the content. The study brings into context, how attraction is perceived and proposes its measurement while being specific to an influencer, their content or associations. This directly relates to an effective consideration in measuring the variable, where the construct is considered with how much it affects the UGC reaction. This differentiates the setup where influencers are perceived as attractive from the scenarios where content is attractive. This represents a newer dynamic that has been pursued by this study, considering the study uses attraction as a construct in a model that measures the impact of UGC by influencers on CBBE. These considerations producing values within the permitted limits showcase that attraction is not just felt towards the influencer but towards the content. For instance, a comedian might not be considered attractive, but their content is. This orientation aligned with the nature of the study and the output of the model. Attractiveness is one of the factors that inspire users to visit social media. Ohanian's (1990) model explains attractiveness as a dimension that impacts celebrity endorsement, and this thesis identifies influencer attraction. In the framework, attraction represents an important factor in social media gratification.

3.2.1.2 Influencer authenticity

The subjective nature that makes someone or something stand out as original is authenticity (Beverland, 2014; Belhassen et al. 2008; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023), which plays an important part in facilitating content attraction. This study identifies authenticity as a reason why social media users follow influencers. Authenticity is a psychological recognition of originality, either

in a personality or in shared content (Beverland, 2014). Specifically, authenticity is the subjective nature of existence that makes something original and outstanding (Belhassen et al., 2008). Originality is described as a key input in interaction, as it yields honesty and influences correspondence (Osorio et al., 2023). According to Ilicic & Webster (2016), authenticity is realized in interactions and is appreciated with correspondence from interactions. According to Beverland (2014), originality is a key element that influences consumption in a trust-based consumption situation.

Othman et al. (2022) discuss social and cultural dynamics, such as dominant religious practices that may make consumers prefer originality. Social media users consider authenticity when interacting with content, however, given that authenticity is a strong construct in content interaction, it is a constituting construct. Content attractiveness and authenticity are important factors in this framework, with authenticity being a constituting variable to attractiveness. This is because, for a process that considers the interaction between an influencer and a social media user, authenticity contributes more to attraction than to other variables in the conceptual framework. Also, in Pöyry et al.'s (2019) examination of the content produced on social media that differentiates their influence, authenticity and attractiveness are variables that go hand in hand.

3.2.1.3 Influencer relevance/credibility

Influencer credibility distinguishes the quality of campaigns and separates influence from popularity. According to Pöyry et al. (2019), influencer credibility has an impact in corporate advertising. Considering the nature of value for customers, as reflected by Bakker (2018), relevance directly affects the quality of campaigns. How a brand or product matches the features that a customer needs is an important dynamic in the marketing/advertising situation. This study has acknowledged the relevance factor with reference to Yuan et al.'s (2016) arguments.

Influencer credibility contributes to vertical marketing as it affects the reaction or responsiveness of consumers, both towards the brand and the content. Koay et al. (2023) illustrates that credibility directly affects the outcomes of promotions. According to Koay et al.'s (2023) model on psychologically perceived credibility, credibility has an advantage in

interactions. These arguments are also shared by Trivedi & Sama (2020) who state that Credibility and trustworthiness are crucial in contributing towards how information is received and processed by social media users. Credibility within media personalities allows consumers to take a more positive orientation when receiving, processing or consuming content (Marhaeni et al., 2022). Influencer credibility is a variable that limits the impact of an influencer endorsement. Hence, the credibility of influencers matters when it comes to their selection brand advertising, as some influencers are only successful in specific market niches.

3.2.1.4 Influencer SNS generated traffic

An impressive aspect or feature of social media influencers, specifically macro and mega influencers, is their large number of followers. Traffic scales, the main drivers of social media engagement, lead to a larger impact from content sharing or communication (Chahal et al., 2020). While other factors in digital marketing, and even classic mass marketing, may influence customer engagement, traffic is one of the most considered outputs in measuring engagement.

Brands have always been compelled to select and identify with advertising spaces that have high traffic. Spaces like television screen time, billboards and concerts have been attractive areas for advertising, however influencers' social media profiles are now often preferred because of their high traffic. Brands rate how well promotions have performed by watching how many people respond to their promotions. Influencers are able to amplify the drivers of social media engagement (Hughes et al., 2019). In the context of influencer-fuelled campaigns, traffic is a crucial factor that requires necessary consideration.

Traffic also affects the scaled impact of content in the engagement context (Li et al., 2011). The prominence of brands for consumers is in most cases measured by analytics, even in this study. In as much as advertising has been evolving, with less mass marketing used, the amount of customer engagement from campaigns is still an important performance criterion (Qian & Mao, 2023). As discussed in Chapter 2, social media traffic contributes to a larger audience reach. Similarly, influencer-generated traffic does not only affect the prominence and recognisability of content but also contributes to responsiveness (Ciasullo et al., 2021). In regard to UGC sharing by influencers, traffic is likely to positively contribute to engagement,

hence traffic is used to represent the potential exposure of brand content to consumers or potential consumers.

3.2.1.5 Influencer consumer parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships between influencers and consumers are another element that determines the impact of their interactions on social media. Users carry a regard towards influencers on social media, creating a relationship with the influencer. Parasocial relationships influence SNS users' aspirations as they interact with influencers on social media (Hung, 2014). Social media influencers amplify SNS gratifications (celebrity-induced entertainment experiences) as they have a parasocial relation with their followers.

Aw & Labrecque (2020) highlight that people establish a bond with particular characters, compelling them to want to interact with them on their channels, in this case, social media. Reinikainen et al. (2020) allow their respondents to scale how autonomously connected they feel to the influencers they follow. This builds on theories and illustrations from Phua et al. (2018), who mention that parasocial relationships occur due to the interactions between a media character and a content consumer.

Parasocial relationships are, therefore, considered in this study in relation to how much consumers feel they are part of an influencers' group or community, and how much they regard their interactions. This study stresses that the parasocial relationship between an influencer and a media user is similar to the relationship between two people who share a preference, similarity or trait. This study uses the basis of mutual connectivity felt by the consumer to measure parasocial relationships. This study's model includes parasocial relationships because they are significant in supporting the nature of the model and the role parasocial relationships play in consumer-brand relationships.

3.2.2 Brand factors

The factors of brand equity are adopted from Keller's (2001) CBBE model, however, through the literature review, different approaches have been stated on how brand equity can be measured. Across different studies highlighted in this thesis such as Siddiqua (2018), there are some diverse measures and terminologies that measure the determinants of brand equity. Due to their validity to this study and the seminal role they have played in numerous brand equity marketing studies, Keller's constructs are selected for this thesis, and measurements have been developed upon them.

Besides user-generated content responsiveness, the constructs selected from this study are similar to the definitions of behavioural and attitudinal outcomes from customer engagement. Various aspects of CBBE measurement make better sense as they also consider the social media uptake for brands and the reasons why companies have moved their investment towards these communication channels. Most of the models consistently propose that CBBE is an outcome of direct and indirect contributions such as communication, spreading positive WOM, conversing on social media, and providing content (see Razmus, 2021). Hence, although the study has considered different perspectives, Keller's (2001) terminology regarding CBBE is used. The next sub-sections explore the brand-related dependent variables mentioned in the aforementioned Table 3.2.

3.2.2.1 UGC responsiveness

User-generated content (UGC) responsiveness has been considered as a brand factor as this research measures the responsiveness of social media users to UGC shared by influencers to promote a brand. Similarly, responsiveness is important in creating a perception from the UGC shared by endorsed influencers. The response contributes to the regard that customers hold for brands, this makes the construct considered a brand factor. The idea of the emotional response elicited from social media users is inspired by Keller's (2001) conceptualisation of BE. Oliver (2014) stresses that the intensity of emotions that evolve in customers responding to campaigns is an important point of measurement. Responsiveness is also a theoretical concern of Ciasullo et al.'s (2021) agenda, who talk about the differential effect of brand knowledge evoked from shared content. Similarly, Aljarah et al. (2024) showcases that UGC has a strong relationship with brand equity by stating that UGC is a stronger predictor of online brand advocacy

Therefore, the research considers responsiveness as an important construct in creating perceptions about the UGC endorsements shared by influencers. This concurs with Oliver's (2014) proposition that the measurement of judgment and feelings evoked from content or campaigns is an important construct.

UGC in this study mirrors considerations by Maia (2024), taking responsiveness from UGC as measurable impact. Attitudes towards influencer content also have implications on users, because they influence expectations and these build upon the final perception. This research's model considers UGC responsiveness as a type of reaction by users when interacting with influencer content. As discussed in Chapter 2, UGC responsiveness is strongly affected by established parasocial relationships. This illustrates that responsiveness is a reaction that is heavily based on the emotional reaction towards content. Sokolova & Kefi (2020) point out how content is received and how the reactions it evokes depends on the sources. UGC responsiveness is represented as a dependent variable means this research investigates how influencer factors affect how social media users react to content created by social media influencers. UGC responsiveness is the outcome of social media interactions between a consumer and a social media user (Devaru et al., 2024). This is measurable in regards to how a social media user responds to brand content shared by social media influencers. In this case, as defined in this study's measurement in Chapter 4, it is how participants respond to brand-related user-generated content. Similarly, perceived established relationships are core contributors to positive engagement. Chang & Chieng (2006) illustrate that brands experience different reactions to the content they share or is shared about them. Reaction towards content shared by brands affect what remains in the minds of consumers.

3.2.2.2 Brand salience

As discussed in the literature review, brand salience represents the extent of a brand's communication, and extent to which messages are noticed by consumers and potential consumers. Brand salience can occur actively, in integrated marketing situations, and passively, through word of mouth. The context of this study and the model highlight brand salience as a variable that determines BE, which is related to the number of reactions during consumer-brand communication.

Keller (2009) illustrates that brand salience is a valuable narrative in the activity of communication between a brand and its customers. Brand salience also contributes to other drivers of BE, which are resonance and perception. Within the proposed framework, salience is one of the elements that comprise BE. This is supported by Buil et al. (2013), who stress that brand noticeability is an outcome of IMC promotions as well, including influencer campaigns. Additionally, Alam & Khan (2019) discuss the preferences of consumers when interacting online, stating that consumers prefer brands that communicate effectively and that are reachable through the allowed channels. Hence, for the research model, brand salience reflects a brand's engagement and accompanying promotions, including influencer-fuelled SNS campaigns.

3.2.2.3 Brand resonance

Brand resonance embodies the reactions and experiences of consumers in consumer-brand interactions. Resonance orients to emotions evoked from the target market in consumer-brand interactions. Keller (2009) breaks brand resonance into attitudinal and emotional elements that influence the brand experiences of customers. Brand resonance is one of the key brand variables in the framework. Through UGC sharing, potential consumers can relate to a brand. The framework represents how brand resonance is impacted through social media UGC sharing.

Brand resonance explains the importance of how communication is received and its positive impact on a brand's promotional campaigns. When considering brand equity in consumer-brand interactions, brand resonance occurs through communications between a brand and its consumers. Ajiboye et al. (2019) also explain that communication plays a role in developing attitudes and feelings. Hence, the consideration of brand resonance as a construct and a research component reveals that communication conviction is an important highlight in a marketing campaign. Brand resonance is therefore included in the framework and the results are reflected through UGC sharing, which reveals that potential consumers are able to relate to a brand.

3.2.2.4 Brand perception

Brand perception represents the value equity that is created by the mind that receives brand messages, and it affects decision-making (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2001). Brand perception is linked with brand imagery, as they both refer to the created image of a brand by a customer/the public. Corporate brands have different brand values which are held within the minds of consumers, and they affect their decision-making (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Brand perception plays a foundational role in customer decision-making (Kim & Phua, 2020). This is explained by several authors as the value of a brand within the consumers' mindset (Djatmiko & Pradana 2016; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). The feelings of Saudi Arabian consumers towards a specific brand are important as they influence attitudes and feelings towards brands. Perception, therefore, is a key consideration in a sociocultural setting which bases its consumption in trust (Almakbuli et al., 2021).

As illustrated by Hung (2008), brand perception is cumulative, meaning that its measurement needs to consider diversity and orientations. In this study's model, brand perception is reflected by how much it is influenced by the other variables, and the overall significance of the model (further discussed in this chapter's succeeding subsections). Brand perception creates a foundation for customer decision-making (Kim & Phua, 2020), hence a strong corporate brand image or a positive perception of a brand by a customer offers companies a competitive advantage over rival competitors. Hence, the perceptions that the consumer has towards the particular organization also contributes to CBBE. Some of research questions in this thesis focus on perception as a key unit of measurement. Perception provides a competitive advantage as it represents how the brand is portrayed.

3.3 Hypotheses development

In this section, the study's hypotheses are introduced by the researcher, building upon the earlier discussion of framework variables. Detailed explanations follow, revealing the connections and theories behind these ideas and offering a complete understanding of the hypothesis development process.

3.3.1 Hypotheses about attraction, authenticity and credibility

This study's objectives involve analysing the role of attraction between an influencer and his/her followers. Creating a demand for attention and attraction is crucial in the development of influence and the parasocial relationship between a user and a media character (in this case an influencer). Zhang et al. (2017) determine that not all individuals contribute equally to the creation and propagation of messages and content on social media. Some users are more passive, while others are influential. Phua et al. (2017) also link the gratification received from using social media to human-associated factors – that is, the people on social media.

The attributes of people on social media play an important role in how they are perceived. A study by Glucksman (2017) determines three primary factors that influence perceptions related to social media influencers' content, which are: confidence, authenticity and interactivity. This thesis intends to test the extent to which authenticity and attractiveness as influencer attributes affect the reaction of their followers towards them or their content.

Authenticity is a variable that is fundamental to interactions, and it is attributed to influence relevance and credibility, especially concerning who receives messages. Theoretically, the relationship between authenticity, attractiveness and follower reaction is supported by Pöyry et al. (2019), Napoli et al. (2014) and Shoenberger & Kim (2023), who illustrate that the authenticity and attractiveness of the influencer who shares or produces content are some of the elements that differentiate the extent of the influence and the reaction from consumers. Authenticity influences how content is received, as it differentiates how it is perceived (Napoli et al., 2014). Finally, Bruhn et al. (2012) emphasize that authenticity creates long-term perceptions, and these affect how future content is perceived.

Therefore, the perception of people is gauged by how much they subscribe to an individual or to a specific type of content (Matsumoto, 2009). Attractiveness is the appealing impact that a person, object or piece of content has on the influencer's followers (Audrezet et al., 2020; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). Credibility is a reaction that is pre-established, specific to a source, in accordance with a developed history between the interacting parties or properties (Carlson, 1995). For instance, a content creator who only posts about political news, issues or predictions is likely to attract political enthusiasts, and their political updates will be believed, whether or not they are false. Influencer relevance and reliability are variables begotten by influencer attraction and influencer authenticity. Hence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (a): *Influencer authenticity has a positive effect on influence attraction.*

Hypothesis 1 (b): *Influencer authenticity has a positive effect on influencer relevance or credibility.*

Hypothesis 1 (c): *Influencer attraction has a positive effect on influencer relevance or credibility.*

As discussed previously, attractiveness is an important response to creation and achievement. From the psychological perspective, Moscovici & Faucheux (1972) argue that the attraction of the brain to attractive objects, people or events influences subsequent attention. Clearly, many people only want to identify with what is good or attractive to them. Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) explain that most people are attracted to what they associate with greatness or domination. It is important to appreciate that over time, interests have shifted and there are more greatly differentiated hobbies, topics, niches and things for people to identify with. However, attraction towards a specific person, subject, topic or niche begets interest and traffic. As Phua et al. (2017) illustrate, the gratification derived from identifying with a certain type of content increases the number of users who engage with such content, increasing social traffic. Agreeing with hypothesis 2, Foroughi et al. (2024) state that attractive content positively influences viewers, as they aspire and attempt to relate with the content. Attractiveness similarly influences content penetration on social media, as attractive content is better shared on social media and is also favoured by social media algorithms (Wang et al., 2024). Hence, attractive influencer content triggers greater gratification by using SNS to engage customers.

Influencer and content attraction is crucial in contributing to the aesthetics of a brand. As influencers promote a brand, UGC from the influencer becomes brand content as well (Aw & Labrecque, 2020). Within SMIs, brand aesthetics encompass the visual and audio-visual elements employed by a brand and its influencers in content creation to convey the brand's identity and values to the audience (Glenister, 2021; Oandasan, 2022). As strategic partners in brand promotion, SMIs curate content that reflects their personal style and aligns with the aesthetic preferences of both their audience and the partnering brand (De Veirman et al., 2017). Consequently, the aesthetics of influencer-generated content serve as a key factor in influencing consumer attitudes and intentions toward the brand, highlighting the importance of

maintaining consistency and authenticity in brand representation (De Veirman et al., 2017). Moreover, within the multimedia landscape of social media, audio-visual elements in UGC such as voiceovers, and video editing styles further contribute to the brand's aesthetic appeal in influencer marketing campaigns (Khamis et al., 2017). Integration of these elements enhances the quality of content interaction and hence improves audience engagement, hence increasing content reach. Hence, influencer content attractiveness is relevant in amplifying the brand's messaging, making traffic a key objective in influencer collaborations (Khamis et al., 2017). By strategically aligning visual and audio-visual elements with the brand's aesthetic preferences, influencers contribute to effectively conveying the brand's identity and values to the audience, thereby enhancing traffic and audience reach.

Additionally, given that influencers have an ability to attract large audiences of people on SNS platforms, they also engage potential customers of certain brands, and this generates traffic. In this context, SNS generated traffic involves the activity of social media engagement regarding a particular brand's product, service, post promotion or offer. Similarly, efforts to drive new engagement positively affect consumer behaviour, as illustrated by Sama (2019). Therefore, the ability to attract large audiences is important for audience engagement and brand association on social media. Attraction occurs as a variable that is associated with traffic. The ability of influencers to attract audiences is what makes them preferred by brands for campaigns (Godey et al., 2016). Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Influencer attraction has a positive effect on influencer generated traffic.*

The relationship between influencer-based factors and the reactions of audiences has been backed up by authors such as Godey et al. (2016) and Aw & Labrecque (2020). They illustrate that parasocial relationships or the need to use SNS media platforms is based on attraction and created regard. As also stated by Godey et al. (2016), the right influencer for the right niche improves the outcome of a specific influencer campaign. Creating a margin of impact requires the customization of influencer campaigns (Godey et al., 2016). Phua et al. (2017) demonstrate that gratification derived from using SNS platforms is connected to how users find social media interactions important. Relevance and credibility differentiate the impact that influencers can have, especially niche influencers. Wei & Wu (2013) illustrate that how much an audience relates to an influencer/media character is reliant to how he/she finds the influencer's content

credible or relatable. A good instance is how sportsmen have sports enthusiasts as their followers, considering the regard for both the audience and the sportsman of the sport. This framework acknowledges the contribution of regard and credibility to established relationships on social media.

Developed parasocial relationships are established based on regard, voluntary participation on social media is established on a predetermined perception of the expected value from the social media interaction (Rasmussen, 2018). Relevance and credibility are variables that lead to increased security and regard, as users participate on social media. The creation of aspirational motives that make users engage in celebrity induced entertainment experiences correlates with how much pre-calculated relevance a specific celebrity has for a consumer. Hung (2014) confirms this by illustrating that a relationship between a media character and his or her follower is determined by how relevant the content is to the lifestyle of the follower. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: *Influencer relevance/credibility has a positive effect on the strength of the parasocial relationship between an influencer and an SNS user.*

3.3.2 Hypotheses about influencer-generated traffic

One of the reasons why social media is profitable for both brands and internet companies is because of its ability to attract traffic. SM traffic relates to different interests, hobbies, lifestyles, and social classes. Traffic is the result of social media communities, new technologies, the internet, consumers, and SMIs to impact BE in unprecedented ways (Lim et al., 2017). Maia et al. (2024) illustrate the impact of sharing user-generated content, arguing that it triggers more reactions from people reacting to the content. Similarly, congruence is established and an inclination of numbers is observed when user generated content shared is perceived better (Ozuem et al., 2023). Traffic is generated from influencer profiles and responds to influencer content. Hence, UGC sharing tends to increase traffic, as more people get to see a brand through an influencer's profile or image.

The projection of an influencer's image or media space improves the outreach of campaigns (Li et al., 2011). Collaborations are particularly handy when brands are evolving or seeking to

connect with a new demographic. Influencers have the prowess to engage their followers and use such strategies to engage customers towards brand campaigns. With the aim of increasing brand noticeability and target customer responsiveness, influencers engage their audiences on different social media platforms with information regarding a product, service offer or announcement by a specific brand. Influencer followers associate with the brand through the influencer, who generates content and acts as a medium between the customer and the brand.

Glucksman (2017) illustrates how social media technology has improved the noticeability of brands, this is considering the masses that use social media to communicate, interact and connect. Social media influencers have a huge ability to attract and influence followers through their behaviour, opinions and trends (Freberg et al., 2011). Additionally, Saima & Khan (2020) and Rosenthal & Brito (2017) illustrate that brands have taken up social influence as an opportunity to showcase their product or service, event or promotion. Social media provides the attributes of engagement by keeping users connected in a manner that increases how much they take notice of content. Consumer responsiveness and brand salience can be influenced by traffic brought about by an influencer endorsement. Hence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4 (a): *Influencer generated traffic on SNS has a positive effect on responsiveness to user-generated content.*

Hypothesis 4 (b): *Influencer generated traffic on SNS has a positive effect on brand salience.*

3.3.3 Hypotheses about parasocial relationships

Another variable that impacts promotions is the parasocial relationship, which impacts how users are personally affected by content. How much they relate to an influencer affects how users react to an influencer's content, not just quantitatively, but qualitatively. How strong people perceive an SMI to be affects how they relate to them, the concern they have about them and how they influence user behaviour (Glucksman, 2017). The parasocial relationship is responsible for an attitudinal reaction towards influencer content (Dibble et al., 2016).

Interactions, through celebrity endorsements, take advantage of pre-established relationships (Conde & Casais, 2023), and this adds a qualitative aspect to influencer endorsement – not

merely how many people will be exposed to a campaign, but how they will react to it. Dibble et al. (2016), further their case by illustrating how preferences for brands can be adjusted by using people who are highly regarded to spread campaigns.

The literature review detailed not just the development, but also the impact of parasocial relationships, and noted that brands optimize their marketing campaigns by taking advantage of parasocial relationships between audiences and media characters. Stronger parasocial relationships impact how content is perceived and its potential influence on decisions (Koay et al., 2023). While influencers have the objective of sharing content, however, the reaction towards the content depends on how the recipient regards the influencer. When users interact on social media, their reaction to brand content is better when highly visible influencers propose the brand content to them. Moscovici & Faucheux (1972) and Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) back the interaction psychology claim by concurring that there is more persuasion when the people spreading the information are high regarded. This consideration is reflected in how a brand is regarded, and the developed or improved relationship between a user and the brand. Hence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5 (a): *The strength of the parasocial relationship between an influencer and an SNS user has a positive effect on a consumer's attitudinal responsiveness towards shared user-generated content.*

Hypothesis 5 (b): *The strength of the parasocial relationship between an influencer and an SNS user has a positive effect on brand resonance.*

3.3.4 Hypotheses about UGC

Previous chapters have illustrated how influencer factors impact on brand value through UGC sharing. The proposed relationship between responsiveness to UGC and CBBE is also analysed by Sadek et al. (2018) and Christodoulides et al. (2012) to illustrate how SMIs are key contributors to marketing. Their influence is important in impacting the perceptions of consumers by establishing regard or trust in a brand. The responsiveness of consumers to influencer content enables influencers to become co-creators of a brand considering the wide channel of the audience that influences have and the deep connection they share with their

followers. The huge influence of attitudinal perceptions takes prominence when SMIs share curated content that promotes a brand (Nafees et al., 2021). CBBE is represented by brand salience, brand resonance and brand perception in this thesis. Attitudinal responsiveness positively impacts a brand by increasing its noticeability, user perception and it even positively influences how consumers relate to the brand.

SMIs harness their influence by disseminating their intended messages through various forms of content on social media platforms (Kim & Kim, 2022). Scholarly studies have examined the traits and perceptions associated with the trustworthiness of SMIs. The strength of the relationship between an influencer and his/her followers can proportionately influence brand perception. Perceptions are important to the trustworthiness and willingness to follow the opinions of SMIs (Schouten et al., 2020). The relationship social media influencers have with their followers establish a cognitive influence, considering the amount of impact social media influencers have (Glucksman, 2017).

Sharing initiates a perception of trust, depending on how information is received, exchanged, and who it comes from (Nambisan & Baron, 2007). A strong relationship between a social media influencer and a customer is an important factor to count on in brand campaigns. The contribution of influencers towards trust and loyalty is, therefore, significant, considering the effect they have on their followers. In a setting of social media, marketing activities have a significant impact on enhancing customer-based brand equity (Bruhn et al., 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012). In Saudi Arabia, social media is giving customers a chance to actively participate as stakeholders.

Sharing establishes a cognitive social impact that is fundamental to relationships, regard, trust and loyalty. Influence builds connections, regard and trust (Matsumoto, 2009; Quinn, 2018; Laroche et al., 2013). The relationships between social media influencers and their influence affect consumers' perception towards a specific brand, for example, using a mechanical tool because it has been endorsed by a renowned engineer. Brand campaigns by social media influencers should be designed to increase and enhance CBBE by ensuring that the consumer feels valued and that their relationship with the brand strengthens over time (Foroughi et al., 2024). Therefore, following hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 6 (a): *Consumers' attitudinal responsiveness towards shared user-generated content has a positive effect on brand resonance.*

Hypothesis 6 (b): *Consumers' attitudinal responsiveness towards shared user-generated content has a positive effect on brand salience.*

Hypothesis 6 (c): *Consumers' attitudinal responsiveness towards shared user-generated content has a positive effect on brand perception.*

3.3.5 Hypotheses about brand salience, resonance and perception

Brand equity, as per Keller's (2001) model, is an integral component of customer engagement, which mostly occurs on online platforms in contemporary marketing. Building brand equity is one of the most important activities that a brand can foster, though it is also one of the most difficult ones (Al-Msallam & Alhaddad, 2016; Chow et al., 2017; Weiger et al., 2017; Goyal & Verma, 2024). The development of the brand equity concept resulted in prolific changes to brands. The conceptual model illustrates how each action in social media marketing through influencer's user-generated content leads to the brand goal. How a brand is noticeable and how a brand's environment reacts to a brand are valuable narratives in brand communications. Keller (2001; 2009) breaks down CBBE into a combination of attitudinal and emotional elements that influence the brand experiences of customers; these are selected as brand salience and brand resonance in the framework.

Brand perception is identified as the end goal in CBBE model. This construct is related to how a brand is noticed and how much a brand relates to its customers. Keller (2001; 2009), identifies a consumer's attitudinal reaction as a dimension that consists of rational and emotional reactions by the consumer in respect to a brand. Recalling Keller's (2001) CBBE pyramid, brand equity is a combination of imagery, feelings, judgment and performance, sandwiched between brand salience and brand resonance.

In this thesis' conceptual model, brand salience comes before brand resonance, which is supported by Keller's (2001) model. However, in this thesis, CBBE is also a process. The connection of brand factors considers the reaction of a customer in a campaign that involves an endorsement between a brand and an influencer. Hence, brand factors are influenced by the interactions between an influencer and a consumer.

In this case, qualitative brand equity is the dominant construct in the model (instead of sales), providing a link between its two dimensions–brand salience and resonance. Perceptions are highly constitutive of the trustworthiness and willingness to follow the opinions and influence of SMIs (Schouten et al., 2020; Prasetio & Azmi, 2024). Hence, perceptions are a representation of qualitative-oriented campaigns by brands. The final hypotheses H7, H8 and H9 summarize the attainment of a brand objective, CBBE, as a process that involves a SMI campaign:

Hypothesis 7: *Brand salience has a positive effect on brand resonance.*

Hypothesis 8: *Brand salience has a positive effect on brand perception.*

Hypothesis 9: *Brand resonance has a positive effect on customer brand perception.*

3.4 Conceptual model
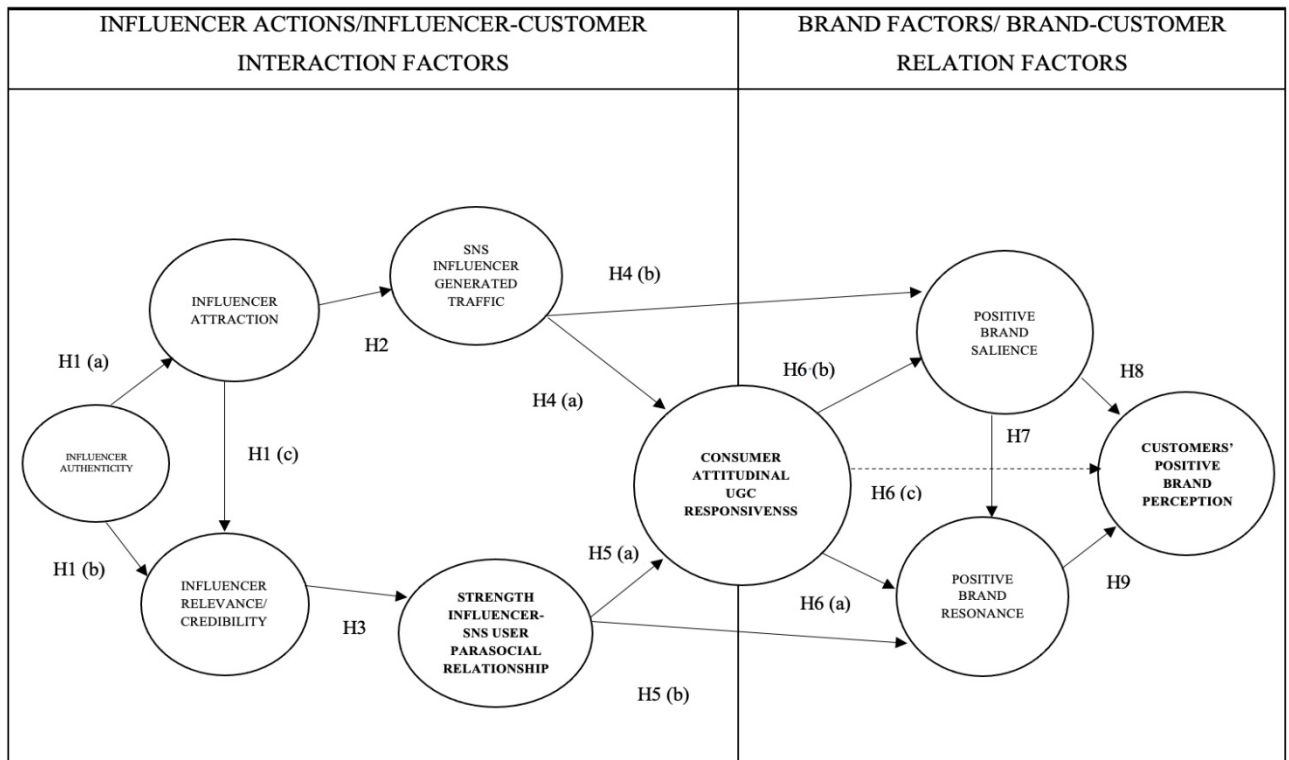
Figure 3.3: Conceptual model

The framework incorporates two influential models that strategically orient and organize the variables into a coherent order. The first tabulation is obtained from Godey et al.'s (2016) model (Figure 2.5), which organise the variables into a tabular structure. Looking at Godey et al.'s (2016) classification, some variables in this thesis correlate with the three sections (influencer factors, brand factors and customer response). However, in this thesis, customer response cuts through some influencer factors and brand factors as well. Hence, in this thesis' framework, the division is modified to cater for the connectivity between the variables.

The arrangement of the variables follows a systematic order of events from sharing content to qualitative brand equity and is propelled by the gratification derived from SNS use which include passing time, showing affection, sharing problems and demonstrating sociability (Phua et al., 2017). This systematic order is represented by the HOE model. According to this framework, the model is valid because it illustrates the progression of learning and decision-making consumers experience as a result of advertising in a logical order: awareness, knowledge, preference, liking, conviction, action (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Craig et al. (2010) use the HOE model to test the influence of mass communication on decision-making and intuition. Smith et al. (2008) acknowledge the illustrative contribution of the HOE model in making a brand better known to the consumer. CBBE is the summed perception that is carried by a consumer regarding a certain brand (Keller, 2001; 2009). As mentioned earlier, this is a valuable variable that cannot be quantified, but can be expressed, through qualitative analysis. The HOE model represents the psychology that surrounds a customer as he/she interacts with a brand. In this thesis, the model makes a significant contribution to analysing the process steps towards a positive brand perception by a customer.

The arrangement of the variables has been adopted from Yuan et al.'s (2016) framework. Although the variables are not very similar, there is a resemblance in terms of arrangement and the relationships between the variables. The structuring of the framework considers the targets of consumer-brand interaction from Keller's (2001) model and the process involving customer-brand interaction from the HOE model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). These models are used by Schivinski et al. (2021) when measuring the influence of consumers' online brand-related activities on BE with social media-related communications.

Schivinski et al. (2021) measure similar variables as those in this thesis using a structural equation model. The authors' conceptual framework portrays both a macro and a micro

relationship respective from the data analysis. Direct coefficients are used to validate the previously designed conceptual framework, as shown from the selected relationships in the present framework. Yuan et al. (2016) also measure variables such as attractiveness and established relationships, which are variables that resemble attractiveness and parasocial relationships in this thesis. Hence, this study's use of the two models is based on a critical response to the previous literature.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter addressed how to represent the attainment of BE through SMI campaigns. Factors identified in the literature review were discussed as interrelated factors, which represent the psychological elements within influencer-fuelled SNS interactions. With brand equity as the target, the chapter presented the variables and constructs of the study, and their proposed relationships. The variables are represented by a model framework, which adapts Yuan et al.'s (2016) model to represent brand perception and commitment as contributed to by influencers. The chapter established the link between influencer-customer interaction factors and the drivers of brand equity. This study's conceptual framework agreed with the theoretical discussions, arguments and propositions by the preeminent authors on BE as an outcome of influencer-fuelled consumer-brand interactions. Additionally, it acknowledged Marmat's (2022) work, showcasing the relationship between communication and developed brand relationships.

This chapter provided linkages and theoretically validated the proposed relationships, which now indicates a need for measurement. The chapter also discussed the constructs and their theoretical definitions as discussed by noted authors. The constructs represent psychological variables within the process of influencer-consumer engagement for IMC brand promotions. The chapter also highlighted the relationships between the variables, visually presenting the model and improving the illustration of the interrelationships between variables. With the conceptual framework discussed and conceptualized, the next chapter defines the data methods. The methodology chapter explains on the research instrument used, research design and variable measurement.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the conceptual framework and associated hypotheses were presented. The methodology chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, methods, data collection and measurement of the variables presented in the conceptual framework. This research, which is focussed on understanding the transformative impact of influencer promotion on brand perception, builds on insights from Pöyry et al. (2019), which emphasize influencer endorsements in interpersonal commercial relationships. Focused on 28–45-year-olds in Saudi Arabia, the study has developed its methodology in the preceding chapters. A cohesive framework has been established, encompassing theoretical summaries and arguments.

This thesis follows social science principles for conclusive data interpretation (McGrath & Johnson, 2003), therefore Chapter 4 details the sample size, piloting, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The research paradigm and design justify the chosen quantitative survey approach, revealing strategic insights into instrument validation and influencer selection. The following subsections explore how measuring the impact of influencer activity on CBBE take place. The chapter also presents an integrated approach to data collection, questionnaire development and measurement, while subsequent discussions cover testing, piloting, sampling, data analysis, and ethics approval. This comprehensive approach enhances the study's depth, offering a nuanced understanding of the research model and findings.

4.2 Research paradigm

Traditionally, researchers have been encouraged to adopt a philosophy that guides the research process and choices. The research philosophy is a theoretical representation of the science adopted when collecting data (Osanloo & Grant, 2016), influences the strategy employed, and links it to a previously designed theoretical framework. The philosophy also illustrates how the research validated the assumptions made in the conceptual framework. The selected philosophy should support the quantitative methods to be adopted. A crucial objective in this study is to obtain perceptions that can be subjected to statistical analyses and assessed against the

conceptual model. This research relies on a positivist philosophy, given that it seeks to obtain the perceptions of people regarding certain activities. This reflects the theoretical perspective of modernism, which accepts science as the basis of knowledge and develops strategies reliant on control, hierarchy and order (Hamilton & Ives, 1982).

This research uses previously devised theories and arguments to establish an objective reality that guides the data collection methods, considerations and policies. The research proposes that human beings are likely to be influenced by people who they regard highly. Crotty (1998) and Yates (2003) describe research that proposes that something exists naturally and directly influences human behaviour is best classified within the objectivism/ realism ontology. Yates (2003) argues that objectivism/realism is a suitable ontology to support pre-established concepts and assumptions while using quantitative data collection methods. This is a research philosophy that backs up research involving numerically based data collection. The numbers are used as predictors and indicators of reality, and the objectivism/realism approach uses previously derived indicators to predict future outcomes (Crotty, 1998).

Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) explain that one approach to research is one where assumptions about reality are tested by evidence. This is the positivist approach. Quantitative data collection methods are practical in social sciences, as they provide a link between how people respond to certain situations or their behaviour within certain environments (Brannen, 2017). Using the conceptual framework, information has been obtained to support established concepts which need to by supported by data.

Creating a link between established concepts and frameworks with actual environmental data requires approaches that are practical and highly accurate. The ability to answer each research question accurately and avoid distorted findings is the prime objective for the data collection process. In the social sciences, the provision of response options must be accompanied by a recognizable scale that offers the potential to analyse people's reactions (Giddings, 2006). For this research, the objectivism/realism ontology mean that assumptions should be validated by data obtained from environmental sources. This approach was developed by Sapsford (2006), who illustrates that society can be analysed empirically by questioning theories that have been based on previous data, information or propositions.

The conceptual framework and the literature review make claims of a positive relationship between influencer promotional activities and positive customer responses towards the

endorsed brand. Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) argue that the positivist approach attempts to identify the mechanism in a selected environment that can predict phenomena. Data obtained from the research was used not just to validate the structured conceptual framework and the claims from the literature analysis, but to predict future outcomes associated with customer-brand interactions.

The research uses pre-established scientific theories to validate contemporary data collected in a natural setting. The research employed a structured survey, which is an established positivist method that allows a researcher to easily collect large amounts of data and compare them with a clear theoretical focus (Giddings, 2006). The foundations of social sciences are based on an experimental approach that supports theoretical constructions, which are best achieved through a modernist approach to data collection. Table 4.1 summarizes the selected research philosophy for this thesis.

Table 4.1: Selected philosophy for this survey (adopted from Crotty, 1998, p. 5)

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology
Objectivism / Realism	Positivism	Modernist	Field study via survey design

The advantage of a quantitative study is that the limited options allow statistical programming of the obtained data (Riffe et al., 2019). The structure of the research considers theoretical constructs and structures that have already been used. The use of a quantitative study is therefore ideal for obtaining statistical data from experiences and perceptions.

4.3 Research method

The research employed a quantitative research approach to gather and analyse data. Quantitative research can be an imperative step in moving past descriptions to actually test theories and descriptions by surveying attitudes (Riffe et al., 2019), and as such is appropriate for this thesis which aims to study the relationships between variables to verify a hypothesis or theory (Yan, 2020). Using this method, the research can convert data obtained from people's responses regarding feelings, actions, attitudes and behaviour into a more statistically interpretable format (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Quantitative data collection methods have more control and can statistically represent feelings, attitudes and perceptions (Brannen, 2017). Philosophy and social sciences need to consider the element of reality even while proving theoretical concepts (Hussein, 2009). Employing quantitative research is ideal for capturing the required information in an interpretable format (Newman & Benz, 1998).

A survey is the most commonly used method for primary data collection (Madsen et al., 2014). Describing a natural population and relating the description to previously constructed theories is easily handled through a survey, which provides statistical quantification (Sapsford, 2006). The utilization of the survey as a research instrument for this study was explained in the preceding sections, hence, the following sections specify the data collection procedures. The data collection method corresponds with Leggett (2022), who uses quantitative data collection to examine the role of influence throughout the customer journey.

The type of survey employed was a cross-section survey, where the data is collected once, in a naturally occurring setting. Staging the data collection in a natural setting compels the participants to recall and answer set questions according to their understanding and ability. The measurements were fit into the naturally occurring setting selected for the study's target population. Researchers such as Schivinski et al. (2021) utilize descriptive surveys to investigate naturally occurring settings related to customer reaction responses regarding brand-consumer interactions. Testing variable relationships has better outcomes when a specific naturally occurring setting is chosen, and this research investigated responses with the setting in question (Zhou & Sloan, 2015).

The used of a descriptive survey as a research instrument has been validated in studies similar to this, for instance, by Sadek et al. (2018), who use a survey to study the impact of brand communication on customer-based equity. Given that the attitudes and beliefs of the

respondents are the main concern, a survey has the best ability to analyse the relationships between the selected variables. Certain elements of data are obtained by identifying a naturally occurring setting with data sources by the researcher. The data included statistics such as influencer audience counts and brand engagement on social media. The study adopted quantitative measurements for each variable, as exemplified by various authors.

The research established the value of each variable, claimed relationships and conceptualizations in the conceptual framework. Validating these concepts requires a consideration of all the variables oriented to a specific research order (Melnyk & Ragatz, 1989). Having an order in research makes it more logical and decreases the likelihood of deficiencies in attaining the goal of validating or acquiring knowledge (Melnyk & Ragatz, 1989).

The survey measured the variables using Likert scale values, frequencies, averages and other statistical calculations. Previous studies have shown data variables in social sciences can be descriptively connected by using a survey instrument. The objectivity of this research can be guaranteed, because CBBE is the result of data that can be summed from the collected information about respondents' reactions towards brands. This is also supported by the conceptual framework which proposes that positive brand perception by a customer is an outcome involving a process of customer-brand interactions supported by influencers. The data collection approach, therefore, reflected both the research questions and the hypotheses.

With a sample size of 477 and a large amount of data, the quantitative method supports reliable and high-quality data output (Sapsford, 2006). Hence, the research design incorporated as many variables as possible and was optimized to validate the relationship between each one of them. The survey is based on the framework and adopts selected peer reviewed measurements for each variable. Through the descriptive survey, the research intended to prove the applicability of the conceptual model, especially regarding the respondents and their perception of brands on social media, as facilitated by interaction with influencers.

In essence, the research adopted a quantitative approach that meets the criteria for methodological precision essential for robust research. Firstly, the precision and objectivity which is characteristic of quantitative methodologies facilitates meticulous measurement and impartial data analysis, thereby reducing the potential for interpretational biases (Hair et al., 2022). Secondly, the emphasis on generalizability is paramount, as outcomes from a quantitative approach aim to transcend the immediate confines of the study, enhancing the

external validity of the findings (Sykes et al., 2018). Thirdly, the adept utilization of statistical tools equip the research with the capacity for rigorous hypothesis testing, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of discernible patterns and trends within the dataset. Lastly, the efficiency of quantitative methodologies in handling large datasets and generating replicable results, as highlighted by Hair et al. (2022), is indispensable for the exhaustive analysis required in this research endeavour.

