

## Formation of Social Brand Engagement through User-Generated Content: Meta Synthesis Technique

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### Abstract

Nowadays, social brand engagement is considered as a vital elements and an important issue in marketing and management fields, since it increases the awareness of brand and also its credibility among audiences. In such a way that it creates a credible and meaningful relationship with customers that at last they became the supporters of such brand. Therefore, this study was to review the issue of social brand engagement through user-generated contents using meta-synthesis method during 2010-2024, systematically. This study made use of documentary method to gather data and population consisted of all internal and external related studies in authentic journals. To evaluate the quality of researches, we made use of Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) and to maintain the quality of meta-synthesis, we made use of Kappa index that the Kappa agreement coefficient of the themes was 0.879 indicating the level of good agreement and reliability of the results. Findings showed that 62 codes and 7 themes were identified including “the use of strategies to increase user participation in UGC, the use of user content in UGC in marketing campaigns, harnessing the power of customer testimonials, creating compelling challenges and contests, using and creating a community around the brand, analyzing the impact of UGC and paying attention to the intersection of legal considerations and ethical procedures in the field of UGC campaigns for the formation of social brand engagement” and 2 dimensions have been identified including “the development of the process of using UGC and the internalization of UGC in the formation and increase of social brand engagement”. Therefore, regular disclosing brand-related contents and creating effective communication channels between the firm and customers on social media can lead to social brand engagement.

**Keywords:** *Social Brand, Brand Engagement, Meta-Synthesis, User-generated contents*

### Introduction

Today, one of the important issues in marketing and management discussions is social brand engagement (SBE). It is due to the fact that it could enhance brands' credit and convert the brand customers to its supporters (Kozinets, 2014) and it was to this reason that attention to the development of brand quality become the most important concerns of large companies (Beiki Demeneh et al, 2024). Actually, SBE means the way of interactions and communication between a

brand and its audience. In recent years, so that, a suitable bed has been created through social media for brands to communicate with their customers directly. Therefore, brands could become aware from views and feedbacks of their customers easily and response them directly. Thus, increasing interactions between brands and audiences lead to brand awareness and at last to attract more customers (Kozinets, 2014). Besides, SBE could convert customers to the brands' fans and supporters in addition to improve

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brand credit. It is due to the fact that it could create positive interactions with audiences that it could promote brand credit and create a positive image in audiences' mind. Therefore, the customers who are engaged with the brand become supporters of that brand and fans through the recommendation and invitation of other people. In fact, social media, that today its role and impact on business is clearer than ever (Jahangiri et al, 2023) could provide audiences' access and connection to the brands in real time through creating a suitable platform for brands that in turn it will lead to more awareness about the brands, more loyalty to the brands and at last to more firms' sales (Frimpong & McLean, 2017).

On the other hand, social media makes it possible for brands to communicate with customers on a more personal level. In such a way that the valuable feedback of the customers is determined in relation to the services and products of that brand, so that other audiences can also make use the experiences of the customers of that brand. These positive interactions between customers and brands through social media lead to more awareness of other audiences and ultimately increase the sales of brands (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). In addition due to the fact that feelings assume a huge part in the buy cycle of brands items or brand administrations (Zohdi & Dalavand, 2023), if the positive interactions between the audience and brands are managed properly and efficiently through social media, it also leads to the improvement of the brand's credibility in addition to creating a positive and effective mental image of the brands in the minds of the audience. Therefore, customers who are engaged with brands have become special supporters of that brand, and at a higher level, they encourage other people to buy the firm's products and services; therefore, social media could increase the sales of services and brand products of firms in addition to creating the possibility of more communication between the audience and brands compared to the past (Perera et al, 2022). Recent literature indicated that brands

have made use of social media as a suitable and efficient tool for marketing. As researchers believe that more than 90 percent of brands have made use of social media for marketing and trading their products and services (Stelzner, 2016). As well as these researches showed that 60% of consumers make use friends, customers and other active audiences' views and opinions in social media related to the firm's brand to buy the services and products they need (Diffley et al, 2018).

Since the use of social media has become an irreplaceable thing in recent years, therefore, various firms have necessarily moved their marketing communications to social media. Therefore, customers are engaged with firms' brands online, and firms should have proper and efficient management in this regard. Finally, it has become one of the main and important goals of brand marketing to search ways to engage customers with the brand (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In addition, with the advancements of technology in recent decades in the field of communication and development of the social dimension, individuals have been engaged and influenced by social media platforms. Therefore, the audiences of the brands are aware of important issues, especially those related to the firms' brands, through the opinions and opinions of other people (Renton & Simmonds, 2017). On the other hand, in addition to using social media for their advertising purposes, brands will also manage their communication goals with their customers in this way. Therefore, brands could engage their customers and take advantage of the ideas and information of their audience to benefit from innovation and improve the level of their products and services (Smith et.al, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Recently, social media has led to the establishment of firms and brands with the possibility of creating social connections and interactions throughout the day and engaging individuals with each other all over the world, and these firms, in turn, could produce and create wealth through social media, which ultimately lead to an

increase in economic added value (Yadav et al, 2013).

