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## Exploring the role and significance of consumer relationship quality and participation within online fashion brand communities

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**Abstract:** This study contributes towards the online value co-creation debate, by examining key theories within the relationship marketing literature for building online brand communities in a fashion context (Chae and Ko, 2016; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). To this end, this research plugs an important gap for the highly lucrative global and digital fashion industry. In the empirical research, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with millennials who interact regularly with luxury fashion brands online. A thematic analysis approach is adopted to discover common threads and similarities in behaviour. Data reveals that online brand communities facilitate customer engagement through quality interactive relationships amongst luxury fashion consumers. On this basis, the authors provide recommendations for luxury retailers on how to maximise business

performance by enhancing online customer interactions. Originality of the paper lies on the revision and validation of a model (Hajli et al., 2017) that depicts the iterative process between virtual brand community participation, qualities of online relationships, loyalty and branding co-creation.

**Keywords:** luxury fashion; millennials; online brand community; relationship quality; social media; value co-creation.

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Gianpaolo Vignali is a graduate from UMIST with his first degree in Mathematics. His career first started as a part-time Lecturer and Researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University before moving to full-time employment in the department of Retail at Leeds Metropolitan University. He then introduced the BSc (Hons) Fashion Buying and Merchandising at Manchester Metropolitan University as Programme Leader until he achieved his PhD and moved to The University of Manchester working as Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Materials. He has written over 40 papers and chapters in the fields of marketing and management.

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## 1 Introduction

The fashion industry is in a constant state of flux (Easey, 2009), and closely in need of strategic brand innovations (Roskamp, 2018). In particular, luxury fashion companies, which are characterised by high value-added brand assets (Kim and Ko, 2012), must remain relevant within competitive environments, by capitalising on the opportunities online brand communities provide for relationship building (Brogi et al., 2013).

Moreover, online brand community members represent the most involved stakeholders (Brogi et al., 2013), as can be embodied for instance, in the fact that about 80% of luxury sales are influenced digitally in which social media reference plays a pivotal role (Statista, 2019). It is for these reasons that understanding how online brand communities contribute to corporate value for luxury fashion companies is extremely relevant and current.

Online brand communities mainly comprise of the consumers which represent the main target of the luxury fashion segment: millennials (aged 23–36), and generation Z (aged 16–22) (Goldstone, 2017; Deloitte, 2018), and since both generations have evolved with the development of digital technology, they form an instrumental segment, and are proactive and vocal within the new streams of consumerism (Buckle, 2019). Still, between the two generations, millennials are the ones who possess more disposable income than generation Z, so they are the major consumers of the luxury fashion industry, and they tend to interact with brands across various online platforms (e.g., social media) instead of just using traditional channels. Brand-customer relationships, within a digital environment, could be built rapidly, as – on the one hand – brands are trying to attain customer loyalty while customers – on the other hand – are trying to associate themselves with the brands to accumulate the perceived relationship equity. (Lemon et al., 2001; Kim and Ko, 2012).

The role of online brand communities for enhancing customer relationships and building credibility amongst competing brands has drawn great attention among scholars (Kang et al., 2014; Teichmann et al., 2015; Khan, 2017; Kamboj et al., 2018). Research which focuses on fashion brand co-creation within online brand communities using social media platforms, is limited. Hajli et al. (2017) researched the issue by looking at the consumer electronics market in Iran, which can be a limitation to generalisability, besides the fact that different product categories may imply different branding strategies. Looking at the model (see Figure 1) proposed by Hajli et al. (2017), the relationship between relationship quality and branding co-creation was not indicated while previous research have shown relationship quality is a relevant driver of customer value co-creation (Payne et al., 2009; López Sánchez et al., 2010; Breidbach et al., 2013)

Since social media is such a valuable channel for fashion companies, this research aims to extend Hajli et al.'s framework, to address a gap in the current literature, by further exploring the impact of relationship quality to customer brand co-creation within online fashion brand communities, emphasising the quality of participation amongst customers as being instrumental within the iterative process.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Online brand community participation using social media*

Three elements must be present for a brand community to form:

- 1 'consciousness of kind', meaning one consumer recognises another as being like-minded
- 2 shared rituals, meaning individuals perform social acts specific to the brand experience that only others within the group understand

3 consumer interactions, either in person or online (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Formation of brand community means that consumers have forged a deeper bond with the brand than casual consumers have formed, and they actively and consciously embrace that brand and its fellow supporters (Humphrey et al., 2016). Brand communities can be integrated in social media, since they are important in facilitating interaction between users and brands (Park et al., 2007): these platforms are nowadays utilised more often to function as the medium for branding, together with customers, in contrary to form a composite brand by combining two different brands (Park et al., 1996).

Habibi et al. (2014a) pointed out five features that make brand communities embedded in social media distinctive:

- 1 'social context' (web 2.0 technologies)
- 2 'structure': this refers to the fact that social media brand community is not structured (Habibi et al., 2014b)
- 3 'scale' (the unlimited and unquantified nature of accommodating members, brand fans)
- 4 The 'storytelling', which is using a combination of texts, photos and videos to unfold elements of a story and encourage audience to engage with its narrative at the same time
- 5 The last aspect is 'affiliated brand communities' in that a lot of subgroups for one particular brand community can co-exist.

Without a doubt, online brand communities are effective tools that luxury fashion brands should leverage to build tighter bonds with consumers. Not by chance, even though the luxury industry has been notoriously late to embrace the digital challenge, lately there are more fashion brands that move on to social media to attract customers. By doing so, fashion retailers have a better chance of being perceived as an original brand on the basis of online presence, and this would persuade millennials to connect with the fashion brand personally (Kim and Ko, 2012) by *participating* to the brands' activities (posts, for instance) in the digital environment.

According to Chae and Ko (2016), the customer social participation (CSP), is 'an effort made to achieve co-creation of values via compulsory, but voluntary interactive participation of the customers in service production and the delivery process in social media'. As the concept of customer participation has become more significant, branding has moved from a firm-centric activity to a collaborative and value co-creation activity where both the firms and their customers interact (Merz et al., 2009). Value co-creation reflects a participative culture in which people tend to find fulfilment, express their creativity and socialise, and where firms look for customers' insights into brands (Ind et al., 2013).

Consequently, as the process of co-creation engages customers in value creation, their roles have shifted from being passive to being active (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). As the service-dominant logic (Lusch and Vargo, 2006) evolves, updated the concept of service-dominant logic from foundational premises 6 (FP6) 'the customer is always a co-producer' to 'the customer is always a co-creator of value' (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Contextually to the development of the SD logic, researchers start to pay attention to brand communities, as consumers become more informed and are equipped with the

skills to develop products by themselves aided by the internet (Füller and Matzler, 2007). Those customers who are knowledgeable about the products or services join the discussion about the products or service and help one another in resolving problems as well (Füller et al., 2008).

Research surrounding online communities' shows that user-generated content (UGC) about a brand is receiving more attention and blossoming in the world of social media. Baldwin et al. (2006) suggest that customer participation in brand co-creation allow brands to get the information about what their customers' desire and eventually make conclusions with their shared knowledge through contents posted by brand community members. Moreover, companies get to know who their customers are by having a glimpse of the profiles of their members (Adebanjo and Michaelides, 2010).

