



International Journal of Environment, Workplace and Employment

ISSN online: 1741-8445 - ISSN print: 1741-8437 https://www.inderscience.com/ijewe

Customer engagement in online brand communities and value co-creation: the Balkan countries perspectives

Fitore Jashari-Mani, Jusuf Zeqiri, Veland Ramadani, Wassim J. Aloulou, Faouzi Ayadi

DOI: <u>10.1504/IJEWE.2024.10062675</u>

Article History:

11 February 2024
18 February 2024
18 February 2024
29 April 2024

Customer engagement in online brand communities and value co-creation: the Balkan countries perspectives

Fitore Jashari-Mani*

Faculty of Business and Economics, South East European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia Email: fj28377@seeu.edu.mk and Faculty of Economics, University of Prishtina, Prishtina, Kosovo *Corresponding author

Jusuf Zeqiri and Veland Ramadani

Faculty of Business and Economics, South East European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia Email: j.zekiri@seeu.edu.mk Email: v.ramadani@seeu.edu.mk

Wassim J. Aloulou and Faouzi Ayadi

College of Business, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Email: wjaloulou@imamu.edu.sa Email: fmayadi@imamu.edu.sa

Abstract: In the digital marketing era, businesses and customers widely use online brand communities (OBC). Customers use OBC to obtain information about products and others' shared experiences to make better purchase decisions. Businesses use OBC to communicate with, connect with, and develop closer ties with their customers. However, increasing customer engagement (CE) in these communities is a challenge for businesses. While many models regarding engagement have been proposed by researchers in various geographic contexts, a gap in the literature remains regarding this topic for emerging Balkan countries. This study aims to propose a model that identifies factors that are positively and significantly related to CE, and by analysing CE's effect on value co-creation as a consequence. We focus on four countries of the Balkan region, using a sample of 764 survey respondents. We document a positive and significant impact of three independent variables in determining CE – ease of use, rewards and recognition, and brand commitment,

92 F. Jashari-Mani et al.

as well as a strong effect of CE on value co-creation. Our results can be used by businesses in transition economies to increase customer engagement through co-creation with their respective customers.

Keywords: customer engagement; CE; online brand communities; OBC; co-creation; Balkan countries.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Jashari-Mani, F., Zeqiri, J., Ramadani, V., Aloulou, W.J. and Ayadi, F. (2024) 'Customer engagement in online brand communities and value co-creation: the Balkan countries perspectives', *Int. J. Environment, Workplace and Employment*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.91–113.

Biographical notes: Fitore Jashari-Mani is a PhD student at South East European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia. Currently, she is serving as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Prishtina 'Hasan Prishtina', Kosovo. Her research interests include entrepreneurial marketing, managing distribution channels, international marketing, marketing of services, customer relationship management, etc.

Jusuf Zeqiri is a Professor of Marketing and International Business at the Southeast European University, North Macedonia. He has more than 20 years of teaching experience at various institutions. He has been teaching for more than 20 years at the undergraduate and graduate levels at South-East European University and has held lectures as a visiting professor at many domestic and international educational institutions in Southeast Europe. He has published more than 50 research papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals and is a reviewer for many international journals. His work to date has been published in high-ranked journals.

Veland Ramadani is a Professor of Entrepreneurship and Family Business at the Faculty of Business and Economics, South-East European University, North Macedonia. His research interests include entrepreneurship, small business management, and family businesses. He authored or co-authored around 180 research articles and book chapters, 12 textbooks, and 25 edited books. He has published in the *Journal of Business Research, International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, among others.

Wassim J. Aloulou is an Associate Professor at the College of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, KSA. He received his PhD in Management Sciences from the University of Pierre Mendes, France Grenoble 2, France, and from the Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion de Sfax, Tunisia in 2008. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on entrepreneurship in MBA and BBA programs. His research interests currently focus on digital entrepreneurship, FinTech, entrepreneurial intentions, and orientations of individuals and organisations. He has authored and co-authored multiple articles in reputable international journals.

Faouzi Ayadi is an Assistant Professor (HDR) of Business Management (Management Information Systems) at the College of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Riyadh – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). He received his MSc degree from Bordeaux 4 University (France) and his PhD degree in Business Management (specialty: Management Information Systems) from Toulouse 1 University

(France). He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on Management Information Systems. He has authored and co-authored multiple articles in reputable international journals (*Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*; *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research; International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship; International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* among others).

1 Introduction

Rapidly expanding worldwide internet penetration has led to significant economic shifts. It is changing the way businesses interact with one another, and with their customers as well. In this changing business environment, the new economy, also known as internet economy or digital economy has emerged. One of the main characteristics of this economy is the connectivity of its actors (Carlsson, 2004), leading to new ways of business–customer interaction (Petrescu and Krishen, 2023).

A digital engagement ecosystem is defined as a group of virtual platforms where businesses can interact and co-create value with their customers (Breidbach et al., 2014). Within this ecosystem, social media is considered a powerful tool for creating and maintaining customer relationships with brands (Itani et al., 2020). Social networks (SN) are a type of social media, used to track and influence customer behaviour toward brands and products (Sundararaj and Rejeesh, 2021). Social network visitors can connect, communicate and cooperate with one another, as well as exchange information and resources. This makes SN an ideal tool for creating online brand communities (OBC). OBCs foster customer relationships and enable customers and businesses to share and exchange brand information and products (Chavadi et al., 2023). Businesses aim to engage customers in their brand discussions in these communities, which is considered vital for brand community success (Kumar and Kumar, 2020). So, studies show that OBCs have a positive impact on fostering customer engagement (CE) and customer-brand relationship (Martinez-Lopez et al., 2021). OBCs are considered a great tool to study CE in SN, because of:

- 1 customer-customer and customer-brand relationship creation (Xi and Hamari, 2020)
- 2 user-generated content which leads to higher purchase intentions (Mayrhofer et al., 2020)
- 3 brand-focused communities (Cheng et al., 2020).

Due to its positive impact on customers' attitudes toward brands and their purchase intentions (Kaur et al., 2020), CE in OBCs attracted the attention of many researchers.

Despite the studies focused in developed countries, when it comes to Western Balkan countries, a lack of studies related to factors affecting CE in brand communities, is noted. There are few studies focused on the impact of social media usage on customer behaviour in general (Rrustemi and Jusufi, 2021) or specifically on customer purchase intentions and loyalty (Gubatova, 2020). Other studies are mainly related to the impact of e-marketing on brand loyalty (Ukaj and Mullatahiri, 2019), the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions (Kajtazi and Zeqiri, 2020), the impact of online reviews on online bookings (Jashari and Rrustemi, 2018), etc. Recently, the study of Jashari-Mani and

Zeqiri (2023) investigated factors that drive CE in OBC in Western Balkan countries and the consequences that come from CE in OBC. Our paper aims to respond to this study's call for future research, by expanding this study through providing a new CE model that includes other factors that also drive CE in OBCs and by evaluating the effect of CE on value co-creation. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on this topic, contributing to digital marketing literature and practice.