Furthermore, many consumers believe that firms design all their activities to maximize their profit. In such a way that they make use of various tools in order to achieve this goal, of which branding is one of the most important. Therefore, consumers that have recently become pessimistic about the activities of the firms pay special attention to the social aspects of the activities of these firms, and finally they want to create more transparency for the brand of these firms (Tsai et al, 2015). Therefore, the consumers of the firm's services and products have chosen a brand for purchase that considers other important issues such as: social issues, environmental issues, unions, associations, and employees' lives in addition to emphasizing profit maximization (Balmer, 2001). Therefore, providing such an image of the brand could create an innovative competitive advantage for that firm. Finally, a firm that is established in this way is considered a social brand. Because, the social responsibility it undertakes shows the firm's commitment to brand development, and this firm has the responsibility to manage and transfer it efficiently to other individuals who want to make use of the firm's services and products through appropriate communication tools (Monfort & Villagra, 2016). Social responsibility includes set of duties that the firm should perform to care and help the society (Pahlavani et al, 2024).

Since that the main mission of social marketing is to influence social and human behavior (Ekhlasmand et al, 2023) and social branding means to create and strengthen a positive relationship between a firm and the audience, it leads to creating social values, solving problems and supporting social issues. Because establishing a deep relationship between the audience, customers, employees, local community and other stakeholders through social branding has a significant impact on sales and improving the business performance of firms. Furthermore, firms should also participate in social and environmental issues in the

society, which ultimately leads to attracting top talents, strengthening brand reputation, innovation in the production of products and services, and increasing competitive advantage. Therefore, this study has focused on user-generated content between these two modes. It is because users tend to follow a content in social networks to be able to answer their questions related to the desired and suitable brand for purchasing products and services. In addition, entertaining and at the same time informative content is one of the important factors for customer engagement on social media and subsequently brand engagement. Therefore, it provides enough motivation to users to consume and interact with social media content about a brand. On the other hand, the objective of this study is not the content that firms produce for their advertisements in social networks, but the content that users themselves produce about a brand. Because the content produced by the user is one of the most effective and cost-effective tactics for social media marketing strategies, which greatly contributes to the knowledge of users' decisions about buying a brand, their behavioral intentions, and ultimately building trust in the brand.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the formation of social brand engagement through user-generated content using the meta-synthesis technique during the period of 2011 to 2022. Next, in the second part, the theoretical foundations are reviewed, and the third part includes the backgrounds. The research methodology is presented in the fourth section. The fifth section provides the findings and results of the study. A general summary of the discussion and results are provided in the sixth section.

## Literature

Recently, with the emergence of technological progress in the field of social media and the rapid acceptance of users, the content produced by users has become one of the most important issues in the field of communication. On the other hand, user-

generated content is voluntary content developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through online platforms. Furthermore, user-generated content platforms are colloquial media that create analytical tensions about different industries. Besides, the content produced by the user is published by social media on one hand and is available by networking websites on the other hand, which is created through amateur and simple routines and functions exclusively. Therefore, the content produced by the user depends on a lot of innovation and creativity (Evans, 2022). On the other hand, there are many types of user-generated content, for example, online forums in which individuals talk about different topics, or blogs, which are services for sharing various posts on different topics by users. The most important blog services are WordPress, Blogger, and Tumblr. Another type of user-generated content is social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, and Instagram, where users chat with other individuals, write messages, or post images and links. Video games are another form of user-generated content (Schivinski et al, 2019).

Unlike traditional marketing, social media has achieved success as a powerful tool in branding companies so that audiences can help other individuals in deciding to choose a brand to buy services and products through sharing their opinions. Therefore, individuals will be engaged in branding of firms through social media. Furthermore, communication between the audience and the brands is easily possible through social media, and the brands could make use of the comments and feedback of their audience to manage properly and efficiently and improve the level of their products (Zhang et al, 2016). Recent studies also suggested that individuals have a strong tendency to decide to buy firms' products and services based on the opinions and views shared by others on social media. Therefore, the formed communication power has a significant impact on the branding of firms to the extent that social brand engagement leads to an increase in sales of firms (Williams et al,

2020). The content produced by brands has a high variety. Some of the most important contents that every brand could produce includes: podcasts, forums, user-generated blog posts, user-generated videos, reviews, Facebook posts or comments, and comments of blogs (Statista, 2018).

Some researchers believe that brand engagement is a positive behavioral, emotional, and cognitive activity related to the brand or customer interactions. Furthermore, brand engagement could occur through social interactions instead of interactions between firms and customers in the context of user-generated content (Liu et al, 2019). When the content produced by the user is accompanied by increasing the value of the certificate of the product's authenticity, building trust and evoking a social sense, it could more and more engage consumers with the social brand. Then, consumers will enter into a positive or negative advertising process without cost and completely free about the brand by producing new content related to the brand. Therefore, other consumers are also influenced by reading the content produced by users about a brand. In other words, the level of trust of users in the user-generated contents is more than the firm-generated contents, because the users consider the content produced by the brand as an advertising tool, while the content produced by the users is considered as the real point of view of the final consumers (Mehaan, 2018). Therefore, the content produced by the user without using the firm's advertising tools creates value for the brand which increases the credibility of the brand and improves the level of trust in the brand while engaging the customer. Thus, it increases customer engagement, which in turn has widespread and long-term effects for that brand (Thomas, 2020).

On the other hand, researchers believe that four main drivers are responsible for the rapid development of user-generated content, which are briefly mentioned below

- Technological driver: Access to broadband has increased with the advancement of technology and the

performance of hardware and software has also been improved during the last decades.