## *2.2 Branding co-creation on social media for luxury fashion brands*

In terms of the ways of managing co-creation of value, Payne et al. (2009) proposed a four-component framework: encounters where interactions form experiences, supplier's value-creation process, customer's value-creation process and the influence of supplementary sources of brand knowledge. France et al. (2015) suggested a model where brand engagement, category involvement and self-congruity lead to branding co-creation and then result in brand knowledge and brand value.

Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) proposed the concept of 'story giving' as a co-creation tool for luxury brands, whereby customers share their own experiences through narrations with contexts provided in the online community, and shared experiences are co-created by members of the community. As soon as customers are willing to initiate co-creation activities within the online brand community, experiences and feedback regarding the brands of their preferences could prompt others to make a purchase (Gensler et al., 2013). Therefore, involving customers as such, poses great upsides, because any positive impacts on branding can differentiate one brand from another, enhancing trust, lowering search cost, minimising perceived risks and serving as a high-quality source from the customer's perspective. These effects play a critical role in social commerce (Liang et al., 2011).

As mentioned above, brands are taking a step back, ceding the control over the narrative to the customers in various ways, and turning what used to be storytelling into story giving (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). Though many different ways of co-creating with customers exist, luxury brands avoided soliciting consumer input for fear of dilution of brand image, which could eventually affect the margins of the company. Story telling has therefore emerged as a preferred communication strategy of luxury brands (Maman Larraufie and Kourdoughli, 2014) which pursue developing online relationships with their customers (Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010). A brand story can reveal its unique history or a symbolic event that develops a connection between the community and the brand (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). Besides, the stories narrated from the perspective of the brand, have educational meanings for its customers; therefore, the customers have a better understanding of the brand compared with other means (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). A good case example of story giving would be Jimmy Choo, a luxury shoe brand, and one of the earliest brands that leveraged social media. This brand is familiar with online and offline engagement initiatives using platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

In the ‘Your Choo Stories’ campaign hosted across various social media platforms, Jimmy Choo extended invitation to its customers to share their significant or most memorable encounters with the brand (Indvik, 2012). The use of hashtag is becoming more and more popular. It is a pound sign followed by a short word or a phrase that is intended to be representative of certain themes. A hashtag essentially is a hyperlink that can redirect you into a sea of related contents. It is intentionally used by different brands in trying to engage their customers.

### 2.3 Relationship marketing

The sense of belonging to a brand and its stakeholders, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is the pivot of the kind of marketing used in luxury fashion market: relationship marketing, defined by Grönroos (1997) as a set of practices that aim to identify, establish, sustain, boost and, when necessary end relationships with customers and other stakeholders. The shift in power from producers to consumers has pushed firms to discover new ways of creating long-lasting relationship (Varley et al., 2019). Fashion consumers nowadays, have access to a great variety of knowledge (Fernie and Grant, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015) and are capable of comparing between brands and products. Fashion retailers have realised that to gain competitive edge their marketing focuses need to shift from being product oriented to customer and service oriented, both in the physical and digital directions (Ryding et al., 2016). With this regard, relationship marketing can upgrade customer’s commitment to a particular brand via the process of better value provision on a consistent basis at a reduced cost (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002).

The process can be realised through value co-creation, which requires managing the inside and outside of customer and supplier value creation processes (Payne et al., 2008).

On par with previous research (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Hajli et al., 2017), this study tackles the relationship marketing by looking at the dimensions of trust, commitment, and satisfaction, as well as their relationship with loyalty and co-creation of value. This happens because the emergence of social media such as Facebook, WeChat and Instagram, provides customers the chance of being the pivotal authors of brand stories (Gensler et al., 2013) and creates space for the implementation of two-way relationship marketing (Lamb et al., 2012). This in turn, can lead to trust, commitment and satisfaction, and long-term relationships: dimensions that boost the intentions of repurchase, resulting in behavioural loyalty (Pentina et al., 2013).

- *Trust* is a crucial building block of successful relationship (Noor, 2012). With regard to relationship marketing, trust lays the foundation of interpersonal and transactional relationships (Guenzi and Pelloni, 2004). Abela and Murphy (2008) put trust as the prerequisite of value co-creation. Trust can serve as a catalyst in customer’s eagerness to participate and build up relationships with service providers online (Gefen et al., 2003). *Commitment* is crucial in terms of relationship creating, building and maintaining (Dwyer et al., 1987). It is characterised as an essential construct for maintaining a long-lasting relationship between businesses and their customers. (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Lee et al., 2003; Hsu et al., 2010). Commitment on customer’s side is embodied in their willingness to involve in online brand community (Hajli et al., 2017), while on the brand’s side, it is embodied in the company’s desire to maintain good relationship with its customers (Noor, 2012).

- *Satisfaction* is defined as a psychological state brought about by the evaluation of perceived product and service performance end results on the basis of predetermined customer expectations (Egan, 2011). Distinctive from commitment and trust, satisfaction embodies in customer's overall emotional evaluation of the how a product performs after usage (Gustaffsson et al., 2006). It is an essential element in creating consistent relationships between businesses and its customers (Hsu et al., 2010). Most authors argue that satisfaction is an extremely important relationship driver (Varley et al., 2019). The aspect of satisfaction is even more prominent in the luxury fashion sector. Athwal et al. (2019) found that the social media marketing activities of luxury brands satisfied two major types of appetite: aesthetic affective needs and cognitive needs. Customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment are directly and indirectly linked to *customer loyalty* (Ball et al., 2004). In the context of retailing, Bloemer and de Ruyter (1998) defined it as the biased behavioural response expressed over time by a customer with respect to a seller, which is a function of psychological processes. Loyalty is often divided into two core dimensions: behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Varley et al., 2019). The behavioural aspect is based on repeat purchase, while the attitudinal aspect is based on customers' biased preferences and positive attitude towards either a product or a brand (López Sánchez et al., 2011). Customer loyalty is particularly valuable in highly competitive market (Richard and Zhang, 2012), like luxury fashion industry, where the cost of acquiring new customers is significantly higher than that of retaining existing ones (Egan, 2011).

### 3 Theoretical framework

To clarify the main variables, the difference between online brand community participation and branding co-creation lies in the degree to which consumers engage in the process and the results reaped because of these interactions. Online brand community participation in the context of this paper, reflects in customers either interacting with luxury-brand-hosted social media platforms or simply consuming the contents posted on them with the intent of information seeking or entertainment/information seeking as discussed previously. Whereas branding co-creation in this sense entails customers participating in the creation of innovative ideas, experiences, symbols or products with the help from luxury brands.