4.4 Influencer selection

Most brands in Saudi Arabia, especially prominent ones, have an ongoing commercial arrangement with an influencer (Altuwayjiri, 2020). Selecting the influencers is an important decision, since part of the survey seeks to find out whether a respondent follows a certain influencer. Establishing a link with an influencer, therefore, means that there is a very high chance of attaining successful influencer and brand connectivity. Therefore, ensuring that those listed in the research had currency and suitability was vital. Determining which SMIs are referenced for this study is limited to the commercial arrangements of the three identified companies. The selection was also based on the prominence of the influencers in the selected media platforms.

The author explored the brands' social media pages to identify the influencers that have been endorsed by Xcite, eXtra and Jarir. The search tools on Twitter and the Explore page on Snapchat have information on trending micro-celebrities (Altuwayjiri, 2020). Several links were also used from information obtained from analytic tools such as Talkwalker, Facebook for Business and Instaon.

The influencer selection process involved the analysis of several platforms, and the outstanding influencers were selected. The most followed users on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram in the electronics retail field were listed. The influencers were organized according to their relationships or previous endorsements with Xcite, eXtra and Jarir. Therefore, the following Saudi influencers were selected (see Appendix 8):

- Abdullah Alsabe

- Fahad Albugami

- Saad Aldhawi

- Abdullah Alsubaie

- Salem Aldalbhe

- Faisal Alsaif

Although there are many female influencers in Saudi Arabia, the most prominent and influential individuals in the electronics consumption niche are male, according to the study's findings. Results from analytics tools such as Talkwalker also reveal the level of selection and awareness among the public for the niche selected.

Participants had to make decisions about the influencer he/she recognized the most so that the questions could measure the influence of influencers who are highly regarded by the participant. The information on influencers forms a part of the findings which informs about the scope of the research regarding celebrity activity and relates it to brand perceptions. Additionally, part of the findings are statements about the selected influencers and their audience and viewership among the sample.

4.4.1 Natural setting for influencer selection

The descriptive survey established whether associations exist between variables in a naturally occurring setting (Zhou & Sloan, 2015). The setting involved a recall period (defined by the measurement development) where the three selected brands employ influencers to promote their content. The selection of influencers occurred through observational methods, with the period selected within the natural setting spanning roughly one month.

The selection of the natural setting began by selecting the best influencers endorsed by the three brands, which totalled six influencers. However, some influencers had been endorsed by more than one brand. The focus was primarily on the numbers of followers, traffic and engagement on social media platforms of the brands.

The survey was designed to list the influencers and inquire how the respondents reacted to the identified naturally occurring setting. The survey was issued to the respondents for responses, with an identified period for analysing the relevant naturally occurring setting. For example, the questions asked respondents to consider social media activities within a recent period, and the respondents were be asked on how they interacted with the brands, and how their perceptions were influenced.

4.5 Data collection

A survey is a reliable research method when researching a sample population, especially because it minimizes the resources spent in research and improves the efficiency and quality of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). An online survey is a highly acceptable tool for mass communication and business research (Kelley-Quon, 2018). According to Dawson (2002, p. 4), there are five crucial questions that need to be answered at the start of any research: "what, why, who, where, when?" Online survey tools have the benefit of promoting a target-focussed model that allows for the flow of information.

However, using an online survey tool, it is necessary to reconsider and evaluate ethical issues such as informed consent, privacy, recruitment, private versus public spaces, and the integrity of research itself (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Hence, it is necessary to understand the ethical and legal implications of placing the survey links on online platforms. This is particularly important for the present research, as this is the main methodological drive of the project.

The administration of the survey in this case involved a self-administration procedure. For effectiveness and accessibility, the survey was conducted online. Qualtrics[XM] (https://www.qualtrics.com/) was used for the online survey hosting. Qualtrics[XM] uses cloud storage, and this means that the responses obtained from the shared questionnaire are stored on a cloud database. The online platforms where the questionnaires were uploaded support different languages and require no coding to configure. Surveys are accessible through an online link generated and shared amongst the participants. Qualtrics[XM] has a mobile-friendly display that allows respondents to access surveys through their mobile phones.

Data collection is undertaken via a survey instrument that contains questions with closed responses on a 5-point Likert scale. The participants accessed the survey through a link to participate that is shared on social media platforms (Twitter, Messenger, Instagram and Snapchat) as well as through emails and chat platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to reach the target of 500 completed responses.

The participants were approached through an interaction that involves sharing information regarding the study and the acceptance of consent to participate via a link. Respondents were required to voluntarily respond to the questions with honesty and integrity. The research population included users of Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Facebook above the age of 18. The study demographics took into account parameters such as income levels, which inform the research on the relationship between income differences and brand promotion. The data was recorded on Qualtrics^{XM}, which is accessed through the researcher's Victoria University account.

4.6 Instrument design

The research instrument is the tool that facilitates the measurement of variables and relationships. The measurement of relationships between the constructs in quantitative analysis can be statistically handled by a wide range of analysis methods (Newman & Benz, 1998). Considering that the research instrument for this study is a survey, the instrument dynamics are important for defining how the study is being undertaken (Zhou & Sloan, 2015).

The survey started with a notice with all the relevant information that a research respondent needs regarding the study, including that participating in the study is voluntary. It also included some basic instructions regarding the survey questions. The preamble obtained informed consent from the participant, which is given by participating in the study (see Appendix 3). This information played an important role in informing the respondents on what the study is about. Communicating the themes of a study in data collection increases the willingness of participants to honestly participate in the study (Laurenceau et al., 1998). The preamble also included information about the rights of the participants and how their contribution to the survey is important. It was also important that the notice emphasized the voluntary aspect of the study participation.

Descriptive studies often implement formal standardized surveys. Holt (2009) explains that structured surveys test and quantify hypotheses in a statistical/mathematical format. To develop the survey, pre-structured research questions were obtained from articles with a similar theoretical context, such as Phua et al. (2017) and Sadek et al. (2018). This means that the most common method is used (further illustrated in the measurement subsection). The wording of the survey was also oriented to ensure harmony of stimuli for each question across all the respondents. For each item, a clarification on how a respondent should understand it and how it contributes to the variable measurement was provided (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A pilot test is carried out to reduce errors and increase practicality. Brannen (2017) argues that pilot studies scale research to improve accuracy and reduce wastage of resources. The pilot, therefore, plays an important role in survey development, specifically in increasing the applicability of survey distribution and the quality of data obtained. The researcher adopted measures from previous studies to measure variables that are similar or the same in this study. The survey was designed on Qualtrics^{XM} to collect as much quantitative data relating to every construct as possible and to validate or disapprove each relationship. The questions required the participants to reflect upon their interactions with influencers and the respective brands. Some of the study's adopted items are already proven to be reliable and credible. For instance, Kyriazos (2018) tests the efficiency of structural equation modelling (SEM) to measure psychological reactions through response scales that test reactions, feelings and perceptions.

Questions from the survey asked respondents to rank listed elements that affect their emotional response to influencers and brands. Using scales is the main way to measure reactions (Dawes, 2008). A good example is when doctors ask patients to rate pain, or how adjudicators measure a performance using ratings. Hence, this survey mainly uses Likert scales to measure participant reactions. Likert scales are attributed to an increase in accuracy when measuring responses that are associated with feelings and reactions from people (Laurenceau et al., 1998). The 5-point Likert scales are more definitive for scale measurement with the selected variables. This means that the items adopted from external measurements have scales adjusted to 5-point Likert scales.

Laurenceau et al. (1998) mention that participants need to interact with a variety of aspects when testing feelings or perceptions. Other variations of Likert scales may be used for closed-ended questions with values that can be used to rate perceptions that range from agreeing to

disagreeing. Therefore, 7-point Likert scales have been used and validated by Dawes (2008) to measure how participants feel. However, it is important to bear in mind that with 7-point Likert scales, the values specifically refer to how intense a reaction is rated by a participant.

The study has a key objective of establishing the relationship between the regard held towards a specific influencer and how this impacts his or her perception of a brand. These perceptions were measured using scales that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These scales captured important construct points, such as how influencers or their content are perceived.

4.6.1 Survey design process

The survey design considers established measurements from previously conducted research methodologies to measuring a respondent's reactions, feelings, attitudes and perceptions. Dillman (2011) highlights that in survey design, audience suitability is key, hence the study identified quantitative measurements that have been proven to be audience-suitable. These measures were relevant to the conceptual framework designed for this study. These items were organized into response points (questions) for the survey, and grammatically arranged to increase understanding. The Arabic translation of the survey was carried out by a credible translation organization, scaled and counterchecked for accuracy. Back translation involved translating a text from its original language to a target language, then back to the original language. This process is important to preserve the text in both languages (Son, 2018).

The survey had to be short enough to enable a participant to comfortably participate, but long enough to obtain the required data on the proposed relationships. The design had to consider the desired format of the responses, and how they are to be measured. Aspects that should be specifically considered proposed by Rubin et al. (2005) are length, simplicity of language, measurability and connectivity to research objectives/questions.

Hussein (2009) writes that many social science researchers omit sufficient detail in explaining what is required to answer the question. When uploaded to Qualtrics[XM], the questions were adjusted for presentability, which contributes to better user experience. The adopted measures ensure that the questions are simple to understand and answer, which contribute to the respondents' comfort levels.

The survey needed at least 35 questions, considering the number of variables and relationships in the conceptual framework and the data necessary to validate them. Answering the survey took each respondent approximately 7-12 minutes. Having short and simple questions reduces the chances of strain and early participant termination during participation, hence improving the quality of research (Dillman, 2011). The survey design emphasized understand ability and simplicity to obtain information that was accurate. Even in the language, there was an emphasis on free will, respect of privacy, and sincerity. Therefore, the respondents were expected to fully understand the questions, conceal their identities and provide complete and unbiased information.

The survey asked how respondents engage with their selected brands, how influencers have contributed to their awareness and engagement with the brands, and how their engagement affects the perception of any of the three brands. The study targeted social media users, both male and female, over the age of 18 years who use the YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat platforms. In Saudi Arabia, the most used social media platforms by people within the specified age cohort are Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter (Kemp, 2022; 2023).

4.7 Measurement development

Measurement is important in scaling as it defines how the research instrument(s) will collect data (Hoyle, 1995). Statistics from the survey about the identified period, such as the number of engagements and fractional representations can be included in the data spreadsheet output. The measurement referred to the independent and dependent variables (see tables 3.1 and 3.2 in Chapter 3). The respondents were asked to rate the influencers' perceived attractiveness/congruence, reliance on content and content validity/credibility. Other questions included how the respondents respond to posts, promotions and products by the influencer about the brand. The survey intended to examine variables and relationships that contribute towards BE and have influencer-driven consumer-brand interactions as input.

A framework for measuring variables is important to determine the right method and assets used to measure each variable as an item. It also informs the general relationship between the main variables in the research statement. From the framework, different scales for variable

measurement were selected and adapted for the study. A specific analysis of how each variable was measured follows.

4.7.1 Measurement of influencer authenticity

Authenticity of content is measured by inquiring how the respondent finds content from an influencer special or different. Authenticity and originality are important bases that influences the gratification achieved from interacting with an influencer's content (Pöyry et al., 2019). The study adopts the measurement of influencer authenticity developed by Pöyry et al. (2019), who use a 7-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to measure respondents' recall of how strongly they feel a brand is truly authentic. Pöyry et al.'s (2019) measure is similar to Napoli et al.'s (2014) and has a Cronbach's alpha of .926, indicating reliability. As authenticity is a key variable in their study, adopting their measurement for this study ensures reliability, accuracy and efficiency. Hence, this study adopts Pöyry et al.'s (2019) measurement to measure authenticity, with 5 selected items from the scale (see Table 4.2 below), and a separate dimension that asks the participants to refer to an influencer's latest posts.

Table 4.2: Scale breakdown for measurement of influencer authenticity (Pöyry et al., 2019)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Influencer authenticity - main adopted scale: Pöyry et al. (2019)	I think this celebrity is honest.	I think the celebrity/celebrities I follow on social media are honest.
	I think this person is sincere.	I think the selected influencer I follow is sincere.
	I think this person is genuine.	I think the selected influencer I follow is genuine.
	Items on the influencers' 9 latest social media posts	

	This photo fits well with this Instagram account's overall style.	This influencer's post(s) fits well with his/her style.
	This person is loyal to his/her style in this photo.	This influencer is loyal to his/her style in his content/posts.

4.7.1.2 Measurement of influencer attraction

According to the literature review, how an influencer manages to lure a follower on social media is an important analytical element. Attraction relates to traffic, as influencers that can lure more audiences have more followers.

Measurement of influencer attraction is adopted from the measured motivations for using SNS (Yuan et al., 2016). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) was used to measure attractiveness. Yuan et al. (2016) designates attractiveness as a construct under influencer credibility, which is also a variable in this study's conceptual framework, therefore Yuan et al.'s (2016) publication plays an important role in informing this thesis' conceptual framework. The definition of the attractiveness variable matches the context and target of this study. The measurement and the items are also related to the study. For attractiveness, the reported Cronbach's alpha is .845, which indicates scale reliability. The identified measurement also provides conditional items, which are illustrated in Table 4.3. The conditions are within questions in the survey that test relationships between attractiveness, credibility and parasocial relationships.

Table 4.3: Scale breakdown for measurement of influencer attraction (Yuan et al., 2016)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Influencer attraction - main adopted scale: Yuan et al., 2016)	Interacting with LeBron James influencer gives me a good feeling.	Staying tuned to the content from influencers I follow on social media gives me a good feeling.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, gives Nike an attractive image.	The selected influencer(s) has an attractive image.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, catches my attention.	The selected influencer(s) catches my attention.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, pleases people.	The selected influencer(s) I follow pleases people.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, is attractive.	I find the influencer I follow on social media attractive.

4.7.1.3 Measurement of influencer relevance/credibility

The measurement of influencer relevance/credibility is adapted from Yuan et al. (2016), who use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) to measure influencer credibility. Yuan et al. (2016) use three dimensions, which are attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness.

This study only adopts items from the credibility and attractiveness dimensions, as attractiveness is a separate variable. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.888 is obtained for expertise and 0.812 obtained for trustworthiness, which indicates the scale is reliable. This study, hence, adopts a 5-point Likert scale to measure influencer credibility. Table 4.4 shows the adopted scales and measurement items for the influencer relevance/credibility variable.

Table 4.4: Scale breakdown for measurement of influencer relevance/credibility (Yuan et al., 2016)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Influencer relevance/credibility - main adopted scale: Yuan et al. (2016)	**Expertise dimension**	
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, is an experienced sportsman.	The selected influencer(s) I follow is experienced in his/her posts.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, is a professional sportsman.	The selected influencer(s) I follow seems professional.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, is a capable sportsman.	The selected influencer(s) I follow seems capable.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, has professional sports knowledge.	The selected influencer(s) I follow seems knowledgeable.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, is a skilled sportsman.	From his/her posts, the selected influencer(s) I follow is skilled in his/her niche.
	Trustworthiness dimension	
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, knows the advertised Nike products very well.	The selected influencer(s) I follow knows the brands he/she promotes.
	LeBron James, as a Nike advertising spokesperson, knows how to use the advertised Nike products very well.	The selected influencer(s) I follow know how to use the products from the brands he/she promotes.

	LeBron James's personal values match the advertised products well.	The selected influencer(s) I follow properly matches his/her value to the brands he promotes.
	LeBron James is appropriate to be a Nike ad spokesperson.	The selected influencer(s) I follow is appropriate for the brands he/she promotes.
	LeBron James's lifestyle matches the advertised Nike products.	The selected influencer(s)' lifestyle matches the brands he/she promotes.
	LeBron James's character is similar to the character of the advertised Nike products.	The selected influencer(s)' character compliments the brands he/she promotes.

4.7.1.4 Measurement of influencer generated traffic

Traffic has been measured using similar dimensions by different authors. The measurement of traffic is mainly on the selected dimensions of soliciting responses and participation. Traffic in this case as a variable is conditional, as the study measures traffic that has been generated from influencer promotions. Hence, an established measurement was adopted based on Kim & Ko (2012). This measurement was also adopted by Godey et al. (2016).

The measurement involves a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). The variable is divided into five dimensions - entertainment, interaction, trendiness customization, and word of mouth. This study adopts the dimensions of interaction and word of mouth, as these dimensions represent traffic obtained from sponsored interactions on social media. These dimensions exhaust the representation of traffic from measured scale items. The dimensions have respective Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87 and 0.70, indicating reliability.

Hence, the study uses a 5-point Likert scale with different dimensions and separate scale questions adapted from Kim & Ko's (2012) measurement items, as illustrated in Table 4.5. However, on the interaction dimension, the study uses conditions that the traffic is attributed to influencer action. This is to establish that the traffic is only obtained from SMI's social media actions.

Table 4.5: Scale breakdown for measurement of influencer SNS generated traffic (adapted from Kim & Ko, 2012)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Influencer SNS generated traffic - main adopted scale: Kim & Ko (2012)	**Interaction dimension**	
	LV's social media enables information sharing with others.	From the influencer's promotions, Xcite, eXtra/Jarir social media profiles enable sharing information with others.
	Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through LV's social media.	From the influencer's promotion, conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through Xcite, eXtra/Jarir's social media profiles.
	It is easy to deliver my opinion through LV's social media.	From the influencer(s) I follow promotions, it is easy to deliver my opinion through Xcite, eXtra/Jarir's social media handles.
	Word of mouth dimension	
	I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from LV's social media to my friends.	I would like to pass along information on an announced offer, product, or service of Xcite, eXtra/Jarir on social media.
	I would like to upload contents from LV's social media on my blog or micro blog.	I would like to share content from Xcite, eXtra/Jarir's social media profiles to my own profiles.

4.7.1.5 Measurement of influencer-consumer parasocial relationships

The measurement for influencer consumer parasocial relationships in this thesis was adopted from Reinikainen et al. (2020), who adopted it from Labrecque (2014), Lee & Watkins (2016), and Quintero Johnson & Patnoe-Woodley (2016). They use 7-point Likert scales to measure parasocial relationships based on the recalled responses from the target sample. The scale adopts different dimensions - familiarity of the respondents (1 = not familiar, 7 = very familiar) and agreement with the items from the scale (1 = fully disagree, 7 = fully agree). The responses were statistically computed into composite reliabilities, which end up with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.9, which indicates reliability, with the average values having a cut-off of more than 0.5.

Therefore, this study adopts a 7-point Likert scale with 4 items to measure influencer-consumer parasocial relationships. Considering the high reliability and presence of information and results from Reinikainen et al. (2020), no supporting scales or items from other authors are adopted into this study's scale for the parasocial relationship construct. The adoption of the scale and items is as illustrated in the Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Scale breakdown for measurement of influencer-consumer parasocial relationships (Reinikainen et al., 2020)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Influencer consumer parasocial relationship - main adopted scale: Reinikainen et al. (2020)	I look forward to watching the influencer on his/her channel.	I look forward to watching the influencer(s) I follow on social media.
	If the influencer appeared on another YouTube channel, I would watch that video.	If the influencer(s) I follow appears on another profile, I would interact with their content as well.
	When I am watching the influencer, I feel as if I am part of his/her group.	When watching the selected influencer(s), I feel a part of his/her community.

	I would like to meet the influencer in person.	I feel autonomous related to the influencer(s) I follow and his content influence.

4.7.1.6 Measurement of UGC responsiveness

UGC has been discussed and interpreted by Altuwayjiri (2020). UGC responsiveness has been measured according to different dimensions. However, the dimension of UGC responsiveness measures the reaction of participants to information from micro celebrities. These reactions are based on congruence and liking the content by the participants, which means that their orientation is appropriate for the measurement of UGC responsiveness in this model.

Altuwayjiri (2020) uses a 5-point scale with four items adopted for this measurement scale. Altuwayjiri (2020) uses a survey comprised of 100 respondents, and obtains different computed values for each hypothesis, using linear regression. This scale was adapted to fit the purpose of the study, as the descriptions of the items are different. The adapted items from Altuwayjiri's (2020) study are indicated in Table 4.7:

Table 4.7: Scale breakdown for measurement of UGC responsiveness (Altuwayjiri, 2020).

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
UGC Responsiveness - main adopted scale: Altuwayjiri (2020)	Microcelebrity number X is congruent with nonprofit organization endorsement.	The selected influencer is relevant to eXtra, Xcite or Jarir.
	I feel self-disclosure reacting to a microcelebrity's content.	I feel self-disclosure interacting with the influencer(s) I have selected.
	This microcelebrity matches, or fits a nonprofit organization committed to providing a safe home for young children.	The selected influencer matches, or fits eXtra, Xcite or Jarir.

	I think the ad is (Very bad, bad, fair, good, very good).	I think the selected influencer(s)' promotions for eXtra, Xcite or Jarir are good.

4.7.1.7 Measurement of drivers of brand equity

Drivers of brand equity are measured together by Kim & Ko (2012) and Yuan et al. (2016). A similar model is used to analyse the drivers of BE, which are brand salience, brand resonance, and brand perception (see Tables 4.9, 4.10, 4.11). This is because the drivers of brand equity are similar variables that have a close relationship. As illustrated by Yuan et al, (2016), value equity, relationship equity and brand equity represent the impact of influencer interaction on brand reaction. The experience derived from consumer-brand interactions is held within the consumer's mind (Chang & Chieng, 2006).

The main adopted scale for the measurement of the drivers of brand equity is from Lithopoulos (2018), who measures preceding attitudinal and emotional perceptions are also a result of how accurate feelings towards a brand. Lithopoulos' (2018) study is selected because it is an informed study that exhausts the measurement of drivers of brand equity. Lithopoulos (2018) uses a 5-point Likert scale with 33 individual items from six latent dimensions. The scale for this study assesses each variable in the brand equity pyramid to obtain a 3-factor solution, which chooses three dimensions that are similar or same as brand salience, brand perception and brand resonance (brand performance, brand responses, and brand resonance). These variables are further divided into more dimensions, which decentralizes the measurement into dependent items, which are also recognized in this study. These are reliable scales, as can be seen from the obtained Cronbach's alpha values. The Cronbach alpha values for each variable are in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Cronbach's alpha values for drivers of brand equity (Lithopoulos, 2018)

Brand performance
Primary characteristics: 0.93
Style and design: 0.91
Brand responses (feelings)
Warmth: 0.93
Fun: 0.92
Excitement: 0.94
Security: 0.88
Social approval: 0.93
Self-respect: 0.94
Brand resonance
Loyalty: 0.95
Attachment: 0.92
Community: 0.94
Engagement: 0.81

The output variables correlate with the selected constructs for this study's conceptual framework. These correlations provide evidence for the validity and reliability of the study's conceptual framework. Moreover, the strong correlations between the output variables and the selected constructs lend support to the study's hypothesis. The correlations between the output

variables and the conceptual framework suggest that the study's framework is an accurate representation of the phenomena being investigated.

Additionally, the observed correlations between the output variables and the selected constructs demonstrate the importance of these constructs in driving brand equity. The significant correlations between the output variables and the conceptual framework provide insights into the underlying drivers of brand equity and their relationships to one another.

Table 4.9: Scale breakdown for measurement of brand salience (Lithopoulos, 2018)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Brand salience - main adopted scale: Lithopoulos (2018)	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth effectively satisfy my needs as a parent with a child aged 5-12.	Xcite, eXtra and Jarir effectively satisfy my needs.
	I like the look, feel, and other design aspects of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	I like the interactions and content from Xcite, eXtra and Jarir.
	I find the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth stylish.	I find content from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir stylish.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth are pleasing to look at.	Xcite, eXtra and Jarir are brands pleasing to interact with.

Table 4.10: Scale breakdown for measurement of brand resonance (Lithopoulos, 2018)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Brand resonance - main adopted scale: Lithopoulos (2018)	**Loyalty dimension**	
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth is the one resource I would prefer to use when planning the activity and sleep for my child aged 5-12.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir are brands I would shop for when shopping for electronics.
	I would be loyal to the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth when planning the activity and sleep for my child aged 5-12.	I would be loyal to Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.
	Attachment dimension	
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth are special to me.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir are brands that are special to me.
	I feel a sense of attachment toward the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	I feel a sense of attachment toward Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.
	I love the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	I love Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.
	Community dimension	

I really identify with the type of people who might use the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth when making activity and sleep recommendations for children aged 5-12.	I really identify with the type of people who might use Xcite, eXtra or Jarir for shopping.
I feel a kinship or affiliation with the type of people who might use the Canadian 24-Hour Movement.	I feel a kinship or affiliation with the type of people who might use Xcite, eXtra or Jarir for shopping
I identify with the makers of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	I identify with owners Xcite, eXtra or Jarir
Engagement dimension	
I would like to talk about the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth with others.	I would like to talk about Xcite, eXtra or Jarir with others.
I would send others a copy of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	I would recommend others to use electronic products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir
I would like to talk with the individuals responsible for creating the Canadian 24-Hour Movement	I would like to talk with the individuals responsible for electronic products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir

Table 4.11: Scale breakdown for measurement of brand perception (Lithopoulos, 2018)

Construct	Scale questions to measure construct	Adapted questions to measure construct
Brand perception - main adopted scale: Lithopoulos (2018)	**Warmth dimension**	
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of warmth.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of warmth
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of calm or peacefulness.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of calm or peacefulness
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give off a feeling of friendliness.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of friendliness.
	Fun dimension	
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth are fun.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir are fun brands.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give off a feeling of playfulness.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of playfulness.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth make me feel cheerful.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir make me feel cheerful.
	Excitement dimension	

	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of excitement.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of excitement.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth make me feel energized.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir make me feel energized.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of enthusiasm.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of enthusiasm.
	Security	
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of security.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of security.
	The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth give me a feeling of safety.	Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of safety.
	Social approval	
	People would approve of my using of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth for making activity and sleep recommendations for my child aged 5-12.	People would approve of my using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir
	People would react favourably toward me if I encouraged my child aged 5-12 to follow the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.	People would react favourably toward me if I use of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir

Self-respect	
Using the Canadian 24-Hour movement Guidelines for Children and Youth when making activity and sleep recommendations for my child aged 5-12 would give me a feeling of self-respect.	Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir gives me a feeling of self-respect.
Using the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth when making activity and sleep recommendations for my child aged 5-12 would give me a sense of pride.	Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir gives me a sense of pride.
Using the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth when making activity and sleep recommendations for my child aged 5-12 would make me feel better about myself.	Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir makes me feel better about myself.

4.8 Testing and piloting

Pilot studies can play an important role in understanding the dynamics of research before the research is done to make necessary adjustments (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001). Pilot studies establish certainty of the data collection procedure through preliminary research (Brannen, 2017). For this research, pre-testing and piloting informed the final version of the study and improved the quality of the research tool. The piloting test involved the distribution of the survey to a test sample of 43 diverse participants. The pilot distribution occurred through Qualtrics[XM], which was the platform used to collect data. The survey was setup in Arabic, and shared with 43 participants from Saudi Arabia.

The participants of the pilot did not just respond, but also scrutinized the questions and provided contributions about whether the survey fulfils the research gap efficiently. On

completion, the results of the pilot were analysed to ascertain if the results were in line with expectations and whether any ambiguity existed in questions. The results were also analysed to ensure that the responses obtained aligned with the targeted sample demographic of 28–45-year-olds. A summary of the pilot analysis results was presented in the validity analysis section.

4.8.1 Validity analysis

The pilot analysis demonstrates the reliability and validity of the collected data, affirming its trustworthiness and accuracy. The 43 responses were exported into SPSS v. 28 for reliability testing and to generate descriptive statistics, such as standard deviation, mean ages, and Cronbach's alpha values.

One main element of analysis considered in this study is age, as the study focuses on the 28–45-year-old age cohort, as shown in Table 4.12. The pilot respondents' mean age is 33, with a standard deviation of 7.9, which illustrates that most of the participants are within the 28–45-year-old age margin. This corresponds with Kemp's (2023) report which highlights the median age being 34. The results demonstrated that the age margins are in the majority of Saudi Arabian online/social media activity.

Table 4.12: Descriptive age statistics from pilot

Age		
N	Valid	43
	Missing	0
Mean		33.120
Median		33.000
Mode		26.0
Std. deviation		7.8933

Variance		62.304
Skewness		.396
Std. error of skewness		.357
Kurtosis		.538
Std. error of kurtosis		.702
Minimum		14.3
Maximum		54.0
Sum		1457.3
Percentiles	25	26.250
	50	33.000
	75	38.500

The pilot study showcased the frequency of social media usage. The frequency distribution revealed significant activity on the selected social media platforms for the study. Participants confirmed their engagement and activity on social media, with Snapchat being the most utilized platform and Facebook being the least used. These platform choices reflect a diverse distribution of social engagements among Saudi Arabians, affirming their social media participation. For a visual representation, see Table 4.13, which displays the distribution of social media activity.

Table 4.13: Social media activity distribution from pilot

Instagram activity distribution				
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid Yes	28	65.1	65.1	65.1
No	15	34.9	34.9	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Facebook activity distribution				
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid Yes	8	18.6	18.6	18.6
No	35	81.4	81.4	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

SnapChat activity distribution				
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid Yes	38	88.4	88.4	88.4
No	5	11.6	11.6	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Twitter activity distribution				
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid Yes	35	81.4	81.4	81.4
No	8	18.6	18.6	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

A key objective of the pilot study was to determine the relevance of the selected influencers. This involved using the frequency of influencer selection as a component in the validity analysis of the research instrument. The pilot study's findings revealed that the influencers selected by the participants align with the chosen influences. The pilot phase demonstrated the accuracy in determining the likely followed electronics retail influencers in Saudi Arabia. However, Salem Aldalbhe was not featured in the table below as he was not selected as a preferred influencer in the pilot study. This illustrates some data inconsistencies because of the small number of participants. Table 4.14 represents the influencer breakdown from the pilot:

Table 4.14: Social media influencer selection descriptive statistics from pilot

SMIs		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Abdullah Alsabe	30	69.8	69.8	69.8
	Fahd Albogami	3	7.0	7.0	76.7
	Saad Aldhawi	1	2.3	2.3	79.1
	Abdullah Alsubaie	2	4.7	4.7	83.7
	Faisal Alsaif	7	16.3	16.3	100.0
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

The three electronic retailer brands Xcite, eXtra and Jarir were referenced in the data collection. To validate the relevance of the brands for the participants, the pilot considers their preference among participants. The pilot proved that the three brands are options/selections for the participants, with pilot respondents (n=43) choosing the brands selected for consumer reference at least once. The most highly selected brand was Jarir. Table 4.15 breaks down the brand selections.

Table 4.15: Brand selection distribution from pilot

Brands					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid	Xcite	1	2.3	2.3	2.3
	eXtra	8	18.6	18.6	20.9
	Jarir	34	79.1	79.1	100.0
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

The reliability analysis of the pilot reflected the small sample size (43 participants). The projected reliability for the final data collection is likely to be higher. The Cronbach's alpha values are > 0.6 for eight out of the nine tested variables. This is regarded as reliable according to Taber (2018). The individual Likert scale responses from the measurement of the variables also indicate reliability. Most of the constructs were reliable with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.6 and above, except for UGC responsiveness.

The participatory pilot feedback indicated an issue with understanding the second item in the UGC responsiveness measurement item set. This item was deleted and the resulting Cronbach's alpha was 0.575. An increased sample size is likely to increase the Cronbach's alpha value. The total statistics illustrate reliable values for a pilot study. These are summarized in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16: Cronbach's alpha results from pilot

Cronbach's alpha results from pilot			
Constructs	**Cronbach's alpha**	**Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items**	**No. of items**
Influencer attraction	.905	.906	5
Influencer authenticity	.761	.782	5
Influencer relevance/credibility	.887	.893	11
Influencer SNS generated traffic	.723	.734	5
Influencer consumer parasocial relationships	.769	.773	4
UGC responsiveness	.575	.654	4
Brand salience	.773	.782	4
Brand resonance	.899	.901	11
Brand perception	.940	.939	16

The pilot test illustrated that the instrument is reliable, and that the data should be included in the main study (see Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). The feedback from the survey influenced the structure of the final instrument, for instance, adjustment to the language of the second item that measures UGC responsiveness. Necessary adjustments were made to the survey before sending it to the targeted demographic. The results of the pilot test were separated from the main survey data. This maintained the accuracy of the data from the study's method and freed it from bias.

4.9 Target population sampling

To some people, social media is just a platform to interact and connect with other people, while for others, social media is a platform that influences crucial elements in their life, such as consumption and selection of activities (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Indeed, social media interaction has become crucial enough in the lives of some people to the point of dependency. The research design considered all these orientations and does not consider how social media is viewed by the respondents.

Saudi Arabia is a country with a population of 36.68 million, with 29.1 million social media users (Kemp, 2023). Out of the social media population of Saudi Arabians, 27.02 million are above the age of 18 (Kemp, 2023). In addition, 84.8% of Saudi Arabians live in urban areas, with approximately 53% of that population being from Riyadh, the capital of the country (Kemp, 2022). Hence, the study's scope was considerably focused on participants from Riyadh, and secondarily from other urban/sub-urban areas. Table 4.17 presents Saudi Arabian population statistics.

Table 4.17: Saudi Arabian population demographics (Kemp, 2023)

Parameter	Population percentage
Age	
18-24	9.8
25-45	34.1
46+	25.7
Gender	
Male	42.4
Female	57.6

Social media platform usage	
YouTube	79
Instagram	33.9
Snapchat	57.7
Twitter	42.3

Data sampling involves the representation of a population. This process attempts to minimize the data convergence from the total population. Determining the right sample size is important in data collection, as this means that the population is properly represented (Vasileiou et al., 2018). To avoid a null hypothesis, it is crucial to eliminate sample size bias. Sample size bias can lead to population bias. P-hacking, which refers to manipulating data, is another manifestation of sample size bias (Head et al., 2015). It often involves the manipulation of the p-value cut-off, typically set at 0.05 in data analysis.

To minimize sample bias, population and sample size parameters must be properly defined and understood. This also maximizes the efficiency of the data collection, observation and analysis. Lwanga et al. (1991) also emphasize the importance of sample size definition by relating it to the accuracy of observations regarding hypotheses. The authors state that the right sample size proves that observations are from the right proportions of populations by minimizing data overlaps in different observation groups. In summary, the method was to test how customer's perception is impacted by influencer promotions with the sample being Saudi Arabians active on social media.

4.9.1 Sampling techniques

The sampling method employed in the study was convenience sampling method with a snowballing technique. This method involves respondents that are volunteering with no defined order for selectivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The method saves on costs and creates

efficiency by allowing data collection to stay natural and increases reliability by being less partial (Sykes et al., 2018). Although the method may result in many data outliers, convenience sampling also ensures the unpredictability of data, providing a realistic reflection of human reactions.

The selected responses were vetted to analyse their quality and differentiated according to the desired target population. The sampling involved sending the survey link to likely participants accompanied with a preamble with sufficient information about the research and participation details. Using convenience sampling and targeting no specific group, the survey link was sent through Facebook posts, Facebook group posts, Twitter posts, emails, Snapchat snaps and WhatsApp chats. The study involved a self-selection procedure; hence, the researcher also approached participants individually by sharing a message with information to participants and a link to access the survey.

4.9.2 Sample size

To maximize the resulting insights, the researcher aimed for a large target sample size. Large sample sizes have the advantage of increasing data reliability by reducing the deviation and increasing consistency (Asiamah et al., 2017). Queirós et al. (2017) indicate that large data sets have lower standard deviations. Considering constraints and fluctuations in social science, the sample size selected should also not be too large, to maintain effectiveness through a study (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). In quantitative research, selecting the sample can be specified by statistical confidence levels, as these levels govern how effectively a sample size supports the study (Davis, 2005). The sample size also needed to consider and reflect the features of the Saudi Arabian population. The sample size was compliant with these guidelines, therefore increasing the reliability of the study.

4.9.2.1 Parameter groups

To comply with institutional and research ethics policies, the survey required participants to be at least 18 years old. The study had two age-based parameters: one with participants aged 28-45 and the other with participants above 18 from different age groups. To determine the number

of observations required in a study, a statistical analysis was performed. Researchers choose a sample size: parameter ratio to define the right sample size for the data, represented as the N:p ratio. For effective and accurate data, Hair et al. (2019a) recommend a minimum ratio of 5:1.

The survey establishes 65 variables, meaning that a minimum of 325 observations are required. According to Hair et al.'s (2019a) recommendation. However, Cohen (1992) recommends that 165 statistical observations are needed to achieve a power of 80%, a data significance of 1% and R^2 that is less than 0.1. Wolf et al. (2013) propose a rule of thumb, which suggests that a minimum of 200 respondents is needed for SEM analysis with minimal outliers, small effect size and good threshold significance.

To further validate the appropriate sample size, a reliable online sample size calculator was utilized (www.calculator.net/). By inputting the desired level of confidence (95%) and margin of error (±5%), the calculator generated a recommended sample size of 385 or more measurements/surveys based on the population of Saudi Arabia. This ensures sufficient statistical power and an accurate representation of the target population. To ensure robustness and validity, the study went beyond the recommended sample size and gathered 477 surveys. This larger sample size aligns with Asiamah et al. (2017), who recommend the benefits of a larger sample size to enhance accuracy and reliability. By incorporating this substantial sample size, the study strengthens its statistical power and increases the confidence in the findings.

The study aimed at a sample size of 262 participants for the main age group of 28-45, which is one of the two parameter groups. The other parameter group consists of 215 participants. It is important to recognize that this represents only a fraction of the total sample. The chosen sample size took into account expected variations in the data and included an additional 50 participants to account for margins and differences in the data obtained. Therefore, the number of participants within the age range of 28-45 ideally needed to fall between 200 and 300.

In order to achieve the target number, it is important to carry out an analysis and understanding of the population demographics with expected distribution targets. The study compared the response to UGC by social media users for the 28-45 age group against responses of other age groups. The study took into consideration that the survey would only be available to participants above the age of 18 and active on social media. The percentage of social media users within the age gap was calculated from the data provided by Kemp (2023). It is a co-efficient of the number of social media users in an age group and the total number of social

media users for the specified age group, expressed as a percentage. This means that percentages of the sample size with sample size targeting is higher. The data obtained is displayed in table 4.18.

Table 4.18: Survey demographics of the study, calculated from data obtained by Kemp (2022)

Parameter		
Age	Population percentage	Sample percentage (considering the sample selects social media users above the age of 18)
18-27	12.3	16.4
28-45	37.6	50
46+	25.3	33.6

In order to obtain the desired target, the study selected a sample size that represents the age groups in the population. The selected age group accounted for 54.9% of the total sample percentage (262 respondents) out of a total of 477 participants representing the entire population. The sample size included the sample size fraction of people between the age of 28 and 45, and the other sample size (made up of 215 participants), that was used as for comparison or as a control experiment.

4.10 Data analysis methods

The data analysis method for the study underwent constant refinement in order to explore and evaluate the relationships between the variables (results are presented in Chapter 5). The approach closely resembled the one implemented by Leggett (2022). The main aim of the data analysis is to measure the impact of UGC from SMIs on consumer-based brand equity. The

quantitative data approach involves using software in order to conduct a preliminary data analysis, a descriptive analysis and SEM.

The process of data analysis started with cleaning data. Cleaning the data involves eliminating invalid and incomplete responses. These responses were kept in a separate record for safekeeping, further analysis and insight to address future gaps in the research. The cleaned data is then taken through a three step data analysis approach, consisting of preliminary analysis, descriptive analysis and SEM (Leggett, 2022).

4.10.1 Preliminary analysis

The initial phase of the data analysis was conducted on the raw Qualtrics^{XM} data by exporting it into a Microsoft Excel file. The file was then fed into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics v.29 software for basic statistical and multivariate analysis. The preliminary analysis stage involved understanding the base inferences that the data communicated. This enabled the researcher to obtain insights such as demographic summaries, cognitive reactions to influencers and basic brand perceptions. SPSS provided the required insight to represent the response data. Through SPSS, basic interpretations were made, summarized and recorded.

4.10.2 Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis plays a crucial role in understanding the characteristics of the data (Loeb et al., 2017). The descriptive analysis included a breakdown of the variable cumulative data into histogram charts that illustrate distribution frequency with mean and standard deviation analysis. This was also done on SPSS v. 29, which described the shape of the data, significant elements of the data that affect the subject, and illustrated data outliers and how they came to be. Multivariate analysis represents the relationship between the variables through multiple and interrelated dependents.

4.10.3 Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) represents a construction with variable relationships that is effective in breaking down large amounts of data in a single analysis (Hoyle, 1995). The analysis of the data results in an output model or plot that resembles the conceptual framework. SEM was used to measure how the variables come together to relate to the conceptual model (Hoyle, 1995). Following the descriptive analysis, the results were fed into the SmartPLS 4 software for SEM (PLS-SEM). Leggett (2022) and Kyriazos (2018) use SEM to measure influence throughout the customer journey, which is a similar approach to that used by this study. SmartPLS was used for composite variable analysis. The data was exported to readable formats (Excel) at different analysis points.

Transferring the data into SPSS from Microsoft Excel increases how the data can be managed, analysed and handled, even for further analyses. SmartPLS 4 was used to conduct Confirmatory Composite Analysis (CCA) and SPSS 29 for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). CCA is a method in SEM that provides a specified statistical significance for pre-established models that are reliant on author adoptions (Hair et al., 2022).

After completing the three-stage analysis procedure, the data was transferred back to Excel and SPSS Statistics for storage and sharing. This step allows for better management, analysis, and handling of the data, including further subsequent analyses. The detailed process and implementation of the data analysis are further expounded and explained in the results chapter.

4.11 Integrity, privacy, security and anonymity of research participants

The design of the survey considered the ethical policies and guidelines. Research privacy, respect and freedom must be respected and preserved, as stipulated by Victoria University (2020). Studies have to stay within the principles of ethics in research. This is to protect people participating in research and to promote a research culture that is considerate and honest. Buchanan & Hvizdak (2009) illustrate the importance of study participants in research, especially for data collection, because they are the main players in the success of the research, and maintaining research integrity through participant consideration is crucial.

Ethical behaviour within research influences data quality factors such as the willingness of a potential respondent to participate in research (Crow et al., 2006). Data collection methods must be aware of the most important people in research; the respondents (Goertzen, 2017; Queirós et al., 2017). This study involved human respondents, which this means that ethical considerations needed to be examined and committed to. The Ethics Committee of Victoria University (VUHREC) approved this study (research application number HRE22-087; see Appendix 5). Ensuring ethical validity also forms a strong foundation for validating the research, especially for data collection methods in similar fields that refer to this study.