- **Social driver:** Recent advances in science and technology have led to an increase in expert human capital in the digital field. Additionally, the culture of sharing content by users on social media has also developed in recent years.
- **Economic driver:** In order to improve the performance of social media, high investments have been made in the field of communication, services and devices and financial barriers have also been reduced in recent years.
- **Institutional driver:** The necessary incentives for the expansion of creativity and innovations in the digital field have been developed and the necessary licenses for the expansion of these types of creativity are easily possible with the development of science and technology in recent decades (Vincent & Vickery, 2017).

Recent researches also suggests that the opinions of individuals in social media have a wide and significant impact on the issues raised about the firm's brand. Therefore, other people could trust to the firm's brand easily. In fact, this issue in turn will lead to some kind of brand engagement. According to some researchers, brand engagement is a multidimensional structure consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Liyanti et al, 2022). Through tools such as liking, tweeting, sharing and posting, social media could create a deep connection between these cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions among the audience (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). On the other hand, two modes can be mentioned in order to have a deep and better understanding of social media communication and the role they play in brand engagement. The first mode, in fact, is social media communication based on user-generated content, and the second mode is firm-generated content (Khajuria & Khajuria, 2017). The content produced by the firm is actually an action that the firm

produces and the consumer performs. While, user-generated content is beyond the firm's control. On the other hand, there are more than five billion social media users worldwide, which play a significant role in the observed developments in information acquisition, online brand engagement, lifestyle and customer experiences (Lim and Rasul, 2022). When the engagement between brand and customers is acquired through social interactions and based on the experience of social network users occurs, this type of social brand engagement could have a unique social environment. Because social actions are the same values, language, meaning and culture that create social brand engagement (Altschwager et al, 2018).

On the other hand, the content produced by the user must have three main criteria, which are summarized as follows:

- Content must be published, otherwise it cannot be considered user-generated content.
- The content that is published must have the necessary authenticity and certification and be produced and published by a real user.
- The content that is produced, in addition to the previous two criteria, must be free of cost for the user to be produced and published (Jiao et.al, 2018).

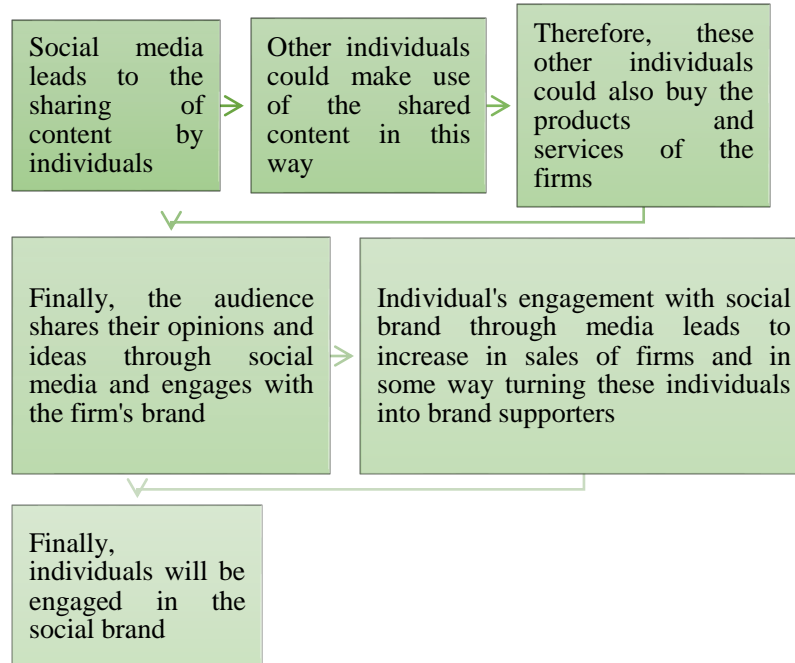
Generally, the content produced by the user could be considered as the content produced by a consortium or an individual that distributes and publishes it through various online platforms. In fact, it is a form of content that is freely created through online platforms by users of a service or a system (McNally et al., 2012). Furthermore, social brand engagement could be considered as a form of social action without borders, in which, participants engage in social interactions with brands and other consumers will also be engaged with them. In other words, the users' engagement in social media through sharing their opinions, views and tastes in relation to the firm's brand is a comprehensive and appropriate definition of social brand engagement (Frimpong & McLean, 2017). Further, traditional

marketing as a whole has undergone very extensive changes in recent years. Because the old mode of traditional marketing which was controlled and managed by marketers, today, has become a two-way and multi-dimensional communication through social media. In such a way that the brand is no longer the definition that the firm presents to the customer, and today, through social media and the possibility of easy communication between people, the brand is actually will be defined by the individuals who will consume the firm's services and products (Santos, 2021).

Some available theories related to social brand engagement and user-generated content in social media are briefly presented as follows:

- **Social exchange theory:** According to this theory, individual tend to interact with brands on social media when they expect to get something in return. These benefits could include information, entertainment, rewards, or simply a sense of belonging to a community.
- **Social identity theory:** This theory states that individual tend to align themselves with groups with which they feel identified. Brands could capitalize on this by creating communities on social media where individuals feel a sense of belonging.
- **Word-of-mouth marketing theory:** According to this theory, individual trust the recommendations of their friends and family more than any other type of advertising. Social brand engagement is a form of word-of-mouth marketing that could be very powerful due to the fact that it is considered valid and reliable.
- **Psychological theory of motivation:** this theory states that individuals act based on different motivations, such as the need for competence, the need for belonging, and the need for power, and as a result, brands could make use of these motivations in their messages and content to encourage users to interact with them on social media (Aljarah et al, 2024; Chaffey, 2016).

