



**A strategic communication framework to manage the effect of user-generated content  
on consumer-based brand equity of major retailers in the Cape Metropole**

**by**

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Sciences**

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I, Terence William Hermanus, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. Hermanus', written in a cursive style.

Date: 15 September 2022

## ABSTRACT

A high degree of competitiveness exists between brands within many industries, both pre- and post-Covid-19. The retail industry in South Africa is characterised by fierce competitive behaviours between the various major retail brands as they jostle for a share of the shrinking disposable income of South African consumers, primarily due to high inflationary pressures. This has contributed to an increase in promotional and communication campaigns, at times overpromising and under-delivering, frequently resulting in poor service quality experiences. These often negative, and positive service quality encounters are subsequently shared on various social media platforms, categorised as user-generated content (UGC), predominantly damaging or enhancing the reputation of the retail brand. The ever-increasing volume of both negative and positive UGC is influencing the consumer-based brand equity of these brands, ultimately impacting on their financial performance. These major retail brands in the Cape Metropole of the Western Cape region generally lack a clear, integrated and comprehensive communication strategy that is able to manage the ever-increasing volume and influence of user-generated content, specifically, negative user-generated content on their brand equity. Previous studies have proposed models that have focused on the evaluation and monitoring of user-generated content and its corresponding effects on consumer-based brand equity. However, these were primarily focused on classifying user-generated content and its subsequent influence on brand equity but are lacking in terms of their focus on the possible response strategies to deal with user-generated content, in particular, negative user-generated content. This study endeavoured to determine whether user-generated content does influence consumer-based brand perceptions, and if so, to determine whether negative or positive UGC exerted the most influence on these perceptions. The data for the study was collected using a mono-method quantitative research approach, which included a sample of 513 Generation Y respondents who completed self-administered online questionnaires distributed using Survey Monkey. The inferential statistics used in the survey questionnaire was factor analysis and both the descriptive and inferential statistics were analysed using SPSS version 27.

The first major finding of this study is that user-generated content does exert an influence on consumer-based brand equity, while positive user-generated content exerted a more significant influence than negative user-generated content. Other related findings of this study are that both positive and negative user-generated content exerted a similar influence on the elements that constitute brand equity, viz. brand credibility, brand loyalty and purchase intentions. A strategic communications framework (UG-5C Model) is proposed that could assist retail brands in dealing with the influence of negative user-generated content on consumer-based brand equity. The UG-

5C model consists of five components, viz. customisation, community, consciousness, creation, and content, which if supported by both earned social media and secondary brand associations, could significantly reduce the viral effects of negative user-generated content on brand equity. The propagation of positive user-generated content, together with its integration into the overall communication strategy of the firm, supported by the UG-5C model, are the recommended strategies to manage the influence of negative user-generated content on consumer-based brand equity.

**Keywords:** user-generated content, Generation Y, brand equity, consumer-based brand equity, response strategies, communication strategy, secondary brand associations and strategic communications framework.

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expressed in this thesis and the conclusions arrived at are those of the author, and are not necessarily to be attributed to the W&R SETA.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late parents, William Jacobus and Mary Theresa Hermanus, who instilled within me a desire to be better than I was yesterday, and who left this expression ingrained within my cognition: “The reading man, makes the thinking man, and the thinking man, makes the clever man”. Source: Mom and Dad.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Dedication	vii
Abbreviations and acronyms	viii
List of Figures	xii
List of Tables	xiii
Glossary	xvi

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

<b>1.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Background of the study</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Problem statement</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Rationale and significance of the study</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Aim and objectives of the study</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Literature positioning</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.8</b>	<b>Research paradigm, methods, and methodologies</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.8.1</b>	Paradigm	<b>13</b>
<b>1.8.2</b>	Research methods	<b>15</b>
<b>1.8.3</b>	Research design	<b>16</b>
<b>1.9</b>	<b>Delimitations of study</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.10</b>	<b>Research methodologies and processes</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.10.1</b>	Population	<b>18</b>
<b>1.10.2</b>	Sampling method and sample size	<b>18</b>
<b>1.10.3.</b>	Data collection instruments	<b>21</b>
<b>1.10.3.1.</b>	Quantitative data	<b>21</b>
<b>1.10.3.2</b>	Data collection	<b>21</b>
<b>1.10.3.3</b>	Data collection and fieldwork	<b>22</b>
<b>1.10.3.4.</b>	Data coding and analysis	<b>23</b>
<b>1.11</b>	<b>Ethical considerations</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>1.11.1.</b>	Informed consent	<b>25</b>
<b>1.11.2.</b>	Anonymity and confidentiality	<b>26</b>
<b>1.11.3.</b>	Protecting participants from harm	<b>26</b>
<b>1.12</b>	<b>Outline of the thesis</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.12.1.</b>	Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study	<b>26</b>



1.12.2.	Chapter 2: Literature: An overview of brand equity and user-generated content	26
1.12.3.	Chapter 3: Research methodology	27
1.12.4.	Chapter 4: Presentation of findings	27
1.12.5.	Chapter 5: Discussion of results, conclusions, and recommendations	27

## **CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF BRAND EQUITY**

<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Theoretical framework</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Brand equity</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Brand equity perspectives and approaches</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Financial perspectives</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Product-market perspective</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.7</b>	<b>Consumer-based perspective</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b>UGC</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2.8.1</b>	CBBE	<b>41</b>
<b>2.8.2</b>	Dimensions of CBBE within the brand resonance model	<b>41</b>
<b>2.8.3</b>	Brand salience or brand awareness	<b>49</b>
<b>2.8.4</b>	Imagery	<b>50</b>
<b>2.8.5</b>	Brand performance	<b>52</b>
<b>2.8.6</b>	Judgements	<b>54</b>
<b>2.9</b>	<b>Brand components</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>2.9.1</b>	Brand quality	<b>54</b>
<b>2.9.2</b>	Brand credibility	<b>56</b>
<b>2.9.3</b>	Brand consideration	<b>56</b>
<b>2.9.4</b>	Brand superiority	<b>57</b>
<b>2.9.5</b>	Brand feelings	<b>57</b>
<b>2.9.6</b>	Brand resonance	<b>58</b>
<b>2.9.7</b>	Brand resonance and behavioural loyalty	<b>59</b>
<b>2.9.8</b>	Brand resonance and attitudinal attachment	<b>60</b>
<b>2.10</b>	<b>Sense of community</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>2.11</b>	<b>Active engagement</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>2.12</b>	<b>Models to manage UGC</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>2.13</b>	<b>Literature gap and contribution of the study</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>2.14</b>	<b>Conceptual framework</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>2.15</b>	<b>Chapter summary</b>	<b>80</b>

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

<b>3.1</b>	<b>The research paradigms: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological considerations</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>The research process</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Research philosophy</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Research approaches</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>The research strategies</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>The mono-method approach</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>3.7</b>	<b>Time horizon</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>3.8</b>	<b>Research design</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.9</b>	<b>Quantitative data</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.10</b>	<b>Data collection</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.11</b>	<b>Population and sampling</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.12</b>	<b>Chapter summary</b>	<b>96</b>

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS DISCUSSION**

<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Data analysis and presentation approach</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Demographic profile of respondents</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Positive UGC</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Negative UGC</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>Mixed-neutral UGC</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>4.7</b>	<b>Data reliability and validity</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>4.8</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>4.9</b>	<b>Chapter summary</b>	<b>133</b>

## **CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>5.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Summary of key findings</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>5.2.1</b>	<b>Key finding 1: Positive UGC exerts the most significant influence on CBBE</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>5.2.2</b>	<b>Findings related to Key Finding 1: Brand performance and brand reliability are integral to positive UGC formation</b>	<b>136</b>

5.2.3	Findings related to Key Finding 1: Positive UGC increases brand credibility and brand loyalty	136
5.2.4	Key Finding 2: Negative UGC exerts a significant influence on CBBE	137
5.2.5	Key Finding 3: Positive and negative UGC in the form of images and videos exert a more significant influence on CBBE	137
5.2.6	Key Finding 4: Consumers are engaging with positive and negative UGC in the form of recommendations to make purchasing decisions	138
5.2.7	Key Finding 5: Mixed-neutral UGC does not influence CBBE	138
5.3	<b>Conclusions of the research study</b>	139
5.3.1	Hypothesis: H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole	139
5.3.2	Hypothesis: H2: UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole	140
5.3.3	Hypothesis: H0: Mixed-neutral UGC does not influence the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole	140
5.4	<b>Research objectives: Conclusions</b>	141
5.4.1	Conclusions drawn on research objective one	141
5.4.2	Conclusions drawn on research objective two	141
5.4.3	Research objective three	142
5.4.4	The UG-5C Framework – Recommendations	144
5.4.5	Additional recommendations	149
5.6	<b>Theoretical applications and conversants</b>	151
5.7	<b>Managerial implications</b>	153
5.8	<b>Directions for future studies</b>	155
5.9	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	157
	<b>REFERENCE LIST</b>	158
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	
	Appendix A: Questionnaire	192
	Appendix B: Ethical Clearance Certificate	198
	Appendix C: Editing Certificate	199

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: The research process onion	15
Figure 1.2: The sampling process	19
Figure 2.1: The brand resonance model	45
Figure 2.2: The satisficing subroutine modelling process	47
Figure 2.3: Conceptual framework one	48
Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework two	52
Figure 2.5: Conceptual framework three	55
Figure 2.6: GAP analysis of the online reputation	70
Figure 2.7: A conceptual model towards managing online reputation	71
Figure 2.8: Four cases of opinion propagation - model of UFC propagation	73
Figure 2.9: User-generated communication framework model (UGCF model)	77
Figure 3.1: The research process onion	83
Figure 3.2: The sampling process	91
Figure 4.1: Gender distribution	98
Figure 4.2: Age distribution	99
Figure 4.3: Education distribution	100
Figure 4.4: Population group distribution	101
Figure 4.5: Which social media platforms do you use most frequently	102
Figure 4.6: Which digital platforms do you engage with?	103
Figure 4.7: How often do you read posts that have been written by other customers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences?	104
Figure 4.8: Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences?	105
Figure 4.9: How many hours do you spend engaging online per day searching for or sharing for product information?	106
Figure 4.10: How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms?	107
Figure 4.11: Influence of UGC on CBBE	108
Figure 5: The UG-5C framework source	143

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Criteria for respondent selection	93
Table 4.1: Profile of respondents indicating a positive influence of UGC	110
Table 4.2: Profile of respondents indicating a negative influence of UGC	111
Table 4.3: Profile of respondents indicating no influence of UGC	112
Table 4.4: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating a positive influence	113
Table 4.5a: Positive UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses	115
Table 4.5b: Positive UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses	117
Table 4.6: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating a negative influence	119
Table 4.7a: Negative UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses	120
Table 4.7b: Negative UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses	123
Table 4.8: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating no influence	125
Table 4.9: No UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses	127
Table 4.10: Assessment of reliability and validity of the constructs	127
Table 4.11: Wilcoxon signed rank tests	129
Table 4.12a: Wilcoxon signed rank test for different statements	131
Table 4.12b: Wilcoxon signed rank test	133

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BE	Brand Equity
CBBE	Consumer-based brand equity
COBRA	Consumer online brand-related activity
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CRM	Customer relationship management
EGC	Enterprise-generated content
E-WOM	Electronic word of mouth
FGC	Firm-generated content
OCE	Online consumer engagement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGC	Producer-generated content
SBE	Social brand engagement
SMM	Social media marketing
SSP	Sector Skills Plan

UGBR	User-generated brand reviews or recommendations
UGC	User-generated content
UGCF	User-generated communication framework
WOM	Word of mouth
W&R	Wholesale and retail
WSP	Workplace Skills Plan

## GLOSSARY

<b>Active engagement</b>	Represents the strongest display of loyalty (Keller & Swaminathan 2020:121; Keller, 2013:121; 2010:69).
<b>Brand associations</b>	Meanings or attachments that consumers have of a brand (Keller, 2010:68; 1993:3).
<b>Brand Equity</b>	The added value with which a given brand endows a product (Farquhar, 1989:24).
<b>Brand Community</b>	A number of brand-loyal consumers who share values, traditions and a sense of belonging and identification (Keller & Swaminathan 2020:120).
<b>Brand imagery</b>	Intangible and abstract associations that consumers have of the brand, based on their exposure to various forms of media or other sources of information (Keller, 2013:11).
<b>Brand resonance</b>	Represents the highest degree of loyalty to and the ultimate relationship that a consumer can have with a brand (Keller, 2013:120; 2010:61).
<b>Brand schematicity</b>	An inclination or propensity to process stimuli according to the consumer's relationship with the brand (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018:215).
<b>Brand salience</b>	An indicator of brand awareness, stemming from the ability to recognise the brand under varying conditions, based on certain brand associations or cues (Ande et al., 2017:1496).
<b>Brand superiority</b>	When consumers view one brand as being more dominant or in ascendancy relative to another brand (Beig & Nika, 2019:5).



<b>Brand awareness</b>	The ability to recall the brand name when provided with a cue about the brand (Wong & Wickham, 2015:440).
<b>Cape Metropole</b>	The metropolitan area of Cape Town, which is also the provincial capital (Socio-Economic Profile: City of Cape Town, 2016:4).
<b>Consumer online brand-related activity (COBRA)</b>	Consumer online brand-related activities are used as a framework to reflect on consumer engagement activities with the brand (Muntinga et al., 2011:14).
<b>Consumer-based brand equity (CBBE)</b>	A consumer perspective of brand equity (CBBE) where the value of the brand lies in the mind of the consumer (Pappu et al., 2005:144).
<b>Customer Relationship Management (CRM)</b>	An approach or strategy that companies use to manage interactions with customers and potential customers (Pan & Lee, 2003:96).
<b>Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM)</b>	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., 2004:39).
<b>Omnichannel</b>	A business model in which all existing channels become completely integrated to offer customers a seamless shopping experience (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014:9).
<b>Paradigm</b>	A paradigm is a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted (Saunders et al., 2009:118).

<b>Social Media Marketing</b>	Marketing-related activities that a firm generates using social media (Cheung et al., 2021:361).
<b>Schema Theory</b>	A cognitive modelling framework or structure based on expectations of a variable which entails the combining of perceptions, values, beliefs, and existing knowledge (Bettman, 1979:40).
<b>User-Generated Content (UGC)</b>	Content generated by consumers, which has disrupted the traditional marketing ecosystem, whereby firms are no longer in complete control of the outcomes of their consumer-driven communication strategies, as the balance of communication power is shifting to the consumer end of the marketing channel (Gensler et al., 2013:243).
<b>W&amp;R SETA</b>	Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (wrseta.org.za, 2021)
<b>Web 2.0</b>	A technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media, and facilitates consumer-generated content (Berthon et al., 2012:62).
<b>Word of mouth (WOM)</b>	Transmissions consisting of informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers (Westbrook, 1987:261).

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The way brands communicate with their target audiences and the way consumers communicate with each other is being pointedly disrupted by the constantly evolving internet and its related communication technologies. The traditional business to consumer (B2C) channel, where marketing content is generated by the business and driven downstream towards the consumer, has evolved significantly (Ali et al., 2019:150). Consumers are now generating their own content, referred to as user-generated content (UGC) and this has disrupted the traditional marketing ecosystem, where firms are no longer completely in control of their consumer-driven communication strategies (Baruah, 2012:9), as the balance of communication power is shifting to the consumer end of the marketing channel (Kim & Johnson, 2016:107; Gensler et al., 2013:243). Ultimately, as a result of the influence of UGC, brand communications are therefore no longer confined solely to the business-to-consumer interface (Bolton et al., 2019:28). The purpose of this study was therefore to develop a strategic communication framework to manage the effect of UGC on consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) within major retailers in the Cape Metropole.

The definitions of brand equity are often categorised into two broad categories with the separation being along either financial lines or from a consumer perspective (Vinh, 2017:177). The CBBE is where the brand value is based on perceptions that are formulated in the mind of the consumer, according to the seminal studies of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Keller and Lehmann (2006:745) assert that the financial perspective of brand equity is founded upon the value of the brand within financial markets. This study focused on the consumer-based perspective because they are the final consumers with whom the retail brands engage, and where the brand equity exists (Raji et al., 2018:5; Brahmhatt & Shah 2017:43; Rachna & Khajuria 2017:6). A study by Londoño et al. (2016:70) focused similarly on the consumer-based perspective, as this is one the main contributors to the financial well-being of a business.

Keller's approach (1993:2) to constructing brand equity from the consumer perspective was useful to this study because it provided a structure and context to both marketing and business strategy formulation. This context of CBBE also provided areas where research can be conducted to improve managerial decision making. This is particularly relevant to the present study, as UGC and the marketing strategies of retail brands both have a significant role to play in the performance of the organisation, as well as the behaviour of consumers (Tunçel & Yılmaz, 2020:98). It is not known whether retailers are

currently able to adapt their communication strategies to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE. However, specialised knowledge and skills are urgently required to understand the effect of UGC on CBBE. The methods that are required to deal with UGC are deemed to be more complex and specialised than what is currently being used, a dimension that is seemingly often out of the control of the retail store (Gensler et al., 2013:243). There have been several research studies on the impact of UGC on sales and profitability; however, there is limited research on how UGC influences CBBE (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014:32). This study therefore proposes a strategic model that retailers could adopt in order to manage the effects of UGC on their CBBE.

Retail stores no longer have complete control over CBBE, as this one-way process is now being diluted by UGC. It makes the controlling and measurement of CBBE rather complex, as it is consumer-based and founded on perceptions and other human emotions, ultimately affecting purchase intentions (Mayrhofer et al., 2020:173). Barwise (1993:100) aptly summarises this perspective when he reasons that until CBBE is clearly defined and measured, the effect that marketing actions have on CBBE will be both difficult and unrealistic to measure.

Studies that have been conducted to determine the influence of UGC on CBBE include Eusebius (2020); Mishra (2018); Rachna & Khajuria (2017) and Schivinski et al. (2016). In the influential study of Christodoulides et al. (2012:3), where UGC's influence on CBBE is measured, the conceptual model used proposes four constructs, namely, co-creation, empowerment, community and self-concept, all of which positively influence UGC, which in turn ultimately influences CBBE. The study found that brand managers need to engage in an interactive strategy to build their CBBE and to improve brand positioning. These findings support the rationale of this study, whereby a more engaging and potentially integrated communication strategy between the traditional business to consumer channel, referred to as firm-generated content (FGC) or producer-generated content (PGC), and UGC needs to be implemented (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022:19). For the purpose of this study, the term FGC will be adopted (Rahmah et al., 2018:13). This will ensure that CBBE is managed more effectively, with the notable difference being the construction of a strategic communication framework to assist retailers to better manage the influence of UGC on CBBE.

This finding, that an interactive strategy has to be adopted, has significance for the current study as it is hypothesised that UGC significantly affects the CBBE of major retail brands. Smith et al. (2012:103) state that UGC is similar to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), but the concept of UGC encapsulates that of eWOM. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004:39) elucidate that online WOM (eWOM) is a form of communication, which could consist of either positive or negative statements made by customers regarding a product or company, which are circulated online to both customers and organisations alike

that are subsequently made available to a multitude of online users. Donthu et al. (2021:758) posit that eWOM can be regarded as online expressed views and feedback about products and services.

Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006:13) found in their seminal study that eWOM is regarded as being more persuasive than advertising, particularly with reference to print advertising. These studies have highlighted the increasing influence in terms of credibility and persuasiveness that UGC has on consumer perceptions, ultimately affecting CBBE. This has particular implications for retail brands as they have a tendency to depend quite heavily on print media as a means of communication with their target audiences.

Despite the prevalence of numerous studies dealing with the influence of UGC on CBBE, there is limited primary data on studies that explain the influence of UGC on CBBE within the retail industry. An analysis of the leading academic databases such as Scimedirect.com, EBSCOhost and Google Scholar revealed that research in this area is still developing.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

There were 14.3 million people employed in South Africa in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The retail sector employs 3.320 million people or 23.2 % of the total labour force (W&R SETA, 2021). Retail and business services together are the biggest employers in most middle- and high-income economies (W&R SETA, 2021). The Western Cape is a province of South Africa, situated on the south-western coast of the country. It is the fourth largest of the nine provinces with an area of 129,449 square kilometres (49,981 sq. mi), and the third most populated, with an estimated 4 393 562 inhabitants (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020). The City of Cape Town, also referred to as the Cape Metropole, is also the provincial capital (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020). Gauteng has the largest concentration of retail businesses with 8895, while the Western Cape has the second largest concentration with 4690 (W&R SETA, 2021). The prevalence of numerous retail stores and high employee numbers in Gauteng and the Western Cape therefore highlights the need for adequately trained and skilled retail staff to render high levels of service quality particularly within these regions.

As retail managers are the interface between the retail business and the consumer market, both in the offline and online domains, viz. the omnichannel retail environment, the scarcity of suitably qualified retail managers presents a huge challenge to the retail industry (Klaiber et al., 2015:394). According to Hüseyinoğlu (2019:109), customers expect a consistent and uniform shopping experience, regardless of the channel they use; they are willing to move seamlessly between the various channels, whether it

is a traditional store, online, or mobile. The consumer revolution within the retail sector is currently a very real challenge as retailers battle to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE. The Wholesale and Retail Sector Skills Plan (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2021) presents a strategic approach to dealing with the influence of the digital revolution, where it clearly states that “In order for the retail sector to become efficient, effective and economical enough to maximise profit margins and customer experience, technological change is critical” (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2021). Key drivers of this revolution are the rapid adoption by consumers of smart mobile devices and digital media; the power shift from FGC to UGC is well aligned with these changes; and the following extract encapsulates the changes in the sector: “gone are the days when a bad shopping experience remains isolated to a customers’ circle of friends and family” (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2021).

Consumers have been influenced as a result of their exposure to WOM communications for decades. When they were exposed to favourable word of mouth it was found to increase the probability of purchase, while exposure to unfavourable WOM decreased the probability of purchase (Richins 1983:76; Arndt, 1967:295). WOM has morphed into eWOM as the internet provided a platform for the rapid acceleration of eWOM and UGC (Cheung & Thadani 2010:329). The impact of negative UGC on consumer perceptions and ultimately CBBE started manifesting itself with the leverage that UGC has gained in terms of purchase intentions and ultimately business profitability (Erkan & Evans, 2018:617).

Consumers are increasingly using UGC to engage with their brands in seamless online and offline environments; however, 45% of consumers will no longer follow a brand if it engages too aggressively in FGC (Embedsocial, 2021). In a study by Sproutsocial.com (2018), of the more than one thousand respondents in the survey, more than ninety percent have used social media in some way to communicate directly with a brand (Sproutsocial, 2018). The most significant finding of this study is that while there was an 18% increase in the average number of messages left online that required a response from the brand, more alarming was the fact that brands responded to only 11% of the consumer messages. This apathy in terms of business responses has serious implications, as 60% of consumers regard UGC as being the most authentic and trusted form of content (Stackla, 2021). This suggests that consumer perceptions have potentially been influenced and ultimately CBBE has potentially been affected (Arya et al., 2022:1393). This influence manifests itself in consumers increasingly making their purchasing choices based on their exposure to UGC (Kim & Song, 2017:1).

Businesses are uncertain of how to engage with UGC, specifically negative UGC, and its ever-increasing prevalence presents a significant problem to many businesses, as they are uncertain how to manage its influence on their brands (Yang et al., 2019:25; Rim and Song, 2016:476). The increasing volume of UGC is indicative of consumers regarding the online platforms as being platforms to engage

directly with brands and also as channels to expedite service-related issues (Yang et al., 2019:25). With the power axis tilting in favour of the consumer and not the brand in the online domain, there is a need to focus on proactively engaging with the ever-increasing phenomenon of UGC (Sparks et al., 2016:84). Significant consequences await brands that continue to ignore the presence of UGC and its subsequent potential influence on brand equity (Zubair et al., 2020:9).

A need therefore exists to also develop a strategic communication framework that could be used to assist retail brands in managing the influence of UGC on CBBE in the retail sector within the Cape Metropole (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2019/20). The next section highlights the problem statement of the study.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

There seems to be a perception amongst retail brands that social media is a place for “young people to socialise” and they do not see a need to develop a meaningful presence on social media platforms (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022:7). Many retailers are still unclear on how to adapt their communication strategies around the increase in UGC, and the interaction between online consumers and retailers presents numerous challenges for retail stores (Stackla, 2019). The traditional approach to marketing and communication is to use it as a one-way means of communication, and its effectiveness seems to be waning (Donthu et al., 2021:769). There is also a decrease in the ability of traditional marketing approaches to influence consumer decision-making and brand perceptions, as consumers are more trusting of UGC and social media as a source of information (Arya et al., 2022:1392; Stackla, 2019) as opposed to traditional media sources. Therefore, a greater likelihood exists that consumers will be influenced by UGC as opposed to FGC, especially from sources that are familiar to them when making purchasing decisions (Mayrhofer et al., 2019:173; Ahn et al., 2014:43).

There is a tendency of retail brands to have some social media presence and activity, but this is often merely a passive presence which simply includes a platform for sharing information (Davari et al., 2017:1910). This kind of platform often lacks interaction with the consumer (Wahyono et al., 2017:29) and it is merely a passive response created as a result of competitive pressures. The increasing volume of UGC, specifically negative UGC, is compounding matters for retailers, as high levels of uncertainty exist around how the influence of UGC is to be managed, presenting a major problem for them (Yang et al., 2019:25).

Retailers are also realising that the modern consumer is much more knowledgeable and informed about brands and they are no longer visiting stores to learn about products (Stackla, 2019). Therefore, there

is a distinct shift in the power axis between consumers and brands, as consumers are now more knowledgeable, have more purchasing options and they are more connected to each other within the online domain (Geng & Chen, 2021:8). These phenomena are key to the problem currently being encountered, where the content that is generated by consumers is disrupting the retail ecosystem in its current state.

Increasingly more and more brands are attempting to engage in social media marketing and communication activities (Bala & Verma, 2018:337). However, these brands often do not actively engage in communication and social media activities in a manner that enhances their brand equity (Smith et al., 2015:128). The reason for this is as a result of two major factors, the one being that they lack the technical expertise, with the other reason cited being a lack of financial resources to meaningfully engage with their online target markets to build brand equity (Smith et al., 2015:128). This, coupled with the fact that the proof of the impact of return on investment based on the financial resource allocations in social media and communication strategies are often unclear, further contributes to the hesitancy of retail businesses to invest in comprehensive social media and communication strategies (Colicev et al., 2018:2; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011:275).

Brands which are embarking on a more engaged and comprehensive social media and communication strategy need to ensure that their online marketing and communication strategies are seamlessly integrated into their traditional business and communication strategy (Tong et al., 2020:69). There is an apparent increased attempt by brands to integrate their main brand and communication strategies into UGC to manage their brand equity. This phenomenon is referred to as paid or brand-related UGC (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022:19; Kim & Song, 2018:16). However, paid or brand-related UGC has not been very effective in this regard, as neutral or unpaid UGC is still regarded as being more trustworthy and effective in influencing CBBE (Kim & Song, 2018:15).

Various models and frameworks that have been conceptualised and modelled on the measurement and control of UGC and its effect on CBBE have been reviewed, e.g., Lim et al. (2020), Qu et al. (2019), Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018), Manaman et al. (2016), Baka (2016); and Gu and Ye (2014). These models and frameworks predominantly focused on the classification and the delimitation of UGC. They are therefore limited in their ability to formulate response strategies to manage the influence of UGC on CBBE.

This study therefore endeavoured to develop a strategic communication framework to assist major retail businesses in adapting their communication strategies to manage UGC more effectively, and ultimately the effects on CBBE. The proposed strategic communication framework is modelled on the conceptual



model framework of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) whose model was formulated to measure the influence of UGC on CBBE and its subsequent impact on purchase intentions.

#### **1.4 Rationale and significance of the study**

The wholesale and retail sector currently employs 3.087 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The Western Cape is a province of South Africa, with an estimated 2.256 million employed persons in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). In the Western Cape, 423 000 people are employed in the wholesale and retail sector (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Gauteng has the largest concentration of retail businesses (8895), while there are 4690 retail businesses located in the Western Cape, the second largest concentration (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2020/2021). In South Africa there are approximately 15 367 retail stores of which 153 could be classified as large retail stores, 334 medium-sized, 13371 small, and 1509 are unknown in terms of their size (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2019/2020). The prevalence of numerous retail stores, which are more concentrated in both the Gauteng and the Western Cape provinces, highlights the increased need for adequately trained and skilled retail staff within these areas.

The highest ranked scarce skill occupation for large, medium, and small companies in the wholesale and retail sector is currently a retail manager, with the customer services manager ranked as the number one “hard to fill vacancy”, which highlight the service quality leadership challenges retailers are encountering (W&R SETA, 2021). Within the e-retail or e-commerce domain, the e-commerce manager is the highest ranked scarce skill occupation, which indicates that suitably skilled retail managers in both the online and the offline domains are in short supply, this shortage in terms of available and skilled retail managers further exacerbates the current challenges posed by UGC and the lack of suitable training for retail managers in dealing with UGC (W&R SETA, 2021; Feiz & Moradi 2019:1457).

However, it is the shared nature of UGC and the speed with which it goes viral, particularly negative UGC, which poses a significant challenge to brands in their ability to manage its effect on CBBE (Bi et al., 2018:90). The motives for sharing UGC, both positive and negative, vary somewhat, ranging from assisting other consumers by providing advice, promoting the brand, self-promotion, and seeking revenge, amongst other reasons (Park & Lee, 2021:3). However, it is argued that the sharing of negative UGC is more self-centred (Bi et al., 2018:90). A paradoxical situation is then created as the viral speed of UGC is exacerbated by the fact there is a particular reluctance by managers to deal with negative UGC (Rim & Song, 2016:476), creating a perfect storm effect. The primary reason for not dealing with negative UGC and its influence on CBBE expeditiously is that managers lack the expertise and knowledge to do so, resulting in many of them attempting to simply delete such posts (Rim & Song, 2016:491), without understanding the viral sharing nature of UGC (Park & Lee, 2021:3).

A significant aspect of the Wholesale and Retail Sector Skills plan (W&R SETA, 2021) is that it highlights the changing technological landscape within which the retail sector finds itself, with the amplified voice of the online consumer and the need for a new approach to communicating with a more informed consumer (W&R SETA, 2021). Retail brands who rapidly embrace these changes and who respond ethically in dealing with the influence of UGC on CBBE will enjoy the loyalty and support of consumers (W&R SETA, 2021).

Developing a strategic communication framework to assist retail brands in managing the influence of UGC on CBBE in the retail sector within the Cape Metropole is therefore of particular significance.

### **1.5 Aim and objectives of the study**

The overall aim of this study, after noting the inadequacy of literature on how UGC influences CBBE in the retail industry, was to develop a framework that will assist retailers to respond and manage the effects of UGC on their CBBE. If retailers are able to negate the influence of UGC by responding to it in a more pragmatic and proactive manner, using a more structured and tailored approach, it will result in higher levels of positive CBBE, which will ultimately contribute to higher levels of profitability for the retailer. Retail stores are currently attempting to reduce the influence of UGC and social media by utilising a marketing strategy that only entails a more traditional and time-consuming FGC approach to influence CBBE, as opposed to a well formulated and purposeful online strategy dedicated to dealing with UGC. This type of approach (FGC) is no longer the most effective approach because of the speed with which UGC is both generated and disseminated, its credibility, and the leverage it has over CBBE (Bi et al., 2018:80). Chelliah et al. (2022:425), Lee and Hong (2019:615), Bi et al. (2018:80) and Chari et al. (2016:1077) capture this disruption of the traditional FGC approach by UGC accurately in stating that eWOM or UGC from trusted sources is what ultimately influences consumer perceptions and not costly advertising campaigns.

The aim of the research was therefore to develop a strategic framework that will assist major fast-moving goods stores, such as Pick n Pay, Woolworths, Checkers, Shoprite, Spar and Food Lovers Market in dealing with user-generated content in a manner that positively affects their brand equity.

The following objectives are identified based on the research problem and study area:

1. To determine whether UGC influences the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.

2. To ascertain whether negative or positive UGC exerts the most influence on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.
3. To propose a strategic communication framework that major retailers could use to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE.

## **1.6 Hypothesis**

By addressing these research objectives, the study will ensure that credible data is generated to test the following hypothesis:

H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

H2: UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

H0: UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

## **1.7 Literature positioning**

UGC as a social phenomenon is embedded within the literature field of human communication theory (Eichhorn et al., 2019:5). Katz (1957:61) asserts that word-of-mouth communication is a more specialised field within communication theory, by virtue of the interpersonal two-way flow of communication. Pertinently, Katz (1957:63) refers to opinion leaders generating word of mouth communication to exert personal influence over others, which can be likened to the possible influence of UGC on CBBE.

The evaluation of the influence of UGC on CBBE is founded on the schema theory, as UGC is an external communication stimulus, which is being superimposed against current knowledge and theory or schema (Eysenck, 1984; Bettman, 1979; Axelrod, 1973). New incoming communication stimuli, such as UGC, that are not congruent with existing schema (Bartlett, 1932) result in new perceptions or CBBE being established (Lee et al., 2018:453; Axelrod, 1973:1248).

According to Keller (2013:57), brand equity was one of the most significant and popular concepts to arise in the 1980s. With its conceptualisation, it elevated the brand dimension within the context of marketing strategy, with the only drawback being the various ways in which brand equity was being defined.

Brand equity is commonly defined as the attaching of greater value, higher levels of loyalty and

increased confidence in a brand compared to its competitors, and the willingness of the consumer to pay more for this brand relative to competing brands (Winit & Kantabutra, 2022:6; Anabila, 2020:232; Malthouse et al., 2016:440; Lassar et al., 1995:11; Mahajan et al., 1994:222; Park & Srinivasan, 1994:271; Kamakura & Russell, 1993:9). As a result of the various perspectives from which brand equity can be measured, viz. customer-based, company-based and financial-based perspectives (Keller & Lehmann, 2006:745; Motameni & Shahrokhi 1998:285) it has resulted in the absence of a common approach as to how brand equity is conceptualised and defined. Keller's (1993:2) model is based on CBBE, where brand equity is defined from the consumer's perspective. It is also referred to as the marketing perspective of brand equity (Mackay et al., 1997:421). It is evident from the literature that CBBE is therefore founded on numerous concepts that ultimately manifest themselves in brand equity. These are also referred to as dimensions or associations, which are closely related concepts that contribute to the formation of CBBE (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016:5480). Keller (2010:61) refers to the dimensions of CBBE as "brand awareness, brand associations, brand attitudes, brand attachment, and brand activity". He states that these dimensions may be influenced by any marketing or potential communication activity, and this captures one of the main objectives of this study, to determine the potential influence of UGC on the brand dimensions of CBBE.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whose definition is regarded as being the most widely accepted (Thao & Shurong, 2020; Senftleben, 2019; Schivinski et al., 2016; Christodoulides et al., 2012), defines UGC along three dimensions of content, namely content made publicly available over the internet, content containing some form of creativity, and content created beyond the boundaries of professional practice (OECD, 2007:3). According to Daugherty et al. (2008:16), who subsequently classified UGC as content generated by consumers, it is media content created by the general public as opposed to paid professionals, and predominantly distributed on the Internet. This description has been widely adopted and accepted by Demba et al. (2019:138), Rachna and Khajuria (2017:2), Schivinski et al. (2016:194), Malthouse et al. (2016:429), and Bahtar and Muda (2016:338). However, Christodoulides et al. (2012:3) posit that this description (Daugherty, 2008) is too vague, lacks focus and does not distinguish between the various platforms from which the content could stem. Despite critiquing the OECD's (2007) definition as not being inclusive of instant messaging and email, they acknowledge that this remains the most accepted definition of UGC.

Park and Lee (2021:2) describe UGC as original content that is generated and distributed by online users. While Manap and Adzharudin (2013:53) state that UGC is similar to eWOM, it works very similarly to WOM, except that it spreads input via an online channel. According to Cox et al. (2009:4), UGC is equivalent to WOM marketing, and is also based on the principle of sharing views and opinions about various brands, products, or services with other people. These views are in contrast to Fernando's

(2007:9) argument – that UGC is entirely different to traditional media, and it is where consumer generated content holds more significance than traditional media. The emergence of Web 2.0, as initially described by O'Reilly (2007:17), is a platform that constantly updates data from numerous sources, creating a dialectical process that remixes data in an engaged environment that evolves the more users are engaged with it. Berthon et al. (2012:62) state that Web 2.0 can be thought of as the skeletal framework that creates an enabling environment for the occurrence of social media and facilitates UGC. It is evident from these perspectives that the rise to prominence of the phenomenon of UGC, as well as eWOM, coincided with the onset of Web 2.0.

Dwyer (2007:63) postulates that UGC provides two types of connected networks – social networks and information-based networks, and these networks evolve because of the influence of eWOM. In this study, the focus was on the informational type of UGC, as this would be the initial purpose that the UGC generated by consumers would serve. Jonas (2010:122) states that UGC can be classified into the following categories, namely blogs, forums and wikis, and sites where various types of content are shared. This study has focused on specific UGC content that has been generated by consumers; and on how this content that consists of pictures, service experiences and videos of service and business protocols has been posted on various social media platforms. The choice of this type of UGC relates to the potential influence that this type of UGC would have on CBBE. According to Schivinski et al. (2015:1054), the effects of UGC on consumers' perception of brands varies, based on the type of UGC the consumer has been exposed to on social media. These varying influences of UGC on the dimensions of CBBE also fluctuate, which holds further implications in terms of brand loyalty and ultimately purchasing intentions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015:43). The findings of Bonhomme et al. (2010:8) that UGC as well as eWOM (Eckes, 2016:33) have a significant influence on consumer brand perceptions and that this ultimately affects CBBE, is in line with the recent findings of Raji et al. (2018:13) that marketing communications and strategies that are generated on different social media platforms have a more significant influence on CBBE.

The influence of UGC on CBBE is well aligned with the CBBE model, called the brand resonance model (Keller, 2001); the theoretical framework for this study was constructed from the perspective of this model. As the influence of UGC on CBBE can be both positive and negative, this correlates well with Keller's view that CBBE is the "differential effect of brand knowledge", based on how consumers respond when brands are marketed to them (Keller, 1993:8). Keller (2013:107) also describes the model as a tool that can be used to create engaging and loyal relationships with customers. The brand resonance model has been popular among researchers to measure the effects on CBBE, e.g. Huang and Cai (2015:432), Aziz and Yasin (2010:182), Kuhn et al. (2008:4), and Konecnik and Gertner (2007:403). Similarly, studies by Colicev et al. (2018), Londoño et al. (2016) and Pappu and Quester (2006), which

are based on the retail sector, examine the relationship between the brand equity of retail brands and CBBE.

The impact of negative UGC on CBBE, referred to as brand equity “dilution”, continues to gain acceptance, particularly with reference to the influence of negative online reviews and their effects on brand equity. With specific reference to brand equity dilution in the study by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011:38), they have concluded that negative UGC has an impact not only on CBBE (Kim & Johnson, 2016:107), but ultimately on purchase intentions and a retailers’ brand equity. Similarly, studies associated with the influence of positive UGC on CBBE also reveal that purchasing intentions are positively influenced (Mayrhofer et al. (2020:178), while Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013:14) highlighted the influence of positive UGC on CBBE. However, to a significantly lesser extent, the finding that UGC does not influence CBBE is prevalent in the literature (Khobzi et al., 2018:14) and the frequently referenced study by Tang et al. (2014) that concludes that UGC has no influence on CBBE. Tang et al. (2014:43) frames the UGC in the study as indifferent or mixed, with indifferent containing no positive or negative inferences, while mixed-neutral contains an equal amount of positive and negative UGC. This study adopted the mixed-neutral frame of reference as the respondents within the sample were exposed to both negative and positive UGC.

The gaps in the body of knowledge that relate to the influence of UGC on CBBE are alluded to in a number of related research studies, as previously indicated. Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2015:43) suggest that further research is needed when using Keller’s CBBE framework (Keller, 2009,1993). A key aspect of their suggested research focus revolves around a deeper understanding and a different point of view on how UGC influences CBBE. Bruhn et al. (2012:783), in their investigation into the relative influence of brand communication on brand equity via social media, as opposed to traditional media, conclude that the effect of UGC on brand awareness, one of the dimensions of brand equity, is rather complex, and therefore additional research should be conducted in this area. Park and Srinivasan (1994:287) in their extensively cited study, suggest avenues for future research that are well aligned to this particular study’s objectives of measuring the influence of UGC on CBBE, where they state the importance of quantifying brand associations that are not associated with product features, and the possible relationship that could exist with consumer preferences.

Aaker (1992:30) states that brand equity creates value for both the organisation as well as for the consumer. Brand equity also increases the likelihood of purchasing one brand or the purchasing intention from one retail brand (Scarth, 2017:71; Malthouse et al., 2016:440) as opposed to another retail brand, and any marketing strategy or activity has the potential to influence brand equity (Rahmah et al., 2018:13). Various studies have shown that increasingly so, consumers have

come to regard other consumers' opinions as being more credible than FGC, which ultimately is affecting CBBE (Dwivedi et al., 2018:1177; Baka 2016:150; Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013:150; Cheong & Morrison, 2008:20). According to Rachna & Khajuria (2017:7), marketers must align UGC with their marketing strategies, as the people generating UGC often serve as influencers or opinion leaders.

The gap in the literature that this study sought to fill is the form of the proposed strategic communication framework that will assist retail brands in factoring the presence of UGC into their communication strategies to neutralise the effects that UGC has on CBBE.

## **1.8 Research paradigm, methods, and methodologies**

### **1.8.1 Paradigm**

Social theory can be conceived in terms of four paradigms based upon various sets of theoretical assumptions that researchers can make (Saunders et al. 2019:140). These four assumptions are objectivist, subjectivist, regulatory and radical, and four possible paradigms are extracted based on how these assumptions are plotted. These four paradigms are embedded in the more commonly adopted epistemological and ontological considerations (Bryman et al., 2014:20), with the functionalist paradigm aligning with positivism, interpretative with interpretivism, the radical humanist paradigm with subjectivism and the radical structuralist paradigm with the objectivist standpoint respectively based on the seminal research study of Burrell and Morgan (1985:20).

Objectivism and subjectivism are the two primary ontological positions are followed in social research, viz. Bryan (2004:29) describes objectivism as an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external realities that are beyond our control or influence. Don-Solomon & Eke (2018:2) assert that objectivism as a research position assumes that social and business phenomena exist in reality beyond the realm of the control of the business factors concerned with their being. The second position, i.e. subjectivism, holds that social phenomena are built on the perceptions and subsequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence (Saunders et al., 2019:137).

An objective ontological position was adopted for this study as the social phenomena of UGC and their influence on CBBE are beyond the control of the researcher and are not within his reach, an objective reality exists (Eusebius, 2020; Naeem & Wilson, 2020). Therefore, these social variables were analysed using scientific and mathematical means, hence the adoption of a quantitative research method (Ataro, 2020:3).

When carrying out a research study, the researcher needs to decide on what may be regarded as acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge. Burrell and Morgan (1979:1) in their ground-breaking research publication describe epistemology as grounds of knowledge based on an understanding of the world and how this knowledge is communicated to others. Bryman (2012:27) elucidates that epistemology encapsulates whether knowledge in the social world can be studied using the same methods as within the natural sciences and what constitutes acceptable knowledge within a field of study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012:23).

The acceptance of a particular epistemological perspective will thus influence the researcher's choice of research philosophy, research methods and the type of data that will be collected and analysed. The epistemological considerations that this study adopted were those of positivism.

Bahari (2010:22) defines positivism as follows: "Positivism assumes that there are social facts with an objective reality apart from the beliefs of individuals". Saunders et al. (2019:144), Bryman (2012:27) and Malhotra and Birks (2006:136) assert that when adopting a positivist perspective while conducting business research, a more scientific philosophy is adopted, resulting in more patterned or law-like conclusions being drawn. The positivist epistemological perspective of this study originated from the hypothesis that a potential relationship existed between the variables of UGC and CBBE, which were to be measured using a quantitative research method (Ledwaba, 2020; Perera et al., 2020; Van Enkevort & Ansari-Dunkes, 2013).

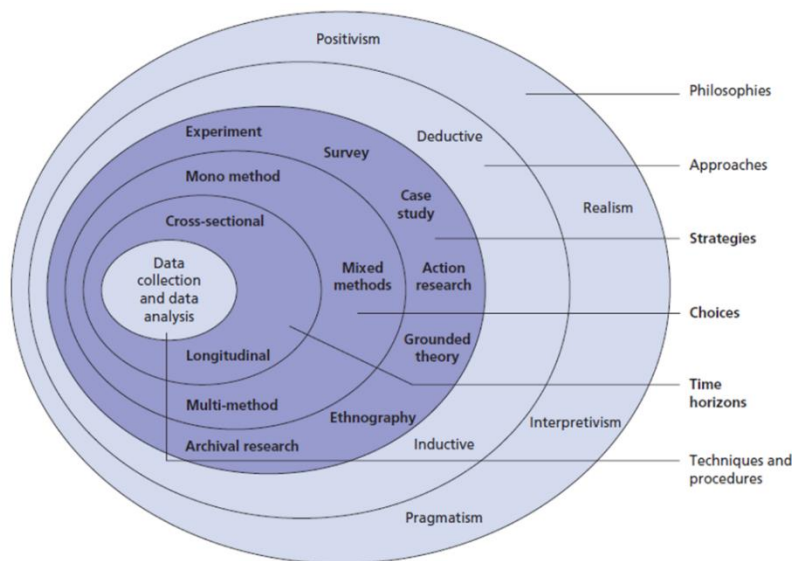
Saunders et al. (2016:128) and Biddle and Schafft (2015:321) describe axiology as the role that values and ethics play while conducting a research process. Throughout this research study, the researcher has been constantly aware of his own values as well as those of his research respondents or participants. This has been especially important to ensure that the research results are regarded as valid and credible. The researcher's axiological position has been determined by his ethical stance with regards to issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, voluntary participation and withdrawal, plagiarism, honesty, and integrity. High levels of confidentiality and anonymity were maintained around all information that was used in this regard. The required consent letter was attained for voluntary participation and withdrawal by the respondents for the quantitative component of the study. The highest ethical levels relating to plagiarism and integrity have been unequivocally maintained throughout the study. All subjective views and opinions have been respected and recorded without bias or prejudice. These personal values have ensured that the data collected is free of the researchers' bias and has been interpreted without the influence of personal views and opinions. The data has also been collected in an ethical fashion without causing harm or discomfort to any respondent included in the study. This has ensured that the data is credible and the researcher has maintained an objective and



independent stance (Saunders et al., 2016:119). The securing of the ethical clearance certificate and endorsement of the study by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology has also assisted with allaying any concerns around credibility and the ethical conduct of the researcher.

### 1.8.2 Research methods

The researcher adopted the research process “onion” as proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) in order to provide clear structure and direction to this study. Figure 1.1 below highlights the different choices, philosophies, strategies and approaches the researcher has adopted when conducting systematic research, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. The rest of this section will thus be arranged in line with the layers of the research onion, starting with a discussion of the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choices, time horizon, data collection and data analysis.



**Figure 1.1: The research process onion (Saunders et al., 2019:174)**

The research philosophy or research design (Cresswell, 2009) thus guides researchers to be able to determine the appropriate, methodological decisions and methods of enquiry. The research design or framework of the research study is therefore the overall plan for the research project, including all the methods that were used to collect, analyse and interpret the data. In essence it can be described as a researcher’s views and perspectives as to how the world is viewed, which ultimately supports the research strategy (Saunders et al., 2019:175).