The experimental aspects of the survey have an ethical dimension regarding the confidentiality of identification and the non-infringement of personal privacy. The study was designed to preserve participant confidentiality. The data collection procedure was presented to VUHREC for approval. Online survey tools have existed for years; however, they have greatly evolved, and it is necessary to reconsider and evaluate ethical research issues such as informed consent, privacy, recruitment, private versus public spaces, and the integrity of research itself (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). The study aimed to retain the culture of responsibility and ethical research, therefore the research reflected the following values:

- **Confidentiality:** the entity information or information about another person must be kept private (Victoria University, 2020). Confidentiality justifies that the data of people, parties or entities involved in the research can be retained, and the procedure ensures such data was not disclosed.
- **Integrity and ethics:** Being ethical and honest in intention was a major goal. The study aimed to relay honest and reliable while maintaining ethical standards. The study ensured that all the output information obtained is retained strictly for academic purposes.
- **Responsible conduct:** The research activity was within the terms of responsible actions. The data collection was relevant to the research objective and did not involve malicious actions for data collection. The liability for the actions and their influence lied with the researcher.
- **Intellectual fulfilment:** The actions of the research were undertaken to contribute towards the validation of a knowledge gap. The research, therefore, had the aims of creating new and valid knowledge to fill knowledge gaps.

The research intended to follow *The Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*, according to Victoria University (2020), which notes that there are three primary principles that researchers must follow: beneficence, justice, and respect for all persons. The researcher ensured compliance with the most recent and up-to-date stringent components of data security and management. This is particularly important for both ethical reasons and for the feasibility of completing the research. Response rates are typically influenced by a mistrust of data collected by online surveys, leading some consumers to be reluctant to share their information and opinions in an environment that is not traditional and is subject to online vulnerability (Couper, 2000). The research had also been scrutinized by the ethics committee of Victoria University, so that it conforms to institutional ethical guidelines.

Consent had to be sought from participants, in a way that conforms to the institution's ethical guidelines. Therefore, a designed consent form was created and formatted according to the VUHREC rules. The information to participants was copied as part of the message to the participants before participating. The message was accompanied with the link to the survey, hence the participant was informed about the survey before opening it (apart from information within the survey itself). The participants were recruited through mutual connection on social media and chat platforms, these platforms include Messenger, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram. The invitation to participate with information to participants (see Appendix 4) was sent to each participant using the messaging tools in the various SM platforms. Sufficient information about the research in the introduction of the survey was provided to enable participants to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. Moreover, the researcher contact information was provided in case any participant wanted further information. The consent form was also included in the survey preamble, which enabled participants to make informed decisions about voluntarily agreeing to participate.

Considering the data collection survey was conducted in Saudi Arabia, it was important to ensure language compatibility. To address this, the survey was translated using back translation (from English to Arabic, then back to English) to limit the influence of language constraints (see Appendix 1). The use of a convenient language for the research is not just an ethical guideline, but also promotes transparency and efficacy in data collection, considering Arabic is the first language for the target population. Even though English is still one of the primary languages within the target population. The approval for the data collection through responses

to the survey was sought prior to participation. Considering the survey was conducted online, online terms and conditions such as privacy preservation, were respected.

4.12 Chapter conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive introduction the data collection process, delving into the specific philosophies, strategies, decisions, and measurements employed. The discussion is particularly relevant for measuring the variables derived from the conceptual framework and validating the proposed relationships. The chapter also highlights the natural setting identified for influencer selection and identification of influencer interaction. The chapter brings together evidence shaped arguments that validate the approach made for data collection. An important highlight in the chapter is the development of measurement criteria. The study has chosen to use validated and peer-reviewed measurements from previously collected data with similar variables as those in the study. Crucial elements such as sample size, piloting and ethics considerations are also highlighted.

In summary, the data collection method used for this thesis is a quantitative study, through an online cross-sectional survey, targeting a sample of 477 respondents. The study adopts already established measurements to scale the variables within the study's conceptual framework. This shapes the research into a questionnaire with about 65 items shared to 477 respondents. Specifically, 262 of the respondents are between 28 and 45 years old, while the other parameter group is people of other ages but above 18.

The data procedure involved a pilot that selected 43 participants who represent the study's main approach. The survey was distributed on Qualtrics[XM] and the output was exported to Excel, SPSS and SmartPLS software for analysis. The data analysis involves a preliminary analysis, descriptive analysis and SEM procedures. The analysis employs SPSS v. 29 for preliminary EFA and descriptive analysis, while SmartPLS 4 is utilized for SEM and CCA. These techniques are relevant and reliable methods for testing relationships, leveraging the capabilities of SPSS and SmartPLS. The next chapter will reveal the extent to which the obtained data exhibits a structure with values aligning to the proposed relationships outlined in the conceptual framework.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methodology of the research and highlighted the research philosophy, methods and procedure, and justification for data collection. This chapter describes the nature of the data collected and the data preparation required before analysis. In a field like marketing, working with correct data means producing insights that are more effective and coming up with recommendations and decisions that are robust. Hence, the chapter summarizes the processes involved in data cleaning, descriptive analysis, reliability and validity testing, and structural equation modelling (SEM) including confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The chapter presents the data analysis including testing of the structural model and hypothesized relationship in the model and invariance testing for different age cohorts.

5.2 Preparation and examination of data

5.2.1 Data cleaning

Data cleaning involves the process of treating data to remove unwanted, invalid and skewed data from a dataset (Woo et al., 2019). Methods of handling and analysing structured (highly organized), semi-structured (partially organized) or unstructured (native) data have been increasing (Azeroual et al., 2019). An increase in data types, diversity and methods emphasizes the importance of research scoping. From a research scope, a researcher is able to obtain an insight of how the collected data is supposed to look. Hence, examination of data is an important post-research action. Joshi & Patel (2021), illustrate that actions prior to data analysis also enable a researcher to come up with a method on how data can be analysed. Data cleaning is an important process to ensure data is appropriate for analysis, particularly as some respondents may submit responses that contain errors due to attention, duplication or typography errors (Murtagh & Heck, 2012). To minimize data errors or analysis problems, cleaning data is necessary, hence, a data cleaning process needs to be systematic and accurate.

Reliance processes in data cleaning involve removing unnecessary sections of collected data and retaining the vital elements that are required in the data analytics process. Maintaining good data quality means relating variables and their relationships to the aim and the significance of a research process (Hair et al., 2019a). As highlighted by Everitt & Hothorn (2011), quality data processing is objective oriented. In as much as data reflects an observation, data needs to be treated and handled in a manner that positively influences output.

5.2.1.2 Context analysis: Research objectives that influence criteria

This study connects important constructs related to social media influencer characteristics and behaviour in Saudi Arabia within the context of consumer electronic retailer brands. First, it is important to understand that this research aims to expound and critically advance the understanding of the effects of UGC by SMIs on the brand equity of electronic brands in Saudi Arabia specifically as it relates to a more mature cohort. This research contributes to an understanding of how SMIs can create UGC aligned with the brand objectives and goals to influence social media audiences. The research targets Saudi Arabian social media users across the media platforms of YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat between the ages 28-45, although other age groups over the age of 18 were also collected.

Other important highlights of the data quality elements are the consumer electronic retailer brands selected; specifically, Xcite, eXtra and Jarir. Another important element in definition of data quality is the selectivity of the influencers. The influencers selected were within a highlighted niche product category (electronics) in the study and therefore this constrained the scope of the study to a single area of significance. Considering the dynamics and the scope of the research (as discussed in the introduction chapter), the obtained responses were treated according to the criteria highlighted for a cleaned data set.

5.2.2 Data cleaning process

The survey accumulated 985 responses captured on-line through the Qualtrics ^{XM} survey platform. These responses were exported into an Excel file for data cleaning. The cleaning process saw the deletion and exclusion of 508 respondents that were eliminated from the data

analysis as they did not meet the study's requirement/criteria; this is presented in Table 5.1. The following list outlines the reasons for exclusion:

- Exclusion due to incomplete responses: This encompasses the incomplete entries filled by participants who did not finish the survey. The following are the common categories of incomplete responses:
    - Incompleteness due to missing selection of the provided brands.
    - Incompleteness due to opting out of survey or for technical issues.
- Exclusion due to non-Saudi responses: This thesis' scoped Saudi participants only, considering the target area highlighted by the study is Saudi Arabia's social media fraternity. There non-Saudi participants were not included in the dataset.
- Exclusion due to provision of influencers' names for other niches besides technology or providing non-Saudi influencers: This thesis was further scoped to consider influencers within the electronic retail sector within Saudi Arabia. In as much as the study selected the top influencers in the electronic retail sector, the study gave participants the option of selecting an influencer within the segment who was not highlighted. Some of the participants provided names of influencers they followed; however, these participants did not match the criteria of the study as they were not within the electronic retail sector or were not Saudi Arabian. The influencer criteria mismatch meant the specific respondents had to be excluded from the data set.
- Exclusion due to some participants' not identifying one of the identified brands (i.e., chose none of the brands): This research was specific to three electronic retailer brands in Saudi Arabia. Any respondent that did not select any of the three provided brands was dropped out of the survey, hence, those responses were deleted.
- Exclusion of participants who filled in the survey within a substandard period of time: Time is a consideration in data collection and analysis as it indicates dedication and concentration by participants (Murtagh & Heck, 2012). Time taken for completion signals the behaviour of the respondent when participating in the survey. The "duration" report was given as time stamps for each response recorded. The record enabled the author to differentiate the participants who completed the survey with adequacy of concentration from those who did not. The minimum time taken to complete the pilot survey was 5 minutes. To ensure the quality of the data, surveys filled within less than 5 minutes from the time stamps, which was considered difficult to read the questions and complete, were regarded as invalid and excluded.

For a systematic data distribution and cleaning process, the initial step started with deletion of the incomplete responses. These responses did not contribute to the aim of the research, and were removed as they were invalid, and would not be regarded as part of the collected data. The incomplete responses deleted also included the responses by participants who did not select a brand. The next step in data cleaning was the deletion of two non-Saudi participants. At this stage, a copy of the Excel sheet was saved, as this comprised of 592 valid responses. The next step was the deletion of participants who selected influencers outside the listed influencers and the participants who filled in the survey within a subpar time of 5 minutes. Hence, this yielded an output of 477 valid and applicable responses for data analysis. The following Table 5.1 summarizes the data cleaning process breakdown:

Table 5.1: Data cleaning process summary

Category	Response tally	Decision	Reason for decision
Total number of initial responses in Qualtrics ^{XM} survey software	985		
Incomplete responses.	393	Deleted	Not valid due to missing sections of data.
Not valid (non-Saudi participants)	2	Deleted	Not valid due to responses existing outside research scope.
Not applicable (participants who did not select an influencer or provided influencers who were not within the categories/standards highlighted by the study)	88	Removed from analysis	Not applicable as selected influencers did not lie within the niche being researched by the thesis.
Not applicable (participants who filled in the survey within less than 5 minutes)	25	Removed from analysis	Not applicable as the responses might have an issue with response quality due to less dedicated time for a survey response.
Final value	477	Used in analysis	Valid responses.

The data cleaning process illustrated a high ratio of exclusion from the initially collected responses. To understand and validate the exclusion ratio, the data set was analysed as per the research scope and criteria. From an analysis of the data, the following conclusions were attained on the source of the data disruption experienced:

- Sub-par ability by the participants to understand the aim of the research, the research significance and the questions in the questionnaire.
- Participant scepticism that the researcher will infringe their privacy or information through participation in the survey.
- Unwillingness to participate by the respondents.
- The length of the survey may have contributed to incomplete responses, as some respondents lost attention and concentration.
- Incomplete responses due to technical issues with survey participation.

While the questionnaire was designed to maintain the academic rigor and minimize potential errors, there will always be some errors that are unavoidable.

5.3 Normality and outlier analysis

5.3.1 Analysis of data normality

Data distribution is a crucial part of analysis, considering distribution expounds on data validity and strength of the data. Data distribution also enables one to understand the nature of the data and creates an insight on data handling (Hair et al., 2019a). In multivariate analysis, an important step in data analysis was the analysis of normalcy and data distribution. As stated, normality is an important analysis factor in multivariate statistics considering it illustrates the distances from the mean and the reliance on the mean as a central average indicator (Hair et al., 2021). Basic analysis of statistics involves using indicators of central tendency as determinants of where the range of data lies.

Values such as the mean, mode and median measure the central tendency of the data distribution. The test of normality varies depending on the data size, type of research and intent (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). Normality is an important element in multivariate analysis where an item is assessed as per how its variable contributions are differentiated (Tabachnicket al.,

2013). The most fundamental assumption in multivariate analysis is normality (Hair et al., 2019a), which involves drawing reference to the shape of the data distribution. The shape of the distribution is a benchmark for correspondence to normal distribution, where the data shape looks symmetrical (Everitt & Hothorn, 2011). Normality analysis is important in understanding the central tendency and dispersion of the data to assess its suitability for inferential testing.

There are several tests in normality analysis, including key identifiers such as histograms, QQ plots, and Shapiro Wilk tests on SPSS. For the study, SPSS was used to analyse normality through a variety of tests including analysis of normality using skewness and kurtosis. Methods such as histograms were applicable, however, their accuracy was questionable considering the large sample size as per statistical analysis parameters (n=477). Other methods like the QQ plots also had doubted accuracy considering their visual aspect.

Hair et al. (2021), also recommend tests of skewness and kurtosis (without incorporating the Z value) for large data sets above n=350. The study selected tests of skewness and kurtosis as reliable tests to analyse normality of the data considering the sample size and statistical limits of the data. Tests of skewness and kurtosis were performed using SPSS and the output was exported for each item.

Studies highlight skewness and kurtosis values to be between -1.0 and 1.0 (Tabachnick et al., 2013); while others (Batini et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2021) suggest skewness and kurtosis values between -2.0 and 2.0. Higher symmetry is attributed to normality, hence, sharp graphs are less normal. For kurtosis, lower values of kurtosis are attributed to normalcy as the values indicating tailing of data through a distribution are higher (Hair et al., 2019a). Considering kurtosis represents "peakedness" or "flatness" of data through the data group, higher kurtosis values indicating normality make sense, as values of data tailing stretch through a data set (Tabachnick et al., 2013).

For the 65 items, the results of skewness and kurtosis lied between ±0.1 and ±0.9 (see Table 5.2); hence all variables were normal. An item-based analysis in outlier value identification is more accurate as an item view analysis is more extensive than using latent variables to analyse for skewness and kurtosis.

Table 5.2: Values of skewness and kurtosis for the 65 items with N=477

Variables	N	Minimum statistic	Maximum statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error
Influencer authenticity 1	477	1	5	-.599	.112	.522	.223
Influencer authenticity 2	477	1	5	-.659	.112	.517	.223
Influencer authenticity 3	477	1	5	-.716	.112	.697	.223
Influencer authenticity 4	477	1	5	-.775	.112	1.153	.223
Influencer authenticity 5	477	1	5	-.837	.112	1.693	.223
Influencer attraction 1	477	1	5	-.896	.112	1.284	.223
Influencer attraction 2	477	1	5	-1.025	.112	2.056	.223
Influencer attraction 3	477	1	5	-1.091	.112	1.887	.223
Influencer attraction 4	477	1	5	-.738	.112	.655	.223
Influencer attraction 5	477	1	5	-.853	.112	1.350	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance1	477	1	5	-1.033	.112	1.628	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 2	477	1	5	-.968	.112	1.168	.223

Influencer credibility/relevance 3	477	1	5	-1.068	.112	1.982	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 4	477	1	5	-.922	.112	.920	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 5	477	1	5	-.971	.112	1.403	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 6	477	1	5	-1.012	.112	1.657	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 7	477	1	5	-.971	.112	1.725	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 8	477	1	5	-.611	.112	.729	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 9	477	1	5	-.492	.112	.259	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 10	477	1	5	-.521	.112	.435	.223
Influencer credibility/relevance 11	477	1	5	-.668	.112	.722	.223
Influencer generated traffic 1	477	1	5	-1.047	.112	1.404	.223
Influencer generated traffic 2	477	1	5	-.927	.112	.803	.223
Influencer generated traffic 3	477	1	5	-.818	.112	.445	.223

Influencer generated traffic 4	477	1	5	-.837	.112	.279	.223
Influencer generated traffic 5	477	1	5	-.286	.112	-.725	.223
Parasocial relationship 1	477	1	5	-.862	.112	.739	.223
Parasocial relationship 2	477	1	5	-.653	.112	-.009	.223
Parasocial relationship 3	477	1	5	-.756	.112	.612	.223
Parasocial relationship 4	477	1	5	-.863	.112	1.098	.223
UGC responsiveness 1	477	1	5	-.414	.112	.423	.223
UGC responsiveness 2	477	1	5	-.256	.112	-.376	.223
UGC responsiveness 3	477	1	5	-.504	.112	.355	.223
UGC responsiveness 4	477	1	5	-.635	.112	.523	.223
Brand salience 1	477	1	5	-.960	.112	2.041	.223
Brand salience 2	477	1	5	-.634	.112	.816	.223
Brand salience 3	477	1	5	-.450	.112	.189	.223
Brand salience 4	477	1	5	-.629	.112	1.068	.223
Brand resonance 1	477	1	5	-.824	.112	1.053	.223
Brand resonance 2	477	1	5	-.522	.112	.066	.223
Brand resonance 3	477	1	5	-.778	.112	1.378	.223

Brand resonance 4	477	1	5	-.493	.112	-.043	.223
Brand resonance 5	477	1	5	-.707	.112	.888	.223
Brand resonance 6	477	1	5	-.065	.112	-.705	.223
Brand resonance 7	477	1	5	-.118	.112	-.846	.223
Brand resonance 8	477	1	5	-.500	.112	-.270	.223
Brand resonance 9	477	1	5	-.337	.112	-.468	.223
Brand resonance 10	477	1	5	-.810	.112	.898	.223
Brand resonance 11	477	1	5	-.817	.112	.500	.223
Brand perception 1	477	1	5	-.712	.112	1.156	.223
Brand perception 2	477	1	5	-.772	.112	1.337	.223
Brand perception 3	477	1	5	-.508	.112	.501	.223
Brand perception 4	477	1	5	-.609	.112	1.046	.223
Brand perception 5	477	1	5	-.484	.112	.139	.223
Brand perception 6	477	1	5	-.440	.112	.011	.223
Brand perception 7	477	1	5	-.382	.112	.016	.223
Brand perception 8	477	1	5	-.612	.112	.333	.223
Brand perception 9	477	1	5	-.587	.112	.245	.223
Brand perception 10	477	1	5	-.661	.112	.584	.223
Brand perception 11	477	1	5	-.344	.112	.041	.223
Brand perception 12	477	1	5	-.602	.112	.894	.223
Brand perception 13	477	1	5	-.470	.112	-.148	.223

Brand perception 14	477	1	5	-.403	.112	-.359	.223
Brand perception 15	477	1	5	-.390	.112	-.301	.223
Brand perception 16	477	1	5	-.624	.112	-.058	.223
Valid N (listwise)	477						

N= Number of Participants

The analysis of normality involved the consideration of all items, this is because skewness and kurtosis values represented the length and depth of the data values obtained. For a higher extent of accuracy, an analysis of skewness and kurtosis on items, and not latent variables, is advised this also applies for Shapiro-Wilk tests, especially for large data sizes. The Shapiro-Wilk is a statistical test to verify if a continuous variable follows a normal distribution.

Also, it should be noted however, that there are reference values for skewness and kurtosis that differ across different publications. Some publications such as George & Mallery (2019) highlight the Z-value and mention that its usage in normality analysis is valid, however, not favourable for large datasets (above 200 participants). Taking into consideration the average margins of skewness and kurtosis for the dataset as obtained from SPSS, normal distribution is implied. The obtained values of skewness and kurtosis lie within the ±2.0, in fact, most of the data (94%) has skewness and kurtosis values within the ±1.0 range. With a normal distribution of data, it can be implied that the reliance on the mean is valid, this is also backed up by the low variance from the data's mean (with an average variance of 4.67). The data also illustrates predictability through the selected Likert scale values by the respondents. With such variables being tested, it can be easier for one to predict the next selection of a participant. The consistency and conciseness of data limits can simplify research by allowing the researcher to employ basic implementations in data analysis to test research claims.

5.3.1.1 Outlier identification

Outliers in statistics are values that lie outside the accepted data limits when a distribution curve is taken into consideration. Whether using a Poisson distribution or Chi-tests, the fraction of

outlying values matter, as this influences the dependability of the data. Highly accurate data has less outliers, however Joshi & Patel (2021) argue that natural data must have outliers. Therefore, identifying data outliers is an essential procedure in data shaping. In some cases, the action is considered a part of data cleaning (George & Mallery, 2019). Figure 5.1 illustrates outliers as points outside the distribution distances. The divergence from the standard distribution is used to measure and rule out outlying values.
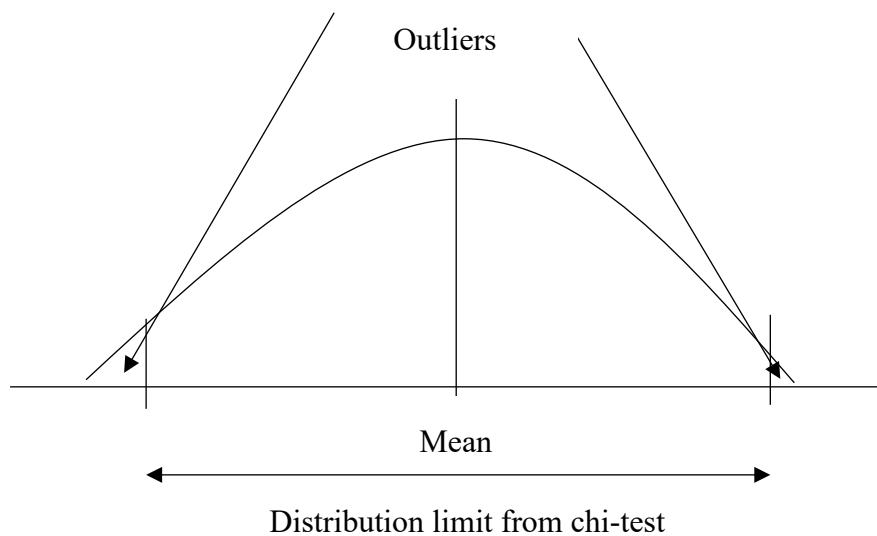
Figure 5.1: Representation of outlier points as a difference from chi-test distribution points

For this research, understanding the limits of data allowed the researcher to be aware of outliers and to scope the likelihood of outliers in the data. One of the methods used to identify outliers on SPSS is the Mahalanobis' distance test proposed by Mahalanobis in 1930 (McLachlan, 1999). This involves using the measure of distance between multiple characteristics, the method involves using the chi-squared (Δ^2) distribution test to obtain values that are outside the chi-squared distribution margins. The measure of divergence is as follows:

Mahal dist. $= \Delta^2 = (\acute{\mu}_1 - \mu_2)^T \sum^{-1} (\mu_1 - \mu_2)$

"Where the superfix T denotes matrix transpose, $\sum$ denotes the common (nonsingular) covariance matrix of X in each group G 1 and G 2. It can be seen that since $\sum$ is a (nonsingular) covariance matrix." (McLachlan, 1999)

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The Δ obtained represents a distance where the outliers lie. Understanding the Mahalanobis'
distance warrants an understanding of outlier identification. For the study, the Mahalanobis'
distance test was used to determine the outliers in SPSS. This involved configuring the SPSS
software using the chi-squared distribution test as a reference. The crucial value Δ^2 distribution
at probability of p= 0.001 for all variables in the data set is 41.553. The distance was then
reconfigured to highlight outliers from SPSS (see Table 5.3), leading to the identification of 14
outliers from n=477.

Mecklin & Mundfrom (2005) highlight that outlier percentages less than 15% are acceptable
in data analysis. For better accuracy, the 5% limit was selected for the study. Considering the
nature of the data and the context of the research, the outliers were retained for further statistical
analysis, since the number of outliers was less than 5% of the sample. An analysis of the
residual statistics from the outlier identification test illustrated favourable residual margins (see
Table 5.3), which were with margins set by Wackerly et al. (2014). This means that the data
margins are valid, with data from the items being close to one another. Hence the sample size
was maintained at 477.

Table 5.3: Residual statistics analysis from Mahalanobis' distance test

Residuals statistics[a]			
	Minimum	**Maximum**	**Std. deviation**
Residual	-20.245	43.876	10.467
Std. residual	-1.916	4.152	.991
Stud. residual	-1.940	4.199	1.002
Deleted residual	-21.083	45.947	10.712
Stud. deleted residual	-1.946	4.276	1.005
Mahal. distance	.748	41.553	7.541
Cook's distance	.000	.164	.008

Centred leverage value	.002	.087	.016	
a. Dependent variable: age				

5.4 Analysis of data reliability

Reliability and validity of data are crucial elements to determine in data analysis. Data reliability and validity illustrate that the data did not occur by chance. Therefore, the reliability tests are important as it indicates the relevance of the data and the strength of the research instrument. A properly developed research instrument showcases high values of reliability. Batini et al. (2009), highlight that research validity decreases the opportunity for bias and increases research transparency. An assessment of reliability involves an appraisal of different methods to analyse the validity of the collected data. The score limits for data validity are important in modern research as they enable a researcher to project the accuracy based on the evaluation of the research work (Mohajan, 2017).

The measurement process within the research started by theoretically assigning items to parameters. Evidence of validity and reliability was previously established from the pilot study and confirmed in the main study (n=477). With a large sample size, the reliability obtained showcased more research practicality as Asiamah et al. (2017, pp. 9-17) discuss that increasing sample size means data is closer to representing the population. This means that the research was efficiently constructed, and the insights showcased from the data relate with the phenomenon from the data's insight.

Table 5.4: Cronbach's alpha and item value statistics

Constructs	Reliability statistics		
	Cronbach's alpha	**No. of Items**	**N**
Influencer authenticity	.901	5	477
Influencer attraction	.802	5	477
Influencer credibility/relevance	.940	11	477
Influencer generated traffic	.808	5	477
Parasocial relationship	.783	4	477
UGC responsiveness	.775	4	477
Brand salience	.850	4	477
Brand resonance	.917	11	477
Brand perception	.957	16	477

N= Number of participants

The measure used to analyse data reliability was the Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient used to measure internal consistency of data within a set of survey items. The statistic is used to deduce whether the items consistently measure with similar characteristics (Cronbach, 1951). The standardized scale for Cronbach alpha, as illustrated by (Gliem & Gliem, 2003), involves values ranging from 0 to 1, higher values of Cronbach Alpha attribute to a bigger extent of agreement between the item values. The Cronbach alpha statistics help researchers evaluate the quality of data by arraying the data output on a similar scale of reference to obtain consistency.

The reliability tests on all the constructs produced Cronbach alpha values greater than 0.75. As Mohajan (2017), highlights Cronbach alphas above 0.6 indicate instrument reliability. With the

minimum Cronbach alpha value over 0.775 (see Table 5.4), the constructs demonstrated reliability.

5.5 Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis involves the analysis of the data for the insights and information it provides, without involving mathematical configurations and considerations. Descriptive statistics create a foundation for further steps in the research (Garson, 2016; Loeb et al., 2017), for instance SEM. The collected data involved various parameters about Saudi Arabian social media users. The data obtained during the secondary analysis and literature review was verified by the data collection procedure. Some of the prompts verify the statistics about demographic dynamics such as age and social media usage. Table 5.5 summarizes the demographic variables.

Table 5.5: Demographic summaries

Variables		N	%
Age in years	18-24	89	18.7
	25-34	168	35.2
	35-44	130	27.3
	45-54	66	13.8
	55-64	21	4.4
	+ 64	3	0.6
Groups according to age	28-45	262	54.93
	18-80 (Excluding 28-45)	215	45.07
Gender	Male	212	44.4

	Female	265	55.6
Education level	High school	53	11.1
	Undergraduate degree	315	66
	Postgraduate degree	109	22.9
Marital status	Single	188	39.4
	Married	266	55.8
	Rather not say	23	4.8
Monthly income	Less than SAR 3000	58	12.2
	Between SAR 3001 and 5000	54	11.3
	Between SAR 5001 and 10000	90	18.9
	Between SAR 10001 and 20000	116	24.3
	Over (SAR) 20000	52	10.9
	Rather not to say	107	22.4
Total		477	100

N= Number of participants; %= percentage

The literature review indicates that Saudi Arabia is one of the countries with a higher average age of social media users, compared to other markets using similar demographic units. The country is also deemed to have a high percentage of active social media users, with the majority of platforms accessed being Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter. The age of respondents is a key variable as the research focuses on social media users in Saudi Arabia aged between 28 and 45. The selected age bracket is backed up by reports by Kemp (2019, 2022, 2023). Saudi Arabia is a developed economy with a high life expectancy and many citizens above the 30 years old.

Although there is a high birth rate (the population has grown by over 3 million in a year according to Kemp's (2022) and (2023) reports), there is still a large percentage of people (46%) over 35. Indeed, the average age of social media users is 34.85 years.

The data indicates that 54.93% of the respondents are between 28 and 45 years old, emphasizing the importance of the age highlighted by this study. The data also shows that about 19% of Saudi social media users are over the age of 45. According to Kemp's (2023) report, 89% of the population are active internet users while 74% are active on social media. The data supports the claims that Saudi Arabia has the highest ratio of social media users in the region. It also supports Talkwalker's (2022) statistics that the largest proportion of social media users in Saudi Arabia are between 25 and 34. Recent reports from Kemp (2023), also expound on Saudi Arabia being an active social economy online, as Saudi Arabia ranks seventh globally in terms of people having individual social media accounts (ArabNews, 2015).

Other population dynamics in the collected data such gender, marital status, education level and income reflect normal demographic distributions. Most social media users are female (55.6%) (Othman et al., 2022). These demographic statistics align with Kemp (2023) who states that despite the increasing birth rate has been increasing, the middle age population is higher in Saudi Arabia. The data indicates that 55.8% of the participants are married, while a 44% are single, which concurs with Kemp's (2023) report on Saudi Arabia's social status.

The data also reveals a considerable number of Saudi Arabians with post college education. Indeed, the sample only indicates 53 participants (11.1%) with high school as their highest education level. The participants exposed to higher education also seem to be more exposed to social media. The collected data also points towards an established social class, with income related to the level of education. The data also shows that 65.4% of the income levels are above SAR 3000 per month. The income levels for the respondents also show an above average financial position, which backs up earlier statements that a mature age cohort has more disposable income.

5.6 Social media platform frequency of use

Social media presence and usage was another component of the study. Hence, the study collected information on respondents' social media activity to verify the presence of parasocial relationships and to validate demographic claims made in earlier chapter(s). These results indicate a social media usage and preference lower than previously obtained statistics. Nevertheless, the data still supports a strong social media presence in Saudi Arabia, with all respondents confirming social media activity. The data also reveals that where social media influence exists, there are different dynamics of social media marketing and reaction to influencer activity. For example, influencers or brands on leading platforms like Snapchat or Twitter are likely to have more impact on consumers.

Table 5.6: Summary of social media usage

Variables		Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		SnapChat		YouTube	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Valid	Yes	41	8.6	308	64.6	364	76.3	435	91.2	267	56
	No	436	91.4	169	35.4	113	23.7	42	8.8	210	44
	Total	477	100	477	100	477	100	477	100	477	100
Rank		5		3		2		1		4	

N= Number of participants; %= percentage

The frequency of social media usage is reflected by the social media preferences selected by the respondents from the social media platforms used by respondents. It is important to take note that the selection of one social media platform does not rule out the usage of another. Users may be active in more than one social media platform.

The social media platform most visited and liked by Saudi Arabians is Snapchat, followed by Twitter and then Instagram (see Table 5.6). YouTube and Facebook have the lowest social media use, despite being the most used platforms globally (Dixon, 2023). According to

Talkwalker (2022), 43.4% of Saudi adults are Instagram users who can be reached by Instagram Ads and influencers.

On Snapchat, Saudi Arabia has the largest percentage of adult users with active accounts (52% of adults) (Talkwalker, 2022). Although YouTube is not favoured as a social media platform by the users in this research, Kemp's (2023) usage statistics in Saudi Arabia are higher than the percentage obtained from the data. This could mean that the respondents use YouTube but do not regard the platform as social media. The data indicates that more personalized social media platforms like Snapchat are preferred over open social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram. This could also mean that social media relationships in Saudi Arabia are based on trust and consideration, compared to the need to connect or share information. This is also highlighted by Kim & Ko (2012), who illustrate a bigger impact of social media information considering high social media validity in communication. Sijabat et al. (2022) follow up on Kim & Ko (2012) discussing engagement as an impact of SMI interactions. Hence, interactions fuelled social media influencers are heavy drivers of engagement in influencer marketing campaigns.

5.7 Social media influencers and brand frequency

Table 5.7 lists the six prominent influencers and three leading consumer electronics retailer brands in Saudi Arabia selected by the researcher. The study's survey gave the respondents the ability to select their preferred influencers, however, the respondents could also select influencers outside those suggested in the survey. The influencers selected for the study are some of the most prominent in Saudi Arabia's consumer sector (see Chapter 3) and hence most were selected by the participants when asked who they followed.

In terms of the consumer electronics brands, Jarir was identified as the leading electronic retailer brand in this survey (selected by 74.2% of the respondents). This was followed by eXtra and Xcite (see table 5.7). A statistical analysis of the brand position and corporate awareness about the three brands from the introduction chapter of this study accentuates that the selected brands are equal competitors, but this is contradicted by the results. The collected data revealed a heavy brand dominance, especially with Jarir. The data also shows that Abdullah Alsabe was the most followed influencer, and the least influential influencer is Salem Aldalbhe.

Table 5.7: Summaries of influencer and brand following

Influencers/Brands		Xcite		eXtra		Jarir		Total	
Influencers		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Abdullah Alsabe		7	1.5	49	10.3	204	42.8	260	54.5
Fahd Albogami		8	1.7	12	2.5	45	9.4	65	13.6
Saad Aldhawi	**Count**	3	0.6	2	0.4	7	1.5	12	2.5
Abdullah Alsubaie		5	1	13	2.7	39	8.2	57	11.9
Salem Aldalbhe		4	0.8	3	0.6	2	0.4	9	1.9
Faisal Alsaif		4	0.8	13	2.7	57	11.9	74	15.5
Total		31		92		354		477	
		6.5%		19.3%		74.2%		100%	

N= Number of participants; %= percentage

5.8 Analysis of factors attracting brand following

Based on the data, the main reasons why respondents follow brands on social media are great content, good advertising, excellent customer service, tips, and offers. The survey allowed the selection of multiple options to avoid confinement. Table 5.8 cross-tabulates the factors which cause respondents follow selected brands. The cross-tabulation illustrates which brands surpass the others when it comes to the reasons why customers follow them on social media.

Table 5.8: Reasons for following brands

Factors			Great content	Good advertising	Excellent products/ customer service	For tips and offers	I follow them because I am their customer
Xcite		Yes	20	20	29	29	18
		%	64.5	64.5	93.5	93.5	58.1
		No	11	11	2	2	13
		%	35.5	35.5	6.5	6.2	41.9
eXtra		Yes	70	67	81	88	67
		%	76.1	72.8	88	95.7	72.8
	Count	No	22	25	11	4	25
		%	23.9	27.2	12	4.3	27.2
Jarir		Yes	268	242	334	276	241
		%	75.5	68.4	94.4	78	68.1
		No	86	112	33	78	113
		%	24.3	31.6	5.6	22	31.9
Total	Yes		358	329	444	393	326

	No	119	148	33	84	151
	%	100	100	100	100	100
	N	477	477	477	477	477

N= Number of participants; %= percentage

The main reasons why customers follow brands on social media is because of tips and offers, great content and excellent customer service (see Table 5.8). This means that the identity of the brand plays an important role in its social media viewership. Phua et al. (2017) discusses how the identities of brands extend through multiple fraternities surrounding the brand, including social media profiles. The data reveals that Jarir is significantly preferred compared to other brands due to its excellent customer service and great content. On the other hand, eXtra is preferred for consumers who follow a brand to get information on tips and offers. Clearly, eXtra is outstanding in the market for tips and offers to the point of customer recognition.

The data illustrates that customers follow brands on social media platforms to stay connected with brands, rather than stay informed. The consumer-brand relationship extends to social media from an already established brand relationship. Hence, consumer-brand relationships are supported by great content, tips/offers and excellent service. With content being an outstanding factor that influences brand preference selection, the study's direction seems to be confirmed. An analysis of these factors illustrates a correlation between the reasons why consumers follow brands on social media. The analysis is further broken down by the correlation and factor analysis in seceding sections.

5.9 Descriptive statistics: Constructs

Multivariate statistics requires the consideration of a central tendency, and deviations from the central tendency. The study implemented 5-point Likert scales as the reference scales for response measurement. From the collected data (n=477), most of the questions inquire about how influence in social media propagates engagement and drives brand equity.

Table 5.9: Description of mean and standard deviation

Constructs	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
Influencer authenticity	477	3.776	.708	.501
Influencer attraction	477	3.769	.600	.361
Influencer credibility/relevance	477	3.950	.654	.428
Influencer generated traffic	477	3.397	.726	.527
Parasocial relationship	477	3.659	.676	.457
UGC responsiveness	477	3.331	.670	.449
Brand salience	477	3.776	.664	.441
Brand resonance	477	3.492	.714	.510
Brand perception	477	3.532	.724	.524
Valid N (listwise)	477			

N= Number of participants

The breakdown of the variable analysis is constituted of averages obtained from every item into the selected latent variable. With Likert scale analysis in multivariate statistics, an important consideration is the extent of the rating towards the maximum (in this case 5). Given the Likert scales used for this study, an analysis of the mean indicates a positive reaction by the respondents regarding the variable measurements. The obtained variable averages range from 3.331 to 3.95 (see Table 5.9), in other words, higher than the mid-level rating (2.5) according to the Likert scale. Considering the mean as a predictor of central tendency, the following equation emerges from the analysis:

$$\textbf{X (mean)} = \sum (\textbf{n}^1\textbf{n}^2\textbf{n}\ldots\textbf{n}^n)/\textbf{n}$$

The central tendency indicated by the obtained values is an important point of consideration that influences the outcome of the research. The variance also indicates the distance from the mean, which indicates how far a dataset can be from the mean.

Analysis of the variance is important as it shows a researcher how far a dataset is from the mean (since variances represent margins from the mean) (Garson, 2016). From the variance formula $\sigma^2 = \sum f (m - \bar{x})^2 / n$ (Garson, 2016), one can understand the contribution that the variance makes and how it can be used for data insight.

Wackerly et al. (2014) also mentions variance as an important value in data reliability in partial least squares analysis. Low values of variance and standard deviation (variances below .5 and standard deviations below 1) in Likert scale analysis show strength of opinion (Mohajan, 2017). This means that the data collected is more inclined to favour the respondent outcomes of the latent variables measures, and there is certainty in using the mean as an indicator of perception. Conceptually, many respondents agree that they are influenced by the variables and also that the drivers of brand equity are an outcome of influence-based factors. Given a deeper analysis of this study's multivariate process proved the research's claims further, the mean appears to be a strong indicator of the inclination of the respondent's opinions about the latent variables.

5.10 Analysis of the relative importance index (RII)

The relative importance index (RII) is a statistical technique used to assess the relative importance of various factors in a dataset. It is commonly used in data analysis to identify the most significant variables that contribute to a particular outcome or response. The relative value of each variable is calculated using its contributing components, identifying key measurement areas that directly affect research (Boakye & Adanu, 2022). In this study, outstanding components which connect the contributors of engagement to the drivers of brand equity are parasocial relationship and UGC responsiveness. The responses for these variables illustrate the main reasons why respondents are connected to influencers and their reaction to their content.

The responses for the two variables were expressed using the RII. As highlighted by Mohajan (2017), the RII is an important method that rates variables, using a calculated index. The RII is

calculated by asking participants to rate the importance of each variable on a scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 10. The ratings are then converted into a percentage, and the average score for each variable is calculated. Finally, the relative importance of each variable is determined by comparing the average score of that variable to the total score of all variables in the dataset. The RII equation formula is as follows:

$$\mathbf{RII} = \Sigma \frac{\mathbf{w}}{\mathbf{NxA'}}$$

Where ω is the weighting given to each factor by the respondent, A is the highest weight, and N is the total number of respondents. According to Akadiri (2011), importance level as the following Table 5.10:

Table 5.10: RII Importance levels

RII Values	Importance level	
$0.8 \leq RI \leq 1$	High	H
$0.6 \leq RI \leq 0.8$	High-medium	H-M
$0.4 \leq RI \leq 0.6$	Medium	M
$0.2 \leq RI \leq 0.4$	Medium-low	M-L
$0 \leq RI \leq 0.2$	Low	L

The variables to be considered for RII analysis are parasocial relationships and UGC responsiveness. This is because the items within these variables carry the most weight, considering the variables are connector variables in the conceptualized framework for the study. Via RII, the researcher was able to determine the items that had the most impact on the research's aim and developed measurement instrument. The RII values for parasocial relationships and UGC responsiveness were obtained and ranked in tables 5.11 and 5.12:

Table 5.11: RII ratings for parasocial relationships

Influencer-consumer parasocial relationships			
I look forward to watching the influencer(s) I follow on social media.	0.748	2	High-medium
If the influencer(s) I follow appears on another profile, I would interact with their content as well.	0.696	4	High-medium
When watching the selected influencer(s), I feel as a part of his/her community.	0.722	3	High-medium
I feel autonomous related to the influencer(s) I follow.	0.760	1	High-medium

Table 5.12: RII ratings for UGC responsiveness

UGC responsiveness			
The selected influencer(s) is/are congruent with my selected brand's (Xcite/ eXtra /Jarir).	0.672	3	High-medium
I feel self-disclosure interacting with the influencer(s) I have selected.	0.600	4	Medium
The selected influencer matches, or fits (eXtra, Xcite or Jarir).	0.690	2	High-medium
I think the selected influencer(s)' promotions for (eXtra, Xcite or Jarir) the brand I have chosen are good.	0.702	1	High-medium

The RII reveals that the autonomy of the relationship between the influencer and the respondent is the most critical factor that supports consumer reaction to influencer content about brands. The influencers appeal to the respondents and this makes the respondents want to relate with them. The feeling of autonomy is an important driver in content sharing is it heavily influences

the potential impact of the content (Kim & Ko, 2012). This can be related to how users may positively react to text messages from loved ones but ignore promotional emails.

Analysis of RII for UGC responsiveness highlights the quality of the promotions by the brand. This means that content quality influences how users relate with promoters. The RII analysis establishes a relationship between how fitting content is and how it can impact user reaction. These dynamics are further expanded using CCA and SEM analysis.

5.11 Correlation analysis

Another aspect of the analysis is correlation comparison, which uses scale values to statistically estimate the relationship proximity between variables (Diedenhofen & Musch, 2015). This enables a researcher to understand variables from an overview of their correlation values. Correlation analysis is a fundamental statistical technique that plays an essential role in data analysis (Garson, 2016). It uses linear regression to obtain data points and relate the variables from the obtained values. Correlation can determine how close variables are and how they are related with one another (Everitt & Hothorn, 2011). Correlation is an important activity in hypothesis testing. Correlation analysis is also important considering that the obtained correlation values form principal components in SEM.