2 Literature review

2.1 Customer engagement

Different authors defined the concept of CE. In general, it is described as interaction and cooperation with brand communities (Brodie, et al., 2013) and other community members (Algesheimer et al., 2005). It has been studied in the context of existing theories, and sometimes it has been treated as an extension of some of them. Some authors define it as a new perspective of customer management (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010). Others relate it to customer relationship marketing (Hollebeek, 2011; Islam and Rahman, 2016; Brodie, et al., 2013; Breidbach et al., 2014), S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; Vargo, 2009), social identity theory (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Casalo et al., 2010) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Hollebeek, 2011).

Most of the studies in marketing literature define CE as a multi-dimensional concept, with only a few of them treating it as a uni-dimensional concept (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Gummerus et al., 2012; Sprott et al., 2009). The vast majority of authors are supporters of the thought that CE has three main dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Brodie et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2014; Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). CE in social media is manifested in different activities like writing comments, sharing content, spreading electronic word of mouth, looking for information, user-generated content, etc. (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

2.2 Online brand communities and customer engagement

OBC are virtual, non-physical groups of members with similar or the same brand preferences and interests, who share brand information and experiences (De Valck et al., 2009; Stokbürger-Sauer, 2010). In general, brand communities' members have different benefits like social, economic (Gwinner et al., 1998) and entertainment as well (Mathwick and Rigdon, 2001), features which apply also for OBC (Nadeem et al., 2020). While CE may have different engagement subjects like brands, communities, media, etc. (Dessart et al., 2015), there are different reasons why people get engaged in OBCs. Many authors developed different conceptual models explaining factors affecting CE in OBCs (antecedents) and the consequences of CE.

Hollebeek and Chen's model (2014) explains that perceived brand actions, performance, value, innovativeness, responsiveness, and delivery of brand promise are factors affecting CE. Another model, one of Van Doorn et al. (2010), lists three antecedents of CE, namely: customer-based, firm-based, and context-based. Whereas Barger et al. (2016) model specifies five factors affecting CE, related to a brand, product, customer, content, and social media. In addition to these models, Chan et al. (2014)

added some other factors, namely: system support, community value, freedom of expression, and rewards and recognition.

2.3 Factors impacting customer engagement in online brand communities

2.3.1 Ease of use

According to Kim et al. (2008), ease of using social media means that its users are provided with the necessary infrastructure and tools to easily communicate and interact with each other. This includes navigation (Reibstein, 2002) and information access without much effort (Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006). Studies show that if social media is perceived as easy to use, customers are more likely to get engaged by its content (Chan et al., 2014; Kwon and Wen, 2010; Ribbink et al., 2004). Casalo et al. (2010) find that brand communities that are easily used have higher CE, while Lin (2006) finds that the ease of using an OBC has a positive effect on the intention to get engaged in that OBC. Also, McLean and Wilson's (2019) research indicates that perceived ease of use (EU)was found to positively influence brand engagement in retailers' mobile applications. Islam et al. (2020) study in the banking sector also finds that EU is an important website attribute that positively affects CE. Other studies are mainly focused on mobile apps (Fang et al., 2017; McLean, 2018), and their results show that the EU is an important driver of CE. Similarly, Marino and Lo Presti's research (2019) based on mobile instant messaging applications used as engaging platforms by businesses, reveals that the perceived ease of using these apps is one of the main variables enhancing CE in these platforms. The same results can also be found in other sectors, like tourism (Ye et al., 2019). Bazi et al. (2020) investigated CE with luxury brands on social media. The results indicate that EU and convenience (grouped in the technology dimension) are among the factors that influence customers to engage with luxury brands.

H1 Ease of OBC usage has a positive impact on CE.

2.3.2 Rewards and recognition

These refer to the utilitarian and hedonic benefits (Baldus et al., 2015) that customers can get as a result of their engagement in OBCs. Rewards may include coupons, games, free product samples (Dessart et al., 2015), fun, and satisfaction (Baldus et al., 2015). Recognition, on the other hand, is the perception of a member that his/her contribution in the community is recognised by other members (Kim et al., 2008). Chan et al. (2014) find that websites and social media accounts that have any kind of reward and recognition system (Gruen et al., 2000) for their active members, have a higher rate of CE. These findings are also supported by the studies of Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014), Gummerus et al. (2012), and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Xu and Wang (2019), in their research on the hotel industry, recommend that financial and non-financial reward systems can be used to improve CE. A recent study (Jang and Kim, 2022) regarding CE in restaurants' brand communities investigated the moderating effect of social rewards and found that the moderator positively affects CE in these communities. Guo et al. (2020), studied the degree of the uncertain reward - DUR's effect (like a lottery) on CE. They found that uncertain rewards combined with other marketing strategies can enhance CE. Likewise, Busalim et al. (2021) show that hedonic and utilitarian motivations drive CE in social commerce platforms.

H2 Rewards and recognition have a positive impact on CE.

2.3.3 Brand commitment

Many studies (Barger et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2011; De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Jahn and Kunz, 2012) show that brand commitment (BC) has a significant positive impact on community engagement. This means that customers who are more committed to a specific brand are more active in online communities, searching and providing information about that brand. Dessart et al. (2015) argue that this is due to the same interests and preferences they share with other community members. These findings are also supported by the studies of Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2008), Baldus et al. (2015), and Huang et al. (2013), who show that the stronger the commitment of customers with a brand, the higher their engagement in the communities of that brand. Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019), in their study of emerging countries, also state that commitment is a factor impacting CE in social media communities. Findings are also supported by Van Tonder and Petzer (2018), Parihar and Dawra (2020) and Gligor et al. (2019) who emphasise that BC is one of the main factors that leads to high levels of CE. Another research is conducted in the B2B industry and proved the same results as those found in the B2C industry (Youssef et al., 2018). Harrigan et al. (2018) find that BC is a strong predictor of CE even in tourism social media sites. Other researchers (Naumann et al., 2020) conducted a study in the services sector, and the results revealed that customers who are more committed to a brand are more engaged in brand communities. Another study, focused on Facebook brand communities of hotels, shows that customer commitment is one of the main factors influencing CE in the community (Touni et al., 2020).

H3 BC has a positive impact on CE.