As highlighted in Figure 1.1 above, there are four major research philosophies viz. positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. When conducting a research study, one may adopt one or more research philosophies. As the epistemological considerations for this study included a positivist research

philosophy, a mono-method research methodology has been adopted (Bryman, 2012:649), which aligns with the studies conducted by Hussain et al. (2020:5); Efanny et al. (2018:201); and Hinestroza (2017:15).

In this study, the positivist epistemological position stems from the need to investigate the influence of UGC on CBBE which was measured using quantitative methods. The use of a quantitative approach and positivism is emphasised by Bryman et al. (2014:31). This has ensured that credible statistical data was generated to test the study's hypotheses and a quantitative approach was well suited to measure the relationships between variables, such as UGC and CBBE or to predict phenomena as found in previous studies (Eusebius, 2020:65; Dube, 2013:86).

A deductive approach also aligns itself to scientific research and it was used to measure causal relationships between variables, hence the leaning towards using a quantitative research method which was used for the deductive dimension of the study, to assess the causal relationship between UGC and CBBE (Raji et al., 2019; Szabist, 2019; Hallgren et al., 2018). A quantitative research method was also appropriate to test the hypotheses that UGC has an influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. Saunders et al. (2019:144) posit that the survey strategy is usually used in conjunction with the deductive approach; surveys are able to collect large amounts of quantitative data that can be standardised. The survey as a research strategy is also fittingly designed to allow for comparisons and relationships between variables. The survey method as a research strategy is further justified, as it is a highly versatile instrument for collecting primary data (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:243). Another major feature of using surveys is that once the data is analysed and extrapolated it is often used to produce conceptual models that encompass causal relationships between variables. As one of the main research objectives of this study was to prepare a strategic communication framework model for retailers to use to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE, it further validates the survey strategy as an appropriate research strategy for collecting the quantitative data.

### **1.8.3 Research design**

The research design that has been adopted for this study was a quantitative mono-method as a singular data collection technique – self-administered online surveys or internet-mediated questionnaires were the research instrument used (Saunders et al., 2019:540). As the data was analysed using quantitative methods, a deductive approach was used, combined with positivism as the research philosophy for this study.

A cross-sectional time horizon was used for this study (Majeed et al., 2021; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020;

Hallgren et al., 2018), as this method is well suited to the use of surveys (Saunders et al., 2019:212

### **1.9 Delimitations of study**

This study's findings and results were considered within the context of certain delimitations. Firstly, the geographical boundaries of the study were limited to major retailers and to a large extent, the respondents included in the study, were limited to the Cape Metropole area. This was due to the limited financial resources and the time constraints associated with the completion of the research study. The second delimitation was that the sample was limited to Generation Y respondents located in the Cape Metropole, which is located in the Western Cape province of South Africa, which has the second highest gross domestic product per capita relative to other provinces (Wesgro, 2021). An analysis of the demographics of the sample revealed that the high qualification levels of respondents, with approximately 60% of all the respondents included in the sample being in possession of a post-matric diploma or degree, coupled with high-income levels within the Cape Metropole. The online spending patterns and social media usage patterns further confirm that the sample used within this study is fairly divergent in comparison with the demographic characteristics of the rest of South Africa. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be able to be accurately extrapolated to the rest of the population of South Africa, as the characteristics of this sample are specific to the Cape Metropole of the Western Cape region.

Thirdly, the measurement of the influence of UGC was only limited to major retailers, and the findings cannot be generalised to other industries and to all types of retailers. The retail industry is too large and diverse to have included all types of retailers within the study. As there are also numerous retail formats and due to their size and operational strategies, not all are engaged with UGC as compared to the major retail brands.

Fourthly, an additional limitation that could have occurred is related to the measurement of the influence of positive, negative and mixed-neutral UGC using only one sample population. This could have resulted in an element of bias from the respondents' perspective when completing the three respective sections of the questionnaire. Using three independent samples could have been considered; however, to achieve the required saturation point for each sample, 385 completed questionnaires would have been required, which would not have been possible within the time and budgetary constraints of the study.

However, this study adopted a mono-method quantitative research approach, which included a large sample of 513 respondents. Additionally, the collected data was analysed using the appropriate statistical programmes, and subsequently followed by the rigorous scrutiny and analysis of the data

trends. Therefore, despite these delimitations, the research techniques employed strengthen the veracity of the study and these delimitations do not detract from its findings.

## **1.10 Research methodologies and processes**

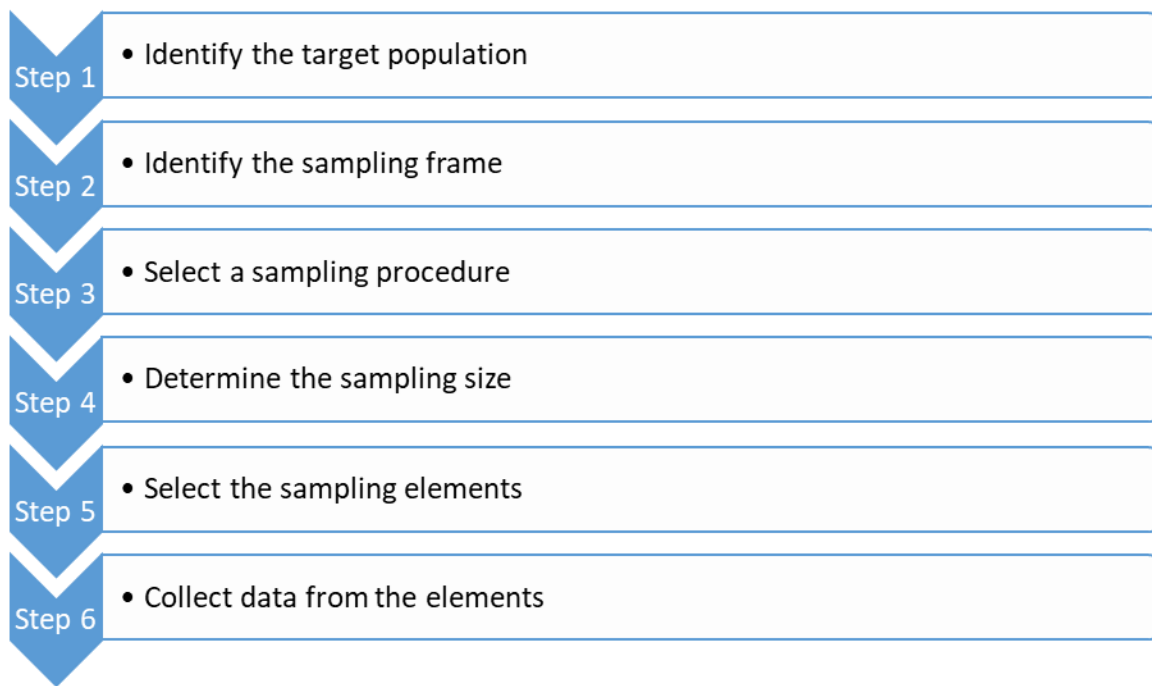
### **1.10.1 Population**

Generation Y'ers who reside in the Cape Metropole and who purchase goods and services from major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole was the target population for this study. This target population, which is referred to as the digital natives or Millennials (Bolton et al., 2013:246), was well suited for this study, as they are active online users and frequently engage and share online content, viz. UGC. They are also active on the main social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter. The specific characteristics and parameters outlining this target population are discussed below. The sample of Generation Y members that has been selected based on their specific demographic, psychographic and geographical characteristics from the sampling frame, typifies and overlaps the population and will ensure adequate representation of the sampling population. The use of Generation Y as the sample frame in studies that measure the influence of independent variables such as UGC on CBBE is well documented (Plieijers, 2021; Kim, 2019; Szabist, 2019; Scarth, 2017).

### **1.10.2 Sampling method and sample size**

Bryman et al. (2014:170) define a sample as “the segment or subset of the population that is selected for investigation”, while Bhattacharjee (2012:65) refers to a sample as a subset of a population of interest to the researcher that is used for drawing statistical inferences.

In order to draw up the samples for this study, the researcher adopted a six-step procedure recommended by Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:283) as highlighted in the model below:



**Figure 1.2: Sampling process (Iacobucci & Churchill, 2010:283)**

The researcher discusses the six different steps in this model as follows:

### **1. Identify the target population**

For this study Generation Y has been identified as target population, specifically members of this population who purchase goods and services both online and “offline” from major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

### **2. Identify the sampling frame**

Cooper and Schindler (2014:338) state that the population units from which a sample is extracted is the sampling frame. Kumar (2011:178) describes a sampling frame as a list that specifies or identifies the various elements in a sampling population. He further highlights that if these cannot be individually identified, one cannot have a sampling frame for that study population. Bryman (2012:187) describes a sample as that fragment or section of the population that is selected for inclusion in the study or investigation.

A commercial syndicated market research company was used to procure the sampling frame that was used for this study. The research company is an ESOMAR member, which is a global non-profit membership organisation established in 1948, consisting of 750 member organisations in over 130 countries (Esomar, 2021). ESOMAR ensures that member organisations conduct themselves in an

ethical and responsible manner when collecting data, and they create a regulatory and legislative framework within which member organisations operate (Esomar, 2021). The commercial syndicated market research company has clients in 12 countries and has a database of over 40 000 respondents. Their client base includes Hewlett Packard, Revlon, Coca Cola, Red Bull, Visa and Nokia amongst others. The database is demographically representative, robust and is the largest in South Africa. Database members are not self-selected, and a rigorous recruitment and registration process is maintained. Prescreening of respondents was conducted as per the respondent profile in Table 3.1 which ensured that the sample drawn was representative of the target population.

The database procured was in Microsoft Excel format and the relevant sampling units were extracted through the manipulation of data in line with the characteristics of the sampling unit. The sample drawn consisted of members of Generation Y who were selected based on the prerequisite respondent profile characteristics. This ensured that sample drawn displayed adequate and valid representation of the sampling population.

### **3. Select a sampling procedure**

A mono-method quantitative approach using a probability sampling technique was used for this study (Bryman, 2012:187). Cooper and Schindler (2014:343) describe probability sampling as a method whereby each population element or unit of analysis has a known, equal, or non-zero chance of being included in the sample. Smith and Albaum (2010:129) describe non-probability sampling as a sampling method where the elements do not have an equal or known chance of being included in the sample. Bryman et al. (2014:171) add a humanistic element to his definition by stating that human judgment will determine which element is to be included in the sample, thus the selection process is not a random process. The use of a mono-method quantitative approach by adopting a probability sampling technique within brand equity studies is a proven methodology (Hussain & Ahmed, 2020; Ali et al., 2019; Stojanovic et al., 2017; Boicu et al., 2015).

### **4. Determine the sampling size**

The sample size for the quantitative sample was calculated using Raosoft.com (Raosoft, 2019). The use of Raosoft.com as a means of calculating the sample size is an accepted formula, and its use within brand equity studies is appropriate (Amagsila, et al., 2022:247; De Guzman, et al.,2022:119).

The Raosoft calculator is based on the normal distribution statistical method given by:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot (c/100) \cdot r(100-r)}{E^2 + Z^2 \cdot (c/100) \cdot r(100-r)}$$
 where n is the sample size, E is the margin of error, N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses of interest, and Z(c/100) is

the critical value for the confidence level  $c$  (Soetan, 2017:168). A minimum sample size of 385 was the recommended size of the survey required to ensure saturation point (Raosoft.com, 2019). The sampling frame used to secure a sample size of 513 respondents would therefore ensure saturation point as well as adequate representation of the sampling population (Raosoft.com, 2019). The sample size of 513 respondents aligned well with similar brand equity studies and was a significantly larger sample size in relation to other studies using the same research designs and methodologies. For example, Aljumah et al. (2021) had a sample size of 393 respondents, Ali et al. (2019) a sample size of 325 respondents, Stojanovic et al. (2017) a sample size of 249 and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) a sample size of 302 respondents, which were used to draw conclusions and inferences in relation to their sampling populations.

## **5. Select the sampling elements**

The sample size of 513 Generation Y members consisted of males and females between the ages of 21 and 40 years of age who displayed the characteristics of members of Generation Y, in terms of demographics, geographic and psychographics (Respondent Profile: Table 3.1).

## **6. Collect data from the elements**

For this study a total of 513 self-administered online questionnaires was used to collect the data. These self-administered online surveys or internet-mediated questionnaires were distributed using Survey Monkey, an online database that allows the data collected to be monitored in real time, and allows for faster analysis and recording.

### **1.10.3 Data collection instruments**

#### **1.10.3.1 Quantitative data**

The quantitative data was collected using surveys as the research method and questionnaires as the research instrument.

#### **1.10.3.2 Data collection**

A mono-method research approach was adopted to collect the quantitative data for this study, supported by an appropriate data analysis procedure (Saunders et al., 2019:179). This approach was adopted for

this study as the quantitative data was collected using a broad survey of 513 self-administered online questionnaires directed at Generation Y to determine the extent of the influence of UGC on CBBE.

The self-administered online questionnaire was completed by respondents who complied with the respondent profile criteria. Respondents were additionally screened by using eight filter questions to determine UGC usage patterns, online spending patterns and demographic factors. This was followed by a 20-question Likert-type scale section used to determine the influence of negative UGC on CBBE. The section that followed on from this was a 20-question Likert-type scale section used to measure the influence of positive UGC on CBBE, while the final 9-question Likert-type scale section was used to measure the neutral effect of UGC on CBBE. These three Likert-type scale sections were used to extract the data to test the hypotheses of the study.

### **1.10.3.3 Data collection and fieldwork**

The data collection instrument used for this study was self-administered online surveys (Saunders et al., 2019:544). Nayak and Narayan (2019:33) hold that online surveys allow the researcher the flexibility to include a large and divergent target population within a short time frame. Online surveys also ensure easier access to participants within the sample who would not usually be accessible (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:72).

### **Pilot test**

Prior to the distribution of the final questionnaire to the targeted sample a pilot test should be conducted within respondents who meet the selection and screening criteria of the targeted sample (Saunders et al., 2019:540). A pilot test was therefore conducted with 40 respondents within the sampling frame, which represented a large enough pilot sample in relation to the targeted sample (Bhattacharjee, 2012:23). The purpose of the pilot study was to identify whether respondents understood the questions within the questionnaire, and to determine whether any problems would be encountered when recording the data. The pilot test was also conducted in order to determine the validity and likely reliability of the questionnaire and the variables of interest (Saunders et al., 2019:540; Bhattacharjee, 2012:23). Upon reviewing the completed pilot study surveys, a few minor language adjustments were made to ensure that all questions were clear and easily understood by respondents within the pilot study. The allocated time used to complete the questionnaire was also deemed to be acceptable. Upon the completion of the minor language edits and based on face validity, it appeared that the questions within the questionnaire and the respective sections within the questionnaire flowed logically, and the completed surveys reflected what was being measured (Saunders et al., 2019:541). Therefore, the final self-



administered online survey was deemed to be ready for data collection within the targeted sample.

#### **1.10.3.4 Data coding and analysis**

The primary data collected during the quantitative component of the study was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics by using SPSS version 27 for analysing both the descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics ensured that the variables were numerically described and compared (Saunders et al., 2016:527). The use of descriptive and inferential statistics (Wojciechowicz, 2020; Van Elst, 2019; Hirschfelder, 2015) in the measurement of the influence of UGC on CBBE was well justified (Wouters, 2016:101); where the dimensions of CBBE were measured using descriptive statistics and the influence of UGC on CBBE was measured using inferential statistics. The data relating to the influence of UGC on CBBE was analysed using inferential statistics (Aljumah et al., 2012:375), specifically, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (Maslikhan, 2019:149; Abina & Uthman, 2018:14). The analysed data and the relationship between the various variables were summarised and displayed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distribution, which included tables, pie charts and bar graphs (Saunders et al., 2019:583).

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of eight filter or combination questions which were factual and the least sensitive (Bhattacharjee, 2012:37). This section consists of questions where respondents needed to select the most appropriate option in terms of their social media platforms frequented and their social media usage. All the questions in this section were coded using a numerical coding scheme for the various response categories (Saunders et al. (2019:570).

As an example to how the various questions were coded, when respondents were asked which social media platforms they predominantly used when looking for product information, the options were Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. These were coded from 1 to 6 respectively. Similarly, when respondents were asked which social media platforms they engaged with, they had the option of choosing Google, which was coded as 1, Yahoo as 2, Bing as 3, Facebook as 4, and Instagram as 5. The other options provided were Twitter, which was coded as 6, YouTube as 7, Daily Motion as 8, Vimeo as 9, and WordPress, as 10. Tumblr was another option, and it was coded as 11, while Gmail, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and TikTok were coded as 12, 13, 14 and 15 respectively.

For the various demographic variables, gender had 3 categories: male which was coded as 1, female was coded as 2 and non-binary was coded as 3. For the various age categories, group 21-25 years was coded as 1, group 26-30 years was coded as 2, group 31-35 years coded as 3, and group 36-40 years had a numerical code of 4. The education component of the questionnaire had 7 categories that ranged

from Grade 8-11, and was coded as 1, Grade 12, was coded as 2, completed Grade 12, was coded as 3, until the 'Other' category, which was coded as 7. Black was coded 1 for the variable 'population group', Coloured was coded as 2, Asian was coded as 3 whilst white was coded as 4.

In the section of the questionnaire that dealt with the determination of responses to and frequency of exposure to UGC, a typical example of a question and its numerical coding follows: "How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain 'service or product' experiences?" The options provided were "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "always", which were coded as 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Similarly, in a question used to ascertain the reasons why respondents read UGC posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences, the options provided were: "to stay informed about brands" which was coded as 1; "to make more informed purchasing decisions" which was coded as 2; "just read to pass time" which was coded as 3, while 4 was the code for "I am just curious". Furthermore, a question relating to time spent consuming UGC content, was posed as follows: "How many hours do you spend engaging online per session searching for or sharing for product information?" The option of less than half an hour was coded as 1, half to 1 hour was coded as 2, 2 hours was coded as 3, 3 hours was coded as 4 and 4 hours or more was coded as 5. On the respondents' average online spending behaviour while using digital platforms, the option of less than R250 was coded as 1, R251-R500 was coded as 2; and the options of R501-R750, R751-R1000, R1001-R2000, R2001-R3000, R3001-R4000 and R4001 or more were coded as 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 respectively.

The final three sections of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and statements where respondents were required to plot their responses on a five-point Likert-type scale. The five-point Likert-type scale options were also numerically coded from 1 to 5 which allowed for a wider range of statistical analysis options (Saunders et al., 2019:570). These three sections of the questionnaire consisted of statements relating to the influence of UGC influence on CBBE, which were either negative, positive or neutral respectively. The five-point Likert-type scale would have options that were used to indicate whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements by choosing from the respective options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The numerical coding was indicated as follows: 1 was the code for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree.

### **1.11 Ethical considerations**

The researcher's axiological position underpinned the ethical considerations and standards for this study. According to Bell et al. (2019:112) it is imperative for all ethical considerations to be integrated

into all facets of the research process and should not be viewed in isolation. The quantitative study was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire as the research instrument, which implicitly ensured higher levels of anonymity (Bell et al., 2019:113). Ethical considerations relating to online studies such as this also presented new ethical challenges, and according to Sugiura et al. (2017:185) the new digital landscape has forced researchers to reconsider established ethical principles of informed consent and privacy. This view is shared by Heath et al. (2018:513) who state the ethical considerations when performing a quantitative study, with specific reference to the view that privacy issues are vastly different in the online environment as compared to the traditional environment. The specific ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, protecting participants from harm and withdrawal during the quantitative data collection processes did not pose any concerns.

### **1.11.1 Informed consent**

Ethical approval of this study was granted by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Ethics Committee. According to Bell et al. (2019:113), the principle of voluntary informed consent is a crucial aspect for participation in a study, and the need to provide participants with as much information as possible is vital. This has ensured that participants were able to make informed and free decisions to participate in the study. Permission for the completion of the online questionnaire was secured via a consent letter and consent was also implicit in the respondent's willingness to be a member of the syndicated market research company's database.

### **1.11.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

High levels of confidentiality and anonymity (Bell et al., 2019:113) were maintained around all the data collected and all the required disclosure and non-disclosure agreements were secured and duly authorised. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not requesting names of participants or companies or any other sensitive or confidential information. An ethical clearance certificate was also secured from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences at CPUT. An informed consent letter was required for voluntary participation and withdrawal from the participants in the study. The highest ethical levels relating to integrity were unequivocally maintained throughout the study. All subjective views and opinions were respected and recorded without bias or prejudice to any of the participants involved in the study. The researcher was aware of the CPUT Plagiarism Policy and ensured that the work presented was authentic and original unless otherwise indicated and, in such instances, full reference to the literature source was indicated and acknowledged.

### **1.11.3 Protecting participants from harm**

Hammersley and Traianou (2012:5) describe the phenomenon of protecting participants from harm not only in the physical context but also in the reputational and financial contexts. Due care and diligence were exercised throughout this study to ensure that all participants were safe and free from any physical harm, anxiety, stress, reputational or financial harm. Saunders et al. (2019:260) state that harm to respondents could quite easily accrue when conducting online studies and caution should be exercised in this regard. A high degree of thoroughness and care was exercised to ensure that one respondent's response was not shared with other respondents in the sample, thereby infringing on confidentiality and anonymity and in so doing causing harm to respondents. Kothari (2004:102) provided an interesting perspective which included potential harm to the study itself by the inappropriate use of question formulation and wording within the questionnaire. Pre-testing of the questionnaire using a pilot study was conducted, to ensure that questions were clear and unambiguous, and that such potential harm to the study and ultimately the researcher was avoided.

## **1.12 Outline of the thesis**

### **1.12.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study**

This chapter outlined the background to the research, defined the research problem, delineated the objectives of the study and a preliminary literature review was presented. The chapter also presented an outline of the research design methodology which consisted of the research processes, approaches, and strategies.

### **1.12.2 Chapter 2: Literature: An overview of brand equity and user-generated content**

The initial part of this chapter outlines the conceptual framework, reviews the concepts of brand equity and consumer-based brand equity, with particular reference to demystifying the concept of brand equity. The outline of the chapter also considers the conceptualization as to how customer-based brand equity is constructed, measured and the strategies required to build CBBE, as well as the models of brand equity. The chapter then delves into how User-Generated Content (UGC) has evolved as a field of study, with particular focus on its origins and the factors and drivers that have contributed to its rapid evolution within the marketing body of knowledge. The final outline of the chapter also captures the conceptualisation by considering how customer-based brand equity is constructed, measured and the strategies required to build CBBE, as well as the models of brand equity.

### **1.12.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter outlines the research philosophies, strategies, approaches and design underpinning the research methodology adopted in this study. The approaches relating to the sampling, data collection and data analysis are also covered here.

### **1.12.4 Chapter 4: Presentation of findings**

This chapter presents the findings of the statistical analysis and the interpretations of the frequency distribution patterns of the collected data. The chapter outlines the demographic profile of respondents and then depicts the behavioural tendencies of respondents in respect of social media usage. The influence of positive, negative and mixed-neutral UGC on the elements that constitute CBBE is then reflected upon, with a particular focus on the overall CBBE. The respective cumulative findings are then used to corroborate the hypotheses of this study, which are then followed by the discussion of the major findings based on the data gathered in this study.

### **1.12.5 Chapter 5: Discussion of results, conclusions, and recommendations**

This chapter discusses the results and major findings uncovered in relation to the research objectives and the implications of the findings for the field of marketing. The key findings of the study are outlined, which serve as a basis for the acceptance or rejection of the three hypotheses of this study. The findings of the study serve as a basis to construct a strategic communications framework that might assist major retail brands to manage the influence of UGC on CBBE. The proposed model was founded upon the premise that the major retail brands are able to consistently deliver a level of brand performance that can consistently meet or exceed consumer expectations. The model will therefore propose strategies that will contribute to the propagation of the volume of positive UGC, and thereby reduce the influence of negative UGC on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.

## Chapter 2

### A literature review of brand equity

#### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, the main problem that the study intended to address was identified, whereby current communication strategies that major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole utilise were found to be inadequate in their ability to deal with the influence of UGC on brand equity, specifically CBBE. The development of a strategic communication framework was proposed that will assist retailers to respond to and manage the effects of UGC on CBBE. Prior to preparing a new framework, the extent of the influence of UGC on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole needs to be determined, which then forms the basis for the strategic communication framework. In this chapter, a literature review will be conducted to analyse the often-varied perspectives and approaches of measuring brand equity, with the consumer-based perspective emerging as the most common approach used. The influence of UGC on CBBE within a generic context is also considered. The brand resonance model then forms the basis of a more rigorous analysis of the various sub-dimensions of the model and its associative relationship with UGC. A review of the decidedly limited models that exist that have the potential to manage UGC is also reviewed, revealing a dearth in the existence of a suitable model to manage UGC. A conceptual framework is proposed that will assist in the control and tempering of the influence of UGC on CBBE within the retail industry.

#### 2.2 Theoretical framework

In order to measure the effect of UGC on CBBE and its subsequent influence on the behaviours of consumers, various underpinning theories were considered. UGC, as a construct and form of communication, also morphs within the literature, with its theories originating from those of human communication, which encapsulate all forms of communication (Eichhorn et al., 2019:5). However, UGC as a variable is grounded in the interpersonal-influence field of study (Katz 1957:1). Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006:5), like many other researchers, reference UGC as e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth). This was considered within the literature study, as well as how this variable influences human behaviour within various social systems.

Schramm (1955:357) asserts that in order for communication to occur, the presence of three elements is required, namely, source, message and destination or receiver. To ensure that the receiver is *ad idem*

with the sender, the sender encodes the message, and transmits the message in a format that increases the receptiveness of the message. This theory underpins the now commonly accepted communication model of the encoder, signal or message, and the decoder in human communication (Huynh, 2020:8). The efficacy of mass marketing communication has, to a large extent, been inhibited by the inoculation theory (Compton & Pfau, 2005; McGuire, 1964).

Inoculation theory, which entails the forewarning of a persuasive attempt, contributed to resistance against mass marketing influences (Compton & Pfau, 2005:99). It is argued that WOM or UGC followed the inoculation theory (Ivanov et al., 2015; Compton, 2009:15), as individuals gravitated to social networks seeking reassurance, as well as attempting to influence and engage with other like-minded individuals. Therefore, UGC as a social phenomenon is embedded in the communication field, specifically the word-of-mouth communication sub-field (Katz, 1957:61). Katz (1957:61) suggests a two-step flow of communication theory, whereby “opinion leaders” who have been exposed to mass communication media use word-of-mouth communication. Opinion leadership theory is when “opinion leaders” use their personal influence on members of their target population (Farivar et al., 2021:2). As UGC can be either positive, negative, or neutral (Ki & Kim, 2019:43) as a construct, it is not contained within the opinion leadership theory domain, as opinion leadership theory is nestled within the influencer marketing field (Farivar et al., 2021:2).

Dichter (1966:166) posits that psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies involving mass media can assist with investigative and informative research, and mass media do also alter public opinion. It is, however, word-of-mouth recommendations that mould brand opinions and perceptions. Arndt (1967:291) postulates that word-of-mouth communication is a clandestine force, the effects of which are often not accurately conceptualised. UGC emanates from word-of-mouth communication, although the literature behind UGC creation is limited, the focus being directed to the motivation for generating UGC (Christodoulides et al., 2011:101). The formation of beliefs or perceptions and the likelihood of processing this information by an external source such as family, friends, or reference groups (Sheth, 1971:15) is referred to as informational belief formation (Steenkamp, 1990:318). The influence of UGC on CBBE has alignment with informational belief formation; however, the consumer response to the UGC is not associated with this framework.

The measurement of the influence of UGC on CBBE is embedded in schema theory (Eysenck, 1984; Bettman, 1979; Axelrod, 1973), where external communication stimuli are extrapolated against existing knowledge or theory. This approach is well aligned with brand equity studies and consumer mind-set studies (Gilal et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2019; Su & Kunkle, 2019; Coelho et al., 2018; Stojanovic et al., 2018:84; He, 2016; Bruhn et al., 2012). The schema theory is a cognitive modelling framework or

structure based on expectations of a variable (Bettman, 1979:40), which entails the combining of perceptions, values, beliefs and existing knowledge (Lee et al., 2018:453).

The process includes processing new information based on existing knowledge (previous schema) as to how the world is organised (Axelrod, 1973:1248). This new information is extrapolated against the pattern of what is known, based on the schema congruency theory (Bartlett, 1932). If the new information is not congruent with what is currently known (Lee et al., 2018:453), then new knowledge structures, patterns or perceptions are formed (Axelrod, 1973:1248).

There are various elements and variations within the process model for schema theory, based on interpretive processes and information flow. For the purpose of this study, only the critical paths of the model were used. Using schema theory, the influence of UGC on the perceptions of consumers will vary based on every consumer's individual interpretation. Halkias (2015:443) and Puligadda et al. (2012:116) have further classified the schema theory based on a consumer's brand affinity. They assert that brand schema is a memory-based cognitive schema that consists of various brand associations and interrelations. These brand schematic consumers possess higher levels of information relating to brand features and functionality because of increased exposure to and socialisation with brands and are therefore more receptive to brand-related UGC (Puligadda et al., 2012:117). Pertinently, brand schematic consumers are exposed to more stimuli, UGC and social experiences, which increases their brand-based associative framework and cognitive interpretive ability (Algharabat et al., 2020:11; Puligadda et al., 2012:118).

### **2.3 Brand equity**

There has been a proliferation in the types and varieties of products, services and brands that consumers are able to choose from over the past few decades. The resultant increase in product and service choices for both consumers and businesses alike has contributed to making purchasing choices more complex. Brands are constantly jostling to offer more value, or to build more brand equity than their competing brands, in their attempts to influence consumer choices (Scarth, 2017:71; Malthouse et al., 2016:440). Brand equity remains a complex construct that is defined in various ways and from different perspectives.

Brand equity is a concept that originates from the 1980s (Yoo & Donthu, 2001:1; Mackay et al., 1998:421; Lassar et al., 1995:11; Park & Srinivasan, 1994:271; Russell & Kamakura, 1993:9) and has been the subject of numerous and often varied definitions, often dependent on the perspective from which the concept has been defined (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016:33). Brand equity is commonly defined



as the attachment of greater value, higher levels of loyalty and increased confidence in a brand compared to competing brands. It also elicits the willingness of brand loyal consumers to pay more for the brand, relative to competing brands (Castillo et al., 2022:75; Lim et al., 2020:929; Erkmen, 2018:3; Zahoor & Qureshi, 2017:56)). The formation of brand equity is embedded in the seminal schema theory (Eysenck, 1984; Bettman, 1979; Axelrod, 1973) as the incoming communication stimuli i.e., brand information, are compared with the stored knowledge relating to the brand. Brand equity is formed when the incoming communication stimuli are perceived as being more superior to the stored knowledge (Bruhn et al., 2012:775).

As a result of the numerous ways in which brand equity has been defined, there is an absence of a common approach as to how brand equity is conceptualised and measured. Farquhar's (1989:24) seminal definition, where brand equity is defined as the additional or augmented value a brand adds to a product, is regarded by many authors as the most commonly accepted definition (Li, 2021:3; Farhat et al., 2020:2238), although Keller's (2013;1998) definition also has many supporters and is widely respected (Datta et al., 2017:1). Farquhar's (1989) definition of brand equity concurs with the definitions of the seminal works of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), which both provide conceptual frameworks that link brand equity with various consumer response variables.

Aaker (1992:3) defines brand equity as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." Keller's definition of brand equity (1993:2), which is conceptualised from the consumer's perspective (CBBE), is defined as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on the consumer or consumer response to the marketing of that brand."

In both Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) definitions, the knowledge of the brand, or the brand name, contributes additional value to the product or service, based on positive consumer perceptions. The existing knowledge based on associations or perceptions form the schemas that serve as the basis for brand equity evaluations (Su & Kunkle, 2019:254). These positive perceptions transcend into the willingness of consumers to pay a premium price for the perceived additional value that they will be receiving, which ultimately contributes to an improved financial position for the brand (De Guzman et al., 2022:122; Akturan, 2020:224; Buil & Martinez, 2013:68).

Aaker (1992:30) states that brand equity creates value for both the organisation and the consumer. Brand equity also increases the propensity of purchasing one brand as opposed to another, as well as increasing a consumer's purchasing intention to select one brand over another (De Guzman et al., 2022:122; Sankar & Sankarnath, 2021:3104; Scarth, 2017:71; Malthouse et al., 2016:440). Increasing

the brand equity of the brand therefore assists with the perceptual positioning of the brand in the mind of consumers.

Despite the different and often varied definitions of brand equity, conceptually, all the seminal definitions agree as to what constitutes brand equity and the fulcrum of its existence. There is, however, discordance as to the source, origins or perspectives from which brand equity is measured, which is critical as brands jostle to build their brand equity (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016:33; Park & Srinivasan, 1994:271). There are numerous studies highlighting the various perspectives of brand equity, within an array of different industries (Chandrakamal & Pandithasekara, 2022; Mathew & Panicker, 2022; Anabila, 2020; Rambocas & Arjoon, 2019; Acar & Erkan, 2018; Kumar & Patra, 2017; Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016; Bianchi et al., 2014; Bruhn et al., 2012; Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011; Fayrene & Lee, 2011).

These varied studies reflect the complexities surrounding brand equity as a phenomenon; it does, however, provide context to the various techniques employed to measure and conceptualise this elusive and multi-dimensional construct.

## **2.4 Brand equity perspectives and approaches**

Shocker et al. (1994:156) argues that as a result of the numerous ways in which brand equity has been defined, understood, and applied, it has resulted in fragmented perspectives as to how brand equity is conceptualised and measured, a view supported by Baalbaki & Guzmán (2016:3) and Park and Srinivasan (1994:271). Farjam and Hongyi (2015: 25) and Keller and Lehmann (2006:745) state that there are three main perspectives from which brand equity can be measured: customer-based, company-based, and financial-based perspectives.

There are subtle differences in the categorisation of the main perspectives. Certain authors (Shuv-Ami, 2015:325) categorise the three main perspectives as the customer perspective (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), product-market perspective (Aaker, 1996) and the financial perspective (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Keller's (1993) model, which is based on the consumer perspective (CBBE), is also referred to as the marketing perspective of brand equity (Mackay et al., 1997:421). Vinh (2017:177) only refers to the financial and customer perspectives. These varying perspectives on brand equity are ultimately stored as fragments embedded in the cognitive structures or schemas, and as new research perspectives and information become available, they influence the construction of new schemas (Bettman, 1979:41).

Sadyk and Islam (2022:2) and Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2018:328) narrow down the various perspectives from which brand equity can be measured even further, by stating that the consumer perspective is the main perspective from which brand equity can be measured. This is evident from the plethora of literature that deals with the CBBE perspective. Keller (1993:2) also supports the consumer-based perspective of brand equity. This specific perspective provides clearer structure and direction when formulating marketing strategies and when making key decisions for a business (Pleijers, 2021:5; Keller, 1993:2).

An overview of the more common perspectives and approaches from which brand equity can be conceptualised or measured is provided below, namely the financial, product-market, employee, and consumer-based perspectives.

## **2.5 Financial perspective**

Brands and their associated values are built up over long periods of time, and the methods to measure the value of the brand often exists in various subject fields, such as finance, accounting, and marketing, amongst others (Janoskova & Krizanova, 2017:100). Xu et al. (2022:1) and Keller and Lehmann (2006:745) conclude that the financial perspective of brand equity is based on the financial value attached to brands in financial markets, inclusive of the considerations of future cash flows. This view ultimately stems from the manner in which the brand is viewed, which is as an asset that can be purchased and sold. However, without an actual financial transaction occurring, it remains extremely difficult to accurately predict its financial value.

Aaker and Jacobson (1994:192) present a contrasting and somewhat negative view on using the financial perspective to measure brand equity. They conclude that the execution of strategies and tactics is often stifled by short-term financial performance measures. The origins of this short-sighted approach to strategy execution are often solely based on the firm's inclination for positive short-term financial performance. Aaker and Jacobson (1994:200) further argue that this approach will not accurately depict the effect of marketing strategies and tactics on a business, and a more strategic performance measurement approach needs to be adopted. Simon and Sullivan (1993:28), in their seminal research on measuring and determining brand equity from a financial perspective, concur with Aaker and Jacobson (1994) on the importance of measuring brand performance on a long-term, as opposed to a short-term basis. This recalcitrant resistance to adopting a long-term view can be attributed to the absence of a suitable financial model that can be used to measure brand equity objectively.

Simon and Sullivan (1993:29) propose an alternative method that can be used to measure brand equity, particularly where the financial market value of future cash flows of an organisation is used for brand equity valuation. The method encompasses both a macro- and micro-level analysis. The macro perspective allocates an objective value, which is allocated to the organisation's brands, and this is used to measure the brand equity for individual brands. The micro perspective measures the influence of marketing strategies on brand equity on the individual brand level, but not in cases where the organisation has more than one brand in its portfolio. Rojas-Lamorena et al. (2022:1080) and Nguyen et al. (2013:2) in their studies suggest that the financial perspective of brand equity is very similar to the market and consumer perspectives (Londoño et al., 2016:71), with the benefits and drawbacks being largely the same. Their view is that the market and consumer perspectives tend to focus on the current brand equity, while financial perspectives display a tendency to focus on future earning potential, a viewpoint shared by Simon and Sullivan (1993).

Rojas-Lamorena et al. (2022:1080) and Baalbaki and Guzmán (2016:35) underscore that brand equity should be viewed from a financial perspective, where brands are viewed as assets that can be bought and sold, based on the financial value of the brand. Barwise (1992:101) posits that measuring brand equity from a financial perspective is an extremely complex and subjective process. In addition to this, the financial valuation process of a brand is often attached incrementally to that of the firm, therefore the valuation process of the brand is not done in isolation or separately to the organisation. Davcik et al. (2015:5) elucidate that brand equity that encapsulates both the value of the brand, and the financial value of the firm, can be conceptualised as financially based brand equity.

Detaching the brand from the product convolutes the valuation process, as brands add value to the equity of the brand via a name, symbol, and design or mark (Farquhar, 1989:25). The complexity related to detaching the brand from the product is aptly highlighted in the example of Coca-Cola being sold as a generic brand (Barwise, 1992:100), as opposed to the branded version and the significant impact that this would have on sales, market share and ultimately the financial value of the brand.

## **2.6 Product-market perspective**

Mahadin et al. (2022: 2028) and Huang and Sarigollu (2014:3) attribute a brand's performance within the market to brand equity, and this is regarded as the product-market perspective. The product-market perspective attaches a single financial figure to the brand valuation process; therefore, it provides an attractive quantifiable mechanism for monitoring fluctuations in brand equity. Keller and Lehmann (2006:746) state that various viewpoints within the product-market perspective to measure brand equity have been identified, specifically premium pricing and brand equity (Bougenvile & Ruswanti, 2017),

brand equity and its relationship with advertising elasticity (Guitart et al., 2018), brand equity and loyalty (Nuseir, 2022:917; Nam et al., 2011) and brand equity's influence on the distribution channel (Glynn, 2010). The various perspectives from which brand equity is drawn align with the schema framework, as the respective incoming stimuli are extrapolated and processed against what is known (Axelrod, 1973:1250).

Research studies determining brand equity from a product-market perspective have been predominantly focused on price dimensions, advertising and, to a lesser extent, on distribution channels (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003:424). Huang and Sarigollu (2014:3) concur with the significance of the price dimension and its relationship with brand equity; however, they add that from a product-market perspective, the relationship between market share (Sharma & Jain, 2019:60) and brand equity is equally important. However, Huang and Sarigollu (2014:3) question the plausibility of the holistic view that these variables present when measuring brand equity from a product-market perspective. They correctly suggest that improved organisational performance in these areas cannot be solely attributed to brand equity. To verify this assumption, it can be observed that an increasing market share could be a result of price reductions, and not solely a direct result of brand equity.

In a study by Gomathy and Rajan (2018:262), the effect of the traditional marketing mix viz. product, price, place and promotion on brand equity is measured, with the conclusion being drawn that a positive correlation exists between the marketing mix variables and brand equity. Their study also emphasises that the promotion dimension of the marketing mix has a more profound effect on brand equity in comparison to the other marketing mix variables.

Mahadin et al. (2022: 2028), Kataria et al. (2019:26) and Ailawadi et al. (2003:2) are emphatic in their support of the measurement of brand equity using the product-market approach, specifically using the price premium as the most popular measure, which ultimately needs to translate into an improved brand performance within the market. This is largely dependent on the brand's ability to charge more than competing brands, a view supported by Bougenville and Ruswanti (2017:16). They also conclude that there is a significant relationship between brand equity and the willingness of consumers to pay a premium price for a product. The opportunity to charge a premium is also made possible when the brand name is an attribute that provides value to the brand (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003:424; Aaker, 1992:3). Davcik et al. (2015:11) raise a divergent perspective on this study by Ailawadi (2003) by criticising its myopic context, which only focuses on the revenue generation facets of brand equity. They suggest that a more integrative brand equity perspective could have been presented, by including the sources and drivers of brand equity.

Guitart et al. (2018) analysed brand equity from the product-market promotional perspective, with a particular focus on the advertising dimension. They assert that a strong correlation exists between advertising and brand equity. A synopsis of their findings reflects that the irregular implementation of advertising campaigns results in a reduction in brand equity. Variations exist in the extent of the influence of advertising on brand equity, based on the intensity of the advertising campaign, premium nature of the brand, and size of the market share. This existing schema or knowledge significantly influences how the incoming stimuli are processed and evaluated, thereby contributing to the formation of prototypes of advertisements within various product categories (Guitart et al., 2018:473). These prototypes serve as a framework against which incoming stimuli are processed to formulate perceptions regarding the high- or low-quality nature of the advertisement (Guitart et al., 2018:473).

As alluded to earlier, in the study by Huang and Sarigollu (2014), the relationship between a higher market share cannot be solely attributed to higher brand equity, because of the convoluted factors that contribute to higher market share. Reynolds and Philips (2005:174) concur with this perspective, and also highlight that market share as a sole indicator of brand equity is flawed (Datta et al., 2017:17), despite its popularity as a means of measuring brand equity. As market share predominantly consists of the repeat purchases of loyal consumers, and their loyalty cannot be traced back solely to brand equity, Reynolds and Philips (2005:174) propose a model of categorising various factors that constitute loyalty viz. beliefs, behaviour, and trend, which represent the likelihood of future repeat purchases. The model is tiered and attached a weighted score to loyalty behaviour versus other factors that contribute to the brand's sales to measure market share, which is purportedly a more accurate indicator as to how brand equity influences market share. Datta et al. (2017:18) propose removing the effects of the marketing mix and any other extrinsic attributes from the market share approach and suggest that a sales-based brand equity model is a more accurate model to measure brand equity.

Glynn (2010:1227) views product-market brand equity from the distribution channel perspective, with a particular focus on business-to-business relationships. By considering brands as market-based assets, producers need to evaluate how best to support their brand within the distribution channel, to facilitate the consumer purchasing process. By adopting this distribution channel perspective, resellers enjoy additional benefits, such as advertising resources, as manufacturers consider how best to deploy their brand resources to enhance reseller support (Glynn, 2010:1232). Keller (2010:65) conducted a study of the influence of brand equity, marketing channels and communications efficiency, albeit within the multi-channel consumer context. His findings align with Glynn (2010) where he concludes that strong brands generate significant pull from within the channel from a consumer demand perspective, contributing to market share growth and increased profitability.

## 2.7 Consumer-based perspective

Research within the consumer domain is seated in the various fields of psychology, sociology and the humanities, and studies highlighting the relationship between consumers and brands often adopt a brand-focused perspective (Puligadda et al., 2012:127). A brand-focused perspective is congruent with a specific type of schema, and as previously stated, brand schematicity is a propensity to process stimuli according to the consumer's relationship with the brand (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018:215).

Bettman (1979:41) elucidates that the incoming stimuli or information related to a brand is processed in chunks, referred to as chunking. These are configurations that are familiar to consumers, which assist in the processing of information. These chunks are categorised into cognitive structures that increase in size, forming larger chunks, based on the volume of new brand information that is being added to it (Bettman, 1979:41). The evaluation and processing of large amounts of incoming stimuli in the form of firm-generated content (FGC) and UGC is processed using brand schema (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018:215), ensuring that the stimuli are extrapolated against existing descriptive and evaluative criteria. This contributes to knowledge formation based on the functionality, symbolism, and various other associations of a brand, forming the foundation of CBBE (Halkias, 2015:442).

The most common perspective from which to measure brand equity is the consumer-based perspective or CBBE (Prachaseree et al., 2022:65; Sarker et al., 2021:1; Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2019:329). Aaker (1991) is regarded as the pioneer of this perspective in which the CBBE model identifies seventeen different methods, which stem from five sources or assets of brand equity. These five sources or assets of brand equity, viz. brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived brand quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand assets, provide the origin from which value is generated for the consumer (Aaker, 1992:30).

As a result of a clearer understanding of what constitutes value for consumers, the process of building value by using various strategies and activities is more accurate and pertinent. These five sources or assets of brand equity are not all equally important, with the source of other proprietary brand assets being the least important (Aaker, 1992:30), while the brand associations source is regarded as the more popular and accepted source (Fitsum, 2019; Srinivasan et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Aaker, 1992).

Brand awareness, or the ability to recall the brand name when provided with a cue about the brand, is an essential prerequisite for building brand equity. This step precedes the remaining two sources of brand equity which are brand loyalty and brand associations (Tufa & Workineh, 2022:44; Keller, 1993:3;

Aaker, 1992:30). Davcik et al. (2015:7) and Wong & Wickham (2015:440) assert that brand awareness is the association that a consumer has with the brand, and the corresponding levels of recognition associated with the brand and the organisation. This description of awareness makes subtle inferences about having a preference or commitment to the brand or the organisation and is a precursor to brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty is an integral component of brand equity. Without the commitment to repurchase and to not switch to competing brands, brand equity will not be established. Oliver (1999:41) succinctly captures the relationship that exists between brand loyalty and brand equity, when defining brand loyalty as “an attained state of enduring preference to the point of determined defence”. Brand loyalty, which is based on consumer perceptions, is an invaluable ingredient of brand equity. Brand loyalty ensures that equity is added to both the brand and the firm, resulting in the corresponding benefits of consumer commitment to purchasing and the associated financial returns (Nuseir, 2022: 917; Keller, 2010:68).

According to Tufa & Workineh, (2022:42), Fitsum (2019:21) and Aaker (1992:30) there is a direct relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty, as higher levels of brand awareness contribute to an increased likelihood of commitment and loyalty towards the brand. Quality and a consumer’s judgment, beliefs or attitudes of what quality is, are commonly referred to as perceived quality (Keller, 1993:5; Zeithaml, 1988:3). Perceived quality is an important dimension of CBBE and an area of focus for many organisations when building brand equity. Netemeyer et al. (2004:210) view perceived quality as the most holistic and fundamental assessment of a brand’s performance and overall excellence, within the context of brand equity and its associated dimensions.