Correlation analysis can help identify patterns in data that might not be immediately apparent. By examining the relationships between different variables, analysts can gain insights into how they are related and how they might influence one another (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). Correlation analysis can be used to test hypotheses about the relationship between two or more variables (Garson, 2016; Hair et al., 2019a).

Correlation analysis can also be used to make predictions about future outcomes. By examining the relationship between two or more variables, a study can use this information to predict how changes in one variable might affect the other. The analysis has also been used by authors such as Benitez et al. (2020) and Schuberth (2021) as a step prior to SEM. This highlights the importance of correlation to this study, considering this study also employs SEM.

Correlation analysis was conducted on SPSS for the nine latent variables. The correlation matrix obtained illustrates the inter-item correlation between the variables. Table 5.13 shows the inter-item correlation matrix for the latent variables.

Table 5.13: Inter- construct correlation matrix

Inter-construct correlation matrix									
Constructs	**Influencer authenticity**	**Influencer attraction**	**Influencer credibility/ relevance**	**Influencer generated traffic**	**Parasocial relationships**	**UGC responsiveness**	**Brand salience**	**Brand resonance**	**Brand perception**
Influencer authenticity	1.000	.550	.633	.164	.492	.263	.238	.118	.107
Influencer attraction	.550	1.000	.573	.401	.624	.335	.402	.324	.357
Influencer credibility/ relevance	.633	.573	1.000	.186	.539	.374	.303	.171	.186
Influencer generated traffic	.164	.401	.186	1.000	.408	.288	.394	.544	.391
Parasocial relationship	.492	.624	.539	.408	1.000	.451	.438	.433	.401
UGC responsiveness	.263	.335	.374	.288	.451	1.000	.331	.319	.321
Brand salience	.238	.402	.303	.394	.438	.331	1.000	.567	.513
Brand resonance	.118	.324	.171	.544	.433	.319	.567	1.000	.737
Brand perception	.107	.357	.186	.391	.401	.321	.513	.737	1.000

The figures from the data had correlation values ranging from 0.30 to 0.80. The correlation values obtained indicate average correlation between different variables with some variables having considerable correlation. The correlation values also displayed considerable correlation within the contributors of social engagement. The drivers of brand equity were closely correlated, however, there was minimal collinearity between the drivers of brand equity and the contributors of engagement.

The values also prove that the variables having a direct proportional relationship with each other were highly correlated. A uniplanar perspective showcased that most of the hypotheses stated hard correlation values starting from 0.30, will the average correlation value for the stated hypothesis being 0.56. This illustrated an above-average relationship between the individual variables in the stated hypothesis and proposed relationships in the conceptual framework chapter. This is further reflected in later stages of the data analysis such as correlation and model structuring in SEM.

It is vital to acknowledge that correlation analysis is the first step in partial least squares regression. The principal component analysis values emerging from stated correlations are used in structural equation modelling as they represent weight which are predictors of variable relationships.

5.12 Testing the conceptual model

The analysis of a conceptual structure and the proposed variable relationships is a core test in statistical analysis. With statistics configurations, data can be used to examine and validate relationships, creating a reinforced insight from theoretical analysis (Hair et al., 2019a). There are several methods used in conceptual framework analysis, the method selected for the study is SEM. Structural equation modelling is a research technique that involves using a combination of factor analysis and regression analysis to examine and project variable relationships (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). The series of analysis for this study included using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) in its multivariate data analysis procedure. SPSS 29 and SmartPLS 4 (PLS-SEM) are the tools used to examine the data further, to establish structural relations between variables. From the

correlation matrix, the variables were further grouped and separated to yield relationship structures to obtain relationship models similar to the proposed conceptual framework.

This study implemented EFA first to explore on the usability of the measurement model. A confirmatory composite analysis was also run alongside a series of regression and component analyses. The data methods lead to the establishment of computed structures, plots and tables that explain variables and item relationships.

5.13 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a data analysis technique that involves reducing data into a smaller set of summary variables (Fabrigar et al., 1999). EFA is meant to make variables measurable by assigning the specific variables into new factors that have not been highlighted by the study's measurement instrument (Fabrigar et al., 1999). EFA is an important technique as it enables the depth of data to be used as a predictor for more elements that can be used to group variables. EFA is an important procedure in social sciences considering it further describes variables in the process of grouping them (Williams et al., 2010). The main aim of steps such as EFA is to find how the variables relate with one another and whether they can be grouped into factors that illustrate more on their similarities.

EFA measure variables as factors from the root values of the variables. As Hair et al. (2019a) explain that exploratory factor analysis uses the values of each variable and estimates their relationship by projecting them into and explain two variables known as factors. Both component analysis and factor analysis can be used in representing the weight of the variables (Fabrigar et al., 1999).

Component analysis plays an important role in making variables as predictors, while factor analysis groups these variables based on principal components as predictors (Watkins, 2018). Considering the structure of measurement of the study and the length and depth of the study's factors, exploratory factor analysis is a crucial step to enable the research instrument to be shaped into a more valid setup for analysis (Baru et al., 2016). Exploratory factor analysis in this case is partaken to increase validity of the research instrument and to group the variables. From the conceptual framework, the variables were theoretically grouped into the contributors

of social engagement and the drivers of brand equity. These were the main groups existing for the variables, in as much as two variables; UGC responsiveness and parasocial relationship were regarded as connector variables. One of the aims of EFA to discover how the variables can be grouped besides the groupings assigned from the theoretical analysis (Baru et al., 2016).

Correlations form considerations in EFA as the principal components forms new dynamics that are considerations being explored in the procedure. The following figure 5.2 provides a visual representation of exploratory factor analysis:
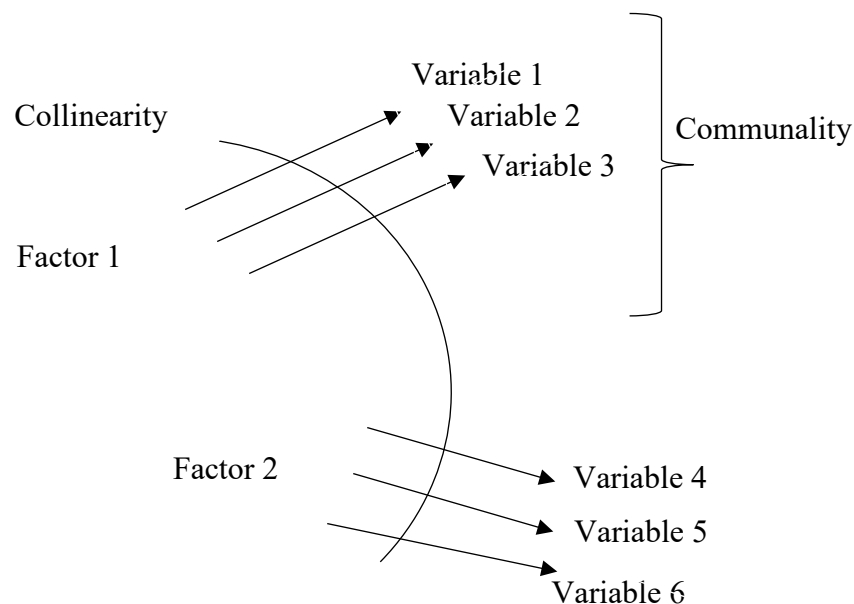
Figure 5.2: EFA factoring and grouping

In this study, EFA seeks to establish variable groupings that can help the research define a sense of direction in how the variables are related, lending support for the research claims involves establishing the relationship not just between individual variables but the variables as groups. The proximity of the items selected for measurement means that variable grouping retained a considerable level of commonality and collinearity. In this study, EFA was conducted using SPSS v. 29 software using a two-step method for item analysis and variable analysis (with N=477). Details of the EFA process is discussed in the following sections.

The EFA involves the analysis of the item and variable groupings. The first step of EFA was conducted to examine the individual item fit into specific factors, which would form variables for scale analysis. Baru et al. (2016), also highlighted that EFA can be used to test the accuracy of items used to measure constructs grouping into likely latent variables and verifying scale reliability. An EFA for all items was run to identify factors of the items. The method involved configuration of SPSS for each of the 65 items with use of principal components analysis (PCA).

5.13.1 Item EFA

The SPSS options involved the selection of principal components analysis (PCA) for EFA. Using principal components is straightforward, principal components are also extensions of correlation values, which makes them easier to understand and use (Hair et al., 2019a). Hair et al. (2021), also highlight that most of the studies use principal component analysis. Considering its simplicity and usability, the PCA was used in this study's EFA. To properly load items and variables into latent factors, rotation is advised, as it increases the accuracy of factor loading (Kline, 2013). Hence, a rotation method is needed, for the study, the analysis considered the Varimax rotation, which is the most common rotation method.

In EFA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test are crucial values, which verify the viability of the analysis. The tests also examine the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Williams et al., 2010). Therefore, the KMO and Bartlett's test are crucial values to report in EFA analysis. KMO estimates the variable adequacy, absolute KMO values should be between 0 and 1, the closer values are to 1 (which is in this case 0.940), the more viable the data is for EFA (Williams et al., 2010). Williams et al. (2010), highlight value above 0.5 are considered good as they show validity of data for exploratory factor analysis.

The Bartlett's test of Sphericity measures the null hypothesis and enables a researcher to know if the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. The reliable values consider a significant result at $p < 0.05$ (approx. X^2 (2080) = 23593.990, $p = 0.001$), which indicates that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and therefore, validates the variables for EFA (Yong & Pearce, 2013). For each test, the KMO and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (N=477) are considered and indicate validity of EFA as reported in Table 5.14 below.

Table 5.14: KMO and Bartlett's test for the 65 items

KMO and Bartlett's test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.940
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	23593.990
	df	2080
	Sig.	<.001

The EFA for the 65 items displayed that all the items loaded into 11 factors. In as much as this does not influence the reliability of the scale, it is important to note the existing statistical factors identified. Watkins (2018) mentions that loaded factors in exploratory factor analysis can represent new latent variables that the data showcases.

An analysis of the extraction of some loadings and the rotated some loadings display total loading values highly concentrated on the first 2 factors. This can potentially contribute to an inconsistency in the adoption and use of the newly identified factors. It is, therefore, important to conduct a detailed analysis of the variables to estimate factor loading values as per the selected measurement model (George & Mallery, 2019). Statistical latent variables also need to be verified. However, even though the measurement model has been shown to be robust according to the reliability analysis, it is still important to conduct a detailed exploratory analysis to test how individual items map into the definitive factors.

The total variances display 11 components which represent 11 factors identified statistically. These can be used as new latent variables, however, for scale development, it is important to understand the cumulative eigenvalues. Cumulative variances, including eigenvalues explain how much a factor stands for or represents a specific variable or item (Watkins, 2018). The cumulative total variances compute to 68.486% (see Table 5.15 below), which indicates an inconsistency in the dataset. Fabrigar et al. (1999), mention that considerable cumulative variances should be above 60%, in as much as variances above 45% are acceptable. Hence, there is the need to identify how the variables load into specific factors listed theoretically.

A specific analysis of the variables, and their collinearity show that factor loadings between items are interchangeable. For instance, there are also some items that load into two factors such as brand perception 1, 13 and 14. Considering the procedure used an absolute value of 0.50, factor selectivity was a huge concern. Watkins (2018) mentions that using the rotated component matrix to analyse factor loadings proves the efficiency of the EFA result. It is important that the study acknowledges 11 factors identified through exploratory factor analysis. Considering the strength of the measurements used and the lower accuracy the of factor loading, EFA also involved verifying the theoretically selected constructs as factors. This means that exploratory factor analysis was carried out for each construct to identify how much an item loads into a theoretically identified construct (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011). Observation of good factor loading values in the second stage EFA approach should indicate model and construct validity.

Table 5.15: Total variance matrix for 65 variables

	Total variance explained								
	Initial eigenvalues			**Extraction sums of squared loadings**			**Rotation sums of squared loadings**		
Component	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	19.211	29.555	29.555	19.211	29.555	29.555	9.996	15.379	15.379
2	9.313	14.327	43.883	9.313	14.327	43.883	8.112	12.480	27.859
3	2.946	4.532	48.415	2.946	4.532	48.415	4.230	6.508	34.367
4	2.360	3.630	52.045	2.360	3.630	52.045	4.205	6.469	40.836
5	2.070	3.184	55.230	2.070	3.184	55.230	3.241	4.986	45.823
6	1.868	2.874	58.104	1.868	2.874	58.104	2.812	4.326	50.149
7	1.708	2.628	60.732	1.708	2.628	60.732	2.779	4.275	54.424
8	1.541	2.371	63.103	1.541	2.371	63.103	2.714	4.176	58.600
9	1.339	2.061	65.164	1.339	2.061	65.164	2.647	4.072	62.672
10	1.108	1.704	66.868	1.108	1.704	66.868	2.070	3.184	65.855
11	1.052	1.618	68.486	1.052	1.618	68.486	1.710	2.631	68.486
12	.982	1.510	69.996						
13	.898	1.381	71.377						
14	.834	1.283	72.660						
15	.764	1.176	73.836						
16	.741	1.140	74.976						
17	.716	1.101	76.077						

18	.695	1.070	77.147						
19	.661	1.017	78.164						
20	.635	.977	79.141						
21	.626	.964	80.105						
22	.603	.928	81.033						
23	.576	.887	81.920						
24	.575	.884	82.804						
25	.539	.830	83.633						
26	.498	.766	84.399						
27	.485	.746	85.146						
28	.462	.711	85.857						
29	.450	.692	86.549						
30	.412	.634	87.183						
31	.398	.612	87.795						
32	.388	.598	88.393						
33	.388	.597	88.989						
34	.376	.579	89.568						
35	.356	.548	90.117						
36	.348	.535	90.652						
37	.329	.506	91.158						
38	.327	.504	91.662						
39	.312	.480	92.141						

40	.302	.465	92.606						
41	.289	.444	93.050						
42	.284	.437	93.488						
43	.269	.414	93.902						
44	.266	.410	94.312						
45	.259	.399	94.711						
46	.251	.386	95.096						
47	.236	.363	95.459						
48	.232	.357	95.817						
49	.222	.342	96.159						
50	.218	.335	96.493						
51	.204	.314	96.808						
52	.198	.304	97.112						
53	.189	.291	97.403						
54	.179	.275	97.678						
55	.178	.274	97.952						
56	.162	.250	98.202						
57	.159	.244	98.446						
58	.150	.231	98.677						
59	.147	.226	98.903						
60	.142	.218	99.121						
61	.131	.201	99.323						

62	.127	.195	99.517						
63	.117	.179	99.697						
64	.102	.157	99.854						
65	.095	.146	100.000						
Extraction method: Principal component analysis									

5.13.2 EFA of each construct

EFA is a powerful tool for evaluating the validity of a measurement structure and developing robust measurement models for subsequent multivariate analyses. Although converting an item into construct EFA analysis is not compulsory, Kline (2013) mentions that construct analysis with EFA contributes to measurement development. Hence, EFA proves the strength of the adopted measurement model and its suitability for the subsequent analysis procedures in multivariate analysis such as SEM (Hair et al., 2019a; Pallant, 2020).

The framework in this study and the already adopted measurements have proved to be reliable, but before using the model in SEM, it is important to understand the variable strengths in their assigned factors. Considering the nature of the study, the researcher determined that using PCA was the best option as principal component EFA results are more common, hence making interpretation more straightforward. Hair et al. (2019a) highlight that PCA is one of the most common methods in EFA. Hair et al. (2019a) recommend configurations for EFA using the PCA and Varimax rotation with an absolute value greater than 0.30. The analysis involved individual extraction of the items in order to estimate how much they load into the latent constructs. Hence, the study uses principal component analysis and Varimax rotation with an absolute value of 0.50.

5.13.2.1 EFA of influencer authenticity

The identified KMO and Bartlett's test values were favourable, indicating that the dataset for influencer authenticity was valid for EFA, considering KMO is 0.853 and the Bartlett's test

significant values were (0.001). Influencer authenticity had 5 items, which focused on honesty, sincerity and the appropriate nature of content to SM users who follow the particular influencer. Considering the items from the adopted measurement, the scale had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.942. This illustrated that the items used, besides the method of analysis, have validity. The purpose of EFA for this study is also to verify the item features and estimate their efficiency in contributing to the constructed model in structural equation modelling. Considering model fitness using item loading strength in EFA is also suggested by Haenlein & Kaplan (2004), as a reliable method of validating model strength for SEM.

Using cumulative values and communalities, it is important to understand how each item contributes to the variable in the selected measurement model, as illustrated by Pallant, (2020). The present percentage of cumulative variance of eigenvalue was at 71.637%, which means that the items represent approximately 0.71 of the variable. The EFA summaries for influencer authenticity show the dependability of the factor fittings by the items. This means that the data can support the model in structural equation modelling. The commonalities were identified also as favourable, considering the highest extraction value was 0.807 and the lowest was 0.619 as illustrated in Table 5.16. The total variances of the construct indicated one factor and each of the items loaded onto the component with favourable factor loading values.

Table 5.16: EFA summary for Influencer Authenticity

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Influencer authenticity 2	.898	.807	
Influencer authenticity 3	.870	.757	
Influencer authenticity 1	.862	.743	

Influencer authenticity 4	.810	.656	
Influencer authenticity 5	.787	.619	
% variance of eigenvalue	71.637		0.901
KMO	.853		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.2 EFA of influencer attraction

To verify the legibility of the EFA analysis, it was important to consider the KMO and Bartlett's test values. Influencer attraction also had favourable KMO (0.823) and Bartlett's test significance (< 0.001) values as reported in Table 5.17. To understand the current item dynamics, it is important to relate the data to that of the original scale, from which this study adopted its measurement from. Influencer Attraction was measured by Yuan et al.'s (2016) study, using LeBron James as the reference influencer. The study by Yuan et al. (2016) used the dynamics of feelings evoked from the participants on the influencer. The adopted measurement yielded a Cronbach alpha value of 0.845 with 5 items, which were quantitatively analysed. The metrics also involved using model analysis.

Compared to Yuan et al.'s (2016) study, the construct in this study obtained a Cronbach alpha of 0.802, which is lower than the adopted measurement. This study has lower contribution values from the items into the variable, compared to a similar variable like influencer authenticity. However, the EFA values for influencer attraction are within the favourable limits.

The cumulative percentage of eigenvalue illustrated that the items represent about 56.235% of the variable, as from the data obtained (see Table 5.17). The nature of the questions, and the methods of data could lead to yielding differences between measurements adopted and

collected data. Field (2013), however, mentions that variance percentages of 50% are acceptable with datasets in social sciences.

The commonality for the items into the influencer attraction construct are lower compared to influencer authenticity. Four out of the five items displayed favourable commonality ties, with the lowest communality standing at 0.454. Pallant (2020), however, highlights that the value was within the valid margin considering acceptable communality values can be as low as 0.3. The items also loaded into a single factor and displayed good factor loading values with the lowest factor value being 0.674. The nature of influencer attraction's measurement allows for lower communalities considering the factor loading values recorded are high and this indicates good validity.

Table 5.17: EFA summary of influencer attraction

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Influencer attraction 2	.801	.642	
Influencer attraction 3	.799	.638	
Influencer attraction 5	.742	.551	
Influencer attraction 1	.725	.526	
Influencer attraction 4	.674	.454	0.802
% variance of eigenvalue	56.235		
KMO	.823		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis			

Rotation method: Varimax

N=477

5.13.2.3 EFA of influencer credibility/ relevance

Following EFA protocol it was key to take concern of the KMO and Bartlett's test values for influencer credibility before considering the data. Influencer credibility/relevance showed strong reliability and validity based on the KMO (0.932) and Bartlett's test values (< 0.001), meaning that the results from the EFA test have a significant output. The overall structure of the variable and its representation by the items in the measurement model showcased robust reliability, which complemented the model structure in SEM.

Yuan et al. (2016), use expertise and trustworthiness as sub-dimensions of the variable, with LeBron James as the case influencer. This study obtained a higher Cronbach alpha value of 0.940 for the dimension of influencer credibility, which indicates higher reliability compared to Yuan et al.'s (2016) study that obtained an average Cronbach alpha value of 0.85 for the two dimensions of influencer credibility. The cumulative percentage eigenvalue 73.961% illustrated that the items effectively represent the variable, contributing to model reliability; as presented in Table 5.18.

Influencer credibility/relevance also revealed reliable extraction commonalities with the principal component analysis. An analysis of factors with the total variance matrix displayed that the items loaded onto two factors indicating the potential of two factors, which represent two statistical latent variables. Influencer credibility/relevance had 10 items loaded into a second factor at a loading value of 0.524 and Influencer credibility/relevance had 11 items loaded on another factor at 0.575. According to Kline (2013), it is important to consider factor loading values in the component matrix to differentiate how a measurement can load it to a specific factor. Jöreskog (1971) emphasized the importance of identifying latent variables that can explain the observed variance in the data. Therefore, the study cannot adopt the second factors as latent variables until these factors are tested against the theoretical identified latent variables.

The analysis of the component matrix indicated that all the items loaded into one component and only two items loaded into the second component. The factor loading values for the second

component are lower than the factor loading values of the first component; 0.704 and 0.668 respectively (see Table 5.18). Component adoption favours factors with the highest factor loading values. Since the factor loading values for the last two items of influencer credibility for the second factor are lower than the first factors, only one component/factor is considered for the variable summation.

The results show that factor loading into the main variable for influencer credibility is reliable and can be considered. Therefore, it is important to considering factor loading values when determining how a measurement can load onto a specific factor can help to ensure that the analysis accurately reflects the underlying theoretical constructs.

Table 5.18: EFA summary for influencer credibility/relevance

Component matrix[a]			
Variables	**Factor**	**Communality**	**Cronbach's alpha**
	1		
Influencer credibility/relevance 3	.856	.824	
Influencer credibility/relevance 5	.844	.768	
Influencer credibility/relevance 1	.842	.813	
Influencer credibility/relevance 4	.834	.783	
Influencer credibility/relevance 7	.819	.670	
Influencer credibility/relevance 2	.810	.733	0.940
Influencer credibility/relevance 8	.798	.682	
Influencer credibility/relevance 6	.798	.638	
Influencer credibility/relevance 9	.746	.677	

Influencer credibility/relevance 10	.704	.770	
Influencer credibility/relevance 11	.668	.777	
% variance of eigenvalue	73.961		
KMO	.932		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.4 EFA of influencer generated traffic

The KMO and Bartlett's test values for influencer generated traffic confirm the suitability of the EFA. These values are 0.732 and < 0.001 respectively, which means that EFA is valid for this item-construct analysis. The Cronbach alpha value of 0.808 surpasses the adopted measurement's average alpha value of 0.785, which indicates high model reliability for the 5 items. The cumulative percentage variance of the eigenvalue is 77.723%, which implies that the item-construct structure is robust and can be relied on for future multivariate analyses (see Table 5.19) as illustrated by Fabrigar & Wegener (2011).

The extraction commonalities with the PCA method are also favourable. The individual items for influencer generated traffic loaded into two factors with the second factor having smaller loading values lower than the first factor. Influencer generated traffic 4 loaded on the second factor at 0.545 and Influencer generated traffic 5 loaded on the second factor at 0.606.

As illustrated by Tabachnick et al. (2013), when multiple factors are presented for a measurement, it is important that the factors are validated using factor loading values. All the items loaded into the first factor with an absolute cut-off value of 0.50. The second factor was successfully loaded by two items which had loading values lower than those of the first factor.

Considering the strength and validity of the adopted measurement model, the first factor is the only considered factor and the second factor was disregarded.

Overall, the results of this exploratory factor analysis demonstrate that the influencer generated traffic constructs are reliable and valid measures. Which is consistent with Jöreskog's (1971) emphasis on the importance of establishing construct validity through factor analysis.

Table 5.19: EFA summary for influencer generated traffic

Component matrix[a]			Communality	Cronbach's Alpha
Variables	**Factor**			
	1			
Influencer generated Traffic 2	.818		.818	
Influencer generated Traffic 1	.788		.759	
Influencer generated Traffic 3	.778		.668	
Influencer generated Traffic 4	.721		.816	
Influencer generated Traffic 5	.677		.825	0.808
% variance of eigenvalue	77.723			
KMO	.732			
Sig	0.001			
Extraction method: Principal component analysis				
Rotation method: Varimax				
N=477				

5.13.2.5 EFA of parasocial relationships

The results of the EFA indicate that the KMO and Bartlett's test values for parasocial relationship are 0.752 and < 0.001, respectively. These values demonstrate that the EFA is appropriate for this item-construct analysis (Field, 2013). The construct position is also found to be sturdy and valid, as evidenced by the Cronbach alpha value of 0.783, which is near the adopted measurement average alpha value of 0.900. This suggests that the model is highly reliable for the four items under investigation.

The cumulative percentage variance of the eigenvalue is 60.718%, which implies that the items reflect 0.607 of the constructs (see Table 5.20). This means that the item-construct structure is resilient and dependable for future multivariate analyses, as illustrated by (Kline, 2013). The high cumulative percentage variance also indicates that the majority of the construct's variability is accounted for by the four items, which adds further validity to the results.

The commonalities identified in the factor analysis were favourable, with the highest extraction value being 0.669 and the lowest being 0.549. The factor loading values recorded were high, indicating good validity (Jöreskog, 1971). Furthermore, the EFA results indicate that the individual items under investigation are interrelated and can be grouped into a single construct. This suggests that the construct is properly represented and reflects the underlying theoretical concept. As also highlighted and proven by Field (2013), the favourable EFA data output provides a strong basis for further research in this area.

Overall, the findings of this study prove that the EFA is a valid and reliable method for exploring the relationship between parasocial relationship and its underlying constructs. The high reliability of the model and the sturdiness of the item-construct structure provide a strong foundation for future research in this field.

Table 5.20: EFA summary for influencer parasocial relationships

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Parasocial relationships 3	.818	.669	
Parasocial relationships 2	.781	.609	
Parasocial relationships 1	.776	.602	0.783
Parasocial relationships 4	.741	.549	
% variance of eigenvalue	60.718		
KMO	.752		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.6 EFA of UGC responsiveness

The outcomes of the EFA demonstrated that the KMO and Bartlett's test values for UGC responsiveness are 0.752 and < 0.001, correspondingly. These values indicate the suitability of the EFA for conducting the item-construct analysis (Hair et al., 2019a). Additionally, the construct position is found to be robust and valid, as demonstrated by the Cronbach alpha value of 0.775. This suggests that the model is highly dependable for the four items under examination. The cumulative percentage variance of the eigenvalue is 61.246%, which implies that the four items represent 0.612 of the construct as reported in Table 5.21. Therefore, the

item-construct structure is durable and reliable for future multivariate analyses. The high cumulative percentage variance denotes that most of the construct's variability is accounted for by the four items, which further enhances the validity of the findings.

Furthermore, the EFA results indicate that the individual items under investigation are interdependent and can be classified into a single construct. This suggests that the construct is a valid representation of the underlying theoretical concept and provides a foundation for further research in this area. Three out of the four items displayed favourable commonalities ties, with the lowest communality standing at 0.302. Hair et al. (2019a); Pallant (2020) and Tabachnick et al. (2013), however, highlighted that the value was within the valid margin considering acceptable communality values can be as low as 0.30.

The results of this study indicate that the EFA is a valid and reliable approach for investigating the association between UGC responsiveness and its underlying constructs. The high reliability of the model and the sturdiness of the item-construct structure form a solid base for future research in this field.

Table 5.21: EFA summary for UGC relationship

Component matrix[a]			Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**			
	1			
UGC responsiveness 3	.883		.779	
UGC responsiveness 1	.830		.688	
UGC responsiveness 4	.825		.680	0.775
UGC responsiveness 2	.549		.302	
% variance of eigenvalue	61.246			

KMO	.752		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.7 EFA of brand salience

The EFA conducted in this study indicated that brand salience is a suitable construct for item-construct analysis. The KMO and Bartlett's test values were found to be 0.771 and < 0.001, respectively. The Cronbach alpha value of 0.850 demonstrates the construct's strong and valid position, even though it is lower than the adopted measurement average alpha value of 0.92. This suggests that the model is highly dependable for the four items under examination. The cumulative percentage variance of the eigenvalue was found to be 69.130%, which indicates that the four items represent 0.691 of the construct as summarized in Table 5.22.

Haenlein & Kaplan (2004) propose that cumulative variance values in social science data range between 0.5 and 0.7, which indicates the obtained eigenvalues for the study are favourable. Therefore, the item-construct structure is dependable and resilient for future multivariate analyses. The high cumulative percentage variance also enhances the validity of the findings as it accounts for most of the construct's variability. The EFA results suggest that the four individual items are interdependent and can be classified into a single construct, providing a valid representation of the underlying theoretical concept for further research in this area. The extraction commonalities with the PCA method were found to be favourable, with the lowest commonality at 0.630 and the highest at 0.754, indicating great validity.

Jöreskog (1971) emphasizes the importance of factor analysis in social science research, which supports the use of EFA as a method for investigating the relationship between variables. The study results demonstrate that the EFA approach is a valid and reliable method for investigating the relationship between brand salience and its underlying constructs. The strong reliability of

the model and the sturdy item-construct structure form a solid foundation for future research in this field.

Table 5.22: EFA summary of brand salience

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Brand salience 2	.869	.754	
Brand salience 4	.833	.694	
Brand salience 3	.829	.687	0.850
Brand salience 1	.794	.630	
% variance of eigenvalue	69.130		
KMO	.771		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.8 EFA of brand resonance

As highlighted, the applicability of EFA analysis depends on the KMO value and the Bartlett's test significant value. The depth of brand resonance's measurement illustrates the good KMO and Bartlett's test, indicating validity for conducing EFA analysis. The Bartlett's test significance value was at below (0.001) and the KMO value was at 0.910.

The robust nature of brand resonance is also supported by the cumulative percentage variance of eigenvalue. From the value, the items represent brand resonance to 67.103%, which is favourable for the adopted measurement, this is also considering the Cronbach alpha of 0.917. Kline (2013) states that multivariate statistics in partial least squares can involve more methods to indicate model reliability, the more the coherence and acceptance of a method, the better the analysis output. Comparing the Cronbach values with the adopted measure (0.905) shows that the measurement is reliable.

An analysis of communality values for this study's data shows relation between the variable and its assigned items, as the highest communality value is 0.845 and the lowest is 0.510; as provided in Table 5.23. The number of items also improves on the scale diversity, which translates to having more items represent a construct (Jöreskog, 1971).

An analysis of the factor loading from the rotated matrix analysis showcased that the items for brand resonance load into two factors, which potentially indicated two latent variables. However, only 3 variables loaded onto the second factor at absolute value of > 0.50; brand resonance 7 loading at -0.517 and brand resonance 6 loading at -0.557 and brand resonance 1 loading at 0.533. The loading values for the second factor are also lower than those of the first factor, suggesting that the second factor can be dismissed, as supported by Hair et al. (2021). Hence, the second factors identified were removed from the EFA report for the construct. In summary, the representation of brand resonance was reliable, meaning that the variable effectively contributed to a robust model in SEM.

Table 5.23: EFA summary for brand resonance

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Brand resonance 4	.798	.656	
Brand resonance 5	.792	.693	
Brand resonance 9	.781	.671	
Brand resonance 8	.776	.669	
Brand resonance 2	.765	.613	
Brand resonance 7	.760	.845	0.917
Brand resonance 3	.734	.713	
Brand resonance 10	.725	.551	
Brand resonance 11	.714	.510	
Brand resonance 6	.701	.802	
Brand resonance 1	.611	.658	
% variance of eigenvalue	67.103		
KMO	.910		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.2.9 EFA of brand perception

The base values for EFA analysis illustrated validity of the construct development. The obtained KMO (0.951) and Bartlett's test (< 0.001) values support that the item-construct exploratory factor analysis is valid for brand perception. The cumulative eigenvalue of the variables used to represent brand perception was 69.424%, and 16 items were utilized for this construct. Considering the Cronbach alpha value of 0.957, the construct development is effectively represented by the items.

The adopted measurement used 6 dimensions to measure evoked feelings and emotions from brand interactions. Lithopoulos (2018) obtained a Cronbach alpha value of 0.92 for the variables, a value lower than this study's Cronbach alpha for brand perception. The comprehensive structure of the variable illustrates that the construct is usable in a SEM.

The extraction communalities with the principal component analysis method are also favourable. The average communality is at 0.709; as shown in Table 5.24, meaning there are considerable inter-item contributions into the brand perception variable. Brand perception 12 has a communality of 0.433, which is less than 0.5, as highlighted by Hair et al. (2019a); Pallant 2020 and Tabachnick et al. (2013) the value is still acceptable. The variable representation for brand perception is also supported by the item number, which means that variable representation by items is diverse.

The individual item for brand perception 14 loaded into two factors with the second factor having smaller loading value (-0.560) lower than the first factor. George & Mallery (2019), mention where multiple factors are presented for a measurement, it is important that the factors are validated using factor loading values. In as much as brand perception loads onto two factors it is only one item that has a factor loading value above 0.5 which is negative and still lower than its respective first factor. In as much as brand perception 12 has a low communality value, it successfully loads onto the first component with an absolute loading value of 0.653. Overall, the results of the study suggest that the construct of brand perception is valid and reliable, as the base values for the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) illustrated the validity of the construct development.

Table 5.24: EFA summary of brand perception

Component matrix[a]		Communality	Cronbach's alpha
Variables	**Factor**		
	1		
Brand perception 11	.856	.733	
Brand perception 6	.852	.742	
Brand perception 9	.848	.720	
Brand perception 7	.842	.711	
Brand perception 8	.826	.684	
Brand perception 3	.817	.669	
Brand perception 15	.814	.831	
Brand perception 5	.805	.669	
Brand perception 2	.780	.728	0.957
Brand perception 10	.775	.633	
Brand perception 14	.768	.847	
Brand Perception 16	.763	.763	
Brand perception 13	.719	.663	
Brand perception 1	.698	.658	
Brand perception 4	.686	.594	
Brand perception 12	.653	.433	

% variance of eigenvalue	69.424		
KMO	.951		
Sig	0.001		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

5.13.3 EFA of latent variables

This research employed a rigorous methodological approach to variable grouping by conducting an EFA of the latent variables. The analysis of latent variables into categories is a common practice in psychology and social science research (Tabachnick et al., 2013). The classification of the latent variables into two factors, namely contributors to social engagement and drivers of brand equity, was complemented by an EFA of the variables.

The PCA was used for the analysis, and a Varimax rotation was implemented to enhance the accuracy and insight of the factor loading analysis. The use of the rotated matrix improved the output of the factor loading analysis, providing better accuracy and insight. The analysis involved the use of two absolute values, namely 0.50 and 0.40. The lowering of the absolute value to 0.40 was intended to incorporate factor loading specifically for UGC responsiveness, as displayed in Table 5.26 below. The EFA of the latent variables into factors also highlights the validity of the data obtained. The present study, therefore, contributes to the existing literature by providing a robust methodological approach to variable grouping using EFA.

Table 5.25: EFA summary of the latent variables with a rotated component matrix for absolute value of .0.50

Rotated component matrix[a]			
Constructs	**Factor**		**Communality**
	1	**2**	
Brand resonance	.898		.811
Brand perception	.838		.710
Brand salience	.697		.562
Influencer generated traffic	.673		.489
Influencer credibility relevance		.857	.741
Influencer authenticity		.851	.725
Influencer attraction		.747	.674
Parasocial relationship		.688	.677
UGC responsiveness			.355
% variance of eigenvalue	63.811		
KMO	.837		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

Table 5.26: EFA summary of the latent variables with a rotated component matrix for absolute value of .0.40

Rotated component matrix[a]			Communality
Constructs	**Factor**		
	1	**2**	
Brand resonance	.898		.811
Brand perception	.838		.710
Brand salience	.697		.562
Influencer generated traffic	.673		.489
Influencer credibility/relevance		.857	.741
Influencer authenticity		.851	.725
Influencer attraction		.747	.674
Parasocial relationships	.451	.688	.677
UGC responsiveness		.444	.355
% variance of eigenvalue	63.811		
KMO	.837		
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: Varimax N=477			

The variable structuring as observed shows it is appropriate for EFA, as shown by the KMO and Bartlett's test values. EFA factor loading shows the factors were two identified factors. Namely, the influencer authenticity, influencer attraction, influencer credibility/relevance and parasocial relationship loading into the second factor/component. Influencer generated traffic and the drivers of brand equity loaded onto the first factor, which accords the variables into one group.

As for UGC responsiveness, an absolute value of 0.50 produces a rotated component matrix that does not load the variable into any factor (see Table 5.25). This prompted an adjustment of the absolute value to 0.40, which favored UGC responsiveness, loading it into the second factor with a loading value of 0.444. This means that the variable grouping into two groups, with the first group containing influencer authenticity, influencer attraction, influencer credibility/relevance, UGC responsiveness and parasocial relationship and the second group having influencer generated traffic and the drivers of BE.

5.14 Confirmatory composite analysis (CCA)

Considering that variable relationships and composite inter-collinearity have been established in the EFA, it is important to understand validity and test the model. For this study, the scope of the research backed up the method used and the data analysis process implemented. This means that the following procedures are impactful. One important step is the assessment of model validity and applicability. This follows EFA, which measures and validates the model that was used in SEM (Hair et al., 2019a). Confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) is the second stage of model assessment following EFA.

CCA is an important procedure, because it enables a researcher to estimate the accuracy and measure the validity of a model (Hair et al., 2022). CCA, as explained by Ciavolino et al. (2021), is a vital statistical method in multivariate statistics, especially for analyses involving SEM. CCA validates the usability of measurement models and analyzes composite construct validity. The method also provides a comprehensive framework for variable analysis which allows the method to address signal errors (Henseler et al., 2014). Contributions from different authors confirm the importance of CCA as a research method in multivariate statistcs.

In this study, CCA was generated using SmartPLS 4 Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) by using the consistent PLS-SEM (PLSc-SEM) algorithm. The SmartPLS 4 algorithm allows for the analysis of latent variables using PLS consistent algorithms (PLSc), which have better output in factor loading analysis scenarios (Yıldız, 2022). Consistent PLS-SEM (PLSc) is a method that corrects estimates of reflectively measured constructs by utilizing a unique reliability coefficient. In contrast to traditional PLS, PLSc consistently estimates inter-construct correlations and indicator loadings, thereby overcoming the consistency issues commonly associated with estimating common factor models (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; Yıldız, 2022). Therefore, by using CCA with consistent PLS-SEM, the study ensures that the model is effectively represented with considerable construct validity, flexibility, and output efficiency.

The consideration of construct dynamics in data analysis is crucial in multivariate statistics, giving multivariate statistics an upper hand over single-indicator measures. As illustrated by Bagozzi & Yi (1988), single-indicator measures are likely to have errors that prevent the measures from capturing the complexity of the constructs. Anderson & Gerbing (1988) agree that for multivariate analysis, CCA provides the edge by allowing deeper measurement dynamics. CCA enables a researcher to improve on the usability of the results by ensuring the data is validated through multiple observable phenomena. CCA also allows for higher accuracy and relibility in analysis, given that it allows an analysis of discriminant validity and covergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Hence, CCA enables researchers to examine these aspects, ensuring that their measurement models accurately represent the constructs under investigation.

Further emphasizing the significance of CCA, Henseler et al. (2014) present a comprehensive guide to performing CCA within the context of SEM. The authors stress that CCA helps researchers evaluate the internal consistency and composite reliability of constructs, ensuring that composite indicators accurately measure the latent variables. Moreover, CCA aids in identifying and addressing potential issues such as indicator-specific measurement errors or misspecification of the measurement model, thus enhancing the overall quality of the SEM analysis (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

The need for CCA in structural equation modeling is well recognized by researchers in the field. Notable authors such as Bagozzi & Yi (1988), Anderson & Gerbing (1988), and Henseler

et al. (2014) highlight the importance of CCA in improving the reliability, validity, and overall quality of SEM studies. By utilizing CCA, researchers can ensure that their measurement models accurately represent the underlying constructs and provide a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation.

5.14.1 CCA measurement model evaluation

The analysis of a model in EFA and CCA, as Hair et al. (2022) illustrate, requires consideration of various dynamics, such as the nature of the data and the type of model. These dynamics play a crucial role in assessing variable reliability and the strength of relationships in CCA (Hair et al., 2022). The present study takes into account the importance of model-supporting statistics during data analysis. The factors that influence these statistics are influenced by the study's sample size of N=477 and 65 variables. The model was informed by the values of CCA factor loading, multicollinearity, reliability, and construct validity, including average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity.

The study's model construction required that each variable is individually loaded into the SmartPLS 4 interface. The first step involved fitting the model data from the summarized data about observed variables. The items and variables were then listed on SmartPLS 4, and the graphical interface is used to connect the variables to their corresponding items. Figure 5.3 summarizes the values of the variable contributions and was adjusted to resemble the conceptual framework. The variable relationships are represented by lines that link the variables.
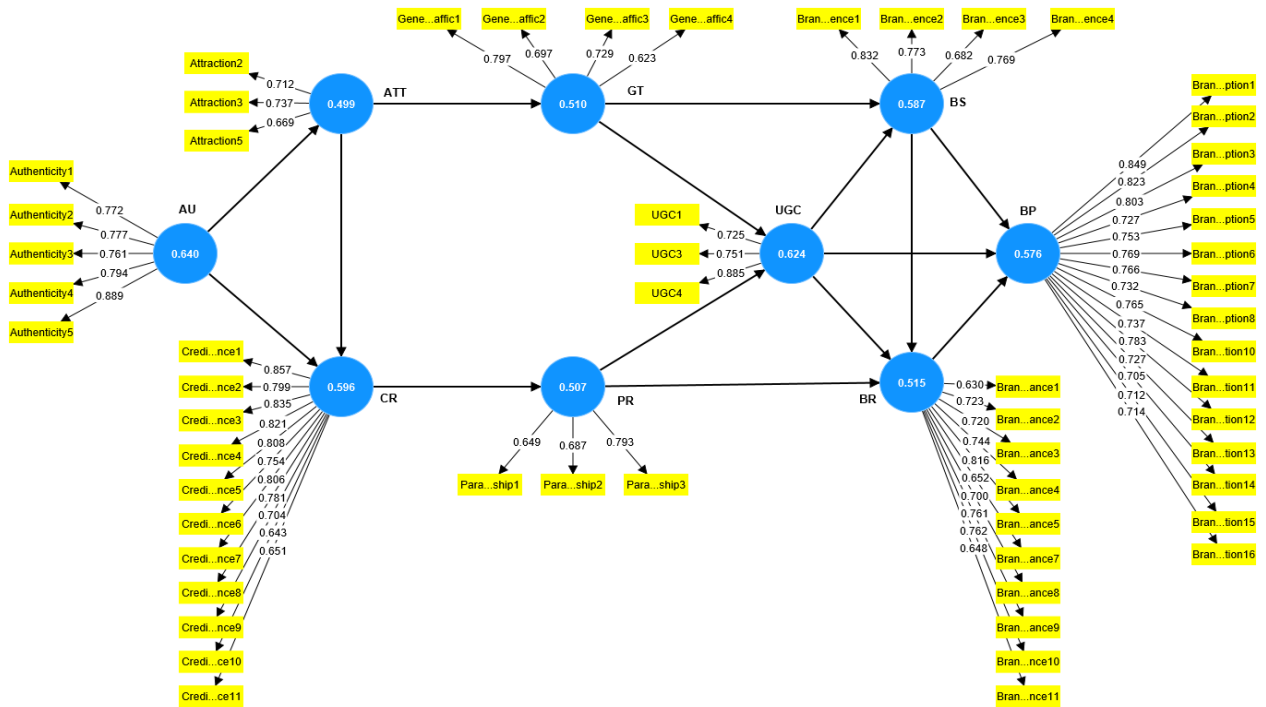
Figure 5.3: The full measurement model (adjusted for factor loading)

AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

As stated by Hair et al. (2020), factor loading, multicollinearity, reliability, construct validity including AVE and discriminant validity are all integral components of CCA in SEM, and they were detailed in the next subsections.