2.4 Value co-creation and customer engagement in online brand communities

Digital communication platforms enable brands to co-create their values with their customers (Sawhney et al., 2005). In the digital environment, co-creation means the integration of customers' thoughts, ideas, feedback, and experiences in the creation of certain business offers and brands (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Saha et al., 2022). This means that customers have to engage in OBCs to participate in the co-creation process, so CE is a preceding of value co-creation (Potts et al., 2008). Therefore, many earlier studies show that co-creation is an effect of CE (Kim et al., 2008; Kumar et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010). Likewise, Muniz and Schau (2007) find that engaged customers in OBCs are more involved in the creation of brand advertising. Additionally, more recent studies reveal similar results. Yen et al. (2020) find that CE is positively related to customer value co-creation behaviours. The study of Nadeem et al. (2021) also shows that CE has a positive impact on value co-creation, and the impact is mediated by brand satisfaction and loyalty. Molinillo et al. (2020) conducted a study with users of Facebook commerce sites and found that CE is a predictor of customers' willingness to co-create. Another research, focused on customers' engagement in coffee shops, investigated the role of CE in value co-creation, and found a positive impact in the mentioned relationship (Yen et al., 2020). Nangpiire et al. (2022) examined positive and negative CE in hotels and restaurant customers. The results

showed that positive CE drove customer value co-creation. Rather (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between CE and value co-creation during the pandemic COVID-19. He found that CE in social media had a positive impact on co-creation and revisit intention.

H4 CE has a positive impact on co-creation





2.5 Conceptual model

Based on the literature review, a conceptual model is proposed. The hypothesised relationship between variables is illustrated in Figure 1. The relationship between CE and value co-creation is moderated by country, to examine the differences in that relationship among countries that are part of the study.

3 Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to test the theory of CE through the testing of the relationship between factors affecting the CE and the impact of CE on value co-creation, in Balkan countries. Factors affecting CE are the independent variables of our study, which are: EU, rewards and recognition, and BC. The dependent variable is CE, and the outcome of CE is value co-creation. We have also tested the impact of the country as a moderator. Relationship between the research model will be statistically tested in this study. The research sample includes participants from Kosovo, North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, and a smaller percentage from Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. It consists of 764 randomly selected respondents, a size that complies with previous similar studies (Table 1). The research focus is on OBC, specifically on Facebook and Instagram, as they are considered important tools for brands to create relationships with their customers (Casalo et al., 2010). The first reason why Facebook and Instagram are chosen is that they enable the creation of online communities where members can interact with one another, and with brands as well. Second, according to Statista (2022), Facebook is the most popular network in the world, with the largest number of active users. Also, Stat Counter (2022) shows that Facebook and Instagram have the highest rate of usage in Balkan countries. Details of used research methods are discussed in the following sections.

Authors	Sample - n
Casalo et al. (2010)	456
Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002)	160
Chan et al. (2014)	276
De Vries and Carlson (2014)	404
Emini and Zeqiri (2021)	334
Gummerus et al. (2012)	276
Kwon and Wen (2010)	229
Mortazavi et al. (2014)	167
Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007)	216

Table 1The sample size of similar studies

3.1 Instrument and items' construction

Data were collected from October to December 2022, using an electronic questionnaire, which consisted of 22 Likert scale questions, with five degrees. It was pre-tested for clarity and understanding, by being delivered to 10 respondents, whose feedback was considered before sharing the questionnaire with other participants. In total, 782 questionnaires were gathered. First, 12 of them were removed because of not fully completed. Further, 6 questionnaires were also removed, because of the low variance ($\sigma < 0.25$). In total, there were 762 questionnaires left for analysis.

 Table 2
 Resources of items used to measure research variables

Variable	Item	Source
Customer	I answer their questions	Dessart et al. (2015)
engagement	I share my thoughts with them	
	I share my experiences with the brand	
	Ask for ideas and information from them	
	I read and react (e.g., like) to the content they share in the group	
Ease of	Are easy to use	Kwon and Wen (2010)
using social	Have clear and understandable content	
networks	Are easy to navigate (browse)	Ribbink et al. (2004), Casalo et al. (2010)
	There you can easily find every information you need about the products	Casalo et al. (2010)
	They offer opportunities for communication and interaction, such as through message boxes (chat box), e-mail, etc.	Kim et al. (2008)

Variable	Item	Source
Rewards and	Offer rewards to active group members	Chan et al. (2014), Kim et al. (2008)
recognition	It is possible to win money or bonus	Baldus et al. (2015)
	The community shows gratitude for active participants	Kim et al. (2008)
	Promotional offers and discounts are available	Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014), Dessart et al. (2015)
	I can get better services	Gummerus et al. (2012)
	I can get faster answers from other members	Gummerus et al. (2012)
Brand commitment	More engaged in communities of brands I'm most involved and connected to	Baldus et al. (2015)
	Of the brands I think are very good	Jahn and Kunz (2012)
	Of the brands that are very important for me	De Vries and Carlson (2014)
Co-creation	I would like to suggest my ideas for new products or services of this brand	Kim et al. (2008)
	I would like to provide my opinion on product- related improvement methods	
	I would like to participate in customer research to provide my opinion	

 Table 2
 Resources of items used to measure research variables (continued)

The items were constructed consulting previous similar studies. They were derived from other measurement tools and were adopted for this study, to measure the research variables. Resources for each item are shown in Table 2.

3.2 Sample description

As shown in Table 3, respondents are mainly young, with 64.4% being 20-35 years old. The vast majority is female, 74.3%. Most of the respondents are from Kosovo (41%) and North Macedonia (25.7%). The majority of them (71.5%) use both Facebook and Instagram.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 20	130	17%
20-35	492	64%
Over 35	142	19%
Total	764	100.0%
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	196	26%
Female	568	74%
Total	764	100.0%

Table 3Sample description

Country	Frequency	Percentage
Kosovo	314	41%
North Macedonia	196	26%
Albania	128	17%
Montenegro	116	15%
Other	10	1%
Total	764	100.0%
Social networks	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook and Instagram	546	72%
Instagram	102	13%
Facebook	56	7%
Other	60	8%
Total	764	100.0%

Table 3Sample description

4 Results

For data analyses, we used IBM AMOS 26 and IBM SPSS Statistics 26. First, to test the measurement validity and reliability we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Then, we used structural equation model (SEM) to test the proposed research model and the research hypotheses. Finally, a multigroup analysis was performed to test the differences in variable relationships between the participating countries.

4.1 Testing normal distribution of data

According to Hair et al. (2010) and Byrne (2010), data have normal distribution if the Skewness values are between -2 and +2, and the Kurtosis values are between -7 and +7. As shown in Table 4, all variables have values between the above-mentioned ranges, indicating a normal data distribution.