The final and seemingly most important and accepted brand equity dimension is brand associations, which are regarded as a key driver of brand equity (Nyström, 2022:42; Wang & Finn, 2013:675). Brand associations are the top of mind associations or meanings that consumers have of a brand. These associations that are attached to the brand are often varied and range from imagery, features, benefits and country-of-origin associations amongst others, and these are often there to assist with product recall and processing product information, and provide reasons to purchase (Aaker, 1991:31). Keller (2013:59; 2010:68) conceptualises brand associations into perceptions, which are formed on the basis of functional features and performance associated with the brand, within the context of the brand image (Van Thuy et al., 2022:232).

Keller & Swaminathan (2020:68) and Keller (1993:2) describe CBBE as the difference in reaction by consumers when exposed to components of the marketing mix of a brand, compared to the consumer’s reaction when exposed to the same marketing mix of a generic product. CBBE is manifested when the



brand is known and familiar to the consumer, and favourable associations are triggered in the memory of the consumer as a result of this exposure. Keller's (2013; 2010; 1993) perspectives of CBBE are useful for assisting with managerial decision-making and also for formulating the marketing strategy.

Brand knowledge is the common construct in both aspects related to Keller's (1993) definition, and this relates to the manner in which consumers react to marketing strategies and its associated effect on sales. Brand knowledge is therefore a key requirement for the formation of brand equity and its differential effects (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:71; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019:212; Keller, 2013:69). Marketers are constantly seeking innovative strategies to trigger the memory banks of consumers, in order to stimulate the existence of prior knowledge and exposure to the brand (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:71), as this significantly influences the success of future marketing strategies.

Brand knowledge can be categorised into the two main components of brand awareness and brand image (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:71; Davcik et al., 2015:10; Keller 2013:73). Keller (2013:73; 1993:3) posits that brand awareness can be further categorised into brand recall and recognising the brand under various conditions, while brand image can be categorised as the associations or familiarity levels linked to memory and previous brand experiences. Brand recall and brand familiarity stem from the consumer's memory, hence many studies that have been conducted within the context of CBBE are referred to as the associative network memory model studies (Keller, 2013:73; Keller, 1993:3).

The associative network memory modelling process is used to measure CBBE (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2019; 2016; Krishnan, 1996) and uses a "node" representing brand concepts or brand information. These nodes within the minds of consumers are used for illustrative purposes and represent the features, benefits, and relationships that the consumer has with the brand. The nodes are linked via numerous and distinctive pathways based on exposure and encounters with the brand (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016:5480). Krishnan (1996:391) further asserts that these nodes within the minds of consumers could also represent brands or products, with the links depicting associations between the respective brands or nodes.

Krishnan's study (1996:391) focuses on the relationship between memory associations and CBBE. This study reveals that these associations triggered by one aspect of brand equity, such as the brand name, can be both numerous and varied in the CBBE building process. These distinct brand associations develop as a result of a plethora of factors and are not necessarily product-feature oriented. However, these associations contribute to perceptions being formed and its analysis is therefore essential in the understanding of how CBBE is conceptualised. These positive or negative brand associations or perceptions are often embedded in the performance and features of the brand, or the associated

benefits that are attached to the brand (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:76). Bettman's (1979:42) authoritative work asserts that network models in the context of memory schemata are closely related to chunking. These network models are important in the analysis of consumer choices, as these models assist in arranging the systems and structures related to specific brands. The memory schemata are used to draw certain conclusions and perceptions, which are based upon how CBBE is perceived.

The critical aspects relating to the formation of CBBE stem from the formation of strong, favourable, and unique brand associations (Keller, 2013:77; Keller, 1993:3). It is evident in literature that brand associations are regarded as the most common and crucial component in the process of building CBBE (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020; Fitsum, 2019; Keller, 2013; Srinivasan et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Aaker, 1992).

Additional CBBE perspectives, conceptualised in accordance with Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), are presented by Pappu et al. (2005:145) where a correlative relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty (Tufa & Workineh, 2022:44; Fitsum, 2019), as well as perceived quality and brand associations is presented. Despite the inclusion of additional brand personality measures, the findings suggest a high degree of congruency with the findings of Aaker (1991), highlighting the multi-faceted conceptualisation of CBBE as a construct.

This multi-faceted, multi-dimensional or holistic approach to literature studies that measure the effect of various variables on CBBE are seemingly more popular as a methodology (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007:413), particularly where the various dimensions of brand equity are attributed to various sources or assets of brand equity. Porto (2018:162) adopted this approach to prepare a model based on the CBBE sources or assets to measure brand performance based on consumer perceptions. Girard et al. (2017:53) employed the CBBE variables, using a multi-dimensional methodology, to prepare a model that measured CBBE within the context of private-label brands. Altaf and Shahzad (2018:605) used a combination of both the multi-dimensional and uni-dimensional approaches in their study of employee brand equity. Shabbir et al. (2017:420) adopted a uni-dimensional approach to measure the influence of one of the CBBE sources, viz. brand loyalty, and its influence on brand equity within the telecommunications industry. Xu and Chan (2010:177) also adopted a uni-dimensional approach in their CCBE study, which assumed that all of the brand features or dimensions within brand equity are identical, except for the equity attached to a brand name.

Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2016:5479) adopted a varied perspective in their CBBE study, as the examination of CBBE was based on the premise that CBBE is a construct that is in a state of flux, and is constantly evolving, as opposed to a static and rigid construct. CBBE, in their study, is viewed as a

process-driven phenomenon that is built around variables that are interrelated and able to co-exist. Variables such as consumers' perceptions, brand encounters and feelings are viewed as being interrelated and not mutually exclusive in their contribution to the formation of CBBE. CBBE is also viewed as a complex system that passes through distinct and varied stages of development, built upon fluctuating concepts that result in high levels of CBBE (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016:5479).

Netemeyer et al. (2004) conceptualised their CBBE study on the seminal work of Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993) by adopting a nomological research approach. The framework of the study by Netemeyer et al. (2004:210) consolidated Aaker's core components of the Brand Equity Ten measurement system (Aaker, 1996:105) and Keller's (1993:2) CBBE perspective into four core CBBE facets and "primary" associations respectively, viz. perceived quality, perceived value for the cost, uniqueness, and the contribution of these three facets' influence on intention to pay a premium. These "core" or "primary" CBBE facets were then juxtaposed with various brand association variables based on the work of Keller (1993), Aaker (1996) and Farquhar (1989) viz. brand awareness, familiarity, popularity, organizational associations, and brand image consistency.

These brand association variables, which are regarded as being linked to the "core" and "primary" CBBE facets, were then used to determine the intention to pay a premium when purchasing a brand. The findings of the study reflect that their proposed model of CBBE and related facets showed internal consistency patterns and validity, when measuring CBBE using numerous brands. Additionally, the "primary" associations extracted from Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996) studies are important precursors for consumer willingness to pay a premium for a brand, alluding to the essential role these associations play in CBBE formation (Netemeyer et al., 2004:222).

## **2.8 UGC**

### **2.8.1 CBBE**

It is evident from literature that CBBE is a delicate and complex construct that consists of numerous volatile variables that emanate from various sources (Sarker et al., 2021:1). CBBE is a perception-based phenomenon (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016) and perceptions are influenced as a direct result of the exposure to various traditional and digital media sources. Axelrod (1973:1249) asserts that schema theory is an information-processing model that entails cognitive and perceptual processes based on how a person observes the environment. UGC is therefore synonymous with the incoming stimuli, whilst CBBE is the perceptual outcome as a result of the cognitive processes. Bettman (1979:42) argues that schemata play a critical role in how consumers formulate perceptions of events within their environment. Schivinski et al. (2016:195) state that the use of the schema framework is well suited for research studies

measuring the relationship between UGC and brand equity as it aligns with communication stimuli, information processing and brand judgements.

Information technology, specifically Web 2.0 and social media, have provided word-of-mouth communication with a powerful vehicle to share content and information, resulting in eWOM (Sijoria et al., 2017:528). Berthon et al. (2012:62) state that Web 2.0 can be thought of as the framework that affords the social phenomena of consumer-content, eWOM, or more specifically the phenomenon of user-generated content (UGC) – the platform for brand engagement. Schivinski et al. (2016:192) state that UGC has created powerful online communities where information is shared at an accelerated pace amongst fellow users or consumers with common interests. Traditionally, the building of brand equity was achieved by using firm-generated content (FGC), where the marketing strategy of the firm was used to create and influence CBBE (Rahmah et al., 2018:13).

Gensler et al. (2013:243) assert that previously, when marketing or brand strategists directed their content at consumers (FGC), this content was always adapted and shared using various media, such as word-of-mouth communication and other traditional media forms such as newspapers and magazines. However, this content, when negatively received, could quite easily be ignored by organisations, as it never reached the critical mass, and brand reputations were left unscathed.

Kuksov et al. (2013:295) underscore that the Internet and social media platforms have provided consumers with a channel of communication that can be used to engage with brands and in so doing, affect the brand's reputation and image. The extent of consumer engagement with the brand and its content extends beyond communicating with the content generated by the organisation, but could also include content such as advertisements, blogs and other content generated by consumers (Arya et al., 2022:1392).

Social media has therefore enabled consumers to not only rapidly share content far more easily, but also to generate their own content (Schildmann et al., 2019:2). Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006:13) assert that eWOM or UGC emerges as a more persuasive phenomenon than advertising; however, they also conclude that consumers have largely varied motivations for engaging in UGC, as well as seeking out UGC. Interestingly, their study also highlighted that the reliance of consumers on UGC as a trusted source of information (Sethna et al., 2017:365) is also varied, but this tendency is potentially attributable to the initial varied motivations for seeking out UGC content in the first place.

Due to the increasing prevalence of UGC, companies are gradually losing control over their brands and reputations online (Chelliah et al., 2022:425). Companies are attempting to build brand equity using

firm-generated content (Christodoulides et al., 2012:7), but as a sole measure this is proving rather ineffective. This could be attributed to the ever-increasing percentage of consumers stating that they are more trusting of UGC, 66% according to Nielsen (2015). Significantly, members of Generation Y tend to display the highest levels of trust in UGC at 85%, therefore, the judgements and perceptions of this category are most likely to be altered, ultimately influencing CBBE (Nielsen, 2015). Christodoulides et al. (2012:7) affirm that UGC production is on the increase, and this is being predominantly driven by the digital natives or members of Generation Y (Bolton et al., 2013:246; Jang et al., 2011:803), who constitute the sample selected for this study.

A key finding in a study by Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) is that UGC can influence CBBE both positively and negatively. Positive UGC that is created by online users, and that contributes to high levels of engagement, seemingly has the most significant influence on CBBE (Mishra, 2019:396; Schivinski et al., 2016:18; Malthouse et al., 2016:441; Kim & Johnson, 2016:107). Ho-Dac et al. (2013:48) argue in their study that negative UGC only adversely affects the CBBE of weaker brands. Interestingly, they state that negative UGC has no significant effect on brands that have a stronger brand equity in terms of sales. Tang et al. (2014:43) in their frequently cited study assert that UGC, specifically mixed-neutral and indifferent-neutral UGC, simply serve to exaggerate and reduce the effect of both positive and negative UGC respectively. Scholz et al. (2013:13) assert that mixed-neutral UGC provides a more balanced perspective and should therefore have a more significant influence on CBBE.

Eckes (2016:32) posits that negative UGC has a negative effect on CBBE and can be regarded as more influential than the marketing mix elements. Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) assert that UGC needs to be integrated into the marketing strategy of businesses due to its influence on CBBE (Schivinski, 2019:599). Buzeta et al. (2020:94) and Wouters (2016:6) elucidate that both negative and positive UGC alter CBBE, while negative UGC has the greatest influence on CBBE and significantly damages brand reputations, the effects of which are lasting and formidable (Wouters, 2016:6).

Lwin (2022:96) and Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) assert that marketers need to focus and react swiftly when dealing with particularly negative UGC, using both their marketing and branding strategies to negate the influence of negative UGC on CBBE (Buzeta et al., 2020:94). Alam and Khan (2019:69) and Kuksov et al. (2013:295) state that UGC affects the image of a brand, which impacts on CBBE, and significantly, they also indicate that no adequate theoretical framework exists to deal with the impact of UGC or online consumer communications. Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013:150) found that in order for brands to build brand equity using social media, an effective communication strategy is required. However, an integral prerequisite to ensure that brand equity is significantly influenced is high

consumer involvement or engagement in the social media communication process, a view supported by Zia et al. (2022:135) and Christodoulides and Jevons (2010:8).

### **2.8.2 Dimensions of CBBE within the brand resonance model**

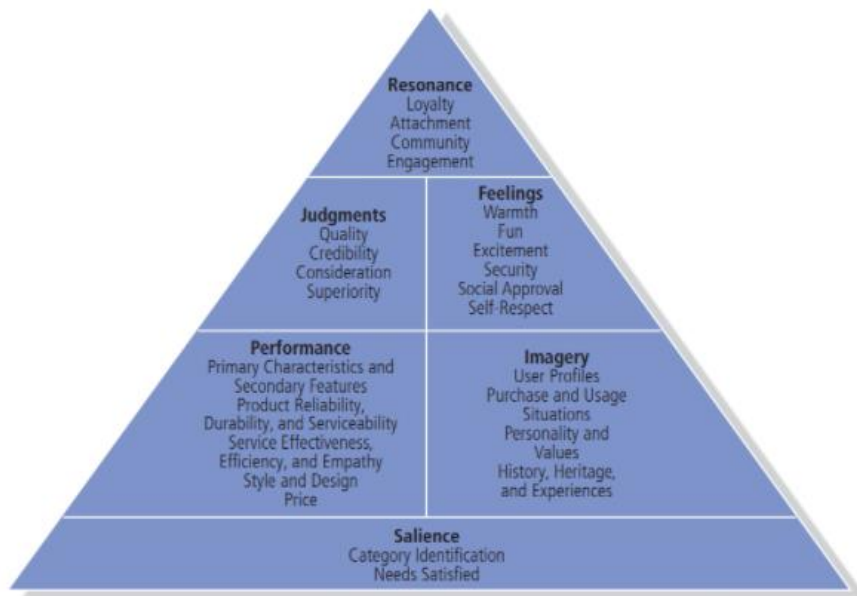
Keller's (2001) popular CBBE model, referred to as the brand resonance model, is often used to both build and measure brand equity within various industries, as well as the effects of various variables on the dimensions that constitute CBBE. Studies involving the brand resonance model to measure brand equity include Jia-yi et al. (2022), Khanna et al. (2019), Duman et al. (2018), Ande et al. (2017), Sandhe (2016), Sinčić & Jelić (2015), Huang et al. (2015), Jung et al. (2014), Raut & Brito (2014), Aziz & Yasin (2010) and Kuhn & Alpert (2008).

Duman et al. (2018:361) notes that Aaker's (1991) model and Keller's (1993) model are the two main CBBE models that are used when conducting research to measure brand equity. However, Kapferer's (1992) hexagonal brand identity prism that includes a brand's physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image is also a popular model for measuring brand equity (Burmam et al., 2009:396). Kapferer (2008:187) states that these six components are integrated into one entity that makes them dependent upon each other. However, the brand identity prism is modelled on one premise that "brands can only exist if they communicate" (Kapferer, 2008:187) and all brands can be regarded as a form of communication.

Steenkamp (2020:9) conducted an evaluation of Aaker's (1991) model and Keller's (1993) model and in essence concluded that both are very similar in terms of the methodological approach to measuring CBBE. Among the main theoretical framework differences, two distinct differences within the context of this study have contributed to influencing the decision to select Keller's brand resonance model as opposed to Aaker's (1991) model. Steenkamp (2020:9) highlights the perspective from which brand equity is measured, with Aaker's (1991) model measuring it from both the organisation and the consumers' perspective, with Keller only using the consumer perspective. Keller's singular perspective, whereby CBBE is based on consumer perceptions as a fundamental construct of brand equity, aligns with this study's theoretical framework.

The second difference, as highlighted by Steenkamp (2020:8), relates to the role of brand loyalty. Aaker (1991) regards brand loyalty as both a dimension and a result of brand equity, while Keller (1993) views loyalty as solely an attribute of strong brand equity. This study adopts Keller's perspective (Keller, 2009:145) on loyalty, within the context of the brand resonance model (see Figure 2.1) which is used to

build brand resonance. The pinnacle of the pyramid represents the highest form of loyalty, which culminates in the highest form of brand equity.



**Figure. 2.1: The brand resonance model (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:108)**

Khanna et al. (2019:3) also asserts the significance of the hierarchical nature of the brand resonance model that represents the sequential structure for building CBBE. Duman et al. (2018:361) reinforces this perspective by stating that brand resonance is the pinnacle of the pyramid, and this stems from a consumers' judgements and feelings, which originate from performance perceptions and brand imagery. However, Duman et al. (2018:361) highlight that in order to build brand resonance, the prerequisite is to establish brand awareness or brand salience (Tufa & Workineh, 2022:44), which is the base of the brand resonance model.

Of interest to this study is that the brand resonance model is also used to measure and track the influence of various marketing communication formats on building brand loyalty, including its impact on brand equity. Keller (2009:145) regards UGC as a form of interactive marketing, where online consumers are building the brand and re-defining how consumers engage with brands. Significantly for this study, Keller (2009:45) states that UGC, as a form of interactive marketing, positively influences and impacts on every dimension of the brand resonance model. As retail brands are constantly attempting to build brand equity (Chhabra, 2017:453), many of the CBBE dimensions within the brand resonance model was used as building blocks, in their attempts to achieve this. As UGC is influencing all the CBBE dimensions, Keller's brand resonance model has therefore been selected for this study to measure the effect of UGC on CBBE.

Keller (1993:2) states that brand knowledge within the memory of consumers is a key ingredient in perception formulation, particularly when the consumer is exposed to FGC or UGC. This statement coincides with the brand schematicity theory (Puligadda et al., 2012) and memory schemata (Bettman, 1979). Bettman (1979:42) asserts that network models in the context of memory schemata are closely related to the chunking phenomenon. These network models are important in the analysis of consumer choices, as these models assist in arranging the systems and structures related to specific brands. Carsana and Jolibert (2018:214) argue that consumers' individual characteristics and perceptual capabilities influence their brand schematicity, which coincides with the influence of these variables on memory schemata (Bettman, 1979:42). Both the memory schemata and brand schema are seemingly influenced and altered when exposed to UGC, affecting the formation of CBBE (Stojanovic et al., 2018:91).

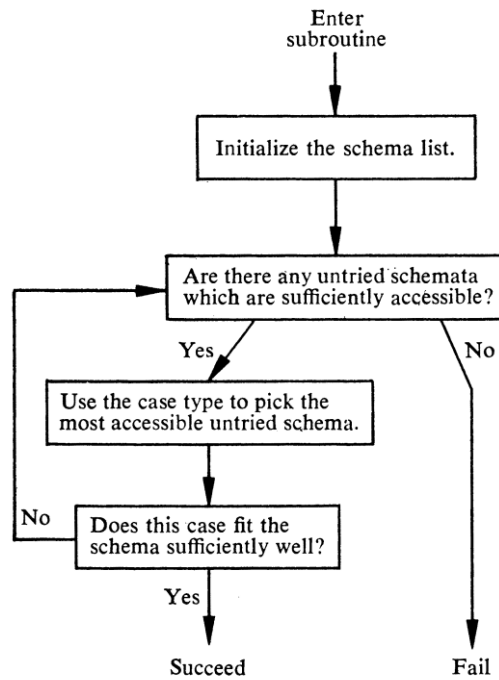
Incoming information such as UGC is stored in specific schemas based on its alignment or link with specifications in the consumers' mind, which are the existing and known CBBE schema (Lane & Fastoso, 2016:301; Puligadda et al., 2012:116; Axelrod, 1973:1250). The formation of the existing and known CBBE schema could originate from various information sources such as FGC or UGC (Aslam et al., 2018:89). According to Su and Kunkel (2019:254), consumers evaluate new information or UGC using either an assimilation or an accommodation process. Subsequent to the evaluation of the incoming content, if a high degree of congruency exists between the existing schema and the new information, the new information is seamlessly assimilated into the schema.

Should consumers be exposed to new UGC that is incongruent with the existing category (Stojanovic et al., 2018:85) or schema, an accommodation process occurs (Su and Kunkel, 2019:254) where the existing brand schema is altered to accommodate the new information. This results in the credibility of the source of the UGC viz. the consumer coming into question (Ali et al., 2019:142). To interpret the new UGC, the incoming information is compared with the consumers' known specifications. As the new UGC does not fit the old interpretation, the interpretive process juxtaposes the credibility of the source of the new information with that of the confidence of the old interpretation (Axelrod, 1973:1250). Significantly, when consumers encounter UGC that is incongruent with their existing schema, the UGC might be interpreted negatively, resulting in the formation of negative perceptions (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2017:294).

The process of seeking a suitable schema into which the new UGC can be placed is referred to as the satisficing subroutine (Axelrod, 1973:1252). The process of selecting the most suitable schema for the new UGC is iterative in nature, as the knowledge of the type of case is used to select the most suitable



schema (Coelho et al., 2019:6). Should the selected schema not be suitable, the next most plausible schema is selected; this process is then repeated until the most suitable schema is found (Axelrod, 1973:1252). This is the satisficing subroutine modelling process that is used to filter incoming UGC, so that the consumer is able to understand the complexities of the world (Coelho et al., 2019:6), which ultimately alters their existing beliefs and perceptions (Halkias, 2015:439; Axelrod, 1973:1252). The satisficing subroutine modelling process is outlined in Figure 2.2 below:



**Figure 2.2: The satisficing subroutine modelling process (Axelrod, 1973:1252)**

Subsequent to interpretation, UGC is stored or categorised into two main types of schemas, which are category-related schemas and image-related schemas (Su & Kunkle, 2019:254). Su and Kunkle (2019:254) posit that brand associations are embedded within both these schemas, and these evoke consumer responses based on exposure to both FGC and UGC. The schema process is then concluded with the formulation of new perceptions and associations (Su & Kunkle, 2019:254) or an altered state of CBBE, as a result of the influence of the new UGC. Halkias (2015:439) concludes that the schema theory provides a comprehensive approach as to how consumers formulate their knowledge and perceptions of brands, and the analysis thereof.

The two most common streams of research involving UGC stem from either researching the various motivating factors for conducting UGC research or the influence of UGC on the various dimensions that constitute CBBE. Based on the latter approach, according to Cheong and Morrison (2008:4), the UGC aspects are often brand-related research, which is a focus of this study.

Studies involving UGC and its effects on brand equity and the various related constructs of brand equity have been conducted, namely trust, attitudes, emotions, perceptions, purchase intentions and brand judgements (Schivinski et al., 2022; Demba, 2019; Scarth, 2018; Malthouse, 2016; Laroche et al., 2012). As previously stated, UGC is a semantically complex term and phenomenon, and the term often morphs, based on the context of the literature. UGC takes on various forms and this can be attributed to the pervasive nature of both social media and the internet as a whole; however, the most common form of UGC content that is being created, and potentially the most influential, is UGC content that is brand- or product-related, which is the focus of this study (Christodoulides et al., 2011:107). Literature highlighting the effect of UGC on the respective dimensions of CBBE is often convoluted within the e-WOM or social media literature context and its effect on CBBE dimensions, as in the studies of Raji et al. (2018) and Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), where e-WOM is categorised as a form of UGC. UGC is also termed or categorised as user-generated social media communication (Khadim et al., 2014:13), or as consumer-generated content (Smith et al., 2012:103). Figure 2.3 below illustrates the influence of FGC and UGC on CBBE:

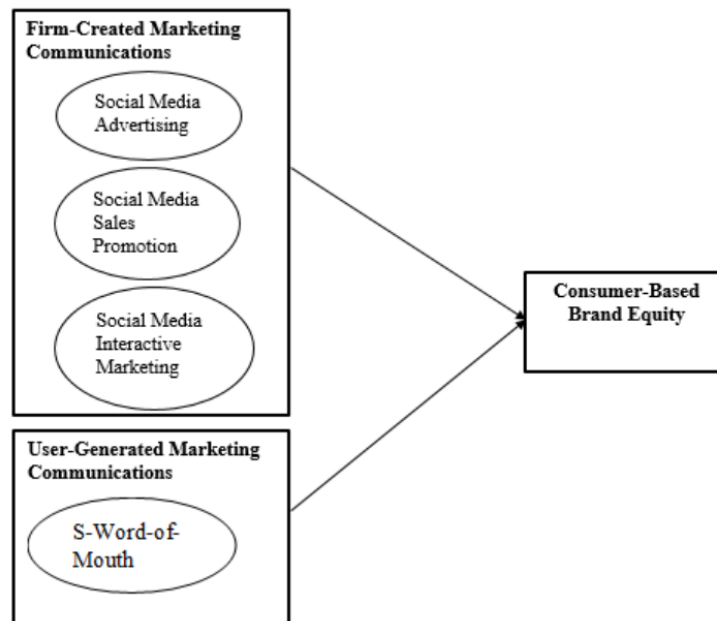


Figure 2.3: Conceptual framework one (Adetunji et al., 2018:6)

The influence of UGC on CBBE will be discussed using the framework of Keller's brand resonance model (2001) with a particular focus on the various dimensions or building blocks that constitute CBBE. This context will ensure that the review of the influence of UGC on the various dimensions of CBBE is performed holistically. However, Puligadda et al. (2012:117) maintain that brand schematicity that is used to process incoming information or UGC relating to brands, pertains only to the cognitive processing ability of the consumer. Therefore, the brand schema is not based on a specific construct such as brand awareness or brand loyalty but is rather a broad construct that is not brand specific (Puligadda et al., 2012:117).

### **2.8.3 Brand salience or brand awareness**

Brand salience or brand identity is the first building block of the brand resonance model and the foundation upon which CBBE is built (Keller, 2013:108). Brand salience can be measured in terms of the consumer's ability to recall the brand within the category, or according to Foroudi et al. (2018:472), brand salience ultimately stems from brand awareness, a key ingredient of CBBE. Ande et al. (2017:1496) assert that brand salience is an indicator of brand awareness, and stems from the ability to recognise the brand under varying conditions, based on certain brand associations or cues.

Keller (2013:72) states that brand awareness, coupled with brand image, constitutes brand knowledge, which "consists of a brand node in memory with a variety of associations linked to it". Ande et al. (2017:1495) also assert that brand salience, while being integral to building brand equity, will not build brand equity as a singular variable. The brand has to possess brand meaning in order to build brand equity in a sequential manner, and brand meaning is immersed within brand performance and brand imagery (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:108).

Sankar & Sankarnath (2021:3111) and Jung et al. (2014:197) argue that brand awareness is a precursor to perceptions associated with the superior performance and the quality of the brand. As a result of the brand awareness, the brand could enjoy a salient position within the mind of the consumer, contributing to perceptions and brand judgments relating to brand quality and brand superiority. Raut (2015:42) also posits that brand salience extends beyond simply being aware of the brand and the related top-of-mind associations (Sandhe, 2016:298), but includes associations that a consumer has of a brand. The higher the propensity of these thoughts and related associations, the greater the probability of selecting the brand during the purchasing process.

Huang and Sarigöllü (2015:141) found that when attempting to build brand awareness with online consumers, it is essential to build a relationship or provide the consumer with a relational experience,

which entails personalising the connection between the brand and the consumer. This relational experience contributes to increased brand awareness and contributes to brand loyalty. Chan et al. (2015:94) posit that the use of online advertising to build brand awareness is limited in its ability, as its effects do not stimulate desire for the brand. This finding, when juxtaposed with conventional advertising, reveals that conventional advertising stimulates both increased brand awareness and brand desire.

Vasudevan and Kumar (2018:357) in their study conclude that UGC as a contributor to the brand awareness dimension represented a more significant source than word-of-mouth recommendations. Raji et al. (2018:5) reveal that a significant correlation exists between UGC and the variables of brand awareness and brand image, where increased exposure to UGC significantly impacts on consumer acceptance of a brand, its related perceptions and brand awareness levels (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013:149). Rachna and Khajuria (2017:6) also found that UGC also has a significant effect on the CBBE constructs of brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality.

Chari et al. (2016:1077) appraised the relationship between UGC that focuses on user-generated brand reviews or recommendations (UGBR) and trust, with specific reference to Facebook. The findings display an expected correlation between the degree of trust that exists between UGBR and the associated level of trust that exists between the individual and their respective Facebook friends, with higher levels of trust in UGBR aligning with the high level of trust in the Facebook friend or source.

#### **2.8.4 Imagery**

Brand imagery relates to the intangible and abstract associations that consumers have of the brand, based on their exposure to various forms of media or other sources of information, such as UGC (Keller, 2013:11). These intangible or abstract associations attached to the brand stem from four main areas, namely user imagery, purchase situation, brand personality and values, and the history, heritage and experiences associated with the brand (Keller, 2013:116). Yuan et al. (2016:3070) state that brand image is based on the beliefs or perceptions that a specific segment of the market has of a brand. These beliefs or perceptions, which are subjective in nature, contribute to the formation of an image of the brand (Yuan et al., 2016:3070). The establishment of the appropriate brand image is an essential component of the formation of the brand's identity and is a more enduring element in the formation of brand equity (Yu et al., 2018:446).

Yu et al. (2018:446) elucidate that brand image, once established, contributes to a more resilient dimension in relation to brand attitude and purchase intention. Therefore, a customer's image of the

brand, when exposed to external marketing stimuli, may not be significantly affected in any way. Latif et al. (2015:98) suggest a six-element model consisting of brand awareness, brand associations, superiority of the brand, brand affection, brand resonance and corporate social responsibility of the brand that serve as a precursor to building its image. A correlation is drawn between the significance of building a positive brand image using the six elements as antecedents of brand image and brand loyalty. Latif et al. (2015:98) argue that a positive brand image heightens brand loyalty levels, which reduces the likelihood of consumers switching brands.

Wang et al. (2022: para.37) and Chakraborty and Bhat (2018:159) reviewed the influence of UGC, which consisted of online consumer reviews and its influence on brand image. Positive UGC or positive online consumer reviews exerted a significant effect on building a credible brand image (Brzozowska-Woś & Schivinski, 2019:18). Therefore, to enhance brand image, marketers should consider a more interactive and engaging strategy to stimulate positive UGC (Cheng et al., 2019:2). Baka (2016:150) states that UGC has a more profound effect within the tourism industry as compared to other industries. UGC within the travel sector is regarded as more credible, and it is regarded as a very reliable source to form an image of the brand (Perez-Aranda et al., 2018:8).

Furthermore, Baka (2016:150) states that the influence of UGC has not merely influenced the tourism sector, but rather transformed it, because of the speed of information dissemination and the critical impact that UGC has on brand equity and brand reputation. UGC within the tourism sector, both positive and negative, is often disseminated using social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. These channels are well suited to sharing visual imagery such as landscapes, scenery, and experiences, and significantly impact on brand imagery and CBBE (Dhanesh et al., 2022:6; Baka, 2016:150). Barreda and Bilgihan (2013:275) in a similar study also found that the hotel industry has been revolutionised from a marketing perspective, by the ability of UGC to alter the image of brands within the hotel industry.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012:462) reference UGC as e-WOM, and measured the effects of UGC on brand image within the motor industry, and the omnipresent variable of purchase intentions. Positive UGC was found to exert a considerable influence on the image of companies and brands. UGC also displayed a significant effect on the reduction of promotional budgetary spend and on increasing the purchase intention of consumers. Interestingly, they suggest that marketers should develop a communication tool to negate the influence of negative UGC on brand equity (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012:472).

Raji et al. (2017:2) also conducted a study on the motor industry, with particular focus on the influence of UGC on the functional and hedonic image of a brand, the latter relating to the perceptions,

associations, and feelings that the brand evokes. Their study reveals that UGC has a significantly greater influence on the hedonic brand image, which is consistent with the finding of other studies (Rachna & Khajuria, 2017; Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013; Bruhn et al., 2012:783), as opposed to the functional brand image. However, functional brand image exerts a greater influence over the purchase intention of consumers (Raji et al., 2017:2). Figure 2.4 illustrates the relationship between UGC and brand image:

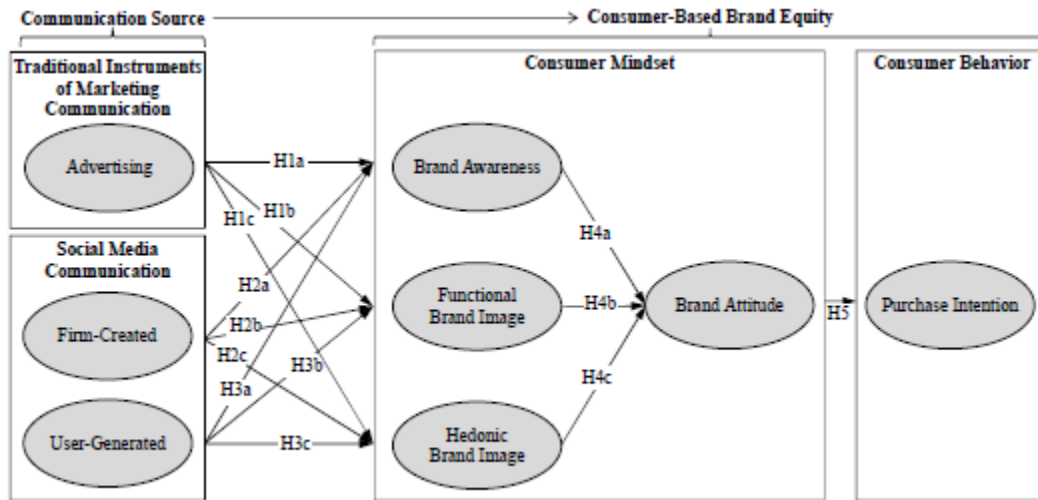


Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework two (Bruhn et al., 2012:774)

### 2.8.5 Brand performance

Keller and Swaminathan (2020:112) describe brand performance as being seminal to the creation of brand equity, as well as being a key element of meeting the functional needs of consumers. The performance of a brand is embedded in its various features, as well as its style, design, reliability and whether or not the price represents a value for money purchase for the consumer (Keller, 2013:113). Brand performance is often measured based on financial returns, such as market share and profitability (Li, 2022:1711; Tuan, 2012:43). Tuan (2012:43) also highlights the importance of the non-financial performance of the brand, which is based on its performance relative to the competition. Keller (2013:113; 2009:143) refers to brand performance within the context of how well the brand meets the needs of consumers, from a quality and functionality perspective.

Keller and Swamanithan (2020:113) and Keller (2013:113) outline five important types of features and benefits that constitute brand performance. Keller & Swamanithan (2020:113) refer to the first attribute as the primary or essential features of the brand, with the primary features relating to the functionality of the brand, while the secondary features relate to the augmenting features that support or assist the primary features, such as style and design. The second attribute relates to the reliability and durability of the product, which is essential to the performance of a product, supported by the ability of the company to support or repair the product, if required. The third attribute around which performance is measured relates to the ability to render efficient and effective service, to support the product in the market (Perera et al., 2022:16). Style and design represent the aesthetic dimensions of the brand, which represents the fourth performance attribute, with price as the fifth performance attribute, representing value for money associations (Keller & Swamanithan, 2020:113). Tuan (2012:43) categorises these into the physical aspects of the brand, specifically, product design as the product-related features or attributes; the secondary features, which are user imagery, are referred to as non-product related features or attributes.

Brand equity in the service industry, referred to as service brand equity by Gautam and Kumar (2012:13), used Keller's (2001) CBBE model and applied the six brand predictors or brand equity constructs, viz. salience, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings, and resonance to the service industry. Gautam and Kumar (2012:13) concluded that brand performance was found to be the most significant dimension, when attempting to build brand resonance.

Zeithaml et al. (1988:15), in their seminal research on perceptions of service quality, state that perceptions of performance are based upon consumer expectations. These consumer expectations, which relate to product performance, are the needs and wants of consumers, and are not static, as they are in a constant state of flux. Zeithaml et al. (1996:35) state that these expectations can be set at two levels, which are desired service and performance, alternatively, adequate service or performance. The desired level represents the service or performance the consumer hopes to receive, while the adequate service or performance represents the service that the consumer will deem as being the minimum acceptable level of service or performance.

Duan et al. (2013:3125) propose a five-dimension model that can be used to measure performance within the service industry. The SERVPERF model that was modelled on the basis of the widely used SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1985) used the same five dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. According to Duan et al. (2013:3120), the SERVPERF model does not measure the gap between consumer expectations and perceptions as the SERVQUAL model does – the SERVPERF model measures the perceptions of the service performance received.

Xu et al. (2017:675) posit that consumer expectations are influenced by both the marketing strategies of companies, as well as consumer-related factors such as UGC. Duan et al. (2013:3124), in the findings of their study using the SERVPERF model, suggest that a company can stimulate the creation of UGC, which can then be used to manipulate consumer expectations, either by raising expectations or lowering them. This would enable a company to better manage performance-based perceptions, as they are able to influence consumer expectations accordingly. The findings of Sethna et al. (2017:365) align with Duan et al. (2013), as they also found that UGC affects consumer expectations and therefore the consumer's experience of the performance of the brand.

### **2.8.6 Judgements**

Francis et al. (2018:242) state that the growth of UGC significantly affects brand judgements. Brand judgements are described by Keller and Swaminathan (2020:117) as consumers' opinions of a brand, which consist of a combination of the brand image and brand performance associations. Gautam and Kumar (2012:13) assert that brand judgement is the second most important construct, following brand performance, when building a relationship between the brand and the consumer and building brand resonance. Keller (2013:117) asserts that judgements are based on four main variables, viz. brand quality, brand credibility, brand consideration and brand superiority. According to Boolaky et al. (2017:569), these four variables are evaluated or judged according to a consumer's rational assessment of the brand.

## **2.9 Brand components**

### **2.9.1 Brand quality**

Zeithaml (1988:5), whose seminal study states that there are various interpretations or definitions of quality, and these are included in Zeithaml's widely regarded perspective that quality, in the context of a brand, can be described as a brand's excellence or superiority. The phenomenon of perceived quality is the consumer's perception or judgement about the superiority of the brand and its related performance, and this is a subjective perspective, as with all quality perspectives.

Xu et al. (2017:30) elucidate that perceived quality is an antecedent for customer satisfaction and is often viewed as a differentiating factor for attracting new consumers. However, Pappu and Quester (2006:10) argue that quality is not an antecedent for customer satisfaction and assert that an inverse relationship exists between these variables. They conclude that the higher the level of customer satisfaction, the higher the perceptions of quality.



Jahanshahi et al. (2011:255) add that, in order for customer satisfaction to occur, the perceived quality needs to equate to price. Jahanshahi et al. (2011:259) also conclude that increases in brand quality perceptions also contribute to increases in consumer loyalty levels. Scott et al. (2015:43) also highlight the importance of brand quality in customer satisfaction, and subsequent increases in the levels of consumer loyalty. In addition to this finding, they conclude that this contributes to increases in the overall brand equity of the company, resulting in the firm enjoying a competitive advantage within the market.

These perceptions of quality are influenced by certain variables, one of which is the reputation of the brand, and this is where UGC potentially alters the quality perceptions of brands (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015:45; Zeithaml, 1988:7). Kim et al. (2012:316) conclude that UGC that has value has an ingrained interactive mechanism that includes content relating to quality, value and utility, referred to as valuable UGC. Valuable UGC seemingly exerts a significant influence on quality and value perceptions, which would impact on CBBE. Figure 2.5 below illustrates the relationship between UGC, perceived quality and its influence on brand loyalty (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015:35).

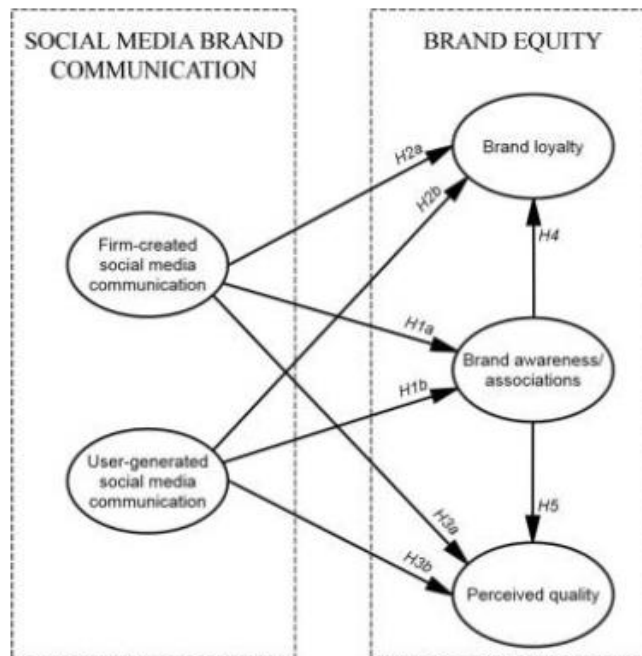


Figure 2.5 Conceptual framework three (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015:35)

### **2.9.2 Brand credibility**

As a phenomenon, brand credibility is a perception-based, multi-dimensional construct that is founded on trust and expertise and is a significant contributor to influencing purchasing decisions and brand selection (Perea et al., 2022: 17; Jeng, 2016:2). Spry et al. (2011:898) suggest that a positive relationship exists between brand credibility, perceived quality and CBBE, but there are variables such as the marketing and brand strategies that are also employed, which influence this relationship.

As a result of the influence of the various marketing and brand strategies on credibility perceptions (Spry et al., 2011:898), it is therefore safe to assume that UGC will also have an effect on brand credibility and therefore will affect CBBE. In Erdem and Swait's research (1998) into the role that credibility plays in influencing CBBE, they state that credibility is a significant contributor to brand equity formation, and inconsistencies in service and product performance influence brand credibility and ultimately brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 1998:154). Dwivedi et al. (2018:1177) regard brand credibility, together with consumer satisfaction, as essential components within brand judgments that culminate in consumer-brand relationships. Dwivedi et al. (2018:1194) also add that a consumer's emotional attachment to the brand influences brand credibility as well as certain dimensions of CBBE. They further posit that in order to build CBBE, brand credibility as well as customer satisfaction must be prevalent.

### **2.9.3 Brand consideration**

Vriens et al. (2019:105) state that the phenomenon of brand consideration is integral to decision-making during the purchasing process. This view is shared by Keller & Swaminathan (2020:118) who indicate that a strong correlation exists between a consumer's purchase intentions, brand associations, brand image and ultimately brand consideration. Despite the brand quality and brand credibility associations, if the brand does not enjoy brand consideration, the equity of the brand and the purchase intentions will be negatively influenced. This finding is consistent with previous findings that UGC significantly affects brand image and negatively or positively influences purchase intention (Raji et al., 2017:5; Bahtar & Muda, 2016:341). Lăzăroiu et al. (2020:4) and Demba et al. (2019:145) highlight in their studies that UGC generates trust among consumers, leading to brand consideration, which is a prerequisite in the purchasing process.

#### **2.9.4 Brand superiority**

According to Beig and Nika (2019:5), brand superiority arises when consumers view one brand as being more dominant or in ascendancy relative to another brand. As previously stated, within the context of brand quality, brand superiority is integral to the perceptions of brand quality (Zeithaml, 1988:3). Liu and Jiang (2020:142) posit that quality judgements or perceptions are how brands are evaluated and brand superiority or excellence is crucial to the evaluative process and subsequent purchasing intentions.

Lassar et al. (1995:13) view brand superiority as a perception-based phenomenon, where one brand enjoys precedence over another brand. Their view is that brand superiority is viewed in a generic sense, whereby one brand has more equity than another, because of its increased value and desirability. Keller (1993:6) suggests that favourable associations or judgements and, by implication brand superiority, are prerequisites for a brand attempting to build equity over competing brands. UGC purportedly influences these consumers perceptions and the associated superior brand perceptions (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016:33; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016:192; Kim et al., 2012:315).

#### **2.9.5 Brand feelings**

How consumers react to a brand, and the associated emotional responses which emanate from consumer perceptions based on the brand's performance and imagery, can be regarded as brand feelings or judgements (Duman et al., 2018:361; Lithopoulos et al., 2018:380). Dwivedi et al. (2018:1177) conceptualise a framework encompassing emotional brand attachment and how CBBE was developed, whereby the judgements of brand credibility and consumer satisfaction influence the consumer's relationship with the brand. The evoked emotions that are common between the consumer and the brand could range from fun and warmth to love and excitement, amongst others (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:117; Dwivedi et al., 2018:1177).

It needs to be noted that brand feelings are not all positive, as a study by Sharma and Jain (2019:63) reveals, which posits that loyal brand relationships or attachments are often strong indicators of possible brand betrayal. In the event that the brand should fail to maintain the expected performance standards, despite strong brand associations, it often results in negative feelings toward the brand. UGC and its influence on brand feelings and emotions highlights that these variables associated with the formation of CBBE are part of an intricate system consisting of numerous permutations and variances (Raji, 2017:2; Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016:5479).

### 2.9.6 Brand resonance

According to Keller (2010:61; 2013:120), brand resonance is the highest degree of loyalty and the ultimate relationship that a consumer can have with a brand. Keller and Swaminathan (2020:117) and Keller (2013: 2010) separate the concept of brand resonance into the intensity of the bond between the consumer and the brand, and the associated activities that emanate from the relationship with the brand. These two components are then divided into the four key categories viz. behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement.

Khanna et al. (2019:4) highlight the importance of the brand's ability to differentiate itself from competing brands, contributing to higher levels of brand equity. Brand equity is a prerequisite in creating behavioural loyalty, which culminates in increasing the resonance between the consumer and the brand (Moura et al., 2019:6). Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015:45) underscore the influence of UGC in increasing both the levels of brand equity (Malthouse et al., 2016:440) and the brand loyalty between the brand and the consumer.

As alluded to previously, both positive and negative UGC have an influence on CBBE, but with the increased frequency and speed of negative UGC, brand loyalty is impacted upon more significantly (Malthouse et al., 2016:440). Loyal consumers experience feelings of betrayal and their trust being broken. As a consequence, brand resonance is being negatively affected (Malthouse et al., 2016:440).

As previously stated, the first component into which brand resonance can be divided, viz. the intensity of the bond with the consumer or the attachment that the consumer has to the brand, can also be referred to as brand love, which can also occur at varying levels of intensity (Coelho et al., 2018:156).

The second component into which brand resonance can be divided relates to the associated activities, such as repeat purchasing behaviours or conducting additional research about the brand (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:120). Zho et al. (2012:895) found in their study that a relationship exists between associated activities, as well as brand communities. They conclude that the engagement with other loyal brand followers, i.e., brand communities, increased the degree of association in terms of activities with the brand (Kuo & Hou 2017:265).

### **2.9.7 Brand resonance and behavioural loyalty**

Jalilvand et al. (2011:151) express a clear preference for describing brand loyalty from a behavioural perspective, as opposed to an attitudinal perspective. This stance is based on their premise that purchase intention is regarded as a greater display of loyalty, as opposed to the intention to be loyal to the brand. Varjonen (2018:13) describes behavioural loyalty in terms of purchasing behaviour, based on frequency and quantity of goods purchased. However, this description is qualified in that this sentiment cannot be regarded as the sole indicator of brand resonance, because brand resonance could also be a result of other factors, such as ease of purchase or the price-point in relation to competing brands.

Keller (2013:120; 2010:69) refers to behavioural loyalty in the context of repeat purchases of the brand, and the amount or volume purchased in relation to the share of the category, hence purchase behaviour. Therefore, purchasing behaviour is a good indicator of behavioural loyalty. However, UGC is also potentially influencing the purchasing behaviour of consumers, and therefore also impacting on behavioural loyalty and ultimately brand resonance (Chokpitakkul & Anantachart, 2020:398; Malthouse et al., 2016:431). Cheung et al. (2021:363) affirm the influence of UGC in firstly building consumer knowledge, thereby altering consumer perceptions, and how these perceptions ultimately affect purchase intentions.