5.14.2 Factor loading

Factor loading is a key concept in CCA within the context of SEM. The factor loading values represent the correlation between an observed indicator and its corresponding latent construct (Schuberth, 2021). The factor loading indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the observed indicator and the underlying latent variable. In CCA, according to Hair et al. (2019a), factor loadings can range from -1 to +1, with high factor loadings indicating that the observed indicator effectively captures the construct's variation, while a low or negative factor loading suggests weak or reverse relationships. Schuberth (2021) and Hair et al. (2019a;

2022) provide valuable insights into the importance of factor loadings in CCA analysis for assessing the strength of the relationship between each variable and the underlying factor.

In CCA within the context of SEM, good factor loading values are indicative of a strong relationship between the observed indicators and their corresponding latent constructs. Each construct must have at least three indicators, as illustrated by Hair et al. (2011). Factor loadings should be statistically significant, indicating that the observed indicator is significantly associated with the latent construct (Ciavolino et al., 2021). Generally, a factor loading of 0.40 or higher is considered adequate, and factor loadings above 0.50 or 0.60 are substantial and indicate a robust relationship (Hair et al., 2019b).

The sign of the factor loading is important and should align with the expected direction of the relationship between the observed indicator and the latent construct. Positive factor loadings indicate a positive association, while negative factor loadings represent a negative association (Ciavolino et al., 2021). Factor loadings should be interpretable and make theoretical sense in the context of the study. Ringle et al. (2023) provide evidence that the factor loading values are important for assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement model, these values are crucial for drawing meaningful conclusions from the data.

The present study met these criteria, hence, the observed values obtained for the variables in this study are consistent with the recommendations. The observed indicators are conceptually aligned with the latent constructs they are intended to measure. In cases where the observed indicators do not align with the latent construct, revisiting the measurement model and making modifications may be necessary. This study used outer loading for factor loading analysis, which is the prescribed method according to Hubona et al. (2021, pp. 4-5). Hubona et al. (2021) indicate that appropriate factor loading values for outer loading are 0.70 or above. However, values from 0.40 to 0.70 are accepted if they do not impact positively on the average variance extracted (AVE) or on Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Hair et al., 2019a). The factor loading values obtained in this study are 0.60 and above, which are usable and considerable values.

Although the model measures 65 items and 9 latent variables, the variable contributions are favourable. Item loading is explored in EFA, with the loading values being slightly higher. However, for CCA, Hair et al. (2019a) recommend dropping items to increase latent variable reliability and contribution to the model. This study employed a reflective measurement, which

Henseler et al. (2009) describe as a model where the variables are reflected by measurements. The development of the measurement involves the analysis and consideration of the latent variable. The selected measures have items that reflect the variable, meaning that model construction starts with the variable and extends to the measures. Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2019a) indicate that reflective measures have considerable inter-item correlation and are supported by good factor loading and Cronbach's alpha values.

In this study, the elements supporting the reflective nature of the model are within the stated statistical thresholds. This means that item dropping for model validity was implementable, and it was used for the study's CCA process. In the CCA analysis and model measurement, a total of five items were excluded from the model due to their impact on the reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). In addition, the variable 'Brand Perception 9' was removed due to collinearity. The researcher also dropped the variable 'Brand Resonance 6' from the model since it loaded lower than 0.60, as was implemented in this study. In a reflective study, the validity of the model is determined by the overall output values (Henseler et al., 2009). This implies that any items that hinder the ability of the model to obtain values are removed. The factor loading output is summarized in Table 5.27.

Table 5.27: CCA factor loading

Variables	ATT	AU	BP	BR	BS	CR	GT	PR	UGC
Authenticity1		0.772							
Authenticity2		0.777							
Authenticity3		0.761							
Authenticity4		0.794							
Authenticity5		0.889							
Attraction1	**Item was dropped**								
Attraction2	0.712								
Attraction3	0.737								
Attraction4	**Item was dropped**								
Attraction5	0.669								
Credibility_Relevance1						0.857			
Credibility_Relevance2						0.799			
Credibility_Relevance3						0.835			
Credibility_Relevance4						0.821			
Credibility_Relevance5						0.808			
Credibility_Relevance6						0.754			
Credibility_Relevance7						0.806			
Credibility_Relevance8						0.781			

Credibility_Relevance9						0.704			
Credibility_Relevance10						0.643			
Credibility_Relevance11						0.651			
Generated_Traffic1							0.797		
Generated_Traffic2							0.697		
Generated_Traffic3							0.729		
Generated_Traffic4							0.623		
Generated_Traffic5	**Item was dropped**								
Parasocial_Relationship1								0.649	
Parasocial_Relationship2								0.687	
Parasocial_Relationship3								0.793	
Parasocial_Relationship4	**Item was dropped**								
UGC Responsiveness1									0.725
UGC Responsiveness2	**Item was dropped**								
UGC Responsiveness3									0.751
UGC Responsiveness4									0.885
Brand_Salience1					0.832				
Brand_Salience2					0.773				
Brand_Salience3					0.682				
Brand_Salience4					0.769				
Brand_Resonance1				0.630					

Brand_Resonance2				0.723					
Brand_Resonance3				0.720					
Brand_Resonance4				0.744					
Brand_Resonance5				0.816					
Brand_Resonance6	**Item was dropped**								
Brand_Resonance7				0.652					
Brand_Resonance8				0.700					
Brand_Resonance9				0.761					
Brand_Resonance10				0.762					
Brand_Resonance11				0.648					
Brand_Perception1			0.849						
Brand_Perception2			0.823						
Brand_Perception3			0.803						
Brand_Perception4			0.727						
Brand_Perception5			0.753						
Brand_Perception6			0.769						
Brand_Perception7			0.766						
Brand_Perception8			0.732						
Brand_Perception9	**Item was dropped**								
Brand_Perception10			0.765						
Brand_Perception11			0.737						

Brand_Perception12			0.783						
Brand_Perception13			0.727						
Brand_Perception14			0.705						
Brand_Perception15			0.712						
Brand_Perception16			0.714						

AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

5.14.3 Indicator multicollinearity

Multicollinearity is an important characteristic of CCA and SEM. Hair et al. (2022) provide valuable insights into the use of multicollinearity for assessing composite construct reliability and validity in SEM analysis. It involves the aggregation of multiple observed indicators to form a composite measure of a latent variable. By combining several indicators, multicollinearity reduces the impact of measurement error and increases the precision of measurement in capturing the latent construct (Hair et al., 2022).

It is important to consider multicollinearity in factor and composite analysis, as it can affect the accuracy of the model's predictions. In least squares analysis, variable relationships are a critical dynamic that must be considered. As illustrated by Hair et al. (2019a), multicollinearity occurs when the predictor variables in a model are highly interrelated, making it difficult to determine the unique contribution of each variable in explaining the dependent variable.

One commonly used measure to assess multicollinearity is the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF quantifies the extent to which the variance of the estimated regression coefficient is inflated due to multicollinearity (Marcoulides & Raykov, 2019). It measures how much the standard error of a regression coefficient is increased when compared to a situation without multicollinearity. A VIF value of 1 indicates no multicollinearity, while values greater than 1 indicate increasing levels of multicollinearity. In the context of VIF, a commonly used threshold for assessing multicollinearity is between 1 and 5.

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Hair et al. (2019a) discuss collinearity values in CCA and prescribes useable threshold in partial least squares statistics. If the VIF value for a predictor variable exceeds 5, it suggests a high level of multicollinearity and indicates that the variable may be problematic in the model. Conversely, a VIF value below 1 suggests no or very low multicollinearity for that variable, while when multicollinearity is present, it can lead to several issues (Marcoulides & Raykov, 2019). Kutner et al. (2004) explain that firstly, multicollinearity can cause challenging to interpret the individual effects of the predictor variables accurately, as their contributions may be confounded by the presence of other highly correlated variables. Second, the standard errors of the regression coefficients tend to be inflated, potentially leading to unreliable statistical significance tests. Finally, multicollinearity can destabilize the regression model, making it sensitive to small changes in the data.

Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019a) and Marcoulides & Raykov (2019), the VIF values indicate that the variables are within the acceptable threshold limits for collinearity (see Table 2.28). However, since the sample size is 477, it is important to consider the overall contribution of factor loadings and how they influence multicollinearity, as suggested by Marcoulides & Raykov (2019). The factor loadings, which represent the strength of the relationship between each variable and the underlying factor, range between 0.40 and 0.70, which is favourable. Other indicators also point out that further modifications of the variables are not necessary, except for the variable 'brand perception 9', which has been dropped due to collinearity.

Overall, the CCA analysis suggests that the model is not overly affected by multicollinearity and that the remaining variables are suitable for use in the model. This is as shown in the Table 5.28 below:

Table 5.28: Multicollinearity statistics (VIF) for indicators

Variables	VIF
Authenticity1	2.833
Authenticity2	3.856
Authenticity3	2.913
Authenticity4	2.090
Authenticity5	1.953
Attraction2	1.519
Attraction3	1.557
Attraction5	1.432
Credibility_Relevance1	3.849
Credibility_Relevance2	2.877
Credibility_Relevance3	3.979
Credibility_Relevance4	3.385
Credibility_Relevance5	3.400
Credibility_Relevance6	2.488
Credibility_Relevance7	2.693
Credibility_Relevance8	3.095
Credibility_Relevance9	2.725
Credibility_Relevance10	2.866
Credibility_Relevance11	2.708

Generated_Traffic1	2.073
Generated_Traffic2	2.363
Generated_Traffic3	1.790
Generated_Traffic4	1.268
Parasocial_Relationship1	1.545
Parasocial_Relationship2	1.596
Parasocial_Relationship3	1.443
UGC Responsiveness 1	1.847
UGC Responsiveness 3	2.254
UGC Responsiveness 4	1.841
Brand_Salience1	1.839
Brand_Salience2	2.350
Brand_Salience3	2.087
Brand_Salience4	1.974
Brand_Resonance1	1.755
Brand_Resonance2	2.193
Brand_Resonance3	2.345
Brand_Resonance4	2.669
Brand_Resonance5	2.723
Brand_Resonance7	2.313
Brand_Resonance8	2.371

Brand_Resonance9	2.345
Brand_Resonance10	2.103
Brand_Resonance11	1.817
Brand_Perception1	2.917
Brand_Perception2	3.756
Brand_Perception3	2.923
Brand_Perception4	2.042
Brand_Perception5	3.388
Brand_Perception6	4.243
Brand_Perception7	3.778
Brand_Perception8	3.265
Brand_Perception10	2.500
Brand_Perception11	3.522
Brand_Perception12	1.833
Brand_Perception13	2.587
Brand_Perception14	4.016
Brand_Perception15	4.444
Brand_Perception16	3.379

5.14.4 Reliability analysis

The quality of a measurement model is determined by assessing the extent to which the data reflects the model. In SEM, the elements and dynamics that illustrate model's reliability and fitness are important indicators of the quality of the structure and components (Hair et al., 2011). Structured component analysis, therefore, relies on statistical dynamics such as to obtain Cronbach alpha and composite reliability values to evaluate the model's reliability and consistency.

Composite reliability (CR) analysis is one way to assess the internal reliability and consistency of a structural model (Schuberth, 2021; Mohajan, 2017). The strength of composite constructs is determined by the analysis of the composite reliability, which combines several observable indicators to analyse the composite efficiency of the latent variables. According to Hair et al. (2019b), an analysis of CR values provides an indication of the consistency of the model. The nature of the model reliability, when analysed using composite reliability, is derived from a comparison of the error variances and the factor loadings of the observed indicators.

Another commonly used statistical measure to assess the internal consistency of a measurement model, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022) is Cronbach alpha, which is also obtained and reported in this study. It is a measure of reliability that indicates how closely related a set of items or variables are as a group. In other words, it measures how well the items in a scale or test are measuring the same underlying construct. Cronbach alpha values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

In this study, considering an analysis of the factor loadings for the latent variables, the obtained composite reliability values (rho_a), (rho_c) and Cronbach alpha are within the stated limit. Considering CCA maximizes extracted variances from the exogenous variables, composite reliability is an important indicator of model validity. Overall, composite reliability analysis and Cronbach alpha are a crucial approach for evaluating the reliability and validity of structural models, which are essential for ensuring the quality of the structure and its components.

The CR values obtained represent the proportion of the true variance in the composite latent variables relative to the total variance. This accounts for both the captured common variance and measurement error by the model, as defined by Fornell & Larcker (1981). CR values are

also useful for evaluating the consistency of the relationships between the constructs in the model, as they consider the captured common variance and measurement error. Sarstedt et al. (2022) suggest that composite reliability values ranging from 0.60 to 0.95 are favourable and indicative of high model validity. These values provide insight into the quality of the measurement model and the consistency of the adopted constructs, which is an important component of ensuring good internal consistency of the model. In addition to composite reliability, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.60 or higher is generally considered acceptable and can provide additional insight into the quality of the measurement model in SEM (Hair et al., 2019a). Favourable composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values, such as those obtained in this study, indicate good internal consistency of the adopted measurement model (Latif et al., 2020).

The high values of composite reliability and Cronbach alpha are desirable, as they indicate that the composite construct is a reliable and valid representation of the measured variables (Hair et al., 2019b). The obtained composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values for each variable provide greater confidence in the measurement model. Hubona et al. (2021) suggest that a well-constructed structural model with favourable composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values can be used in subsequent analyses. The obtained values provide a robust criterion for adopting the constructed model and comparing it with competing models in similar discussions involving the research question. In addition, the AVE and discriminant validity are important dynamics that complement the results obtained from CR analysis (Henseler et al., 2015). In addition the inclusion of Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, (rho_a) and (rho_c) values provides further support of measurement reliability. Overall, the reliability analysis is a crucial approach for evaluating the reliability and validity of structural models.

Table 5.29: Constructs' reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability)

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	N
Authenticity	0.900	0.901	0.899	477
Attraction	0.748	0.751	0.749	477
Credibility-Relevance	0.941	0.944	0.942	477
Generated-Traffic	0.801	0.811	0.805	477
Parasocial-Relationship	0.755	0.761	0.754	477
UGC-Responsiveness	0.832	0.841	0.832	477
Brand-Salience	0.851	0.854	0.850	477
Brand-Resonance	0.913	0.916	0.914	477
Brand-Perception	0.954	0.954	0.953	477

N= Number of participants

5.14.5 Construct validity

Henseler et al. (2015) highlighted that construct validity is a key factor in assessing the reliability and validity of a structural model. Researchers must recognize that convergent validity is a critical determinant of model applicability in research, as emphasized by Ringle et al. (2023). Schuberth (2021) illustrates how construct validity assesses the measurement instrument and establishes how it is represented in the theoretical concept.

To establish construct validity, the author employed various techniques and methods to support the construct validity of the observed indicators. Several methods and strategies can be used to analyse construct validity. In this study, the consideration of convergent validity and discriminant validity examined the degree of agreement between the latent constructs.

Convergent validity measures the degree of convergence or agreement within multiple indicators that are supposed to represent the same construct (Afthanorhan et al., 2020).

5.14.5.1 Convergent validity: Average variance extracted (AVE)

The average variance extracted (AVE) is a physical measurement used in CCA (Hair et al., 2022). The values of AVE represent the amount of variance obtained when a construct is compared to the measurement error. The AVE reflects the ability of a construct to explain the variability of its observed indicators. High AVE values indicate a strong relationship between the data indicators and the latent variables, indicating a degree of agreement or convergence between the indicators used to measure a construct (Ringle et al., 2023). Measures of convergent validity using extracted variances in CCA imply that the observed indicators are effective in measuring the supposed constructs.

The consideration of latent variables for average rate variance extraction in this study aimed to highlight the strength of the indicators representing the intended constructs, as supported by Hair et al. (2019a) and Fonell & Lacker (1981). The study utilized a consistent PLS (PLSc) algorithm to obtain the AVE, and the results were reported in Table 5.30 below.

The recommended AVE values for good model validity vary across different fields and depend on the specific context of the study. However, Hair et al. (2019a) and Fornell & Larcker (1981) provide general guidelines and benchmarks for interpreting AVE values. Fornell & Larcker (1981), state in their seminal work on assessing structural equation models that AVE values above 0.5 indicate good convergent validity. AVE values below 0.50 may indicate insufficient convergent validity, suggesting that the construct does not explain a significant proportion of the variance in the observed indicators. Hair et al. (2019a, b) recommend an AVE threshold of 0.50 as a minimum criterion for acceptable construct validity. They suggest that AVE values below 0.50 may indicate weak or inadequate measurement models.

It is important to note that the interpretation of AVE values should be considered alongside other measures, such as factor loadings, composite reliability, and theoretical expectations (Muhamad Safiih & Azreen, 2016). AVE values should be interpreted within the specific research context and in line with established guidelines and benchmarks in the relevant field. The study has considered the different statistical criterion in CCA to back up the listed AVE.

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The study's model has AVE values that are within the recommended range for good construct validity, as displayed in Table 5.30. For influencer attraction, the measurement technique revealed an AVE value of 0.499, which is close to the recommended threshold of 0.50. While Fornell & Larcker (1981) suggest that an AVE value of less than 0.50 indicates that the measurement error is greater than the amount of variance explained by the construct, which may indicate that the construct is not well-measured by its indicators, it's important to note that in some cases, such as when the construct is difficult to measure or when the sample size is small, an AVE value below 0.50 may still be acceptable.

On the other hand, Hair et al. (2019a) suggest that AVE values from 0.40 also indicate convergent validity when the composite reliability value is over 0.70. Nevertheless, it's important to consider other measures of construct validity, such as factor loadings and composite reliability, alongside AVE values.

The variances captured are larger than the variance to the measurement error, indicating that the obtained AVE values show model consistency with the errors being within the limits prescribed by Hair et al. (2019a) and Fornell & Larcker (1981). Overall, the study's results suggest good construct validity for the measurement technique used for influencer attraction, as well as for the other constructs examined in this study.

Table 5.30: Average variance extracted (AVE) results

Constructs	AVE
Authenticity	0.640
Attraction	0.499
Credibility-Relevance	0.596
Generated-Traffic	0.510
Parasocial-Relationship	0.507
UGC-Responsiveness	0.624
Brand-Salience	0.587
Brand-Resonance	0.515
Brand-Perception	0.576

5.14.5.2 Discriminant validity

Maintaining the uniqueness of constructs by separating relationships within statistical margins is essential when conducting CCA, as illustrated by Henseler et al. (2015). Therefore, discriminant validity is a crucial factor to consider in analysing construct validity, as highlighted by Henseler et al. (2015) and Henseler et al., (2009).

Discriminant validity analyses examines the distinction between different constructs, which allows for a margin of separation that enables each construct to remain unique. By estimating the possibility of overlapping constructs, where two constructs can exist but represent the same observable variable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), discriminant validity values within the allowed ranges mean that the constructs, while related, are still inimitable, and their relationship can be analysed effectively. The consideration of discriminant validity allows a

model to capture the unique aspects of its contributing constructs, which in turn improves the model's overall fitness.

According to Gu et al. (2019), discriminant validity is measured by comparing the correlation and the AVE square root values. If the AVE square root for the measured construct is greater than the correlation between the respective construct and other constructs in a model, then the discriminant validity is sufficient. Different criteria have been imposed on discriminant validity values for model fitness. In SmartPLS 4, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) is a considered checkpoint for analysing discriminant validity. The HTMT analyses construct validity by considering the ratio distance between the construct's correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). The method was introduced by Henseler et al. (2015) to supplement traditional discriminant validity analysis methods such as cross-loadings and Fornell-Lacker criteria. As Sarstedt et al. (2022) clearly stated, the HTMT ratio is the best criterion to consider for reliability compared to Fornell-Larcker criterion or cross-loadings. The HTMT ratio can be configured on SmartPLS 4, and it was obtained for the CCA method implemented in this study.

Hair et al. (2022) describe the HTMT ratio as a method for assessing discriminant validity in CCA, which is calculated by comparing the correlations between constructs (heterotrait correlations) to correlations within constructs (monotrait correlations). The goal of discriminant validity assessment is to ensure that a reflective construct has the strongest relationships with its own indicators (Hair et al., 2022). A lower HTMT ratio indicates stronger discriminant validity, implying that the constructs are more distinct from each other (Henseler et al., 2015).

The HTMT approach provides a clear and intuitive way to evaluate discriminant validity in CCA. The usability of HTMT in CCA lies in its ability to address limitations associated with traditional approaches. Sarstedt et al. (2022) argue that the HTMT ratio is a better criterion for reliability compared to the Fornell-Larcker criterion or cross-loadings. Unlike the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which relies on comparing AVE values to squared inter-construct correlations, the HTMT approach directly compares correlations between constructs, providing a more accurate assessment of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022). The HTMT approach has gained popularity because it accounts for measurement error and potential bias in estimating correlations between constructs, leading to more reliable results.

Henseler et al. (2015) provide guidelines for interpreting HTMT values. They suggest that an HTMT value below 0.85 indicates acceptable discriminant validity, while an HTMT value above 0.90 suggests potential issues with discriminant validity. These thresholds provide researchers with a benchmark to evaluate the strength of discriminant validity between constructs. As highlighted by Henseler et al. (2015), researchers can obtain bootstrap estimates and confidence intervals for the HTMT ratios, allowing them to assess the statistical significance of discriminant validity.

The HTMT ratio was configured in SmartPLS 4 and obtained for the CCA method implemented in this study. There is an automated procedure to calculate HTMT values based on bootstrapping. The method obtained values within the recommended threshold, as the HTMT values for all the variables are below 0.85. The measured constructs support the discriminant validity of the scales used. Table 5.31 below summarizes the HTMT ratios for the latent variables and their correlation, showing considerable HTMT values, meaning the variables are dissimilar.

Table 5.31: Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

Constructs	ATT	AU	BP	BR	BS	CR	GT	PR	UGC
Attraction	*1.000*								
Authenticity	0.656	*1.000*							
Brand-Perception	0.379	0.123	*1.000*						
Brand-Resonance	0.383	0.161	0.797	*1.000*					
Brand-Salience	0.479	0.279	0.579	0.668	*1.000*				
Credibility-Relevance	0.662	0.691	0.198	0.207	0.342	*1.000*			
Generated-Traffic	0.492	0.225	0.422	0.584	0.457	0.251	*1.000*		
Parasocial-Relationship	0.740	0.507	0.481	0.520	0.542	0.546	0.472	*1.000*	
UGC-Responsiveness	0.364	0.309	0.299	0.309	0.386	0.434	0.283	0.437	*1.000*

1.000 = Correlation between variable (in **bold**); AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

5.15 Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a statistical method that is commonly used in social science research to test and validate a theoretical model that explains relationships between variables (Hoyle, 1995). It is a multivariate analysis technique that can handle multiple relationships among variables (Hair et al. 2021), making it an appropriate method for this study's quantitative techniques. SEM involves a statistical representation of variables, which are projected into variable relationships. For this study, SEM involves a multi-stage hierarchal analysis after the assessment of validity via EFA and CCA. Following these assessments, Henseler et al. (2009) recommend evaluating and assessing models using SEM as a reliable method of quantitative analysis.

In this study, SEM is assessed using SmartPLS 4 Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The models are evaluated using a consistent PLS-SEM bootstrapping (BTc) algorithm technique with 5000 subsamples and a 95% confidence interval method to test the study's relationships. These techniques are frequently used in SEM to estimate the reflectively measured parameters of the model and the relationships between constructs (Hair et al., 2017; Becker et al., 2023). Additionally, multiple group analysis (MGA) is employed to examine the differences between two groups of different ages, which is a useful method for identifying potential differences between groups (Cheah et al., 2023).

Considering the study's theoretical framework and the type of data obtained, the study implemented the consistent PLS (PLSc) approach. As Yıldız (2022) points out, consistent PLS (PLSc) is an extension of traditional PLS and offers a more comprehensive and detailed approach to modelling. Unlike traditional PLS, which only estimates path coefficients, PLSc requires correlations between latent variable scores and indicators. This is necessary in order to accurately estimate the path coefficients in a least squares manner (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; Yıldız, 2022).

According to Dijkstra & Henseler (2015a, 2015b), latent variable scores are not essential for consistent PLS (PLSc) analysis. However, consistent latent variable correlations provide enough information to estimate the path coefficients using consistent PLS-SEM bootstrapping (BTc). PLSc provides a more reliable and accurate approach to modelling than traditional PLS and can be used to further analyse and understand relationships between variables (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; 2015b). Furthermore, to test the relationships between constructs and obtain appropriate results, this study utilized a one-tailed test at a 95% significance level with a P-value of 0.05 and a T-value of 1.645, due to the direction of the study's hypotheses (Privitera, 2017; Pagano, 2012).

The method provides an already validated and structurally robust model, which is presented in Figure 5.4.
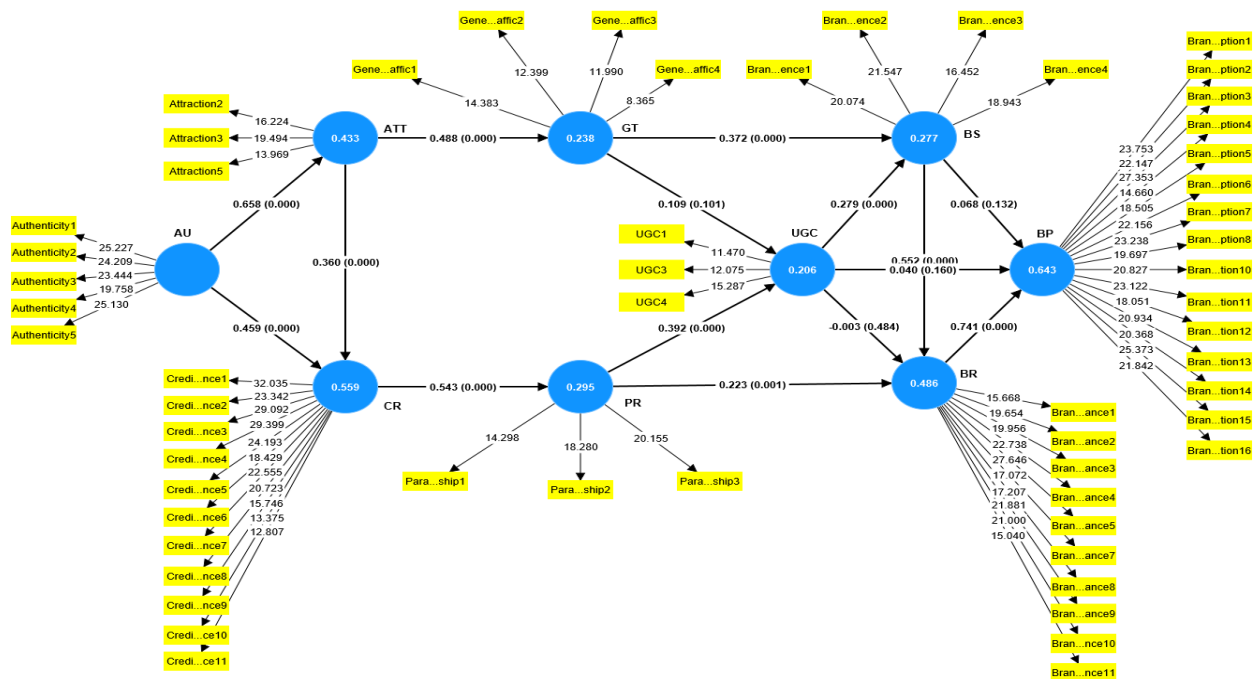

Figure 5.4: The structural equation modelling analysis (complete model – all participants)

AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception.

5.15.1 Evaluation of SEM

Through the study's SEM techniques, the researcher investigated the relationships between constructs by using statistical entities to analyse path coefficients. Statistical entities to analyse path relationships, represented as path coefficients included beta coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values; as detailed in the following subsections. The SEM was applied to both models: the complete participants' model (n=477, all participants) and the focus age group' model (n=262, participants aged 28-45) (see Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5). Furthermore, as suggested by Hair et al. (2019a, b), the study assessed the VIF for multicollinearity in the SEM to evaluate the extent to which multicollinearity may have affected the validity of the SEM results. In addition, the study assessed the predictive power to evaluate the SEM by conducting the coefficient of determination (R^2-square and Q^2-square; see Shmueli et al., 2019).

Additionally, the study evaluated the goodness of fit (GoF) of the models by assessing the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR). The SRMR had a value of 0.057 for the complete model (n=477) and 0.063 for the model with the main age group (n=262). The SRMR values indicate that the models had a good fit, suggesting that they accurately represented the relationships between the variables, as termed by Hu & Bentler, (1999). The validity of the model representation was also backed up by the factor loadings, which were found to be within the recommended values (see Table 5.27), further supporting the models' validity and strengthening the study's internal consistency.

Hence, through using a rigorous statistical approach, these analyses were conducted to evaluate the internal validity of the models and confirm their accuracy in representing the data, which is critical for drawing valid conclusions from the study results.

5.15.2 Analysis of path coefficients

In SEM, path coefficient including beta coefficient, t-value and p-value are measured to evaluate the significance of the relationship between constructs (Hair et al., 2019a). The beta coefficient, as defined by Hair et al. (2019b; 2020), measures the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and ranges from -1 to +1. Specifically, a value of 0 indicates no significant relationship, while a value of 1 indicates a

strong positive relationship and a value of -1 indicates a strong negative relationship (Hair et al., 2019b).

Moreover, this research tested the statistical significance of the relationship between two variables in SEM using t values. It is calculated by dividing the beta coefficient by its standard error and indicates how far the path coefficient is from zero in terms of standard errors (Hair et al., 2021). If the t-value is greater than 1.645 or less than -1.645, this suggests that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, which means that there is less than a 5% chance that the relationship occurred by chance (Privitera, 2017).

The p-value, on the other hand, is a measure of the probability that the relationship between the variables occurred by chance. According to Privitera (2017), a p-value less than 0.05 is generally considered statistically significant, and a p-value of 0.001 indicates strong support for the hypothesis, which means that the null hypothesis of no relationship can be rejected. Therefore, if the beta coefficient is significant (i.e., the t-value is greater than 1.645 or less than -1.645 with a p-value less than 0.05), there is evidence of a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Hair et al., 2019a and Privitera, 2017).

To evaluate the extent of multicollinearity in SEM, this study also assessed the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Hair et al., 2019a). The VIF is a measure of how much the variance of a regression coefficient estimate is inflated due to the presence of multicollinearity among constructs (Kutner et al., 2004).

The VIF values in this SEM models, ranged from 1.000 to 1.950 (see Table 5.32 and Table 5.33), indicating that multicollinearity was not a major concern in the SEM models. According to Hair et al. (2019a, b), a VIF value less than 3 indicates a low degree of multicollinearity, which is great, while a value between 3 and 5 indicates a moderate degree of multicollinearity, which is possible of issue. A value greater than 5 indicates a high degree of multicollinearity, which is a problem. Therefore, the study assessed the VIF in the SEM to ensure the validity of the results and to confirm the accuracy of the models in representing the data. Furthermore, as highlighted by Hair et al. (2019a) and Privitera (2017), values of beta coefficient, t-value and p-value are considered indicators of relationship significance. The study, hence, took into consideration the three indicators for significance analysis, which is interpreted in the succeeding paragraph.

The study's SEM analysis (complete model – all participants) revealed significant relationships in 11 of the 15 construct relationships (see Table 5.32). In particular, influencer authenticity had a significant positive impact on influencer attraction ($\beta = 0.658$, $t = 14.978$, $p < 0.001$) and influencer credibility/relevance ($\beta = 0.459$, $t = 6.617$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, influencer attraction had a significant positive impact on influencer generated traffic ($\beta = 0.488$, $t = 8.532$, $p < 0.001$) and influencer credibility/relevance ($\beta = 0.360$, $t = 4.684$, $p < 0.001$). Parasocial relationship was significantly impacted by influencer credibility/relevance ($\beta = 0.543$, $t = 10.353$, $p < 0.001$).

Other significant relationships included a positive relationship between influencer generated traffic and brand salience ($\beta = 0.372$, $t = 6.628$, $p < 0.001$). A positive relationship was obtained between parasocial relationship and brand resonance ($\beta = 0.223$, $t = 3.043$, $p < 0.001$) and user-generated content responsiveness ($\beta = 0.392$, $t = 5.092$, $p < 0.001$). Other positive relationships include user-generated content responsiveness and brand salience ($\beta = 0.279$, $t = 4.628$, $p < 0.001$), brand salience and brand resonance ($\beta = 0.552$, $t = 8.583$, $p < 0.001$), and a positive relationship between brand resonance and brand perception ($\beta = 0.741$, $t = 15.563$, $p < 0.001$).

Conversely, the study's results show that four relationships were not supported by the model's criteria, indicating that they were not statistically significant. These included relationships between influencer generated traffic and user-generated content responsiveness ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 1.274$, $p > 0.101$), user-generated content responsiveness and brand resonance ($\beta = -0.003$, $t = 0.041$, $p > 0.484$) and user-generated content responsiveness with brand perception ($\beta = 0.040$, $t = 0.993$, $p > 0.160$). In addition, another rejected relationship was for the relationship between brand salience and brand perception ($\beta = 0.068$, $t = 1.115$, $p > 0.132$).

Table 5.32: Path coefficients (total participants)

Constructs	VIF	β	SE	T	P	Outcome
AU -> ATT	1.000	0.658	0.044	14.978	0.000	Supported
AU -> CR	1.765	0.459	0.069	6.617	0.000	Supported
ATT -> CR	1.765	0.360	0.077	4.684	0.000	Supported
ATT -> GT	1.000	0.488	0.057	8.532	0.000	Supported
CR -> PR	1.000	0.543	0.052	10.353	0.000	Supported
GT -> UGC	1.281	0.109	0.086	1.274	0.101	Rejected
GT -> BS	1.094	0.372	0.056	6.628	0.000	Supported
PR -> UGC	1.281	0.392	0.077	5.092	0.000	Supported
PR -> BR	1.554	0.223	0.073	3.043	0.001	Supported
UGC -> BR	1.295	- 0.003	0.063	0.041	0.484	Rejected
UGC -> BS	1.094	0.279	0.060	4.628	0.000	Supported
UGC -> BP	1.183	0.040	0.041	0.993	0.160	Rejected
BS -> BR	1.470	0.552	0.064	8.583	0.000	Supported
BS -> BP	1.950	0.068	0.061	1.115	0.132	Rejected
BR -> BP	1.833	0.741	0.048	15.563	0.000	Supported

VIF = Variance inflation factor; β = Beta coefficient, SE = Standard error, T = t-statistic, P = p-value ($P < 0.05$; $P < 0.01$; $P < 0.001$; $T > 1.645$); AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR= Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic, PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

An analysis of the focus age group's relationship significance measures the difference in the weight of relationships between all participants and the focus age group. For the focus age

group (28-45 years), the study's SEM analysis exposes a relationship significance in 13 of the 15 constructs (see Table 5.33). Specifically, influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on influencer attraction (β = 0.586, t = 9.176, p < 0.001) and influencer credibility/relevance (β = 0.366, t = 4.190, p < 0.001). Additionally, influencer attraction has a significant positive impact on influencer generated traffic (β = 0.470, t = 6.538, p < 0.001) and influencer credibility/relevance (β = 0.431, t = 4.331, p < 0.001). Influencer credibility/relevance has significant impact on parasocial relationship (β = 0.517, t = 7.159, p < 0.001).

Other significant relationships include a positive relationship between influencer generated traffic and brand salience (β = 0.268, t = 3.254, p < 0.001). Other positive relationships exist between parasocial relationships and brand resonance (β = 0.208, t = 2.051, p < 0.020) and UGC responsiveness (β = 0.324, t = 3.248, p < 0.001). Also, there is a positive relationship between influencer generated traffic and UGC responsiveness (β = 0.271, t = 2.466, p < 0.007). UGC responsiveness and brand salience has an accepted relationship (β = 0.270, t = 3.090, p < 0.001) and brand perception (β = 0.111, t = 1.842, p < 0.033). There is also a positive relationship between brand salience and brand resonance (β = 0.489, t = 5.394, p < 0.001), and a positive relationship between brand resonance and brand perception (β = 0.660, t = 8.721, p < 0.001).

In contrast to the relationships represented by the complete model, there were more significant outcomes for the research's scoped main age group. This illustrates stronger relationships between variables for the scoped age group compared to the complete data representing all adults. Insignificant relationship outcome was detected between user-generated content responsiveness and brand resonance (β = 0.134, t = 1.505, p > 0.066). The second rejected hypothesis was the relationship between brand salience and brand perception (β = 0.088, t = 1.007, p > 0.157).

Table 5.33: Path coefficients (focus age group)

Constructs	VIF	β	SE	T	P	Outcome
AU -> ATT	1.000	0.586	0.064	9.176	0.000	Supported
AU -> CR	1.522	0.366	0.087	4.190	0.000	Supported
ATT -> CR	1.522	0.431	0.099	4.331	0.000	Supported
ATT -> GT	1.000	0.470	0.072	6.538	0.000	Supported
CR -> PR	1.000	0.517	0.072	7.159	0.000	Supported
GT -> UGC	1.206	0.271	0.110	2.466	0.007	Supported
GT -> BS	1.196	0.268	0.082	3.254	0.001	Supported
PR -> UGC	1.206	0.324	0.100	3.248	0.001	Supported
PR -> BR	1.521	0.208	0.101	2.051	0.020	Supported
UGC -> BR	1.284	0.134	0.089	1.505	0.066	Rejected
UGC -> BS	1.196	0.270	0.088	3.090	0.001	Supported
UGC -> BP	1.234	0.111	0.060	1.842	0.033	Supported
BS -> BR	1.438	0.489	0.091	5.394	0.000	Supported
BS -> BP	1.775	0.088	0.088	1.007	0.157	Rejected
BR -> BP	1.826	0.660	0.076	8.721	0.000	Supported

VIF= Variance inflation factor; β = Beta coefficient; SE= standard error; T= t- statistic, P = p-value (P < 0.05; P < 0.01; P < 0.001; T > 1.645), AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

5.15.3 SEM assessment

To assess the predictive power and quality of SEM, the study used the coefficient of determination (R^2 square) and (Q^2 square) for predictive ability (Hair et al., 2019b: Shmueli et al., 2019). The R^2 square is a commonly used measure to assess the predictive power and quality of SEM models. It is calculated by dividing the explained variance by the total variance of the endogenous constructs. The interpretation of R^2 square is as the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the model's independent variables (Hair et al., 2019b). R^2 square value, however, ranges between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating a better fit of the model to the data. A cutoff value of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 are substantially acceptable, however, a value of 0.10 or less is in some cases considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2019b). Thus, in this study's models, R^2 square values are ranging on the threshold of acceptance, with the lower being 0.204 for brand salience (main age group Model – focus age group) and 0.206 for UGC responsiveness (complete model – all participants), respectively.

The Q^2 square, on the other hand, is a measure of the predictive ability of the endogenous constructs of a model used in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), and it was examined through PLSpredict (Shmueli et al., 2019). Q^2 square value of 0 indicates that the model has no predictive ability, while a Q^2 square value of 1 indicates perfect predictive ability.

According to Shmueli et al. (2019), as a rule of thumb, the Q^2 square value should be positive more than zero (in this study's models the lower is 0.005) to indicate the predictive ability of SEM. However, the appropriate threshold for an acceptable Q^2 value can vary depending on the research context and the nature of the variables in the model (Hair et al., 2019b). In this study, the Q^2 square values were above the cutoff value, indicating strong predictive power and quality of the models.

Overall, the study used both R^2 and Q^2 square values to evaluate the predictive power and quality of the SEM models, and the results suggest that the models performed well (see Table 5.34).

Table 5.34: R² and Q² results (predictive power)

Constructs	Total population (all participants)		Focus age group (participants aged 28-45)	
	R²	*Q²*	*R²*	*Q²*
ATT	0.433	0.286	0.343	0.223
BP	0.643	0.012	0.599	0.005
BR	0.486	0.018	0.481	0.008
BS	0.277	0.038	0.204	0.019
CR	0.559	0.407	0.504	0.316
GT	0.238	0.035	0.221	0.025
PR	0.295	0.158	0.268	0.126
UGC	0.206	0.048	0.251	0.030

ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception
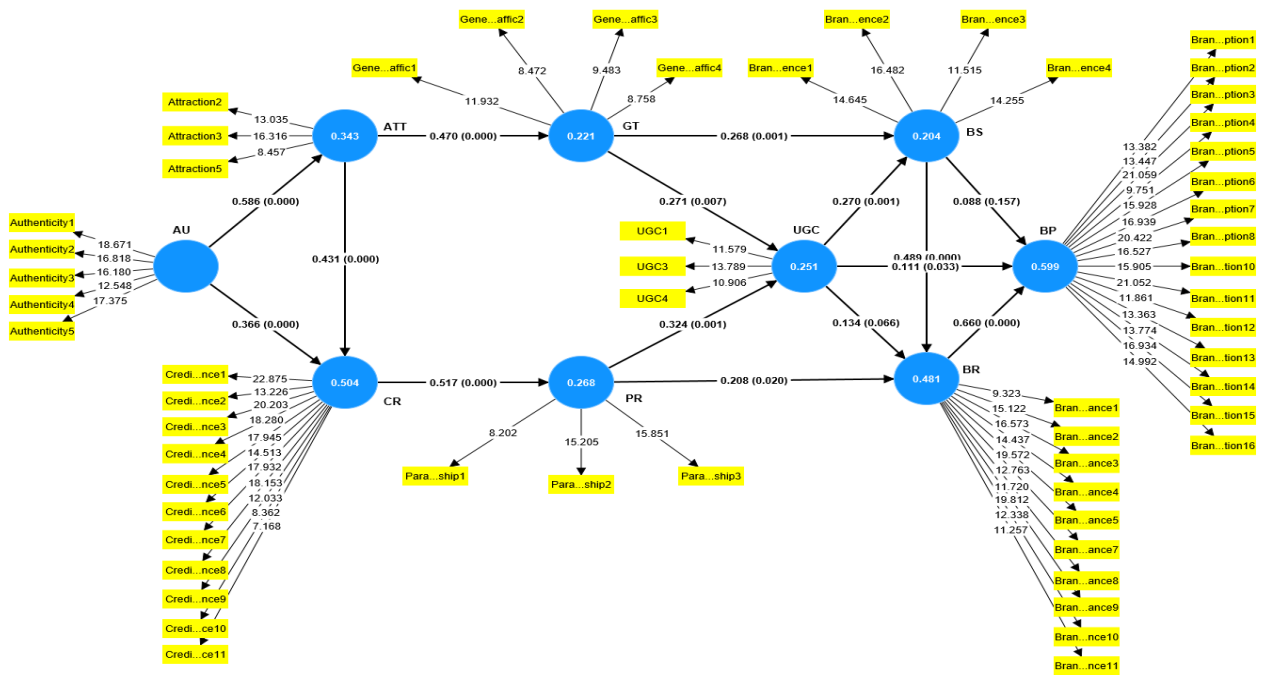
Figure 5.5: The structural equation modelling analysis – (focus age group – age 28-45)

AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

5.15.4 Multiple group analysis (MGA)

In this study, one of the objectives was to compare between two different age groups by conducting multiple group analysis (MGA). The MGA was conducted through consistent permutation multiple group analysis (CPMGA) in SmartPLS 4 with 5000 permutations to assess the differences between groups (Sarstedt et al., 2011). It is important to note that consistent permutation multiple group analysis is a more stringent method that ensures that the same permutation is applied to all groups. This makes it a more appropriate method to test the difference between groups to ensure that both groups are treated equally and the results are not biased (Henseler et al., 2016; Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; Klesel et al., 2019).