Researchers believe that user-generated content in social media is so powerful that firms have been required to present marketing goals in social media by changing their approach in recent years. Therefore, customer engagement with the brand and the content produced by the audience on social media are recently considered the most important indicator in the field of corporate marketing (Mayrhofer et al, 2020). Graph (1) shows the relationship between social brands' engagement with social media by its users.



Graph 1. *Relationship between Social media and social brand engagement based on theoretical studies*

We made use of two theories including theories of social impact and social proof in our research due to the fact that social influence creates changes in views and actions and social proof theory lead to increasing consumer trust in online shopping. In one hand, The main theme of social influence theory, as presented by Coleman (1958), is that people's views, beliefs, and then actions or behaviors are influenced by views, beliefs, and actions through three processes. In the context of the application of social influence theory in the influence of social media, it can be said that social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram change the perceptions and preferences of consumers through online interactions, which can include discussions and information exchange among social media members. These groups are based on online interaction with each other and with features of social media satisfaction such as interactivity and entertainment, leading to the development of social impact through a significant change in knowledge, views and goals and behavioral intentions of social media members as a result

of exchanging content. Information and increased perception are valued (Othman & Okafar, 2019). On the other hand, Social proof is a social and psychological phenomenon in which people imitate the actions of others in an effort to perform a behavior in a given situation. Social proof theory states that the actions and behaviors of people around people or those who are related to them are the guide of these people in similar situations. Social proof theory is very important in increasing consumer trust in online shopping. Electronic word-of-mouth advertising among community members, such as online ratings, is a very favorable and effective signal for the company's reputation for the buyer and affects its decision-making. Consumers' social interaction in social media leads to increased trust in online sellers and purchase intention (Talib & Saat, 2017).

In all the researches, online comments and content created by users have been used to achieve goals such as the effect of comments on sales, meeting customer needs, consumer behavior, advertising marketing strategies,

customer satisfaction, customer motivation, etc. Unlike the previous researches and literature, this research takes a new look at the content created by users and considers this content as a valuable source based on all the results of previous researches, but it seeks to find the question that how is formation of social brand engagement through UGC and for this purpose the research tried to achieve this goal by using meta-synthesis technique. On the other hand, to find this question, you have to go to the created content itself. Many customers may express their opinions when answering this question verbally, but their final word is the content they share on social networks. As a result of this research, with a new look, it seeks to find the factors that show

the formation of social brand conflict and the factors affecting it.

### Empirical Background

In many researches that have been conducted in recent years regarding the relationship between user-generated content and social brand engagement, the factors and the relationship between them have been studied partially within the country; Therefore, according to the review of research backgrounds, it is necessary to cover this gap in internal studies with an in-depth and comprehensive review of the relationship between user-generated content and social brand engagement. In Table 1, a summary of the background of the research is presented:

Table 1.  
*Summary of Research Empirical Background*

Researcher	Year	Title	Results
Hao et al	2024	Brand engagement and community user behaviors in online interest communities: exploring a moderated mediation model"	Positive interaction of brand engagement and trust and commitment and user-generated content
Advani & Gokhale	2023	Influence of brand-related user generated content (UGC) and brand engagement on Instagram	The role of UGC in creating stimuli for users to pay attention to the brand and finally engage in the brand
Bemmes	2023	Social Media Use and engagement: Continuing with the OHIO school wellness initiative.	There is no significant difference between the use of social media posts, including images, links, and text in brand engagement
Ghaly	2023	The influence of user-generated content and social media travel influencers credibility on the visit intention of Generation Z	Positive interaction of UGC and reliability dimensions to UGC with customer brand engagement
Ko et al	2022	Influence of Emojis on user engagement in brand-related user generated content.	The positive interaction of emotional emojis on brand engagement, the negative interaction of informational emojis on brand engagement and the positive role of emotional emojis on customer engagement in commercial posts and its negative role in general posts.
Naeem & Ozuem	2021	Understanding the social consumer fashion brand engagement journey: insights about reputed fashion brands	Social responsibility, sharing experiences, being connected and up-to-date as motivating factors for using UGC
McShane et al	2021	Emoji, Playfulness, and Brand Engagement on Twitter.	Increased engagement with tweets with the presence of emojis, more emojis lead to likes and retweets, the effect of emojis on brand engagement depends on the nature of the interaction between emojis and text.



Researcher	Year	Title	Results
Puligadda et al	2022	Are you engaged? The influence of brand schematicity on online brand engagement and brand purchase	Consumers who create brand content online may buy brands less, while those who consume brand content online buy more brands.
Shabani	2020	The effect of UGC on customers' purchase intention with the mediating role of credibility and perceived usefulness	Positive effect of UGC on purchase intention, perceived credibility, perceived usefulness
Golmohammadi	2018	Factors affecting customer engagement in cyber space	The significant relationship between virtual interaction of customers and the engagement of customers in the virtual space with the brand

According to the contents mentioned in the theoretical foundations and research backgrounds section, it could be seen that due to the novelty of the topic of social brand and content produced by the user, there are no consistent and accurate studies to examine the coherence of the relationship between these two variables. Therefore, in this research, it has been tried to identify, analyze and categorize all the studies done in this field using the meta-synthesis method. Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of a systematic review of the relationship between social brand engagement and user-generated content with meta-synthesis technique.