Mayrhofer et al. (2020:178) presented an additional variable regarding the influence of UGC on purchase intentions, whereby the effect of UGC on persuasion knowledge was measured. Persuasion knowledge, which can be described as a defensive mechanism, is triggered by exposure to external stimuli, such as an advertisement, to raise consumers' defensive barriers. However, exposure to UGC seemingly does not trigger persuasion knowledge, thereby not triggering the "defensive barriers", resulting in the consumer being more receptive to UGC. This leads to increased positive receptiveness to UGC, which increases the purchase intentions of consumers and contributes to brand resonance.

Khanna et al. (2019:4) consider brand resonance to be a contributor to behavioural loyalty, resulting in a high degree of reciprocity between these two variables. This reciprocal relationship between resonance and loyalty contributes to high levels of interactivity between consumers (Khanna et al., 2019:4). For Keller & Swaminathan (2020:122) and Keller (2013:122), however, their indicator of loyalty digresses from purchasing intent as an indicator of loyalty. The willingness to invest time to conduct research on the brand, attend brand events, or invest resources into the brand, are regarded as more affirmative indicators of behavioural loyalty.

Cheung et al. (2020:131) concluded that positive UGC assists with the reinforcement of product quality perceptions and associated benefits by consumers, which contributes to increasing levels of behavioural loyalty and purchasing behaviour (Calvo-Porrà & Lévy-Mangin, 2017:94). Bruhn et al. (2012:782) postulate that both positive and negative UGC have an influence on the brand image, the subsequent purchase intentions, and the resultant levels of behavioural loyalty. In the case of positive UGC, there is a positive influence on the likelihood of purchasing, while negative UGC has the converse effect on the purchase intentions, with both having the resultant effect on behavioural loyalty.

Kim and Johnson (2016:107) also confirm a strong correlation between UGC and favourable behavioural responses, such as the existence of future-purchase intention, which also has a resultant positive impact on brand sales. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012:472) also affirm the influence and the important role of positive UGC on increasing the propensity to purchase. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015:46) also report an influence of UGC on brand loyalty, together with its influence on other CBBE variables, such as brand awareness and quality perceptions.

Bahtar and Muda (2016:341) assert that UGC has a definitive effect on purchase intentions, but no distinction is made as to whether positive or negative UGC has a greater effect on purchase intentions. Eckes (2016:11) posits that negative UGC seemingly has a more profound effect on brand loyalty as opposed to positive UGC, but these findings varied across the respondent spectrum, based on the respective categories of consumers. The categories of consumers were based on the level of knowledge consumers had of the brand, with less knowledgeable consumers (novices) being affected more significantly, as opposed to the more knowledgeable consumers (experts).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that UGC influences purchase intentions (Christodoulides et al. (2012:13) and, by inference, behavioural loyalty and the resultant brand resonance – however, it is inconclusive as to where negative or positive UGC has the greater influence on this variable. Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) found that negative UGC has a greater probability of being shared, as opposed to positive UGC. However, no inference can be drawn as to whether negative UGC has a greater influence than positive UGC, on both behavioural loyalty and brand resonance.

### **2.9.8 Brand resonance and attitudinal attachment**

Keller and Swaminathan (2020:120) and Keller (2013:120) qualify the concept of behavioural loyalty, as an indicator of brand resonance, as being inadequate as a singular variable, as previously stated, while a strong attachment to the brand is a more significant indicator of brand loyalty and ultimately brand resonance. Keller (2010:67) makes reference to brand attachment as the psychological strength of the

degree of loyalty between the brand and the consumer. The brand is viewed as being special in a wider context, while attitudinal attachment is associated with brand love and pleasure highlighting the emotional connection between the brand and the consumer.

Coelho et al. (2018:155) also categorise a consumer's attachment to a brand as brand love, which epitomises the attachment or robust commitment a consumer has to the brand. This perspective of brand love represents the consumers' attachment to the brand, and it is very different to interpersonal love. However, it includes a passionate bond and emotional commitment to the brand, a view shared by Albert and Merunka (2013:260). Qutywa (2020:38) makes reference to brand attachment and attitudinal attachment as interchangeable or generic terms, and reference is made to these two terms within the ambit of attachment to the brand. Jalilvand et al. (2011:151) argue that an attitudinal perspective, in terms of brand loyalty, signifies favourable preferences and a positive disposition towards the brand, indicative of high levels of brand resonance and purchase intentions (Castillo et al., 2022:75).

Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011:304) postulate that attachment to the brand needs to symbolise a brand romance and should the romance level of engagement be high, attitudinal attachment, brand loyalty and brand resonance will also be high. This degree of attachment to the brand creates higher levels of attitudinal attachment than traditional loyalty programmes. Huang et al. (2013:187) provide a varying perspective, describing attitudinal attachment as a broader variable encompassing the psychological connections that a consumer has with the brand. The brand is therefore regarded as being special in a more holistic context, encompassing a deeper connection or higher levels of brand resonance, extending beyond attitudinal attachment. The perspective of analysing attitudinal and emotional connection to a brand within a psychological context is supported by Vernuccio et al. (2015:707). They amplify the view that the stronger the attachment between the consumer and the brand, the higher the loyalty levels and brand resonance, and the more likely a premium can be charged for the brand.

A strong attitudinal and emotional attachment to the brand also increases the likelihood of brand support and acceptance of other product varieties with the range of the brand – a result of the higher levels of brand resonance (Wallace et al., 2014:39). Wallace et al. (2014:39) note that consumers who have brand love, or a strong attachment to the brand, will be more likely to generate positive UGC about the brand. This phenomenon is referred to as co-creation (Eusebius, 2020:212). However, despite this, they will not tolerate transgression or betrayal by the brand (Jain & Sharma, 2019:993). Wallace et al. (2014:39) affirm that these characteristics or indicators represent an authentic brand relationship and is a reflection of the consumers' selves and a measure of their attachment to the brand.

There is limited literature that illustrates the relationship between UGC and attitudinal attachment as a specific variable within brand resonance. Many authors have addressed the relationship between UGC and brand loyalty within CBBE, UGC and brand loyalty as a single variable, UGC and brand attitude, but not within the narrow context of UGC and attitudinal attachment. Schivinski et al. (2016:192), in their study of the influence of firm-generated content (FGC) and UGC and its effect on brand equity and brand attitude, conclude that FGC only affects brand attitude, while UGC had a positive influence on both brand equity and brand attitude.

Chakraborti & Bardhan, (2022:408) and Bruhn et al. (2012:784) also found that both positive and negative UGC impacts on brand attitudes, which strengthens or conversely weakens brand loyalty levels. Morra et al. (2017:14) corroborate this finding, whereby a relationship exists between the variables of UGC and its influence on both quality perceptions, as well as on brand loyalty levels. Abzar et al. (2014:825) assert that UGC displays a significant positive effect on brand attitude, which influences the purchase intention, leveraging the level of brand loyalty. Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011:44) made reference to the variable of brand dilution, which consisted of negative UGC significantly weakening CBBE and consumer purchase intentions, thereby affecting their brand loyalty levels, which could negatively influence the consumer's attitudinal attachment to the brand.

Reichmann (2017:35) analysed the value of leveraging the positive outcomes of UGC on behalf of the brand, as a means of enhancing the relationship between the brand and the consumer, by strengthening the loyalty and the brand resonance levels. An inverse relationship between negative UGC and brand resonance levels was also revealed, whereby the impact of negative UGC reduced the levels of loyalty and brand resonance. Wouters (2016:139) corroborates this finding, whereby negative UGC impacts negatively on brand loyalty as a variable.

An additional significant finding by Wouters (2016) was that brand loyalty displayed the most significant negative influence in relation to the other CBBE variables. This aligns with feelings of betrayal experienced by brand-loyal consumers who display higher levels of brand resonance (Jain & Sharma, 2019:993; Malthouse et al., 2016:440). Interestingly in a study by Wouters (2016:135), UGC also depicted the most significant impact on the brand loyalty variable within the CBBE dimension for non-loyal consumers. However, amongst brand loyal consumers, negative UGC displayed triple the impact on the brand loyalty dimension of CBBE, which highlights the brand betrayal sentiment, and displays the significance of the influence of brand loyalty on both the brand attachment and brand resonance variables (Wei et al., 2022:20; Wouters, 2016:135).



## 2.10 Sense of community

Keller (2010:69) postulates that a sense of community is potentially the strongest display of loyalty, as a category within brand resonance. Here, loyal consumers both online and offline are prepared to interact with other loyal brand followers. This interaction with other loyal consumers could take various forms, ranging from joining brand-related clubs, being members within brand-related chat rooms or simply tweeting about the brand. Keller and Swaminathan (2020:120) also add that the phenomenon of sense of community, referred to as a brand community, takes on a broader meaning within this category of brand resonance, eliciting a sense of belonging and an affiliation with other loyal brand followers, fellow users, consumers, or employees of the company.

Cheng et al. (2019:4) assert that a brand community is distinguished by a number of brand-loyal consumers who share values, traditions and a sense of belonging and identification. Veloutsou and Black (2020:873) define a brand community in a more generic sense, referring to it as a group of varying members who unite around a common goal or purpose. Huang et al. (2013:187) state that brand communities also contribute to a sense of community and create a bond between members. This attachment or resonance displayed is referred to as a sense of kinship between members, a common example being Harley-Davidson consumers.

Santos et al. (2022:11) and Hajli et al. (2017:136) assert that a brand community is modelled around the social engagement and interactions of brand users, and that it also provides marketing value for the firm. The marketing value of UGC that is co-created by brand communities seemingly has marketing value for the business, but little research evidence exists in this field (Hajli et al., 2017:136). Coelho and Bairrada (2019:155) suggest that brand communities are specialised groups of individuals who share a set of beliefs, and their relationship revolves around a specific feature, such as a brand (Arya et al., 2022:1393).

Luo et al. (2015:493) postulate that brand communities are groups of consumers whose common interest is a brand, who share a passion for the brand, adhere to a social identity and have common goals. Reichmann (2017:20) adds that a strong brand community or a sense of commitment by members also influences the behaviour of consumers, but more importantly, it also increases their loyalty and commitment levels.

Online brand communities are also founded upon social relationships between consumers and admirers of the brand who enjoy expressing their views and sentiments online (Shaari & Ahmad, 2017:210). These online brand communities contribute to various components of brand resonance behaviour, such

as brand recommendations and brand satisfaction as a result of these interactions (Shaari & Ahmad, 2017:210). Keller (2009:149) posits that frequent engagements between members within a brand community contribute to strengthening the bond between consumers and their attachment to the brand, contributing to brand resonance.

According to Luo et al. (2015:493), the combination of brand communities and social media platforms contributes to an escalation in the volume of UGC that is generated, as an online brand community could potentially consist of a few hundred thousand consumers. This increased interaction between brand community members contributes to higher levels of brand resonance, mostly as a result of UGC co-creation (Harrigan et al., 2018:395; Luo et al., 2015:493). Brand communities have multiple stakeholders, who could include users, brand employees, or any individuals or organisations which have an interest in the brand (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013:1506).

Mangold and Faulds (2009:361) assert that consumers are gregarious by nature, and enjoy the company of like-minded individuals within online brand communities. They suggest that brands leverage off these behavioural tendencies, whereby consumers co-create UGC and interact with the brand to improve brand interaction and communication with their brand communities (Pereira et al., 2022:17; Maslowska et al., 2017:24). Brodie et al. (2013:112) conclude that the interaction process within brand communities needs to be understood, as it has consequences for brand marketers because brand control is shifting to brand communities. Their study also argues that marketers are able to join these brand communities, if their interaction has a value-adding role. Laroche et al. (2012:81) also highlight the potential benefits associated with online brand communities for brands, which include increasing information dissemination (Santos et al., 2022:11; Schivinski et al., 2016:192), and enhancing the bond and engagement between brand community members (Brodie et al., 2013:112).

Pereira et al. (2022:17) and Goh et al. (2013:103) assert that brand community engagement in UGC results in an increase in consumers' purchases. This influence stems from persuasive and interactive engagements from within the brand community. Laroche posits that the more significant potential benefits associated with brand communities entail improving the consumers' relationship with the brand. This includes increasing the brand loyalty levels, and increased resistance to negative UGC (Vernuccio et al., 2015:713). However, Laroche et al. (2012:81) qualify this perspective by highlighting the inherent negative consequences associated with brand communities when it generates negative UGC, and the negative impact on the associated brand loyalty and brand resonance levels.

Ho-Dac et al. (2013:50) argue that the strength of the brand equity determines the extent of the effect of the influence of UGC, specifically online consumer reviews (OCR), which have a significant impact

on purchase intention and brand resonance (Bahtar & Muda, 2016:338). It is essential for newer brands with weaker brand equity to negate the influence of negative UGC by generating positive UGC, thus increasing their brand equity within these brand communities (Ho-Dac et al., 2013:50). However, stronger brands are not immune to the effects of negative UGC and if ignored, the accumulation of the volume of negative UGC, which is steadily increasing (Chang et al., 2013:498), will influence the brand, should brand resonance wane (Gensler et al., 2013:50; Ho-Dac et al., 2013:50).

Brands that possess higher levels of brand equity also only enjoy the benefits of increased co-creation and increased brand resonance within the brand community (Christodoulides et al., 2012:14). Quach and Thaichon (2017:63) refer to the co-creation process as an interactive process and as dialogue between active consumers and the firm. Koivisto and Mattila (2020:571) make reference to the co-creation process as the “new brand logic”, where the interactive process between consumers contributes to brand equity. Cheng et al. (2019:6) validate the relationship between consumer interaction and heightened levels of brand equity and CBBE. This interaction and engagement between online community members results in the brand representing the phenomenon of co-creation, ultimately culminating in the brand “being the experience” (Cheng et al., 2019:6). Social media platforms have provided perfect platforms and opportunities for brand communities to engage in the co-creation process of generating brand-related content (Koivisto & Mattila (2020:571; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013:1506).

Coelho et al. (2018:156) suggest that companies create brand communities, both online or offline, in order for consumers to engage with other loyal brand followers around their love of the brand. These brand communities potentially increase the intensity of the relationship with the brand, resulting in higher levels of resistance to the influence of negative UGC. Notably, when dealing with negative UGC, one-to-one communication may not be the most suitable option, while addressing the negative UGC within the brand community could assist in retaining brand resonance levels (Gensler et al., 2013:50). However, this also presents the danger of brand equity dilution within the brand community, when the response to or engagement with negative UGC is not favourable (Bowden et al., 2017:878). The resultant reaction from the consumer and brand community might also be negative (Gensler et al., 2013:50), harming the brand equity, purchase intentions Estrella-Ramón & Ellis-Chadwick (2017:20) and brand resonance.

Cheng et al. (2020:7) assert the value of brand communities in generating positive emotions and feelings towards the brand, increasing the affinity between the brand and the consumer, resulting in higher levels of brand loyalty and resonance. Keller (2010:69) argues that interaction between users strengthens the

bond between the brand and the consumer, culminating in consumers becoming brand ambassadors, and displaying very high levels of loyalty and resonance.

## **2.11 Active engagement**

Keller (2013:121; 2010:69) postulates that active engagement is the strongest display of loyalty, exceeding purchase intention and brand consumption as displays of brand loyalty and resonance. These displays of engagement could entail willingness to conduct research on the brand, investing time or any other acts of positive interest as means of engaging with the brand or other brand users (Keller, 2013:121; 2010:69). Cheng et al. (2019:4) argue that active engagement includes, amongst others, sharing positive UGC, receiving recommendations and suggestions relating to the brand (Anwar et al., 2022: 330; Wirtz et al., 2013:229), and being a member of brand communities, which contribute to brand loyalty and brand resonance.

Cheng et al. (2019:2) posit that engagement with the brand, which could be in the form of website engagements, customer support interactions, being active members of loyalty programmes and any other attempts to be engaged with the brand, contributes to relationship equity. These attempts to build an interactive relationship with the brand through active engagements can also be referred to as consumer brand engagements (CBE), which culminate in the formation of CBBE and relationship equity for the brand (Cheng et al., 2019:2; Wirtz et al., 2013:236). So et al. (2014:307) conceptualises consumer brand engagement as consisting of five variables or dimensions viz. interaction, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and identification.

Beccari and Valerio (2019:24) describe engagement as any participation or association with the brand, while online or social media engagement entails engaging with the brand using social media. Unal et al. (2017:354) make reference to the active engagement process of consumers in an online domain as online consumer engagement (OCE). However, they add that the variable consumer engagement is a relatively unknown variable and is often also referenced as brand engagement.

Unal et al. (2017:357) also highlight that within existing literature, emphasis is placed on the engagement process and a single variable viz. the brand, as opposed to the engagement process and multiple variables such as the consumer, the brand, brand equity, etc. Active engagement as a type of behaviour towards a brand, where UGC is generated, displays the highest level of brand affirmation (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:121). Schivinski et al. (2016:18) assert that as brands increase their CBBE, there is a corresponding increase in engagement with the brand, contributing to higher levels of brand loyalty and resonance.

Muntinga et al. (2011:14) conceptualised the COBRA typology of consumer online brand-related activities as a behavioural construct, which is used as a framework to reflect on online consumer engagement activities with the brand. The COBRA typology is a continuum that is used to measure various online brand behaviours and social media interactions, based on consumer usage and consumption patterns. Numerous studies have been conducted using the COBRA typology to analyse consumers' online brand engagement behaviours and activities (Cheung et al., 2020; Buzeta et al., 2020; Schivinski et al., 2019; Piehler et al., 2019; Muntinga et al., 2016; Schivinski et al., 2016). It is notable in various studies (Buzeta et al., 2020:93; Roosen & Lüttje, 2020:23; Muntinga et al., 2011:14) that UGC is discussed within the COBRA context, and includes all consumer-to-consumer interactions and engagements.

The COBRA typology is a continuum that categorises how online users engage with online content in terms of their usage, such as consuming, or contributing and creating content. This categorisation holds implications for the active engagement variable and brand resonance (Muntinga et al., 2011:16). The three variables along the continuum represent the usage of online brand-related content with consumption representing the lowest form of online brand engagement activity, therefore representing the lowest level of COBRA or brand engagement and brand resonance (Keller, 2013:121). The types of engagement activities that occur here include watching and downloading content, reading comments, and viewing likes without responding (Khan, 2017:237). The contribution or participation variable represents the second highest display of usage of COBRA and brand-related content in terms of brand activity and engagement (Muntinga et al., 2011:14). The type of engagement with COBRA or any other brand-related content could include sharing user-to-user content, liking and commenting (Piehler et al., 2019:1848; Khan, 2017:237).

The creation variable represents the highest display of engagement with COBRA in terms of activity and interaction with brand-related content (Mishra, 2019:396; Malthouse et al., 2016:441). Muntinga et al. (2011:17) describe creating content as the production of content that is consumed and contributed to or participated in by other online users. Created content or UGC that is actively created could include all content such as commenting on websites, producing video content, writing blogs and product reviews (Malthouse et al., 2016:430; Muntinga et al., 2011:17).

Buzeta et al. (2020:94) refer to the latter two types of consumer usage and consumption patterns of COBRA, viz. contribution and creation, as the higher order that COBRA represents. This categorisation represents the highest level of brand activity and involvement and has the potential to exert the most influence over other consumers. The importance of these categorisations is that both the positive UGC

and positive COBRA represent the highest level of brand engagement, which subsequently also represent the highest display of brand equity and resonance (Mishra, 2018:396; Malthouse et al., 2016:441; Schivinski et al., 2016:21).

Mishra (2019:396) and Muntinga et al. (2011:34) also reveal that the rationale or motivational factors behind UGC or COBRA creation is driven by the desire or motivation of consumers within online brand communities to alter other consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions. Buzeta et al. (2020:94) qualify this by adding that the higher-order motivational factors of COBRA can have both a positive or negative influence on CBBE, depending on the nature and type of engagement with the brand. Buzeta et al. (2020:94) posit that negative UGC could be factual content, or UGC that is generated for malicious reasons, and has the potential to influence consumer perceptions. Negative UGC therefore potentially negatively influences CBBE and results in the brand resonance being negatively influenced (Mishra, 2019:396; Estrella-Ramón & Ellis-Chadwick, 2017:20)

Since the higher-order motivational factors of COBRA, viz. contribution and creation, have the potential for the highest level of active engagement, it is vital for brands to generate positive FGC (firm-generated content) that will stimulate further engagement by consumers (Buzeta et al., 2020:94; Calise 2019:171) and build brand resonance. However, as stated previously by Schivinski et al. (2016:192), FGC seemingly only influences the attitudinal dimension of brand resonance, while UGC potentially influences all the dimensions of brand resonance. Majid and Laroche (2019:24) assert that consumers evaluate FGC with a negative sentiment, as opposed to UGC that is evaluated more positively, but this positive sentiment is only temporary, as repeated UGC posts by a consumer are eventually viewed as being a form of advertising or FGC.

It is imperative for firms to produce FGC that trigger the higher-order motivational factor of COBRA, specifically content creation, to strengthen the consumer-brand engagement process (Cheung et al., 2021:371). Muntinga (2015:16) suggests that all three motivational factors in terms of COBRA need to be factored into the planning and generation of FGC, to ensure that all the respective consumer needs and motivations in terms of COBRA are satisfied. Cheung et al. (2021:370) analysed the relationship between the social media marketing activities (SMM) of an organisation (FGC using social media) and COBRA and concluded, amongst other findings, that the FGC needs to be entertaining, customised, interactive and include trendy information for the engagement process to be optimal.

Muntinga (2015:16) asserts that the need for content such as FGC or SMM that is entertaining in nature, contributes to the consumption and contribution factors of COBRA (Buzeta et al., 2020:92; Schivinski et al., 2016:23), although this content never triggers high levels of content or UGC creation. FGC or

SMM that is interactive in nature results in the highest levels of content or UGC creation (Muntinga, 2015:16), which is the key higher-order COBRA. UGC has the greatest influence on purchase intentions, resulting in high levels of active engagement between the brand and the consumer, contributing to high levels of brand resonance (Cheung et al., 2021:370)

Liu et al. (2021:823) also conclude that luxury brands have also increased their social media engagement with their users, as this stimulates active engagement with consumers, contributing to an increase in purchase intentions, which positively influences brand resonance. The influence of UGC on online users results in interactive engagement behaviours such as social interaction, social consensus and purchasing review (Naeem & Ozuem, 2020:11), which are precursors for brand engagement and a key building block of brand resonance.

Naeem and Ozuem (2020:1) conclude that there is inadequate conclusive evidence regarding understanding consumer motivations that surround the generation, exchange or contribution and consumption of UGC. They propose a UGC SBE model (social brand engagement) that assists with measuring the influence of the social parameters of UGC on the behaviour of other social media users. Naeem and Ozuem (2020:11) conclude their findings by arguing that the UGC generated by other online users such as friends, or brand communities, exert the most significant influence over other online consumers.

## **2.12 Models to manage UGC**

The literature is limited with respect to strategies and approaches that companies can use to manage and control the influence of UGC on brand equity (Lim et al., 2020:932). It is further evident from literature that the models and strategic frameworks that have been conceptualised to manage UGC have been predominantly built from a marketing perspective within the context of reputation management (Aureli & Supino, 2017:103). Killian and McManus (2015:539) observe that despite the significant growth in the engagement between brands and online consumers using social media platforms, very little research has been conducted in this area.

There is a particular dearth of literature that deals with the models and frameworks that companies can integrate into their strategic marketing strategies to manage UGC and other social media communications (Killian & McManus, 2015:539). Nicoli and Papadopoulou (2017:326) notably assert that additional strategies to manage UGC such as response strategies, timing of responses and managing the reputation of the brand need to be integrated into a strategic marketing and communication strategy.

Aureli & Supino (2017:88) state that the majority of the studies involving UGC and its influence on brand equity has been conducted from a monitoring perspective and there are no clear formalised strategies to deal with the influence of UGC. Notably, they add that there is an absence of specialised skills within companies to deal with UGC, a view supported by Nicoli & Papadopoulou (2017:323), and strategies are primarily reactive, as opposed to being proactive, when managing UGC and its effects.

Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018:1) assert that as UGC continues to increase its influence on consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour, companies need to develop a communication strategy that will manage the influence of UGC on the reputation of the brand accordingly. Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018:2) propose a model that is based on the SERVQUAL model (Parasurman et al., 1985), and it is used to measure the gap between consumer expectations and the perceptions of the service received.

The proposed gap analysis of the online reputation model by Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018:4) has three components, while the main component of the model is a communication framework that attempts to manage consumer perceptions better than competitors. These perceptions emanate from the differences between expected and perceived service. The communication framework has therefore been formulated to manage the online brand equity and reputation of the brand in a generic sense, and not within the context of the CBBE dimensions. See Fig 2.6 below:

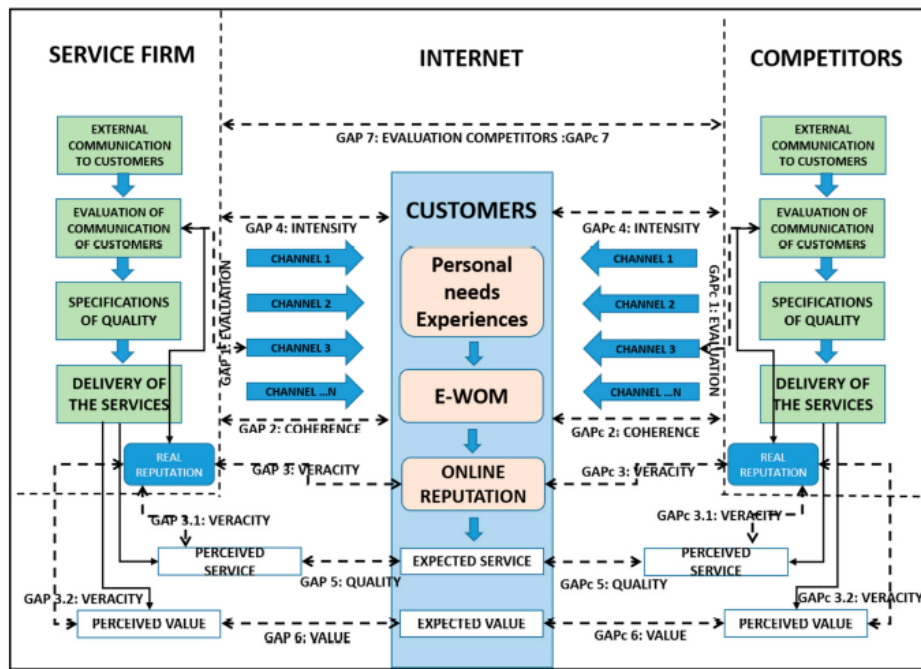
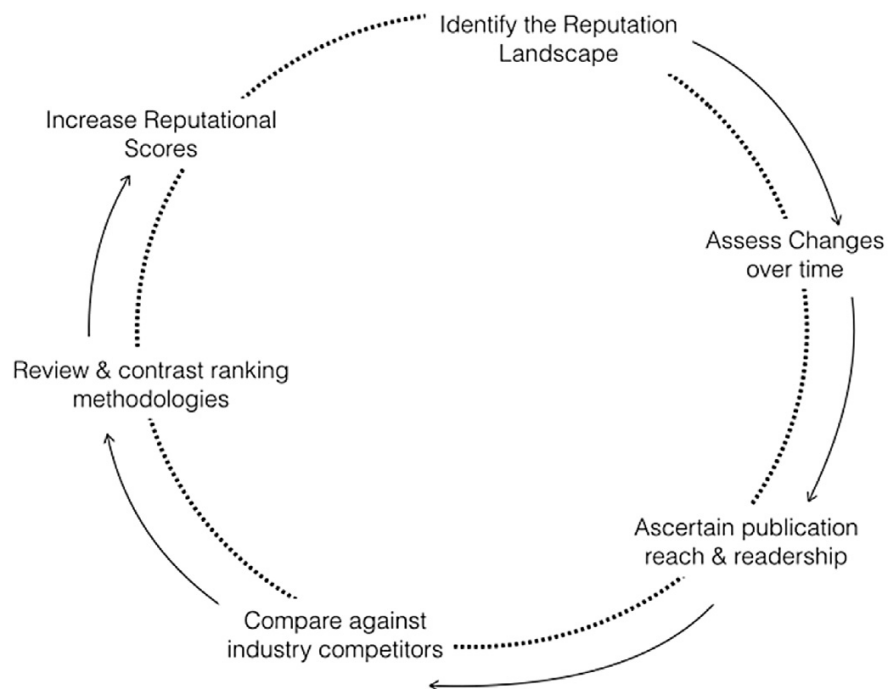


Figure 2.6: Gap analysis of the online reputation (Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018:4))



Baka (2016:158) proposes a conceptual model to manage the influence of UGC on the reputation of hotel brands within the tourism industry. The purpose of the model is to highlight the need to improve managerial insights and modify strategies for the management of UGC and its influence on a brand. The model is based on an integrative approach that entails the monitoring of UGC using various technological tools.

The purpose is for a company to be proactive in its engagement with UGC and implement an appropriate reactive strategy (Baka, 2016:160). Baka (2016:160) concludes that the conceptualisation and use of the model has highlighted the importance of implementing one integrated business strategy towards managing the influence of UGC, encompassing both online and offline strategies.



**Figure 2.7: A conceptual model towards managing online reputation, inspired by Fombrun (1996) and adapted in the context of UGC (Baka, 2016:160).**

A deficiency of this model is that its focus is primarily on the management of corporate reputations with a particular focus on reputation rankings within the travel and tourism sector. The conceptual model is

also modelled around UGC that emanates solely from TripAdvisor, hence its specificity to the tourism sector (Baka, 2016:160).

Gu and Ye (2014:579) assert that the influence of UGC within the travel industry is growing rapidly and companies are adopting an active role to engage with consumers. Their research was conducted from a company perspective, whereby the effectiveness of company responses to UGC was measured in relation to consumers' perceptions of the response received, and the associated customer satisfaction levels. Gu and Ye (2014:571) notably state that dealing with UGC is an essential component in a company's communication strategy; however, very little literature exists on how to deal with UGC.

A panel data model was developed by Gu & Ye (2014:570) to measure the efficacy of management responses, within the context of negative UGC. Their findings suggest that a high degree of variability exists in terms of consumer perceptions of the company responses. Another notable outcome from the use of the model was the observation of the negative impact of the company's response on other online consumers' perceptions. It was found that because of their exposure to the company's response, the perception of these consumers was also altered, which has implications for the CBBE also being negatively affected (Gu & Ye, 2014:579). A deficiency of the model is that it only based on repeated reviews of the same hotel. It is also only based on the response of management, which is then measured for heterogeneity using regression analysis (Gu & Ye, 2014:574).

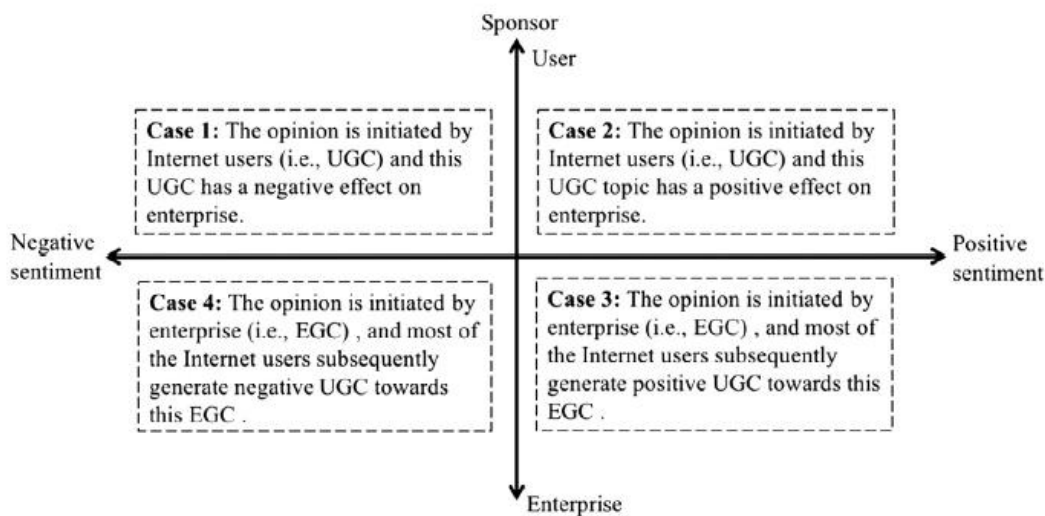
Lim et al. (2020:932) proposed a model using hierarchical regression analysis, with brand equity and social media activity outcomes as the dependent and independent variables respectively. Social media outcomes are described as being online tactics that a company employs to retain its competitiveness. These online tactics are categorised into social media outcomes, and are aligned with the company's marketing strategies to maintain its brand equity.

The model of Lim et al. (2020:927) is designed on the premise that companies have limited knowledge of the efficacy of social media strategies, contributing to inefficiencies in the allocation of their resources. The model highlights which social media strategies a company needs to employ to target a specific online consumer, to achieve a particular social media outcome, and in so doing integrate these into their social media marketing strategies to build brand equity (Lim et al., 2020:927). A major drawback of the model is that it does not measure the influence of UGC on brand equity – the model focuses predominantly on FGC and its impact on the profitability of the firm (Lim et al., 2020:934)

Qu et al. (2019:1) elucidate that the influence of UGC, particularly negative UGC, is well-documented in literature and has contributed to companies having to respond using FGC or EGC (enterprise-generated content). The study measures the influence of an interactive EGC-UGC model to control the proliferation of negative UGC. The model of UGC propagation is based on the assumption that when users post

UGC that is product- or service-related, it is exposed to other users, who then form perceptions about the UGC (Qu et al., 2019:5), which results in the UGC being shared, contributing to propagation.

FGC or EGC is then subsequently generated in an attempt to manage or influence the negative UGC. The model categorises the UGC propagation into four stages, based on the EGC-UGC influence and the opinion sponsor. The model of UGC propagation reveals the most optimal methodology for using EGC or FGC to manage and diffuse negative UGC. Qu et al. (2019:16) indicate that the response speed of EGC, increasing the quantity of the EGC, as well as increasing the frequency of interactions between the company and the user, assists with negative UGC diffusion. A flaw of this model is that it focuses primarily on negative UGC and does not include the influence of positive UGC. An additional drawback is that the model categorises UGC into only product- or service-related UGC and not brand-related UGC, therefore excluding various dimensions of brand equity (Qu et al., 2019:5).



**Figure 2.8: Four cases of opinion propagation – Model of UFC propagation (Qu et al. (2019:4).**

Manaman et al. (2016:94) proposed an online reputation monitoring system using an N-gram learning approach, which is based on algorithms, to monitor the reputation of a company. The model is based upon a sentiment analysis process, which categorises the attitude of an online user who has generated UGC. Using a Likert-type scale, the content is polarised into positive, negative, neutral and irrelevant UGC. The results are then analysed to ascertain how the UGC could affect the perceptions of online consumers and the reputation of the company (Manaman et al., 2016:99). The deficiency of this model is that it is designed on UGC emanating predominantly from Twitter and therefore does not consider

many other social media platforms. Also, the algorithm used is modelled solely around the name of the company, and not on a more varied algorithm for tracking brand-related UGC (Manaman et al., 2016:94).

The models reviewed reflect various commonalities and tendencies, in terms of managing the influence of UGC on the reputation of the company and the associated brand equity. Many of the models focus on the monitoring, classification and control of the spread of UGC. There are limited models in literature that focus on the response strategies that need to be employed to manage UGC and its effects on CBBE. The model proposed by Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2018:4) is potentially the most comprehensive as it advances a modelling process that alters the CBBE of online consumers. However, the design of the model is intrinsically not focused on CBBE, but its focus attempts to alter consumer perceptions within the context of service quality gaps, in relation to that of competitors. Additional considerations evident in literature regarding the modelling of the various frameworks, speed of response, quantity of FGC content and the frequency of interaction with the consumer are all seemingly important brand-related factors that assist with managing UGC and its influence.

Research studies involving UGC and its influence on various CBBE dimensions, as well as Keller's brand resonance model (Keller, 2001) are well documented, which align with the theoretical and methodological framework of this study. A recurring and critical recommendation is that any proposed model or framework to manage UGC and its effects on CBBE needs to be integrated into the strategic marketing and communication framework of the company. There is no evidence in the literature of a strategic communication framework to manage the influence of UGC on CBBE, which is the primary objective of this study.

### **2.13 Literature gap and contribution of the study**

Keller (2010:57) underscores the love-hate relationship that exists between researchers and practitioners alike, in the manner in which brand equity is conceptualised. Brand equity as a variable has magnified the significance of the brand when designing marketing strategies, and stimulated researchers' interest in this phenomenon – this represents the “love” dimension. The “hate” dimension is reflected in the multifarious ways in which brand equity is defined, measured, and conceptualised (Keller, 1993:2). This literature review reflects the various perspectives from which brand equity can be measured, with Aaker's (1991) consumer-based perspective and Keller's (1993) theories being the most popular within the literature. Keller's (2001) conceptualisation of CBBE dimensions into the brand resonance model is arguably the most popular and commonly researched brand equity model in recent years.

Previous studies that have measured the influence of UGC on CBBE and its variables have all concluded that UGC influences CBBE, albeit in a nomological manner. The influence of UGC on CBBE variables displayed variances with regards to the specific CBBE variable being studied and the industry within which the study was conducted. Positive and negative UGC also displayed varying effects on CBBE (Zia et al., 2022:124; Rachna & Khajuria, 2017:7), with inconclusive evidence available as to whether positive or negative UGC exerted a greater influence on CBBE (Christodoulides et al., 2012:13). However, negative UGC displayed the greater propensity for being shared and the viral speed with which it is shared is faster than positive UGC (Hornik et al., 2015:279).

The combination of the complex nature of the CBBE and UGC variables makes the analysis and management of these two variables an extremely difficult task. UGC, in its absolute form, is a relatively new and unknown variable, and its influence on CBBE variables, as well as its influence on consumer behaviour, has not been extensively researched. Studies involving UGC and various CBBE variables have been conducted within the context of various industries, including the retail industry (Jayasuriya, 2022; Naeem & Wilson, 2020; Pappu & Quester, 2006). Various models and frameworks to manage the influence of UGC, as well as its variables have also been conducted. Kuksov et al. (2013:295) state that despite UGC affecting brand image and impacting on CBBE significantly, no adequate theoretical framework exists to deal with this phenomenon.

A key aspect of their suggested research focus revolves around a need for a deeper understanding and a different perspective as to how UGC influences CBBE (Bruhn et al., 2012:783). The gap in the body of knowledge relates to the absence of a strategic communication framework that retailers could use to manage the influence of UGC on CBBE. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015:43) elucidate that additional research is needed when using Keller's CBBE framework (Keller, 1993, 2009). The strategic communication framework proposed in this study to manage UGC is in accordance with Keller's brand equity pyramid, as this is one of the most recognised models for building CBBE, and all these dimensions are influenced by UGC.

## **2.14 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015:35) was developed to measure the effect of UGC on brand equity and its effect on purchase intentions. This conceptual framework forms the basis of the conceptual model used in this study due to the strong correlation between the variables included in this study. Additionally, the conceptual framework of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015:35) is also embedded in the schema theory, as this conceptual framework aligns with the processing of the incoming information in the form of FGC and UGC, stored knowledge, and the formation of CBBE.

Stojanovic et al. (2018:86) posit that there are similarities in the effect of both FGC and UGC, as they relate to brand awareness (Zia et al., 2022:134) and ultimately brand equity, when modelled on the schema theory (Bettman, 1979; Axelrod, 1973).

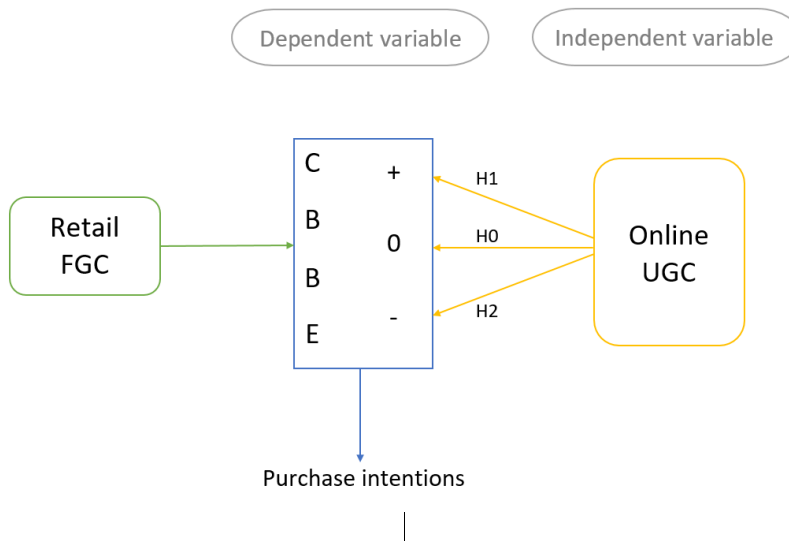
He (2016:27) asserts that since FGC is only positive in nature, while UGC can be both positive and negative, it results in a differential effect on CBBE. Similarly, Bruhn et al. (2012:775) in their study of brand equity explain that schema theory is well suited as a theoretical framework for processing communication stimuli such as UGC. He's (2016) study on the effect of UGC on brand equity was formulated upon the conceptual framework of Bruhn et al. (2012). The schema theory, as a theoretical framework from which to build a conceptual framework to examine the influence of UGC on CBBE, is seemingly the most appropriate theory (Ali et al., 2019:139).

The UGCF (user-generated communication framework) model was used to construct the conceptual framework of this study to illustrate relationship between the UGC and CBBE within the retail industry. The conceptual model is based on two main variables with UGC being the independent variable as it displays a causal effect on CBBE. UGC is also regarded as a form of communication that is out of the ambit of control of the company, hence its classification as an independent variable (Schivinski et al., 2016:190). As CBBE is the primary variable of interest and CBBE is affected by variances in the composition of UGC, i.e. negative or positive, CBBE is regarded as the dependent variable (Saunders et al., 2009:367). This study will be a quantitative study whereby the potential influence and relationship of UGC (independent variable) on CBBE (dependent variable) will be measured, allowing for a larger sample size, to assess the causal relationship between these two variables (Hallgren et al., 2018:12; Rachna & Khajuria 2017:7; Wouters, 2016:64).

The rationale behind the design of the UGCF model is based on various assumptions. The first assumption is that FGC is no longer the most effective means of building CBBE, as firms are no longer in complete control of their FGC (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2013:14). The second assumption is that major retail firms in the Cape Metropole do not have a strategic communication framework to deal with the influence of UGC on their CBBE (Tunçel & Yılmaz, 2020:110). The third assumption is that the effect of negative UGC is diluting CBBE (Malthouse et al., 2016:440) and affecting the purchasing intentions of consumers of major retail brands in the Cape Metropole.

The influence of UGC on CBBE is altering consumer perceptions and impacting on the manner in which consumers respond to the brand. Studies involving UGC and its influence on the CBBE variables are relatively extensive (Rachna and Khajuria, 2017:7; Schivinski et al., 2016:192; Schivinski and

Dąbrowski, 2013:14; Kuksov et al., 2013:295; Christodoulides et al., 2012:7). These studies are all consistent in their findings that UGC has an influence on CBBE.



**Figure 2.9: User-generated communication framework model (UGCF Model)**  
**Source: This researcher**

This is contrary to studies involving FGC and its influence on CBBE, where the literature is limited and often contradictory in nature. There are two main perspectives evident in the literature. Firstly, the influence of FGC on CBBE is measured, and secondly, where the influence of FGC on the behaviour of consumers is measured (Yao, 2021:19). Kumar et al. (2016:7) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2013) found that FGC has a positive effect on consumer behaviour and purchase intentions, while Berthon et al. (2012:269) and Cheong & Morrison (2008:20) reported contrasting results, concluding that FGC content is not as credible as UGC content, and the influence of FGC on CBBE is waning.

Sagynbekova et al. (2020:6), Yi et al. (2019:31), Bashir et al. (2017:756), Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013:150) elucidate that an integrated approach is needed, whereby the UGC is integrated into FGC. This will increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the FGC, thereby reducing consumer scepticism. Colicev et al. (2018:100) suggest that both UGC and FGC as variables influence the spending propensity of consumers equitably, while UGC exerts greater influence in terms of brand awareness.

In line with these findings, with specific reference to the findings of Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013) and Christodoulides et al. (2012), the following hypotheses have been developed:

**H1:** *UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.*

Studies outlined above in the literature review suggest that a correlation exists between UGC and CBBE. Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013:14) and Bruhn et al. (2012:770) displayed evidence of the positive influence of UGC on CBBE dimensions. The latter study also concludes that brand attitude has an impact on CBBE; as UGC positively affects the brand attitude dimension within CBBE, the purchase intentions of consumers are correspondingly influenced. In addition, Christodoulides et al. (2012) also conclude that UGC has a positive effect on CBBE and purchase intentions. Mayrhofer et al. (2020) state that when increasing consumer involvement with UGC, the significance of the impact on CBBE variables are heightened, which is consistent with the findings of Buzeta et al. (2020:94).

The influence of positive UGC on CBBE or on the various elements that constitute CBBE is also well documented, but potentially not as extant as the influence of negative UGC on CBBE. Xu et al. (2021:11) assert that positive UGC alters brand image perceptions, which contribute to the purchasing intentions of consumers. This finding correlates with that of Llopis-Amorós et al. (2019:141) who also state that positive UGC exerts a significant influence on all the elements that constitute brand equity, and similarly influences purchasing intentions, often regarded as the culmination of CBBE. Malthouse et al. (2016:441) and Machado et al. (2019:382) concur as they elucidate that UGC has a positive impact on CBBE, with the former also stating that the effect of positive UGC has a sustained effect on purchasing behaviour. Kim and Johnson (2016:98), while in agreement regarding the positive influence of UGC on consumer behaviour, also conclude that brand engagement and brand sales increase as a result.

This study therefore hypothesises that UGC exerts a positive influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. As the influence of UGC on CBBE can be both positive and negative the following hypothesis has been developed:

**H2:** *UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.*

UGC can be either positive or negative: while positive UGC emanates from positive consumer experiences, negative UGC originates from unsatisfactory consumer experiences (Hornik et al., 2015:273). Bruhn et al. (2012:359) confirm that negative UGC has a negative effect on brand attitudes, which negatively influences CBBE. Buzeta et al. (2020:94) corroborate this finding, concluding that negative UGC is a threat to CBBE. Kim and Johnson (2016:107) found that not only does negative UGC have a more significant influence than positive UGC on purchase intentions and brand engagement, which are essential components of CBBE, but negative UGC has the potential to spread faster and damage CBBE more significantly.



Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011:38) found that negative UGC has a considerably greater negative effect (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013:96) on purchase intentions, and consequently also on CBBE, a phenomenon referred to as brand dilution. This study further concluded that negative UGC has implications not only for negatively influencing CBBE, but also includes inferences on retailer reliability, and this negative sentiment is magnified when the retail brand is unfamiliar.

Therefore, in line with these findings the study assumes that UGC also exerts a negative influence on CBBE. As the influence of UGC on CBBE variables could either be positive or negative, the possibility exists that the influence of UGC on CBBE is neutral (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013:87), whereby consumer perceptions are impartial to UGC and are not influenced by it in any way.