**Figure 1** The role of online communities in branding co-creation (see online version for colours)



Source: Hajli et al. (2017)



**Table 1** Summaries of propositions and interviews' questions

Themes	Sub-themes	Propositions	Questions
Online brand community participation	Content consumption (Shao, 2009)	1 To explore the extent to which participation in an online luxury fashion brand community using social media increases customers' trust, commitment and satisfaction towards the brand.	Can you tell me about your recent encounter with a luxury fashion brand on their official social media (e.g., consuming the posted contents, respond to, for instance like and comment, and the posts)?  How often do you interact with luxury fashion brand on social media and what is your favourite luxury fashion brand?  How do you feel about the encounter? How does it affect your relationship with the brand?
	Social interaction (Shao, 2009)	2 To investigate whether improved customers' trust, commitment and satisfaction in online brand community towards the luxury fashion brand are interrelated with brand loyalty and branding co-creation.	What do customer's commitment, trust and satisfaction in relation to luxury fashion brand mean to you?  How do you think a person who is committed towards, trusting and satisfied with a luxury fashion brand interacts with the brand on social media?  Could you give me an example?
Relationship quality	Trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Hajji et al., 2017)	3 To investigate whether improved customers' trust, commitment and satisfaction in online brand community towards the luxury fashion brand encourage branding co-creation.	Are you loyal to any luxury fashion brand? If so, how do you interact with the brand on social media? If not, how do you conceive it to be?
	Commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Hajji et al., 2017) Satisfaction (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Hajji et al., 2017)	4 To investigate if increased customers' loyalty towards the luxury fashion brand positively influence branding co-creation by online brand community participation.	Have you involved in the development or improvement of a service that has included the views of a luxury fashion brand via social media (for example, recommend a product of a luxury brand)? If so, could you describe it to me? Have you engaged in or contributed to products and services creation via social media along with organisational members? Can you describe the process? What are the motivations for the participation above?
Brand loyalty	Repeating purchase (López Sánchez et al., 2011; Varley et al., 2019)		
	Biased preference and positive attitude towards a brand (López Sánchez et al., 2011; Varley et al., 2019)		
Branding co-creation in online brand community	Exchange of product or service-related information (Fuller et al., 2008)		
	Resource integration when using the product or service (Storbacka et al., 2016; Simeoni and Cassia, 2019)		
	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand (Berthon et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009; Parmentier, 2015)		

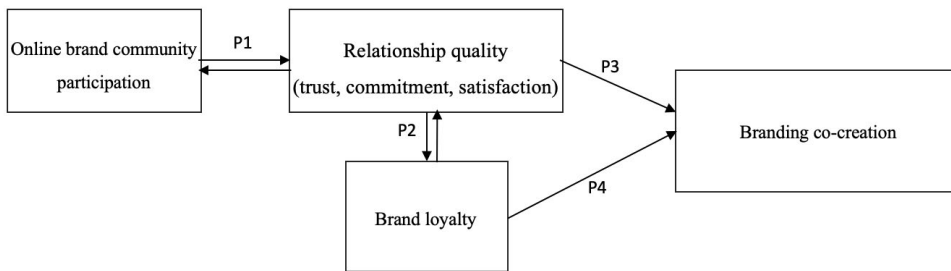
Looking at the model (see Figure 1) proposed by Hajli et al. (2017), the relationship between relationship quality and branding co-creation was not indicated while previous researches have shown relationship quality is a relevant driver of customer value co-creation (Payne et al., 2009; López Sánchez et al., 2010; Breidbach et al., 2013). López Sánchez et al. (2010) have shown that trust and commitment are key precursors to improved customer value creation. Payne et al. (2009) found that high level of relationship quality could encourage the customers to co-create.

Therefore, as highlighted in the introduction section, in order to fill the gap mentioned above, this study proposes that increased level of relationship quality is positively related to customer value co-creation. Another relevant aspect that was neglected by Hajli et al. (2017) is the impact of relationship quality on online brand community participation as it was identified that engagement is in part supported by the relationship between customers and the brand (Hollebeek, 2011; Gambetti et al., 2012).

Thus, to make the model more complete, this research proposes the existing relationship (from the perspectives of trust, commitment and satisfaction) and highlights the participation of customers within an online luxury brand community.

To understand how online brand community participation has an impact on value co-creation between customers and brands, this research draws on the framework proposed by Hajli et al., 2017 (Figure 1) and makes the propositions depicted in Figure 2. Table 1 summarises the literature review process and the propositions, as well as questionnaires' related questions.

**Figure 2** The revised framework of the role of online communities in branding co-creation



## 4 Methodology

There are two commonly used analysis methods in qualitative research: content analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018) and thematic analysis (King et al., 2019). In comparison to content analysis, thematic analysis provides a more comprehensive and nuanced account of the concerns people have over certain events, or the reasons why people use certain products/undergo certain procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ayres, 2007); this approach thus leading to the discovery and identification of common threads that extend across the segment of data being analysed (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000). More

importantly, thematic analysis is also capable of doing what content analysis does—for example examining the mediation effects between things like texts, symbols, messages, mass-media content, and technology-enabled social interactions (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2018). Thematic analysis is systematic and combines the analysis of the researcher's meaning in a particular context (Marks and Yardley, 2004), which is important for a theme that is subjective and fairly difficult to be measured by numerical data (i.e. the relationship between trust, commitment, satisfaction, loyalty and branding co-creation). Since this research deals specifically with the luxury fashion sector, in order to produce a more represented and more accurate set of findings related to the less explored online brand co-creation context, a thematic analysis approach is adopted.

To test the generalisability of the model to be revised (Hajli et al., 2017), it is necessary to be consistent with its research method i.e. interview. The semi-structured interview technique was chosen, as it ensures that constructs identified during an extensive literature review are questioned, whilst flexibility in the semi-structured method allows for addition and deletion of questions where appropriate. This enables the researcher to probe an answer further to uncover the connections between online brand community participation and branding co-creation. According to Dana and Dana (2005), the advantages of qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) research, includes the ability to learn directly from the research subject, thereby reducing measurement errors common in survey studies which often need to make assumptions. The end result is a deeper holistic understanding.

To align with the grounded theory strategy, purposive sampling technique was adopted. To encourage participation, have an equalising effect, and show respect for the participation (Hollway and Jefferson, 2012), 10 USD or equivalent gifts were given to valid participants. Screening surveys were employed to ensure that all the participants are active fashion brand community members aged between 22 and 36. Participant recruitment was conducted on an on-going basis until theoretical saturation is reached, which turned out to be seven participants. The sample is small and therefore results are tentative. However, given the underexplored nature of this study, it was felt the results would provide some initial insights, with a view to informing the design of a much longer term and holistic exploration.

## **5 Data analysis and results**

In using the thematic approach, one overarching theme after another was described and discussed, extracting examples from the transcript, and thus, directly quoting what interviewees said, in order to help characterise the themes. Interviewees were not presented equally in the quotations: some went more to the point or were more articulate than others in their responses were, so only the most representative quotations have been reported.

As for the data analysis tool, usually thematic analysis is done by using the software NVivo, but since the number of interviews in this research is relatively small (this means that there is not a large amount of texts), hereby the data was analysed manually by following the three stages of coding in using thematic analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008):

- 1 *Open coding*, where data – coded only on the basis of literature – are put into different categories.
- 2 *Axial coding*, where the relationships between different categories are drawn at this stage, the researchers interpret meaning of the existing codes them and cluster them in categories, so as to reassemble the codes that were fractured during the open coding.
- 3 *Selective coding*, where integration of different categories to generate a theory is labelled. In this last stage of coding, a number of themes are identified (King et al., 2019) thanks to a process of integration and redefinition of open codes and axial codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). In practice, key themes were derived from the collected data as a whole by factoring in theoretical ideas and practical stance of the research (King et al., 2019).

In this research, according to the general principles of grounded theory, Spiggle's (1994) analysis technique of categorising, abstracting, making comparisons and integrating has been used as supplement to ensure the appropriateness of data analysis. At first, open codes were generated from literature review on branding co-creation in online brand community, and open code were then further refined to generate axial codes and selective codes. Data was then reorganised and presented in descriptions, and visualisations, in order to draw conclusions from the analysis.