### Methodology

This research is applied one in terms of its purpose and document-library study based on the data collection method. The population of the research was all the domestic and foreign studies published in reliable publications that studied user-generated content in social media, communication networks, and social networks between 2010 and 2024. To collect data, all published researches in the field of research in domestic and foreign reliable databases were reviewed based on the keywords including "user-generated content", "social brand", "social brand engagement" and "virtual interaction", in relation to the "relationship of UGC and SBE". Theoretical saturation was achieved after a complete survey of the Table 2.

researches, and the most relevant researches were selected using a purposeful sampling method. The research method is analytical-descriptive and meta-synthesis was used to analyze data. Meta-synthesis is a qualitative method based on a systematic review of library studies for a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon. The meta-synthesis method is considered a qualitative research method that its data was gathered using library studies and research background. It is a method that combines the data of the results of other studies with specific steps to meet the researcher's goal and obtains new results (Noblit et.al, 1998).

Meta-synthesis refers to four areas including meta-method, metatheory, meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. In this research, the seven-step method of Sandlowski & Barroso (2007) was used to perform meta-synthesis including setting research questions, systematic review of documents and texts, searching and selecting suitable researches, extracting results, analyzing and qualitative synthesis, controlling the research quality and finally, the presenting of the findings (Sandlowski & Barroso, 2007).

### Results

In this section, the findings of each meta-synthesis stage are presented separately.

Stage 1. Setting research questions

*Meta-analysis Research Questions*

What	What is the nature of the relationship between UGC and SBE?	Identifying the relationship between UGC and SBE
The studied Society	What is the studied community to identify this relationship?	All valid domestic and foreign databases
Time Limit	In what period of time was this connection studied and searched?	From 2011 to 2023 From 2010 to 2024
How	What method was used to collect these researches?	Documentary based research

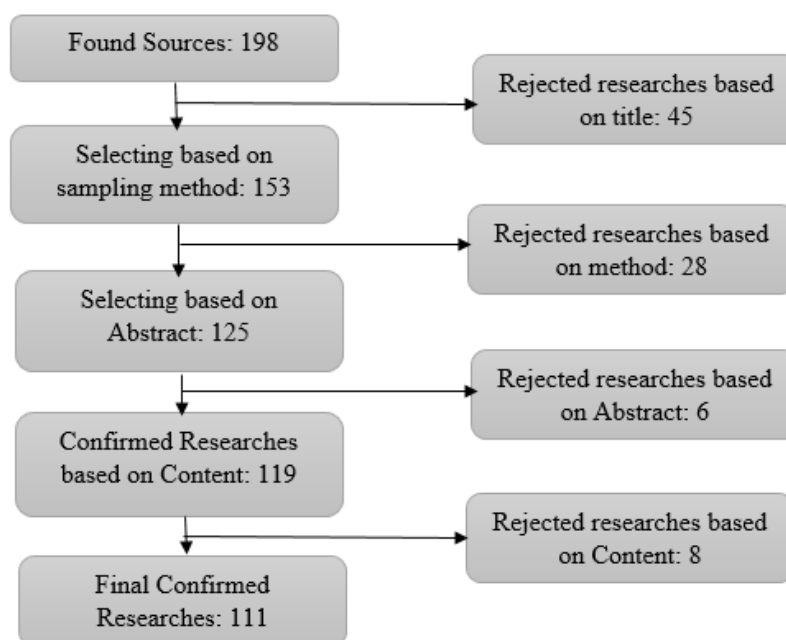
Stage 2. Systematic review of documents and texts

In the meta-synthesis method, secondary data is used to collect information, that is, past documents. In this research, all the available studies in the field of UGC and its relationship with SBE were searched from databases including Google's website, databases of domestic publications, including the specialized database of articles, science and technology research institute (Irandoc), Humanities Comprehensive Portal, Jihad University Scientific Information Center Database, Civilica Knowledge Reference and databases of foreign publications including Scencedirect, Springer, Scopus, Google Scholar, Sage Journals, Emerald and the results were analyzed carefully. The tool for gathering information was peer-reviewed scientific journals, which researches were selected with keywords including "user-generated content", "social brand", " Brand Engagement", "SBE" and " Social Media Interaction" about research subjects in the period of 2011 to 2023 in

domestic research and from 2010 to 2024 in foreign research using a purposeful method.

Stage 3. Searching and selecting suitable researches

At this stage, considering the parameters of the research title and research quality, a total of 198 researches were found related to the subject, and 153 researches remained in the research after examining the research method. Then, among these 153 researches, 111 researches were selected as the sample after studying the abstract and content of the researches. Inclusion criteria were: the study examines the UGC; it is related to the field of marketing and brand; It is studied the consumer behavior, the studies should contain the necessary information in the field of the research topic, the studies have been published in the period of 2010 to 2024. And the exclusion criteria is that the research was done with a quantitative method. CASP was used to evaluate the quality of these studies. Figure 1 shows the method of selecting researches in the third stage.