Permutation testing is a powerful approach that provides a more accurate estimate and can be used to test hypotheses about model parameters and/or to assess the significance of differences between groups (Chin & Dibbern, 2010). Therefore, after generating the groups in SmartPLS 4, the beta coefficients for both groups were examined to determine the probability (p-value) of observing a difference between the two groups (all participants group/ focus age group) and

identify any differences in the relationships between the variables being studied. This division was based on previous research suggesting that there are important age-related differences in the variables being studied among these different age groups (Rhodes et al., 2019). The inclusion of participants from multiple age groups enhances the generalizability of the findings and allows for a better understanding of the role of age in the variables being studied.

The results shown in Table 5.35, indicated that five of the hypotheses have significant differences between the two groups. This illustrates that different relationships exist between some of the variables for the two groups, although a larger number of the relationships reveal insignificant differences between the groups. The difference between the beta coefficient values for the two groups was denoted as D (Difference). The values of D indicate the differences in beta coefficient, meaning higher differences indicate larger distances between the two groups' coefficients (Deng & Yuan, 2015).

The p-value is an important factor in determining results dependability, with a value less than 0.05 indicating significance (Privitera, 2017). In this study, the p-value was used as the cutoff element to illustrate significance, considering the varying differences in ages between the two groups.

The study found that 10 hypotheses were insignificant between the two groups (all participants group/ focus age group) based on the p-value. These hypotheses include influencer attraction to influencer credibility/relevance, influencer attraction to influencer generated traffic, brand resonance to brand perception, brand salience to brand perception, and brand salience to brand resonance. Additionally, the study found that influencer credibility/relevance to influencer parasocial relationship, influencer parasocial relationship to brand resonance, and user-generated content responsiveness were all insignificant differences between the two age groups. Finally, UGC responsiveness to brand perception and brand salience were also found to have insignificant differences. The permutation MGA indicated a high extent of similarity between the observable variables between the two age groups.

The study found significant differences between the two ages in terms of influencer authenticity, influencer credibility/relevance, and influencer generated traffic. Specifically, the total population group had a higher level of relationship than the focus age group to the proposed hypothesis for influencer authenticity on influencer attraction ($D = - 0.148$; $P < 0.045$) and influencer credibility/relevance at ($D = - 0.254$; $P < 0.036$). Similarly, the relationship

between influencer generated traffic and brand salience had a significant difference, with the beta value for the focus age group being lower than that of the other age group (D = - 0.225; P < 0.028). Furthermore, the study found that the relationship between influencer generated traffic and UGC responsiveness was significant, with the beta value for the 28-45 age group being higher (D = 0.361; P < 0.020).

In addition, the tie between UGC responsiveness and brand resonance has a significant relationship difference with the main age group (28-45) with the proposed hypothesis at (D = 0.292; P < 0.011). Overall, the study found significant and insignificant differences between the two age groups in several areas. Including influencer authenticity, influencer credibility/relevance, influencer generated traffic, UGC responsiveness, brand salience and brand resonance (see Table 5.35 below).

Table 5.35: Permutation MGA

Constructs	β¹ (28-45)	β² (18-27 and 46-80)	D	P	D (Outcome)
ATT -> CR	0.431	0.228	0.202	0.098	Insignificant
ATT -> GT	0.470	0.515	- 0.045	0.351	Insignificant
AU -> ATT	0.586	0.733	- 0.148	0.045	Significant
AU -> CR	0.366	0.619	- 0.254	0.036	Significant
BR -> BP	0.660	0.820	- 0.160	0.052	Insignificant
BS -> BP	0.088	0.028	0.060	0.326	Insignificant
BS -> BR	0.489	0.630	- 0.141	0.151	Insignificant
CR -> PR	0.517	0.576	- 0.058	0.301	Insignificant
GT -> BS	0.268	0.493	- 0.225	0.028	Significant
GT -> UGC	0.271	- 0.091	0.361	0.020	Significant
PR -> BR	0.208	0.239	-0.031	0.417	Insignificant
PR -> UGC	0.324	0.496	- 0.172	0.138	Insignificant
UGC -> BP	0.111	0.011	0.100	0.114	Insignificant
UGC -> BR	0.134	- 0.158	0.292	0.011	Significant
UGC -> BS	0.270	0.323	- 0.052	0.339	Insignificant

β = Beta coefficient, D = Difference between groups, P = Permutation **(p-value)**

$P < 0.05$; $P < 0.01$; $P < 0.001$; AU = Influencer authenticity; ATT = Influencer attraction; CR = Influencer credibility/relevance; GT = Influencer generated traffic; PR = Parasocial relationships; UGC = User-generated content responsiveness; BS = Brand salience; BR = Brand resonance; BP = Brand perception

5.16 Chapter conclusion

This chapter analysed the data collected using reliable and valid methods and techniques. The data was collected from 477 Saudi participants over the age of 18 in Saudi Arabia, who provided valid and considered responses. The chapter set the foundation for the discussion chapter by undertaking a multivariate analysis that included data cleaning, descriptive statistics analysis, correlation analysis, EFA, CCA and SEM phases. These methods provided a comprehensive analysis of the data and established the validity of the research.

The methods used in this study analyse demographic dynamics, the value of responses, the validity of the measurement instrument, the weight of relationships, and the validity of the model. This provided a thorough analysis of the data collected and helped to ensure that the research findings were accurate and reliable. The multivariate method used in this study indicated that constructs representing social engagement are likely to contribute to consumer-based brand equity. This finding provided valuable insights into the factors that contribute to consumer-based brand equity.

Overall, this chapter provided a detailed analysis of the data collected and established the validity of the research. The next chapter uses the findings provided to discuss valuable insights from social media users into the factors that contribute to consumer-based brand equity in consumer electronics brands in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This research investigates the extent to which an influencer's shared UGC contributes to building BE. The previous chapter presented the results of testing the conceptual model presented in Chapter 3. This chapter discusses the results in terms of the research scope and the literature and reflects on the prior contextual and theoretical contributions to the field, and how the study's findings support these contributions. As pointed out in the study's research scope, the thesis specifically considers the Saudi Arabian market, and the research focusses on the mature cohort of social media users aged between 28 and 45. As discussed previously, Saudi Arabian social media is dominated by people aged between 28 and 45 (Kemp, 2022). This phenomenon is unique to Saudi Arabia, and it is important, but often overlooked, to understand their behaviour towards influencers and the development of BE.

The first section of this chapter discusses the research's demographic elements, thereby reviewing the context of this study. Saudi Arabia's social media usage complements this study's scope as the location has the right population dynamics to test the research's theme. The discussion of the background against the findings establishes a linkage between earlier sections of this study such as the literature review and conceptual framework. The section additionally focusses on how relationships, as a psychological dimension of influencer-style IMC, affect marketing outcomes. The section also discusses other factors or forces discussed by the literature and how they are reflected in the current findings.

The following sections will discuss the variables identified by the study's theoretical analysis and conceptual framework to establish a representation of the research constructs that is contextual and considerate of the research findings. The final section summarizes the relationships proposed by the study, and whether the results support the hypotheses. Hence, this chapter builds on the literature of the role of influencers as key contributors to improving brand perception and hence BE on potential consumers in Saudi Arabia's social media market.

6.2 The mature social media user: The case of Saudi Arabia

The investigations in this study focused on an unorthodox social media target of a mature age cohort, which distinguishes this research from previous literature on SMI marketing. Previous literature and statistical analyses such as Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) and Stanger et al. (2017) consider social media as a platform that is highly impactful on young people. However, this study considers Saudi Arabia, which is a market dominated by mature social media users. Reports by Kemp (2022) and (2023), show that the average age of social media users in Saudi Arabia is 35.67. Hence, Saudi Arabia has the demographic characteristics (specifically its age distribution) that complements the research preferences.

Rubin et al. (2005) argue that understanding a research setting enables the research audience to better interpret results by placing them in the right context. The setting for this research is supported by other research, for instance Bakker (2018) and Conde & Casais (2023), who explore influencer campaigns and their lasting impact on consumers. Aligning with similar studies on the role of SMI is important. This study was strictly scoped and considers a specific age group. The research setting provides an illustration of how the scope of the research is reflected by the data. This examination lays an important foundation in relating the research questions and objectives to the results obtained.

The focus on Saudi Arabia, a specific age group and on brand equity establishes this research as a strong contributor to contemporary research into IMC campaigns. In line with this study's scope and findings, previous studies such as Stanger et al. (2017) illustrate similar social media usage demographics and the impact of social media communication on brand perception. Greater acknowledgement and acceptance of the idea that key opinion leaders and social media people/personalities are related to by social media users is occurring (Tajvidi et al., 2020). This study's results present data that least occurred by chance, is populated with responses that support the present power of social media engagements fuelled by influencers. A preliminary conclusion is that the study effectively aligns the contextual characteristics of the research setting, the research method efficiency and the findings.

6.3 Contextual research considerations and existing theoretical contributions relevant to the findings

6.3.1 Relating results with research gap

This research gap mainly involved establishing an understanding of the effects of user-generated content by social media influencers' marketing activities on qualitative brand equity among mature consumers of electronic brands in Saudi Arabia. The study picks three electronic brands and an audience of Saudi Arabians aged between 28-45 years. The concept of SMIs has made marketing more efficient with user-generated content being a key contributor that builds upon a positive perception by a consumer in a brand (Ozuem et al., 2023; Aljarah et al., 2024). The research gap is, however, how much this is in mature age groups in Saudi Arabia who use social media in the market. Therefore, this study hugely contributes to literature by providing an understanding of how influencers can create user-generated content aligned with the brand objectives and goals to influence mature social media audiences.

This study established a deep demographic context through acknowledging statistics, claims and contributions from previous reports, analysis and literature on the Saudi Arabian SNS consumer market. In the introduction of this study, the study emphasizes its contributions as being a part of a long-term economic outcome for the Saudi Arabia's planned economic vision, set to be attained by 2030 (Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, 2016). Economic orientations play a role in influencing people within the economy, especially how they are influenced towards consumption behaviours (Jackson, 2014). With current adoption of technology, specifically social media usage in Saudi Arabia, the nature of marketing has inclined towards taking advantage of social media connectivity, as illustrated by behaviours (Mabkhot et al., 2022). Given that 80.1% of users in Saudi Arabia, are using at least one social media platform (Kemp, 2023), the findings support that Saudi Arabia's SNS usage is a core part of social activity. The study's model assumes that marketing is heavily influenced by people's social media usage, considering they follow brands and influencers.

The results showcased that SMIs Faisal Alsaif and Abdullah Alsabe were influencers that had the highest following cohorts from the 477 Saudi participant responses received. Social media traffic complements interactions with brands and connection with influencers. Studies by Qian & Mao (2023), and Evania et al. (2023) state that influencers that were regarded as being

psychologically persuasive and with high social media traffic across multiple social media platforms are likely to influence social media usage. With the e-commerce sector being a high-value sector in Saudi Arabia, there is a high demand for user-generated content. From the perspective of social media influencers, demand for user-generated content has translated to opportunities for influencers to use user-generated content to educate, inform, entertain and influence social media users. Tafesse & Wood (2021), similarly observe that the need for content presents an opportunity for influencers to collaborate with brands in their user-generated content sharing endeavours. The research method was successfully able to define a connection between a participant and a renowned influencer preselected by the author.

The connection between consumers and brands is a key consideration of this study, as highlighted in the literature. This research inquired into why participants follow specific brands or follow specific influencers. This is because there are different reasons as to why people engage in social media activities, as discussed by Phua et al., (2017). Also, a consumer-brand relationship on social media needs to be defined, as the findings by Phua et al. (2017), do not specifically accentuate how gratifications of SNS usage affect consumer-brand relationships, this study goes beyond that. Understanding this will bring more validated scope to the study, in terms of how such parasocial relationships are influenced. The findings of this research additionally examine the reliance on social media as a connection between consumers and brands, as participants revealed that they follow brands, for several reasons, including excellent products/customer service by brands.

6.3.2 Relating results with research literature and theories

Psychological considerations encompassed by this study, such as parasocial relationship and brand perception are key components in the study. Theoretically, this study considers psychological components, and relates these components through the hierarchy of effects model and Keller's CBBE model. An exploration of likely relationships by the study's methods through factor and composite analysis showcased both variable and relationship validity for variables such as parasocial relationship and brand perception. This illustrates that this study's consideration of psychological forces that govern social media interactions is validated by the findings. The focus is also validated by Turner (1988), who discusses the theory of social interaction, revealing that perceptions influence selectivity in interactions and decision making.

The study has underlined parasocial relationships as one of the key variables that influence interactions between an influencer and their followers of the influencer. From an influencer's perspective, a good relationship and high regard by followers are psychological elements to retain and improve. The project's method emphasized the importance of psychology in interactions. The conceptual framework indicated that established relationships and resulting perceptions are key foundations in strong influencer-consumer and consumer-brand relationships. Reinikainen et al. (2020) and Shieh & Lai (2017) confirm that relationships and perceptions affect parts of the customer journey and affect the decisions that customers make. The development of the digital world has increased the reliance on digital communication platforms as pivot points for connecting. Relationships are being established and strengthened through online platforms with digital media usability and dependence being very important. This is reflected in this study's Saudi Arabian participants, given its favourable economic status and levels of education (Mabkhot et al., 2022). The research findings reveal the relevance of influencers and promoted content, considering the relative importance index analysis reveals that participants are more inclined towards content and promotions that are good and favourable.

The study revealed that great content and excellent product and customer service are some of the major reasons why people follow brands online. This means that the identity of the brand is important, and it influences how customers interact with a specific brand, as also emphasized by Hollebeek et al. (2021). This research's findings identified good content as one of the reasons for social media users to follow brands. This relates to arguments of content organization and sharing proposed by Godey et al. (2016), where good content contributes viewership and media traffic. This study identifies different forces that fuel consumer-brand relationships on social media, emphasizing the importance of the consumer-brand relationship, specifically as it related to the medium of social media.

Customer recognition is as an important consideration in this study as well. The study considers theoretical contributions from the HOE (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) and Keller's CBBE (Keller, 2001) models. Exploring these models reveals that marketing is not just about advertising and promotional campaigns, but also how uniquely a brand stands out, especially when compared to its competitors (Kim et al., 2023). The study, therefore, pursued on engagement as a key contributor to brand equity. Other theories expressed by authors such as Godey et al. (2016) and Lassar et al. (1995), have illustrated that brand equity revolves around a number of

psychological variables that are measurable. Responses from the participant's end are likely to be heavily influenced by the psychological surroundings of the participant.

An analysis of the customer's perspective was narrowed down by the study when the study looked at the relative importance index. The outstanding item was the one inquiring on the feeling of autonomy between the respondent and the respective influencer followed by the respondent. Social media users seek to connect and interact with different personalities that they feel autonomously related to. These feelings have been discussed by different theoretical setups that analyse social media engagement. For instance, Santos (2022), found social engagements as contributing towards building relationships. Hence, social media interactions, specifically consumer-brand and consumer-influencer are psychological in nature, and this enables influencers and brands to maximize on parasocial relationships and brand perceptions.

6.4 Examination of proposed framework and construct relationships

The ability of a brand to connect with consumers is key to the objectives of the study. As proposed in the framework by Akrout & Diallo (2017), relationships and communication drive value in successful marketing contexts. Besides examining relationships and communications, the study accords with the contemporary media channels that allow sharing, exchange of information and building relationships. The psychological dynamics of interactions and relationships on social media inspired the development of the constructed model.

This study builds upon theories, methods and claims about the impact of communication on consumer-brand interactions. Nguyen et al. (2020) examine consumer actions and relate them to perceptions about brands. Other theoretical constructions, frameworks and propositions that have been cited in the literature review complement Nguyen et al.'s (2020) examination. This research adopts a similar orientation, proposing that relationships considering the communication between a brand and a consumer can be fuelled by influencer interactions.

In Chapter 3, various hypotheses were presented about the relationships. The researcher constructed a conceptual model to measure and validate the hypothetical relationships between SMIs, UGC and BE. The proposed relationships rely on various claims and theories that

propose that communication is a crucial contributor to a positive brand perception. The study scopes a specific age group (28-45) for its method and analysis.

The age segmentation investigates relationships between the constructs to statistically test the theoretical concerns and claims. Chapter 5 presented the statistical processes used to develop the research outcomes. The predictive power of the statistics reveals strength and the nature of the model. However, according to Ajzen (2002), the diversity of psychological behaviour and social sciences involves a consideration of background and theoretical concerns behind the statistics. Multiple group analysis was undertaken in SEM to distinguish how impactful or significant social media campaigns are on the focus demographic compared to other demographics. Hence, the study uses a multiple-group analysis to investigate the differences between the groups. The findings indicate that the hypothesized relationships between the constructs are mostly supported by the data for the total population and the focus age group. This illustrates the depth of the study's propositions and the significance of influencer engagement on brand equity.

However, the study finds that five out of the 15 hypothesized relationships have different outcomes for the two different populations. This results in a diversified approach. Tan & Segson (2021) approach their study in a similar manner to explore the key differences between different groups in regard to the impact of social media communication on brands. The statistical analysis reveals that 11 out of 15 of the hypothesized relationships are proven to exist in the total population, and 13 out of 15 are proven to exist in the focus age group.

The next subsection connects the statistical outcomes with theoretical propositions and discusses potential factors and contributors that influenced the results, and how they impact on the hypotheses.

6.4.1 Hypothesis discussion

Influencer authenticity → Influencer attraction (H1a)

It was hypothesized that the authenticity of an influencer can positively affect the outcome of influencer interactions, including the attractiveness of an influencer's content. Osorio et al. (2023) argue that authentic interactions are likely to receive acknowledgement and evoke a positive emotion. In the psychological context, authenticity and originality are foundational in establishing and even differentiating between attractions (Pöyry et al., 2019; Napoli et al., 2014). Authenticity does not just influence the formation of attraction but provides a strong basis as to why certain interactions exist and are stronger than others (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Osorio et al. (2023) claims and finds that authenticity is a strong construct to consider in social relations as it influences the nature and strength of the attraction. Originality is important in establishing long-term relationships between interacting parties (Napoli et al., 2014).

In the case of social media interactions, authenticity facilitates identifiability. The analysis of influencer authenticity establishes its relationship with other variables in the model. Specifically for attraction, influencer authenticity affects the nature of the content and the relatability or identifiability of the content, which is likely to lead to attraction (Bruhn et al., 2012).

Psychological considerations surrounding social interactions are important in the corporate advertising sector. It is crucial to consider factors or constructs that support positive interactions when relating to advertising, such as attraction. The results of this research reflect the importance of authenticity and originality in relatability and attraction, as proposed by Agnihotri et al. (2023).

The findings establish a positive relationship between influencer authenticity and influencer attraction. The relationship is significant for both the total population (n=477) and the focus age group (n=262). Influencer authenticity and how it is perceived and reflected in influencer attraction is just as valid to consumers aged 28 to 45 as it to other age groups. This means that the specific consumer group being focused on by the study should be considered just as much as other age groups.

The nature of authenticity and how it is appreciated may be perceived differently and reacted to differently. The focus age group, being adults, is more likely to appreciate authenticity and find it attractive. Napoli et al. (2014) highlight that an appreciation of authenticity is affected by diverse factors, including experience. With a wider range of experience, the focus age group appreciates authenticity when interacting and indeed, is likely to appreciate it more. This is supported by the results which indicate a significant difference between the populations. The total population reflect a stronger relationship than the focus age group. The outcome of this analysis is that the nature of social media influencers is a factor in influencer-fuelled campaigns.

Influencer authenticity → Influencer credibility/relevance (H1b)

Authenticity is a perceptual realization of originality or genuineness in a connection (Beverland, 2014). This definition shares similarity with the expression of source credibility by Yuan, Kim & Kim, (2016), who state that source credulity is the established originality and reliance of a message. Hence, the extent or capacity of realized authenticity is likely to influence the validity of campaigns as original expressions are likely to create value in the establishment of relationships in the social media context (Phua et al., 2017).

This hypothesis proposed that a positive relationship between influencer authenticity and influencer relevance or credibility. As discussed and expounded in theory, authenticity directly affects identifiability (Beverland, 2014). The nature of authenticity allows what is to be comfortable and establishes that whoever or whatever they are interacting with is dependable. The psychological contribution of authenticity has been additionally discussed by Ilicic & Webster (2016) to bring reliability; credibility has been discussed by the case is within the scope of dependability and reliability. This is supported by Bruhn et al. (2012), in regard to how authenticity establishes credibility and reliance.

The statistical representation of authenticity showcases that the sample population was able to understand originality as a factor and how it influences their reliance on influencer content. Influencer authenticity is statistically reflected as proclaimed by theoretical contributions by Agnihotri et al. (2023) that have further analysed authenticity and originality in the context of social interactions and communication. The aspect of relevance is also understood in regard to

how particular content matches specific needs required by a content consumer. For social media influencers, Lou & Xie (2021) and Xie & Lou (2020), state that the nature of the content and how it is relied upon relates with the matching value of the content to the consumers' needs. Hence, original content is highly likely to be not just appreciated but also revisited.

In consensus with the examined theoretical contributions, the findings found a positive relationship between influencer authenticity and influencer relevance. Authenticity, therefore, ends up being a crucial contributor to relevance and credibility and this is effectively replicated in the results of the study. A similar outcome was observed in the 28-45 age group. This illustrates and builds upon the perception of authenticity in adults, and it likely influences seceding events or interactions. With supported outcomes, it also means that research dynamics effectively represent the theories and measurement models adopted.

The results also indicated a notable distinction between the two ages categories, showing a stronger relationship in the broader age range (encompassing all participants) compared to the narrower focus on ages 28-45. For this relationship, source credibility and authenticity appear to be better realized and appreciated by the 18-27 and 46-80 age groups. As stated by Hruska & Maresova (2020), individuals with higher incomes, particularly within the mature cohort (in this case 28-45 age group), are among the more susceptible targets for social media promotions. Hence, credibility and relevance, though important, are likely to have less impact on this group compared to younger age groups.

Influencer attraction → Influencer credibility/relevance (H1c)

Influencer attraction, and how it influences credibility is defined in this study with psychological theories from Zimbardo & Leippe (1991), who explain that our brains identify with attractive as human beings are psychologically tuned to associate with survival. Specific to the proposed relationship, Santos (2022) accentuates that with attractive content on social media, comes the assurance of traffic.

This research analysed the selected influencers' backgrounds, which ensured that the selected influencers were those most followed in the electronics retail market. This enabled the author to pinpoint the relationship between influencer content and social media user traffic. The

statistics show that influencer attraction positively contributes to influencer credibility/relevance. Given that authenticity also contributes to influencer relevance/credibility, considering the nature of social media interactions, attraction to the social influencer also plays a role in affecting influencer reliance.

The nature of users on social media is in most cases centred on interacting with social media influencers for positive gratification (Phua et al., 2017). Attraction is a key contributor to positive gratification, as illustrated in the literature review chapter of this study. As accentuated by Saldanha et al. (2018), established attachments of attractions beget credibility in endorsements. Hence, social media interactions are heavily influenced by attraction. Lampeitl & Abeg (2017), claimed that interactions on social media, especially those involving famous people on social media are mostly fuelled by attraction. Taking the study's measurement propositions into concern, attraction is a key component that inspires social media engagement (Godey et al., 2016; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Additionally, attraction is discussed by Trivedi & Sama (2020), to directly contribute to interest, which is a key component of consideration in the hierarchy-of-effects model, adopted by the study.

The favourable path coefficient values also mean that the responses obtained indicate that attraction draws responses in users. These responses involve users being dependent on an influencer for content. Ghosh (2022) similarly discusses social media channels as information channels, meaning that attention is easily captured and retained by attractive setups on social media. Relevance and credibility are reflected as a reaction from the perspective of the consumer. The nature of measurement coincides with measurements adopted by Yuan et al. (2016), which inquire from the respondent on whether they consider the influencers credible. This places a perspective upon the respondents, which allows them to reflect upon the influencer interactions they identify with.

Similar outcomes were observed for the 28-45 age group, meaning that responses towards attraction all yield in the same direction when it's associated with influencer credibility. With differentiated interests on social media, the nature of the results shows that the 28-45-year age group reacts to influencer attraction as well. Even as interests diversify, the outcome is similar through the two data groups. Influencers trigger gratification and dependability according to the type of content shared (Phua et al., 2017), and this is also the case for 28-45-year-olds.

Hence, the attraction existing between influencers and consumers has a similar outcome across all audiences. Considering the output values and the number of responses from the 28-45 age group, the respective group showcased that influencer attraction positively affects dependability. As more reliance is established with the focus age group, the ability to retain audiences by influencers is more for the focus age groups. Hence, influencer attraction as scoped for the age group triggers dependability as well, meaning that follower retention is a key consideration for influencers endorsed by brands. The results, hence, reveal that increased gratifications on social media have an impact on the relevance perceived by social media users, hence affecting the nature of consumer-influencer interactions on social media.

Influencer attraction → Influencer generated traffic (H2)

Attraction occurring directly influences the numbers that recognize and interact with the attractive sources, as stated by Godey et al. (2016). Moreover, Trivedi & Sama (2020), established a positive relationship between attraction for a media character and following the media character has or garners. The nature of influencer attraction in this study was to ask the respondents to identify with an influencer and reflect and respond on attractiveness of the chosen influencer. Influencer attraction measurement was reflectively represented by four items. The direct approach of measurement revealed that attraction developed towards an icon is better centred on the content shared by the influencer compared to the aura of the influencer. Yuan et al.'s (2016) study considers attraction being associated with the aura of an influencer, and how social media users respond to it. The study took up these measurement dynamics, focusing on the nature of the content as well.

An analysis of theoretical concerns from Agarwal (2020), considers the nature of content when discussing influencer attraction. The representation of this relationship as a hypothesis statistically pointed out that influencer traffic positively affects the generated traffic. As mentioned, attractive media personalities draw attention and trigger more gratification, meaning that the way they engage customers is likely to draw more attention (Phua et al., 2017).

The ability of influencers to attract audiences is what makes them preferred by brands for campaigns (Lampeitl & Åberg, 2017). Considering how engagement was understood and measured by the study, SNS-generated traffic involves the activity evoked within social media

platforms on a target profile or account. The resulting values attest the outcome is supported, hence, attraction is understood and regarded as a reason why social media influencers have followers. Narangajavana Kaosiri et al. (2019), highlight content velocity as being more inclined to social media influencers who are able to draw large audiences. Engagement being an important dynamic in this study, as it measures the outcome of communication, generated traffic is a validated outcome of influencer attraction felt by social media users.

Attraction is crucial in response to creation and achievement, meaning that volume resonates with attraction as psychologically people gravitate to what attracts them. With the volumetric influence of attraction Trivedi & Sama (2020) took the initiative to discuss its implications, picking out influencers as key drivers to IMC goals. The 28-45 sample group likewise illustrates that the conformation of one's psychology to attractive objects is irrespective of social media adoption or age. The outcome shows that the subject of influence cuts across different masses and the identification with good or favourable is appreciated for the 28–45-year-old age group. As illustrated by Zimbardo & Leippe (1991), attraction to a specific character begets interest, and this results in traffic, with the universal likelihood of people being attracted to good or attractive things.

With the outcome supporting the nature of this relationship across the research age group, attraction brings about increased gratifications, increasing following volumes. This means that an influencer with an attractive aura, personality, message or physique is likely to influence traffic to a particular target source, in this case, a brand. This attests that the outcome observed is similar in Saudi Arabia as in other regions.

Influencer credibility/relevance → Parasocial relationships (H3)

Parasocial relationship encompasses psychological components that involve the created regard by a social media user to an influencer. The nature of the construct as discussed by Conde & Casais (2023), yields the orientation of how it is built upon by several virtues during social media interactions. Influencer-based factors such as authenticity affect the reactions of audiences, building such as parasocial relationships (Agnihotri et al., 2023). Agnihotri et al. (2023), as well, conclude theoretical outcomes involving parasocial relationships; that they are affected by developed reactions of reliance on social media interactions. Godey et al. (2016)

expound on this by stating that influencers matching the needs of the audience are more preferred, and their content is looked forward to.

The relevance of this measurement dynamic cannot be understated considering the societal and cultural dynamics of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is an economy whose consumption is based on trust; this is accentuated in the study. As proven by Schouten et al. (2020) and Ashraf et al. (2023) that trustworthiness is a key influencer of consumption and advertising perception. The theoretical contributions by Sokolova & Kefi (2020), shed a light on trustworthiness affecting credibility stating that credibility and conformability as key contributors to trustworthiness. This was robustly reflected by within the research parameters considering participants agreed to expertise and trustworthiness being a key factor in the content they connect with in their influencer-user interactions. From the research findings, the proposed relationship between influencer credibility and parasocial relationship yielded a positive outcome. This coincides with statements from Poyry et al. (2019), which mention on credibility within audiences heavily affecting the outcome of interactions. Illustrating that Saudi Arabia, within its consuming aspects, seek insight on consumption choices with sources that are trustable and dependable.

The result confirmed an accepted outcome on the respective relationship for the focus age group; 28-45. The relationship between an influencer is rooted in regard across all audiences, hence, proving that interaction outcomes are irrespective of audience, especially for the proposed relationship. Created regards, hence, are proposed to play an important role in developing relationships with social media audiences.

Considering the specificity of age, the importance of social media interactions is likely to change. The study already highlights that the 28–45-year age group is more susceptible to online content and promotions. The results of the study confirm the relationship of influencer credibility and parasocial relationships, hence, influencer credibility is an important driver of parasocial relationships. The study's model acknowledges the contribution of relevance and credibility to established relationships on social media and this study can confirm that it is valid across all age groups. Hence, the influencer credibility and parasocial relationship is supported statistically and shares similar outcomes with reputable studies (Agnihotri et al., 2023; Koay, et al., 2023).

Influencer credibility brings about dependability, influencing the efficiency of social media interactions (Yuan et al., 2016). SNS interactions that are highly regarded and important compel users to be more connected to the influencer personalities fuelling these interactions (Phua et al., 2017). The results support that an influencer who viewed as credible and relevant is more likely to connect with their audience. It is unsurprising for this to be the case given Saudi Arabians are largely inclined to engage and consume on trust given their collectivist culture (Othman et al., 2022). Therefore, developed parasocial relationships are based on the foundation of regard, as supported by the results obtained.

Influencer generated traffic → User-generated content responsiveness (H4a)

This study takes up responsiveness as more of a psychological dynamic and carries this through the research method and being showcased in the results obtained. The nature of mental dynamics with IMC campaigns and promotions as defined by Keller (2009) and Barger & Labrecque (2013), highlight marketing communications as being more mentally impacting as such influencer-generated traffic and parasocial relationships are important contributors in the conceptual model. This shows that the obtained results from the model support its claims in covering the mental aspect of reaction by users or consumers in influencer campaigns. The proposed relationship claimed influencer generated traffic to positively impact user-generated content responsiveness.

This proposed relationship that influencer generated traffic positively impacts UGC responsiveness was rejected. The nature of the relationship, as illuminated by this research, involved the consideration of UGC responsiveness as an outcome that is in reference to the feelings evoked. However, with this relationship, engagement considered is with reference to generated traffic. The data collected reflects the relationship differently, instead, agreeing with inferences from Jamali & Khan (2018) and Hutter et al. (2013). Pradhan et al. (2023) analyse the obtained traffic from social campaigns and concludes that their effect on the nature of the message has little to no congruent impact considering the nature of modern-day interactions on social media. This inference explores the consideration of responsiveness as the qualitative magnitude of impact from social media traffic. The study highlights the diversity of modern communications systems and accentuates that not every instance of heavy online traffic is

likely to have an impact. Pradhan et al. (2023) provide insights into why influencer traffic may not always be preferred, highlighting failed celebrity campaigns.

In as much as the theoretical contributions point towards traffic influencing content responsiveness, the margin of this impact is affected by more sensitive elements, some elements covering variables that are outside this study's scope such as discrimination or information accuracy. The relationship proposed considered the volumetric nature of UGC responsiveness, this considered providing the study the comprehensive structure of covering the necessary relationships. Considering the nature of the relationship, its contributing variables and the obtained values to assess the criteria of the relationship, the obtained outcome demonstrates that traffic is a dynamic that influences engagement quantitatively.

This study's findings revealed that traffic is understood and interpreted differently. In most cases, there are several ways of measuring traffic within outreach campaigns. The study was keen on the outcome of the traffic in regard to the engagements and the intractability. In as much as users are more likely to see a brand that is associated to an influencer, the engagement of the content is important. The results also revealed that traffic is a diverse variable, considering it has been an important criterion in consumer marketing. Moreover, traffic, in as much as is present with influencer marketing, is not just specific to influencer marketing, this is considering brands have the ability to pay for advertising spaces (Agarwal, 2020). The study measured traffic with reference to the generated traffic from influencer UGC promotions. This meant an analysis of the output traffic, and the numbers yielded by a brand due to the outcome of UGC promotions by a certain influencer. The results showed that in as much as interactions and engagements increase due to influencer promotions, the nature and accuracy of the scale cannot be directly reflected. Hence, the output of traffic is a smaller fraction of the number of user engagements between an influencer endorsed by a brand and the target users. The study took into consideration that traffic also comes from other channels, hence identifying traffic as a construct that is also influenced by other demographic contributors.

Whereas a consideration of the outcome for the focus age group revealed that the relationship was accepted. In as much as this was due to the likelihood of the values separating the outcomes being narrowly separated, the inference shows that social media traffic positively influences UGC responsiveness for the specific age group. The result showcases that interests of the two groups can be interpreted differently. Social media is a platform that is more likely to evoke

positive reactions and feelings for the focus age group than the other age groups, as highlighted by Ebrahim (2020). This means that the perception of the focus age group on information shared on digital platforms is likely to be different.

The study takes note of this difference by considering the impact of the differences using a multiple group analysis. The projection of an influencer's image or content through high-velocity content channels is likely to influence the content responsiveness, the study's results illustrate that this responsiveness could be subject to audience perceptions.

Influencer generated traffic → Brand salience (H4b)

Brand salience is the measure of a brand's noticeability (Keller, 1999). Brand salience is an outcome of both direct and indirect interactions between a brand and its consumers. This study measured the brand salience caused by influencer-led social media campaigns. The impact of IMC campaigns analysed by this study rely on concepts discussed by Keller (2001). The study's results reflected different dynamics to showcase the noticeability of brands. For instance, the number of respondents following Jarir online could be an indicator that this company is the most noticeable electronic consumer brand in Saudi Arabia. The study proposes that traffic contributed by influencers to brands' social media profiles directly contribute to brand salience established by consumers towards these brands. The proposed hypothesis that influencer-generated traffic and brand salience was statistically accepted.

The research relied on identifying the mental position of consumers on brands, and how influencers contribute to this. The strength of a brand is directly affected by the position the brand possesses in the market (Phua et al., 2017). This study's method adopted a measurement from Lithopoulos (2018) which considered the nature of the brand and the resulting reactions from participants' involvement with the brands. This study's literature review correspondingly explains engagement as an important driver for traffic outcomes, such as brand salience, coinciding with studies by Razmus (2021) and de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020). The traffic on social media allows social media users to interact and share with the brand, contributing to an effective relationship between the consumer and the brand. Understanding the dynamic of this relationship and how it is measured allows the study to further highlight the importance of communication and engagement.

The hypothesis outcome for the focus age group reflected similar relationship considerations. In as much as there was a significant difference between the entire sample and the focus age group, the observed outcome for the two age groups was similar. This means that attracting traffic on social media platforms has an impact on 28-45-year-olds as well. As per Tajvidi et al. (2020) advertising is highlighted to be more profitable for brands with the context of demographics with disposable income, this study has identified that group being within the 28-45 age gap.

Lim et al. (2017) found that the impact of traffic and its power on social media is strong and unprecedented. Its strength cuts across different consumer groups that are active on social media. This points to additional theoretical concerns by Ferchaud et al. (2018), which state that by influencers engaging in content sharing, they are likely to be more preferred by brands when focusing on new demographics. As the study scoped, media campaigns should consider new demographic groups, including 28-45-year-olds who are also significantly affected by influencer campaigns.

Parasocial relationships → User-generated content responsiveness (H5a)

Parasocial relationships have a key impact on social media behaviours, they affect the regard towards an influencer and shared influencer content (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Parasocial relationship is a mental regard held by a user towards a media character. Critical theoretical concerns and contributions by Conde & Casais (2023) and Koay et al. (2023) agree that parasocial relationships have an impact on the attitudinal and qualitative perception of shared content. Recent literature has been taking note of the role of attachments and parasocial relationships in marketing campaigns. For instance, Saldanha (2018), analyses endorsements and how they are complemented with attachments between the endorsed celebrity and the brand being promoted. In addition, Saldanha et al. (2018) provide valuable insights by analysing the importance of establishing connections between celebrities and consumers in marketing campaigns, stating that they bring credibility.

Hence, parasocial relationships complement the study's framework by influencing the quality of engagements as contributor to positive brand equity. Contextually, the strength of the proposed hypothetical concerns was also backed up by the statistical results relationship being

more inclined towards evoked feelings and judgements. Meaning, participants were aware of the qualitative aspect associated with measuring the two related variables.

The strength of the parasocial relationship is also attributed to the impact the positivity of perception with content shared, as discussed by Phua et al. (2017) and Dibble et al. (2016). Considering both variables highlight more on the qualitative output of engagement their correlation also favours the variable distance and commonality existing between them. This is because parasocial relationships have a mental impact on the outcome of engagements on social media. Newer studies such as Agnihotri et al. (2023), have similarly explored parasocial relationships and noted the impact of this relationship on presumptions that come before content interpretation. From a different perspective, these presumptions are likely to influence the outcome of responsiveness and further influence attitudinal and behavioural concerns. The nature of the variable, henceforth, suggests that the consideration of qualitative elements in the measurement of IMC outcomes is an important theoretical point of concern. The accepted nature of the relationship's outcome allows the research to build upon the need to consider qualitative perceptions as a key outcome just like purchase intention or revenue.

The statistical consideration of the 28-45 age group further verifies the importance of parasocial relationships as contributors towards content responsiveness. This insight showcases personal relationships are theoretical constructs that do not just affect younger social media users. In as much as the extent of parasocial relationships held by consumers vary, their impacts on content responsiveness are still considerable for all ages. This illustrates that some outcomes evoked from parasocial relationships are similar across different social media users.

With the diversification of social media interests, adaptability and usability, it is likely that the magnitude of different parasocial concerns has different impacts across an audience. However, the scope of consumer needs by the study influences the dynamic of the research instrument and measurement. Shan et al. (2020), statistically account for parasocial relationships by highlighting their importance in content reception. This means that parasocial relationships can have similar impacts across different audiences depending on the contextual surroundings of the social media interactions.

Parasocial relationships → Brand resonance (H5b)

Existing parasocial relationships influence the impact of shared content by influencing presumptions. Resonance is discussed and supported by Keller (2001; 2009) and Hollebeek et al. (2014). The positive relationships involving resonance are important when measuring the output of influencer campaigns. The measurement of brand resonance involves determining how respondents relate to a specific brand. Considering the brands selected by the study are also linked to selected influencers, the results present a positive relationship. The study complemented the obtained outcome because the study was scoped for specific social media influencers and specific brands as well. Given an already established relationship between an influencer and an SNS user, content reception is likely to be more positive. This has been statistically reflected by the study. This hypothesis is complemented by the results, as the strength of parasocial relationships is statistically confirmed to positively impact brand resonance.

Similar studies by Yuan et al. (2016) reveal similar outcomes that connect parasocial relationships to brand ties. Shan et al. (2020) argue that the relatability and identification of a brand in a case that involves curated content is likely to be higher where the curated content is shared by relatable personalities. The study also highlights that establishing a social relationship provides a sense of connectivity that compels users that follow the respective influences to also resonate with the respective promoted brand. The response to content promotion is likely to be more positive with stronger established parasocial relationships (Reinikainen et al., 2020). The outcome is reflected in the study, considering the specific influencers and their brands.

A similar impact was observed for the 28-45 age group. The extent of brand identification is likely to be similar to the relatability of the social media influencer in the case of an influencer-led promotion (Shan et al., 2020). This highlights that the demographic concerns that exist in the design of influencer-induced campaigns and promotions are merely limitations considering the similarity of the outcome of occurred across the different age groups. Hence, the inference obtained from the study point to the respective relationship existing and being valid regardless of age. The validity of this relationship illustrates that influencer promotions that target different age groups should accommodate age groups that might be potentially ruled out in the

cases of influencer campaigns. The study has established that parasocial relationships influence resonance by customers in the case where an influencer takes part in UGC sharing for the brand.

User-generated content responsiveness → Brand resonance (H6a)

User-generated content responsiveness is the differential effect of the content shared, in this case, on a respective brand. Sethna et al. (2017), take into account that responsiveness is reflected in different orientations, including response numbers and attitudinal responses. The consideration of different dynamics in measurement affect the nature of measurement and this had an effect on the bearing of the relationships established from the results. In as much as the theoretical considerations of this relationship such as Sadek et al. (2018) point towards UGC positively influencing brand resonance. The nature of UGC responsiveness as a variable influenced the observed outcomes when the variable was connected to some variables in the study's model. Purani & Jeesha (2021), similarly discover that responsiveness towards content does not necessarily equate to a positive relationship between a consumer and a brand.