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
CE	-0.330	-1.169
EU	-1.101	0.902
RR	-0.307	-1.101
BC	-1.144	0.574
Cc	-0.672	-0.350

Table 4Normal distribution of data

Notes: *CE – customer engagement. EU – ease of use. RR – rewards and recognition. BC – brand commitment. Cc – co-creation.

4.2 Estimation of scale's reliability and validity

For the scale's reliability and validity estimation, CFA analysis was carried out. To test the internal consistency of items used to measure a variable, the reliability estimator – Cronbach's alpha – α test was used. According to Hair et al. (1998) and Kline (1994), alpha values higher than 0.7 show an accepted and satisfactory internal consistency of the instrument. As Table 5 shows, all the α values of the research variables are greater than 0.7, indicating a high internal consistency, so there is no reason to drop any of the variables.

To further support the reliability, the items' correlation was also analysed. A correlation above 0.3 (> 0.3) indicates that the questions add to the explanatory value of the questionnaire (Ferketich 1991; Kline 1993). As Table 5 shows, all values are above 0.3, meaning that no item should be removed from the questionnaire.

Items		Standardised regression weights	Item total correlation	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
EU5	They offer opportunities for communication and interaction, such as through message boxes	0.726	0.677		
EU4	There you can easily find every information you need about the products	0.782	0.741		
EU3	Are easy to navigate (browse)	0.841	0.785		
EU2	Have clear and understandable content	0.789	0.725		
EU1	Are easy to use	0.805	0.745	0.891	0.623
RR6	I can get faster answers from other members	0.812	0.756		
RR5	I can get better services	0.887	0.838		
RR4	Promotional offers and discounts are available	0.834	0.804		
RR3	The community shows gratitude for active participants	0.908	0.873		
RR2	It is possible to win money or a bonus	0.786	0.788		
RR1	Offer rewards to active group members	0.804	0.801	0.935	0.705
BC3	Of the brands that are very important to me	0.871	0.819		
BC2	Of the brands I think are very good	0.905	0.841		
BC1	More engaged in communities of brands I'm most involved and connected to	0.862	0.796	0.908	0.773

 Table 5
 Standardised regression weights, item-total correlation, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE

102 F. Jashari-Mani et al.

Items		Standardised regression weights	Item total correlation	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
CC1	I would like to suggest my ideas for new products or services of this brand	0.897	0.817		
CC2	I would like to provide my opinion on product-related improvement methods	0.906	0.828		
CC3	I would like to participate in customer research to provide my opinion	0.789	0.744	0.896	0.749
CE5	I read and react (e.g., like) to the content they share in the group	0.685	0.604		
CE4	Ask for ideas and information from them	0.812	0.771		
CE3	I share my experiences with the brand	0.795	0.846		
CE2	I share my thoughts with them	0.808	0.866		
CE1	I answer their questions	0.811	0.834	0.915	0.614

 Table 5
 Standardised regression weights, item-total correlation, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE (continued)

4.3 Convergent and discriminant validity

To test if the questionnaire measures the concepts it was designed to measure, we conducted convergent and discriminant validity. One of the main conditions for reaching convergent validity is that the factor or estimate loadings (beta coefficients) of all items should be higher than 0.7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). From the results shown in Table 5, we can see that the estimates or beta coefficients are all above 0.7, except the value of item EU5 (highlighted value) which is slightly lower than the requested value, but as discussed later, it does not make a problem in model fit or hypotheses testing, so it was not removed.

	Brand_comm.	Reward_recogn.	Ease_use	Custo. _engage	Co_creat
Brand_comm	0.879				
Reward_recogn	0.526	0.839			
Ease_use	0.388	0.379	0.789		
Custoengage	0.559	0.683	0.383	0.783	
Co_creat	0.531	0.649	0.364	0.747	1.133

Table 6Discriminant validity

Convergent validity shows if the questions used to measure one variable are correlated with each other. It is reached if the average variance extracted – AVE is higher than 0.5,

> 0.5 (Becker et al., 2013). As indicated in Table 5, the AVE results of all variables are greater than 0.5, meaning that convergent validity is reached, so items are not correlated.

On the other hand, the discriminant validity shows how much the questions of one variable differ from the questions of the other variable. It is reached if the square root of AVE for one variable (bold values in the diagonal of the table), is greater than the correlation of that variable with other variables (values below the value in bold). As illustrated in Table 6, discriminant validity is also reached for all variables, so each variable measures different research constructs.

4.4 Estimation of the research model

Model fit was measured and estimated using some indicators like chi-square per degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF), relative fit index (RFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

The model estimation results show a good model fit. The chi-square value CMIN/DF is below 5.0 (\leq 5), indicating an acceptable model (Marsh and Hocevar, 1985). Also, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI values are greater than 0.9 (> 0.9), showing a good model fit. Another used indicator for model fit is RMSEA. For the model to be accepted, the RMSEA value should be between 0.05 and 0.08 (MacCallum et al., 1996). As Table 7 shows, the RMSEA of this model is 0.07, in the accepted range for a good model fit.

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	Р	CMIN/DF	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI	RMSEA
Default model	56	890.035	197	0.000	4.518	0.927	0.951	0.942	0.951	0.068

Table 7Model fit estimates

4.5 Common method bias (CMB)

Common method bias (CMB) is related to the portion of variance that is caused by a method used in that study (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). According to Podsakoff and Organ (1986), CMB happens when estimates of relationships between two or more constructs are biased since they are measured using the same technique. Thus, CMB may also happen as a result of the similarity in the design of survey items that causes respondents to reply similarly. Moreover, the problem with CMB may emerge because of the single measurement used by a researcher to administrate a survey where a similar format is used for collecting all variables simultaneously (independent variables and dependent variables), for example using the same Likert-type scales format for collecting responses for dependent and independent variables. In this study, in order to check CMB, Harman's one-factor test is used. This test denotes that CMB exists if exploratory factor analysis (EFA) items are loaded into one single construct and explains a variance that exceeds 0.50 of AVE due to the method used (Fuller et al., 2016). In order to check whether there is an issue with CMB, we used Harman's one-factor test. The results showed that the variance explained by a single factor is 45.2%. that indicates that there is not any issue regarding CMB, because it's under the recommended threshold of 0.50 of AVE. Therefore, CMB could exist if the newly discovered common latent factor accounts for more than 50% of the variation (Eichhorn, 2014).

4.6 SEM and hypotheses testing

To test the relationship between research variables, SEM analysis was used. As shown in Figure 2, the adjusted R-squared of CE $R^2 = 0.68$, which shows that 68 % of CE variance is explained by the variance of independent variables (EU, RR, and Cc). While co-creation adjusted R-squared $R^2 = 0.63$, shows that 63 % of Cc variance is explained by the variance of CE.