Therefore, as this study hypothesises that UGC can exert either a positive or a negative influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole, the following null hypothesis has been developed:

**H0:** *UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.*

Limited literature exists in which the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE has been measured (Tang et al., 2014:43). Bruhn et al. (2012:782) elucidate that UGC by its very nature can be regarded as a neutral form of communication, as it is seemingly mostly devoid of any firm influence. This perception of neutrality associated with UGC facilitates the view that UGC is more trustworthy and authentic. Tang et al. (2014:43) describe UGC that is neutral as mixed-neutral UGC, as it contains an equal amount of both positive or negative content, while content that has neither positive nor negative claims, is termed indifferent-neutral UGC. Tang et al. (2014:46) conclude that mixed or indifferent-neutral UGC does exert some form of influence on CBBE, albeit indirectly in the form of influencing brand awareness and brand associations. Interestingly, two additional findings emerge from Tang et al. (2014:55): firstly, mixed-neutral UGC is seemingly regarded as more trustworthy and credible and more likely to be evaluated and considered by consumers; and perhaps more importantly, neutral UGC amplifies the positive and negative effects of UGC.

Sonnier et al. (2011:713) underscore that both positive and negative UGC have a greater effect than mixed-neutral UGC, although all three variables exert an influence on the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Mudambi and Schuff (2010:188) found that UGC in the context of online reviews of a moderate or neutral nature was more useful than extremely positive or negative reviews. Morra et al. (2017:15) found that UGC exerted no influence on CBBE variables, as it was regarded as generated by non-expert consumers, and therefore could not be regarded as trustworthy. Negoro and Alif (2020:15)

found that UGC had no effect on CBBE, despite also finding that UGC had an influence on brand attitudes. However, this finding is questionable, considering that brand attitude is an integral component of brand equity (Keller, 2010:61). Yu (2019:10) found that the influence of UGC, while not neutral, was limited in its influence on CBBE to only quality perceptions and brand loyalty, which aligns with Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) where a low correlation between UGC and CBBE variables was revealed.

The literature is ambivalent as to the effect of neutral UGC on CBBE, with varying findings in this regard, ranging from UGC having an effect on CBBE, to UGC having no effect on CBBE, therefore this hypothesis is inconclusive at this stage.

## **2.15 Chapter summary**

This chapter presents the schema theory (Eysenck, 1984; Axelrod, 1973) framework in which this literature study is embedded. The various approaches and perspectives from which brand equity can be measured are presented. The CBBE perspectives of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) are the most popular approaches from which brand equity can be measured. Keller's (2001) brand resonance model with its associated dimensions is considered and forms the axis of the literature review. The influence of UGC on the various sub-dimensions within the hierarchical structure of the brand resonance model is clearly articulated. Various models that are in existence to deal with UGC are evaluated, while highlighting their respective deficiencies. The conclusion is drawn that no strategic communications framework currently exists that can adequately deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE. A UGCF conceptual framework modelled on Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2013) framework outlines the influence of UGC on CBBE.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design and Methodology

The key aim of this chapter is to enunciate the philosophical assumptions that underpinned this research study, as well as introduce the research design, the research strategy and the empirical techniques that were applied in order to solve the research problem. This chapter specifically outlines the research methodology adopted for this study, which is based on the research process of Saunders, et al., (2019). This process delineates the research approaches and techniques that were used to achieve the research requirements of this study. A mono-method quantitative research methodology was utilised, and the data was collected using self-administered online surveys, distributed according to a simple random sampling method.

As UGC as a social phenomenon and its influence on CBBE are not within the control of the researcher, and a mathematical and scientific analysis was required to measure the influence of UGC on CBBE, a quantitative research method was adopted to complete this study.

When conducting systematic research, it is imperative to have an initial understanding of the nature of the knowledge applied to the phenomena under study, and the logical relationships that exist between the variables (Saunders et al., 2019:79). The researcher thus has to have clear epistemological, ontological and axiological positions before a research framework can be developed for the study (Saunders et al., 2009:106).

#### **3.1 The research paradigms: Ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological considerations**

According to Saunders et al. (2019:138), a paradigm is defined as “a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted”. Social theory can be conceived in terms of four paradigms based upon various sets of theoretical assumptions that researchers can make (Saunders et al. 2019:138). These four assumptions are objectivist, subjectivist, regulatory, and radical and four possible paradigms are extracted based on how these assumptions are plotted. These four paradigms that could be used when studying organisations consist of the functionalist, interpretative, radical humanist and the radical structuralist, and each of these paradigms is able to evaluate organisational questions. These four paradigms are embedded in the more commonly adopted epistemological and ontological considerations (Bryman et al., 2014:20), with the functionalist paradigm aligning with positivism, interpretative with interpretivism, the radical humanist paradigm with subjectivism and the radical structuralist paradigm with the objectivist standpoint respectively, based on Burrell and Morgan’s (1985:20) seminal research study.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2012:17) posit that ontology is a philosophical assumption that is concerned with the nature of reality, whereas epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and that reality. A researcher's ontological position shapes the way he or she sees and studies the research objects (Saunders et al., 2016:124).

Two main ontological positions are followed in social research, viz. objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism portrays the position that social entities exist in reality, external to social actors concerned with their existence. Bryan (2004:29) defines objectivism as "an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence". The second position, i.e., subjectivism, holds that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence (Saunders et al., 2009:110), while Morgan and Smircich (1980:497) define subjectivism as follows: "The appreciation of world phenomena is seen as being dependent on the ability to understand the way in which human beings shape the world from inside themselves".

For this study an objective reality exists, as the social phenomena of UGC and their effects on CBBE are beyond the ambit of control of the researcher and beyond his reach or influence. These social phenomena are best measured in an objective manner, whereby the researcher has distanced himself from the research to ensure that the variables observed were free of any bias and influence on the findings, hence the adoption of a quantitative research method (Ataro, 2020:3; Saunders et al., 2009:110).

In this study, the research objects were members of Generation Y who are customers of the various retail business in the Cape Metropole. When this research study was conducted, the researcher decided on what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge in the field of study. According to Crotty (1998:8), epistemology can be defined as "how we know what we know". Al-Ababneh (2020:72) postulates that epistemology is one's perspective of viewing the world and making sense of it. Saunders et al. (2016:127) postulate that knowledge exists in different forms, which range from numerical and textual data, visual data, data in the forms of stories, narratives and even fictional accounts. The adoption of a certain epistemological position has thus influenced the researcher's choice of particular research methods and the kind of data that has been collected and analysed. The epistemological consideration that this study has adopted was that of positivism.

The perspectives of Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:41), Bryan (2004:24) and Grix (2002:178) include an epistemological stance that supports the application of natural scientific methods that are inclusive of the observable reality within social reality or society as a whole, that contribute to the production of

generalizations. The positivist epistemological position was applied to the measurement of the influence of UGC on CBBE which has been measured using quantitative and scientific methods.

When conducting this research study, the researcher took cognisance of his own values to predicate those of his research participants. This was especially important to ensure that the research results could be regarded as credible and therefore the researcher’s choice of the research philosophy and research methods was a reflection of his values (Saunders et al., 2016:128). According to Saunders et al. (2019:134), “axiology refers to the role of values and ethics within the research process”. The researcher’s axiological position thus determined his ethical stance with regards to issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, voluntary participation and withdrawal, plagiarism, honesty, and integrity. High levels of confidentiality and anonymity were thus maintained around all the data that was collected.

### 3.2 The research process

In order to give a proper structure and direction to this study, the researcher adopted the research process onion as proposed by Saunders et al. (2019:130). As indicated in Figure 3.1 below, the research process onion highlights the different choices, philosophies, strategies and approaches adopted during this systematic research process. The rest of this chapter will thus be arranged in line with the layers of the research onion, starting with a discussion of the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choices, time horizon, data collection and data analysis methods chosen.

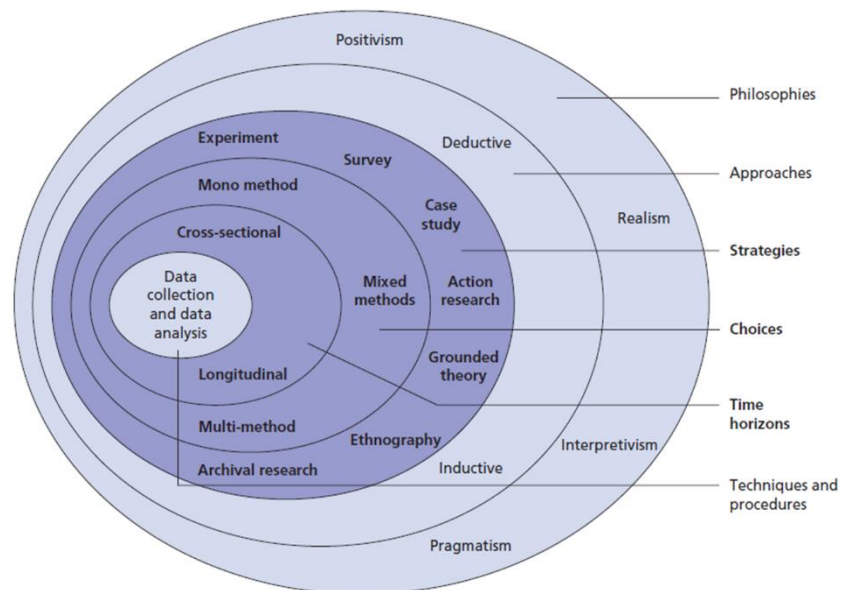


Figure 3.1: The research process onion (Source: Saunders et al., 2019:174)

### 3.3 Research philosophy

A research philosophy is a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed, and used. Each and every research study should be based on underlying philosophical assumption(s) about what constitutes “valid” research and the research question(s) which is/are appropriate for the development of knowledge in a particular study. Saunders et al. (2016:124) describe a research philosophy as a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge in a particular field of study.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2012:17) elucidate that the research philosophy is the most important element of methodology as it provides the starting point and guide to the rest of the research process. The research philosophy has thus guided the researcher to be able to determine the appropriate methodological decisions with regards to the structure of the research, the research design, that is, the methods that were used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data. In essence it can be described as a researcher’s assumptions about the world, which underpin the research strategy, and the methods that are adopted (Saunders et al., 2019:131).

As highlighted in Figure 3.1 above, there are four major research philosophies viz. positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. When conducting a research study, one may adopt one or more research philosophies. This study has assumed a mono-method quantitative approach through the adoption of the positivist research philosophy, which aligns with the approach of Hussain et al. (2020:5); Efanny et al. (2018:201) and Hinestroza (2017:15).

According to Bryan (2004:24), positivism is “an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond”. Positivism is “a perspective which assumes that the properties of the social world can be studied using objective scientific methods” (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007:15). In this study, the positivist epistemological position was used to investigate the influence of UGC on CBBE which was measured using quantitative and scientific methods; the use of a quantitative approach and positivism is emphasised by Bryman et al. (2014:31). This ensured that credible statistical data was generated to test the study’s hypotheses and a quantitative approach was appropriate to determine the relationships between the respective variables, viz. UGC and CBBE, and to predict phenomena as found in previous studies (Eusebius, 2020:65; Dube, 2013:86).

An alternative research philosophy is Bhaskar's critical realism theory which stems from his initial theory on transcendental realism and critical naturalism (Corson, 1991:223). Bhaskar (2008:15) states that

transcendental realism can be regarded as “*objects of knowledge as the structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena; and the knowledge as produced in the social activity of science*”. Saunders et al. (2019:147) posits that critical realism is what is experienced as “sensations” which are images of the real world and not the objects directly. As our senses are receiving these images, we are often deceived about what reality actually is. Critical realism posits two main steps, which are the events and sensations experienced, and the mental assimilation after being exposed to the stimuli (Saunders et al., 2019:147). This displays a strong correlative relationship with UGC as the stimuli, and the processing of this stimuli being CBBE.

### **3.4 Research approaches**

Saunders et al. (2016:145) notes that when conducting a research study, a researcher has the option of either using the deductive approach, the inductive approach, or a combination of the two approaches. This study has adopted a deductive approach. The adoption of this approach is supported by Hussain et al. (2020:5) and Hinestroza (2017:15).

A deductive approach was found to be suitable as this study was founded upon a theoretical framework originating in the sub-fields of UGC and CBBE. The theoretical framework was specifically structured around the theory of customer-based brand equity, specifically on Keller’s customer-based brand equity model (1993) and categories within the model and the influence of UGC on these categories. According to Bryman et al. (2014:9), deductive theory represents the most common approach of the association between theory and research. Ali and Birley (1999:103) state that “in deductivist research there is a well-established role for existing theory since it informs the development of hypotheses, the choice of variables, and the resultant measures which researchers intend to use”. While deduction owes more to positivism and induction to interpretivism, Saunders et al. (2019:154) state that such labelling is potentially misleading and of no real practical value. The deductive approach entailed the process of developing the research questions and this approach is strictly guided by theory and these theories were rigorously tested. The deductive approach was also the most appropriate method that could be used to fulfil this study’s main objective which was to measure the influence of UGC on CBBE.

A deductive approach also aligns itself to scientific research and this was used to measure causal relationships between the respective variables, hence the use of a quantitative research method for the empirical dimension of the study. A deductive approach was therefore suitable to assess the causal relationship between UGC and CBBE, as well as being suitable to test the hypotheses above concerning the influence of UGC on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. The deductive approach also lends itself to greater generalisations and inferences that could potentially be drawn beyond the

geographical boundaries of the Cape Metropole regarding the influence of UGC on CBBE within the South African market, despite the size of the sample used (Saunders et al., 2019:154)

Ali and Birley (1999:103) postulate that deduction and induction are two extremes on a continuum on which researchers position themselves, thus they need not restrict themselves fully to only one approach. As no additional data was collected subsequent to the study being completed to test the veracity of the initial data collected, which is a key requirement of the abductive approach, the abductive approach was not considered (Saunders et al., 2016:145).

This scholarly task has been approached using a wide lens (funnel approach) perspective and over the duration of the study, an increasingly narrow focus on specific variable was implemented (Putnam & Mumby, 2014:246). This assisted the deciphering of important theoretical questions, and more specifically within the context of this proposed study, the potential relationships between various variables. The wide lens or broad theory stage commenced with an initial literature review of the topic and the related variables, as delineated in the previous chapter.

This study was conducted from a communication theory perspective, pointedly from a word-of-mouth communication sub-field (Katz, 1957:61). However, as previously stated, the research study specifically focused on the measurement of the influence of UGC on CBBE, a phenomenon that is embedded in schema theory (Eysenck, 1984; Bettman, 1979; Axelrod, 1973).

### **3.5 The research strategies**

Saunders et al. (2019:189) argues that there are several strategies that a researcher may adopt when conducting a research study. These strategies include archival research, ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, action research, survey, and experiments.

Wiid and Diggins (2013:110) state that the survey method is the most common method of gathering primary marketing information. They also state that the researcher approaches either the consumer or the intermediary directly, therefore facilitating the research process as a result of direct contact with the respondent. It is also well suited for collecting information on motives, opinions, attitudes and intentions of both consumers and enterprises. According to Saunders et al. (2019:193), the survey strategy is usually associated with the deductive approach; and as surveys are able to collect large amounts of quantitative data that can be standardised, this study therefore used a mono-method quantitative approach. The survey method as a research strategy was further justified, as it was highly versatile in collecting the primary data (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:243). The survey as a research strategy was also fittingly designed to allow for comparisons and relationships between variables, which was required for this study. Another major feature of using surveys is that once the data was analysed and extrapolated,



it was used to produce the conceptual model that encompassed the causal relationship between the respective variables. As one of the main research objectives of this study was to prepare a strategic communication framework model for major retailers to use to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE, it further validated the survey strategy as an appropriate research strategy. In the studies of both Hirschfelder (2015:19) and Friedrich (2014:73), surveys were used to measure attitudes based on exposure to particular phenomena, which aligns well with this study where the exposure to UGC and its influence on CBBE was measured.

### **3.6 The mono-method approach**

A mono-method quantitative approach was used for this study, as its epistemological considerations included a positivist method, hence the adoption of a quantitative research methodology. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006:16) define the mono-method research approach as “*a type of research design in which only the qualitative or quantitative approach is utilised across all stages of the study*”, while Al-Ababneh (2020:88) posits that a mono-method is a single means of collecting data. Both these mono-method perspectives are supported by Saunders et al. (2019:179), but they further qualify the mono-method by stating that it is a single data collection technique supported by a corresponding data analysis procedure. Hussain and Ahmed (2020), Hallgren et al. (2018), Stojanovic et al. (2017) and Ali et al. (2019) similarly adopted a quantitative mono-method approach for their respective brand equity studies.

### **3.7 Time horizon**

The time horizon for this study was cross-sectional as this is well suited to the use of surveys (Saunders et al., 2019:212). A research study can either be longitudinal or cross-sectional in nature. Cooper and Schindler (2014:128) state that longitudinal studies, which are repeated over an extended time period, are ideally suited to tracking changes such as consumer responses, but an element of bias is often prevalent in this kind of study which could therefore affect the findings. Bryman et al. (2014:109) corroborate that this type of research design is rarely used in business and management research because of the time and high cost implications. According to Kumar (2011:105), a cross-sectional study is more suitable as it has an extremely simple design, the researcher is able to contact the respondents, and it is an appropriate design to use when studying attitudes, or the effectiveness of an intervention or strategy that has been implemented. It was therefore well suited specifically to measure the influence of UGC on CBBE.

### **3.8 Research design**

Cooper and Schindler (2014:124) state that there are many definitions of research design, similarly there are many characteristics associated with the concept, but they distil the various definitions around a number of essential characteristics. Their interpretation of the essentials of research design revolves around the fact that research design is the blueprint used to outline all research activities attached to timelines, formulated around research questions. It also specifies the types of sources of information, indicates the relationships between variables, the types of information to be collected, as well as outlining the respective timelines. Saunders et al. (2016:164) define a research design as a general plan of how to go about answering the research question(s). Research design specifies the sources from which the researcher collected and analysed the data, as well as the discussion of the ethical issues and the constraints that were encountered. Bryman et al.,(2014:46) describes a research design as a structure for data collection and data analysis which reflects aspects of the research process, particularly the causal relationships between variables. Saunders et al. (2019:176) and Bryman et al. (2014:36) both concur that when adopting a quantitative research design a strong emphasis is placed on the quantitative elements of the study which would entail adopting a deductive approach, coupled with positivism as the research philosophy.

### **3.9 Quantitative data**

The quantitative data was collected using a survey research method by means of self-administered online surveys or internet-mediated questionnaires as the data collection instrument (Saunders et al., 2019:540). Nayak and Narayan (2019:33) suggest that online surveys allow the researcher to reach a large and diverse target population within a short time frame, which would enable easier access to participants within the sample who would not usually be accessible (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:72). Bryman et al. (2014:106) suggest that self-administered online surveys still need to be designed with a high degree of rigour, as with conventional surveys. These internet-mediated questionnaires were distributed using Survey Monkey from an online database, where the data collected was monitored in real time, which allowed for faster analysis and recording.

### **3.10 Data collection**

The type of data collected for this study can be classified as categorical data (Kaur et al., 2018:61), as it cannot be accurately quantified using numerical values (Bhattacharjee, 2012:65), though it can be classified into groups or sets (Saunders et al., 2019:567). However, categorical data can be further subdivided into dichotomous, nominal, or ordinal categories (Kaur et al., 2018:61). For this study the data

was collected using ordinal or rank categories, whereby numbers were allocated to the various categories (Baak et al., 2020:3) without objective values being added, with predominant use of a Likert-type scale being used. Saunders et al. (2019:567) regards nominal data collection as a more accurate means of categorising data.

For this study the quantitative data was collected using a broad survey of 513 self-administered online questionnaires directed at Generation Y members to determine the extent of the influence of UGC on CBBE. The validity of the responses was controlled by the monitoring of the completion times of the questionnaires. Completion times is an indicator of the accuracy and comprehensiveness with which respondents have completed the questionnaire (Leiner, 2019:242). The average completion for the 513 respondents was fourteen minutes and in exceptional cases where questionnaires were completed within an unusually shorter time, these responses were disregarded and regarded as invalid. A guiding -rule was applied whereby any questionnaires completed in less than eight minutes was regarded as an invalid response. Completed questionnaires were also quality checked for completeness by selecting individual check questions, which were then cross-checked against follow-up questions to ensure response validity (Saunders, et al., 2016:452).

This representative sample size ensured that sufficient data was collected to draw findings that could be generalized to the population (Bryman et al., 2014:168). The sample size was determined using online sampling software Raosoft.com (Raosoft, 2019). The sample size chosen ensured an acceptable confidence level of 95% (see sampling size section), a confidence level supported by Smith and Albaum (2010:135).

The primary data collected during the quantitative component of the study was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics ensured that the variables were numerically described and compared (Saunders et al., 2016:527). The use of descriptive and inferential statistics in the measurement of UGC on CBBE was well justified, based on Wouters (2016:101) where each of the dimensions of CBBE was measured using descriptive statistics, and the negative impact of UGC on CBBE was measured using inferential statistics. In Hirschfelder's study (2015:19) it is also stated that in the field of marketing the use of descriptive statistics is common practice. According to Van Elst (2019:41) one of the important uses of inferential statistics is to "estimate the plausibility or likelihood of hypotheses given the observational evidence for them". In this study it is hypothesised that UGC does significantly affect the CBBE of major retail brands; however, through the use of inferential statistics, predictions or inferences about a population were drawn through the analyses of a sample (Hirschfelder, 2015:125). As CBBE is a perception-based phenomenon, the inferential statistics for the survey questionnaire that deal with perceptions will be factor analysis. This method was used to identify

the various dimensions affecting CBBE, which will be followed by the reliability analysis method to determine the reliability of the factors chosen (Matsunaga, 2010:99).

Reliability is the degree to which a measuring instrument provides consistent results (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:283), hereby ensuring that results are consistent and accurate. To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the three constructs being measured Cronbach's Alpha scores were used (Malhotra & Birks, 2006:313). The Cronbach's Alpha scores depicting the reliability of the research instrument is discussed in chapter four.

Saunders, et al., (2016:451) asserts that a robust research instrument coupled with a well conceptualised research design significantly contributes to the validity of the findings of the research findings. The research design adopted for this study was the research process onion by Saunders, et al., (2019) which is a commonly adopted research design, hence the validity of the research findings. The internal validity relates to the ability of the questionnaire to measure what needs to be measured, while the content validity ensures that adequate coverage of the research objectives was attained (Saunders, et al., 2016:450). Based on the the literature reviewed and the components that constitute brand equity, the research instrument incorporated both internal and content validity into its design (Saunders, et al., 2016:450).

A selection of possible questions to be included in the questionnaire of the self-administered online survey is included in Appendix A. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Bhattacharjee (2012:48) states that Likert-type scales allow for more specificity, and it also makes allowance for neutrality in terms of the respondents' choice within the questionnaire. The over-arching design of the questionnaire was modelled on measuring the influence of the three variables viz positive, negative and mixed-neutral UGC and its corresponding effects on CBBE. The questionnaire commenced with a combined set of filter and list questions (Saunders, et al., 2016:457) to ensure respondent applicability of the questionnaire. These filter questions related to the various social media and digital platforms that the respondent uses, degree of exposure to UGC, time spent online and spending patterns. A high degree of UGC involvement was a requirement in order for the respondent to be able to respond to the questions relating to the UGC dimensions, and in no way resulted in any bias within the data. A series of category questions which are well suited to collecting the demographic characteristics of respondents was then used (Saunders, et al., 2016:455). The relevant data measuring the influence of UGC on CBBE was collected using a five-point Likert-type rating scale. This type of design is appropriate for measuring the specific opinions of respondents, based on how strongly they agree or disagree with various statements (Saunders, et al., 2016:457). A series of questions modelled on the components that constitute CBBE formation informed

the design of the questionnaire, and this was used to determine the influence of positive, negative and mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE.

### 3.11 Population and Sampling

Bhattacharjee (2012:65) defines a population “as all people or items with the characteristics that one wishes to study”, a view shared by Cooper and Schindler (2011:364) who express the perspective that it is the total collection of all the elements about which we wish to draw conclusions or inferences. Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:283) make reference to the target population as the totality of all the cases that comply or conform to some designated specification. The target population for this study are members of Generation Y who are online shoppers, are active on social media, and who reside in the Cape Metropole.

In order to extract the samples for this study, the researcher has adopted the six-step procedure recommended by Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:283):

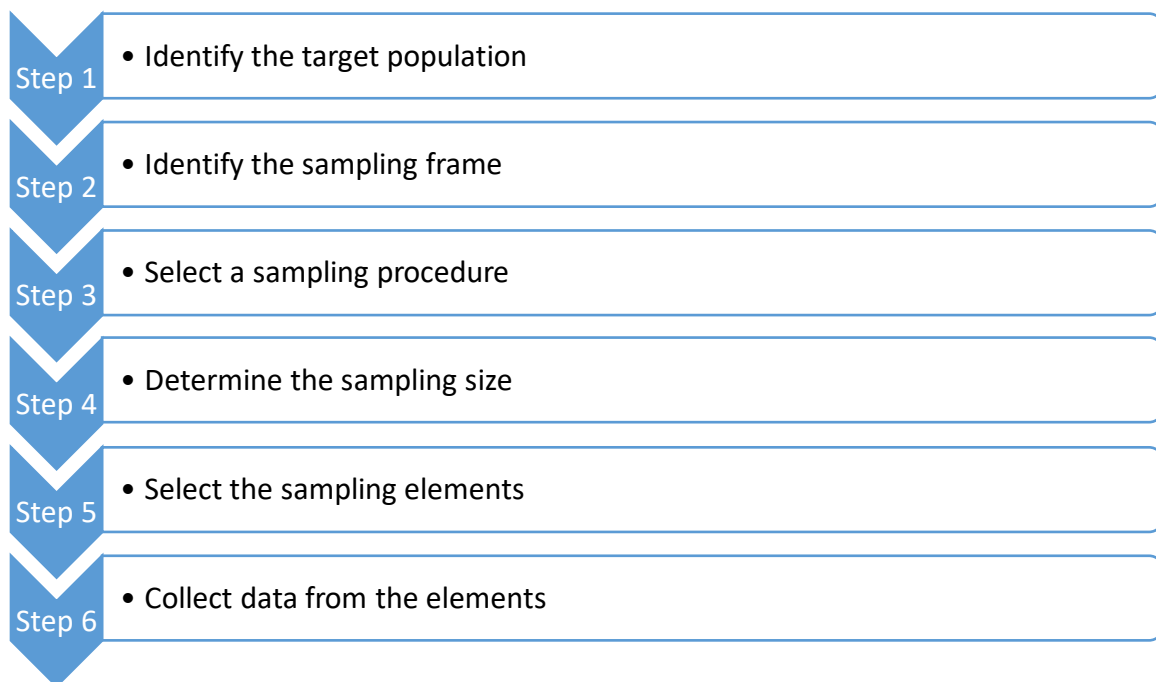


Figure 3.2: Source: Iacobucci & Churchill (2010:283)

The six respective steps in the sampling process have been applied as follows:

#### 1. Identify the target population

The target population will be members of Generation Y who purchase goods and services both online as well as from the major brick and mortar retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. This target population consists of active online users who engage with the various social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The specific characteristics and parameters outlining this target population are discussed below. A significant statement by Bolton et al. (2013:246) is that service-based managers need to monitor and understand the online social behaviour of members of Generation Y as it will signal and alter future behaviours of consumers. The behavioural changes include the altering of service expectations, frequency and intensity of brand engagement, purchasing behaviours and ultimately brand loyalty (Bolton et al., 2013:246).

#### 2. Identify the sampling frame

Kumar (2011:178) describes a sampling frame as a list that specifies or identifies the various elements or units within a target population. He further highlights that if these units cannot be individually identified, a sampling frame cannot be constituted for that study population. Camilleri (2018:16) states that a sampling frame reflects the names of all the items in a universe from which the sample is extracted. This is qualified as a list of the various units within the target population that can be included in the sample, which may include households, institutions, or individuals (Camilleri, 2018:16). A sample is defined by Malhotra and Birks (2006:385) as a “subgroup of the population selected for participation in the study”. Bryman (2012:187) defines a sample as “a segment of the population that is selected for investigation”. Bhattacharjee’s perspective (2012:65) pays particular attention to the statistical processes whereby the subset is extracted from the target population, as well as how statistical inferences can be drawn from the population.

The sampling frame for this quantitative study was drawn from a database consisting of 40 000 respondents who was procured from a commercial syndicated market research company (discussed in detail in Chapter 1, section 1.10.2). Using pre-qualifying selection criteria outlined in Table 3.1 the relevant sampling units were extracted from the sampling frame. Through the manipulation of data in line with the pre-qualifying criteria of the sampling unit, a sample of 513 respondents was drawn.

**Table 3.1: Criteria for respondent selection**

<b>Respondent Profile</b>	
<b>Members of Generation Y</b>	
<p><b>Demographic</b> Male and Female Age 21-40</p>	<p><b>Geographic</b> The geographic boundaries of the location of the respondents should be limited to the Cape Metropole</p>
<p><b>Psychographic</b> Sociable and outgoing Reads online reviews and online service experiences Enjoys receiving recommendations Active on social media platforms e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter etc. Shops online frequently</p>	<p><b>Behavioural</b> Value conscious Price sensitive Pragmatic shopper Cautious in their purchasing decision-making</p>

The sample of members of Generation Y, who were selected from the sampling frame according to their specific demographic, psychographic, geographic and behavioural characteristics, would typify and overlap the population and ensure adequate representation of the sampling population.

These members of Generation Y or digital natives are broadly defined by Bolton et al. (2013:246) as *“all people born between 1981 and 1999 – regardless of their circumstances, actively contribute, share, search for and consume content – plus work and play– on social media platforms”*. Permission for the completion of the questionnaire was secured via a consent letter, and consent was also implicit in the respondent’s willingness to be a member of the syndicated market research company’s database.

### 3. Select a sampling procedure

Since this study has adopted a mono-method quantitative approach, a probability sampling technique was used in selecting the appropriate sample for this study. Bryman (2012:187) describes probability sampling as method whereby each element or unit of analysis has a known, equal, or non-zero probability of being included in the sample (Bryman et al., 2014:170; Smith and Albaum, 2010:11).

Probability sampling, as well as non-probability sampling, have various types of sampling techniques that can be used during the sampling process. A few of these will be discussed below, with the identification and justification of the most appropriate technique that were used for this study. Probability samples are those based on simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling and cluster or area sampling (Saunders et al., 2019:567; Malhotra & Birks, 2006:363). Kumar (2011:185) describes simple random sampling as one of the purest sampling techniques, which is very closely aligned with the definition of randomisation, where every unit of analysis has an equal or known chance of being selected in the sample. Simple random sampling was used for this study as access to the 40 000-member sampling frame was easily accessible (Saunders et al., 2019:309). Every  $n^{\text{th}}$  member within the 40 000-member sampling frame was randomly selected up to a maximum of the targeted number of 1200 respondents. This secured the completion of 513 self-administered online surveys, thereby ensuring a representative sample size.

Systematic sampling involves selecting the sample at regular intervals from the sampling frame; it is a useful sampling method if the population covers a relatively small geographic area, which was not applicable to this study as online users are mostly likely to be dispersed across the entire Western Cape region (Saunders et al., 2019:309). Smith and Albaum (2010:133) state that is sometimes required to segment or divide a population into segments or strata based on various characteristics to ensure that the total population is divided into homogenous segments, then a simple random sample can be drawn from each stratum or segment, which is known as stratified sampling. Kumar (2011:186) posits that stratified sampling is not suitable when the target population is large and geographically dispersed. In that case, cluster sampling is more suitable and then the population is divided into clusters, using geographic boundaries, and random samples are drawn from these clusters, with all units within the selected cluster being measured. This sampling method was not selected as the target population did not consist of a complete list of clusters, but rather of individual cases (Saunders et al., 2019:313).

Non-probability sampling includes convenience sampling, purposive or judgmental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling techniques (Cooper and Schindler, 2011:386). Bhattejee (2012:69) asserts that as the selection of the sample units to be included in a sample are non-random, this does not allow for the calculation of sampling errors and may include a degree of sampling bias, ultimately influencing inferences to the target population. As a sampling frame from which sample units could be selected was available, a selected sampling method using probability sampling, such as simple random sampling, was deemed to be more suitable for this study (Saunders et al., 2019:313).

Smith and Albaum (2010:130) and Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:286) describe a convenience sample as a method that is used based on accessibility and convenience, and the term is often used generically to select respondents following various ad hoc procedures. Malhotra and Birks (2006:364) postulate



that quota sampling may be viewed as a form of judgemental sampling consisting of a two-stage restricted process that is commonly used during street interviews. Bhattarjee (2012:69) defines quota sampling as “segmenting the population into mutually exclusive subgroups (as in stratified sampling), and then a non-random set of observations is chosen from each subgroup to meet a predefined quota”. The quota sample selected therefore needs to display the same characteristics as the population from which the sample was drawn.

Kumar (2011:190) describes snowball sampling as the process of selecting a sample using networks, where a homogenous group of individuals is selected and the required information is collected from them, after which a referral type of system is used, where the first sample identifies other people within the sample frame, who could be included in the next sample, who also display homogenous traits in common with the first sample, which is repeated until saturation point is reached.

A simple random sampling method is therefore the most suitable sampling method to be used to answer the research questions and to achieve the research objectives of this study.

#### 4. Determine the sampling size

The sample size for the quantitative sample was calculated using Raosoft.com (Raosoft, 2019). For the calculation of sample size of the quantitative aspect of the study, a population size of 2 423 893 which represents the total number of members of Generation Y that are based in the Western Cape (Statistics South Africa, 2019). This figure represents the total size of the population and represents the population that was used to secure a representative sampling frame of 40 000 sample units from a syndicated market research company.

Using a commonly accepted 5% margin of error and a confidence rate level of 95% represents a tolerable uncertainty level and a response distribution of 50%. This in turn represents the probability of the expected results and makes allowance for skewness of responses within the sample, and subsequently provides the largest possible sample size of 385 (Raosoft.com, 2019). A sample size of 385 will ensure saturation point is reached. According to Saunders et al. (2017:1895), saturation means that no additional data and no further sampling will alter the properties of the category; a sample size of 385 respondents will therefore ensure saturation point, and is the minimum recommended size for a survey (Raosoft.com, 2019). As stated previously, this representative sample size ensured that sufficient data would be collected to draw findings that would be generalizable to the population (Bryman et al., 2014:168).

#### 5. Select the sampling elements

The sample size of 513 members of Generation Y consisted of males and females between the ages of *21 and 40 years of age, who* displayed characteristics of members of Generation Y in the demographic, geographic and psychographic terms outlined in Table 3.1. The respondents would need to be active online users who engage with social media, and who are exposed to UGC. They would be qualified using the initial screening questions within the questionnaire.

#### 6. Collect data from the elements

A total of 513 self-administered online questionnaires was used collect the data for this quantitative study. These self-administered online survey or internet-mediated questionnaires were distributed using Survey Monkey, an online database, where the data collected could be monitored in real time which allowed for faster analysis and recording. The primary data collected was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics by using SPSS version 27. The inferential statistics used in the survey questionnaire was factor analysis.

### **3.12 Chapter summary**

This chapter outlines a research process which is founded upon Saunders's (2019) research onion. This research process outlines the primary choices, approaches and research techniques that were employed to execute the research requirements of this study. A mono-method quantitative research methodology was employed, and the data was collected using self-administered online surveys, distributed according to a simple random sampling method. The following chapter discusses the associated results of the data collection process, and their implications for the hypotheses and research objectives of this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results Discussion**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter outlined the research methodology and design that was adopted for this research study. This results discussion chapter will be structured around the questionnaire used to collect the data for this study, and the chapter outline will be formulated around the respective questions within the questionnaire (Appendix A). The sections of this chapter align with the various measurement sets and the associated research objectives of the study. The chapter begins with an illustrative depiction and discussion of the demographics of the respondents. This is followed by an analysis of their social media behaviours, their associated responses based on UGC exposure, followed by the influence of UGC on consumption patterns. A detailed discussion of the influence of positive, negative and the neutral influence of UGC on CBBE is then presented. The chapter concludes by providing a summation of the tested hypotheses in terms of acceptance and rejection thereof, as well as the major findings of the study.

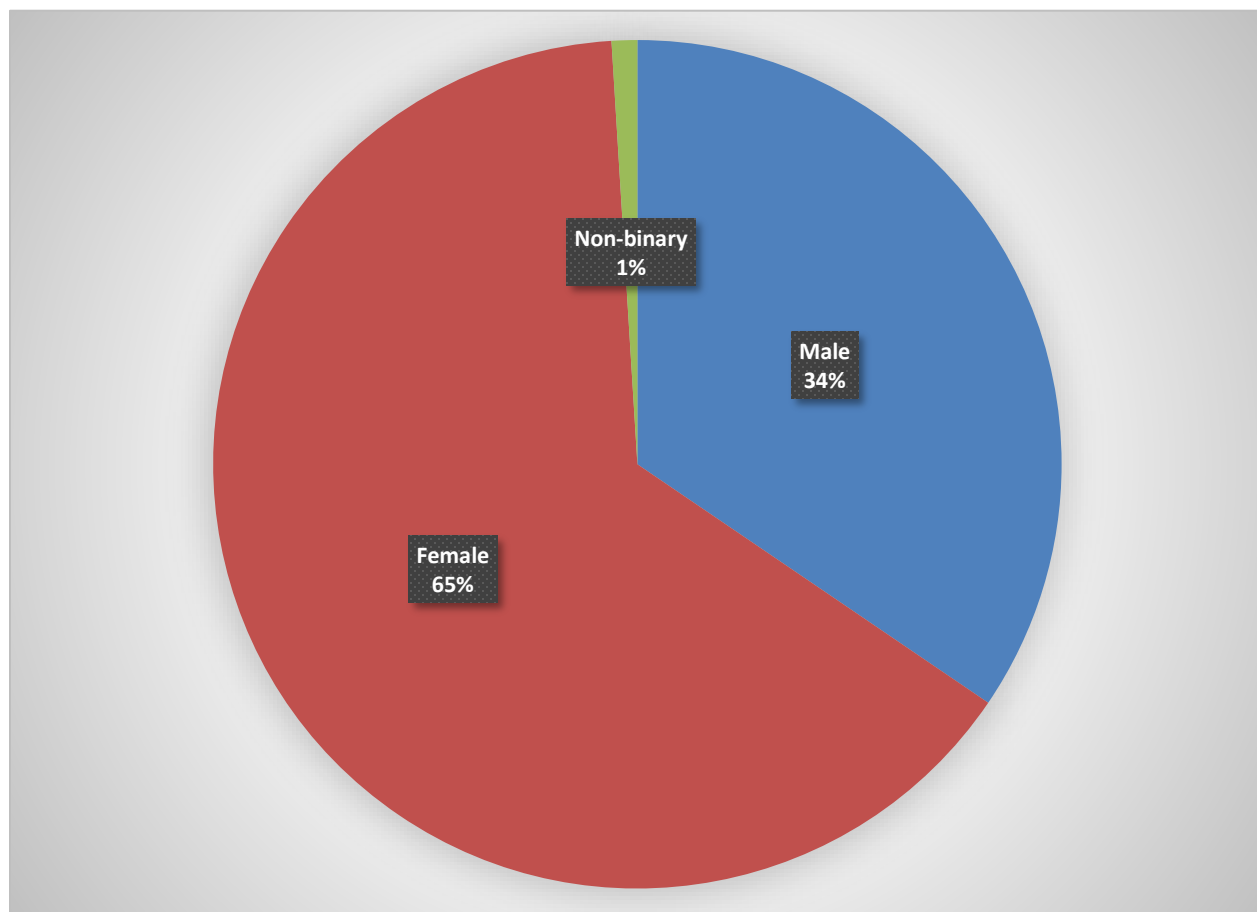
#### **4.2 Data analysis and presentation approach**

IBM SPSS (Statistics 27.0) was the statistical software package used to generate the statistics and analyse the data collected from which various interpretations and inferences were drawn. The various statistical results were extracted and presented in various illustrative formats ranging from pie charts, bar charts and tables, which were then discussed and interpreted. The data analysed was drawn from the 513 Generation Y respondents who completed the questionnaire, the data was analysed using frequency distributions, and descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data.

#### **4.3 Demographic profile of respondents**

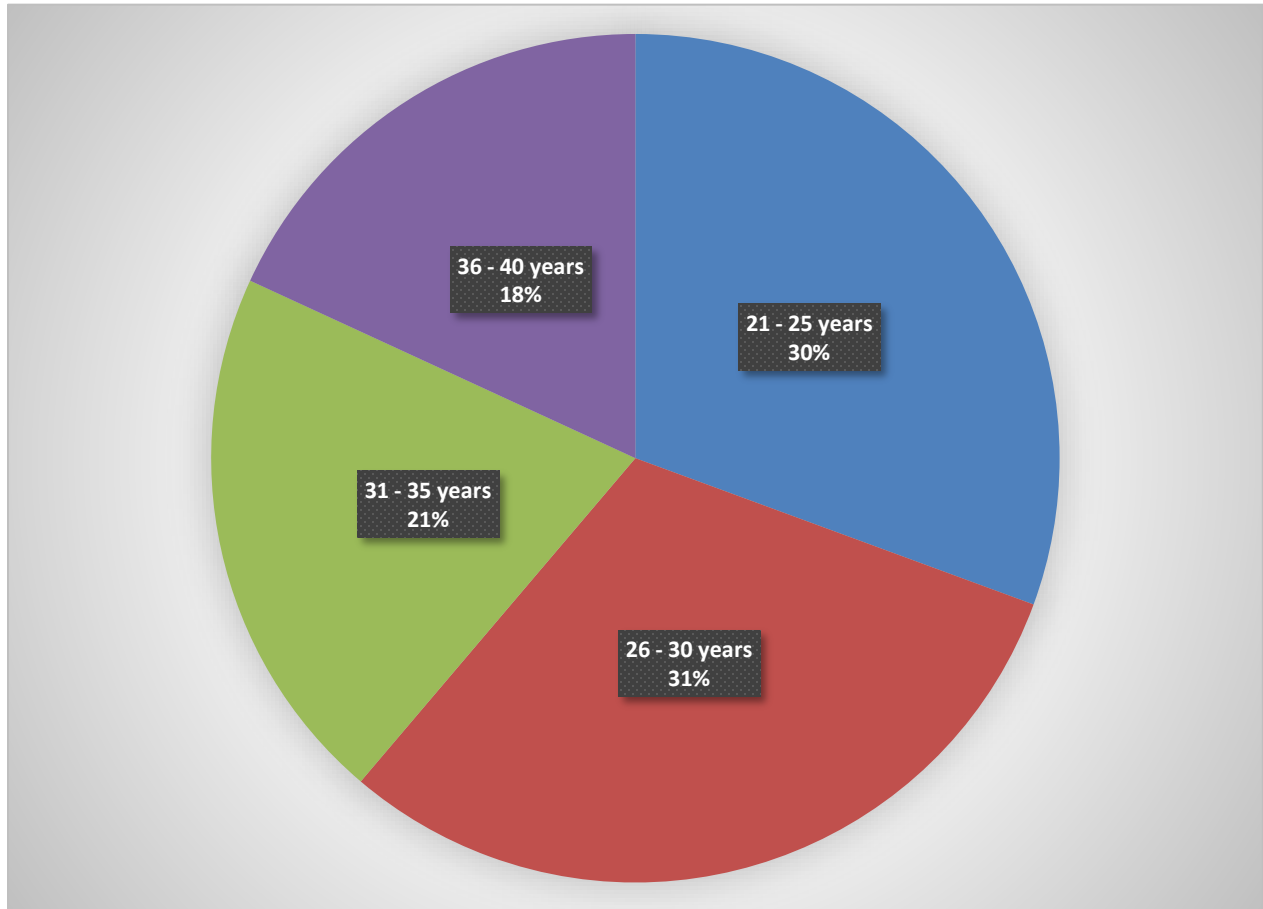
Figure 4.1 below presents a total of 513 respondents who completed the questionnaire, with 65% being female, 34% male and 1% as non-binary. The skewed percentage of female respondents was also found in a study of online shopper behaviours in South Africa by Makhitha and Ngobeni (2021:5), while Ata and Sezer (2021:42) also found that female were in the majority in terms of online shopping purchases, and the frequenting of shopping websites, with 76% and 63% respectively.

Zhang et al. (2020:11) also report that women are more likely to spend more time on social media than men, which could account for the skewed gender representation, as the survey was conducted online.



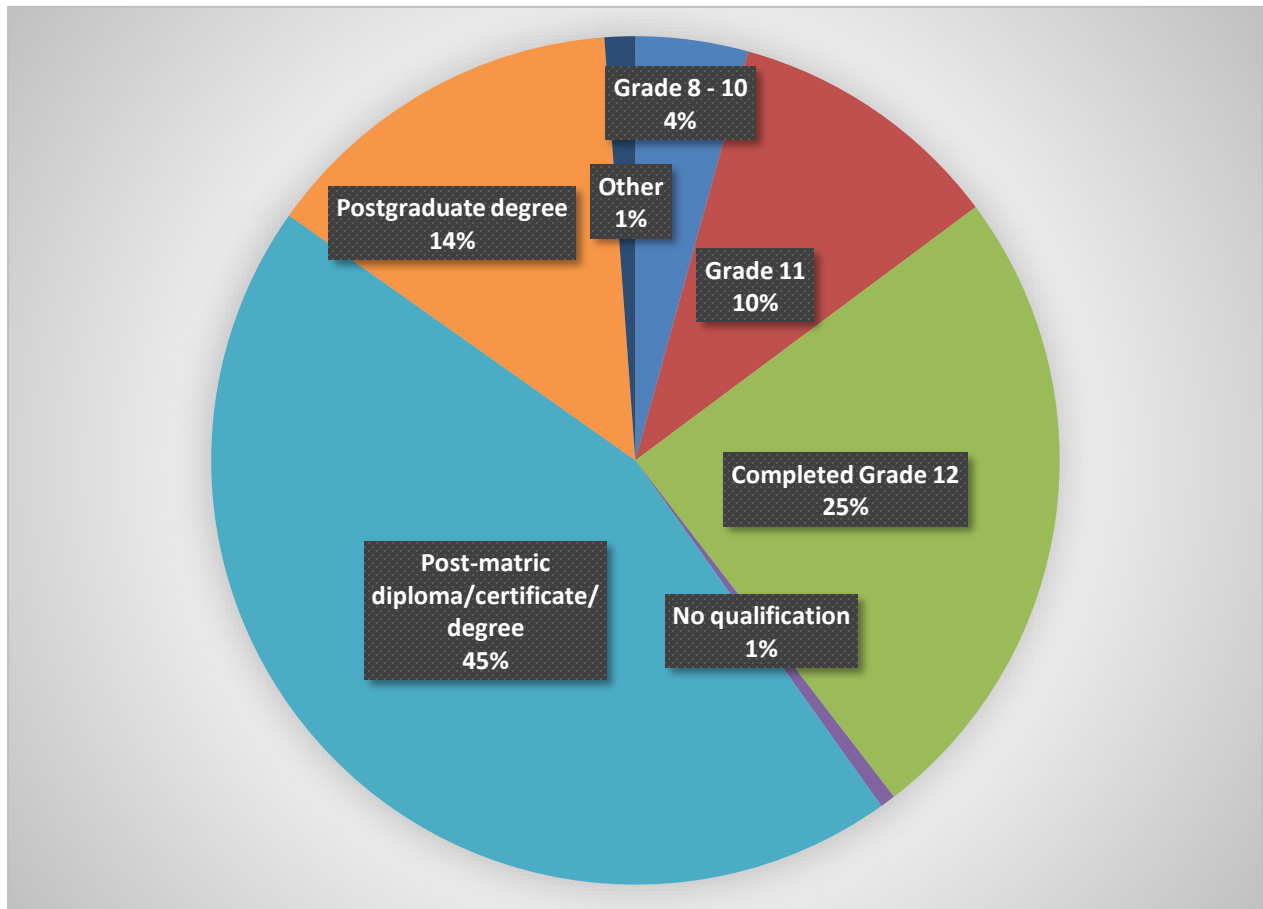
**Figure 4.1: Gender distribution**

The respondents included in the sample were 513 members of Generation Y or Millennials between 21 – 40 years of age (Bolton et al., 2013:246). The breakdown in terms of the age profile of the 513 respondents was as follows: 31% were aged 26 – 30 years, 30% were aged 21 – 25 years, 21% were aged 31 – 35 years and 18% were aged 36 – 40 years old (Figure 4.2).