### *5.1 Analysis procedure*

In this subsection, a subset of interviews was selected to present as cases, followed by theme-by-theme analysis of the full data set. In the pre-data collection framework, framework identified 4 themes based on literature review:

- 1 online brand community participation
- 2 relationship quality
- 3 brand loyalty
- 4 branding co-creation.

Therefore, the case examples were chosen on a meaningful and purposive basis. In Table 2, each serial profile number represents one interviewee, and the data items relate to the interview extract for analysis. Open codes are generated based on the bold sentences.

## 5.1.1 Online brand community participation

**Table 2** Summaries of open codes and axial stage (online brand community participation)

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Data item</i>	<i>Open codes</i>	<i>Axial Codes</i>
1	<p>... I would check out their Instagram page to <i>look at new releases or things that are in style</i>. I'd also <i>like the posts and comment on what I think and see what other people say.... because I really like to just go on their pages and check out their posts</i></p> <p>...I <i>liked the post and commented "Wow, so unique and bold"</i>. I <i>liked other people's comments</i> which had the same opinion as mine</p> <p>...I love Louis Vuitton so I <i>would follow their Instagram page and just check for posts about new releases and their look books</i>.</p>	<p>Scrolling, trend seeking</p> <p>Like; comment</p> <p>Subscription; news seeking; trend seeking</p>	<p>Content consumption; information seeking</p> <p>Social interaction</p> <p>Information seeking; information seeking; information seeking</p>
2	<p>I <i>liked a post made about their bold joggers</i>. I didn't make any comments on them but just thought they looked pretty nice and something I'd like to have</p> <p><i>The way I would recommend them would be to like the post</i>. I don't see myself reposting it or anything like that but I would <i>definitely give it a like</i></p> <p>I think if someone is committed, trusts, and satisfied with a brand they would be interested in liking and commenting on different posts from brands. Like for me <i>I am willing to like posts that I like and enjoy</i></p>	<p>Like</p> <p>Like</p> <p>Like</p>	<p>Social interaction</p> <p>Social interaction</p> <p>Social interaction</p>
3	<p>Since I love Michael Kors products, I <i>always follow their content posts to see what new products they come up with</i></p> <p>...I <i>comment on their posts</i> that I want to buy it, I <i>ask others what they think about the product</i>, I want to know all that I can.</p> <p>I mentioned it above that I'm loyal to Michael Kors, Gucci, Juicy Couture, Kat Von D. I <i>interact regularly in the sense that I comment on products I'm excited about</i></p>	<p>News seeking</p> <p>Comment; opinion seeking</p> <p>Comment</p>	<p>Information seeking</p> <p>Social interaction; information seeking</p> <p>Social interaction</p>
4	<p>I often see their ads on Facebook or Instagram, and often <i>click the links to see the items shown or check out a current sale that is being advertised on social media</i>.</p> <p>These ads appear, I <i>will click on them either because I am interested</i>, or because I want my targeted ads to contain the brands that I like.</p>	<p>Targeted ads consumption</p> <p>Targeted ads consumption</p>	<p>Content consumption</p> <p>Content consumption</p>

**Table 2** Summaries of open codes and axial stage (online brand community participation) (continued)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial Codes
	Since I was looking at their website at a bracelet. I first became aware of their sale through my email ads, but then <i>saw targeted ads on social media containing the items I recently viewed.</i>	Targeted ads consumption	Content consumption
	I think when a person has brand loyalty because of the company's promise of quality products and customer experience, they are <i>willing to share the ads or tag friends in the ads when there is something of interest, they think someone they know would like.</i>	Tagging friends; sharing content	Social interaction
	Customers will <i>promote the brand, often in the comments section</i> , usually in response to seeing ads.	Unconditional promotion; comment	Word of mouth; social interaction
	One place they shared the news of this sale (in addition to sending emails) was posting ads on Facebook. Because of their great quality and stylish products, <i>I tagged a friend in the comments section below their ad on Facebook, so she could check out the sale.</i>	Tagging friends	Social interaction
5	I really enjoyed the different objects, products, and designs [of] the video series Hermes put out. <i>It made watch the videos and have a closer appreciation with the brand.</i>	Video watching	Content consumption
	A person that is committed to a luxury fashion brand will <i>interact with the brand on social media as a true friend. Following, liking, sharing, and commenting. Every time a picture of video is posted, that customer will see it right away.</i>	Subscription; like; comment; sharing content	Information seeking; social interaction
	I would engage in discussion and <i>mention it to friends or tag others. I would absolutely leave traces...</i>	Tagging friends; proactive engagement	Social interaction
6	<i>I recently was scrolling Nordstrom's insta and saw a fall outfit (cute plaid blazer and leather bag) that I liked, so I 'hearted' it!</i>	Scrolling; like	Content consumption; social interaction
	<i>...I would assume they would like a lot of the posts, comment on the posts or even DM about product availability...</i>	Like; comment; inquiry	Social interaction; information seeking
7	I often <i>comment with emojis or tag friends</i> if I think that they'll really like something! <i>I have gotten thank you from the brand...</i>	Comment; tagging friends; response from the brand	Social interaction
	<i>I commented with some love on a Chanel post. I loved the photography!</i>	Comment	Social interaction

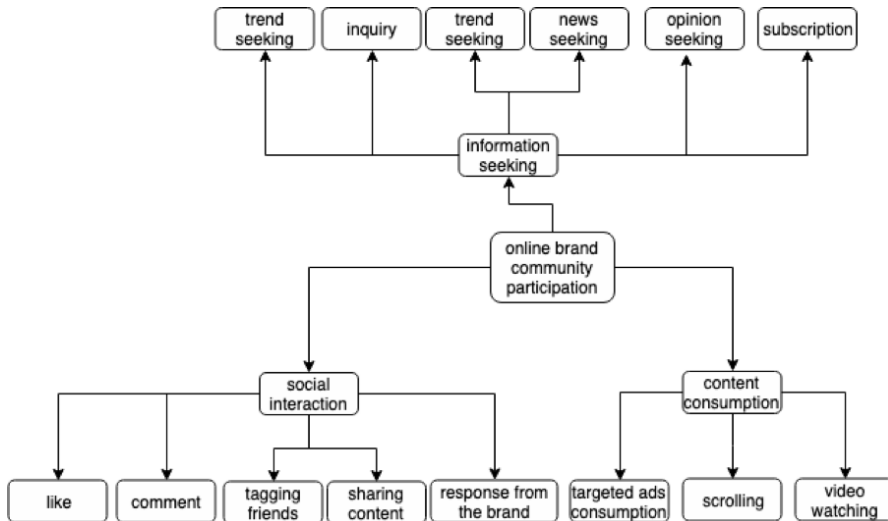
**Table 2** Summaries of open codes and axial stage (online brand community participation) (continued)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial Codes
	I think that a person might interact more than someone who is a casual liker. This means that instead of just liking the images, they <i>would comment or ask questions</i> . They might also <i>share an image</i> if it is something that really resonates with them.	Comment; inquiry; sharing content	Social interaction; information seeking
	I don't necessarily repost the images, but I do find myself <i>liking and commenting</i> more than I do on brands I just like.	like; comment	social interaction

5.1.1.1 Selective code generation

At this particular stage, the open code 'unconditional promotion' and the axial code 'word of mouth' were dismissed because these two codes occurred only once, which might not be representative of the phenomena under investigation. Therefore, to endure the quality of qualitative analysis, these two codes were omitted from the process of selective code, which is illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3** Diagram showing three coding levels leading to the theme 'online brand community participation'



5.1.2 Relationship quality

With regard to the relationship quality, open codes that were generated were mostly descriptive words and hard to interpret, therefore the definitions of the three relationship quality dimensions (listed in the literature review) were used to help guide the axial coding process. Within the realm of relationship quality, the trust dimension lays emphasis on *interpersonal and transactional relationships* (Guenzi and Pelloni, 2004;

Wu and Yen, 2007). The dimension of *commitment* emphasises on the longevity of the business relationship between a brand and its customers (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Lee et al., 2003; Hsu et al., 2010). Finally, *satisfaction* stresses the evaluation of the psychological state and the emotions of the customers (Gustafsson et al., 2006; Egan, 2011).