Additionally, different constructs can be used to analyse resonance, as seen in a study by Shieh & Lai (2017), a proper representation of resonance reveals its importance as an impact criterion. Analysis of responsiveness as a factor additionally reveals that the nature of the variable, which needs more dynamic included into its measurement especially when relating the variables to other constructs in studies. This proposed relationship was rejected by the findings. The theory and literature on the drivers of brand equity such as brand salience by Keller (2001:2009) and Hollebeek et al. (2014) are reliant on the attitudes and feelings. Whereas theory on UGC responsiveness is diverse, potentially exploring different orientations such as response numbers (Sethna et al., 2017). Hence the nature of the relationship, influenced the statistical validity through this research's data methods.

The relationship was rejected for both models, the total population and the 28-45 age group. Research by Jamali & Khan (2018) look at the traits that influence perceptions and responses by a brand, illustrating that not every research instance is identifiable with the consumer's attitudinal reaction even though there is theoretical proof. Glucksman (2017) equivalently states that reactions by customers are highly integral and can be differentiated according to the influences surrounding the interactions. This means that there are more considerable factors

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associating influencer campaigns that cannot be encompassed within a single research model. These factors involve contextual characteristics such as personal preferences and beliefs being core influences in online interactions and associated decision making. This means that the nature of the variables reflected yielded outcomes that what influenced by additional factors outside the scope of the study.

User-generated content responsiveness → Brand salience (H6b)

As defined, brand salience represents the noticeability of a brand, theoretically, content responsiveness and noticeability are related. As Buil et al. (2013), accentuate, brand noticeability is an outcome of communications and promotions from SNS campaigns or promotions, and the reactions by their targets. Additionally, Ajiboye et al. (2019), state that reactions and responses from brand interactions have an impact on a brand's recognition among its target market. Taking that into concern, this research was already considerate of other dynamics that affect a brand's noticeability. This study's results showcased that the noticeability of a brand can come from influencer promotions.

The research instrument involved asking a participant to relate a brand with a specific influencer they follow. The variable output, hence, encompassed the consideration that the participant was already aware of the research scenario in mind. Salience exists as a variable that represents the strength of a brand, in the context of influencer-induced communications, resonance is theoretically influenced by the responsiveness of users to published UGC.

The nature of this relationship is supported by statistical data, however, the relationship exists as accepted, amidst similar relationships that are statistically rejected. As stated, the data scenario by the study, as with similar scenarios in social sciences is affected by other factors outside the scope of the research. Theoretically and even statistically, Cheng et al. (2019), back up the outcome, identifying a positive relationship between UGC responsiveness and brand salience. However, the nature of their study focuses more on the content by brands and is more generally placed in the advertising scope. This means that their studies encompass elements proposed by Aaker & Biel (2013) that exist in the IMC research field.

The proposed relationship is attested by the statistical outcome. Hence, from this respective outcome, the relationships obtained are statistically supported for this hypothesis, in as much as similar relationships are rejected. This shows that the outcome obtained is still statistically valid, even with the occurrence of other constructs as mentioned that affect the nature of the statistics obtained. For both age-segmented sample groups, the proposed relationship had the same outcome, although there is a higher outcome by the focus age group. The results show that even with the complex nature of IMC marketing factors, constructs and variables, UGC responsiveness still positively affects one of the drivers of brand equity. Hence UGC has an impact on brand strength collected by a brand, as is also supported by Kim & Ko (2012) and Agarwal (2020).

User-generated content responsiveness → Brand perception (H6c)

Like other drivers of brand equity, brand perception is influenced by other factors in the consumer-brand interaction. Brand imagery/perception encompasses the impression carried by customers regarding the brand, hence, factors such as product quality or customer care efficiency affect brand perception as an outcome (Djatmiko & Pradana, 2016). Additionally, perception can also be influenced by other activities such as public relation (P.R) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions (Menon and Kahn, 2003; Hung, 2008).

To be more refined and specific, this research featured brand perception in the limelight of being an outcome of influencer-induced campaigns. As per the statistical testing, the hypothesis of the relationships existing between the attitudinal responsiveness to UGC and brand perception in the entire sample is not supported. UGC responsiveness, as from statistical results of the entire sample, statistically revealed it poorly links with the drivers of brand equity. The similarity of (H6) producing rejected outcomes was also reflected in (H6c). This coincides with the literary establishment asserted by Ozuem et al. (2023) who stated that content responsiveness not always has an impact on the perception of the brand. The nature of the relationship, therefore, is influenced by considerations that affect social media interactions and the nature of relationships established.

In as much as there are more rejected relationships for the connectivity between UGC responsiveness and the drivers of brand equity, this was not the case for the relationship

between UGC responsiveness and brand perception for the 28-45 age group. Literature analyses by Sethna et al. (2017) and Li et al. (2011), found that the outcomes of content responsiveness in regard to brand equity and brand perception can occur differently across different audiences. This illustrates that observed outcomes for UGC responsiveness can be influenced by not just variables or constructs but contextual characteristics as well such as demographic dynamics. The nature of UGC responsiveness is likely to be perceived differently across different audiences.

The contribution of SMIs towards UGC responsiveness could be further analysed in regards to how it can affect different settings. Consumers in Saudi Arabia actively participate as stakeholders and this influences the quality of the content they create or respond to (Othman et al., 2022). Considering different user dynamics which are affected by demographics such as purchasing propensity, the outcome of responsiveness could vary in a manner that can be statistically reflected by the outcomes identified by the study.

6.4.2 Hypotheses involving the drivers of BE

The drivers of brand equity, as adopted from Keller's (2001) model are desired end-constructs measured within this research. Brand equity is a perception of brand value and as such is becoming a more important consideration for brands and the organizations they represent. This study's scope, objective, contribution and literature review highlight that different considerations are taken into account in terms of what influences brand equity. However, different perspectives of analysis have revealed that brand equity involves a build-up that comes through with multiple steps.

Hence, this study builds on existing theories, for instance, the AIDA model and the ACCA model, which are building blocks for the hierarchy-of-effects (Barry, 1987; Wijaya, 2015; Chakravarty & Sarma, 2018). The theories illustrate a series of actions and influences that surround a customer's experience with a brand. This study particularly looks at how influencers fuel brand engagement and how influencers contribute to the overall outcome in terms of brand perception. This research further illustrates the crucial role of influencers as key contributors to improving brand perceptions considering influencers are already connected with potential consumers.

The revelations of the data are specific to the scope of the research, the method used to measure the research propositions and the obtained outcome from the respondents. The drivers of brand equity have been illustrated to be positively related across different literature contributions. The discussion of these relationships across different literature including contributions by Hollebeek et al. (2021), define these variables as closely related. Considering these definitions are derived from Keller's (2001) model, the commonality and relationship between these constructs is theoretical defined as strong. Different measures have additionally established the strength between these variables (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

The outcome that has been obtained in this respective study is therefore as a result of the theoretical and measurement backup as well as the research context. Understanding the research context is an important part of research analysis and discussion as it enables the researcher to be aware of how results were affected by other factors (Azeroual et al., 2019). Considering that the study explores a new research gap, the nature of the data obtained may be influenced by additional factors. The complexity of the concept of marketing communication also allows for a margin of differences in the outcome observed considering testing and measurement occurring across different audiences. The revelations by the data in regard to the measurement of brand equity have diverse outcomes in as much as a majority of the outcomes have been accepted.

Brand salience → Brand resonance (H7)

The nature of how brand equity is theoretically expressed and measured indicates that each of the drivers of brand equity is positively related, including brand salience and brand resonance. The foundations of brand equity indicate that brand salience and brand resonance share a close and significant relationship (Abd Aziz & Yasin, 2010). Keller's (2001) model reveals that resonance supports salience, illustrating that salience plays a major role in influencing experiences between a consumer and a brand. This study adopts that insight and represents salience as a contributing variable to resonance. The strength of a brand is likely to influence its relatability with its customers.

The findings of this study confirm a strong positive relationship between brand salience and brand resonance. Bearing in mind that this study considers influencer-driven campaigns, the

findings support that the impact of a strong brand supported by an established media personality affects the relatability of the brand with users. Users are likely to positively respond to a strong and established brand. This is because the brand has benefited from diverse contributions to establish its position in the consumers' minds (Phua et al., 2017).

The proposed hypothesis between brand salience and brand resonance is statistically accepted, which illustrates the similarity between the two variables. In this case, the strong brand position is a result of influencer UGC sharing. The findings are similar to Keller's (2001) model, where salience and resonance are interacting variables within the CBBE pyramid. The findings also support statements by Ajiboye et al. (2019), illustrating that communication and experiences surrounding a brand are crucial for a brand's image.

The relationship is accepted for the 28-45 age group as well. This showcases that the drivers of brand equity function across different demographics. Kim & Phua (2020) argue that the reflection of brand equity involves judgment, feelings, engagement and perceived imagery. These factors were discussed earlier in the chapter concerning brand salience and brand resonance.

Brand salience → Brand perception (H8)

The proximity of the respective variables in this proposed relationship is not reflected by the rejected hypothesis in models for both the entire sample and the focus age group. In most cases, literary works have illustrated on the strength and communality of brand salience and brand perception, this includes work by Hollebeek et al. (2022). The nature of these relationships embodies brand communications and interactions, drawing other factors such as reputation and social responsibility. In this case, (H8) yields a rejected outcome, contrary to stated and highlighted theoretical contributions.

However, works of literature from Hassan et al. (2016), highlight on weak relationships existing between the drivers of brand equity. Pradhan et al. (2023), discussed on the awareness of the modern consumer, stating that the modern consumer is more inclined to appreciate perceived value compared to the brand position. Hence, this outcome, and its similar arguments from obtained publications reveal that there are more forces into consideration when measuring

brand outcome. For the studies that also reject this outcome, the basis is on consumption preference and purchase intention. These are orientations that are outside the scope of the study.

Considering the setting and context of the research, the outcome reflected was subject to the responses from participants. In as much as the scope of the study is communicated, there are more forces that influence participants' or consumers' orientations and perceptions, influencing their responses as well. The nature of rejection is similarly based on significance values, illustrating that the outcome was affected by research setting dynamics as opposed to the nature of the theoretical claims.

The context of the study is, however, considerate of drivers of brand equity affecting one another. Considering the variable representation, the rejected outcome does not significantly affect the nature of the model, let alone the strong theoretical backing that connects the drivers of brand equity individually.

Brand resonance → Brand perception (H9)

Consumer-brand interactions and perceptions are gradually and discreetly growing in importance in the mind of consumers (Kim et al., 2023). As illustrated by Keller (2001, 2009) and Aaker (1992, 1996), this is what yields brand loyalty as in the build up towards brand loyalty, there are several different dynamics, listed as the drivers of brand equity. Brand resonance is heavily linked with brand perception in previous literature. For instance, Islam and Rahman (2016) admits that images of a brand held in a customer's mind is because of experiences between a brand and its customers. Bilro & Loureiro (2020), also state that different experiences and events between a consumer and a brand are likely to affect the perceived value of the brand by a customer. With these considerations, this study used methods that bring together the similarities of the two variables, resulting in findings that showcase a strong relationship between the variables.

The hypothesized relationship between brand resonance and consumer brand perception is accepted by the data analysis. The statistical outcome complements the theoretical concerns expressed by Jraisat et al. (2015) The consideration of brand perception and a driver of brand equity also involves contributions from Shieh & Lai (2017), mentioning that it is related to

brand resonance. These two constructs interactively relate with one another as discussed and proven by previously highlighted theoretical claims. The study reflects the nature of this relationship by identifying a positive outcome. In previous research (Keller, 2009; Shieh & Lai, 2017) the nature of a brand's relatability influences its reputation.

The outcome was additionally accepted for the focus age group illustrating that the considerations of brand perception are similarly reflected through differentiated demographic characteristics. Consumers prefer brands that they can relate to and are more inclined to select brands that they think understand them (Keller, 2009). When taking multiple brands into consideration the aspect of brand resonance and positive brand perception is further extrapolated and this was the case in the study.

The study selects prominent electronic brands and compels the respondents to consider and analyse these brands about how they react to them. The significance of this research setting allows the respondents to consider perception in the basis of how one brand compares to another competing one. This expresses similarities as identified by Jraisat et al. (2015), considerations. Therefore, brand resonance and perception are represented accordingly as the dynamics of the research context also contributed to the outcomes observed.

6.5 Chapter conclusion

The chapter discussed the results of this research, relating them to the context of the research and the research claims. The chapter considered the scope of the research and its influence on the methods selected to collect data. The chapter investigated different age segments based on Kemp (2022; 2023), exploring the nature of the respondents, and how demographic, social and cultural facets of Saudi Arabia, the research's target location, influenced the data obtained from the respondents.

The discussion related these results with established theory and the established research objective and design. It discussed the proposed relationships with regard to the obtained results. The results support the literature review and conceptual framework about the nature of most of the relationships proposed by the study and add to the existing body of literature by highlighting the dynamics that should be considered in modern-day IMC campaigns.

The study portrays the study's focus age group (28-45) as an important demographic to be considered in influencer campaigns. Hence, the discussion explains and confirms the theoretical and statistical findings of this research. The next chapter revisits the scope of this research, summarizes observations and findings from this research and highlights on limitations and future considerations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and future research

7.1 Introduction

This study investigated the contribution of UGC by SMIs on qualitative brand equity. The HOE model was applied to analyse the conceptual framework. This research combined conceptual knowledge from Keller (2001; 2009), Oliver (2014) and Kim and Ko (2012) to explain the relationship between qualitative brand equity and other SNS elements that affect brand value. The study focused on three Saudi Arabian electronics retailer brands, Xcite, eXtra and Jarir. The research focused on Saudi Arabians between the ages of 28 and 45. The research instrument gathered data from 477 Saudi participants over the age of 18 and analysed them in two cohorts: participants aged 28-45 and participants outside the 28-45 age margin. The research employed a cross-sectional survey to test the variables and validate the conceptual model. The adoption of multivariate analysis effectively represented the proposed relationships for data interpretation.

Overall, the research, through its scope, literature and method, contributes to the marketing literature by improving the understanding of social media influencer marketing and addressing a significant knowledge gap. This chapter presents the conclusions of this study, the impact of the results to academia and businesses and considerations for future research.

The study established the importance of brand perception, considering its impact on purchasing intention. Creating a desire or positive consideration from the customer's decision point is also a target in marketing. As Keller's (2001) CBBE model emphasizes brand trust and brand loyalty, the mental constructs surrounding the customer are as important as purchases or revenue. The importance of an established relationship between a brand and a consumer can be strengthened by the establishment of a strong parasocial relationship between the influencer endorsing the brand and the customer. Hence, desired relationships should be established and retained by brands through effective engagement.

In economies such as Saudi Arabia, established relationships based on trust and loyalty positively impact business, because of the nature of trust and its contributions to established business relationships. Brand equity is a phenomenon that can be practically influenced by brands through established communication methods and strategies (Berry, 2000; Yoo et al.,

2000). With these findings, audience behaviour has been effectively scoped, which has established a reliable pattern of reaction in regard to how customers respond to brands and influencers on social media.

7.2 Summary of contribution to the existing research

As we have seen, social media offers a convenient platform for marketing as it connects people and facilitates regard and consideration between two interacting parties. Social media is a more convenient and affordable way for brands to connect to users. Social media platforms are widely adopted and used, offering brands a platform to connect to existing and potential customers. Hence, as brands seek to diversify and intensify marketing communication, incorporating social media into brand marketing strategies aligns with current evolving interactions in the digital domain. The increasing level of "tech savviness" by users allows them to connect better on social media. Hence, social media communication is a strategic platform for consumer-brand interaction.

Saudi Arabia is a dynamic community deeply active in social media. Delving into the intricate dynamics of this digital realm, this study situated itself within the considerations of social media communication studies, theories, and analyses. These insights underscore the paramount role of social media as a reliable and influential channel for facilitating consumer-brand communications within this context.

Building upon this foundation, the study took a distinctive turn by focusing on a demographic often overlooked in contemporary marketing literature—the mature age group. This strategic shift was a deliberate choice aimed at addressing a significant gap in existing research. While prevailing studies emphasize the impact of social media on younger demographics, attention is directed to Saudi Arabia's mature social media users aged between 28 and 45, aligning the focus with the demographic characteristics outlined in Kemp's report (2023), which reveals that 99% of the population are active internet users while 79.3% are active on social media.

Echoing the proposition by Harrison et al. (2017), the research endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of the communication dynamics in this unexplored segment. The careful consideration of both the broader social media landscape and the specific demographic

nuances lays the groundwork for a unique contribution to the evolving discourse on influencer marketing and brand communication strategies.

The efficiency of social media as a marketing tool is realized not just through advertising on social media, but through using SMIs as communicating as intermediaries in the communication between brands and their consumers. This study significantly acknowledges influencers as effective facilitators of consumer-brand interactions through their traffic, influence and the established parasocial relationships between them and their audiences. Citing articles such as Conde & Casais (2023), and Koay et al. (2023), this study considers the parasocial relationship as a contributor to responsiveness, established trust and dependability.

Through its proposed framework, this study delves into parasocial relationship as a crucial component in influencer marketing as it affects the reception and perception of messages by influencers. This study's findings also reveal that the parasocial relationship is a valid construct in the proposed conceptual model, emphasizing its position in the research. The parasocial relationship specifically affects the impact of messages considering the pre-established bond between an influencer and a social media user and the pivotal role within the customer journey. The study, hence, brings out influencers as crucial components in contemporary marketing.

This study also makes a contribution that differentiates it from previous literature on social media influencer-infused marketing, which is the focus on a mature age group. Previous literature and statistical analyses by Usher et al. (2014) and Stanger et al. (2017) have considered social media as a platform that is highly impactful on young people. The established setting by this study considers Saudi Arabia, which is a market dominated by mature social media users. This research context differentiates the research from existing literature, the specification of China as a study location by Zou & Peng (2019) enabled this study to illuminate the importance of social media influencers as key opinion leaders on mature consumers. Saudi Arabia has the demographic characteristics (specifically its age distribution) that complement the research preferences, and this was reflected in the research findings as well.

In line with Harrison et al.'s (2017) proposition, the setting and scope of this research was carefully considered to ensure the quality and validity of the results from the selected research methods. Both tangible and pragmatic evidence has been presented, showcasing the need to consider unorthodox audiences such as people aged between 28 and 45. As discovered by the findings, the average age of social media users in this research was at 34.85 years, the mean

age is within the selected age margin for the study. The data obtained shows that 54.93% of the respondents were between the age of 28 and 45. Communication stands out as a crucial component in marketing, contributing significantly to the establishment of brand equity. This study, hence, highlights that communication is more impactful on the selected audience as they are more inclined to positively reacting to online promotional content. The importance of the highlighted age group lies in disseminating essential brand information such as products, pricing, and distribution channels, as outlined by Schivinski & Dabrowski (2015). These informational facets play a vital role in constructing brand awareness, influencing customer perceptions for the identified age group. Also, focus on influencer marketing and SNS promotions has mostly been on younger SNS users. The consideration of the focus age group establishes a comprehensive approach towards SNS marketing and creates a new market gap to be considered by scholars and marketing practitioners.

The study also attempted to look at the most beneficial aspect of IMC campaigns, this resulted in the consideration of brand equity as the goal, opposed to purchasing intention or revenue. Other studies like Weismueller et al. (2020), focus on revenue and purchasing intention, this study adopts brand equity, which is regarded a more valuable objective of marketing campaigns, as noted by Na et al. (1999) and Hollebeek et al. (2021). This study's findings identified a significant positive influence from social media communications in fostering parasocial relationships. While taking into account different considerations within communications by Aaker & Biel (2013), this study showcased that brand equity in consumer communities is impacted by the user-generated content shared by social media influencers. This research analysed the effect that social media messages by influencers have on consumer loyalty and brand associations, taking age grouping as a component.

This study, additionally, provided a deeper understanding of how influencers can create UGC aligned with the brand goals. Further, it sought to understand how UGC through the use of social media can influence brand association, brand salience, and brand resonance, resulting in brand perception. UGC by SMIs on brands through social media can influence consumers and can help achieve brand performance.

The matter of brand equity adopted by this study addresses the concerns of behavioural and attitudinal dimensions (Tajvidi et al., 2020). As per Keller (2009), brand equity as the differential effect that a brand has upon the perceptions and the decisions of customers, hence

represented by this study with brand salience, brand resonance and brand perception. Therefore, customer perception is an element that was be used to scale qualitative brand equity. Tajvidi et al. (2020) discusses qualitative brand equity as a strong coefficient in marketing success and important in managing quantitative values for the brand. Hatch & Schultz (2010), explain brand equity to be related to consumer behaviour towards a brand, this is how consumers perceive a certain brand. The value of a brand is the outcome of the brands impact on consumers. Hatch & Schultz (2010), discuss that there is a connection between the value of a brand and how much customers relate or perceive the brand, and social media influencers have a role to play in that belief.

7.3 Discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings

The applicability of this study's theoretical claims and findings illustrates key considerations of marketing being communication centric, relationship focused and relevant across most consumer ages. The study also highlights on social media as a key channel for integrated marketing communication. Hence, the literature and findings from this study expound on newer and more effective methods of brand communications establishing the impact of their efficiency.

The research communicates the need for fostering and improving relationships when interacting with consumers as a key part of maintaining positive perceptions. The study also adds that relationships can be co-maintained by influencers considering their parsasocial relations with their followers. Hence, the study positively contributes to theory and practice in marketing through expounding on key knowledge gaps in marketing psychology.

This study similarly concludes that influencer campaigns are more impactful, considering their nature, illustrating on the effectiveness of considering these channels for IMC campaigns. Noting attraction, authenticity and parasocial relationships as key drivers of influencer-fuelled social engagement, this study enables marketing scholars and practitioners to consider influence as a key input in communication. This research, hence, contributes to knowledge on communication in marketing setups by considering influence, attraction, traffic and relationships.

Additionally, the research findings from this study complement the developing literature on the efficiency of brand placement through the use of modern media platforms. Social theories by Goguen (2014) emphasize on the importance of sharing of information on a brand, product, service or offer, which enlightens a customer, acting as an opportunity for brands to promote and educate. This study, hence, takes into consideration the advantage of established customer communities that exist through connected influencers.

This study's scope challenges future research to be more considerate of demographic backgrounds when analysing social media campaigns. The study highlights a new audience that emphasizes the consideration of involving a wider remit in regard to target customer groups. In most studies, the specificity of influencer marketing is centred on younger audiences, by the study accurately challenging that perception, it establishes a significant research point. Considering the contribution to knowledge and the specificity of this study's scope, the focus on the 28-45-year age group verifies a more significant market gap to be included SNS campaign targets. Hence, the study improves on the contributions into marketing literature through statistically establishing the importance of rarely considered demographics in influencer campaigns. The findings obtained from this research establish relevance of focus on the 28-45 age group. The findings from the study revealed that the impact of IMC communications with modern media platforms cuts across different age groups, breaking established facets of knowledge that digital media platforms are more conversant upon young age groups.

The establishment of the research involved the consideration of psychological elements that contribute to brand perceptions with influencer-fuelled IMC campaigns on social media. Established psychological statutes such as parasocial relationships, as illustrated by Phua et al. (2017), showcase that influence is more effective with pre-established relationships. The research findings, henceforth, opens up research perspectives for future studies and marketing implementations to be age considerate, noting that influencer campaigns have the potential to affect all age groups.

Contributions in marketing distinctions selected in this study have improved the applicability of brand-customer communications, engagement and influence. Recent studies such as Evania et al. (2023), have been looking at the impact of communication, media marketing and their impact on purchasing intention. However, the measurements and methods of this study take

into consideration the lasting impact of IMC on the consumer. As expressed by Aaker (1991), Keller (2001), and Hollebeek et al. (2014), the perception of the brand within the minds of consumers is an important dynamic. Studies such as these ones have been trying to conceptualize and measure the applicability or impact of communications on brand equity.

The study's findings reported that influencer engagements are preferred by consumers, considering the preference to engaging and interactive content produced by influencers. The statistically established relationships also showcased that the nature of interactions is in most cases influenced by influencer dynamics. This correspondingly illustrates that engagement is dependent on the attachment established between the influencer and the SNS users or consumers (Saldanha et al., 2018). Hence, the study establishes that influencer marketing needs to consider, and leverage established relationships.

7.4 Limitations of the research

Although this research offers valuable insights into the impact of UGC and social media influencers on qualitative brand equity, some limitations should be acknowledged. This research recognizes the need for influencer diversity, especially in areas or market gaps that are less common with certain demographics. This limitation was acknowledged through the lack of female influencers in the study, which is due to the low participation by female influencers in the electronic niche in Saudi Arabia. The electronic niche in Saudi Arabia witnessed limited participation from women, reflecting deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms. In acknowledgment of the limitations inherent in this study, it is crucial to underscore the broader societal context that contributes to the absence of female influencers in the study's list of selected influencers. This was a constraint due to the specific context of the electronic niche in Saudi Arabia, where female influencers are infrequent. This scenario potentially impacted the generalizability of the findings to certain market niches, as the female demographic was not represented in electronic retailer brands by a female influencer in these markets. This lack of representation not only affects the current study's generalizability but also sheds light on the broader issue of gender disparities in digital spaces. This is a crucial limitation as female influencers have capabilities of reaching large audiences and have a powerful impact on their followers (Lokithasan et al., 2019). Future research should consider

a diverse representation of influencers to better measure the impact of influencer marketing across different genders and demographics.

Another layer of complexity is introduced by the reliance on self-reported data through surveys. While surveys offer valuable insights into user perceptions and interactions, they inherently depend on respondents' ability to accurately recall and articulate their experiences. The subjective nature of self-reported data introduces an additional layer of complexity, as individuals may interpret questions differently or recall events selectively. Delving deeper into the intricacies of self-reported data, the study grapples with the ever-present challenge of social desirability bias. Despite the measures taken to ensure respondent anonymity and confidentiality, the inherent desire to present oneself in a socially desirable light may persist. An instance of pre-existent bias in research is the central tendency, where respondents are inclined to provide more neutral responses instead of those on extreme ends (Dawson, 2002). This bias could potentially influence responses, leading to an idealized portrayal of user interactions with influencers. To address this challenge, future research might consider employing implicit measures or experimental designs that minimize the impact of social desirability, thereby enhancing the reliability of the collected data.

The dynamic nature of social media trends and algorithms introduces a temporal dimension to the study's limitations. While the surveys captured a snapshot of influencer marketing activities within a specific timeframe, the rapid evolution of social media platforms means that trends and algorithms are in constant flux. To capture the ongoing impact of influencer marketing strategies, a longitudinal approach or real-time monitoring could be employed. This would allow researchers to track changes over time, providing a more nuanced understanding of the sustained effects of influencer collaborations.

Additionally, the study's focus on specific retail technology brands in Saudi Arabia invites consideration of the broader industry landscape. Electronic retail, represented by brands such as Xcite, eXtra and Jarir, constitutes a specific sector within the larger market. Future research endeavours could benefit from exploring a diverse range of industries and brands to uncover potential variations in influencer dynamics. This broader approach would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how different sectors leverage influencer marketing strategies to engage with their target audiences.

In recognition and acknowledgment of these limitations, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges inherent in influencer marketing research. By highlighting the contextual factors shaping these constraints, future research in this field can navigate and build upon these insights, ultimately advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics between UGC, SMI, and qualitative BE.

7.5 Considerations for future research

To address gaps in marketing psychology knowledge and foster development, it is imperative to identify key areas for future research. Drawing from the considerations, recommendations, and limitations of this study, several aspects warrant attention for further exploration. To properly improve on knowledge and development in marketing psychology gaps, highlighting areas of focus for future research is a crucial research action. From the study's considerations, recommendations and limitations, a few considerations for further research are highlighted.

The first consideration for future research is the integration of influencer diversity when analysing the impact of influencer-fuelled campaigns. For instance, further studies in the electronic retail niche on influencers should consider female influencers. Studies should also be conducted considering influencers impact on brand equity in new demographics and niches. Considerations such as demographic locality, medical condition or disability should be made when selecting influencers for campaigns targeting small market groups. By considering these research areas, studies are more likely to effectively investigate on unique opportunities and challenges presented by these new demographics in the context of brand partnerships and marketing campaigns.

In future studies on influencer marketing, there should be an exploration and differentiation between brand and influencer credibility. This study used influencer credibility as a variable, considering its basis on influencer dynamics involving content shared. Future studies should consider brand credibility as well, highlighting its position vis- à-vis influencer credibility. Also, future research should unpack the complex interplay between brand credibility and influencer credibility in affecting consumer perception and brand equity. Influencer credibility is different from brand credibility, as people respond to influencers based on interactions, and to brands primarily based on consumption (as seen from the research findings). This analysis

can also involve how influencer credibility can enhance or detract from brand credibility, and vice versa, depending on the influencer's image, alignment with brand values, and past endorsements. This exploration would cover potential knowledge gaps on credibility and enable marketing psychology scholars to better understand the effectiveness of influencer campaigns and its implications for brand image and equity.

Another avenue for future research could involve measuring the impact of influencer UGC on other demographic groups, sectors and research scopes that are inadequately scoped by literature but are more likely to have an impact on consumer behaviours. There are demographics and market areas that need to be considered when measuring the impact of communication on campaigns. For instance, the study could be potentially replicated in different markets such as SE Asia, North America or Australia/Oceania. Insights from the replicated studies are likely to draw more substantial conclusions on influencer marketing. The studies would also create an understanding of influencer marketing for mature age groups that is specific to the respective demographic. Hence, new research should consider analysing how cultural nuances and demographic densities impact the reach and influence of influencer campaigns across different regions and market segments. Similarly, unorthodox consumer industries such as telecommunications have had little literary consideration. The aspect of brand equity development is currently generalized across common consumer niches. This knowledge needs to be extended to other niches, market gaps and demographics as well.

By addressing these critical considerations, future research holds the promise of delving into unexplored realms, unveiling invaluable insights into the ever-evolving landscape of influencer marketing. For instance, research could explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in user-generated content generation and influencer marketing. The rise of AI-driven content generation services, as noted by Liu et al. (2024), present an intriguing area for investigation. Future research should examine the application of AI in UGC creation, considering the dynamics and efficiencies of this technological advancement. Similarly, the concept of AI influencers, as mentioned by Zhang & Wei (2021), open up the possibility of generic characters influencing human behaviour. Future studies could delve into the AI space concerning UGC sharing and brand equity development in social media marketing setups.

Such explorations stand to deepen the literature's understanding of the intricate dynamics of contemporary marketing, offering profound revelations not only about its impact on brand

equity and consumer behaviour but also about its broader implications for diverse industries within the realm of marketing psychology. This comprehensive investigation will contribute to a more holistic comprehension of the multifaceted influences of influencer marketing across various sectors, thereby enriching the field of marketing psychology.

7.6 Recommendations

The main recommendation from this study is communicated in its aim. Brands should seek to take advantage of social media as a platform for marketing. Even better, brands should take advantage of parasocial relationships and use them to create a more intentional impact through campaigns and promotions. This is through brand marketing managers working more closely with SMIs to ensure that content creation and messaging enhance brand equity through parasocial relationships.

Brands are advised to capitalize on social media as a potent marketing platform. Leveraging parasocial relationships can amplify the impact of campaigns and promotions. This entails a closer collaboration between brand marketing managers and SMIs to ensure that content creation and messaging synergistically enhance brand equity. The recommendation extends to incorporating SMIs as integral intermediaries, working collaboratively with brand managers on various aspects such as new product releases, promotions, endorsements, and overall campaign curation.

Another recommendation is the consideration of smaller-scale parasocial relationship setups. This is through taking note of the potential of micro-influencers, who have a deeper connection with their followers. This study's methods were based on established brands and prominent influencers; however, influencer marketing is applicable through all business scales. This study has highlighted micro-influencers, meaning that even smaller brands have the chance to take advantage of parasocial relationships and use influence in their campaigns. The study also identifies a differentiated age group for influencer campaigns, suggesting that the 28-45 age group is more responsive to marketing campaigns. Hence, the scope of this study seeks to inform brands, marketing practitioners and scholars that influencer adoption in communication is an activity that could be pivotal in a brand's success.

Participants suggested that companies should focus on improving their overall customer experience by providing superior customer service, responding promptly to inquiries, and establishing a better connection with customers through social media (see Appendix 2). Improving customer experience is likely to supplement marketing campaigns fuelled by influencers. Similarly, influencers can work collaboratively with brands to improve customer service, offer customer support and curate more content to inform customers. Paying attention to the quality of the products or services offered by a company is crucial for building customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers are more likely to purchase a product if they know that it is backed by reliable support (e.g. warranty) and that the quality of the product is high. According to a study by Cronin & Taylor (1992), the way customers perceive the quality of the service provided by a business is a crucial factor in determining their satisfaction and loyalty to the business.

Therefore, companies should focus on enhancing their quality to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Research has demonstrated that social media marketing can be leveraged to improve customer engagement and satisfaction (Jain et al., 2018). In addition, social media can be utilized to create brand awareness, foster brand loyalty, and augment sales (Kim & Ko, 2012). Providing exceptional customer service can lead to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth advertising, which can help companies build their reputation (Reichheld & Teal, 1996).

While trying to use influencers to drive communication, brands should supplement their strategies with swift responses to customers' queries during IMC campaigns. Responding swiftly to inquiries can help to enhance customer satisfaction and can lead to increased sales (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). Establishing a better connection with customers through social media can help companies build relationships with their customers and create a sense of community around their brand, which can lead to increased customer loyalty and positive brand associations (Hollebeek et al., 2016). This can be achieved by engaging with customers on social media platforms by responding to comments and messages, sharing user-generated content, and creating a sense of exclusivity by offering special promotions or sneak peeks to social media followers. However, it's important to keep in mind that the responses may not be representative of the entire population being studied and that those who choose to answer optional questions may have different opinions or experiences than those who choose not to

answer. Therefore, it's essential to avoid generalizing based solely on the responses to the optional question.

7.7 Conclusion

This study investigated the contribution of UGC by SMIs on qualitative brand equity. The research focussed its scope on Saudi Arabian social media users with an emphasis on the ages of 28 and 45 years old in comparison with other age groups. The research combines Keller's CBBE model and the HOE model to explain the relationship between qualitative brand equity and other SNS elements that affect brand value.

This study used SEM to numerically represent the proposed relationships. This study's research method relied on social media usage, educational and digital literacy. Its success means that exploring the study's research gap was a valid research activity, considering the gap lies in social media communications. The literature breakdown and findings conclude that communication is a crucial component in the facilitation of healthy consumer-brand relationships, and personalities like influencers effectively facilitate the communication.

The research findings support the literature that social media is a key element in communication, especially for the Saudi Arabian electronics retailer market. The unique contextual background established by the research highlights a research gap that is often overlooked and discussed in existing literature (to the author's knowledge). This study's context created a setting that responded to the adopted research methods and the organization of the research.

Study methods that involve social media need to comprehensively visualize and cover population or sample dynamics (see Ghosh (2022). Through its scope, methods, and obtained data, this study has properly engaged with the demographic dynamics associated with social media usage. For instance, certain findings obtained by the study such as social media usage statistics replicate existing data, such as reports by Kemp, (2022; 2023). Hence, besides the results, the insights obtained from the study's method have expounded on the discussions and arguments in preceding chapters. The success of the research method also reflects the significance of this study.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms the relevance and applicability of exploring social media communications in diverse contexts, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The questionnaire (English and Arabic versions)

NOTE:

You are invited to participate in a study to understand how electronic retailers in Saudi Arabia use the user-generated content of social media influencers to build their brand and engage consumers. The study is for a PhD study for Ibrahim Alibrahim at the Victoria University, Australia.

The research focuses on a remarkable research gap and will contribute to a deeper understanding of how electronic retailers in Saudi Arabia use the user-generated content of social media influencers to align with their marketing and brand objectives and engage consumers. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how user-generated content through the use of social media can influence brand engagement, brand perception, and brand loyalty, and how these constructs affect their perception and ultimately contribute to brand equity for major electronic retailer brands.

The survey should take approximately 7-12 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the research at any time. The information you provide through this online survey is non-identifiable and information will be protected and kept confidential. Furthermore, you will not be asked for your name and therefore the response you provide cannot be linked to you. Analysis of the data will be performed at the aggregate level.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact, Associate Professor Romana Garma at romana.garma@vu.edu.au , Dr. Colin Drake at colin.drake@vu.edu.au , Ibrahim Alibrahim at ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au.

This study has received ethics approval from Victoria University (HREC). If you have any queries or complaints about the way, you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Consent

Please click on "Agree" to confirm that you are at least 18 years old and that you freely consent to participate in this study. Further, you understand that through participation you agree with how the information you provide will be used.

1:

[ ]   Agree

[ ]   Disagree

INSTRUCTIONS

Please answer the questions with honesty and integrity.

SECTION 1: MESUREMENT OF INFLUENCER RELATIONS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA USERS
This section aims to measure your relationship with the influencers you follow on social media. The section honestly inquires for your perception of the influencers and how you find them special.
Which one of the following social media platforms are you engaged with actively?
(Check all the appropriate ones)
- Facebook []
- Instagram []
- Twitter []
- Snapchat []
- YouTube []

Which of the following electronic retail social media influencers do you follow/consider the most on the social media platforms you are active? (Check only one)
- Abdullah Alsabe []
- Fahad Albugami []
- Saad Aldhawi []
- Abdullah Alsubaie []
- Salem Aldalbhe []
- Faisal Alsaif []
- Other: _____

Which of the following electronic retailer brands do you prefer and find yourself connected to the most, and related to the influencer you have chosen?
(Select one only)
- Xcite []
- eXtra []
- Jarir []
- None [] *(end of survey)*

Consider the influencer you regard the most (selected influencer)
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I think the influencer I follow on social media is honest.					
I think the influencer I follow is sincere.					
I think the influencer I follow is genuine.					
Recent posts from the influencer fits well with his/her style.					
The influencer is loyal to his/her style in recent content/posts.					

Consider the influencer (selected from section 1) that you regard the most
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Staying tuned to the content from influencer(s) I follow on social media gives me a good feeling.					
The selected influencer(s) has an attractive image.					
The selected influencer(s) catches my attention through his posts and content					
The selected influencer(s) I follow pleases people.					
I find the influencer(s) I follow on social media attractive.					

Consider the influencer (selected from section 1) that you regard the most
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The selected influencer(s) I follow is experienced in his/her posts.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow seems professional.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow seems capable.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow seems knowledgeable.					
From his/her posts, the selected influencer(s) I follow is skilled in his/her niche.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow knows the brands he/she promotes.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow know how to use the products from the brands he/she promotes.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow properly matches his/her value to the brands he/she promotes.					
The selected influencer(s) I follow is appropriate for the brands he/she promotes.					
The selected influencer(s)' lifestyle matches the brands he/she promotes.					
The selected influencer(s)' character compliments the brands he/she promotes.					

Consider the influencer (selected from section 1) that you regard the most
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
From the influencer's promotions, my selected brand's (eXcite/Extra/Jarir's) social media profiles enable sharing information with others.					
From the influencer's promotion, conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through my selected brand's (eXcite/Extra/Jarir's) social media profiles.					
From the influencer(s)' I follow promotions, it is easy to deliver my opinion through my selected brand's (eXcite/Extra/Jarir's) social media handles.					
I would like to pass along information on an announced offer, product, or service of eXcite, Extra/Jarir on social media.					
I would like to share content from eXcite, Extra/Jarir's social media profiles to my own profiles.					

Consider the influencer (selected from section 1) that you regard the most
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I look forward to watching the influencer(s) I follow on social media.					
If the influencer(s) I follow appears on another profile, I would interact with their content as well.					
When watching the selected influencer(s), I feel as a part of his/her community.					
I feel autonomous related to the influencer(s) I follow.					

SECTION 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFLUENCER ACTIVITY AND BRAND EQUITY
This section aims to measure how your interactions with the selected influencer(s) have influenced your perceptions on the brands you follow on social media. Recall the influencer(s) you have selected in section 1, and use the information to mark the appropriate option as provided in the scale.

Which one of the following is the main reason why you follow the selected brand(s)?
(Check all the appropriate ones)
- Great content []
- Good advertising []
- Excellent products/customer service []
- For tips and offers []
- I follow them because I am their customer []

Consider the influencer (selected from section 1) that you regard the most
To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The selected influencer(s) is/are congruent with my selected brand's (eXcite/Extra/Jarir).					
I feel self-disclosure interacting with the influencer(s) I have selected.					
The selected influencer matches, or fits eXtra, Excite or Jarir.					
I think the seleced influencer(s)' promotions for eXtra, Excite or Jarir/the brand I have chosen are good.					

Consider the brand you prefer the most
To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Xcite, eXtra and Jarir effectively satisfy my needs.					
I like the interactions and content from Xcite, eXtra and Jarir.					
I find content from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir stylish.					
Xcite, eXtra and Jarir are brands pleasing to interact with.					

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Consider the brand you prefer the most
To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir/the selected brand I follow are brands I would shop for when shopping for electronics.					
I would be loyal to Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow.					
Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow are brands that are special to me.					
I feel a sense of attachment toward eXcite, Extra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow.					
I love Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow.					
I really identify with the type of people who might use Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow for shopping.					
I feel a kinship or affiliation with the type of people who might use Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow for shopping.					
I identify with owners Xcite, eXtra and Jarir/the selected brand I follow.					

I would like to talk about Xcite, eXtra or Jarir with others.				
I would recommend others to use electronic products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.				
I would like to talk with the individuals responsible for electronic products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.				

Consider the brand you prefer the most
To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of warmth.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of calm or peacefulness.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of friendliness.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir are fun brands.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of playfulness.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir make me feel cheerful.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give off a feeling of excitement.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir make me feel energized.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of enthusiasm.					
Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of security.					

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Xcite, eXtra or Jarir give me a feeling of safety.					
People would approve of my using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.					
People would react favorably toward me if I use of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir.					
Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir gives me a feeling of self-respect.					
Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir gives me a sense of pride.					
Using of products from Xcite, eXtra or Jarir makes me feel better about myself.					

Do you have any recommendations on how you would want the brands you follow on social media to improve how they communicate with you?

SECTION 3: BIODATA

This section obtains information on you as a participant.
Instructions: Check the appropriate box.

