

# Examining the Moderating Effects of Firm Generated Content on Online Social Brand Engagement

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## Abstract

*This research furthers our understanding of the influence of social presence on social brand engagement (SBE) and the moderating effects of firm-generated content and consumer commitment. Employing a quantitative survey design, 738 consumers with prior experience in following brands on social media were randomly interviewed using online questionnaire. The findings suggest that social presence influence social brand engagement, however, this is significantly moderated by the firm-generated content and the consumers' level of commitment in engaging with the brand. The findings provide insights into the potential role of SBE and social presence in advancing the broader understanding of brand relationship management, brand engagement and social media research.*

## Introduction

Recent technological advancements and the buzz surrounding the use of social networking sites by consumers have changed the media landscape and how firms engage with their customers (Felix et al., 2017; Hammedi et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Pagani and Malacarne, 2017). The adoption of information technology by firms to engage with customers has been extensively researched (Hajli, 2014), however, these studies have mainly focused on how user-generated content (UGC) influence market outcomes in a number of contexts (e.g., Laroche et al., 2012; Stephen and Galak, 2012; Toubia and Stephen, 2013). To this end, Kumar et al. (2016) call for further research to examine the level of influence of FGC (e.g., informative and transformative) on social brand engagement. In a related study, Hudson et al. (2016) call for a need to further examine the connection between social media interactions and consumer brand relationship. This study therefore, responds to these calls to investigate firm-customer social brand engagement from the social presence theory (SPT) perspective. We introduce a new theoretical perspective (i.e., SPT) to shed light on actors' social media presence and the moderating effects of FGC and consumer's level of commitment on social brand engagement.

The objectives of this study are three-fold. First the study examines the influence of social presence on social brand engagement. Second, we examine the moderating role of firm-generated content and consumer commitment on social brand engagement. Finally, we seek to establish the relative effects of social brand engagement on brand

usage intent and e-WOM. The findings provide insights into the potential role of SBE and social presence in advancing the broader understanding of brand relationship management, brand engagement and social media research.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: first, we provide a review of the theory related to social presence, consumer brand engagement and firm generated content leading to model and hypotheses development. Next, we describe the research methodology and discuss the statistical results. Finally, the findings are presented, followed with discussion and implications for theory and practice, and conclude with limitations and future research directions.

## **Social presence**

The social presence theory (SPT) evolved from the use of telecommunications and outlines how individuals engage in the use of social media as they see it as a form, behaviour, or sensory experience that projects some form of intelligence and social acceptance (Tu, 2000). Tracing its roots in the “social psychological theories of interpersonal communication and symbolic interactionism”, the theory has been applied in the “context of mediated communication” (Cui et al., 2013, p. 662), which is also extended to social media research to explain the social presence concept (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Nowak, 2013). Accordingly, Biocca and Harms (2002) conceptualise social presence into three levels that include; the perceptual level of awareness of co-presence with others, social presence typified by the subjective judgement which elaborates the psycho-behavioural accessibility of others, and the mutual social presence or the inter-subjective social presence that illuminates the dynamic interactions between participants. This conceptualisation aligns well with Short et al. (1976) unidimensional consideration of social presence as a subjective quality of the medium, which is determined by the perceptions of the social participants. While the subjective quality of the medium makes interactions more social and salient, this increases social presence on the part of the customer (Nowak, 2013), which is likely to enhance their brand engagement practices on social media

## **Consumer brand engagement via social media**

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) has generated an increased attention in both practice and research in recent times. Various authors have defined brand engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 154) conceptualise consumer brand engagement as “a consumer's positively valence cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions”.