**Table 3** Summary of open codes and axial coding stage (relationship quality)

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Data item</i>	<i>Open codes</i>	<i>Axial code</i>
1	The encounter definitely <i>gives me a feeling of happiness</i> because I really like to just go on their pages, check out their posts, and discuss the latest products with other people. This affects my relationship with the brand by <i>making me feel closer to the brand</i> .	Happy; closer relationship	Satisfaction; closer relationship
	I felt like everyone was in <i>like a same community</i> as me and into luxury fashion.	Sense of community	Sense of belonging
	Yes, <i>every day is a day closer to the brand</i> where you really get into it as if you're <i>part of this group of people who really love the brand</i> .	Closer relationship; sense of community	Closer relationship; sense of belonging
2	<i>...I feel good</i> . A lot of what they post is relevant to me, but these are something I would buy. <i>It definitely made me like them more</i> and <i>I went and checked out their website to find out more info about them</i> .	Good feeling; fondness; attractiveness	Satisfaction; satisfaction; commitment
	<i>It makes me like them more</i> because it has items that are perfect for someone like me and <i>it was nice to see advertising geared towards me. I still would shop at their website...</i>	Fondness; acceptance of targeted ads; consistent purchase	Satisfaction; satisfaction; commitment
	<i>I wanted to find more polos that I could buy</i> because the place I worked in college required business casual, so I wanted more options to wear to work.	Purchasing desire	Trust
3	<i>...and they responded with different options to resolve my complaint, which makes me feel valued and content</i> . And I have a <i>better image</i> of them as well.	Feeling of being valued; happy; better image	Satisfaction; satisfaction; trust
	<i>... I always follow their content posts to see what new products they come up with, what new perfumes they release and I get excited about them</i> .	Excitement	Excitement
4	Overall, it <i>strikes me as odd</i> that seemingly unconnected websites and social media apps know what you've been searching or emailed about	Feeling of weird	Confusion
	This doesn't directly affect my relationship with the brand, other than <i>keeping them in my mind</i> more than they otherwise would be, and <i>encouraging me to check out their content more regularly</i>	Brand awareness; attractiveness	Entry into better relationship; commitment



**Table 3** Summary of open codes and axial coding stage (relationship quality) (continued)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial code
	I will seek out shopping experiences at companies where I know their <i>customer support is good</i> , or their <i>quality stands up to daily wear</i> . For example...	Customer support; durability	Satisfaction
	When I find a product, I like with a company I trust, <i>I usually try to buy further products from them...</i>	Continuous purchase	Trust
	I viewed comments about when and why they were closing online, <i>I believe in the Facebook comments in an ad about their final sales...</i>	Trustworthiness	Trust
5	...It made [me] watched the videos and <i>have a closer appreciation with the brand</i> .	Appreciation	Satisfaction
	I feel <i>entertained</i> . I feel like the <i>brand is aesthetically pleasing</i> . It <i>makes me want to purchase their products</i> , and shows its high quality, clean, and luxurious.	Entertained; pleased; purchasing desire	Satisfaction; satisfaction; trust
	Customer's commitment trust and satisfaction to a luxury fashion brand <i>means a valued relationship</i> .	Feeling of being valued	Satisfaction
	...That commitment shows the <i>eagerness of a brand</i> .	Eagerness	Commitment
6	Often my interactions look like 'liking' a pic or commenting an emoji or brief comment <i>showing my approval of the post</i> .	Approval	Trust
	This encounter <i>makes me feel good</i> . I do have an <i>extremely positive view of Nordstrom</i> as a brand in general so that definitely contributes to that feedback...	Good feeling; positive	Satisfaction; satisfaction
	<i>I've never had a bad experience shopping there</i> , that's why I'm committed to the brand!	Positive past experience	Satisfaction
	A person who is personally invested in a luxury fashion brand will likely be <i>very interactive</i> on the brand's social media platforms.	Interactive	Commitment
	... <i>I have a good history with these brands</i> , so I am inclined to like and comment on their posts instead of just 'looking'	Positive past experience	Satisfaction
	I like how reformation's <i>clothes are made sustainably</i> and the <i>dresses are simple and not overly flashy</i> . It's a minimal cool girl style. <i>All of the influencer/celebs whose fashion sense I admire wear this brand</i>	Social responsibility; ideal for personal taste; celebrity endorsement	Trust
7	Yes! I think in retrospect <i>it makes me think more positively of the brand</i> and makes me want to buy more products. It also makes me <i>more aware of products that are all available</i> .	Positive; brand awareness	Satisfaction; exposure

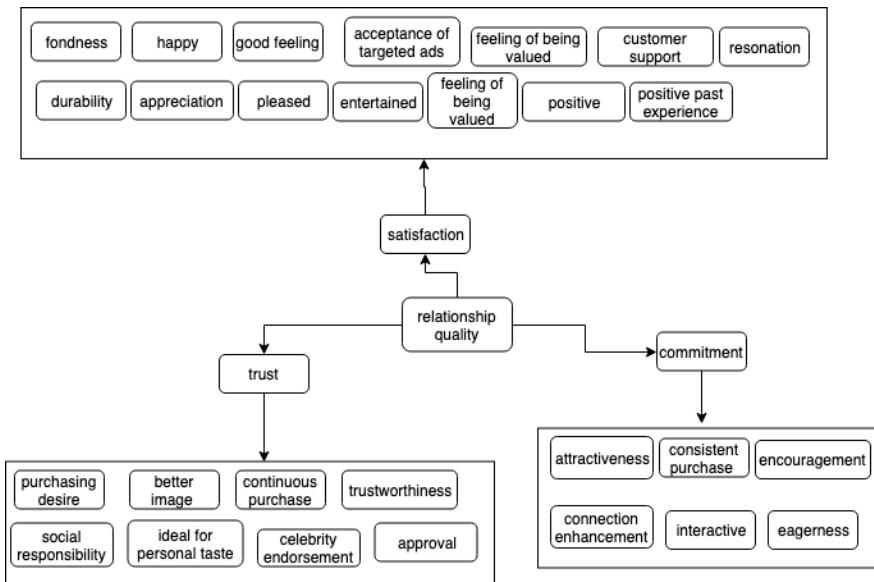
**Table 3** Summary of open codes and axial coding stage (relationship quality) (continued)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial code
	...they would comment or ask questions. They might also share an image if it is <i>something that really resonates with them</i> .	Resonation	Satisfaction
	I think that my time feels like part of the bigger creation process, which makes me feel <i>more connected to the brand</i> .	Connection enhancement	Satisfaction; commitment

5.1.2.1 Selective code generation

At this stage, several codes were dismissed. Online brand community member, the axial code ‘sense of belonging’ and the open code ‘sense of community’ in this case, were the prerequisite of conducting the interview and therefore dismissed in the coding process. The open code ‘feeling of weird’ and the axial code ‘confusion’ were also dismissed because it only occurs once and make up a tiny portion of the interview taken so might not be representative of the phenomena under investigation. The open code ‘brand awareness’ and the axial code ‘exposure’ and ‘excitement’ were also dismissed because though relevant in the theme, do not necessarily contribute to the analysis and occur only once. In addition, the code ‘closer relationship’ relates directly to the selective code so was not included in the coding and analysis process.