Table 8	Hypothesis	testing
---------	------------	---------

Hypotheses			Estimate	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R</i> .	Р	Conclusion	
H1	Custoengage	<	Ease_use	0.239	0.05	4.812	0.001	Supported
H2	Custoengage	<	Rewardrecogn	0.425	0.035	12.957	0.001	Supported
Н3	Custoengage	<	Brand_comm.	0.274	0.038	7.197	0.001	Supported
H4	Co_creat.	<	Custoengage.	0.95	0.053	17.83	0.001	Supported

Note: p < 0.001.

To test the hypotheses, we analysed the regression coefficients (β), critical ratio (t-value), and significance level. If regression estimates are higher than 0.10 in 0.05 significance level, they are considered to have an impact on the model (Huber et al., 2007). Referring to the results in Table 8, all three independent variables are positively related to CE, and

CE is positively related to Cc. Rewards and recognition is the variable that mostly explains CE in OBC. Results lead to hypothesis testing. EU has a positive impact on CE, with a regression coefficient = 0.239, p = 0.001, and t-value = 4.812. So, H1 is accepted. According to the results, rewards and recognition have a positive effect on CE, thus the second hypothesis is also supported ($\beta = 0.425$, p = 0.001, t = 12.057). Regarding H3, it can be indicated that it is supported, as results show that BC has a positive effect on CE ($\beta = 0.274$, p = 0.001, t = 7.197). The last hypothesis is about the consequence of CE. Values in the table show that CE has a positive impact on co-creation ($\beta = 0.95$, p = 0.001, t = 17.83). Thus, H4 is also supported.

4.7 Moderating effect of country

Since the study included several Balkan countries, we wanted to see if there is any difference between the effect of CE in Cc among the participating countries. To test the moderation effect of the country, we conducted a multigroup moderation analysis. The sample was divided into four groups, Kosovo (N = 314), North Macedonia (N = 196), Albania (N = 128), and Montenegro (N = 116). There were only 10 participants from other Balkan countries, so they were not included in the analysis. Regression weights (estimates, Table 9) show that the CE->Cc relationship is significant in all countries (p = 0.001).

Relationship	Parameter	Estimate	<i>C.R</i> .	Р
$CE \Rightarrow CC$	KS	1.026	8.112	0.001
	NM	0.703	9.956	0.001
	AL	1.022	7.697	0.001
	MN	0.932	10.076	0.001

 Table 9
 Regression weights of CE => CC among countries

Notes: KS – Kosovo; NM – North Macedonia; AL – Albania; MN – Montenegro; p < 0.001.

	KS	NM	AL	MN
KS	0			
NM	-2.232	0		
AL	-0.023	2.122	0	
MN	-0.603	1.968	-0.558	0

 Table 10
 Critical ratios for differences between countries

Notes: KS – Kosovo; NM – North Macedonia; AL – Albania; MN – Montenegro; p < 0.001.

To examine the between-countries differences in the CE => CC path coefficient (z-score), we used the critical ratios matrix. If the z-score is less than -1.96 or greater than 1.96, the path is considered significantly different from the other respective group (Gujarati, 2004). From the results (Table 10), it can be concluded that there is no significantly different CE => CC relationship between Kosovo – Albania, Kosovo – Montenegro, and Albania – Montenegro (bold values). Whereas results show a

significant difference in CE => CC relationship between Kosovo – North Macedonia, North Macedonia – Albania, and North Macedonia – Montenegro.

5 Discussion and conclusions

This paper examined CE in OBC in Balkan countries. Research is specifically focused on factors impacting positively CE and its effect on value co-creation. In the research model, variables EU, rewards and recognition, and BC represent factors impacting CE, while co-creation is studied as a consequence of CE.

Results indicate a significant positive impact of EU in CE. This means that CE in OBC is higher if OBC are easier to use. This is in line with the findings of McLean and Wilson (2019), Islam et al. (2020), Ye et al. (2019), Bazi et al. (2020), and McLean (2018), whose focus was mainly on mobile apps, websites, and social media. They found that online engagement platforms that are easy to be used, positively impact CE in these platforms. These findings are also supported by the results of our research in OBCs, used as engagement platforms.

The study also found a positive correlation between rewards and recognition and CE. In other words, brands that offer more rewards and recognition for active members of their communities have higher rates of engagement. Results supported the previous work of Jang and Kim (2022), Guo et al. (2020), and Busalim et al. (2021). Despite financial rewards, our study treated recognition as well. Results support Xu and Wang's (2019) study, which found that non-financial reward systems can drive higher CE.

Moreover, results reveal a positive impact of BC in CE. This can be explained that customers are more engaged in OBCs if they are more committed to their respective brands. This is conforming to the findings of Vohra and Bhardwaj's (2019) study which is focused on emerging countries and the study of Touni et al. (2020) focused on Facebook brand communities.

Furthermore, our study investigated the effect of CE on customer value co-creation. Different studies examined the customer co-creation process in different subjects like advertising (Muniz and Schau, 2007) or brand offers (Nadeem et al., 2021; Molinillo et al., 2020; Nangpiire et al., 2022). They found that co-creation is driven by CE. These findings are also supported by our research results that show a significant positive impact of CE in co-creation, meaning that the more customers are engaged in OBC, the higher their participation in developing and creating brands' products and offers.

In our study, we also found that the country is not quite a strong moderator of CE and value co-creation relationships. Results indicated that there are some differences in the CE->CC relationship between some countries, but there are also countries with no significant difference with other countries regarding the CE => CC relationship.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical contribution of our paper lies in expanding the existing literature regarding CE study in OBCs for the Balkan region, in light of CRM, S-D, SIT and SET theories. Our results are in compliance with the customer relationship marketing theory (Hollebeek, 2011; Islam and Rahman, 2016; Brodie, et al., 2013; Breidbach et al., 2014), proving that through CE customers develop co-creative interactions and relationships with brands, thus co-generating value. Our findings also support the S-D logic theory

(Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; Vargo, 2009), which lies in the co-creation value between collaborative stakeholders (customers and brands). Further, findings that prove that brand-committed customers are more likely to engage in brand communities as they feel that they are part of those groups, support the theory of social identity theory (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Casalo et al. 2010). At last, our findings contribute to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Hollebeek, 2011) which implies that parties engage in a cost-reward relationship, supported by our findings that customers get more engaged if they get more rewards and recognition. Regarding the CE theory of Balkan countries, our study adds new variables in the model of CE in OBCs, compared to Jashari-Mani and Zeqiri's (2023) model. Finally, our model proves that the finding that value co-creation is a consequence of CE is valid also for developing countries like those of Balkans, which is in line with findings of studies conducted in more developed countries (Molinillo et al., 2020; Yen et al., 2020 and Nadeem et al., 2021).