Figure 1. *Research selection method***Stage 4: Extracting results**

At this stage, a number of codes were extracted before the selection of sources. Codes and code extraction sources are presented in Table 3. The content of the

researches was carefully studied and the codes that were related to the keywords were selected and concepts and categories were formed based on them. The extracted codes along with the source of each are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Coding of Studied Researches*

N	Codes	Some Extracted Sources	Code Frequency
1	Impact of UGC content and quality	Mohammad et al (2020); Li (2022); Farzana et.al (2015)	4
2	The role of users' social signals through UGC	Chorana & Cherroun (2020); Gharehkhani & Pourhashemi (2020); Frimpong et.al (2022)	3
3	The role of cognitive, emotional, affective indicators of users in UGC	Kim (2014); Gardan et al (2022); Ko et.al. (2022)	3
4	The potential role of UGC in marketing	Li (2022); Moser & Eijkeren (2016)	2
5	The role of trust in and dimensions of reliability in UGC	Pramesti & Alversia (2024); Cheng & Khan (2017); Nyein (2019); Gally (2023)	5
6	The role of user subjective norms in UGC	Perera et.al (2022); Demba et al (2019); Zhao et al (2022); Hatim Abuljadail (2017)	7

<b>N</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Some Extracted Sources</b>	<b>Code Frequency</b>
7	The role of rational, relatively rational and emotional users in UGC	Mirbaha (2019)	4
8	Changing attitude towards UGC	Mathur et al (2021); Phua et al (2019); Nyein (2019)	3
9	Social responsibility as motivation factors for making use of UGC	Bazi et al (2019); Frimpong et.al (2022); Naeem & Ozuem (2021)	3
10	The role of passive and active users, creative, critics and simple consumers in the effectiveness of UGC	Malthouse et al (2019); Naeem & Ozuem (2021); Thomas (2020)	3
11	Emotional and functional value of UGC	Farzana et.al. (2015); Mohammad et.al. (2020); Wong & Lee (2022)	3
12	The positive interaction of UGC and its functions such as openness, participation, ease of creating and sharing content	Moran et al (2019)	7
13	The positive role of negative UGC in increasing brand engagement	Yang et al (2019); Dhaoui et al (2018)	5
14	The positive interaction of the number of likes and common comments between users	Yang et al (2019); McShane et.al (2021)	6
15	The role of socio-psychological variables including self-position search, perceived critical mass with customer engagement	Kim (2014); Frimpong et.al (2022);	7
16	The role of simple and short posts and content having hashtags in more customer engagement	Gkikas et al (2022)	3
17	Mixing customers with audience activation campaigns	Frimpong et.al (2022); McShane et.al (2021)	4
18	The role of perceived social connection on the relationship between brand trust and brand engagement	Lampeitl & Åberg (2017); Frimpong et.al (2022)	4
19	Negative UGC about the brand and its positive role in customer behavior	Rossolatos (2020); Sykora et al (2021)	5
20	The role of collectivism-individualism at the national level on the effect of textual characteristics and social relations on UGC-brand engagement	McShane et.al (2021)	2
21	The effect of media format and content type (comment, like and share) on customer engagement	Phua et.al. (2019)	7
22	UGC and its power to reduce the purchase risk of hidden buyers, and their greater engagement	Li (2022); Timoshenko (2018)	3

N	Codes	Some Extracted Sources	Code Frequency
23	Greater effect of UGC of old consumers than new consumers on customer engagement	Loureiro et.al (2018)	3
24	The role of UGC and brand culture, cultural references, personality traits or values and its use for brand engagement	Cheung et.al (2020)	3
25	UGC both enhances and hinders customer decision-making	Naeem & Ozuem (2021)	4
26	The role of UGC as an act of identity expression and its relationship with brand engagement	McCreadie (2012); Meehan (2018)	3

### Stage 5. Analyzing and qualitative synthesis

Research findings are analyzed and synthesized in the fifth stage of synthesis. At this stage, the content of 111 researches has been selected using the coding method based on the analysis. 27 codes, 4 themes and 2

dimensions have been identified totally. Table 4 presents the findings. At this stage of meta-synthesis, the findings indicated that such a coherent and systematic study has not been done in past studies.

Table 4.  
*Categorization of Research Findings*

Dimensions	Theme	Code
The development of the process of using UGC to form social brand engagement	Making use of strategies to increase user participation in UGC to form social brand engagement	Paying attention to users' motivations, cognitive, emotional, and affective indicators of users in UGC, trust and dimensions of reliability in UGC, subjective norms of users in UGC, logical, relatively logical and emotional users in UGC, passive and active, creative users, critic and simple consumer in the effectiveness of UGC, emotional value and functional value of UGC, social-psychological variables, collectivism-individualism, textual characteristics and social relations, brand culture, cultural references, personality characteristics or value and using it for brand engagement
	Making use of user content in UGC in marketing campaigns to form social brand engagement	Creating hashtag campaigns, paying attention to simple and short posts and content containing hashtags for more customer engagement, contest and reward campaigns, customer opinion and description campaigns, user training campaigns, customer engagement in new product development, storytelling campaigns, establishing live interaction with customers, and participation of influencers.
	Harnessing the power of customer testimonials to form social brand engagement	Embedding the customer satisfaction section in social media, embedding the customer conversation section about the credibility and correctness of the brand's work, working based on the testimonials generated by users, overcoming objections, building trust with potential customers, using customer testimonials to highlight brands values such as customer service or innovation, Using UGC as an act of identity expression and its relationship with brand engagement

Dimensions	Theme	Code
Internalization of UGC in the formation and increase of social brand engagement	Creating compelling challenges and contests to form social brand engagement	Identifying the audience, setting goals, setting rewards or prizes, creating hashtags, measuring success, following up, paying attention to users' social signals through UGC, paying attention to UGC and its power in reducing the risk of buying hidden buyers
	using and creating a community around the brand to form social brand engagement	Encouraging dialogue, holding a discussion of participation, social support, providing a platform to express creativity, creating opportunities for networking, creating a sense of ownership, creating a sense of social responsibility in users in the production of UGC
	Analyzing the impact of UGC to form social brand engagement	Authenticity and trust, socialization, paying attention to UGC's enhancing and hindering features for customer decision-making, low cost, increasing customer engagement, information and insights, challenges and considerations, the positive role of negative UGC in increasing brand engagement, paying attention to the positive role of negative posts by the user and its J-shaped relationship with brand engagement, paying attention to the positive interaction of emotional emojis on brand engagement
	paying attention to the intersection of legal considerations and ethical procedures in the field of UGC campaigns for the formation of social brand engagement	Paying attention to obtaining customer satisfaction in using UGC, paying attention to the copyright law, using UGC content adjustment policies, encouraging users to create diversity in UGC, clarifying how to use UGC, using feedback mechanisms, promoting ethical considerations