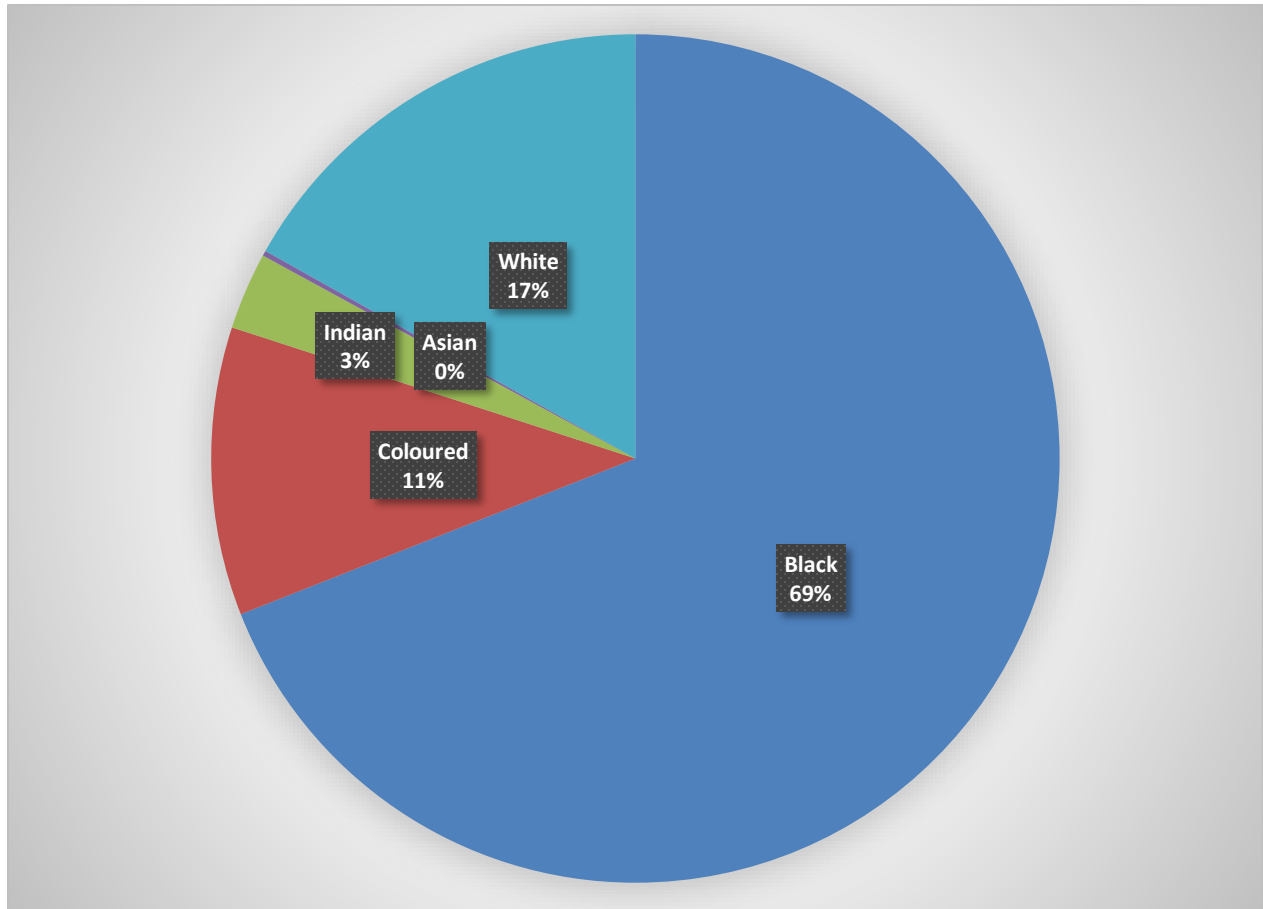
**Figure 4.2: Age distribution**

Figure 4.3 below outlines the educational breakdown of respondents, which indicates that 45% of the respondents completed a post-matric diploma/certificate/degree, 25% completed Grade 12, while only 1% indicated that they did not have any formal qualification.



**Figure 4.3: Education distribution**

Figure 4.4 below highlights the respective ethnic groups of the respondents included in the study. The majority of the respondents (69%) were Black African, followed by Whites who made up 17% of the respondents, 11% of the respondents were Coloured, and 3% classified themselves as Indian. The ethnic representation is well aligned with the population statistics of South Africa, with Black African making up 80.7% of the population, followed by 8.8% Coloured and 7.9% White (Statistics South Africa, 2019).



**Figure 4.4: Population group distribution**

The results in Figure 4.5 below outline the social media platforms used most frequently by respondents, viz. WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. WhatsApp displayed the highest incidence of use with 98.2% of the respondents selecting it as the most frequently used social media platform. The emergence of WhatsApp as the most popular social media platform is aligned with the findings of Zian and Shami (2021:13) where WhatsApp was found to be the most popular and most frequently used communication platform, which can be attributed to its convenient conversational,

sharing, and interactive nature.

Rosenfeld et al. (2018:648) also confirm WhatsApp's status as the most popular social media platform, with the most users and the social media brand with the highest level of brand recognition.

Facebook is used by 94% of the respondents, while YouTube is used by 84.6%. LinkedIn is the least used social media platform with only 53.6% of the respondents indicating its use, predominantly as a job-searching platform (Marin and Nilă, 2021:7).

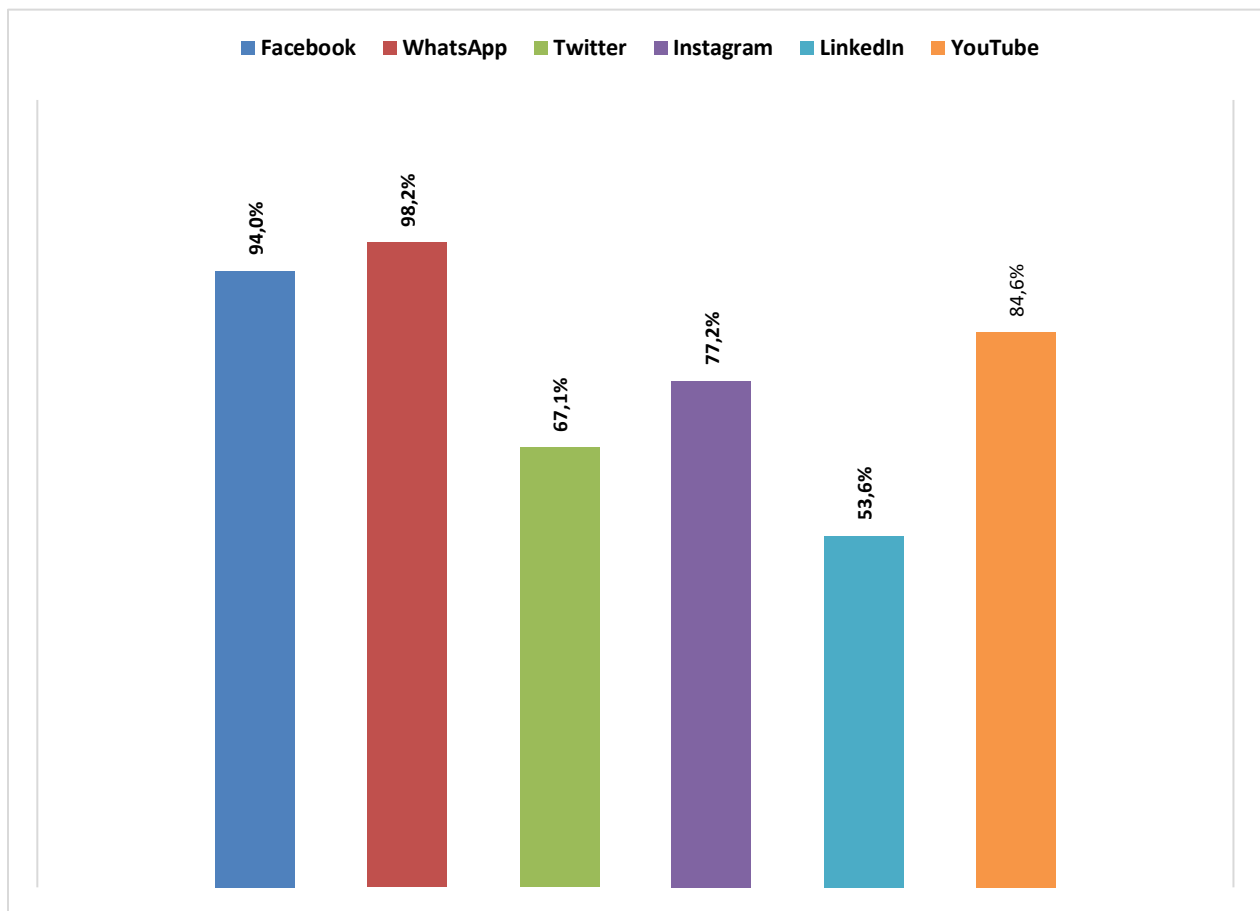


Figure 4.5: Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?



The frequency distribution for all the various digital platforms (Figure 4.6), inclusive of the social media platforms that respondents engaged with, also indicates that the most respondents (95.5%) engaged with WhatsApp. Zian & Shami (2021:13) further highlight WhatsApp’s popularity as a sociable communication platform. This was followed by Google which is used by 94.3% of respondents, while 91.8% engaged on Facebook, 86.5% on Gmail and 83.6% on YouTube. Only 6.6% of the respondents engaged with Daily Motion and 7.6% engaged on Vimeo.

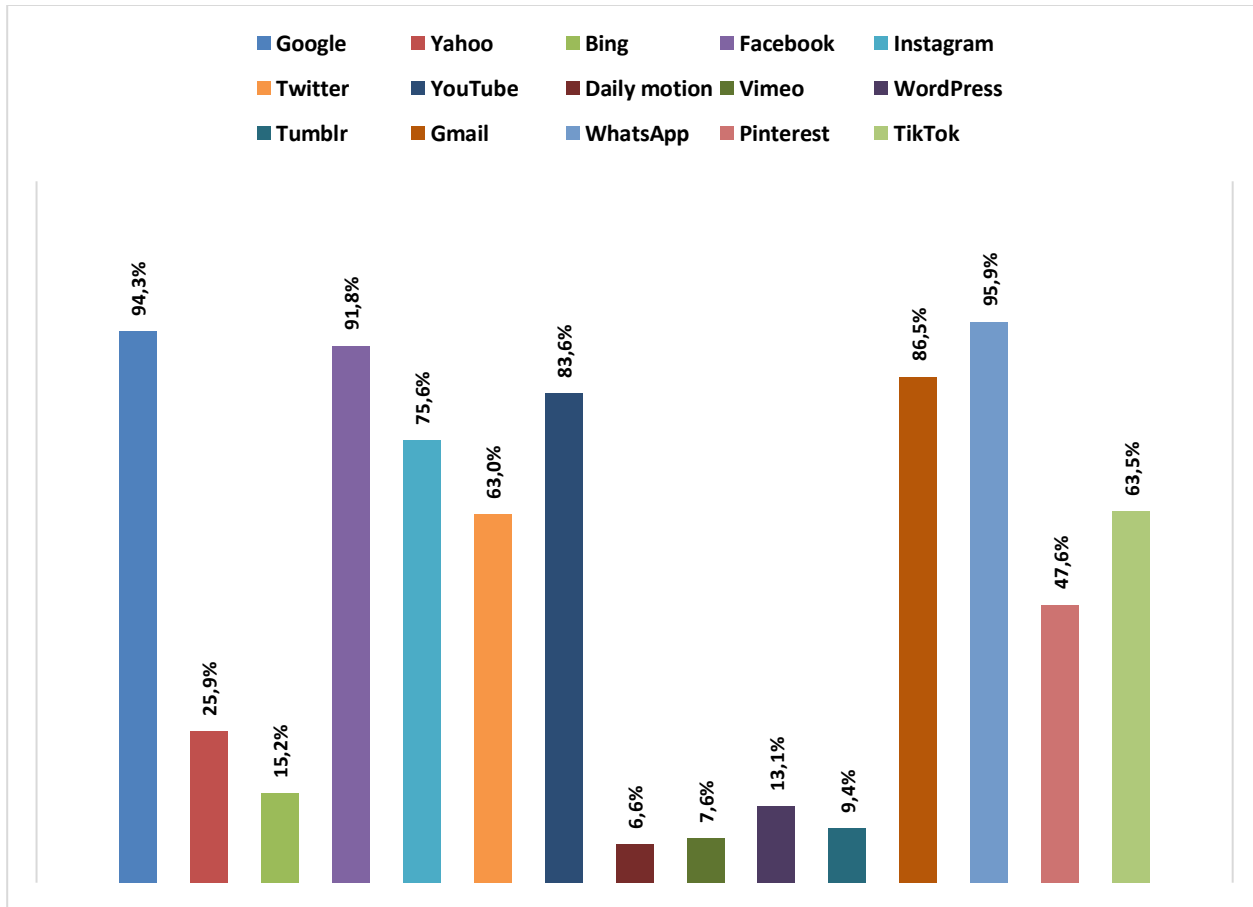
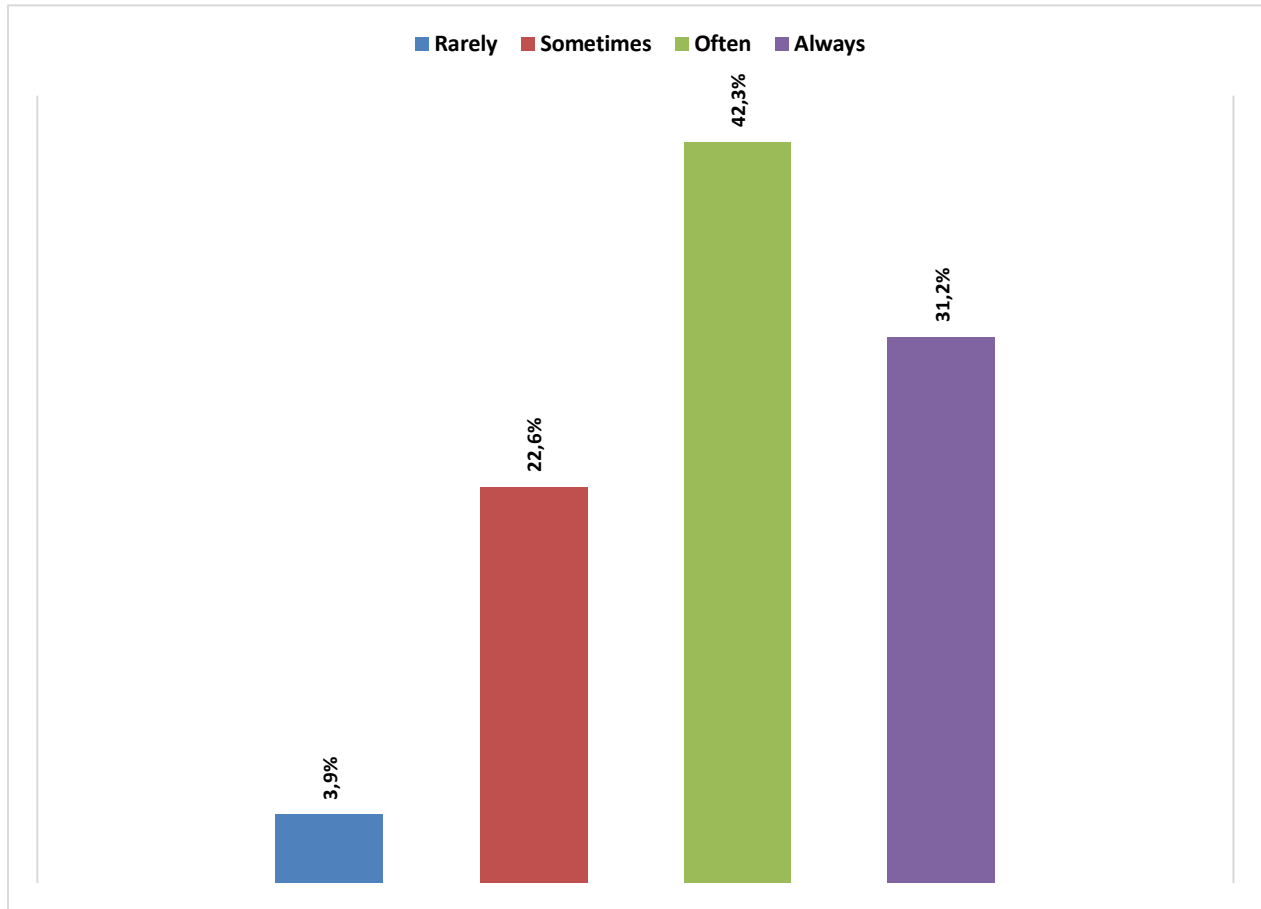


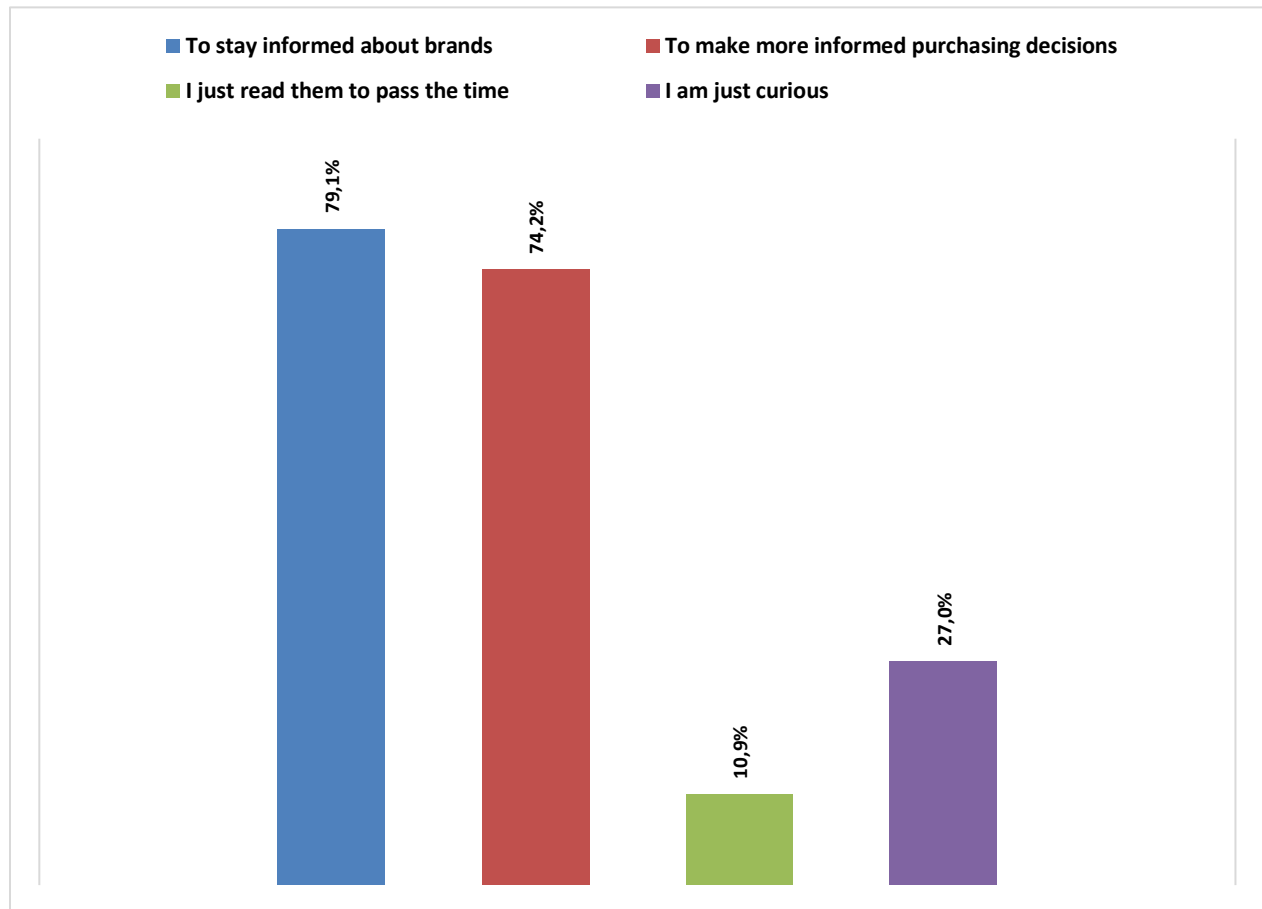
Figure 4.6: Which digital platforms do you engage with?

Figure 4.7 below shows that 42.3% of the respondents often read posts that had been written by other consumers (UGC) that contained service or product experiences, while 31.2% always read posts and only 3.9% rarely read these posts. This indicates that a strong tendency, representative of a total majority of 73.5% of respondents, read UGC content. This is consistent with consumers' information-seeking behaviours in terms of opinions and advice, coupled with the increasing popularity of social media sites (Piehler et al., 2019:1838).



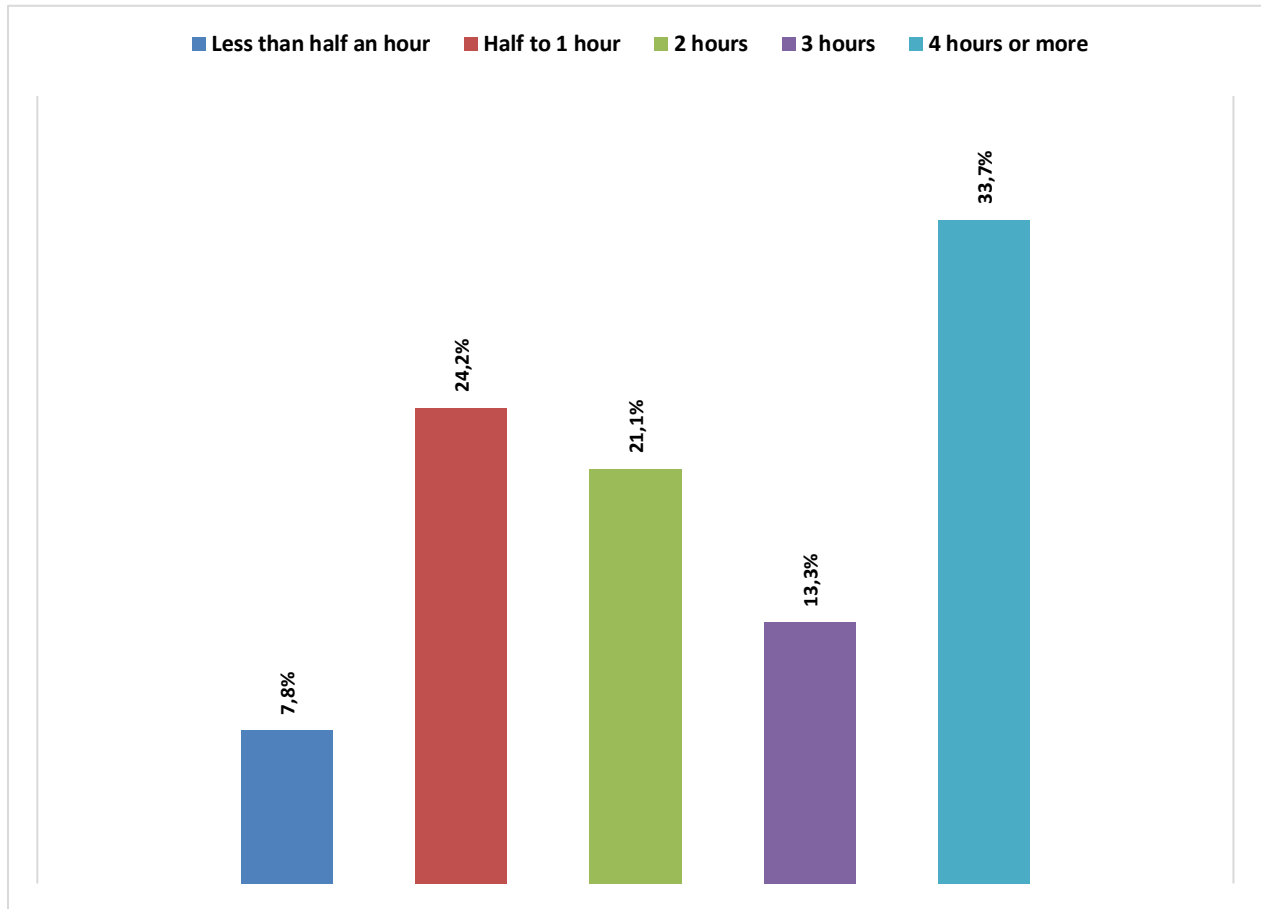
**Figure 4.7: How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences?**

Piehler et al. (2019:1838) expound that consumers' information-seeking behaviour is often brand-, product-, usage-, or purchase-related, which corroborates the finding in Figure 4.8 that 79.1% of the respondents read posts related to other consumers' brand reviews (Singh & Kumar, 2022: 157; Tsai & Men, 2017:6) and service experiences to stay informed about brands. A further 74.2% read posts to make more informed purchasing decisions, 27% read posts because they were just curious, while 10.9% read posts to pass the time.



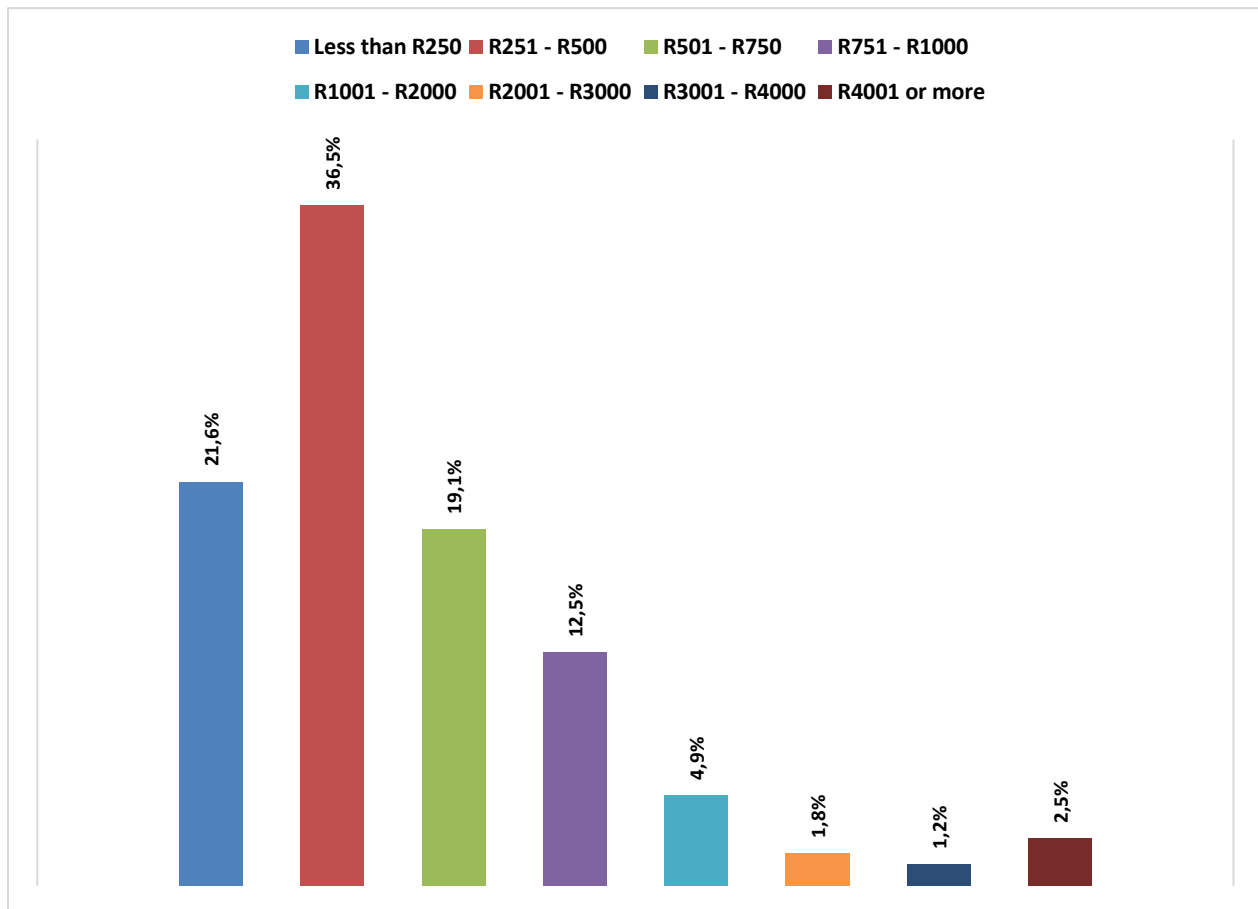
**Figure 4.8: Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences?**

Furthermore, 33.7% of respondents spent 4 hours or more engaging in online activities per day searching for or sharing product information, 13.3% spent approximately 3 hours, 21.1% spend 2 hours, 24.2% spent ½ hour to an hour, while only 7.8% spent less than half an hour engaging in online activities (Figure 4.9).



**Figure 4.9: How many hours do you spend engaging online per day searching for or sharing for product information?**

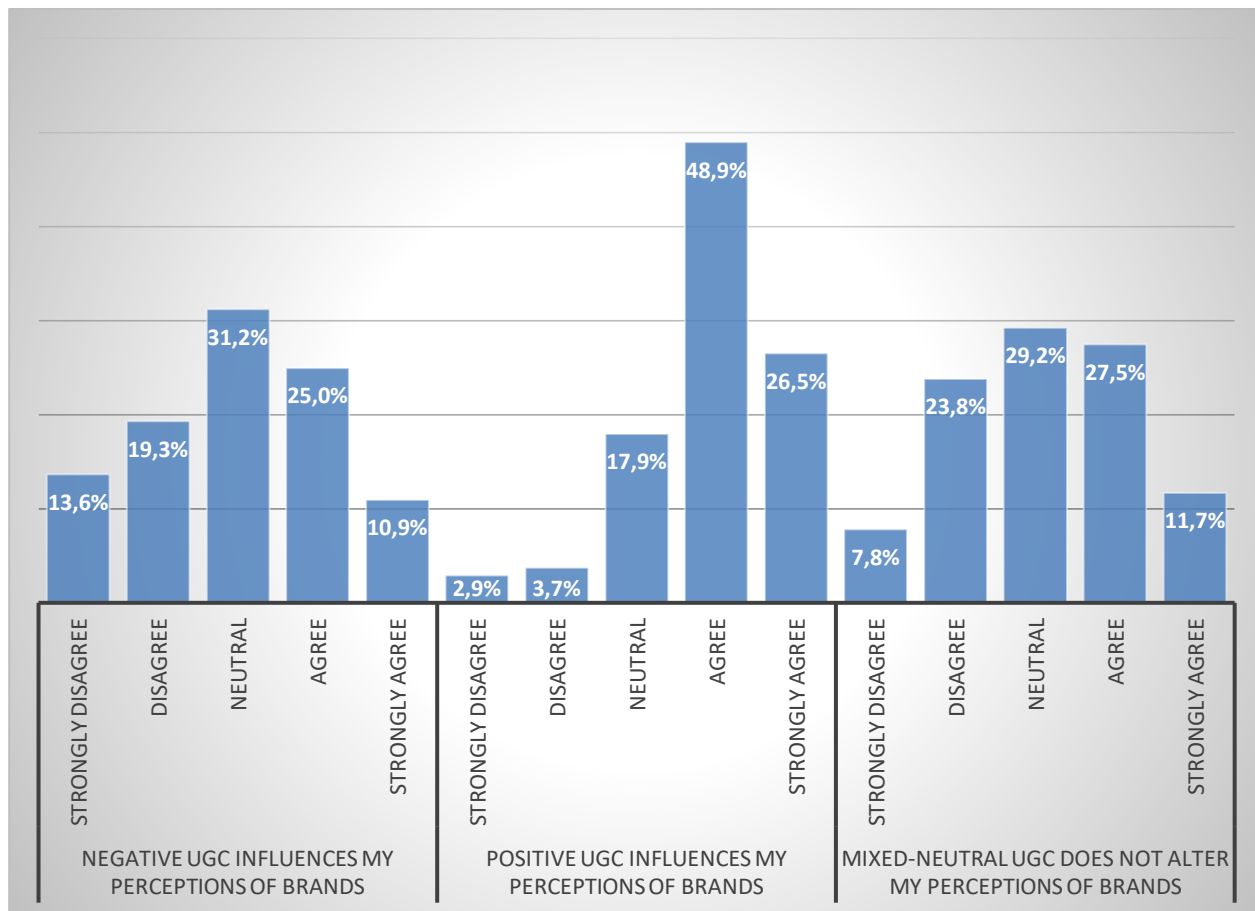
The spending patterns are reflected in Figure 4.10 below, which indicates that 21.6% spent less than R250, 36.5% of respondents spent R251 to R500 on average per month using digital platforms, while 19.1% spent between R501 to R750. The rest of the respondents (12.5%) spent R751 to R1000 and (10.3%) spent more than R1000 on average per month while using digital platforms.



**Figure 4.10: How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms?**

The frequency distribution of the influence of positive UGC on CBBE in Figure 4.11 below shows that 75.4% of the respondents said that UGC positively influenced their brand perceptions; this consisted of the combination of respondents who agreed (48.9%) and who strongly agreed (26.5%) with the statements. The significant positive influence of UGC on CBBE is consistent with the findings of Xu et al. (2021:11), Llopis-Amorós et al. (2019:141), Machado et al. (2019:382), Schivinski et al. (2016:202), Malthouse et al. (2016:441), Kim and Johnson (2016:107), and (Christodoulides et al., 2012:13) who, in their respective studies, concluded that UGC has a positive effect on CBBE.

The 35.9% of respondents indicated that UGC negatively influenced their perceptions of brands; this figure consisted of 25% (agree) plus 10.9% (strongly agree), a percentage significantly lower than the 75.4% who indicated that UGC positively influenced their perceptions. This finding corroborates the findings of Estrella-Ramon et al. (2019:8), Colicev et al. (2018:12), Estrella-Ramón & Ellis-Chadwick (2017:20), Eckes (2016:33), Wouters (2016:146), Daugherty and Hoffman (2014:96) and Park and Lee (2009:65).



**Figure 4.11: Influence of UGC on CBBE**

Studies measuring the influence of negative and positive UGC on CBBE are ubiquitous within the literature, and the findings are conclusive regarding the effects thereof, which contrasts with studies measuring the neutral effect of UGC on CBBE (Tang et al., 2014:54). The influence of neutral UGC on CBBE displayed a higher tendency of 39.2%, which includes 27.5% (agree) plus 11.7% (strongly agree) than the influence of negative UGC on CBBE (35.9%). This high tendency suggests that respondents

indicated that UGC has no effect on CBBE. The findings of Smith et al. (2012:108) display a similar tendency whereby neutral UGC also displayed a more significant influence than negative UGC. The high percentage tendency of neutral UGC contrasts with the finding of Daugherty & Hoffman (2014:95) where neutral UGC had the lowest influence on CBBE. Hallgren et al. (2018:26) conclude that UGC has a neutral effect on CBBE, as UGC displayed no significant influence on CBBE; however, a limitation indicated in their study suggests that the specific nature of the UGC used in the study, viz satirical internet memes, could have influenced this finding.

Tang et al. (2014:55) in their often-invoked study are emphatic in their findings that neutral UGC significantly influences UGC, displaying a tempering and altering effect on positive and negative UGC. They also posit that studies measuring the influence of neutral UGC on CBEE often display inconsistent results, as researchers view neutral UGC as a hybrid between positive and negative UGC i.e., mixed neutral UGC. This current study therefore considered this finding and neutral UGC is viewed as a mixed neutral variable. However, users process positive and negative UGC differently when exposed to mixed neutral UGC (Tang et al., 2014:45). Sonnier et al. (2011:713) assert, on the basis of their findings, that both positive and negative UGC displayed a greater influence than neutral UGC. Khobzi et al. (2018:14) corroborates this finding that neutral UGC displayed the lowest level of influence on perceptions, as opposed to positive and negative UGC within the context of liking behaviours, thereby also reducing brand engagement activities. Contrary to these findings, Mudambi and Schuff (2010:188) found that UGC in the context of online reviews of a moderate or neutral nature are more useful than extremely positive or negative reviews.

In addition, the respondents who indicated that positive UGC influences their perceptions of brands are profiled in Table 4.1 below. These are specifically respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that positive UGC influenced their perceptions of brands. The majority of the respondents indicating a positive influence of UGC on CBBE were females (64.9%), while 30.7% of the respondents were aged between 26 and 30 years and 29.5% were aged between 21 and 25 years. Of the respondents indicating a positive influence, 44.4% had a post-matric diploma/certificate/degree while 22.2% completed Grade 12, while the majority of the respondents were Black (71.2%).

**Table 4.1: Profile of respondents indicating a positive influence of UGC**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	Male	134	34.6%
	Female	251	64.9%
	Non-binary	2	0.5%
Age	21 - 25 years	114	29.5%
	26 - 30 years	119	30.7%
	31 - 35 years	87	22.5%
	36 - 40 years	67	17.3%
Education	Grade 8 – 11	16	4.1%
	Grade 12	46	11.9%
	Completed Grade 12	86	22.2%
	No qualification	3	0.8%
	Post-matric diploma/certificate/degree	172	44.4%
	Postgraduate degree	60	15.5%
	Other	4	1.0%
Population group	Black	274	71.2%
	Coloured	37	9.6%
	Indian	10	2.6%
	Asian	1	0.3%
	White	63	16.4%

The respondents who indicated that negative UGC influenced their perceptions of brands are profiled in Table 4.2 below. These are respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that negative UGC influenced their perceptions of brands. Most of the respondents indicating a negative influence of UGC on CBBE were also females (59.8%) and 40.2% were males, while 34.8% of the respondents were aged between 26 and 30 years and 28.3% were aged between 21 and 25 years. From the respondents indicating a negative influence on CBBE, 41.8% had a post-matric diploma/certificate/degree while 21.7% completed Grade 12, while the majority of the respondents were also Black (67.8%).



**Table 4.2: Profile of respondents indicating a negative influence of UGC**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	Male	74	40.2%
	Female	110	59.8%
	Non-binary	0	0.0%
Age	21 - 25 years	52	28.3%
	26 - 30 years	64	34.8%
	31 - 35 years	35	19.0%
	36 - 40 years	33	17.9%
Education	Grade 8 – 11	8	4.3%
	Grade 12	21	11.4%
	Completed Grade 12	40	21.7%
	No qualification	2	1.1%
	Post-matric diploma/certificate/degree	77	41.8%
	Postgraduate degree	34	18.5%
	Other	2	1.1%
Population group	Black	124	67.8%
	Coloured	20	10.9%
	Indian	7	3.8%
	Asian	0	0.0%
	White	32	17.5%

The profile of respondents who indicated that they were indifferent to the influence of UGC is presented below (Table 4.3). These are the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they were indifferent to the influence of UGC and that brand reviews did not alter their perceptions of a brand. The majority of the respondents indicating that UGC had no influence on CBBE were female (62.7%), while 36.8% were males. The age distribution within this segment consisted of 30.8% of the respondents who were aged between 26 and 30 years, and 26.9% were aged between 21 and 25 years. Furthermore, the respondents indicating that they were indifferent to the influence of UGC, 42.3% had a post-matric diploma/certificate/degree while 23.4% completed Grade 12; additionally, 68.5% of the respondents were Black and 16% were White.

**Table 4.3: Profile of respondents indicating no influence of UGC**

	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	74	36.8%
	Female	126	62.7%
	Non-binary	1	0.5%
Age	21 - 25 years	54	26.9%
	26 - 30 years	62	30.8%
	31 - 35 years	48	23.9%
	36 - 40 years	37	18.4%
Education	Grade 8 – 11	8	4.0%
	Grade 12	27	13.4%
	Completed Grade 12	47	23.4%
	No qualification	1	0.5%
	Post-matric diploma/certificate/degree	85	42.3%
	Postgraduate degree	32	15.9%
	Other	1	0.5%
Population group	Black	137	68.5%
	Coloured	22	11.0%
	Indian	9	4.5%
	Asian	0	0.0%
	White	32	16.0%

#### 4.4 Positive UGC

Furthermore, it can be deduced from Table 4.4 below that the respondents indicating that UGC positively influenced their perceptions, 98.2% used WhatsApp to look for product information, with 94.3% displaying a preference for Facebook, which corresponds with the findings of Sangwan et al. (2021 :150) and Darshan (2018:977), while 84.8% used YouTube (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating a positive influence**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Which social media platforms do you use to look for product information?	Facebook	365	94.3%
	WhatsApp	380	98.2%
	Twitter	259	66.9%
	Instagram	295	76.2%
	LinkedIn	211	54.5%
	YouTube	328	84.8%
Which social media platforms do you engage with?	Google	367	94.8%
	Yahoo	98	25.3%
	Bing	62	16.0%
	Facebook	358	92.5%
	Instagram	293	75.7%
	Twitter	240	62.0%
	YouTube	325	84.0%
	Daily motion	27	7.0%
	Vimeo	32	8.3%
	WordPress	57	14.7%
	Tumblr	40	10.3%
	Gmail	340	87.9%
	WhatsApp	373	96.4%
	Pinterest	191	49.4%
	TikTok	249	64.3%
How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences?	Rarely	10	2.6%
	Sometimes	75	19.4%
	Often	166	42.9%
	Always	136	35.1%
How many hours do you spend engaging online per session searching for or sharing for product information?	Less than half an hour	30	7.8%
	Half to 1 hour	90	23.3%
	2 hours	82	21.2%
	3 hours	56	14.5%
	4 hours or more	129	33.3%
How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms?	Less than R250	80	20.7%
	R251 - R500	144	37.2%
	R501 - R750	75	19.4%
	R751 - R1000	52	13.4%
	R1001 - R2000	17	4.4%
	R2001 - R3000	5	1.3%
	R3001 - R4000	4	1.0%
	R4001 or more	10	2.6%
Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences?	To stay informed about brands	314	81.3%
	To make more informed purchasing decisions	291	75.4%
	I just read them to pass the time	38	9.8%
	I am just curious	100	25.9%

Prasad (2018:405) found that the majority of the respondents (57%) regarded YouTube as being trustworthy, while Sangwan et al. (2021:150) found that YouTube was the second most popular source in their study (93.8%). The preference for WhatsApp as the most popular social media engagement platform, used by 96.4% of respondents, can be attributed to ease of use and versatility across smartphones and other devices (Modak & Mupepi, 2017:51), followed by Google, which was used by 94.8% of the respondents, and 92.5% used Facebook.

Table 4.4 illustrates the respondents who indicated that UGC positively influenced their perceptions; a total of 78% of respondents indicated that they often read posts that contain service or product experiences. This strong tendency consisted of 42.9% of respondents who indicated that they often read UGC posts of other users, as well as 35.1% of respondents who indicated that they always read UGC posted by other users. The primary reasons for reading and engaging with UGC was to stay informed about consumer brand and service experiences (81.3%) and to make more informed purchasing decision (75.4%).

Table 4.4 further indicates that the spread of the amount of time respondents spent engaging in online activities was largely varied, with 33.3% of respondents who indicated a positive influence of UGC on their perceptions spending four hours or more per session engaging in online activities such as searching for or sharing product information. The only other category displaying a significant tendency were those respondents who spent between 30 minutes to an hour online, and 23.3% of respondents fell into this category. The high degree of heterogeneity in terms of time spent online is consistent with the findings of Machado et al. (2019:379). This finding aligns with the tendencies displayed in Jamaludin et al. (2021:58) who also found that Millennials tend to spend more time online. Additionally, de Almeida (2019:41) also found an increased propensity of UGC sharing amongst Millennials, thus increasing the exposure to UGC and the resultant influence on CBBE.

Of the cohort that was influenced by positive UGC (Table 4.4) a total of 57.9 % of respondents spent less than R500 on online transactions, consisting of 37.2% of respondents spending between R251 to R500 on average per month using digital platforms, while 20.7% spend less than R250 per month. This relationship correlates well with the findings of Ansari et al. (2019:9) and Kim and Johnson (2016:107).

With specific reference to the frequency of the statements relating to the influence of positive UGC on brand perceptions, a high degree of generality exists whereby the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements (Table 4.5a). The highest propensity (91.5%) related to brand reliability and the formation of positive perceptions; an integral dimension of brand performance as found by Steenkamp (2016:230). This was followed by 90.4% of respondents who agreed that

positive UGC in the form of brand reviews relating to brand performance resulted in their forming positive perceptions (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:159; Chari et al., 2016:1077).

**Table 4.5a: Positive UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses**

Factor matrix	Positive UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
Q10.1	UGC positively influences my perceptions of brands	N	15	19	92	251	136	387	0,738
		%	2.9%	3.7%	17.9%	48.9%	26.5%	75.4%	
Q10.2	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being reliable, results in my forming positive perceptions	N	3	3	27	192	162	354	0,796
		%	0.8%	0.8%	7.0%	49.6%	41.9%	91.5%	
Q10.3	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand performance, results in my forming positive perceptions	N	1	3	33	201	149	350	0,794
		%	0.3%	0.8%	8.5%	51.9%	38.5%	90.4%	
Q10.4	Positive UGC relating to positive service experiences influence my purchasing decisions	N	2	3	38	178	166	344	0,788
		%	0.5%	0.8%	9.8%	46.0%	42.9%	88.9%	
Q10.5	Positive UGC (pictures) influences my purchasing choices significantly	N	2	9	43	179	154	333	0,766
		%	0.5%	2.3%	11.1%	46.3%	39.8%	86%	
Q10.6	Positive UGC (video clips) influences my purchasing choices significantly	N	3	4	43	183	154	337	0,798
		%	0.8%	1.0%	11.1%	47.3%	39.8%	87.1%	
Q10.7	Positive UGC (pictures and video clips) of service quality experiences positively influences my perceptions	N	3	4	34	192	154	346	0,794
		%	0.8%	1.0%	8.8%	49.6%	39.8%	89.4%	
Q10.8	Positive UGC (video clips) of service quality experiences positively influences my perceptions	N	3	3	38	184	159	343	0,806
		%	0.8%	0.8%	9.8%	47.5%	41.1%	88.6%	
Q10.9	Positive UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	N	1	12	41	190	143	333	0,785
		%	0.3%	3.1%	10.6%	49.1%	37.0%	86%	
Q10.10	I quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it.	N	42	97	65	99	84	183	0,279
		%	10.9%	25.1%	16.8%	25.6%	21.7%	47.3%	

Further, 89.4% and 87.1% of respondents agreed that positive UGC in the form of pictures and video clips of service quality experiences positively influenced their perceptions and purchasing choices respectively, which is consistent with the findings of Plieijers and Kristal (2021:40), Schivinski et al. (2015:1058) and Mayrhofer et al. (2019:173). Significantly, 86% of respondents indicated that positive UGC altered their perceptions, which ultimately positively affected the overall image that they had of the brand, a similar finding to Mishra (2019:396), Chakraboty and Bhat (2018:159) and Schivinski et al. (2016:18). Interestingly, 47.3% quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it.