From the social exchange theoretical perspective, firms focus much on relationship building which transcends beyond the transaction (Donaldson and O'Toole, 2007; Lambe et al., 2001). This implies series of interactions which are interdependent and contingent on the firm and customers involved (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). From the social/relational exchange and social presence theoretical perspectives, we introduce the term social brand engagement (SBE) taking into account the increasing and critical role of social media in consumer brand engagement practices (Laroche et

al., 2012). Social brand engagement could be associated with the subject's self-image, which is driven by their level of belongingness to a social group (Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Hammedi et al., 2015). SBE is a full social act without boundaries that allows participants to engage in social interactions with brands and other consumers. Drawing from Kozinets (2014) and Laroche et al. (2012), we define social brand engagement as:

*The connection, creation and communication of the brand's story between the firm and consumers (both existing and prospects), using brand or brand-related language, images and meanings via the firm's social networking site*

In such associations, SBE may include an interdependence of the consumer, brand and other consumers, and more significantly, the consumer's level of commitment to engage in such practices. Drawing from the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013), it is envisaged that, these could be propelled by factors including "social status enhancement, social interactions, learning more about using the product and having fun" (Baldus et al., 2015, p. 983). In light of this, customers build brand knowledge and associations (Hammedi et al., 2015), brand usage intent, and motivation to engage in electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Abrantes et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014; Relling et al., 2016).

### **Firm-generated content (FGC)**

Firm-generated content (FGC) has mainly been prominent in the traditional media of advertising, in which case, the firm in a non-personal means directly communicates its messages to the target audience (Keller, 2016). Technological advancements in recent times have empowered both firms and consumers via increased access to information (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2016), which has also changed the nature or process of communication between the firm and the consumer (Gensler et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2016; Labrecque, 2014). As a result, the role of FGC becomes increasingly essential in online CBE via the social media. Kumar et al. (2016, p. 9) explain FGC as "the messages posted by firms on their official social media pages". These messages are critically important, as they could enhance corporate credibility and trust on the part of the firm through their direct interactions with customers (Lee et al., 2006).

Kumar et al. (2016, p. 9) further explain FGC as a "multifaceted construct" likely to affect the target audience taking into account the "message sentiment, customers' response to the message, and customers' innate disposition" toward the firm's social media platform. This suggests that, FGC can focus on the unique brand attributes superior to competing brands (informational) or match brand to consumer aspirations, insights and experiences, and feelings (emotional including love, sexual desire, fear, guilt) (transformational) (Ashley and Tuten, 2015).

### **Model Development and Hypotheses**

Proponents of social presence theory assert that perceptions of social presence are subjective, which depends on the medium's objective quality (technological social presence) (Biocca and Harms, 2002; Gunawardena, 1995; Short et al., 1976; Tu, 2000; Walther, 1992). The intimacy resulting from interactions propagated by social presence enhance consumer's feelings and also provide a platform for learning (Dunlap and Lowenthal, 2009), which could influence their preparedness to participate in brand

engagement practices. Hence, social presence encourage online social interactions fundamental to person-to-person communication (Nowak, 2013; Shen and Khalifa, 2008; Tu, 2000). Further, the intimacy enshrined in social presence provides a better understanding of participants' feelings of staying connected with other users of the medium and to a larger extent, the level of interactions among these users (Nowak, 2013), be it individual consumers or firms. These elements are more likely to enhance social brand engagement practices on the part of the firm. Escalas and Bettman (2005), Hammedi et al. (2015) and Dessart et al. (2015) associated individual's belongingness to a social group, strong networking or information value as factors that could also promote or influence social brand engagement. On this premise, we hypothesise that:

H1: Social presence is likely to positively influence social brand engagement

SBE tends to motivate the consumer taking into account their interactive experience with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). This in turn builds customer brand knowledge and associations (Hammedi et al., 2015), which is likely to influence brand usage intent, and motivation to engage in electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Abrantes et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014). Online SBE influenced by social presence, FGC and commitment could encourage such consumers to share their experiences with others via social media. The increasing use of social networking sites and the continuous sharing of information among consumers (Anderson et al., 2016) provides an avenue to promote e-WOM (Relling et al., 2016). e-WOM is explained as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Abrantes et al. (2013) found that consumers' familiarity with brands enabled by some cognitive activities and experiential learning encourages them to engage in e-WOM. We therefore, argue that SBE is more likely to encourage consumers engage in e-WOM, thus we hypothesise:

H2: Social brand engagement practices is positively related to positive e-WOM to others

As earlier noted, social brand engagement includes the concept of dedication and commitment on the part of the consumer (Hsieh and Chang, 2016), and their compelling interactive experiences with the brand (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). In this vein, SBE could serve as a means to build and strengthen consumer relationships with brands, which is likely to influence their brand usage intent (Brodie et al., 2013). For the purpose of this study, we explain the term 'brand usage intent' as *a consumer's intention to purchase and use a particular brand (compared to others with similar attributes) for her good self, with others or for others*. Previous researches have found a significant positive relationship between CBE and loyalty intentions (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2010; Dwivedi, 2015) and consumer purchase intention (Algesheimer et al., 2010; Hsieh and Chang, 2016). Thus, we hypothesise:

H3: Social brand engagement practices is positively related to consumer brand usage intent

Similar to the above discussion, we argue that engaging in positive e-WOM will help create brand awareness to others, which in a way could excite brand usage intent from

other consumers. Past studies have alluded to a possible increase in sales of brands/products as a result of positive WOM (e.g., Duan et al., 2008). López and Sicilia (2013) admonish firms to engage in early WOM marketing to generate conversations on social media among others to speed up the product adoption process. Thus we hypothesise that:

H4: Positive e-WOM is positively related to consumer brand usage intent

### Moderating effects of FGC and commitment

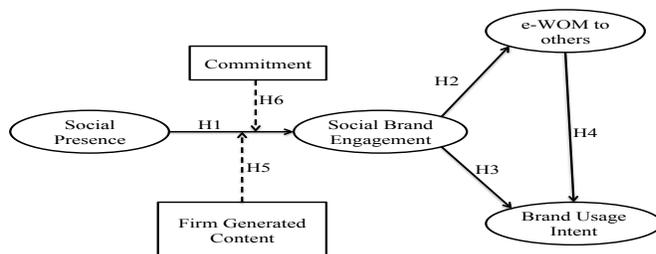
From the above discussions, we argue that even though social presence is likely to provide a platform for social brand engagement, this process could be moderated by the firm generated content (FGC) (Kumar et al., 2016) as well as their behavioural ties (e.g., commitment to the brand) (Hudson et al., 2016; Sung and Campbell, 2009). As FGC reflects messages posted by firms on their social media platforms (Kumar et al., 2016), Lee et al. (2006) particularly reiterate the critical importance of these messages in enhancing direct interactions with customers. Hudson et al. (2016) consider consumer level of commitment as a behavioural tie that could have a significant effect on a person's engagement with a brand. Commitment is considered a key variable that influences a number of behaviours on the part of the consumer, especially with regard to engagement practices and on-going relationships (Hsieh and Chang, 2016; Sharma and Patterson, 2000; Sung and Campbell, 2009). Consumer's engagement commitment is conceptualised as a consumer's belief that an on-going brand engagement and relationship is worth investing (Sharma and Patterson, 2000). Hence, consumer's commitment to a brand is likely to enhance or reinforce their brand-relational exchange (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002), which is also more likely to moderate their SBE. Thus we develop the following hypotheses:

H5: FGC strengthens the effects of social presence on social brand engagement

H6: Consumer's level of commitment reinforces the effects of social presence on social brand engagement

Following the above discussions, a hypothesised model is presented in Figure 1. The model shows the various path relationships as explained in the model development above.

**Figure 1: Hypothesised Model**



## **Methodology**

To evaluate our hypothesised model, we employed a quantitative survey design using an online questionnaire with inclusion/exclusion criteria to only involve respondents with some prior experience with social media brand engagement. We did not limit ourselves to one particular social networking site (see, VanMeter et al., 2015) and also did not focus on any particular brand. We randomly recruited 1250 consumers of social media in Ghana, who have experience following and engaging with brands on social media. Prior to the main study, the research instrument was pretested with 25 respondents from the population of interest. A preliminary analysis of the pilot study indicated all scales satisfied the internal consistency recording a Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha > 0.7$  (Osei-Frimpong, 2017). In addition, all scale items measured a corrected item-total correlation of  $> 0.3$ , which justified their inclusion in the questionnaire used in the main study (Osei-Frimpong et al, 2016).