**Figure 4** Diagram showing three coding levels leading to the theme ‘relationship quality’



### 5.1.3 Brand loyalty

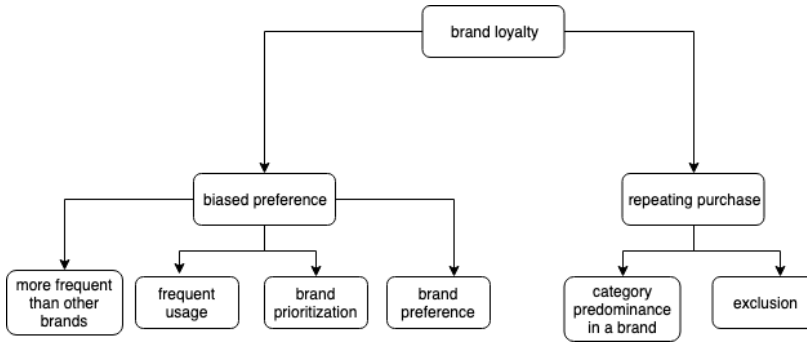
**Table 4** Summary of open codes and axial coding stage (brand loyalty)

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Data item</i>	<i>Open codes</i>	<i>Axial codes</i>
2	Definitely love Calvin Klein. I wear a lot of their clothing items at work and they are the only brand of underwear that I buy.	Frequent usage; exclusion	Biased preference; repeating purchase
3	What do customer's commitment, trust and satisfaction in relation to luxury fashion brand mean to you? To me it means that I'm paying high dollar for top quality products, <i>being loyal to a brand</i> , For example, if it's a purse, <i>I'm going to prioritize Michael Kors over others because I love Michael Kors purses.</i>	Brand loyalty  Brand prioritisation	Brand loyalty  Biased preference
4	...when I find a product I like with a company I trust, I usually try to buy further products from them, <i>choose their products over others that are similar from other companies...</i>	Brand prioritisation	Biased preference
5	I do think a <i>super committed person would prioritize the brand or even have a separate account.</i>	Brand prioritisation	Biased preference
6	<i>I buy most of my shoes and professional and event clothes at Nordstrom because of the excellent customer service and generous return policy.</i>  <i>Yes, [commitment, trust and satisfaction towards Nordstrom] it translates to purchases because I trust Nordstrom and their policies and company, I am more inclined to make purchases there.</i>  <i>I'm not loyal to any particular brand but I do have a few brands that I look to for different reasons.</i>	Category predominance in a brand  Brand preference  Brand preference	Repeating purchase  Biased preference  Biased preference
7	I think that I am most loyal to Kate Spade NY because <i>I have bought more of their products than other brands</i> I follow.	More frequent than other brands	Biased preference

#### 5.1.3.1 Selective code generation

At this stage, it can be seen that the open codes generated are more unified than the other overarching themes, amounting to just six codes. All of the open codes emerged were then categorised into two axial codes, biased preference and repeating purchase, both of which are the fundamentals of brand loyalty informed by literature review, hence the selective code.

**Figure 5** Diagram showing three coding levels leading to the theme ‘brand loyalty’



5.1.4 Branding co-creation

**Table 5** Summaries of open codes and axial coding stage (branding co-creation)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial codes
1	I really like to just go on their pages, check out their posts, and <i>discuss the latest products with other people</i> . This affects my relationship with the brand by making me feel closer to the brand.	Interaction between members	Exchange of product or service-related information
	Said I can help with improving their clothing design and logos. I went on and <i>worked with some people internally to work on designs for some bags and shirts and hoodies</i> .	Co-design	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand
	They called me in to <i>recommend them some ideas</i> because I am a graphic designer, which I helped <i>design some of the bags they were making and their clothing line</i> .	Idea contribution; co-design	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand
2	<i>I would recommend them</i> . I wear them around the house, and they are extremely comfortable	Recommendation	Resource integration when using the product or service
	<i>So I made the comment that I would like to see more polos posted about</i> because it would help me come up with different designs that I could buy. I can't say that they took my advice, but I did at least <i>attempt to give them a recommendation</i>	Leaving advice	Resource integration when using the product or service
3	<i>A person on the thread said they had it and loved it so I responded that I can't wait to add it to my arsenal</i> . I have about 20 perfumes	product discussion	exchange of product or service-related information

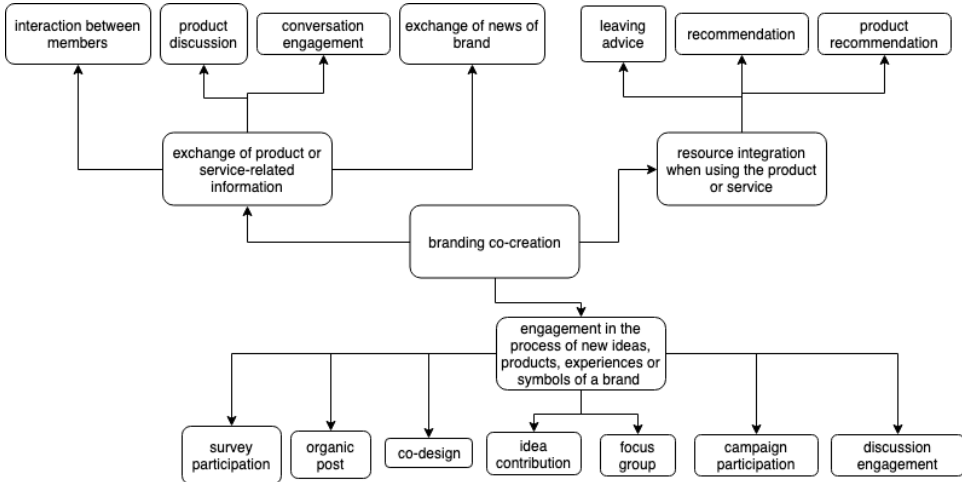
**Table 5** Summaries of open codes and axial coding stage (branding co-creation) (continued)