In terms of reactions, after being exposed to positive UGC (Table 4.5b), 83.2% of the respondents indicated that positive UGC altered their feelings towards the brand, which transcended into positively influencing behaviours and ultimately purchasing choices. Hence 86% of respondents indicating that they would consider this specific brand when making their next purchasing choice. This finding that positive UGC alters brand feelings and influences purchasing behaviours correlates with Gajenderan et al. (2020:284) and Kim and Johnson (2016:107). Additionally, 84.8% of respondents indicated that their relationship with the brand was positively affected (Reichmann (2017:35), while 84.8% of the respondents revealed that positive UGC resulted in their being more loyal to the brand.

These high frequencies are an indication that for this group of respondents, positive UGC had a significant effect on the CBBE of consumers, which positively impacted on the brand equity of major retail businesses. Interestingly, these respondents also showed that 47.3% of them quickly forgot about positive UGC after being exposed to it.

**Table 4.5b: Positive UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses**

Factor matrix	Positive UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
Q10.11	I quickly forget about the associated positive brand perceptions after being exposed to positive UGC	N	49	110	74	94	60	154	0,259
		%	12.7%	28.4%	19.1%	24.3%	15.5%	39.8%	
Q10.12	Positive UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	N	5	15	45	196	126	322	0,677
		%	1.3%	3.9%	11.6%	50.6%	32.6%	83.2%	
Q10.13	Positive UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	N	14	21	49	175	128	303	0,598
		%	3.6%	5.4%	12.7%	45.2%	33.1%	78.3%	
Q10.14	I tend to like the brand more after being exposed to positive UGC	N	2	12	46	167	160	327	0,776
		%	0.5%	3.1%	11.9%	43.2%	41.3%	84.5%	
Q10.15	I regard the brand as being more credible after I am exposed to positive UGC about the brand	N	4	8	46	193	136	329	0,785
		%	1.0%	2.1%	11.9%	49.9%	35.1%	85%	
Q10.16	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to positive UGC	N	2	10	50	188	137	325	0,770
		%	0.5%	2.6%	12.9%	48.6%	35.4%	84%	
Q10.17	I will consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to positive UGC	N	4	5	45	187	146	333	0,727
		%	1.0%	1.3%	11.6%	48.3%	37.7%	86%	
Q10.18	My relationship with the brand is positively affected after being exposed to positive UGC	N	3	10	46	195	133	328	0,730
		%	0.8%	2.6%	11.9%	50.4%	34.4%	84.8%	
Q10.19	Positive UGC results in me being loyal to the brand	N	2	9	48	185	143	328	0,756
		%	0.5%	2.3%	12.4%	47.8%	37.0%	84.8%	
Q10.20	I tend to actively engage with the brand after being exposed to positive UGC	N	3	10	59	182	133	315	0,743
		%	0.8%	2.6%	15.2%	47.0%	34.4%	81.4%	

## 4.5 Negative UGC

A high degree of correlation exists between the responses of the respondents within the positive and the negative categories in terms of their social media usage. The social media usage and engagement pattern is presented in Table 4.6 below, in which similarly 97.8% of these respondents also used WhatsApp to look for product information, 92.4% used Facebook and 81% used YouTube. Correspondingly, 94.6% also used WhatsApp as their primary engagement platform, followed by Google, which was used by 91.8% of the respondents, while 89.7% used Facebook. This aligns with the findings of Rosenfeld et al. (2018:648) that suggests that similarities in age and demographic characteristics result in similarities in usage and engagement on WhatsApp.

Table 4.6 also highlights the likelihood of reading negative UGC that was written by other consumers that contain service or product experiences. A total of 75% of respondents indicated that they read the negative UGC posts of other consumers. This consisted of 38.6% who said that they always read the posts of other consumers and 36.4% who often read the posts of other consumers. While the 75% total (negative UGC) is marginally lower by 3%, than the 78% total (positive UGC) of respondents who indicated that they always read the posts of other respondents, its impact on CBBE is more significant (Buzeta et al., 2020:94; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016:195; Wouters, 2016:146).

The amount of time spent online by Millennials (Melović et al., 2021:8) also displays homogenous patterns of behaviour (Ladhari et al., 2019:120) compared to that of the group that was positively influenced by UGC, with 35.9% of respondents who indicated a negative UGC influence on perceptions, spending four hours or more, and 22.8% spending two hours online engaging in online activities and searching for or sharing product information.

The influence of negative UGC on the purchasing transaction value displayed no significant differences with the group who indicated that positive UGC had a greater impact on their perceptions, with a total of 54.9% spending less than R500, consisting of 35.9% of the negatively influenced respondents spending between R251 to R500 per month, while 19% spent less than R250. These differences in spending patterns are typical of Generation Y or Millennials and the varied spending behaviours displayed is consistent with the findings of Ladhari et al. (2019:118) whereby demographic characteristics significantly influence purchasing behaviours.

Table 4.6 also outlines the main reasons why these respondents' read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences, with 80.4% of respondents indicating that it ensured that they remained informed about consumer brand and service experiences and to make more informed purchasing decisions (68.5%).



**Table 4.6: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating a negative influence**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Which social media platforms do you use to look for product information?	Facebook	170	92.4%
	WhatsApp	180	97.8%
	Twitter	116	63.0%
	Instagram	141	76.6%
	LinkedIn	92	50.0%
	YouTube	149	81.0%
Which social media platforms do you engage with?	Google	169	91.8%
	Yahoo	44	23.9%
	Bing	27	14.7%
	Facebook	165	89.7%
	Instagram	139	75.5%
	Twitter	111	60.3%
	YouTube	144	78.3%
	Daily motion	12	6.5%
	Vimeo	13	7.1%
	WordPress	28	15.2%
	Tumblr	15	8.2%
	Gmail	156	84.8%
	WhatsApp	174	94.6%
	Pinterest	80	43.5%
TikTok	108	58.7%	
How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences?	Rarely	10	5.4%
	Sometimes	36	19.6%
	Often	67	36.4%
	Always	71	38.6%
How many hours do you spend engaging online per session searching for or sharing for product information?	Less than half an hour	10	5.4%
	Half to 1 hour	37	20.1%
	2 hours	42	22.8%
	3 hours	29	15.8%
	4 hours or more	66	35.9%
How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms?	Less than R250	35	19.0%
	R251 - R500	66	35.9%
	R501 - R750	38	20.7%
	R751 - R1000	21	11.4%
	R1001 - R2000	11	6.0%
	R2001 - R3000	2	1.1%
	R3001 - R4000	3	1.6%
	R4001 or more	8	4.3%
Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences?	To stay informed about brands	148	80.4%
	To make more informed purchasing decisions	126	68.5%
	I just read them to pass the time	23	12.5%
	I am just curious	49	26.6%

**Table 4.7a: Negative UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses**

Factor matrix	Negative UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly	Factor loadings
Q9.1	UGC negatively influences my perceptions of brands	N	70	99	160	128	56	184	0,469
		%	13.6%	19.3%	31.2%	25%	10.9%	35.9%	
Q9.2	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being unreliable, results in my forming negative perceptions	N	1	14	30	93	46	139	0,664
		%	0.5%	7.6%	16.3%	50.5%	25.0%	75.5%	
Q9.3	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to poor brand performance, results in ye forming negative perceptions	N	5	5	19	104	51	155	0,711
		%	2.7%	2.7%	10.3%	56.5%	27.7%	84.2%	
Q9.4	Negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influence my purchasing decisions	N	1	12	19	87	65	152	0,722
		%	0.5%	6.5%	10.3%	47.3%	35.3%	82.6%	
Q9.5	Negative UGC pictures influences my purchasing choices significantly	N	0	10	26	94	54	148	0,733
		%	0.0%	5.4%	14.1%	51.1%	29.3%	80.4%	
Q9.6	Negative UGC (video clips) influences my purchasing choices significantly	N	1	7	23	94	59	153	0,702
		%	0.5%	3.8%	12.5%	51.1%	32.1%	83.2%	
Q9.7	Negative UGC (pictures) of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	N	3	5	27	93	56	149	0,747
		%	1.6%	2.7%	14.7%	50.5%	30.4%	81%	
Q9.8	Negative UGC (video clips) of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	N	2	5	18	108	51	159	0,715
		%	1.1%	2.7%	9.8%	58.7%	27.7%	86.4%	
Q9.9	Negative UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	N	5	5	34	87	53	140	0,731
		%	2.7%	2.7%	18.5%	47.3%	28.8%	76.1%	
Q9.10	I remember the negative UGC for a long time after being exposed to it	N	1	15	37	72	59	131	0,746
		%	0.5%	8.2%	20.1%	39.1%	32.1%	71.2%	

Both of these tendencies pose negative implications for CBBE. Despite the tendency of negative UGC being lower than that of respondents who are positively influenced in terms of purchasing decisions, the influence of negative UGC on purchasing decisions is more pronounced (Maksimova, 2018:49;

Wouters, 2016:6).

Table 4.7a outlines the frequency of statements relating to the influence of negative UGC on CBBE. For respondents who responded that negative UGC negatively influenced their brand perceptions, 86.4% indicated that negative UGC in the form of video clips of poor service quality experiences negatively influenced their perceptions, compared to 89.4% who were positively influenced.

This represents the most significant negative influence on CBBE, which corresponds with the findings of Szabist (2019:51), while Muntinga (2018:8) and Malthouse et al. (2016:430) suggest that UGC which includes videos and photographs increases engagement, and therefore this form of UGC has a greater negative influence on CBBE.

Similarly, a high prevalence was displayed by respondents (84.2%) who indicated that negative UGC in the form of brand reviews, specifically relating to poor brand performance, coupled with 82.6% who indicated that negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influences their purchasing decisions, resulting in their forming negative perceptions. This is compared to 90.4% and 88.9% respectively on the equivalent positive dimension. Significantly, Chakraborty and Bhat (2018:151) assert that negative UGC in the form of reviews is regarded as being more credible and has a more profound influence on CBBE than positively framed UGC recommendations, and has implications for purchasing behaviour. Accordingly, with regard to influence on purchasing choices, 83.2% of the respondents indicated that negative UGC in the form of video clips, and 81% in the form of pictures of poor service quality experiences, significantly influenced their purchasing choices. Schivinski et al. (2015:1059) corroborate this finding and confirm that UGC imagery impacts on CBBE and purchase intentions. Additionally, the influence of UGC on CBBE and purchase intentions can be significantly increased by consumer involvement in the creation of the content (Schivinski et al., 2015:1059; Christodoulides et al., 2012:14).

Interestingly, only 76.1% had their overall image of the brand altered by negative UGC, in relation to 86% of respondents who indicated that positive UGC altered their perceptions. Notably, 71.2% of the respective respondents remembered the negative UGC, and the associated negative brand perceptions for a long time after being exposed to it. This tendency is vastly higher than the associated positive dimension, in which 47.3% quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it. This finding correlates with Buzeta et al. (2020:94) and Wouters (2016:6) who also conclude that negative UGC has the greater influence on CBBE, the effects of which are lasting and more formidable than positive UGC's influence on CBBE.

In terms of reactions, after being exposed to negative UGC (Table 4.7b), 82.1% of the respondents

revealed that negative UGC affected their feelings and the confidence they had in the brand. While 70.7% had their overall perceptions regarding the quality of the brand influenced when exposed to negative UGC, this was significantly lower compared to 84% of respondents whose perceptions were altered when exposed to positive UGC. Buzeta et al. (2020:94), Kim and Johnson (2016:107) and Ecke (2016:32) assert that the impact of negative UGC on CBBE is greater than that of positive UGC, so while the influence of negative UGC on CBBE might be lower than that of positive UGC, the impact is deemed greater.

After being exposed to negative UGC, 70.1% of the respondents indicated that their relationship with the brand was negatively affected, compared to 84.8% who were positively affected. While 66.3% of respondents no longer regarded the brand as credible after being exposed to negative UGC, the corresponding effect was that 64.7% were no longer loyal to the brand, and 62.5% tended to dislike it, with all these tendencies being significantly lower than the influence of positive UGC. Despite these lower tendencies, Dwivedi et al. (2021:27) conclude that negative UGC has severe implications for brand credibility, trust and the associated virality (Lappeman et al., 2018:14).

The frequency of distribution of respondents who indicated that negative UGC would result in their not considering the brand when making their next purchase was 61.4%, while 60.9% indicated that they would no longer actively engage with a brand after being exposed to negative UGC. Comparatively, the influence of positive UGC on CBBE was 86%, although Park and Lee's frequently cited study (2009:66) confirms the influential role of negative UGC, asserting that negative UGC has a more significant influence on purchase intentions than positive UGC. Muda and Hamza (2021:13) posit that negative UGC needs to be present, as it adds authenticity and believability to the positive UGC, thereby influencing brand equity (Maksimova, 2018:49) and purchase intention.

This finding is an indication that the perceptions of respondents are negatively influenced by negative UGC. Despite the frequency distributions of negative UGC not being as pronounced as in the case of the positive influence of UGC on CBBE, negative UGC has a more lasting effect on CBBE (Buzeta et al. (2020:94). It therefore negatively influences the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

**Table 4.7b: Negative UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses**

Factor matrix	Negative UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
Q9.11	I remember the associated negative brand perceptions for a long time after being exposed to negative UGC.	N	6	15	33	80	50	130	0,697
		%	3.3%	8.2%	17.9%	43.5%	27.2%	70.7%	
Q9.12	Negative UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	N	1	9	23	93	58	151	0,727
		%	0.5%	4.9%	12.5%	50.5%	31.5%	82.1%	
Q9.13	Negative UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	N	4	7	22	89	62	151	0,720
		%	2.2%	3.8%	12.0%	48.4%	33.7%	82.1%	
Q9.14	I tend to dislike the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	N	3	17	49	70	45	115	0,724
		%	1.6%	9.2%	26.6%	38.0%	24.5%	62.5%	
Q9.15	I no longer regard the brand as being credible after I am exposed to negative UGC about the brand	N	1	23	38	76	46	122	0,734
		%	0.5%	12.5%	20.7%	41.3%	25.0%	66.3%	
Q9.16	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to negative UGC	N	3	19	32	84	46	130	0,738
		%	1.6%	10.3%	17.4%	45.7%	25.0%	70.7%	
Q9.17	I will not consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to negative UGC	N	4	23	44	64	49	113	0,708
		%	2.2%	12.5%	23.9%	34.8%	26.6%	61.4%	
Q9.18	My relationship with the brand is negatively affected after being exposed to negative UGC	N	2	17	36	78	51	129	0,768
		%	1.1%	9.2%	19.6%	42.4%	27.7%	70.1%	
Q9.19	Negative UGC results in my no longer being loyal to the brand	N	6	20	39	73	46	119	0,766
		%	3.3%	10.9%	21.2%	39.7%	25.0%	64.7%	
Q9.20	I will no longer actively engage with the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	N	6	25	41	74	38	112	0,715
		%	3.3%	13.6%	22.3%	40.2%	20.7%	60.9%	

**4.6 Mixed-neutral UGC**

Table 4.8 below illustrates the frequency distribution of respondents, indicating that mixed-neutral UGC has no influence on their perceptions. With reference to the social media usage and engagement patterns, 98% of respondents used WhatsApp to look for product information, while 94.5% used

Facebook and 83.1% used YouTube and 95% used Google to engage. These frequency distribution patterns are consistent and strongly aligned with both the positive and the negative sets of respondents.

Similar tendencies as far as reading mixed-neutral UGC are evident where a total of 79.1% of respondents indicated that they often read mixed-neutral UGC that contained service or product experiences that had been written by other consumers; this total consisted of 42.8% who indicated that they always read the posts of other consumers and 35.8% who often read these posts.

The mixed-neutral group displayed the highest tendency with 43.3% of respondents indicating that they spent four hours or more per session engaging online or sharing product information and 19.4% spent approximately two hours online per session. Interestingly, despite this group of respondents indicating that mixed-neutral UGC did not influence their perceptions, a total of 55.2% of these respondents spent less than R500 on online purchases, which consisted of 35.3% of these respondents spending on average between R251 to R500 using digital platforms per month, while 19.9% spent less than R250. This figure is marginally lower than the respondents who were positively influenced (57.9%) and higher than the group which was negatively influenced (54.9%).

Tang et al. (2014:55) corroborate this finding when they assert that mixed-neutral UGC exerts an influence on sales, because of its more informative nature. Scholz et al. (2013:13) likens the effects of mixed-neutral UGC to that of the influence of positive UGC, as mixed-neutral UGC contains purer and more balanced information which consumers find more valuable, hence its influence on CBBE and purchasing intentions (Cunha, 2021:37). The main reasons why these respondents read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences was to stay informed (82.1%) and to make more informed purchasing decisions (66.7%). These tendencies aligned with the other two cohorts, with the tendency to make more informed decisions being slightly lower than the positive cohort at 68.5%, which confirms the findings of Scholz et al. (2013:13).

**Table 4.8: Social media usage and engagement pattern for those indicating no influence**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Which social media platforms do you use to look for product information?	Facebook	190	94.5%
	WhatsApp	197	98.0%
	Twitter	140	69.7%
	Instagram	153	76.1%
	LinkedIn	96	47.8%
	YouTube	167	83.1%
Which social media platforms do you engage with?	Google	191	95.0%
	Yahoo	58	28.9%
	Bing	34	16.9%
	Facebook	183	91.0%
	Instagram	152	75.6%
	Twitter	128	63.7%
	YouTube	170	84.6%
	Daily motion	18	9.0%
	Vimeo	18	9.0%
	WordPress	31	15.4%
	Tumblr	24	11.9%
	Gmail	170	84.6%
	WhatsApp	189	94.0%
	Pinterest	97	48.3%
TikTok	131	65.2%	
How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences?	Rarely	9	4.5%
	Sometimes	34	16.9%
	Often	72	35.8%
	Always	86	42.8%
How many hours do you spend engaging online per session searching for or sharing for product information?	Less than half an hour	17	8.5%
	Half to 1 hour	28	13.9%
	2 hours	39	19.4%
	3 hours	30	14.9%
	4 hours or more	87	43.3%
How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms?	Less than R250	40	19.9%
	R251 - R500	71	35.3%
	R501 - R750	34	16.9%
	R751 - R1000	27	13.4%
	R1001 - R2000	10	5.0%
	R2001 - R3000	4	2.0%
	R3001 - R4000	4	2.0%
	R4001 or more	11	5.5%
Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences?	To stay informed about brands	165	82.1%
	To make more informed purchasing decisions	134	66.7%
	I just read them to pass the time	31	15.4%
	I am just curious	47	23.4%

Additionally, with respect to the frequencies on the statements relating to mixed-neutral UGC having no influence on brand perceptions, the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements (Table 4.9). Contrary to the finding of Cunha (2021:37), 76.1% of these respondents agreed that the overall image they had of a brand was not altered when exposed to mixed-neutral UGC. Therefore mixed-neutral UGC has no influence on CBBE, as brand image is integral to CBBE (Yuan et al., 2016:3070; Kuksov et al., 2013:295) while Keller & Swaminathan (2020:118) highlight the strong relationship that exists between brand image and perceptions (Keller, 2010:68; 1993:3) and purchase intentions (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:118). Also 75.1% of respondents would continue to engage with a brand after being exposed to mixed-neutral UGC.

With regards to purchasing decisions, a high frequency of respondents indicated that mixed-neutral UGC in the form of video clips (72.6%) and pictures (70.6%) had no influence on their purchasing choices, which conflicts with the overall finding of Tang et al. (2014:55). Similarly in contrast to Scholz et al. (2013:13), 69.7% of respondents revealed that their overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand was not influenced when exposed to mixed-neutral UGC, and 67.7% showed that their feelings or emotions towards the brand were not influenced by UGC.

Of the respondents within the mixed-neutral cohort, 65.7% of respondents indicated that they did not trust UGC. This should be juxtaposed against the respondents (82.1%) who indicated that they read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences to stay informed (82.1%) and to make more informed purchasing decisions (66.7%). While Tang et al. (2014:43) assert that UGC is regarded as more trustworthy, Morra et al. (2017:15) found that UGC exerted no influence on CBBE as respondents regarded UGC as content that was generated by non-experts. Chari et al. (2016:1077) posit that for UGC to be regarded as more trustworthy, the source of the UGC needs to be regarded as more credible, hence UGC generated by Facebook friends is regarded as being more credible and trustworthy, despite these sources being non-expert.



**Table 4.9: No UGC influence on brand perceptions of major retail businesses**

Factor matrix	No influence	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings	
Q11.1	Mixed neutral UGC does not alter my perception of brands	N	40	122	150	141	60	201	0,758
		%	7.8%	23.8%	29.2%	27.5%	11.7%	39.2%	
Q11.2	UGC (pictures) has no influence on my purchasing choices	N	11	17	31	88	54	142	0,806
		%	5.5%	8.5%	15.4%	43.8%	26.9%	70.6%	
Q11.3	UGC (video clips) has no influence on my purchasing choices	N	7	21	27	92	54	146	0,861
		%	3.5%	10.4%	13.4%	45.8%	26.9%	72.6%	
Q11.4	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is not influenced when exposed to UGC	N	8	14	39	89	51	140	0,845
		%	4.0%	7.0%	19.4%	44.3%	25.4%	69.7%	
Q11.5	The overall image I have of the brand is not altered when exposed to UGC	N	5	12	31	100	53	153	0,869
		%	2.5%	6.0%	15.4%	49.8%	26.4%	76.1%	
Q11.6	UGC does not alter my confidence in the brand as I do not trust UGC	N	7	19	43	88	44	132	0,853
		%	3.5%	9.5%	21.4%	43.8%	21.9%	65.7%	
Q11.7	My feelings or emotions towards the brand are not influenced by UGC	N	5	20	40	85	51	136	0,849
		%	2.5%	10.0%	19.9%	42.3%	25.4%	67.7%	
Q11.8	I will continue to engage with the brand after being exposed to UGC	N	4	4	42	94	57	151	0,612
		%	2.0%	2.0%	20.9%	46.8%	28.4%	75.1%	

#### 4.7 Data reliability and validity

**Table 4.10: Assessment of reliability and validity of the constructs**

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Positive	0.943	20
Negative	0.948	20
No influence	0.891	8

Malhotra and Birks (2006:313) states that reliability is the degree to which a scale generates congruous results based on the constructs being measured, should the measurement process be repeated. Kumar (2011:168) posits that reliability within the context of the use of a measuring instrument is established when consistent and stable outcomes are produced if repeated measurements are conducted under the same conditions. Saunders et al. (2019:213) conclude that reliability is consistency when replicated, while validity embraces the suitability of the measurement instruments, the exactness of the analysis and whether the conclusions drawn are generalisable. Malhotra and Birks (2006:314) refer to validity as the presence of certain characteristics within a measurement based on the variables being studied.

Cronbach's Alpha scores were used to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the three constructs being measured, a common approach whereby several items are totalled to form a total score for the scale (Malhotra & Birks, 2006:313). The acceptable average standard of these split-half coefficients is between 0 to 1 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:53), with high levels of internal consistency reflected with the values closer to 1 (Hair et al., 2013:6). As the Cronbach's Alpha scores for the three constructs of the influence of positive, negative and mixed neutral UGC on CBBE are 0.943, 0.948 and 0.891 respectively, the internal consistency is deemed to be robust and acceptable (Hair et al., 2013:6). It can therefore be concluded from these scores that the same construct was measured and a degree of connectedness exist between the related scale items being investigated (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:53).

The factor loadings in Tables 4.5a, 4.5b, 4.7a, 4.7b and Table 4.9 were calculated to determine patterns of correlation between the variables (Jeon and Yoo, 2021:381). The investigated variables displayed a factor loading above 0.5, with the exception of three variables, which were not eliminated from the study, as the majority of the variables displayed a high factor loading (Vinh et al., 2019:711). The measurement device used in this study therefore displays acceptable levels of convergent validity (Saunders et al., 2019:517).

#### **4.8 Hypotheses**

In order to determine the influence of UGC on the CBBE of major retailers in Cape Metropole, three research hypotheses were tested using Wilcoxon signed rank test. A non-parametric test was used (Ledwaba, 2020:58; Kumar & Chanda, 2020:6668; Chen, 2015:88) for one-sample and for two-related samples (Daboul, 2020:153). This test was used because the statements measuring the influence of UGC on brand perceptions were measured on a Likert-type agreement scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), which is commonly treated as an ordinal scale. The test was used to determine if the central location (i.e., the median) of the responses of the UGC statements differ from 3,

which represents the average sentiment. The choice of 3 is based on the central tendency using the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (Malhotra, 2006:45), using the scale of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), while 3 is the central tendency and represents a neutral position, which is neither a positive nor a negative influence.

In this one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test the null hypothesis is that the median is equal to 3, and if it is rejected, it means that the respondents either agree or disagree with the positive or negative UGC statements and their influence on CBBE. This would therefore be an indication that either negative or positive UGC influences CBBE.

To determine statistical significance, a significance level of 0.05 was used for all the analysis in this study (Saunders et al., 2019:607). A p-value that is less than 0.05 indicates statistical significance, while a p-value that is greater than 0.05 indicates statistical insignificance. The null hypothesis is rejected when the p-value is less than 0.05 (Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016:129), therefore the level of agreement is statistically different from the median of 3.

Consideration must be given to whether the specific median being tested is lower or higher than 3. If it is lower than 3, it is an indication that the respondents disagree with that particular statement, and if it is higher than 3 it is an indication that the respondents agree with that particular statement.

The results of the one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test are presented in Table 4.11 below.

**Table 4.11: Wilcoxon signed rank tests**

Variables	One-Sample (test value = 3)		Related samples	
	p-value	Conclusion	p-value	Conclusion
Negative UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.04	Different (>)	0.00	Positive
Positive UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.00	Different (>)		
Negative UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.04	Different (>)	0.02	Negative
Mixed-neutral UGC relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand	0.02	Different (>)		
Positive UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.00	Different (>)	0.00	Positive
Mixed-neutral UGC relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand	0.02	Different (>)		

For the hypothesis that UGC does have a positive influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole, the p-value is 0, which is less than 0.05. The mean and median for this statement is

greater than 3 and this is an indication of a positive influence of UGC on brand perceptions.

Similarly, there is support that UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole as well as a group of respondents who indicate that UGC has no influence of how they perceive a brand. Another statistical hypothesis test called the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test (Andersen et al., 2020:878; Munyau, 2017:78) was used to evaluate whether there is a significant difference between the negative and positive influence of UGC on CBBE hypotheses and which one presents the most significant influence on CBBE.

The test was conducted in the following format:

- i. Positive UGC has no influence on CBBE
- ii. Negative UGC has no influence on CBBE
- iii. Negative and positive (mixed neutral) UGC has no influence on CBBE

This scenario requires use of Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test (Andersen et al., 2020:878) because all the respondents answered questions about the influence of negative UGC on CBBE and the influence of positive UGC on CBBE, while the influence of mixed-neutral UGC – being a combination of positive and negative UGC (Tang et al., 2014:43) – potentially has no influence on CBBE. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the two types of UGC and its influence on CBBE is measured. The results of the Wilcoxon matched-pairs test show that the influence of positive UGC on CBBE is statistically different from the negative influence of UGC on CBBE, as well as the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE. Significantly, the influence of positive UGC on CBBE has the highest median.

Moreover, the influence of negative UGC on CBBE is significantly different from the mixed-neutral UGC effect on CBBE, with the influence of negative UGC on CBBE having a higher median.

These results reveal that positive UGC influences CBBE more significantly than does negative UGC (Xu et al., 2021:11; Kim & Johnson, 2016:107; Malthouse et al., 2016:441; Schivinski et al., 2016:202 and Christodoulides et al., 2012:13), while the influence of negative UGC on CBBE (Estrella-Ramon et al., 2019:8; Colicev et al., 2018:12; Wouters, 2016:146; Daugherty and Hoffman 2014:96) is notably more pronounced than the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE (Khobzi et al., 2018:14; Tang et al., 2014:45; Sonnier et al., 2011:713).

Positive and negative UGC therefore have a significant influence on CBBE, with the influence of positive UGC being more dominant than negative UGC. while the tendency of respondents who indicated that

mixed-neutral UGC does not influence their perceptions of brands is significantly lower than the influence of positive and negative UGC on CBBE. In addition, this study sought to establish whether positive or negative UGC has a more significant influence on various brand-related factors which influence CBBE. To measure the effect of these factors, the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test is used to compare the paired individual statements with reference to the positive and negative influence of UGC on CBBE (Table 4.11a).

**Table 4.12a: Wilcoxon signed rank test for different statements**

		One-Sample (Test value = 3)		Related samples	
		p-value	Conclusion	p-value	Conclusion
	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being unreliable results in my forming negative perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being reliable results in my forming positive perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to poor brand performance results in my forming negative perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand performance results in my forming positive perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influences my purchasing decisions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC relating to positive service experiences influence my purchasing decisions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (pictures) influences my purchasing choices significantly	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC (video clips) influences my purchasing choices significantly	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (video clips) influences my purchasing choices significantly	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC (pictures) of poor service quality experiences negatively influences my perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (pictures) of service quality experiences positively influences my perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC (video clips) of poor service quality experiences negatively influences my perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC (video clips) of service quality experiences positively influences my perceptions	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	I remember the negative UGC for a long time after being exposed to it.	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Negative
	I quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it.	0.03	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		

The majority of the brand-related factors is influenced more significantly by positive UGC than by negative UGC. The influence of positive UGC on brand-related factors such as reliability, brand performance, and service quality experiences have a significantly higher influence than the influence of negative UGC on these brand-related factors (Schivinski et al., 2016:202). Positive UGC in the form of pictures and video clips also has a significantly higher influence on purchasing choices in comparison to the influence of negative UGC in the form of pictures and video clips (Plieijers and Kristal, 2021:40).

Additionally, positive UGC has a more profound effect on the feelings and overall brand image consumers have of a brand, relative to the influence of negative UGC on feelings and brand image. However, the influence of negative UGC seems to be more enduring in relation to the influence of positive UGC, as respondents indicated that they remember the influence of negative UGC and the associated negative brand perceptions for a longer time after being exposed to it in relation to positive UGC (Lappeman et al., 2018:14). In terms of the effect of both positive and negative UGC on brand confidence, there is no difference between the effect of negative and positive UGC in this regard.

Table 4.11b below also indicates that positive UGC has a more notable influence on building affinity for a brand, as respondents tend to like the brand more after being exposed to positive UGC and consequently regard the brand as more credible after being exposed to positive UGC. Similarly, and expectedly, the influence of positive UGC on brand loyalty and active engagement is also more pronounced compared to negative UGC

Therefore, a summation of these tendencies and results proves that positive UGC has a more profound influence on CBBE in relation to negative UGC; however, negative UGC poses various challenges as far as CBBE is concerned. Negative UGC has a more damaging influence on CBBE and its effects on CBBE is more enduring which has a negative effect on brand image.

**Table 4.12b: Wilcoxon signed rank test**

		One-Sample (test value = 3)		Related samples	
		p-value	Conclusion	p-value	Conclusion
	I remember the associated negative brand perceptions for a long time after being exposed to negative UGC.	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Negative
	I quickly forget about the associated positive brand perceptions after being exposed to positive UGC	0.23	Retain H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.26	No difference
	Positive UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	I tend to dislike the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	I tend to like the brand more after being exposed to positive UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	I no longer regard the brand as being credible after I am exposed to negative UGC about the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	I regard the brand as being more credible after I am exposed to positive UGC about the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to negative UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to positive UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	I will not consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to negative UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	I will consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to positive UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	My relationship with the brand is negatively affected after being exposed to negative UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	My relationship with the brand is positively affected after being exposed to positive UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	Negative UGC results in my no longer being loyal to the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	Positive UGC results in my being loyal to the brand	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		
	I will no longer actively engage with the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	0.00	Positive
	I tend to actively engage with the brand after being exposed to positive UGC	0.00	Reject H <sub>0</sub>		

#### 4.9 Chapter summary

This chapter outlines the data patterns and the notable results based on interpretation of the frequency distribution tendencies. These results reveal that consumers are constantly seeking out sources of information that could assist them in making more informed purchasing decisions, and UGC fulfils a vital role in this regard. Positive UGC displayed the most significant influence on CBBE, followed by negative and mixed-neutral UGC respectively. Both positive and negative UGC exerted an influence on the various elements that constitute CBBE, which include altering respondents' feelings toward the brand,

brand image and ultimately their purchasing decisions. Notably, positive UGC displayed significantly lower endurance levels in relation to negative UGC, in so far as its influence on CBBE is concerned, adding credence to the more damaging effects of negative UGC on CBBE. The next chapter presents the key findings drawn from this study, acceptance of the hypotheses, recommendations, and the proposed strategic communication framework.



## Chapter 5:

### Presentation of the proposed framework, conclusions, and recommendations

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlines the data analysis and the discussion of the results which are based on the manner in which consumers engage and respond to UGC and its associated influences on consumer perceptions. Some of the more notable findings displayed related to the social media platform usage with WhatsApp and Facebook consistently the being the most popular platforms. It is also highly evident that irrespective of the type of UGC that consumers are exposed to, they are highly likely to read the UGC content posted by other users. More significantly, the primary reasons for consumers wanting to read the UGC posted by other consumers was to be informed about brands, as well as ensuring that they made more informed purchasing decisions. Notably, the influence of both negative and positive UGC on CBBE became even more pronounced when the content contained picture or video content. The strong data tendencies displayed around these specific findings highlight the significance of this study, as well as the associated implications for the management of CBBE.

The previous chapter also presented the related findings of the influence of positive, negative, and mixed-neutral UGC on elements such as brand image, purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. These related findings are then contextualised in terms of their associated influence on CBBE. The research results indicated that positive UGC has the greater influence on CBBE relative to positive and mixed-neutral UGC. Despite the more significant influence of positive UGC on consumer perceptions, it is the damaging virality and lasting effects of negative UGC on CBBE that poses significant consequences for large retail brands in the Cape Metropole. The influence of mixed-neutral UGC was found to have the lowest influence on brand image, purchasing choices and overall quality perceptions, hence the lowest influence on CBBE.

This chapter outlines the summary of the key findings of the study and the associated challenges and consequences it holds for retail brands in managing the ever-increasing volume of UGC and its effect on CBBE. The final conclusions of the research study are then outlined based on the respective hypotheses initially identified in the study. A proposed strategic communications framework is then presented to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE for retail brands. Thereafter, the final recommendations are discussed within the context of theoretical and practical applications and its associated implications for future studies. Concluding remarks are provided in the final section of the chapter.

## **5.2 Summary of the key findings**

An outline of the key findings that emanate from the empirical investigation of this study is outlined below:

### **5.2.1 Key finding 1: Positive UGC exerts the most significant influence on CBBE**

The influence of positive UGC on CBBE is widespread and displayed a significant frequency distribution in relation to negative and mixed-neutral UGC. This finding is consistent with the tendencies displayed within the various elements which are considered as the building-blocks of CBBE, which are discussed under each related finding below. The study also revealed a very high tendency indicating that positive UGC has a marked influence on the overall image that respondents have of a brand, confirming the influence of positive UGC on CBBE, as brand image is an integral component of CBBE (Keller & Swaminathan (2020:118). This finding has implications for retail brands and presents them with opportunities to enhance their brand equity and reduce the damaging influence of negative UGC by creating positive UGC, as explained in the following paragraph.

### **5.2.2 Findings related to Key Finding 1: Brand performance and brand reliability are integral to positive UGC formation**

Brand performance and brand reliability are key elements in the formation of positive UGC which creates positive CBBE (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:159). These two elements are essential in ensuring that consumer expectations are met or exceeded, and that the consumer receives value for money when purchasing products. Therefore, retail brands need to sell products and provide services that meet or exceed the needs of consumers. Importantly, these products, where required, need to be durable and reliable. It is also essential that these products be well supported by service levels that are also consistently reliable. These are two key components in ensuring that retail brands will be perceived as firms that consistently deliver from a brand performance perspective. This ultimately results in the formation and generation of positive UGC, and the subsequent formation of positive CBBE (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:118).

### **5.2.3 Findings related to Key Finding 1: Positive UGC increases brand credibility and brand loyalty**

Various studies have revealed that consumers regard negative UGC as being more credible than positive UGC (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:151). To a lesser extent, mixed-neutral UGC is also regarded

as more trustworthy than positive or negative UGC (Tang et al., 2014:55). The majority of findings in studies measuring the influence of negative and positive UGC on consumer perceptions are that positive UGC exerts a greater influence on CBBE than negative UGC (Tang et al., 2014:41). Consistent with those findings, this study also revealed that positive UGC displayed the most significant influence on CBBE. It also needs to be borne in mind that UGC is widely regarded as being more credible than FGC (Mayrhofer et al., 2019:173). Positive UGC results in consumers liking a brand more, which enhances the affinity that the consumer has for the brand. This affinity that develops between the consumer and the brand transcends into improved credibility and quality perceptions. This results in an improved relationship with the brand, increasing the brand loyalty, engagement with the brand and increasing positive CBBE (Arya et al., 2022:1393).

#### **5.2.4 Key finding 2: Negative UGC exerts a significant influence on CBBE**

While the study found that the influence of negative UGC on consumer perceptions to be less significant than that of positive UGC, the resultant effect of negative UGC on purchasing behaviour is more pronounced than positive UGC (Buzeta et al., 2020:94). Similarly, despite the influence of negative UGC on altering the overall image of the brand (76.1%) being lower than that of the influence of positive UGC on brand image (86%), the effect of negative UGC accrues in the form of lost sales due to the influence of negative UGC on CBBE. Notably, consideration needs to be given to the finding that negative UGC (71.2%) is recalled by a significantly larger majority of respondents in relation to positive UGC (47.3%). This finding highlights the more enduring influence of negative UGC on CBBE (Buzeta et al., 2020:94) as the range discrepancy between these two variables is the highest within this study.

#### **5.2.5 Key finding 3: Positive and negative UGC in the form of images and videos exert a more significant influence on CBBE**

The influence of both positive and negative UGC on CBBE is consistent with the findings of similar studies, although there is a dearth in the literature with regards to studies measuring the influence of UGC in the form of visual imagery and its influence on CBBE. The influence of both positive and negative UGC in form of pictures and video clips displayed a similar degree of correlation with a pronounced influence on CBBE (Dhanesh et al., 2022: 6; Szabist, 2019:51; Muntinga, 2018:8). Negative UGC in the form of pictures and videos displayed the most prominent influence in relation to all the other variables on CBBE (86.4%), while positive UGC in the form of pictures and videos also exerted a profound influence on CBBE (89.4%). The most notable outcome of UGC in the form of pictures and videos is that it stimulates consumer engagement with UGC (Singh & Kumar, 2022:157; Malthouse et al., 2016:430). Active brand engagement based on positive UGC is deemed to be one of the strongest

displays of loyalty and resonance with the brand, and it is integral to building positive CBBE (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:121). Conversely, negative UGC in form of pictures and videos also displayed evidence of exerting an acutely damaging effect on CBBE (Szabist, 2019:51).

#### **5.2.6 Key finding 4: Consumers are engaging with positive and negative UGC in the form of recommendations to make purchasing decisions**

Positive and negative UGC is becoming more prevalent as being a valuable source of information upon which consumers are making their purchasing decisions. This tendency to use UGC or word of mouth recommendations to make purchasing decisions is not uncommon; however, it was exacerbated by the increased use of smart phones, excessive exposure to FGC and high levels of social media usage (Sangwan et al., 2021:150). It has also been found that a high tendency to read both positive and negative UGC content pertaining to product and service encounters exists, the main reason being to stay abreast with product and service-related information.

While positive UGC displayed a more significant influence on purchasing decisions, positive UGC also displayed a tendency to be more easily forgotten, highlighting the need for its frequent reinforcement. Despite the influence of positive UGC on aspects such as brand loyalty, affinity for the brand and credibility of the brand being stronger in this study, the damaging effects of negative UGC on these elements present more dire consequences for the financial performance of retail brands.

Notably, although this study found that negative UGC in the form of recommendations on purchasing decisions was less influential, this form of negative UGC is regarded as more credible than positively framed UGC (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:151).

#### **5.2.7 Key finding 5: Mixed-neutral UGC does not influence CBBE**

Studies that have measured the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE have displayed varied findings. These range from the influence of mixed-neutral UGC having no effect on CBBE (Hallgren et al., 2018:26), to mixed-neutral displaying a significant effect on CBBE (Tang et al., 2014:55), to this form of UGC having a less significant effect than positive and negative UGC on CBBE (Khobzi et al., 2018:14). The latter study has similarly presented ambivalent findings as to the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE, where mixed-neutral UGC displayed a more significant influence on CBBE than negative CBBE.

Despite 39.2% of respondents indicating that mixed-neutral UGC has no effect on CBBE, it could

therefore be deduced that a larger majority of respondents agree that mixed-neutral UGC has an effect on CBBE. This deduction is consistent with the social media usage behavioural patterns that displayed very high tendencies, which are patterns consistent with the positive and negative data sets, and it is also reflective of high levels of social media usage (Sangwan et al., 2021 :150). Similarly, high frequency distribution patterns were displayed in terms of searching for product information, time spent online and the reading of UGC content. The most significant sub-finding is the strong tendencies displayed by these respondents indicating that they read UGC content to stay informed, and to make more informed purchasing decisions which is indicative of mixed-neutral UGC influencing CBBE (Tang et al., 2014:55).

These tendencies are contradicted by the high frequency distribution displayed where respondents indicated that mixed-neutral UGC, inclusive of mixed-neutral UGC containing picture and video content, does not alter their overall image of the brand, a key component of building CBBE. Additionally, a lack of trust is deemed to be the primary reason why mixed-neutral UGC does not alter CBBE, and the source of the UGC is regarded as not being credible, contradicting Tang's (2014:43) finding that mixed-neutral UGC is more trustworthy.

### **5.3 Conclusions of the research study**

Three hypotheses were tested to establish the significance of these UGC positive and negative influences on brand perceptions and they are as follows:

- Hypothesis: H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.
- Hypothesis: H2: UGC has a negative influence on CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.
- Hypothesis: H0: Mixed-neutral UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

#### **5.3.1 Hypothesis: H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.**

To determine statistical significance, a statistical level of 0.05 that was used for this study; the p-value less than 0.05 is an indication of statistical significance. The p-value of the positive UGC variable

indicated in Table 4.10 – Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.00, and the mean and median for this statement EW greater than 3, therefore, indicating a significant positive statistical relationship between the two variables of positive UGC and CBBE. The high probability of a relationship between these two variables is corroborated by the significant frequency distribution of the data tendencies related to the respective variables that constitute the building blocks of CBBE, viz. brand performance, brand reliability, brand credibility and brand loyalty.

To conclude, it is therefore highly probably that Hypothesis H1 is supported by the collected data that positive UGC exerts an influence on CBBE.

### **5.3.2 Hypothesis: H2: UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.**

The p-value of the negative UGC variable in Table 4.10 – Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.04, which displays a significantly higher value in relation to the statistical level of 0.05. Therefore, this indicates a significantly lower or limited influence of negative UGC on CBBE, in relation to the influence of positive UGC on CBBE. Similarly, the frequency distribution of the data tendencies of the elements that have a negative effect on CBBE, such as brand loyalty, brand credibility and the influence of negative recommendations are also less pronounced.

To conclude, it is therefore highly probably that Hypothesis H2 is also supported by the collected data and that negative UGC exerts a medium influence on CBBE.

### **5.3.3 Hypothesis: H0: UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.**

While the p-value of the mixed-neutral UGC variable in Table 4.10 – Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.02, and as it is also less than 0.05, it is therefore an indication of statistical significance that mixed-neutral UGC does not alter CBBE. However, this null hypothesis cannot be completely rejected. The frequency distribution of the data outlining the number of respondents who indicated that mixed-neutral UGC has no influence on their brand perceptions (39.2%) potentially presents a possible inverse relationship, whereby mixed-neutral UGC could potentially influence the CBBE of a larger percentage of respondents. Additionally, the elements that influence CBBE, such as reading and engaging with UGC, as well as the use of UGC content to make more informed purchasing decisions, contradict the null hypothesis.

Therefore, to conclude while the null hypothesis is rejected, previous studies and the frequency

distribution of data suggests that the possibility of a relationship exists between the elements of mixed-neutral UGC and CBBE.

#### **5.4 Research objectives: Conclusions**

The following three objectives were identified based on the research problem and study area:

1. To determine whether UGC influences the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.
2. To ascertain whether negative or positive UGC exerts the most influence on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.
3. To propose a strategic communication framework that retailers could use to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE.

##### **5.4.1 Conclusions drawn on research objective one: Does UGC influence the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole?**

The findings of H1 and H2 conclusively reveal that UGC exerts an influence on the CBBE of retailers in the Cape Metropole. While the various forms of UGC displayed varied levels of influence on CBBE, the effect on CBBE is definitive (Buzeta et al., 2020:94). Based on the high levels of engagement and usage of brand reviews related to brand performance and how this informs online users' purchasing choices, inferences can be drawn on the influence of UGC on CBBE (Wang et al., 2022: para. 37). Similarly, the elements that constitute some of the building-blocks of CBBE, were also significantly affected because of exposure to UGC (Keller, 1993:5). These elements, specifically, brand performance, brand reliability, brand credibility, brand loyalty and ultimately the overall brand image, all displayed increases or decreases, dependant on the type of UGC it was exposed to (Zia et al., 2022:134). As brand image is central to CBBE formation, the formation of negative or positive CBBE significantly influences how consumers respond to it. Additionally, the manner in which consumers behave towards a retail brand, in terms of behaviour and the resultant purchasing intentions, are all influenced.

Notably, because purchase intentions and behaviours are based on consumer perceptions (Cheung et al., 2020:142), therefore they influence the CBBE of the major retailers in the Cape Metropole.

##### **5.4.2 Conclusions drawn on research objective two: Do negative or positive UGC exert the most influence on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole?**

This study found that positive UGC exerted a significantly higher influence on CBBE than negative UGC (Mayrhofer et al., 2019:173; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:159). Despite the lesser influence of negative

UGC on CBBE in this study, its associated damaging virality and more enduring effect on CBBE has previously been highlighted (Estrella-Ramon et al., 2019:8), contrasting with the corresponding influence of positive UGC, which was quickly forgotten by approximately half of the respondents in this study. The statistical prevalence of positive UGC over negative UGC and its corresponding effects on CBBE could potentially originate from the credibility of the brand recommendation. Positive UGC is founded on the credibility of the source of the UGC, as well as the associated levels of trust that emanate from the brand recommendations (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018:157). While this was not measured in this study, both aspects, source credibility and trust, are characteristics associated with the social media platforms that displayed the highest statistical tendency, viz. WhatsApp and Facebook (Chari et al., 2016:1077). The nature of these platforms ensures that the online users who share positive UGC are in all likelihood known to the consumer, elevating the trust and credibility levels of the positive UGC.