## **Data collection**

In the main study, consumers of the following social media: Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn were interviewed using an online questionnaire. Respondents who have followed and engaged with brands on social media for a minimum of six months were included in the study. In all, 775 (out of 1250) qualified respondents completed the questionnaire. An initial screening of the completed questionnaires resulted in 738 useable questionnaires, after discarding responses with missing values of three or more (cf, Hartline et al., 2000). Hence, the valid completed questionnaires used in the analysis represented a response rate of 59.04%.

## **Analysis and results**

Preliminary analysis was conducted using SPSS 23.0 to assess the normality of the data and the level of interrelatedness among the items to measure a single construct. All scale items measured a Cronbach alpha  $> 0.7$  with a correlation significance at the level of  $\rho = 0.05$ . We further conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 23.0, employing the maximum likelihood estimation. The factor loadings (see Appendix 1) and the fit indices indicated a reasonably fit to the data ( $\chi^2_{(382)} = 1124.716$ ,  $\rho = .0001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.944$ ; GFI = .919; CFI = .961; RMSEA = .051). Byrne (2010) note that RMSEA values of  $< .05$  indicate a good fit, and values as high as .08 indicate a reasonable fit, which suggest that our RMSEA value of .051 is acceptable.

## **Validity and construct reliability**

Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), we assessed the discriminant and convergent validity of the measures. The results presented in Table 1 indicate convergent validity was satisfied following the average variance extracted (AVE) values above .50 and construct reliabilities  $> .70$ . In addition, discriminant validity was supported since the AVE values for each construct was greater than the square of their correlations (Hair et al., 2006; Pagani and Malacarne, 2017). Further, there was no evidence of cross-loadings. Satisfying validity and reliability concerns of the measures indicate their acceptability for hypothesis testing (Mathieu and Taylor, 2006).

**Table 1: Validity and Construct Reliability Measures**

	CR	AVE	SBE	COM	FGC	BUI	e-WOM	SOP
Social Brand Engagement (SBE)	0.920	0.697	<b>0.835</b>					
Commitment (COM)	0.889	0.729	0.247	<b>0.854</b>				
Firm Generated Content (FGC)	0.906	0.707	0.410	0.280	<b>0.841</b>			
Brand Usage Intent (BUI)	0.885	0.660	0.360	0.207	0.302	<b>0.812</b>		
e-WOM	0.826	0.542	0.310	0.495	0.348	0.210	<b>0.736</b>	
Social Presence (SOP)	0.967	0.788	0.269	0.240	0.405	0.240	0.262	<b>0.888</b>

CR – Construct Reliability; AVE – Average Variance Extracted

### Structural model estimation results

The full structural model evaluation (without the moderating variables) was done using AMOS 23.0, and the results suggest an acceptable model fit to the data. The model evaluation presented the following fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 474.864$ ,  $df = 178$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $GFI = .944$ ,  $AGFI = .927$ ,  $CFI = .968$ ,  $RMSEA = .048$ ). A detailed list of the standardized path coefficients with their respective t-values and  $R^2$  are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Structural parameter estimates (standardized coefficients)**

Paths	Standardised coefficients		
	$\beta$	t-value	$R^2$
Social Presence → Social Brand Engagement (H1)	.434 <sup>***</sup>	9.845	0.189
Social Brand Engagement → e-WOM (H2)	.401 <sup>***</sup>	8.302	0.161
Social Brand Engagement → Brand Usage Intent (H3)	.198 <sup>**</sup>	2.266	0.082
e-WOM → Brand Usage Intent (H4)	.123 <sup>**</sup>	2.107	