### Stage 6. Controlling the research quality

In the sixth stage, the Kappa index was used to maintain the quality of the meta-synthesis. In this way, another expert in this research field, without information about how to integrate the codes and concepts created by the researcher, categorized the codes. Then, the concepts presented by the researcher were compared with the concepts presented by the expert, and finally, the Kappa index was calculated based on the number of similar and different created concepts. Kappa coefficient in this study was calculated using SPSS version 28 software at a significant level (0.000). Accordingly, the Kappa agreement coefficient

of the themes was 0.879, which indicates the level of good agreement and reliability of the results.

### Stage 7. Findings

Finally, the findings of the research were stated in the last stage. Based on the findings, 4 themes and 2 dimensions were identified and their quality tested and confirmed carefully. In the seventh step, the proposed research model is presented which is the result of meta-synthesis analysis. Based on the findings of the research, the final model of the relationship between UGC and SBE is compiled in Figure 2.

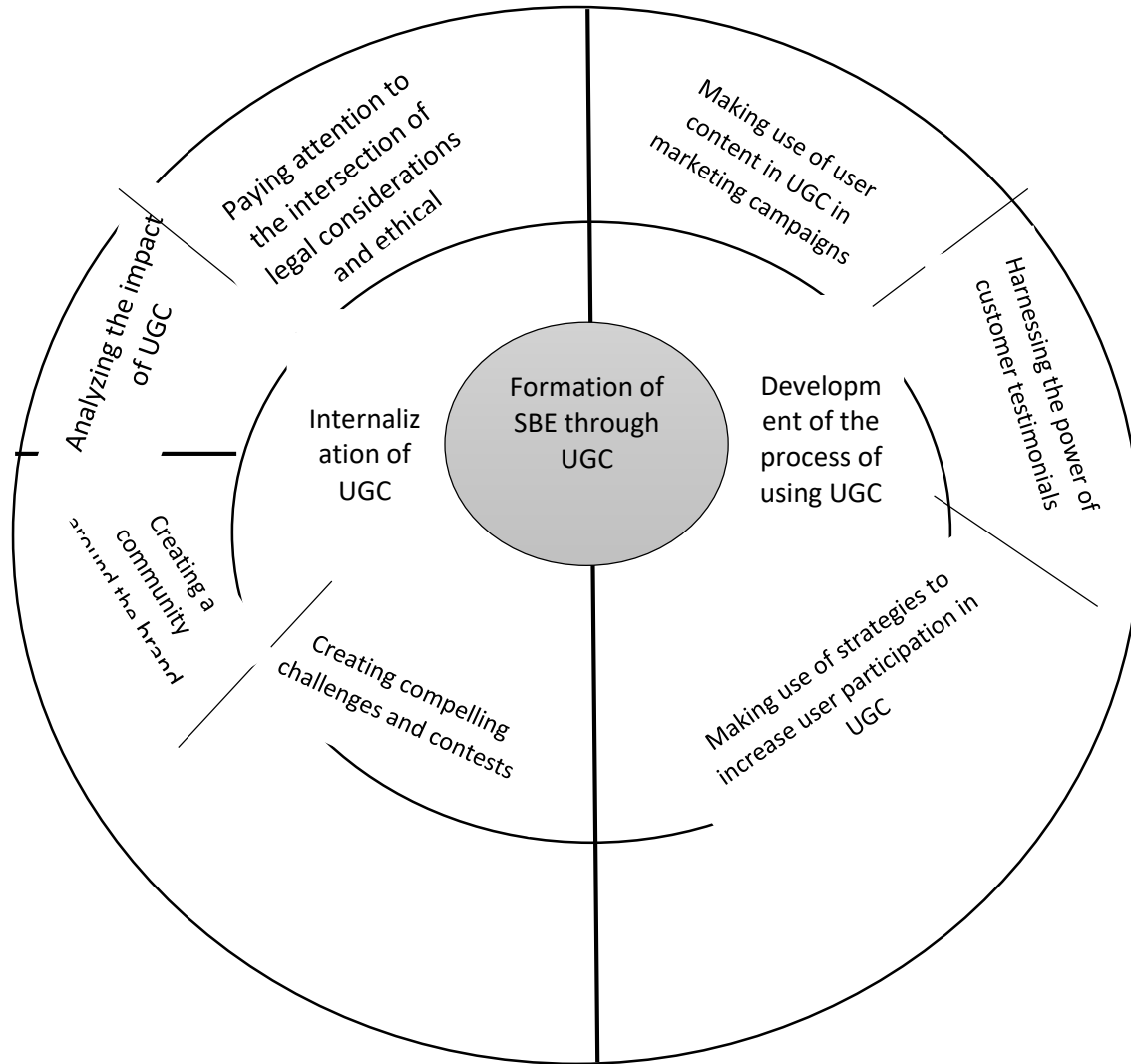


Figure 3. Relationship Model between UGC and SBE

### Discussion and Conclusion

The Objective of this study was to review systematically the formation of social brand engagement through user-generated content with meta-synthesis technique. Results showed that the content of 111 final researches has been selected in which 27 codes, 4 themes and 2 dimensions have been identified totally. According to the results, UGC recognition and its types and recognition of opportunities to make use of UGC to increase brand engagement, capability assessment and identification of used gaps between UGC and brand engagement, the role of UGC in