5.2 Practical implications

Findings also reveal many practical and managerial implications. This study can serve as a model for managers and businesses of Balkan countries to understand how to boost CE in their social media accounts and brand communities and improve their digital marketing strategies. First, based on research results, businesses are recommended to facilitate OBCs usage and provide the necessary tools for easier use. This will encourage customers to get more engaged in brand communities. Second, according to the results, businesses should invest more in reward systems, to distinguish between active and passive members of the brand community, and reward active ones, because this appears to drive CE. Third, managers are suggested to apply more attractive strategies to have higher customer-BC, so that committed customers are more likely to share brand information with other community members, thus promoting the brand. Finally, businesses can use CE to have higher participation in value co-creation, knowing the importance of involving customers in brand value creation.

5.3 Limitations and scope for future research

Despite the contribution, this paper has its limitations as well. Its biggest limitation is the number of countries that are part of the study. As it was stated before, the sample consisted mainly of four Balkan countries, and only a small number of participants were from other countries of the region. So, future researchers are strongly encouraged to expand the number of countries in their studies regarding the Balkans region. Another limitation is the focus of the study is on Facebook and Instagram only, leaving other SN out of the research. New social platforms that are widely used by businesses and customers today, like TikTok, can be used in future research. Additionally, our research investigated only three factors that drive CE and one consequence of CE. Future researchers can expand the model and add more variables that affect and derive from CE. These limitations can be used as topics for future researchers focused on Balkan countries.

Acknowledgements/funding

This work was supported and funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) (grant number IMSIU-RG23150).

References

- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U.M. and Herrmann, A. (2005) 'The social influence of brand community: evidence from European car clubs', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69, No. 3, pp.19–34.
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Dholakia, U. (2002) 'Goal setting and goal striving in consumer behavior', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 63, No. 1, pp.19–32.
- Baldus, B.J., Voorhees, C. and Calantone, R. (2015) 'Online brand community engagement: scale development and validation', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 68, No. 5, pp.978–985.
- Barger, V., Peltier, J.W. and Schultz, D.E. (2016) 'Social media and consumer engagement: a review and research agenda', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp.268–287.
- Bazi, S., Filieri, R. and Gorton, M. (2020) 'Customers' motivation to engage with luxury brands on social media', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 112, No. 5, pp.223–235.
- Becker, J.M., Rai, A., Ringle, C.M. and Völckner, F. (2013) 'Discovering unobserved heterogeneity in structural equation models to avert validity threats', *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp.665–694.
- Blau, P. (1964) Exchange and Power in Social Life, Wiley, New York.
- Breidbach, C., Brodie, R. and Hollebeek, L. (2014) 'Beyond virtuality: from engagement platforms to engagement ecosystems', *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp.592–611.
- Brodie, R.J., Ilic, A., Juric, B. and Hollebeek, L. (2013) 'Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: an exploratory analysis', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp.105–114.
- Busalim, A.H., Ghabban, F. and Hussin, A.R.C. (2021) 'Customer engagement behaviour on social commerce platforms: an empirical study', *Technology in Society*, Vol. 64, No. C, pp.1–15.
- Byrne, B.M. (2010) Structural Equation Modeling With AMOS: Basic Concepts, Applications, and Programming, Routledge, New York.
- Campbell, D.T. and Fiske, D.W. (1959) 'Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp.81–90.
- Carlsson, B. (2004) 'The digital economy: what is new and what is not?', *Structural change and Economic Dynamics*, Vol. 15, No. 9, pp.245–264.
- Casalo, L.V., Flavian, C. and Guinaliu, M. (2010) 'Determinants of the intention to participate in firm-hosted online travel communities and effects on consumer behavioral intentions', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 31, No. 6, pp.898–911.
- Chan, T., Zheng, X., Cheung, C., Lee, M. and Lee, Z. (2014) 'Antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in online brand communities', *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.81–97.
- Chavadi, C.A., Sirothiya, M., Menon, S.R. and MR, V. (2023) 'Modelling the effects of social media–based brand communities on brand trust, brand equity and consumer response', *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp.114–141.
- Cheng, F.F., Wu, C.S. and Chen, Y.C. (2020) 'Creating customer loyalty in online brand communities', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 107, p.105752, DOI: 10.1016/ j.chb.2018.10.018.