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$

From Table 3, all hypotheses (thus, H1-H4) are supported. The results suggest that Social Presence significantly influence Social Brand Engagement. Supporting hypothesis H1 ( $\beta = .434$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $R^2 = .189$ ) implies that consumers not only use their online social presence to share personal pictures, videos and messages, but also spend a considerable amount of time to follow brands on social media. Supporting hypothesis H2 ( $\beta = .401$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $R^2 = .161$ ) indicates the critical effects of social brand engagement. Given the viral nature of messages or user comments posted on their social media pages or platforms, this finding should be given some prominence as consumer experiences in participating in social brand engagement practices could have dire consequences on the brand, especially in situations of negative experiences. With regard to hypothesis H3 ( $\beta = .198$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .082$ ), though supported, social brand engagement had a weak influence on brand usage intent as compared to the effect on e-WOM. The consequence of the finding suggests consumers are likely to increase their intentions to use brands they engage on social media. Similarly, the level of influence on brand usage intent resulting from e-WOM is weak, though the hypothesis H4 is supported ( $\beta = .123$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .082$ ). This finding also implies that, e-WOM is more likely to arouse potential customers to develop an intent of using a brand as a result of shared experiences or information from friends on social media.

## Interaction effects

Following the model evaluation to test the various hypotheses (thus, H1-H4), moderating effects were examined hierarchically using moderated SEM with AMOS 23.0 (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Following Ranaweera and Jayawardhena (2014) and Matear et al. (2002), additional variables were created to test the interactive effects. First we changed the continuous independent (Social Presence) and moderating variables (FGC and Commitment) through mean centring, then created an interactive term by multiplying the independent variable and the moderating variable. This resulted in creating the following interactive terms: 'Social Presence X FGC' and 'Social Presence X Commitment'. The dependent variable (Social Brand Engagement) was regressed on the independent variable (Social Presence), the moderator (FGC or Commitment), and the interactive term.

As earlier noted, we conducted the interaction test hierarchically with AMOS 23.0 by first examining the moderating effects of 'Firm Generated Content' on the dependent variable. A significant interactive effect was examined supporting hypothesis H5, and the analysis also indicates the model fitted the data well as presented in Table 3. The effects are pronounced given the measures and respective R<sup>2</sup> as presented in Table 3. For instance, with 29.4% explained variance, the effects were much stronger compared to the main effects on the path Social Presence → SBE in Table 2.

**Table 4: Results of moderated SEM interactions of Firm Generated Content**

Path	Unstandardized Path Coefficient $\gamma$	t-value	Standardised path coefficient $\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>
Social Presence → Social Brand Engagement	.487	6.549	.553 <sup>***</sup>	.294
FGC → Social Brand Engagement	.326	3.391	.356 <sup>***</sup>	
Social Presence X FGC → Social Brand Engagement	.150	4.016	.198 <sup>**</sup>	
Model fit indices	$\chi^2 = 260.876$ , $df = 97$ , $p < 0.001$ , $GFI = .960$ , $AGFI = .943$ , $CFI = .978$ , $RMSEA = .048$ , $PCLOSE = .680$			

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$

Following the steps outlined above, the interaction effects of Commitment on SBE were also examined. From Table 4, there was a significant positive moderation effect of Commitment on the influence of Social Presence on SBE. With 32.7% explained variance, the effects were much stronger compared to the main effects on the path Social Presence → SBE in Table 2.

**Table 4: Results of moderated SEM interactions of Commitment**

Path	Unstandardized Path Coefficient $\gamma$	t-value	Standardised path coefficient $\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>
Social Presence → Social Brand Engagement	.548	4.615	.596 <sup>***</sup>	.327
Commitment → Social Brand Engagement	.412	2.680	.472 <sup>**</sup>	
Social Presence X Commitment → Social Brand Engagement	.169	2.817	.238 <sup>**</sup>	
Model fit indices	$\chi^2 = 257.507$ , $df = 97$ , $p < 0.001$ , $GFI = .960$ , $AGFI = .943$ , $CFI = .979$ , $RMSEA = .047$ , $PCLOSE = .721$			

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$

## **Discussion**

The study proposes a framework for integrating social presence, social brand engagement and the moderating effects of firm generated content and commitment on the part of the consumer. Our results shed light on the need for firms to engage in social brand engagement practices with their consumers and other prospects. In line with Gensler et al. (2013), our finding suggests that social presence provide a platform for the firm's social brand engagement practices. This implies that while consumers spend a considerable amount of time on social media, there is a high possibility of engaging in social brand engagement practices as indicated in our results. In support of other studies (e.g., Kozinets, 2014; Laroche et al., 2012), we argue a strong relationship between social presence and social brand engagement.