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Data item</i>	<i>Open codes</i>	<i>Axial codes</i>
	It didn't change my thoughts on the brand. <i>I was simply engaging with other consumers who like the same products that I do.</i>	Product discussion	Exchange of product or service-related information
	I interact regularly in the sense that I comment on products I'm excited about and <i>I engage with other people also commenting on it.</i>	conversation engagement	exchange of product or service-related information
	I was involved in <i>making decisions on packaging for a luxury brand and how they promote it on social media.</i> Just the other day, <i>I was also involved in a focus group about a social media campaign for a luxury mattress brand.</i> I contribute to focus groups like these regularly on a monthly basis and I regularly <i>recommend brands to people if they mention to me that they have a specific need.</i> For example, <i>purses I will always recommend Michael Kors</i> because I am loyal to their brand and love the quality of their purses.	Idea contribution; focus group; product recommendation	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand; resource integration when using the product or service
4	Choose their products over others that are similar from other companies and <i>tell family members and friends about it.</i>	Product recommendation	Resource integration when using the product or service
	When they went out of business, <i>my friends and I shared that information with each other...</i>	Exchange of news of brand	Exchange of product or service-related information
	I do like Marc Jacobs products and have brand loyalty. It would depend on what the social media campaign was. <i>If it was a commercial or ad with a good message, or thought provoking or helped a good cause like charity, I would be more inclined to participate in it.</i>	Campaign participation	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand
5	<i>I would engage in discussion</i> and mention it to friends or tag others. I would absolutely leave traces; I feel like more targeted ads or brands would pop up in my targeted advertising.	Discussion engagement	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand
6	<i>I would post items for Nordstrom's editorial content. I know they have a crowdsourced component on the app that allows users to post outfits by occasion.</i> It's on the 'looks' tab in the app.	Organic post	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand

**Table 5** Summaries of open codes and axial coding stage (branding co-creation) (continued)

Profile	Data item	Open codes	Axial codes
	I have recommended certain brands or items to friends on Instagram. <i>I've DMed my friends and sisters countless links of Reformation dresses...</i>	Product recommendation	Resource integration when using the product or service
	<i>I would post publicly about the brand or tag the brand if I was wearing it in an outfit post.</i> I like people knowing I wear this brand.	Organic post	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand
7	I got a survey for Kate Spade where <i>I have my reactions to fashion offerings on their upcoming product line. I got to say what I liked and what I didn't</i> —kind of giving my initial reactions to products.	Survey participation	Engagement in the process of new ideas, products, experiences or symbols of a brand

**Figure 6** Diagram showing three coding levels leading to the theme 'branding co-creation'



## 6 Findings and discussion

### 6.1 Finding 1: the predominant ways of online brand community participation are 'like' and 'comment', while information seeking is a main motivation for community participation

From the frequency of emerging codes, it can be concluded that:

- a the most predominant ways of community members participating in luxury fashion brand online brand community are 'liking' and 'commenting', as some of the comments from profile 1 and 2 (data items 1, respectively) and 6 (data item 2) of Table 2.

- b One motivation of community participation that emerges from the data analysis, is the information seeking. Respondents would ‘DM<sup>1</sup> about product availability’, ‘ask questions’, ‘inform about which new products they come up with’ and ‘check out their Instagram page to look at new releases or things that are in style’ etc. This confirms the Shao’s (2009) model that suggests the need for information is one of the most fundamental reasons people use user-generated media.

Moreover, the literature review suggests that the participation in online brand community contributes to the quality of relationship between the brand and its customers (Lemon et al., 2001; Roser et al., 2009; Humphrey et al., 2016; Hajli et al., 2017; Kamboj et al., 2018). This proposition is evidenced in Table 3, where the interviewees’ answers express how they felt about their encounters with the luxury brand community: respondents felt ‘happy’ about the brand, indicating they were more satisfied with them after participation (see profile 1, data item 1). Respondents also felt being ‘encouraged’ to consistent participation and more ‘connected’ to the brand, indicating increased level of commitment from the customer’s side (see profile 1, data item 3 and profile 2, data item 1). Moreover, respondents were more eager to ‘purchase’ an item from the company, indicating an increased level of trust: see profile 5 (data item 2), still of Table 3.

## 6.2 *Finding 2: high-quality products and customer service experience create trust, commitment and satisfaction*

Respondents explained what they perceived commitment, trust and satisfaction towards a luxury fashion brand to be: the provision of high-quality products and customer service experience emerged as two of the most important factors in creating trust, commitment and satisfaction:

“I would say commitment would be being committed to providing their customers a quality product and a varying selection of things for everyone. Trust goes along the same lines they create a quality product and we trust that it will be solid quality and fit well. Satisfaction would definitely be whether or not the quality of the product satisfies what I feel the brand would provide.”  
(profile 2)

“A good customer service experience and quality of products are really important to me. I will seek out shopping experiences at companies where I know their customer support is good, or their quality stands up to daily wear.”  
(profile 4)

The findings reinforce the proposed theoretical framework and correspond with the literature stating that trust is the outcome of customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012) and that social media consumption can result in customer satisfaction (Athwal et al., 2019). For a reference for ‘commitment’, see profile 2 (item 1), for a reference for ‘satisfaction’, see profile 2 (item 2) and for a reference for ‘trust’, see profile 7 (item 1) of Table 3.

Moreover, the respondents indicated that pre-existing good relationship in terms of satisfaction, trust and commitment with a luxury fashion brand contributes to their participation in online brand community: this aligns with proposition 1. To be specific, respondents indicated that trust encourages customer engagement (Fournier, 1998; Bowden, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011) and is the foundation of

commercial relationship, which correspond to the literature (Guenzi and Pelloni, 2004; Wu and Yen, 2007) and can result in loyalty (Fournier, 1998) - in fact it is the building block of brand loyalty. The findings also support proposition 2, by indicating that customers' trust, commitment and satisfaction towards the luxury fashion brand can lead to with brand loyalty. For a reference, see profile 3 (data item 2), profile 4 and 5, as well as profile 6 (data item 2) of Table 4.

Respondents indicated that their increased relationship quality by online brand community participation contributes to branding co-creation, confirming proposition 3. The consequent branding co-creation was found to be predominantly in the form of recommendation. For instance, the respondent of profile 2 shared his experience of how he first 'liked a post' about a jogger on Facebook page, which later got him 'buy a couple of those joggers', and after which, the 'extremely comfortable' sensation satisfied him to the point where he would recommend them.

Findings also suggested the direct influence of brand loyalty on the encouragement of branding co-creation in online brand community, corresponding with proposition 4 and extant literature that brand loyalty is the antecedent of branding co-creation (Payne et al., 2009; Hajli et al., 2017).

### *6.3 Finding 3: pre-existing quality relationship with the brand leads to participation and co-creation in online brand community, and vice versa*

The impacts on online brand community participation were a further finding. It was indicated by respondents that their pre-existent brand loyalty can contribute to online brand community more so than they otherwise would be (for an example, see profile 7 of Table 4).

Another further finding suggested that branding co-creation in online brand community can enhance relationship quality. For example, the respondents of profile 4 shared the experience of exchanging information about the latest sales put out by her favourite luxury brand, and after she checked out the ads about the sales, the feeling of trust emerged. This is outlined, for instance, in profile 4 (item 2) and profile 7 of Table 5.

### *6.5 Finding 4: brand attachment and self-expression are main drivers for branding co-creation*

When respondents were asked about their motivations of undertaking branding co-creation activities in online brand community, there were mainly two reasons:

- 1 Their attachment with the luxury brand - including, commitment, trust, satisfaction and loyalty, which have been discussed in previous sections.
- 2 Their intendancy of finding fulfilment and self-expression. This correspond with Ind et al.'s (2013) proposition that value co-creation reflects a participative culture in which people tend to find fulfilment, express their creativity, and socialise – even though monetary incentives were also found to be a motivational factor in branding co-creation.