- Cheung, C., Lee, M. and Jin, X. (2011) 'Customer engagement in an online social platform: a conceptual model and scale development', 32nd International Conference on Information System 2011, ICIS 2011, Shangai.
- De Valck, K., Van Bruggen, G.H. and Wierenga, B. (2009) 'Virtual communities: a marketing perspective', *Decision Support Systems*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp.185–203.
- De Vries, N.J. and Carlson, J. (2014) 'Examining the drivers and brand performance implications of customer engagement with brands in the social media environment', *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 21, No. 6, pp.495–515.
- Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C. and Thomas, A.M. (2015) 'Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective', *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.28–42.
- Eichhorn, B.R. (2014) Common Method Variance Techniques, Cleveland State University, Department of Operations and Supply Chain Management, Cleveland, OH.
- Emini, A. and Zeqiri, J. (2021) 'Social media marketing and purchase intention: evidence from Kosovo', *Economic Thought and Practice*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp.475–492.
- Enginkaya, E. and Yilmaz, H. (2014). What drives consumers to interact with brands through social media? A motivation scale development study. Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 148, 219 226
- Fang, J., Zhao, Z., Wen, C. and Wang, R. (2017) 'Design and performance attributes driving mobile travel application engagement', *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp.269–283.
- Ferketich, S. (1991) 'Focus on psychometrics: aspects of item analysis', *Research in Nursing and Health*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp.165–168.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981) 'Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.382–388.
- Fuller, C.M., Simmering, M.J., Atine, G., Atine, Y. and Babin, B.J. (2016) 'Common methods variance detection in business research', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69, No. 8, pp.3192–3198.
- Gligor, D., Bozkurt, S. and Russo, I. (2019) 'Achieving customer engagement with social media: a qualitative comparative analysis approach', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 101, No. 1, pp.59–69.
- Gruen, T.W., Summers, J.O. and Acito, F. (2000) 'Relationship marketing activities, commitment, and membership behaviors in professional associations', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 64, No. 3, pp.34–49.
- Gubatova, Z. (2020) Building Brand Loyalty Through Social Media In Economic Crisis: a Gender and Gen Y Perspective of South-East European Luxury Fashion Consumers, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sheffield.
- Gujarati, D.N. (2004) Basic Econometrics, 4th ed., McGraw-Hill Companies, New York.
- Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E. and Pihlström, M. (2012) 'Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community', *Management Research Review*, Vol. 35, No. 9, pp.857–877.
- Guo, Z., Zhang, Y., Zhang, Y. and Ke, X. (2020) 'The degree of the uncertain reward and customer engagement: an explanation mechanism based on optimistic estimation', *Asia Pacific Journal* of Marketing and Logistics, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp.879–898.
- Gwinner, K.P., Gremler, D.D. and Bitner, M.J. (1998) 'Relational benefits in services industries: the customer's perspective', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.101–114.
- Hair, J., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. and Anderson, R.E. (2010) *Multivariate Data Analysis*, 7th ed., Pearson Educational International, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.
- Hair, J.F., Anderson, R.E., Tatham, R.L. and Black, W.C. (1998) *Multivariate Data Analysis*, 5th ed., Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M.P. and Daly, T. (2018) 'Customer engagement and the relationship between involvement, engagement, self-brand connection and brand usage intent', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 88, No. 7, pp.388–396.
- Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (2010) 'Toward a theory of brand co-creation with implications for brand governance', *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 17, No. 8, pp.590–604.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G. and Gremler, D.D. (2004) 'Electronic word-ofmouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet?', *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.38–52.
- Hollebeek, L. (2011) 'Exploring customer brand engagement: definition and themes', *Journal of strategic Marketing*, Vol. 19, No. 7, pp.555–573.
- Hollebeek, L.D. and Chen, T. (2014) 'Exploring positively-versus negatively-valenced brand engagement: a conceptual model', *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp.62–74.
- Hollebeek, L.D., Glynn, M.S. and Brodie, R.J. (2014) 'Consumer brand engagement in social media: conceptualization, scale development and validation', *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp.149–165.
- Huang, J., Su, S., Zhou, L. and Liu, X. (2013) 'Attitude toward the viral ad: expanding traditional advertising models to interactive advertising', *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp.36–46.
- Huber, F., Herrmann, A., Meyer, F., Vogel, J. and Wollhardt, K. (2007) Kausalmodellierung mit Partial Least Squares-Eineanwendungsorientierte Einführung, Gabler, Wiesbaden.
- Islam, J.U. and Rahman, Z. (2016) 'The transpiring journey of customer engagement research in marketing: a systematic review of the past decade', *Management Decision*, Vol. 54, No. 8, pp.2008–2034.
- Islam, J.U., Shahid, S., Rasool, A., Rahman, Z., Khan, I. and Rather, R.A. (2020) 'Impact of website attributes on customer engagement in banking: a solicitation of stimulus-organismresponse theory', *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 38, No. 6, pp.1279–1303.
- Itani, O.S., Krush, M.T., Agnihotri, R. and Trainor, K.J. (2020) 'Social media and customer relationship management technologies: influencing buyer-seller information exchanges', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 90, No. 5, pp.264–275.
- Jahn, B. and Kunz, W. (2012) 'How to transform consumers into fans of your brand', *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp.344–361.
- Jang, Y.J. and Kim, E. (2022) 'How self-identity and social identity grow environmentally sustainable restaurants' brand communities via social rewards', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 48, No. 3, pp.516–532.
- Jashari, F. and Rrustemi, V. (2018) 'Impact of online reviews in online booking case study capital City of Kosovo', *Euro Economica*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp.151–164.
- Jashari-Mani, F. and Zeqiri, J. (2023) 'Drivers and outcomes of online customer engagementevidence from Balkan countries', *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-05-2023-0079.
- Kajtazi, K. and Zeqiri, J. (2020) 'The effect of e-WOM and content marketing on customers' purchase intention', *International Journal of Islamic Marketing and Branding*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.114–131.
- Kaur, H., Paruthi, M., Islam, J. and Hollebeek, L.D. (2020) 'The role of brand community identification and reward on consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty in virtual brand communities', *Telematics and Informatics*, Vol. 46, Article No. 101321.
- Kim, J.W., Choi, J., Qualls, W. and Han, K. (2008) 'It takes a marketplace community to raise brand commitment: the role of online communities', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 24, Nos. 3–4, pp.409–431.
- Kline P (1994) An Easy Guide to Factor Analysis, Routledge, London.
- Kumar, J. and Kumar, V. (2020) 'Drivers of brand community engagement', Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Vol. 54, Article No. 101949.

- Kumar, V., Aksoy, L., Donkers, B., Venkatesan, R., Wiesel, T. and Tillmanns, S. (2010) 'Undervalued or overvalued customers: capturing total customer engagement value', *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp.297–310.
- Kwon, O. and Wen, Y. (2010) 'An empirical study of the factors affecting social network service use', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.254–263.
- Lin, H.F. (2006) 'Understanding behavioral intention to participate in virtual communities', *Cyber Psychology and Behavior*, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp.540–547.
- MacCallum, R.C., Browne, M.W. and Sugawara, H.M. (1996) 'Power analysis and determination of sample size for covariance structure modeling', *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp.130–149.
- Marino, V. and Lo Presti, L. (2019) 'Stay in touch! New insights into end-user attitudes towards engagement platforms', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 36, No. 6, pp.772–783.
- Marsh, H.W. and Hocevar, D. (1985) 'Application of confirmatory factor analysis to the study of self-concept: first- and higher-order factor models and their invariance across groups', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 97, No. 3, pp.562–582.
- Martínez-López, F.J., Aguilar-Illescas, R., Molinillo, S., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Esteban-Millat, I. (2021) 'The role of online brand community engagement on the consumer-brand relationship', *Sustainability*, Vol. 13, No. 7, p.3679.
- Mathwick, C. and Rigdon, E. (2001) 'Experiential value: conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalog and Internet shopping environment', *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp.39–56.
- Mayrhofer, M., Matthes, J., Einwiller, S. and Naderer, B. (2020) 'User generated content presenting brands on social media increases young adults' purchase intention', *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp.166–186.
- McLean, G. (2018) 'Examining the determinants and outcomes of mobile app engagement a longitudinal perspective', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 84, pp.392–403.
- McLean, G. and Wilson, A. (2019) 'Shopping in the digital world: examining customer engagement through augmented reality mobile applications', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 101, No. 7, pp.210–224.
- Molinillo, S., Anaya-Sánchez, R. and Liébana-Cabanillas, F. (2020) 'Analyzing the effect of social support and community factors on customer engagement and its impact on loyalty behaviors toward social commerce websites', *Computers in Human Behavior*, July, Vol. 108, Article No. 105980.
- Mortazavi, M., Esfidani, M.R. and Barzoki, A.S. (2014) 'Influencing VSN users' purchase intentions', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.102–123.
- Muniz, A.M. and O'Guinn, T.C. (2001) 'Brand community', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp.412–432.
- Nadeem, W., Khani, A.H., Schultz, C.D., Adam, N.A., Attar, R.W. and Hajli, N. (2020) 'How social presence drives commitment and loyalty with online brand communities? The role of social commerce trust', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 55, Article No. 102136.
- Nadeem, W., Tan, T.M., Tajvidi, M. and Hajli, N. (2021) 'How do experiences enhance brand relationship performance and value co-creation in social commerce? The role of consumer engagement and self brand-connection', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, October, Vol. 171, October, Article No. 120952.
- Nangpiire, C., Silva, J. and Alves, H. (2022) 'Customer engagement and value co-creation/destruction: the internal fostering and hindering factors and actors in the tourist/hotel experience', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp.173–188.
- Naumann, K., Bowden, J. and Gabbott, M. (2020) 'Expanding customer engagement: the role of negative engagement, dual valences and contexts', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54, No. 7.