Gender:
Male []   female []

Citizenship:
Saudi []   Non-Saudi []

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(If Non-Saudi, end of survey/survey response is disregarded)

Please Input Your Age

Highest Education Qualification
High School []
Undergraduate []
Postgraduate []

Marital Status:
Single []
Married []
Rather not say []

Monthly Income Level *(Please tick the appropriate one)*
Below 3000SAR []
3000-5000SAR []
5000-10000SAR []
10000-20000SAR []
Above 20000SAR []
  Rather not say []

YOUSEF SAHARI
CPN5OQ23X
ENGLISH -> ARABIC
VALID TO 13/12/2023
SIGNATURE:
TRANSLATION DATE 25/05/2022
CERTIFIED TRANSLATOR

ملاحظة:

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي للدكتوراه بعنوان " تأثير مشاركة المحتوى الذي ينشئه المؤثرون على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على حقوق ملكية العلامة التجارية لبيع التجزئة الالكترونية المستندة إلى المستهلك في المملكة العربية السعودية". تهدف هذه الدراسة لفهم كيفية استخدام تجار التجزئة للعلامات الالكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية وخصوصا للمحتوى المقدم من قبل المؤثرين/ المشاهير في شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي لبناء العلامة التجارية وجذب العميل.

يقوم بتنفيذ هذا المشروع الباحث إبراهيم البراهيم، كجزء من دراسة الدكتوراه في جامعة فيكتوريا، أستراليا. تحت إشراف الدكتور رومانا جارما والدكتور كولين دريك.
ستساهم المعلومات التي تقدمها في فهم أعمق لكيفية استخدام تجار التجزئة للعلامات الالكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية للمحتوى الذي ينشئه المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وذلك بما يتوافق مع أهدافهم التسويقية والعلامة التجارية وجذب العملاء.
تهدف الدراسة إلى فهم مدى تأثير صنع المحتوى في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في جذب وإدراك وولاء العميل للعلامة التجارية، وايضا كيف لهذا التأثير أن يبني تصور العملاء للعلامة التجارية التي سيساهم بدوره في السيطرة على مواكبة العلامات التجارية الالكترونية الرائدة.

سيستغرق إكمال الاستطلاع من ٧ إلى ١٢ دقيقة تقريبًا.

تذكر أن مشاركتك اختيارية، وإذا شعرت بعدم الارتياح يمكنك الانسحاب من الاستطلاع في أي وقت. المعلومات التي تقدمها من خلال هذا الاستطلاع عبر الإنترنت سرية ولن يطلب منك الإفصاح عن اسمك ولذلك لا يمكن التعرف عليك من خلال الاجابات. سيتم تحليل البيانات وكتابة النتائج والتقارير بأسلوب جمعي.
حصلت هذه الدراسة على موافقة أخلاقيات البحث من جامعة فكتوريا، وإذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو استفسارات، يرجى التواصل مع الأستاذ مع الدكتور رومانا جارما على الإيميل romana.garama@vu.edu.au ، أو الدكتور كولين دريك على الإيميل colin.drake@vu.edu.au ، أو إبراهيم البراهيم على الإيميل ibrahim.alibrahim@live.VU.edu.au.
إذا كانت لديك أي استفسارات أو شكاوى حول الطريقة التي عوملت بها، فيمكنك الاتصال بسكرتير آداب المهنة، لجنة أخلاقيات (آداب المهنة) البحوث الإنسانية بجامعة فيكتوريا، مكتب البحوث، جامعة فيكتوريا، ص.ب. 14428، ملبورن، فيكتوريا، 8001، البريد الإلكتروني researchethics@vu.edu.au أو هاتف رقم 4781 9919(03).

الموافقة مع الاطلاع المسبق على المشاركة في الدراسة البحثية:
الرجاء النقر فوق "موافق" إذا كنت:
1. عمرك لا يقل عن 18 عاماً
2. تشارك باختيارك
3. مدرك لكيفية الاستفادة من المعلومات المقدمة

[ ] أوافق
[ ] لا اوافق

تعليمات:
الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة بصدق ونزاهة

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<u>القسم الاول: قياس علاقات المؤثرين مع مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي</u>

ما هي منصات التواصل الاجتماعية التالية التي تشارك فيها بفاعلية؟. اختر جميع ما هو مناسب.

- فيسبوك
- إنستغرام
- تويتر
- سناب شات
- يوتيوب

أي من المؤثرين التاليين المهتمين في المجال الالكتروني تتابعهم بصورة أكثر في منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي التي لديك بها تفاعل كبير؟ (حدد واحدًا فقط)

- عبد الله السبع []
- فهد البقمي []
- سعد الضاوي []
- عبد الله السبيعي []
- سالم الدلبحي []
- فيصل السيف []
- لا يوجد [] *(نهاية الاستبيان)*

أيٌّ من العلامات التجارية لبائعي التجزئة الإلكترونية التالية تجد نفسك مرتبط بها أكثر من غيرها؟ (اختر واحدة فقط)

- إكسايت []
- إكسترا []
- جرير []
- لا يوجد [] *(نهاية الاستبيان)*

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر الذي تعتبره الأكثر تأثيراً (المؤثر المختار)
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					أجد نفسي أبحث عن مشاركات من المؤثر الذي أتابعه في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.
					أعتقد أن المؤثر الذي أتابعه على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أمين.
					أعتقد أن المؤثر الذي أتابعه على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مخلص.
					أعتقد أن المؤثر الذي أتابعه صادق.
					تتناسب المشاركات الأخيرة من المؤثر بشكل جيد مع أسلوبه.
					المؤثر مخلص لأسلوبه في المحتوى/ والمنشورات الأخيرة.

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر (المحدد في الجزء 1) الذي تعتبره أكثر تأثيراً من غيره.
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					متابعة المحتوى من المؤثر الذي أتابعه على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يعطيني شعورًا بالرضا.
					المؤثر المختار لديه صورة نمطية جذابة.
					المؤثر المختار يلفت انتباهي في محتواه.
					المؤثر الذي أتابعه يسعى على إرضاء متابعيه.
					أجد المؤثر الذي أتابعه على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي محبوب.

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر (المحدد في الجزء 1) الذي تعتبره أكثر تأثيراً من غيره.
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه ذو خبرة في مشاركاته.
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه يقدم محتوى محترف.

					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه مؤهل ومتمكن لما يقدمه.
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه ذو إطلاع معرفي واسع.
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه ماهر ومتمرس في مجال تخصصه من خلال مشاركاته.
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه يعرف العلامات التجارية التي يروج لها.
					المؤثر المختار الذي أتابعه يعرف كيفية استخدام المنتجات التي تقدمها العلامات التجارية التي يروج لها.
					يتطابق أسلوب حياة المؤثر المختار مع العلامات التجارية التي يروج لها.

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر (المحدد في الجزء 1) الذي تعتبره أكثر تاثيراً من غيره.
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					من خلال العروض الترويجية للمؤثر للعلامات التجارية المختارة (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) فأن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تتيح مشاركة المحتوى مع الأخرين.
					من خلال العروض الترويجية للمؤثر، فأن المحادثات وتبادل الآراء مع الأخرين، تتم من خلال وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي فيما يخص العلامة التجارية المختارة (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير).
					من خلال المؤثر المختار، من السهل تقديم رأيي من خلال وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي فيما يخص العلامة التجارية المختارة (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير).

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر (المحدد في الجزء 1) الذي تعتبره أكثر تاثيراً من غيره
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					إذا ظهر المؤثر الذي أتابعه في صفحه أخرى، فسأقوم بالتفاعل مع محتواه أيضًا.
					عند مشاهدة المؤثر المختار، أشعر بأنني جزء من مجتمعه.

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					أشعر بالثقة فيما يتعلق بالمؤثر الذي أتابعه.
					أجد محتوى المؤثر المختار مهمًا في التأثير على حياتي، قراراتي واستهلاكي.

القسم الثاني: العلاقة بين نشاط المؤثر وجودة العلامة التجارية:

لماذا تتابع العلامة التجارية المختارة؟ اختر جميع ماهو مناسب.

- محتوى رائع. []
- إعلان جيد. []
- منتجات ممتازة / خدمة العملاء. []
- للحصول على العروض. []
- أتابعهم لأنني عميلهم. []

يهدف هذا القسم إلى قياس كيف تأثرت تصوراتك حول العلامة التجارية التي تتابعها على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي من خلال تفاعلاتك مع المؤثر المختار. استرجع المؤثر الذي قمت بتحديده في القسم الاول، واستخدم المعلومات لتحديد الخيار المناسب كما هو مذكور في المقياس.

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار المؤثر (المحدد في القسم الاول) الذي تعتبره أكثر تاثيراً من غيره.
إلى أي مدى توافق أو لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					المؤثر المختار يتجانس مع العلامة التجارية التي أخترتها (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير)
					أشعر أنني أفصح عن ذاتي من خلال المؤثر الذي أخترته.
					المؤثر المختار يناسب العلامة التجارية التي أخترتها (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير)
					أعتقد أن العروض الترويجية المقدمة من المؤثر المختار مناسبة للعلامة التجارية التي أخترتها (إكسترا / إكسايت / جرير)

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار العلامة التجارية المفضلة بالنسبة لك.
الى أي مدى توافق/لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					تعجبني التفاعلات والمحتوى المقدم من العلامة التجارية التي أتابعها (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).

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					أجد المحتوى المقدم من العلامة التجارية التي أتابعها (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) يمتاز بالأناقة.
					عندما أقوم بالتسوق لشراء أجهزة إلكترونية أحب أن أتسوق من خلال العلامة التجارية المحددة التي أتابعها (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير)
					العلامة التجارية المختارة (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) التي أتابعها تلبي احتياجاتي بشكل مُرضٍ وفعال.

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار العلامة التجارية المفضلة بالنسبة لك.
الى أي مدى توافق/لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
					سأكون مخلصًا للعلامة التجارية المختارة (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) التي أتابعها.
					العلامة التجارية المحددة (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير) التي أتابعها هي علامة تجارية مميزة بالنسبة لي.
					أشعر بالانحياز تجاه العلامة التجارية المختارة (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير) التي أتابعها.
					أحب العلامة التجارية المختارة التي أتابعها (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير).
					أتعرف على فئة الأشخاص الذين قد يتسوقون من العلامات التجارية المحددة التي أتابعها (اكسايت / اكسترا / جرير).
					أشعر بقرب أو ارتباط مع فئة الأشخاص الذين يتسوقون من العلامة التجارية المختارة التي أتابعها للتسوق (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير)
					لدي ارتباط أوصلة جيدة مع العلامة التجارية المختارة التي أتابعها (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).
					أود التحدث مع الأفراد المسؤولين عن المنتجات الإلكترونية في العلامة التجارية المختارة (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).

مع الأخذ في الإعتبار العلامة التجارية المفضلة بالنسبة لك.
الى أي مدى توافق/لا توافق على العبارات التالية:

	أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني إحساس بالارتياح.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني إحساس بالطمأنينة.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني شعوراً بالود.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني شعوراً بالمرح.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تجعلني أشعر بالانشراح.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني شعوراً بالإثارة.
						(إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) العلامة التجارية المحددة تمنحني شعوراً بالأمان.
						يؤيدون الناس استخدامي لمنتجات من العلامة التجارية (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).
						سيتفاعل الناس معي بشكل إيجابي إذا استخدمت منتجات من العلامة التجارية (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).
						يمنحني استخدام منتجات من العلامة التجارية (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) شعوراً باحترام الذات.
						يمنحني استخدام منتجات من العلامة التجارية (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) شعوراً بالفخر.
						استخدام منتجات من العلامة التجارية (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) يجعلني أشعر بالرضا تجاه نفسي.
						يمكنني ربط المؤثر المختار، بالعلامة التجارية المختارة (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير).
						أرغب في إقامة شراكة بين العلامة التجارية المفضلة لدي (إكسايت / إكسترا / جرير) والمؤثر السعودي المفضل لدي على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

هل لديك أي اقتراحات لتحسين جودة تواصل العلامات التجارية التي تتابعها على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟
_____

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القسم الثالث: البيانات الشخصية.

تعليمات: الرجاء الإجابة بشكل صحيح.

الجنس:

ذكر [ ]

أنثى [ ]

الجنسية:

سعودي [ ]

غير سعودي [ ]

(إذا كان المشارك غير سعودي، سيتم تجاهل المشاركة)

ما هو عمرك؟

سنة ــــــــــ

المستوى التعليمي:

المرحلة الثانوية [ ]

المرحلة الجامعية [ ]

الدراسات العليا [ ]

الحالة الاجتماعية:

أعزب [ ]

متزوج [ ]

لا اريد الإفصاح [ ]

مستوى الدخل الشهري:

(يرجى اختيار المستوى المناسب)

أقل من ٣٠٠٠ ريال سعودي [ ]

٣٠٠٠ ــ ٥٠٠٠ ريال سعودي [ ]

٥٠٠٠ ــ ١٠٠٠٠ ريال سعودي [ ]

١٠٠٠٠ ــ ٢٠٠٠٠ ريال سعودي [ ]

أعلى من ٢٠٠٠٠ ريال سعودي [ ]

لا اريد الإفصاح [ ]

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Appendix 2: Open-ended question (recommendations for brands from participants)

Recommendations
Company should focus on increasing sales by improving the marketing strategy through offering more promotions, providing better explanations of products, and creating more engaging social media content.
Attractive promotional offers and reasonable prices for sale and maintenance.
I suggest that there be more options and offers to draw customers' attention to the brand in the midst of competition and the large number of followers on social media.
Paying attention to the content of the ads and the quality of the photography provided by Jarir on the social media accounts.
The brands should focus on creative advertising
Improve the brands' websites to visit and engage with them directly.
The first priority of mine is focusing on warranty and quality
More interaction by social media platforms, especially to present advantages and how to use various and new products.
Provide better offers and advertisements in order to better attract customers' attention
Suggest intensifying promotions for customers in order to satisfy their desires.
Establishing a quick link between the brand and the customer to ensure convenience and speed of interaction for the customer
The companies have to provide more detail of the product.
I hope the brands do not exaggerate the advertisements submitted by celebrities on social media platforms.
Companies should follow up with customers after a purchase (6-12 months) to ensure that they are satisfied with the product and to address any issues or concerns they may have.
Customer service at Jarir after sales is bad. A fee must be paid for providing maintenance or checking the devices.
It is preferable to respond to inquiries more quickly.
More offers constantly.
Lower the prices so that everyone can buy.
Advertising through social media must be strictly controlled and monitored.
Their sales policy must be clear on their site.
Knowing the needs of customers through personal communication with customers, meeting their requests and providing them, as well as providing more offers according to distinguished customers
In the regard of offers, I hope that the companies are providing real offers.
Prices are expensive, so I suggested lowering the prices.
Communicate with the customer 24 hours daily.

Yes, Jarir is one of the oldest and best companies, but in terms of communicating with the customer in social communication, it is not the best, and this matter must be improved.
Responding quickly to customers and not ignoring their problems.
I wish they had more offers.
Reconsider prices and offers for products.
The warranty for the devices must be strong and comprehensive, even for personal use, and replacement with new devices of the same type. Also, competitive and attractive ads.
The more honest the person is in his advertisement, the better the product.
I hope that attention will be given to middle and low income people.
Developing its own applications and communicating with the customer.
The influencers must have a positive attitude towards the product they are promoting on social media.
Activate the feature of responding to inquiries quickly, appropriate to the era of speed in which we live now - also the times of annual offers are scheduled and clear to the customer so that he can benefit from them, especially if the period between purchases and offers is less than a week
The honesty should be in every advertisement, not on a specific advertisement.
Do not only give your advertisement to celebrities, advertise them in any other way.
Improve the content on social media to attract customers effectively.
More interaction.
Improve customer service and compensation.
To be responsive to people needs and requirements.
Being more present in social media networking programs, by sharing existing trends with customers.
Yes, I wish to respect the customs and religion of every country in which it is located
The continuation of the offers for a longer period and providing the products more quickly.
Companies should be ready to deliver the full information when the customer inquiries about something.
More discount, low price, offers.

Appendix 3: Certified translation of the consent form (English and Arabic versions)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of an online survey on How Social Media Influencers' User-Generated Content Sharing Impacts Qualitative Brand Equity in older Saudi Arabians?'This study measures the contribution of user-generated content sharing by social mediainfluencers in co-operation with consumer electronic brands in Saudi Arabia and its influenceon qualitative brand equity as perceived by consumers.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,

Of

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study on "'How Social Media Influencers' User-Generated Content Sharing Impacts Qualitative Brand Equity in older Saudi Arabians" being conducted by Ibrahim Alibrahim. I understand my role in this study and that I freely consent to participate in the study. I understandthat I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardies mein any way.

Signed:

Date:

If you have any concerns, questions or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the on the details below.

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Romana Garma	Associate Investigator: Dr. Colin Drake
Head Victoria University Business School	Senior Lecturer
Victoria University Business School romana.garma@vu.edu.au Phone: +61 (3) 9919 1515	Victoria University Business School colin.drake@vu.edu.au
Student Researcher: Ibrahim Alibrahim	Phone: +61 (3) 9919 9551 Local Contact:
Victoria University Business School PhD. Student Business and Management (Marketing) ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au (+966) 56644 9988	Ibrahim Alibrahim Ibrahim3ziz1@gmail.com (+966) 50744 4147

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461

Consent Notice:
The consent notice below will be displayed on the front page of the online survey for participants in order to provide online consent for participating in the survey. You are invited to participate in a study to understand how electronic retailers in Saudi Arabia use the user-generated content of social media influencers to build their brand and engage consumers. The study is for a PhD study for Ibrahim Alibrahim at the Victoria University, Australia.

The research focuses on a remarkable research gap and will contribute to a deeper understanding of how electronic retailers in Saudi Arabia use the user-generated content of social media influencers to align with their marketing and brand objectives and engage consumers. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how user-generated content through the use of social media can influence brand engagement, brand perception, and brand loyalty, and how these constructs affect their perception and ultimately contribute to brand equity for major electronic retailer brands.

The survey should take approximately 7-12 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the research at any time. The information you provide through this online survey is non-identifiable and information will be protected and kept confidential. Furthermore, you will not be asked for your name and therefore

the response you provide cannot be linked to you. Analysis of the data will be performed at the aggregate level.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact, Associate Professor Romana Garma at romana.garma@vu.edu.au , Dr. Colin Drake at colin.drake@vu.edu.au , Ibrahim Alibrahim at ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au.
This study has received ethics approval from Victoria University (HREC). If you have any queries or complaints about the way, you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Consent
Please click on "Agree" to confirm that you are at least 18 years old and that you freely consent to participate in this study. Further, you understand that through participation you agree with how the information you provide will be used.
1:
[ ]   Agree
[ ]   Disagree

INSTRUCTIONS
Please answer the questions with honesty and integrity.

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جامعة فيكتوريا ملبورن أستراليا

نموذج موافقة للمشاركين المشاركين في البحث

معلومات للمشاركين

نود أن ندعوك لتكون جزءًا من استطلاع عبر الإنترنت حول كيف تؤثر مشاركة المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على المساواة النوعية للعلامة التجارية في السعوديين الأكبر سنًا؟ بالتعاون مع العلامات التجارية الإلكترونية الاستهلاكية في المملكة العربية السعودية وتأثيرها على قيمة العلامة التجارية النوعية كما يراها المستهلكون

شهادة من قبل المشارك

أنا،

أقر بأن عمري 18 عامًا على الأقل وأنني أعطي موافقتي طواعية للمشاركة في الدراسة التي أجراها إبراهيم الإبراهيم حول "كيف تؤثر مشاركة المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على حقوق الملكية النوعية للعلامة التجارية في السعوديين الأكبر سنًا". أفهم دوري في هذه الدراسة وأنني أوافق بحرية على المشاركة في الدراسة. أفهم أنه يمكنني الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة في أي وقت وأن هذا الانسحاب لن يعرضني للخطر بأي شكل من الأشكال

التوقيع:

التاريخ:

إذا كانت لديك أية مخاوف أو أسئلة أو تعليقات، فالرجاء عدم التردد في الاتصال بي أو بمشرفي على التفاصيل أدناه

رئيس المحققين:		المحقق المساعد:	
الأستاذ المساعد رومانا جارما		الأستاذ المساعد كولين دريك	
عميد كلية إدارة الأعمال في جامعة فكتوريا		رئيس المحاضرين في جامعة فكتوريا كلية الإدارة	
كلية إدارة الاعمال في جامعة فكتوريا Romana.garma@vu.edu.au الهاتف: 99191515 (3) 61+		كلية إدارة الاعمال في جامعة فكتوريا Colin.drake@vu.edu.au	
الباحث:		الاتصال داخليا:	
إبراهيم البراهيم		إبراهيم البراهيم	

</div>

Ibrahim3ziz1@gmail.com (+966) 507444147	كلية إدارة الاعمال بجامعة فيكتوريا طالب دكتوراة إدارة واعمال (تسويق) Ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au (+966) 566449988

إذا كان لديك أي استفسارات أو شكاوى حول الطريقة التي عولجت بها، يمكنك الاتصال سكرتير الأخلاق ، لجنة أخلاقيات البحث البشري بجامعة فيكتوريا ، مكتب الأبحاث ، جامعة فيكتوريا ، ص.ب. 14428 ، ملبورن ، مركز فيينا الدولي ، 8001 ، البريد الإلكتروني Researchethics@vu.edu.au أو الهاتف (03) 4781 9919 أو 4461

إشعار الموافقة:

سيتم عرض إشعار الموافقة أدناه على الصفحة الأولى من الاستبيان عبر الإنترنت للمشاركين من أجل تقديم الموافقة عبر الإنترنت للمشاركة في الاستبيان. أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة لفهم كيفية استخدام تجار التجزئة الإلكترونيين في المملكة العربية السعودية للمحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون للمؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لبناء علامتهم التجارية وإشراك المستهلكين. الدراسة لدراسة الدكتوراه للطالب ابراهيم البراهيم في جامعة فيكتوريا، أستراليا.

يركز البحث على فجوة بحثية ملحوظة وسيساهم في فهم أعمق لكيفية استخدام تجار التجزئة الإلكترونيين في المملكة العربية السعودية للمحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون للمؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي للتوافق مع أهدافهم التسويقية والعلامة التجارية وإشراك المستهلكين. علاوة على ذلك، يسعى إلى فهم كيف يمكن للمحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون من خلال استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أن يؤثر على مشاركة العلامة التجارية ، وإدراك العلامة التجارية ، والولاء للعلامة التجارية ، وكيف تؤثر هذه التركيبات على تصورهم وتساهم في نهاية المطاف في ملكية العلامة التجارية للعلامات التجارية الإلكترونية الكبرى لمتاجر التجزئة.

من المفترض أن يستغرق إكمال الاستطلاع من ٧ إلى ١٢ دقيقة تقريبًا.

مشاركتك طوعية، ويمكنك الانسحاب من البحث في أي وقت. المعلومات التي تقدمها من خلال هذا الاستطلاع عبر الإنترنت غير قابلة للتعريف وسيتم حماية المعلومات والحفاظ على سريتها. علاوة على ذلك، لن يُطلب منك اسمك وبالتالي لا يمكن ربط الرد الذي تقدمه بك. سيتم إجراء تحليل البيانات على المستوى الإجمالي.

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو استفسارات، يرجى الاتصال، الأستاذ المساعد رومانا جارما على

romana.garma@vu.edu.au ، والدكتور كولين دريك على colin.drake@vu.edu.au ، إبراهيم علي إبراهيم

على ibrahim.alibrahim@live. vu.edu.au.

حصلت هذه الدراسة على موافقة الأخلاق من جامعة فيكتوريا (HREC). إذا كانت لديك أي استفسارات أو شكاوى حول الطريقة التي تمت معالجتها، فيمكنك الاتصال بسكرتير الأخلاقيات، لجنة أخلاقيات البحث البشري بجامعة فيكتوريا ، مكتب الأبحاث ، جامعة فيكتوريا ، صندوق بريد 14428 ، ملبورن ، مركز فيينا الدولي ، 8001 ، البريد الإلكتروني Researchethics @ vu.edu.au أو الهاتف (03) 9919 4781 أو 4461.

موافقة

الرجاء النقر فوق "موافق" لتأكيد أن عمرك لا يقل عن 18 عامًا وأنك توافق بحرية على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. علاوة على ذلك، أنت تدرك أنه من خلال المشاركة فإنك توافق على كيفية استخدام المعلومات التي تقدمها.

انا:

| [ ] | أوافق |
| [ ] | لا أوافق |

تعليمات

الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة بصدق ونزاهة.

Appendix 4: Certified translation of the information to participants involved in research (English and Arabic versions)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS
INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled 'How Social Media Influencers' User- Generated Content Sharing Impacts Qualitative Brand Equity in older Saudi Arabians?' This project is being conducted by a student researcher Ibrahim Alibrahim as part of a PhD Candidate, Business and Management (Marketing) at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Romana Garma from Deputy Dean, Victoria University Business School and Dr. Colin Drake from the Victoria Graduate School of Business.

Project explanation

This study measures the contribution of user-generated content sharing by social media influencers in co-operation with consumer electronic brands in Saudi Arabia and its influence on qualitative brand equity as perceived by consumers. The specialty of this study is that the research is focused on social media users who are not frequent targets of social media influencer promotions, an older social media user cohort. Even for an older cohort of consumers, online brand engagements have their usefulness, and this is at the foundation of what this study is measuring. The study is important because it will provide insight into consumer beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of brand content and communications, and how these constructs affect their perception of the brand and ultimately contribute to brand equity, testing on consumer electronic brands: Xcite, eXtra and Jarir.

What will I be asked to do?

As a participant, you are required to be in the best shape, and answer the presented questions honestly and responsibly.

The questionnaire participation takes approximately 7-12 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to end the not to attend to the questionsthat you may feel are compromising your privacy or voluntary participation in this study.

How will the information I give be used?

The information from the survey will provide a deeper understanding of how influencers can create user-generated content aligned with the brand goals for a more susceptible audience. Further, it seeks to understand how UGC through the use of social media can influence brand engagement, brand perception, and brand loyalty, resulting in brand equity.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There is no risk participating in this study, and the research has received approval from the VictoriaUniversity Human Research Ethics committee at Victoria University.

How will this project be conducted?

The administration of the questionnaire in this case involved a self-administration procedure. For the effectiveness and accessibility, the survey is be conducted online. Respondents are required to voluntarily respond to the questionnaires with honesty and integrity, from the referred link. The online platforms where the questionnaires will be uploaded are convenient enough to support different languages and require no coding in configuring them. The participants' responses will then be collected, exported into excel and SPSS formats for further analysis.

Who is conducting the study?

DR ROMANA GARMA
Deputy Dean, Victoria University Business School
PhD (Melb), Grad Cert Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Education (VicMelb), MBus (Marketing)(VicMelb), BA
(Accounting) (VicMelb)
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Ibrahim Alibrahim
Victoria University Business School
PhD. Student Business and Management
(Marketing)
ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au
(+966) 56644 9988

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone(03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

YOUSEF SAHARI
CPN5OQ23X
ENGLISH -> ARABIC
VALID TO 13/12/2023

SIGNATURE :

TRANSLATION DATE **25/05/2022**

CERTIFIED TRANSLATOR

جامعة فيكتوريا ملبورن أستراليا

معلومات للمشاركين المعنيين في البحث

أنت مدعو للمشاركة

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي بعنوان "كيف تؤثر مشاركة المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على المساواة النوعية للعلامة التجارية في السعوديين الأكبر سئًا؟".

يجري تنفيذ هذا المشروع من قبل الطالب الباحث إبراهيم البراهيم كجزء من مشروع الدكتوراه تخصص إدارة الأعمال والإدارة (التسويق) في جامعة فيكتوريا تحت إشراف الدكتورة رومانا جارما من نائب العميد بكلية إدارة الأعمال بجامعة فيكتوريا والدكتور كولين دريك. من كلية فيكتوريا للدراسات العليا في إدارة الأعمال.

شرح المشروع

تقيس هذه الدراسة مساهمة مشاركة المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون من قبل المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بالتعاون مع العلامات التجارية الإلكترونية للمستهلكين في المملكة العربية السعودية وتأثيرها على المساواة النوعية للعلامة التجارية كما يراها المستهلكون.

تخصص هذه الدراسة هو أن البحث يركز على مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي الذين ليسوا أهدافًا متكررة لترويج المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وهم مجموعة أقدم من مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. حتى بالنسبة لمجموعة كبيرة من المستهلكين، فإن مشاركات العلامات التجارية عبر الإنترنت لها فائدتها، وهذا هو أساس ما تقيسه هذه الدراسة. الدراسة مهمة لأنها ستوفر نظرة ثاقبة لمعتقدات المستهلكين، ومواقفهم، وتصوراتهم لمحتوى العلامة التجارية والاتصالات، وكيف تؤثر هذه التركيبات على تصورهم للعلامة التجارية وتساهم في النهاية في ملكية العلامة التجارية، واختبار العلامات التجارية الإلكترونية للمستهلكين: اكسايت، اكسترا، جرير.

ماذا سيطلب مني أن أفعل؟

بصفتك مشاركًا، يجب أن تكون في أفضل حالة، وأن تجيب على الأسئلة المطروحة بصدق ومسؤولية.

تستغرق المشاركة في الاستبيان حوالي ٧-١٢ دقيقة.

ماذا سأستفيد من المشاركة؟

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، ولك مطلق الحرية في إنهاء عدم الرد على الأسئلة التي تشعر أنها تهدد

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خصوصيتك أو مشاركتك التطوعية في هذه الدراسة.

كيف سيتم استخدام المعلومات التي أقدمها؟

ستوفر المعلومات الواردة من الاستطلاع فهماً أعمق لكيفية قيام المؤثرين بإنشاء محتوى من إنشاء المستخدم يتماشى مع أهداف العلامة التجارية لجمهور أكثر حساسية. علاوة على ذلك، يسعى إلى فهم كيفية تأثير المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون من خلال استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على مشاركة العلامة التجارية وإدراك العلامة التجارية والولاء للعلامة التجارية، مما يؤدي إلى ملكية العلامة التجارية.

ما هي المخاطر المحتملة للمشاركة في هذا المشروع؟

لا يوجد خطر من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، وقد حصل البحث على موافقة من لجنة أخلاقيات البحث البشري بجامعة فيكتوريا في جامعة فيكتوريا.

كيف سيتم تنفيذ هذا المشروع؟

تضمنت إدارة الاستبيان في هذه الحالة إجراء الإدارة الذاتية. من أجل الفعالية وإمكانية الوصول، يتم إجراء الاستطلاع عبر الإنترنت. يُطلب من المستجيبين الرد طوعًا على الاستبيانات بأمانة ونزاهة، من الرابط المشار إليه. تعد المنصات عبر الإنترنت حيث سيتم تحميل الاستبيانات ملائمة بما يكفي لدعم لغات مختلفة ولا تتطلب أي تشفير في تكوينها. سيتم بعد ذلك جمع ردود المشاركين وتصديرها إلى تنسيقات إكسل و اس بي اس اس لمزيد من التحليل.

من يقوم بالدراسة؟

الدكتورة رومانا جارما
نائب عميد كلية إدارة الأعمال بجامعة فيكتوريا
دكتوراة (ملبورن)، شهادة جراد في التعليم العالي (فكتوريا-ملبورن)، ماجستير إدارة (تسويق، ملبورن-فكتوريا)، بكالوريس (محاسبة، ملبورن-فكتوريا).
(VicMelb) (محاسبة)
+61 (3) 9919 1515
romana.garma@vu.e.du.au
ابراهيم البراهيم
كلية إدارة الأعمال بجامعة فيكتوريا
دكتوراه. إدارة الأعمال الطلابية (التسويق)
ibrahim.alibrahim@live.vu.edu.au
(+966) 56644 9988

قد يتم توجيه أي استفسارات حول مشاركتك في هذا المشروع إلى كبير المحققين المذكورين أعلاه. إذا كان لديك أي استفسارات أو شكاوى حول الطريقة التي عوملت بها، فيمكنك الاتصال بسكرتير الأخلاق ، لجنة أخلاقيات البحث البشري بجامعة فيكتوريا ، مكتب الأبحاث ، جامعة فيكتوريا ، صندوق بريد 14428 ، ملبورن ، مركز فيينا الدولي ، **أو الهاتف (03) 4781 9919 أو 4461.** البريد الإلكتروني researchethics @ vu .edu.au .8001. ، البريد

Appendix 5: Ethics approval document

Quest Ethics Notification - Application Process Finalised - Application Approved

quest.noreply@vu.edu.au
To: Romana Garma
Cc: Ibrahim Alibrahim; colin.drake@vu.edu.au

Thu 20/10/2022 11:16 AM

Dear DR ROMANA GARMA,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE22-087
» Chief Investigator: DR ROMANA GARMA
» Other Investigators: MR Ibrahim Abdulaziz A ALIBRAHIM, DR COLIN DRAKE
» Application Title: Investigating social media influencers impact on Saudi Arabian consumer perceptions of brand equity of electronic retailer brands
» Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) Updated 2018' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date; 20/10/2022.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research

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Appendix 6: Data collocation approval from Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Arabic version)

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية
عمادة الموارد البشرية

جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية
داخلي: 33754
تاريخ الإنشاء: 1444/05/17
تاريخ الإرسال: 1444/05/17
المرفقات: بدون
رقم الجهة: 033

قرار رحلة علمية لمبتعث في الخارج - إلحاقي

- إن عميد الموارد البشرية بجامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية.
- بناءً على المادتين (الثالثة) و (الخامسة عشرة) من لائحة الابتعاث والتدريب لمنسوبي الجامعات.
- وبناءً على القرار الإداري رقم (١٤٤٩٣٩) وتاريخ ١٤٤٠/١١/١٨هـ القاضي بابتعاث "إبراهيم بن عبد العزيز عبد الله البراهيم" المحاضر في قسم الإعلان والاتصال التسويقي بكلية الإعلام والاتصال، خارجياً إلى جامعة (Victoria University) في أستراليا، لدراسة مرحلة الدكتوراه في تخصص (الاتصال التسويقي).
- وبناءً على موافقة القسم في جلسته رقم (١) بتاريخ ١٤٤٤/٥/١١هـ على الطلب، وتأييد توصية مجلس الكلية لذلك في جلسته رقم (١٣) بتاريخ ١٤٤٤/٥/١٣هـ.
- وبناءً على تفويض اللجنة الدائمة للابتعاث والتدريب في جلستها رقم (١٦) للعام الجامعي ١٤٣٦/١٤٣٥هـ، لرئيس اللجنة الدائمة للابتعاث والتدريب بتمديد مدة دراسة الماجستير والدكتوراه والرحلة العلمية النظامية، بعد ورودها من مجالس الأقسام والكليات، ولموافقة معالي رئيس الجامعة على محضر اللجنة بهذا الشأن.
- وبناءً على تفويض معالي رئيس الجامعة لوكيل الجامعة رقم (٣٥٥٥٣) وتاريخ ١٤٤١/٠٣/٢٠هـ، وتفويض وكيل الجامعة لعميد الموارد البشرية رقم (١٠١٣٨٥) وتاريخ ١٤٤١/١٢/٢٧هـ لتوقيع قرارات وكالة الابتعاث والتدريب.
- وبناءً على مقتضيات النظام.

يقرر ما يلي:

١. الموافقة على القيام برحلة علمية من مقر البعثة في أستراليا إلى المملكة العربية السعودية للمبتعث " إبراهيم بن عبد العزيز عبد الله البراهيم" (سجل مدني: ١٠٥٩٩١٦١٢٠)؛ لغرض جمع بيانات الدراسة لإكمال بحثه لنيل درجة الدكتوراه لمدة (٩٠) يوماً اعتباراً من ١٤٤٤/٥/٢١هـ.

٢. يقوم المبتعث بمراجعة الكلية فور وصوله المملكة، ويباشر أبحاثه أثناء رحلته العلمية، تحت إشراف كلية الإعلام والاتصال، ويقوم القسم بإعداد تقرير وافٍ عن الرحلة يُرفع إلى وكالة الابتعاث والتدريب بعمادة الموارد البشرية.

٣. تقوم كلية الإعلام والاتصال -بعد انتهاء الرحلة- بإشعار وكالة الابتعاث والتدريب بعمادة الموارد البشرية ببداية الرحلة ونهايتها.

٤. يبلغ هذا القرار للجهات المعنية لإنفاذه.

القرعاوي

عميد الموارد البشرية
أ.د خالد بن عبد الكريم البصير
د. محمد بن عبدالعزيز المنصور

الأصل للملف المبتعث ونسخة لكل من:
- مكتبنا
- فضيلة وكيل الجامعة
- سعادة وكيل الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي.
- أمانة مجلس الجامعة لإحاطة المجلس بذلك.
- وكالة الابتعاث والتدريب.
- إدارة التوظيف.
- الاتصالات الإدارية بإدارة الرواتب والنفقات.
- وحدة الاتصال الداخلي بالقسم النسائي، عمادة الموارد البشرية.
- الأرشفة الإلكترونية.
- سعادة الملحق الثقافي في أستراليا.
- سمو عميد كلية الإعلام والاتصال، ولتزويد المبتعث/إبراهيم البراهيم بنسخة
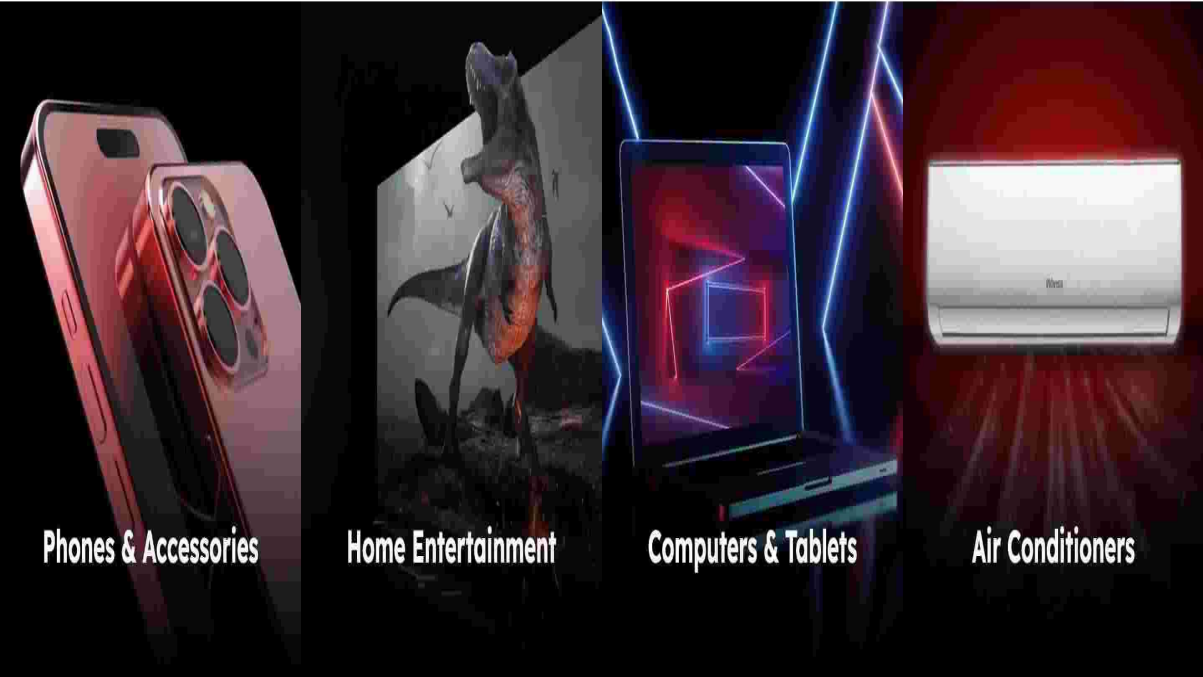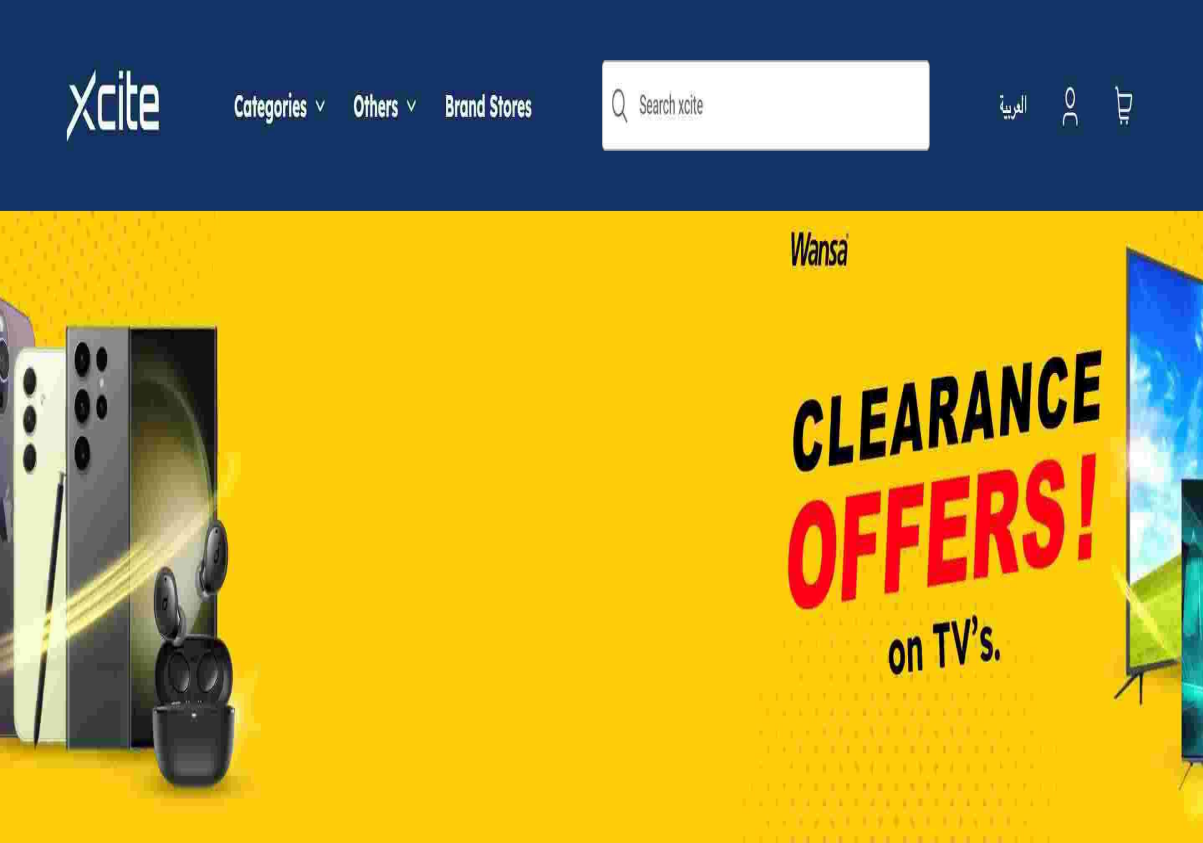
011 258 8955
011 258 7176
@HR_imamu
HR_Deanship@imamu.edu.sa

Appendix 7: Electronic brands' websites (Jarir, Xcite and eXtra)

Appendix 8: Online influencers' profiles