“I like to have my opinions and ideas heard because I'm sure there are customers out there who feel the same way when it comes to what they are looking for in a brand.” (profile 3)



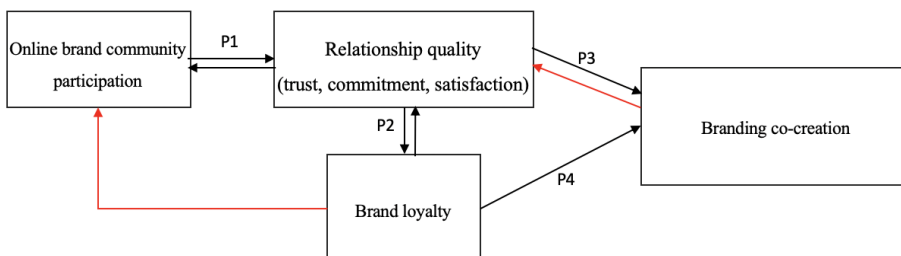
“I think that has been most exciting because it feels like I am a tiny part of the co-creation process.” (profile 7)

“The former process provided some coupons as an incentive. And then latter offered monetary return, so kind of like a collaboration process.” (profile 1)

## 6.6 Final framework

Figure 7 presents the final theoretical framework that depicts the role of online communities in branding co-creation: it unveils a new and nuanced online brand community participation process, which leads to branding co-creation. Online brand community participation is confirmed to be positively related with the relationship quality dimensions of trust, commitment and satisfaction. Furthermore, among all the means of participation, ‘liking’ and ‘commenting’ are the most frequently used way of participating by luxury fashion community members. The relationship quality dimensions of trust, commitment and satisfaction, are generally perceived by community members as high-quality products and good customer service. Furthermore, these dimensions are found to be positively related with all the other three themes, i.e. customers who have developed either trust, commitment or satisfaction are more likely to participate in online luxury fashion brand community and branding co-creation activities and become loyal to the luxury fashion brand than those who have not. A direct impact of brand loyalty on online brand community participation was identified, whereby a customer who has developed a certain degree of loyalty to a luxury fashion brand, is more likely to participate in its online brand community than one who has not for instance, by checking out its social media posts regularly, and pressing the ‘like’ button. It was also confirmed that brand loyalty encourages customers’ branding co-creation in luxury fashion brand online communities. The final framework identifies the impacts of branding co-creation in luxury fashion brand online community on relationship quality in that customers increase either their level of trust, commitment or satisfaction after undertaking branding co-creation activities. Besides relationship quality and brand loyalty, factors like the desire for self-expression, sense of fulfilment and creativity as well as monetary return are the identified reasons for branding co-creation.

**Figure 7** The final theoretical framework of the role of online communities branding co-creation (see online version for colours)



The insights generated from the online brand community member interviews support the process outlined in the framework: that is, that social media facilitates the social interactions of customers with their favourite luxury fashion brands, who develop high quality relationships, leading to loyalty and branding co-creation. Moreover, the proposed theoretical framework is consistent with the findings, which suggest customers who have

developed high quality relationships with a luxury fashion brand, or who are loyal to one, are more likely to be involved with an online fashion brand community. The framework also presents additional findings, compared to the original framework, as depicted on Figure 7, in red.

## 7 Conclusions

Based on data collection and data analysis, this study framework provides a comprehensive account of how online brand community facilitate customers to develop better relationship and cultivate brand loyalty, both of which leading to branding co-creation. The findings of this study contribute to existing knowledge on relationship marketing, social media, brand loyalty and most importantly branding co-creation. Academic knowledge on this branding co-creation, although evolving rapidly, is still lacking. Where studies concerning both brand community and branding co-creation do exist, these are not fashion industry centric. This research provides insights into how customers are using social media to engage with their favourite brand: this in turn, can help brands in pursuing an effective online marketing strategy. The findings reveal that luxury fashion brands may build online brand communities to facilitate the social interactions of customers in order to develop relationship quality and loyalty out of the purpose of branding co-creation. The findings also reflect the fact that interconnections of customers in online luxury fashion brand communities produce enhanced relationships and loyalty, which can be a practical strategy of branding co-creation. Moreover, as the study has unearthed the iterative nature of this process, the resulting co-creation of brand value can reversely enhance the bonds of brand loyalty and relationship quality via online brand community interactions as were shown before.

### 7.1 *Theoretical contribution*

The research findings justified relevant literature and confirmed that online luxury fashion brand communities like social media, play a facilitating role in the social interactions of customers with their favourite luxury fashion brands, who develop high quality relationships, leading to loyalty and brand co-creation. This study achieved this result by integrating relevant theories and Hajli et al.'s (2017) model as the theoretical basis to establish a theoretical framework of branding co-creation in online brand community. Hajli et al. (2017)'s model was validated and further extended over the course of literature review and data collection. As a result, the direct impact that brand loyalty has on online brand community participation as well as the strengthening effect of brand loyalty on relationship quality afterwards branding co-creation activities were identified. Integrating relevant theories to develop co-creation of value in online brand community is a contribution to better understanding branding in general. Another contribution is the combination of co-creation of value and branding. Lastly, using data from the luxury fashion sector, confirms traditional customer behaviour theories and sheds light on new perspectives such as branding co-creation, all of which consolidate the nature of these concepts across sectors.

## 7.2 Managerial implications

This study has practical implications for luxury fashion sector: utilising online brand communities like social media for branding co-creation poses great upside for marketer at a time like this when the scale of social commerce is still growing. The findings suggested, in fact, that luxury fashion brands might gear their online marketing strategies towards branding co-creation via engaging customers in social media. It was also suggested that building brand communities to facilitate this process is viable and effective. With great accessibility of social media, customers are able to share knowledge, experiences and opinions regarding a brand with others at ease. Growing a brand using online community backed by relationship quality and brand loyalty poses great potential for luxury fashion brands. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the cultivating process of brand loyal in online community does not necessarily happen between the brand and its customers, it can be between customers, which is why it is important that the brand take a facilitating role in running an online community. In other words, the process of exchange between customers must be smoothed for the best consequences possible. For instance, since the iterative nature of the process, the official social media account can transform a portion of information from brand meanings into easily recognisable and memorable tags and encourage customers to share post contents that include the tags. In summary, this study presents how brands can benefit from their customers' participating in online community. Facilitating social interactions of customers through social media can develop relationship quality and loyalty leading to branding co-creation.

## 7.3 Limitations and future research

There are several limitations to this research. Firstly, the findings of this study may not be generalised to the whole millennials population given that only seven interviews were conducted, but future study might take on a sample that is bigger sized and more representative of the target. In addition, this research sampled only online community members, and since branding co-creation include the facilitating role of the brand, future study might take on the perspective of brands, supplemented by company data or community data about its members. Moreover, this study focused on millennial social media users only, so the findings may not apply to other age groups. Future study might take on how do these finding apply to other age groups like gen Z. Lastly, since this research focused on luxury fashion brands in general, it would be useful for further studies to take on the subject on a case-by-case basis, learning how one specific brand is doing in comparison to the other.

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## Notes

- 1 DM stands for direct message, or a private message with a person on social media, especially Twitter.