- Parihar, P. and Dawra, J. (2020) 'The role of customer engagement in travel services', *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 29, No. 7, pp.1469–1499.
- Pavlou, P.A. and Fygenson, M. (2006) 'Understanding and predicting electronic commerce adoption: An extension of the theory of planned behavior', *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp.115–143.
- Petrescu, M. and Krishen, A.S. (2023) 'A decade of marketing analytics and more to come: JMA insights', *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.117–129.
- Podsakoff, P.M. and Organ, D.W. (1986) 'Self-reports in organizational research: problems and prospects', *Journal of Management*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp.531–544.
- Potts, J., Hartley, J., Banks, J., Burgess, J., Cobcroft, R., Cunningham, S. and Montgomery, L. (2008) 'Consumer co-creation and situated creativity', *Industry and Innovation*, Vol. 15, No. 5, pp.459–474.
- Prahalad, C.K. and Ramaswamy, V. (2004) 'Co-creating unique value with customers', *Strategy* and *Leadership*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp.4–9.
- Rather, R.A. (2021) 'Demystifying the effects of perceived risk and fear on customer engagement, co-creation and revisit intention during COVID-19: a protection motivation theory approach', *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, June, Article No. 100564, Vol. 20.
- Reibstein, D.J. (2002) 'What attracts customers to online stores, and what keeps them coming back?', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp.465–473.
- Ribbink, D., Riel, A., Liljander, V. and Streukens, S. (2004) 'Comfort your online customer: quality, trust and loyalty on the internet', *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 14, No. 6, pp.446–456.
- Rrustemi, V. and Jusufi, G. (2021) 'Understanding social media marketing activities in Western Balkans: empirical insights from Kosovo', *Ekonomski Pregled/Economic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 6, pp.869–893.
- Saha, V., Goyal, P. and Jebarajakirthy, C. (2022) 'Value co-creation: a review of literature and future research agenda', *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp.612–628.
- Sawhney, M., Verona, G. and Prandelli, E. (2005) 'Collaborating to create: the Internet as a platform for customer engagement in product innovation', *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp.4–17.
- Sprott, D., Czellar, S. and Spangenberg, E. (2009) 'The importance of a general measure of brand engagement on market behavior: development and validation of a scal, *journal of marketing Research*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp.92–104.
- Stat Counter (2022) *Social Media Stats* [online] https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/ albania (accessed 25 March 2023).
- Statista (2022) Social Media Statistics [online] https://www.statista.com/statistics/253704/ instagram-adoption-curve-of-leading-brands/ (accessed 25 March 2023).
- Stokbürger-Sauer, N.E. (2010) 'Brand community: drivers and outcomes', *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp.347–367.
- Sundararaj, V. and Rejeesh, M.R. (2021) 'A detailed behavioral analysis on consumer and customer changing behavior with respect to social networking sites', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 58, Article No. 102190.
- Touni, R., Kim, W.G., Choi, H.M. and Ali, M.A. (2020) 'Antecedents and an outcome of customer engagement with hotel brand community on Facebook', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp.278–299.
- Ukaj, F. and Mullatahiri, V. (2019) 'The Relationships among service quality and e-marketing with trust and loyalty to brands of mobile telephone operators in Kosovo', *Journal of Distribution Science*, Vol. 17, No. 10, pp.27–39.
- Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K.N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P. and Verhoef, P.C. (2010) 'Customer engagement behavior: theoretical foundations and research directions', *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp.253–266.

- Van Tonder, E. and Petzer, D.J. (2018) 'The interrelationships between relationship marketing constructs and customer engagement dimensions', *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 38, Nos. 13–14, pp.948–973.
- Vargo, S.L. (2009) 'Toward a transcending conceptualization of relationship: a service-dominant logic perspective', *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 24, Nos. 5–6, pp.373–379.
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2004) 'Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp.1–17.
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2008) 'Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution', *Journal of the Academy of marketing Science*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp.1–10.
- Verhoef, P.C., Reinartz, W.J. and Krafft, M. (2010) 'Customer engagement as a new perspective in customer management', *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp.247–252.
- Vohra, A. and Bhardwaj, N. (2019) 'Customer engagement in an e-commerce brand community: An empirical comparison of alternate models', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 13, No. 1.
- Weinberg, B.D. and Pehlivan, E. (2011) 'Social spending: managing the social media mix', *Business Horizons*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp.275–282.
- Wiertz, C. and de Ruyter, K. (2007) 'Beyond the call of duty: why customers contribute to firm-hosted commercial online communities', *Organization Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp.347–376.
- Xi, N. and Hamari, J. (2020) 'Does gamification affect brand engagement and equity? A study in online brand communities', *Journal of Business Research*, March, Vol. 109, pp.449–460.
- Xu, F.Z. and Wang, Y. (2020) 'Enhancing employee innovation through customer engagement: The role of customer interactivity, employee affect, and motivations', *Journal of Hospitality* and Tourism Research, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp.351–376.
- Ye, S., Ying, T., Zhou, L. and Wang, T. (2019) 'Enhancing customer trust in peer-topeer accommodation: a 'soft' strategy via social presence', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 79, No. 1, pp.1–10.
- Yen, C.H., Teng, H.Y. and Tzeng, J.C. (2020) 'Innovativeness and customer value co-creation behaviors: Mediating role of customer engagement', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 88.
- Youssef, Y.M.A., Johnston, W.J., AbdelHamid, T.A., Dakrory, M.I. and Seddick, M.G.S. (2018) 'A customer engagement framework for a B2B context', *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp.3–17.