In advancing our knowledge, we examined the moderating effects of firm generated content (FGC) on social brand engagement practices. Our results indicate the effects of social presence on SBE are strengthened by FGC. Unfortunately, most studies have focused rather on the effect of user-generated content (UGC) on brand engagement via social media (e.g., Laroche et al., 2012; Stephen and Galak, 2012; Toubia and Stephen, 2013). While UGC is important and well integrated in SBE (Gensler et al., 2013), we extend on their study arguing for the criticality of FGC in such brand engagement practices as reported in our findings.

In a similar vein, we found consumer's level of commitment to moderate social brand engagement practices. Whereas social presence encourages social interactions among participants on social media, their level of commitment to a particular brand is essential to incite them to build brand relationships (Hudson et al., 2016) and engage in SBE. Our results indicate both significant effects of the interaction term (Social Presence X Commitment) and Commitment as a moderating variable suggesting that Commitment duly acts as a moderator as well as an independent antecedent of SBE. In a related study, Gensler et al. (2013) include consumer brand relationship characteristics as a moderating variable in their integrated framework of social media's impact on brand management. Although the authors failed to highlight consumers' commitment as one of the characteristics, we focused on this consumer characteristic on the premise that customers' decision to engage with brands on social media is a choice, and therefore, consumers' level of commitment is considered critical in moderating their engagement practices.

## **Theoretical implications**

This paper contributes significantly to the literature on social presence theory, social brand engagement (SBE), social media and firm generated content (FGC). Our model in Figure 1 and the results shed light on the application of social presence theory to understand social brand engagement and its consequences. Most studies on social presence have focused on other perspectives, for instance, as an antecedent to social capital (Chang and Hsu, 2016), antecedent to community participation (Shen and Khalifa, 2008), and as an indirect consequence of instant messaging (Nowak, 2013). This work however, departs from these previous studies by establishing its positive influence on SBE practices when used as a vehicle in this regard. We conceptualise

social presence as a unidimensional construct (e.g., Nowak, 2013) and establish its relevance and application in SBE.

In order to better understand the dynamics of the influence of social presence on social brand engagement, we examined the moderating effects of FGC and consumers' level of commitment. While user-generated content has dominated studies on social interactions, very few have focused on FGC (e.g., Kumar et al., 2016), this paper projects the critical importance of FGC in promoting SBE. Our work supports the importance of SBE and why it matters in social media discourse. First, FGC as a moderator enhances firm-consumer interactions as well as building consumer-brand relationship through social brand engagement practices. An approach where firms provide brand related stories or information creates an avenue to manage brands, communicate and leverage brand awareness with customers.

Our conceptualisation integrates social presence theory, brand engagement, FGC, commitment and other consequences of SBE (i.e., e-WOM and brand usage intent), which presents a new dimension in social media research. We have provided a strong theoretical perspective to shed light on social media and brand engagement. The findings present insights to the potential role of SBE and social presence in advancing the broader understanding of brand relationship management, brand engagement and social media research.

### **Managerial implications**

Our findings suggest social presence as a vehicle for social brand engagement practices. In this regard, as social presence depends on the media information richness (Cui et al., 2013), managers should take into account the consumer's intentional, cognitive, or affective states and provide the necessary tools and practices on their social networking sites that could enhance the mutual understanding and psychological attachment among consumers. Firms should employ techniques that could arouse consumers' interest and curiosity to excite them to participate in the brand social interactions.