decision-making and increasing the social brand engagement and outcomes of making use of UGC are the themes extracted in the relationship between social brand engagement and user-generated content; and improving the process of using UGC in brand engagement and implementing and internalizing UGC in brand engagement increasing are two identified dimensions. Our results are in line with the results of Li (2022) and Santos (2021). To explain our results, it can be said that the evaluation of the existing knowledge on the impact of UGC on brand engagement and the issue of the impact of UGC on brand

performance has been highlighted due to the significant level of connection of consumers to the internet in general and social media, which opens new ways for them to interact with firms. Consumers who connect themselves with a particular brand (especially a luxury brand that is associated with providing a unique and valuable experience to buyers) get the opportunity to not only repeat official messages and statements presented as recommendation, but also to be complementary, those whose personal opinions are intertwined with those of other customers. As a result, the brand image becomes unique and difficult to imitate, which may improve its overall competitiveness in the market (Li, 2022).

The results indicate the significant potential of UGC in the field of brand marketing and brand engagement. In particular, its presence contributes to brand quality and customer loyalty, because it is associated with positive characteristics such as openness and sincerity. In addition, it does not create persuasion knowledge in consumers through advertisements, therefore, facilitate purchase decisions without causing stimulation (Yang et al., 2019). However, before using content generated by the user to increase brand engagement, especially social brand, the users should be prepared, culturalize, and motivate to generate content, because it may affect the image of the brand in an unfavorable way and lead to its negative perception by existing and potential customers, which is especially related to the background of a significant share of negative messages that consumers generate in the virtual space in relation to the brand (Liu et.al, 2019).

On the other hand, the knowledge of persuasion in consumers, their culture and preparation to produce content about the user, requires measuring the capability, identifying the existing gaps in the way of positive interaction of UGC with brand engagement. All these factors make it possible to talk about

the importance of UGC for the promotion and marketing of brands, especially in the contemporary business environment with a significant degree of competition between different brand owners, a high level of digitalization and the subsequent connection of consumers to the network and social media that enable them to receive a variety of information related to their favorite brand or product, including information generated by other buyers. However, the said potential of UGC can be both positive and negative, which means that brand owners who seek to use it should use a comprehensive approach that reduces most of the adverse effects of said content. This means the need to implement a series of evaluation and feasibility measures that provide the maximum effectiveness of UGC (Thomas, 2020). In sum, user-generated content (UGC) has revolutionized the way brands interact with their audiences, turning passive consumers into active participants in the brand's narrative. This shift has not only democratized content creation but has also deepened the connection between brands and their customers. By leveraging UGC, brands can foster a sense of community, authenticity, and trust that resonates with the modern consumer's desire for transparency and ratatability. The power of UGC lies in its ability to transform customers into brand advocates, who willingly share their experiences and stories with the world. This organic form of engagement is invaluable, as peer recommendations often carry more weight than traditional advertising. Furthermore, UGC campaigns can lead to a treasure trove of data and insights, enabling brands to better understand their audience and tailor their strategies accordingly. From a marketing perspective, UGC serves as a multi-faceted tool that not only enhances brand visibility but also provides a platform for customers to express their creativity and connection with the brand. Although some researchers abroad have done similar issues, but none of the previous researchers have presented a comprehensive



model that includes a model about brand formation through UGC. Therefore, the findings of the current research can be used by many researchers in the field of UGC. In addition to, in many industries which now has intense competition inside the country and even abroad, so far, a comprehensive research on brand formation through virtual media and the relationship with UGC has not been done and therefore the findings of the research are very important in many industries. The findings of this research led to the development of a model in the discussion of user-generated content and brand engagement, therefore, by conducting this research, the officials of different industries got acquainted with the way social brand conflict is formed through UGC, and different angles related to the development of theory in the discussion of user-generated content and its role in brand engagement were clarified, and as a result, different company' managers in different industries will find the necessary knowledge and understanding regarding the effective factors of engagement in the brand. By conducting this research, the different angles of the role and impact of the content produced by users in the brand conflict were determined, and the findings of the research can be used for different companies in different industries, advertising companies, and other manufacturing and service companies. Also, the findings of the research can be useful for academics and theoreticians, because it has clarified the different angles of user-generated content and its role in social brand engagement.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be state that it is important to provide consumers with an opportunity to provide feedback and exchange opinions about the brand in a relatively controlled environment. For example, regularly disclosing brand-related messages and creating effective communication channels between the firm and its customers on social

media (for example, topic groups) can not only ensure the generation of useful content, but also reduce the risk of incidents that may affect image and performance and damage the brand (for example, spreading false information). During this activity, special attention should be paid to UGC sources, since the reaction of buyers to brand-related content created by financial stakeholders (such as influencers, celebrities, etc.) can be less than expected, especially in a scenario where they can be positive. According to the two dimensions identified in the current research, it is suggested to firms active in the field of making using of UGC to improve the process of using content generated by the user and to implement and internalize the content generated by the user in order to increase customer engagement.

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