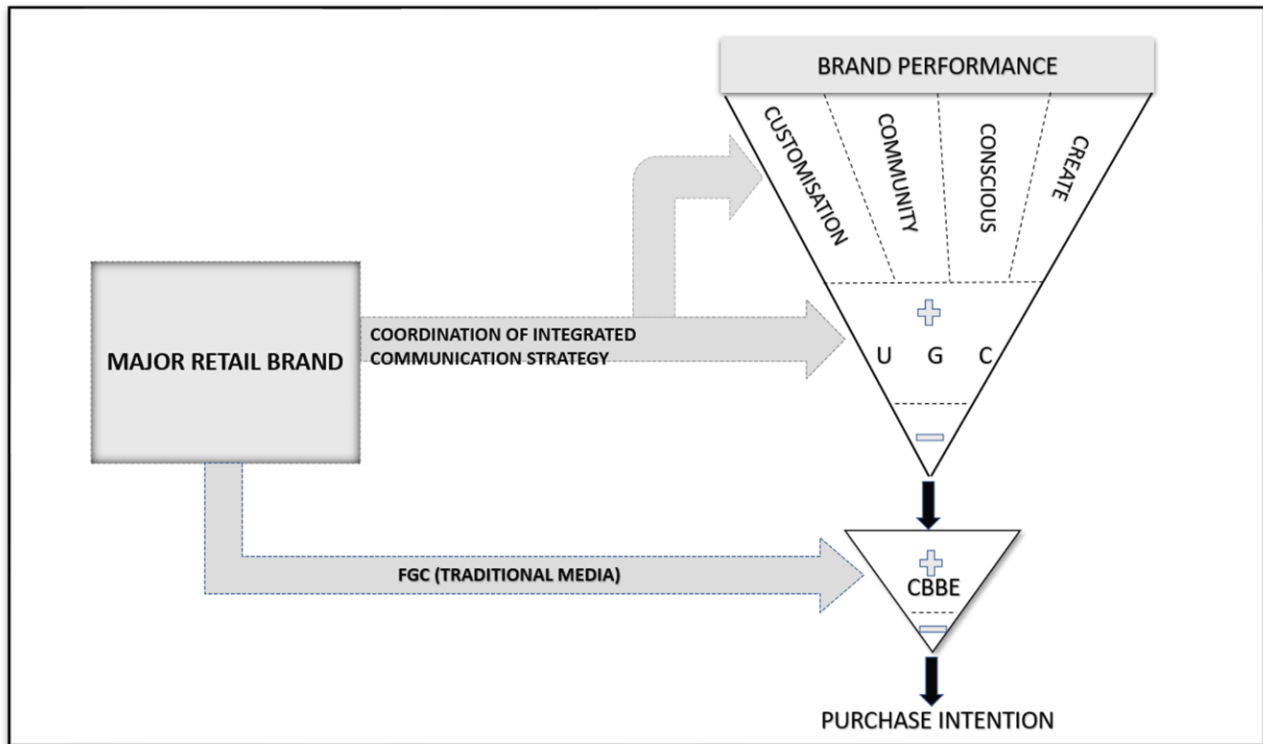
Another potential reason for the dominance of positive UGC over negative UGC could be the hedonic and perceived quality of positive UGC, both of which are linked to positive cognitive and emotional responses and the corresponding effect on CBBE (Kim & Johnson, 2016:107). However, it needs to be noted that the presence of high levels of brand reliability, quality and brand performance remain a prerequisite for positive UGC formation, as it underpins the establishment of a positive brand image and the resultant positive CBBE generation.

#### **5.4.3 Research objective three: To propose a strategic communication framework that retailers could use to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE- The UG-5C Framework**

The proposed UG-5C Framework has been designed to assist major retail brands with the ever-increasing influence of UGC on CBBE. The competitive and congested nature of the retail industry requires brands to constantly differentiate themselves from their competitors within these highly contested consumer-markets. Building and maintaining brand equity therefore remains integral to all business strategy formulation within the business, none more so than the communication strategy. As consumers regard FGC as being less credible than UGC (Mayrhofer et al., 2019:173), and with the increased volume of UGC influencing CBBE, a need for a comprehensive communication framework to manage the influence of UGC is required.

However, as brand equity is the culmination of strategy and is an output with which a brand is bestowed, it requires frequent evaluation and measurement to ensure that brand equity is maintained (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:58). The UG-5C Framework is modelled on the premise that the retail brand is consistently able to deliver a level service that is well supported by a range of products and services, which represents a value-offering for consumers.





**Figure 5: The UG-5C framework**

The UG-5C Framework is also created on the foundation of brand performance which is an integral dimension to the formation of brand perceptions (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:112). However, as brand performance consists of various sub-dimensions such as brand reliability, durability, service quality, functionality and style (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:112), all of these sub-dimensions are required to meet or exceed consumer expectations to ensure the basis for CBBE formation.

The overall outcome of the UG-5C Framework is the formation of positive UGC, which is then generated more purposefully and in greater volume, in an attempt by the retail brand to negate the influence of negative UGC, contributing to positive CBBE formation. Therefore, the retail brand needs to develop an integrated online communications strategy that targets online consumers, supported by a communication strategy that focuses on the use of traditional media channels.

The integrated online communications strategy is a communication strategy that encompasses both FGC and UGC and its primary objective to influence and stimulate the behaviour of online consumer related activities (Buzeta et al., 2020:83), resulting in the formation of positive CBBE.

#### **5.4.4 The UG-5C framework – Recommendations**

Within the context of the UG-5C framework, the following recommendations that major retail brands could employ are proposed:

##### **1. Customisation**

The findings of this study reveal that negative UGC often originates as a direct result of a poor service quality experience or because of poor product performance. The subsequent virality of negative UGC is exacerbated as brands are either unresponsive or respond using a generic response that is devoid of empathy or personalisation (Malarvizhi et al., 2022:10). Therefore, the FGC that is generated to deal with the influence of negative UGC, as well as the positive FGC that is propagated needs to be customised and personalised in order to be effective (Troiville et al., 2019:79). Customised FGC enhances the reputation of the retail brand, as online-users view this customised attempt as an acknowledgement that they are valued as consumers and are made to feel appreciated. It is also viewed as making a special effort to resolve the issue at hand by acknowledging the consumer by using their correct name and surname. This type of responsive approach also allows the retail brand to respond to the negative UGC in a more personalised and accurate manner, which enhances the credibility of the retail brand and reduces the negative virality of the UGC (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2016:30). This also assists with the marginal reduction of negative CBBE levels, as the enhanced brand credibility assists with formation of positive CBBE, which is offset against the negative CBBE formation (Dwivedi et al., 2018:1177).

Also, it needs noting that that customisation of the FGC is not specific to the communications strategy of the retail brand, but rather the customisation of the FGC content to negate the influence of negative UGC on CBBE. A generic response to negative UGC needs to be avoided as this has a tendency to aggravate the online firestorm, hence the shift to a more customised and personalised approach (Lappeman et al., 2018:14).

Ciasullo et al. (2019:143) emphasises the use of a personalised approach when dealing with negative UGC, as it strengthens the relationship with the online consumer, as well as reducing the negative emotions associated with the poor product or service experience. Liu et al. (2021:824) assert that brands do not sufficiently prioritise the significant role that personalisation plays in meeting and exceeding consumer expectations, as these service quality perceptions crucially underpin CBBE formation.

## **2. Community**

This study has found that the presence of both positive and negative UGC influences CBBE. The generation of UGC is intrinsically linked to the formation of online brand communities (Schivinski et al., 2016:192), which correspondingly increases the intensity of the relationship that brand communities have with the brand (Arya et al., 2022:1393; Coelho et al., 2018:156). Retail brands need to develop innovative ways to use their communication strategies to build a relationship with their online consumer markets. By increasing the participation and interaction levels between the retail brand and online consumers, an analogous increase in the associated levels of trust and commitment occurs. Hajli et al. (2017:136) assert that this subsequently improves the quality of the relationship between the brand and the consumer and with an improved relationship, loyalty levels are also increased. This contributes to the generation of increased levels of sharing, interaction and ultimately positive UGC, which assists with negating the damaging effect of negative UGC on CBBE.

It needs to be noted that individualism should not be neglected at the expense of brand community formation (Hung, 2014:609), and brands also need to establish a point of identification or aspects of interest that online consumers can relate to. These common areas of interest therefore serve as a basis for brand community formation and its associated resonance with the brand (Hung, 2014:609). Retail brands need to ensure that they actively direct their FGC in a manner that engages and stimulates brand communities in a concerted and integrated manner, hereby encouraging brand engagement (Hajli et al., 2017:136). Despite the formation and identification of these brand communities presenting various benefits for retail brands, such as developing deeper relationships and improved understanding of target audiences, the main purpose of this engagement with brand communities (Coelho & Bairrada, 2019:162) should be the generation of positive UGC, or the co-creation of content, using a combination of UGC and FGC for the objective of building brand resonance (Zia et al., 2022:135 & Hajli et al., 2017:141).

## **3. Consciousness**

While the damaging effect of negative UGC on CBBE has been found to be significantly higher in other studies (Kim & Johnson, 2016:107), it is the virality of negative UGC that causes the damage to purchase intentions and brand equity. Prior to the creation of Web 2.0, retail brands were only required to manage consumer complaints during their trading hours; however, UGC is not bound to a retail store's trading hours and therefore requires a different type of response. Kim and Johnson (2016:107) found that not only does negative UGC have a more significant influence than positive UGC on purchase intentions and brand engagement, which are essential components of CBBE, but negative UGC has the

potential to spread faster and damage CBBE more significantly. Brands need to be cognisant of the importance of speed when dealing negative UGC, as delayed responses could result in the negative UGC spiralling beyond the control of the brand (Qu et al., 2019:15). In addition to speed of response, it is also the type of response that is important in the management of negative UGC, as these responses are of a defensive nature, and they do not address the complaint accurately and comprehensively (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015:201), further aggravating the situation. The UG-5C framework will not be primarily focused on speed of response, but rather adopt a somewhat more measured response that is more comprehensive and accurate (Johnen & Schnittka, 2019:874).

Negative UGC relating to retail brands is often a direct result of product and service failure and the UGC post is often written highly emotively prior to being shared on a social media platform. Staff who are expected to respond to these complaints need to be adequately trained to respond to the negative UGC or complaint without being distracted or drawn into the emotive aspects of it. Also, staff who are responsible for the handling of social media complaints are often not sufficiently conscious of the ramifications associated with not dealing with negative UGC in an effective manner. They are also not fully capacitated to deal with negative UGC decisively and often must refer the complaint to another department or colleague, causing extensive delays or the non-fulfilment of promises.

Retail brands and the staff involved with dealing with negative UGC need to raise their consciousness levels as far as the consequences associated with negative UGC are concerned. They need to adopt the mindset that negative UGC is an opportunity to impress the consumer; additionally, this allows the retail brand with not only a chance to retain the consumer's business, but also to enhance the reputation of the brand (Lappeman et al., 2018:14). Therefore, retail staff who are responsible for the handling of negative UGC need to be actively engaged with the various social media platforms (Fabrick, 2020:93), and they also need to be conscious of the factors that aggravate the generation of additional negative UGC.

Einwiller& Steilen (2015:201) assert that simply apologising about the poor consumer encounter or explaining the events that contributed to its occurrence will not alleviate negative CBBE. It is important for retail staff to ensure that they place emphasis on placing the consumer in the same or a better position than they were in prior to the poor customer experience. These attempted interventions are referred to as response strategies and they are focused on redress or partial redress of the consumers' situation (Einwiller& Steilen 2015:202). These response strategies are critical to ensuring that consumer expectations are either matched or exceeded, resulting in a positive or satisfactory service quality experience, reducing negative CBBE.

#### 4. Create

Various studies have concluded that positive UGC content created by online users that results in high levels of engagement exerts the highest degree of influence on brand perceptions (Mishra, 2019:396). Therefore, retail brands need to generate FGC that stimulates online users into creating positive UGC content that is engaging and interactive in nature, as this contributes to the dilution of the effect of negative UGC on CBBE (Lwin, 2022:97). While ensuring the generation of positive interactive UGC benefits CBBE, the frequency of the engagement is also important to negate the escalation of the negative UGC (Qu et al., 2019:15). Additionally, positive UGC stimulates the inclination of other online consumers also to generate positive UGC (Zia et al., 2022:134; Ciasullo et al., 2019:142). This generation of positive UGC contributes to further depleting the effects of negative UGC, by assuring other online consumers of the isolated nature of the presence of the negative UGC.

Similarly, the aforementioned brand communities also need to be considered, as they are responsible for the creation of positive UGC due to their highly interactive and social nature. High levels of active engagement on social media platforms are crucial to the establishment of high levels of positive CBBE, as this negates the influence of negative UGC on CBBE (Lwin, 2022:97), as negative UGC seemingly only effects the CBBE of brands with weaker brand equity (Ho-Dac et al., 2013:48).

Online users all display varying types of behaviours, with some users being highly active in relation to the more passive users, referred to as lurkers, with the active users being responsible for creating content while the lurkers consume content (Machado et al., 2019:382). As active users display higher levels of affinity for the brand in relation to the passive users, and subsequent higher levels of positive CBBE, retail brands therefore need to stimulate the lurkers into active engagement (Lee & Park 2022:2213).

This process needs to be gradual and could include small initial increments of engagement, hereby slowly building the relationship with the retail brand and the activity levels of lurkers. This could simply be the encouragement to start following a retail brand on Facebook or by liking an image on their Facebook page (Ibrahim et al., 2022:17). This contributes to positive brand evaluations and perceptions, as well as an increased likelihood of purchase intentions (Schivinski et al., 2022:19; Beukeboom et al., 2015:33).

Consistent with the findings of other studies, this study has also concluded that UGC in the form of pictures and video content exerts a more pronounced influence on CBBE (Szabist, 2019:51). UGC in the form of pictures and videos should also be used by retail brands to create interest and points of

engagement for online consumers. Hartmann et al. (2021:34) state that the use of a brand selfie, which includes an image of the brand, contributes to high levels of brand engagement and has a positive effect on CBBE (Plieijers & Kristal, 2021:45).

Retail brands should consistently strive to create opportunities for active engagement with online users, as increased engagement between a retail brand and online consumers results in the creation of UGC, which contributes to increased brand loyalty and attachment (Arya et al., 2022:1393; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:121).

## **5. Coordination**

In this study, while positive UGC primarily exerted a significant influence on CBBE, the associated elements displayed similar compelling tendencies in terms of their influence on CBBE. The influence of UGC on brand credibility displayed one of the highest tendencies and as consumers, specifically Millennials, regard FGC as being less credible than UGC, the dedicated use of FGC within a retail brand's communication strategy would not be the most effective approach. FGC within the retail sector, which tends to rely more on traditional media channels such as television, radio and print, is used for building brand awareness. Schivinski et al. (2022:18) posit that not only do consumers distinguish between FGC and UGC, but they also interpret the two forms of communication very differently, with UGC being more aligned to influencing brand perceptions (Ibrahim et al., 2022:17; Bruhn et al., 2012:781),

While these two communication strategies are not mutually exclusive, should a retail brand want to build positive CBBE in the most effective manner, a combined and well-coordinated communication strategy is required (Schivinski & Dabrowski 2014:46). To maximise the impact on CBBE, this integrated communication strategy (Rachna & Khajuria, 2017:7) needs to ensure that targeted consumers are actively engaged in it (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013:150).

FGC content inevitably includes pictures and video content; however, the communication strategy needs to ensure the active engagement of online users. However, stimulating interaction with users and the generation of UGC content also needs to align with the objectives of the communication strategy, and the overall marketing strategy of the retail brand (Schivinski et al., 2022:18; Nisar et al., 2020:8). These consumer or firm-initiated interactions create brand stories, high levels of interaction between online users and brands occurring on social media platforms (Gensler et al., 2013:253). These brand stories are often launched using the traditional media platforms to provide the impetus for maximum exposure of the brand story, followed by interactions on various social media platforms (Arora & Sanni, 2018:18).

Colicev et al. (2018:12) suggest the more aggressive use of owned social media to build brand awareness, due to the high costs associated with using traditional media channels.

The creative strategy that is used to generate the maximum creation of positive UGC requires a carefully tailored and well thought-out creative communication strategy. The communication strategy could leverage off trending social media stories or use topics that are of interest to the brand's online consumers and that will generate the required online buzz. Wang et al. (2019:55) provide an intriguing alternative approach, where the FGC content is mismatched or not aligned, where the FGC content is both persuasive and realistic in nature, which results in higher levels of UGC creation and adoption.

The UG-5C Framework can be used to generate high levels of positive UGC by using its five components in an integrated and synergistic manner. However, it needs to be underpinned by an overarching communications strategy. Major retail brands will primarily use traditional media for this communications strategy, as this provides new marketing and communication campaigns with the initial impetus required at the launch of their campaigns. Traditional media are also better suited for building brand awareness and brand interest within target markets. Therefore, this communication strategy will use traditional media to focus on the brand equity dimensions that the integrated communications strategy does not align well with. However, the UG-5C framework needs to be executed within certain parameters, and also be guided by specific goals in terms of the retail brands' other strategic brand equity and marketing objectives.

The UG-5C framework is based on the propagation of positive UGC to increase the level of positive CBBE, which is also the primary principle upon which Qu's (2019) model of UGC propagation is based, though Qu's (2019) model also focuses on increasing the frequency of interactions, volume of UGC and to some extent speed of response (Ibrahim et al., 2022:17). As for the UG-5C framework, response time is not a primary component as a more measured approach is used, with the focus on providing a more accurate and comprehensive response, as opposed to a speedy response.

#### **5.4.5 Additional recommendations**

The strategies outlined within the UG-5C model will ensure that a more holistic approach is adopted to ensure the formation of positive CBBE. While the adoption of the UG-5C model is proposed, a few additional recommendations are also presented below:

## **Earned social media**

The findings of the study, while aligning with similar studies, are also in contrast with other studies that attempted to determine the influence of UGC on CBBE and other related brand equity variables. This highlights the volatility of the extent and the outcomes associated with the influence of UGC on CBBE. This is in contrast with retail brands' continued reliance on traditional media to influence CBBE. The use of FGC which primarily includes traditional media continues to be highly prevalent, mostly because it is known, controllable and easily executable. This traditional approach is then supplemented with a social media strategy, often resulting in an ungainly integrated communications strategy. Despite this approach contributing to the propagation of positive UGC, a more co-ordinated approach to manage negative UGC is required.

The use of earned social media is also recommended to bridge the gap between FGC and UGC (Sharma et al., 2022:140). Earned social media is a cost-effective brand-related or user-generated post, which is usually generated by an influencer, which stems from their exposure to a retail brand's social media posts (Schivinski et al., 2022:19; Mattke et al., 2019:802). Earned social media (ESM) usually includes favourable recommendations or brand endorsements by influencers who often have large numbers of social media followers (Mumbengegwi & Abratt, 2019:73). Colicev et al. (2018:16) assert in their study within the retail sector that the use of ESM significantly contributes to the formation of positive CBBE. While ESM is also regarded as credible and trustworthy (Mattke et al., 2019:802), it also provides impetus to increased brand engagements and brand interactions, which in turn will stimulate UGC generation and enhanced CBBE levels (Colicev et al., 2018:3).

## **Secondary brand associations**

CBBE formation is inextricably linked to incoming stimuli. The stimulus used in this study was UGC which exerted a significant influence on CBBE. Similarly, brand associations are valuable in shaping the knowledge of consumers, contributing to CBBE formation (Keller, 1993:3). Brand associations are intrinsic to the formation of brand image, and are a primary dimension of brand knowledge and the subsequent emergence of either positive or negative CBBE (Keller, 1993:1). Retail brands need to make frequent use of unique, positive, and favourable brands associations. The pragmatic use of these various types of brand associations needs to be aligned to their brand, range of products or their related services in order to effectively build brand equity.

Secondary brand associations are associations that are affiliated to a brand, but these could originate from varied sources (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020:60). While the sources from which retail brands can



leverage secondary brand associations are many and diverse, these could range from characters, events, countries, influencers; or even other non-competing brands could be used. However, the pragmatic selection of which secondary brand sources to leverage is crucial to building positive brand equity, as the incorrect selection could have the inverse effect on the equity of the brand. Therefore, it is essential for retailers to select secondary brand sources that display brand values and attributes that correspond with theirs.

Eusebius (2020:250) found that secondary associations also exist within UGC, and these associations while varied, can be extrapolated to all the CBBE dimensions within the Brand Resonance pyramid. Accordingly, retail brands should adjust their integrated communications strategy to methodically manipulate secondary brand associations to achieve the desired effect within the various dimensions of the CBBE model, thereby building positive CBBE. However, a key consideration for retail brands is to ensure that they achieve the necessary synergy between their secondary brand associations, their integrated communications strategy, UGC generation, and their use of traditional media. Gensler (2013:253) states that the coordination of all these branding strategies that are available to brands makes the control and management thereof extremely challenging. However, a guiding rule for all these strategies is the maintenance the reputation of the brand.

## **5.6 Theoretical applications and conversants**

This research study provides insights into the fields of brand management, consumer behaviour and communication theory. The study focuses on the influence of UGC on the CBBE of Millennials and the associated implications for major retail brands. The theoretical framework is modelled on the conceptual framework of Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2015) model that measures the influence of both UGC and FGC and their impact on CBBE. The omnipresent influence of UGC, which is often more likely to be of a negative nature, coupled with the ever-increasing usage of social media as platforms to influence consumer choices, highlight the significance of this study. This behavioural change in the decision-making processes of Millennials has been further aggravated by the shift away from FGC as a primary source of information when making purchase decisions. Despite the influence of negative UGC on CBBE being less pronounced than that of the influence positive UGC (Mishra, 2018:396), the damage to brand equity that negative UGC holds should not be discounted.

While this study focused on the influence of UGC on CBBE (Demba, 2019; Malthouse, 2016), studies focusing on these two variables are becoming increasingly more widespread due to the ubiquitous nature of UGC. The results evident in this study corroborate with similar studies that have measured the influence of UGC on CBBE, in that both positive and negative UGC exert an influence on CBBE, while

mixed-neutral seemingly has no influence, thus these theories are confirmed.

The influence of UGC on Keller's (2010) brand resonance model and its associated dimensions and how these influence purchasing decisions that constitute CBBE, and how these influence consumer judgements, brand perceptions and purchasing decisions, underpin the theoretical foundations of the study. While the study was not able to measure the influence of UGC on every-sub dimension of CBBE within the brand resonance model, the findings that UGC exerts an influence on brand performance, brand judgements and brand feelings are confirmed. As the study has also found that UGC influences brand loyalty levels (Zia et al., 2022:134), the corresponding levels of brand resonance are also affected. Notably, a key component with the UG-5C framework suggests the use of online communities as a vehicle for generating positive CBBE formation, which correlates with community engagement as one of the key sub-dimensions of brand resonance formation. The influence of UGC on CBBE and its associated dimensions of the brand resonance model can therefore also be confirmed.

The two main theoretical constructs of UGC and CBBE exist in divergent theoretical fields. UGC originates from word-of-mouth communications (Westbrook, 1987:261) and has now evolved into a disruptor within the marketing communications field. While brand equity can be defined and conceptualised from various perspectives, it is Keller's (1993:2) consumer-based perspective (CBBE) that is commonly accepted. UGC as an incoming stimulus is processed using the schema theory (Eysenck, 1984), where known brand information is extrapolated against stored information, thus forming perceptions is therefore also confirmed.

Significantly, while UGC remains an independent variable, it is the degree of influence that FGC can exert on UGC that presents significant implications for major retail brands. How the major retail brands proceed to adapt their FGC to influence UGC is embedded within COBRA typology (Muntinga et al., 2011). The COBRA typology is a continuum that outlines how UGC is consumed, contributed and created, with the respective levels representing corresponding levels of brand engagement and brand resonance (Mishra, 2018:396). How UGC is consumed within cognition is a study that might exist within the body of knowledge that borders on psychology and consumer behaviour theory; it is the two variables of contribution and creation of UGC that present the most opportunity for retail brands in the building of brand equity. Therefore, it is within the context of the COBRA typology (Muntinga et al., 2011) that additional research could be conducted to determine communication strategies that could be employed to shift online consumers along the COBRA continuum. The objectives would be therefore to increase the levels of the contribution and creation dimensions of the COBRA typology, and the associated positive CBBE formation.

Embedded in the ability of both positive and negative UGC to influence CBBE is trust, with the associated credibility of the source of the UGC being an integral component of this process (Chelliah, et al., 2022:430). This study also revealed that mixed-neutral UGC exerts a significant influence on CBBE and displays a neutralising effect on the degree of influence that both positive and negative UGC exerts on CBBE. This theoretical conversant (Huff, 1999:49) presents intriguing parameters as the literature is largely ambivalent with regards to the effects of mixed-neutral UGC. With the steady increase in influencer's propagating positive UGC, coupled with the associated tendency of "brand-bashing", mixed-neutral UGC has the potential to surpass both positive and negative UGC in its ability to influence CBBE. This could be as a result of the balanced perspectives associated with mixed-neutral UGC; hence it being regarded as more authentic and credible.

While an understanding of the theoretical implications of the influence of UGC on CBBE is recommended, this merely serves as a background to the integral role that UGC can play in either enhancing or damaging the equity of the retail brand. Retail brands need to be alert to the opportunities and threats posed by UGC and its varying and diverse influences on an already complex construct, brand equity.

## **5.7 Managerial implications**

Word of mouth communication and its successor UGC present significantly different challenges for major retail brands within not only the Cape Metropole surrounding Cape Town, but also for many retailers beyond these geographic boundaries. While these brands are becoming more aware of the consequences and the significance associated with negative UGC, their primary focus is the management and elimination of negative UGC.

While the early detection of negative UGC has improved with the use of various algorithms (Kassem et al., 2020:527), the management of negative UGC together with positive UGC is not well understood (Legocki et al., 2021).

The management of UGC should not exist within a siloed customer service or separate complaint-handling department, but should rather be integrated into the strategic communication or marketing department of retail brands. While the management of negative UGC should remain a priority, a strategic, proactive approach needs to be adopted with regards to the generation and management of positive UGC, as opposed to a reactive approach in dealing with negative UGC. The creation of positive UGC should therefore become a strategic focus area, which is seamlessly integrated into FGC, embedded specifically within the communication or social media strategy (Rachna & Khajuria, 2017:7).

Additionally, the realisation of the value of positive UGC in dealing with negative UGC hereby shifts to a more proactive approach focusing on the generation of FGC that will stimulate not only the consumption of UGC, but more importantly the contribution and creation of positive UGC.

Within the context of UG-5C framework and the COBRA typology (Muntinga et al., 2011), and the adoption a more proactive approach to UGC management, the management within major retail brands is presented with a number of implications in terms of the execution of their communication strategy. Firstly, eliciting reactions from passive online consumers requires additional financial resources in the form of incentives, promotions, discounts, or competitions, so as to prompt them to be more active and encouraging them into consuming the UGC (Buzeta et al., 2020:9).

Secondly, shifting these online users to display higher levels of interaction and engagement will require a communication strategy that focuses on UGC contribution and creation (Cheregi, 2018:302). Creative communication campaigns that online consumers find compelling, entertaining and trendy should be considered (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022:19; Cheung et al., 2021:370). Encouraging discussions related to product styles, colour choices and product experiences will elicit contributions from online users. Thirdly, a communication strategy that is highly interactive and participative as well as one that presents the online user with rewards and incentives is well suited to the creation of content (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022:19). A shift away from entertaining FGC needs to be noted here, as Piehler et al. (2019:1850) assert that this does not encourage interaction or high the levels of engagement.

Additionally, the calibre of the staff allocated to perform the duties and tasks associated with the management of negative UGC needs to be considered: staff who more experienced and skilled than those who usually occupy these positions within retail stores. The staff handling negative UGC have often been working within the face-to-face environment. However, the skill set required to manage negative UGC is notably different. As previously stated, negative UGC is often written highly emotively, as the motives for creating the negative UGC are not only an attempt to attract the attention of the affected retail brand, but also to stimulate the support and reaction of other online users (Legocki et al., 2021). Staff therefore require high levels of emotional intelligence to be able to separate the emotive from the factual content, ensuring that they remain impartial when dealing with negative UGC. These personnel also need to be adequately empowered, well trained and need to have a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of all the various divisions within the business (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2017:311). This is to ensure that when executing the appropriate response strategy, and commitments and promises are made to online consumers, it is within the capabilities and competencies of the affected departments and staff.

Despite the focus shifting to the integration of UGC into FGC and the formulation of a more integrated communication approach, Kumar (2016:22) cautions against discarding the usage of traditional media as a means of communication, as significant synergies exist when harnessing both approaches. It also needs to be borne in mind that adaptations to strategies present a retail brand with additional cost implications. However, with the execution of these new communication strategies, retail brands will enjoy the benefits of higher levels of brand loyalty, enabling them to exert more dominance over their market share and enjoy higher levels of positive CBBE. Therefore, where possible this allows certain retail brands to command a more premium price for their products and in so doing offset the costs of the execution of the new strategy (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013:96).

Perhaps the most significant implication for brand managers in the management of UGC on CBBE lies in the attitudinal approach to managing its ever-increasing effect on brands. The realisation that UGC is becoming increasingly prevalent, and its management is integral to building brand equity. Therefore, the integrity of the brand needs to be more closely guarded against the damaging effects of negative UGC. Negative service encounters which often occur at specific operational areas or touchpoints need to be minimised and avoided wherever possible. Brands need to be more pragmatic in managing their reputation, so as to reduce the associated negative viral consequences that occur as result of negative service encounters. An analysis of these touchpoints and the extent to which they contribute to the formation of negative UGC needs to be conducted. Brand managers need to make strategic decisions that outline the tactical and operational strategies that should be employed across all the touchpoints of the brand. These strategies need to be clearly outlined in terms of their execution, based on the specific situation that is being encountered.

## **5.8 Directions for future studies**

This study attempted to establish whether UGC exerts any influence on the CBBE of major retailers within the Cape Metropole. Coupled with this finding was the determination whether positive, negative or mixed-neutral UGC exerts a greater influence on CBBE of these retailers. While it was found that positive UGC exerts a greater influence than negative or mixed-neutral UGC, a number of opportunities for future research arise.

While numerous studies have attempted to determine the influence of either positive or negative UGC on CBBE, studies involving the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE are limited (Tang et al., 2014). While the dearth of studies in this area this could be attributed to the relative recency of the concept of UGC, however, a more likely reason could be the complexity surrounding the different types of mixed-neutral (Tang et al., 2014:43).

CBBE as a construct is extremely convoluted, consisting of numerous sub-dimensions within the brand resonance model, therefore presenting various opportunities for future studies. While various studies have been directed at the entire model or on the sub-dimensions of the model, many aspects of the model remain uninvestigated. The influence of UGC on brand imagery is a prime example of one of the sub-dimensions that could be researched more extensively in future. The dearth of research in this area could be attributed to the dichotomous nature of brand imagery and the abstract nature of its components (Keller, 2013:11)

UGC as a phenomenon is increasingly attracting more research interest; the reason could be attributed to the devastating effects of negative UGC on the equity of brands. As a consequence, various studies have measured the effects of negative UGC on brand equity. However, as this study revealed more research needs to be directed at the potential role that positive UGC could play in positive CBBE formation. Here the research could be directed at how positive UGC could assist in the creation of positive brand equity that is more resilient to the effects of negative UGC.

Various areas of future research opportunities could also be conducted to determine the motives for UGC generation. The research in this area could be directed at the motives for the generation of either positive, negative or mixed-neutral UGC. While the motives for UGC generation will provide some valuable insights into the understanding of the cognitive processes surrounding UGC generation, new investigations involving UGC within the theoretical constructs of Eysenck's (1984) schema theory will assist in understanding how UGC is processed, within the context of existing knowledge, and the resultant formation of brand equity. The scope of the research could also be narrowed down by conducting a deeper investigation into the motivational and consumer behaviour theories separating passive consumers from active creators of UGC content, which will also assist in the management of UGC.

While the aforementioned research areas will provide useful insights into the types of UGC and their respective influence on brand equity and its related dimensions, similarly, new perspectives will be gained from understanding the rationale and motives behind UGC generation. However, the primary focus of future research should be directed at the holistic management of UGC and its associated integration into the marketing and brand management strategies of firms.

## 5.9 Concluding remarks

User-generated content has disrupted the way brands are managed, marketed, and controlled within the marketplace. The initial management of UGC was thought to reside within the realms of customer-relationship management, before traversing in the direction of the marketing and social media functions. For many firms, including retailers, it still occupies a straddled position between these various functions, further aggravating its management.

Brand equity is an equally complex construct that continues to have numerous perspectives from which it can be described and defined (Keller, 2013:57). Building brand equity no longer rests within the sole domain of a firm, and it can be argued that the scale of building brand equity has tipped in favour of the consumers.

The aim of this research study was to prepare a strategic communications framework to assist major retail brands to manage the influence of negative UGC on their CBBE, while at the outset, the focus was primarily on negative UGC and its management. While this continues to be the case, solely because of its damaging virality, more attention needs to be diverted in the direction of positive UGC and the value it presents in the management of negative UGC.

A major finding of this study was that positive UGC exerted a greater influence on CBBE than negative UGC. The associated positive effects of positive UGC on brand credibility, brand loyalty and purchase intentions resulted in the development of the UG-5C model which consists of five components that could assist with an improved management strategy of UGC and its effects on CBBE.

Overall, a paradigm shift is required by major retail brands in terms of the way they manage UGC and its corresponding effects. What is needed is the integration of the management of UGC into a cohesive communications strategy, together with the adoption of a more coordinated approach, by using appropriate response strategies for managing both negative UGC and the increasingly important positive UGC.

UGC as a contemporary phenomenon will continue to mutate as will its effects on CBBE. As recommended, additional research into the lesser-known areas of UGC is needed, and it will therefore be required of major retail brands to constantly adjust their brand management strategies accordingly.

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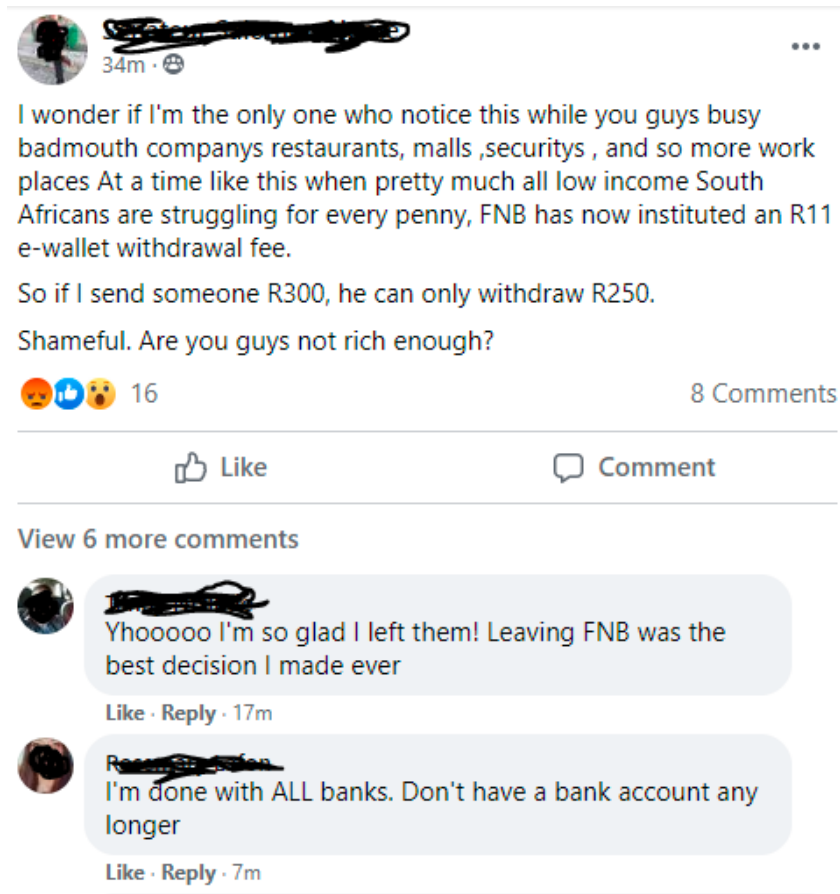
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## APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

### User-Generated Content Questionnaire

Dear Participant

Thank you for voluntarily participating in this survey on user-generated content (UGC or E-word of mouth), which includes social media conversations about brands and retailers, etc. (refer to the example below). The survey will not take longer than 10 minutes to complete and no personal information is required. Responses are confidential and will provide valuable information on UGC and the impact it has on consumer behaviour. It will only be used for academic purposes.



The screenshot shows a social media post from a user whose name is redacted. The post is 34 minutes old and contains the following text:

I wonder if I'm the only one who notice this while you guys busy badmouth companys restaurants, malls ,securitys , and so more work places At a time like this when pretty much all low income South Africans are struggling for every penny, FNB has now instituted an R11 e-wallet withdrawal fee.

So if I send someone R300, he can only withdraw R250.

Shameful. Are you guys not rich enough?

The post has 16 reactions (represented by icons for angry, like, and sad) and 8 comments.

Below the post are two visible comments:

- Comment 1: "Yhooooo I'm so glad I left them! Leaving FNB was the best decision I made ever" (17m)
- Comment 2: "I'm done with ALL banks. Don't have a bank account any longer" (7m)

1. **Filter:** Do you use any social media platforms that include UGC? 1.1 Yes  1.2 No

2. Which social media platforms do you use? **Tick ALL that apply.**

- 2.1. Facebook  2.2. WhatsApp  2.3. Twitter  2.4. Instagram   
2.5. LinkedIn  2.6. YouTube  2.7. Other  \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which digital platforms do you engage with? **Tick ALL that apply.**

- 3.1. Google  3.2. Yahoo  3.3. Bing  3.4. Facebook   
3.5. Instagram  3.6. Twitter  3.7. YouTube  3.8. Daily motion  
 3.9. Vimeo  3.10. WordPress  3.11. Tumblr  3.12. Gmail   
3.13. WhatsApp  3.14. Pinterest  3.15. TikTok  3.16. Other   
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences? **Tick ONE.**

- 4.1. Rarely  4.2. Sometimes  4.3. Often  4.4. Always

5. Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences? **Tick all that apply.**

- 5.1. To stay informed about brands  5.2. To make more informed purchasing decisions  
 5.3. I just read them to pass the time  5.4. I am just curious  5.5. Other

6. How many hours do you spend engaging online per day? **Tick ONE.**

- 6.1. Less than ½ hour  6.2. ½ to 1 hour  6.3. 2 hours   
6.4. 3 hours  6.5. 4 hours or more

7. How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms? **Tick ONE.**

- 7.1. Less than R250  7.2. R251 – R500  7.3. R501 – R750   
7.4. R751 – R1000  7.5. R1001 – R2000  7.6. R2001 – R3000   
7.7. R3001 – R4000  7.8. R4001 or more

8. Demographic factors

8.1. What is your gender?

- 8.1.1. Male       8.1.2. Female       8.1.3. Non-binary       8.1.4. Prefer not to mention

8.2. To which age category do you belong?

- 8.2.1. 21 – 25       8.2.2. 26 – 30       8.2.3. 31 – 35       8.2.4. 36 – 40

8.3. What is your highest level of education?

- 8.3.1. Grade 8 – 11       8.3.2. Grade 12       8.3.3. Completed Grade 12   
 8.3.4. No qualification       8.3.5. Post-matric diploma/certificate/degree   
 8.3.6. Postgraduate degree       8.3.7. Other

8.4. With which population group do you associate yourself most?

- 8.4.1. Black       8.4.2. Coloured       8.4.3. Indian       8.4.4. Asian   
 8.4.5. White       8.4.6. Other

9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree regarding user-generated content (UGC) and brand perceptions (CBBE) of major retail businesses. (**TICK ONE block per statement**):

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
9.1. UGC negatively influences my perceptions of brands	9.1.1.	9.1.2.	9.1.3.	9.1.4.	9.1.5.
9.2. Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being unreliable, results in my forming negative perceptions	9.2.1.	9.2.2.	9.2.3.	9.2.4.	9.2.5.
9.3. Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to poor brand performance, results in my forming negative perceptions	9.3.1.	9.3.2.	9.3.3.	9.3.4.	9.3.5.
9.4. Negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influence my purchasing decisions	9.4.1.	9.4.2.	9.4.3.	9.4.4.	9.4.5.
9.5. Negative UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	9.5.1.	9.5.2.	9.5.3.	9.5.4.	9.5.5.
9.6. Negative UGC video clips influence my purchasing choices significantly	9.6.1.	9.6.2.	9.6.3.	9.6.4.	9.6.5.

9.7.	Negative UGC pictures of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	9.7.1.	9.7.2.	9.7.3.	9.7.4.	9.7.5.
9.8.	Negative UGC video clips of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	9.8.1.	9.8.2.	9.8.3.	9.8.4.	9.8.5.
9.9.	Negative UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	9.9.1.	9.9.2.	9.9.3.	9.9.4.	9.9.5.
9.10.	I remember the negative UGC for a long time after being exposed to it.	9.10.1.	9.10.2.	9.10.3.	9.10.4.	9.10.5.
9.11.	I remember the associated negative brand perceptions for a long time after being exposed to negative UGC.	9.11.1.	9.11.2.	9.11.3.	9.11.4.	9.11.5.
9.12.	Negative UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	9.12.1.	9.12.2.	9.12.3.	9.12.4.	9.12.5.
9.13.	Negative UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	9.13.1.	9.13.2.	9.13.3.	9.13.4.	9.13.5.
9.14.	I tend to dislike the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	9.14.1.	9.14.2.	9.14.3.	9.14.4.	9.14.5.
9.15.	I no longer regard the brand as being credible after I am exposed to negative UGC about the brand	9.15.1.	9.15.2.	9.15.3.	9.15.4.	9.15.5.
9.16.	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to negative UGC	9.16.1.	9.16.2.	9.16.3.	9.16.4.	9.16.5.
9.17.	I will not consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to negative UGC	9.17.1.	9.17.2.	9.17.3.	9.17.4.	9.17.5.
9.18.	My relationship with the brand is negatively affected after being exposed to negative UGC	9.18.1.	9.18.2.	9.18.3.	9.18.4.	9.18.5.
9.19.	Negative UGC results in my no longer being loyal to the brand	9.19.1.	9.19.2.	9.19.3.	9.19.4.	9.19.5.
9.20.	I will no longer actively engage with the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	9.20.1.	9.20.2.	9.20.3.	9.20.4.	9.20.5.
<b>10.1.</b>	<b>UGC positively influences my perceptions of brands</b>	10.1.1.	10.1.2.	10.1.3.	10.1.4.	10.1.5.

10.2. Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being reliable, results in my forming positive perceptions	10.2.1.	10.2.2.	10.2.3.	10.2.4.	10.2.5.
10.3. Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand performance, results in my forming positive perceptions	10.3.1.	10.3.2.	10.3.3.	10.3.4.	10.3.5.
10.4. Positive UGC relating to positive service experiences influences my purchasing decisions	10.4.1.	10.4.2.	10.4.3.	10.4.4.	10.4.5.
10.5. Positive UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	10.5.1.	10.5.2.	10.5.3.	10.5.4.	10.5.5.
10.6. Positive UGC video clips influence my purchasing choices significantly	10.6.1.	10.6.2.	10.6.3.	10.6.4.	10.6.5.
10.7. Positive UGC pictures and video clips of service quality experiences positively influence my perceptions	10.7.1.	10.7.2.	10.7.3.	10.7.4.	10.7.5.
10.8. Positive UGC video clips of service quality experiences positively influence my perceptions	10.8.1.	10.8.2.	10.8.3.	10.8.4.	10.8.5.
10.9. Positive UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	10.9.1.	10.9.2.	10.9.3.	10.9.4.	10.9.5.
10.10. I quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it.	10.10.1.	10.10.2.	10.10.3.	10.10.4.	10.10.5.
10.11. I quickly forget about the associated positive brand perceptions after being exposed to positive UGC	10.11.1.	10.11.2.	10.11.3.	10.11.4.	10.11.5.
10.12. Positive UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	10.12.1.	10.12.2.	10.12.3.	10.12.4.	10.12.5.
10.13. Positive UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	10.13.1.	10.13.2.	10.13.3.	10.13.4.	10.13.5.
10.14. I tend to like the brand more after being exposed to positive UGC	10.14.1.	10.14.2.	10.14.3.	10.14.4.	10.14.5.
10.15. I regard the brand as being more credible after I am exposed to positive UGC about it	10.15.1.	10.15.2.	10.15.3.	10.15.4.	10.15.5.
10.16. My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to positive UGC	10.16.1.	10.16.2.	10.16.3.	10.16.4.	10.16.5.

10.17. I will consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to positive UGC	10.17.1.	10.17.2.	10.17.3.	10.17.4.	10.17.5.
10.18. My relationship with the brand is positively affected after being exposed to positive UGC	10.18.1.	10.18.2.	10.18.3.	10.18.4.	10.18.5.
10.19. Positive UGC results in my being loyal to the brand	10.19.1.	10.19.2.	10.19.3.	10.19.4.	10.19.5.
10.20. I tend to actively engage with the brand after being exposed to positive UGC	10.20.1.	10.20.2.	10.20.3.	10.20.4.	10.20.5.
<b>11. UGC (brand reviews) relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand</b>	11.1.	11.2.	11.3.	11.4.	11.5.
11.1. UGC (pictures) has no influence on my purchasing choices	11.3.1.	11.3.2.	11.3.3.	11.3.4.	11.3.5.
11.2. UGC (video clips) has no influence on my purchasing choices	11.4.1.	11.4.2.	11.4.3.	11.4.4.	11.4.5.
11.3. My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is not influenced when exposed to UGC.	11.5.1.	11.5.2.	11.5.3.	11.5.4.	11.5.5.
11.4. The overall image I have of the brand is not altered when exposed to UGC	11.6.1.	11.6.2.	11.6.3.	11.6.4.	11.6.5.
11.5. UGC does not alter my confidence in the brand as I do not trust UGC	11.7.1.	11.7.2.	11.7.3.	11.7.4.	11.7.5.
11.6. My feelings or emotions towards the brand are not influenced by UGC	11.8.1.	11.8.2.	11.8.3.	11.8.4.	11.8.5.
11.7. I will continue to engage with the brand after being exposed to UGC	11.9.1.	11.9.2.	11.9.3.	11.9.4.	11.9.5.

**Thank you for your time!**

## APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance Certificate



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Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	Faculty: <b>BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES</b>
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The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on **9 June 2020**, ethics **Approval** was granted to **Terence Hermanus (189041374)** for a research activity for **D. Com. Marketing** at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Title of dissertation/thesis/project:	<b>A strategic marketing framework to manage the effect of user generated content on consumer-based brand equity of major retailers in the Cape Metropole</b>  Lead Supervisor (s): Dr V Mugobo
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### Comments:

**Decision: Approved**

	<b>10 June 2020</b>
Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee	Date



## APPENDIX C: Editing Certificate

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13 September 2022

### To whom it may concern

This is to certify that I have edited the following thesis by Mr Terence Hermanus:

A strategic communication framework to manage the effect of user-generated content on consumer-based brand equity of major retailers in the Cape Metropole

Best regards



**KEN BARRIS**