As firms social media platforms enhance a more personal level communication and interactions (Huotari et al., 2015), creative strategies in relation to FGC should be considered critical to win the attention of the consumer and one that would lead to repeat visits to interact. For instance, sharing interesting information about their brands, or on upcoming and on-going brand activities on social media platforms, could initiate discussions among members of the social media community. In addition, with regard to transformative creative appeal, managers should use positive emotional appeals (that portray humour, love, joy, etc.) to attract consumers, excite and arouse their interest to participate in such social brand interactions. This could be through the use of images, short videos as well as creative messages. In effect, since social presence promotes interactions, organisations should seek ways to understand and leverage social media phenomenon to engage well with consumers.

### **Limitations and future research**

This research provides empirical evidence backing the relationships between social presence and SBE, consequences of SBE, and the moderating effects of FGC and

commitment in SBE practices. The findings of this study provide robust support for the theoretical model and predicted relationships. However, like any research, this study was not without limitations. First, we took a general view of FGC as messages posted on the firm's social networking site by the firm. We however, did not examine whether there are any differences between informative and transformative creative strategies adopted by firms in engaging their customers on social media. Future research could examine the potential impact of these creative strategies (informative versus transformative) on SBE, which could provide interesting insights to build on our current work.

Given the conceptual difference between social brand engagement and brand community engagement, further research is encouraged in this endeavour to provide deeper understanding of SBE by exploring other possible moderators (other than FGC and commitment) and other potential consequences of SBE. While we focused mainly on positive e-WOM, it is possible that SBE could also result in negative e-WOM, and therefore, we encourage future research to explore this further to establish the potential effects.

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## Appendix 1. Scale Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
<b>Brand Usage Intent (Hollebeek et al., 2014)</b>			
It makes sense to use brand X following my engagement with the brand	0.704	0.885	0.660
Even if another brand has the same features as brand X, I would prefer to use brand X	0.872		
If there is another brand as good as brand X, I prefer to use brand X because of my experience with brand X	0.913		
If another brand is not different from brand X in any way, it seems smarter to use brand X because of my knowledge on the brand	0.743		
<b>Social Presence (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Nowak, 2013)</b>			
My presence on social media gives others a good idea of who I am	0.863	0.967	0.788
Social media interactions are a part of my everyday activity	0.936		
Provides a sense of realism and belonging	0.916		
Helps others better understand me	0.907		
Social media presence makes it seem more like my communication partners and I are in the same room	0.874		
Makes it seem more like we are having a face-to-face conversation	0.842		
Would allow others to know me well even if I only met them online	0.864		
I feel out of touch when I do not log onto a social media platform.	0.895		
<b>Electronic Word of Mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004)</b>			
Through social media, I can express and share my joy about a brand with others	0.729	0.826	0.542
I feel good when I share with others on social media about brands I engage with	0.749		
I tell others about a great experience with a brand I have engaged with on social media	0.758		
My contributions with others on social media show my level of knowledge about the brand	0.708		
<b>Social Brand Engagement (Habibi et al., 2014; Laroche et al., 2012)</b>			
I follow companies and their brands using social media	0.767	0.920	0.697
I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because I feel better afterwards	0.798		
I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because I am able share my experiences with others	0.909		
I participate in the brand engagement activities to enable me reach personal goals	0.858		
I participate in the brand engagement activities on social media because of the emotional attachment I develop for the brand	0.835		
<b>Firm Generated Content (Kumar et al., 2016)</b>			
I follow information posted by firms on their social media platform about their brands	0.843	0.906	0.707
I follow brand related messages on the firm's social networking site to know more about the brand	0.903		
I share information and contribute to the firm's social media platform when the message posted relating to the brand is interesting	0.835		
I follow brands social media platforms to learn of any on-going or upcoming brand activities	0.778		
<b>Commitment (Hudson et al., 2016; Sharma and Patterson, 2000)</b>			
I am very committed to my engagement with the brand	0.752	0.889	0.729
I am willing to make sacrifices to engage with the brand	0.855		
I should put maximum effort to maintain the relationship with the brand	0.943		
I have a strong sense of loyalty toward the brand	0.955		
I have unique feelings for the brand and therefore, keep me committed to engaging with it on social media	0.780		

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