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## Editorial

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## 1 Introduction

Social commerce is changing the way people communicate, collaborate, consume and create. To compete effectively, organisations must take a proactive stance towards the transformational changes within an evolving digital era of commercialisation. The development of global telecommunications has resulted in social media becoming an important tool for companies to engage consumers with products, to collaborate through online social communities, and for the purpose of unlocking co-creation possibilities, which in turn increases consumption opportunities for companies (Arrigo, 2018; Okazaki and Taylor, 2013). Thus, the ubiquitous nature of social media makes it a powerful marketing and sales tool for brands worldwide (Boardman, 2019).

Social media brings many advantages, particularly in terms of facilitating the connection between brands and customers, thereby developing brand-customer relationships in a more timely and cost effective manner (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Building closer relationships with consumers via social media helps brands win their loyalty (Kelley and Alden, 2016), highlighted by 62% of millennials saying that if a brand engages with them on social networks, they are more likely to become a loyal customer (Schroeder, 2018). As such, brands can take advantage of social media sites' extensive user bases by connecting with their target consumers on there, creating brand communities and facilitating stronger and more direct interactions with them (Touchette et al., 2015). Brands are no longer broadcasting their messages as a monologue, but are actively engaging in a dialogue with their consumers, sharing videos, blogs, product information and creating polls to encourage interaction, reaching a global audience (Bürklin et al., 2019). In particular, Pramono and Aprilianty (2020) found that there is a positive relationship between social media marketing, customer relationships and purchase intention, and that social content that facilitates symbolic and hedonic value is the most engaging content.

The pervasive usage of social media provides consumers themselves the opportunity to become innovators, by enabling them to communicate with, and influence others outside of their social circle. Indeed, literature has recognised the significance of

word-of-mouth (WOM) in influencing consumer decision-making (Chu and Kim, 2011), because consumers generally trust their peers more than they trust advertisers or marketers (Sen and Lerman, 2007). Consumers can share brand's content or create their own, comment on and like posts, or voice their concerns instantaneously (Bürklin et al., 2019). The anonymous and convenient characteristics of social media allows consumers to share their opinions more comfortably without revealing their identities (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006), changing consumers from a 'passive observer' to an 'active participant' (Chu and Kim 2011).

However, despite the many benefits of social media for business success, such platforms do also present some key challenges. Busalim et al. (2021) found that, perceived value and social interaction significantly impact customer engagement behaviour on social commerce platforms. This indicates that brands need to ensure that they are clearly providing value to consumers through social media and focus on quality content that is true to their brand identity, and not just content for contents sake. Moreover, the anonymous nature of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has made it difficult for consumers to determine the quality and credibility of the eWOM within the market place, as social media is inundated with wrong and fake content, which as a result, could lead to distrust amongst consumers or on the other hand, drive consumers to make the wrong decisions (Zhang and Gupta, 2018). The lack of ethical guidelines for social media usage is a troubling issue for both businesses and entrepreneurs alike, and one that they must learn more about. In the world of social media, there is nowhere to hide, with every mistake highlighted, shared and magnified, permanently on record. Brands are under pressure to create engaging and aesthetically pleasing content, with standards of visual marketing becoming increasingly higher, but they also need to ensure that they are sensitive towards their consumers worldwide, therefore being aware of and understanding gender, and cultural differences is paramount.

## **2 Special issue insights**

Academic literature recognises that social commerce has four key areas which are the basis for research; social media, interactivity, the extension of commercial activities, and new participants in online commerce (Bürklin et al., 2019). This special issue includes seven papers, encompassing all four of the social commerce research themes. This issue brings to the forefront key developments, opportunities and challenges, related to technological applications within a social commerce context. The articles focus on how new technological platforms, and/or use of technologies are being used internationally, to drive customer and/or business interactions within a social commerce context. This special issue contains seven papers each of which focus on the following aspects.

Paper 1, titled 'Investigating shopper motivations for purchasing on Instagram', by Courtney Chrimes and Rosy Boardman, investigates shopper motivations and subsequent eWOM intentions when purchasing fashion garments via Instagram. A quantitative survey was distributed via social media channels and collected 205 valid respondents from females aged 18–43. Numerous preliminary analyses were conducted before undertaking structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesised model. The study found that both hedonic (i.e., latest trends) and utilitarian (convenience and information availability) motivations positively affected consumers' intention to search

for garments on Instagram. However, cost (utilitarian) and authority (hedonic) were found to have no effect on consumers search intentions. The findings further suggest that there is a significant link between searching for garments on Instagram and purchase intentions and that users who search for fashion items on Instagram are also prone to undertaking eWOM by sharing garments with their friends and commenting on product posts.

Paper 2, titled 'Exploring the role and significance of consumer relationship quality and participation within online fashion brand communities', by Myriam Caratù, Daniella Ryding, Erqi Li and Gianpaolo Vignali, 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. 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.

Paper 3, titled 'Social media, s-commerce and social capital: a netnography of football fans and organisations', by Alex Fenton, Chris Procter, Rachel McLean and Anabel Quan-Haase, states that social media channels allow brands to establish meaningful social relations with customers. This paper evaluates the role of social capital in building these online relationships for the benefit of commercial value and s-commerce for brands. Extensive empirical data was collected over a two-year netnography study using the social media channels of a football club in the UK as a vehicle for the study. A multimethod design was employed that included online participant observation, social network analysis, and semi-structured interviews with football fans and social media managers. The majority of brand social media followers are often weakly connected. Finding ways to strengthen social capital with customers has significant brand and commercial implications. Positive interactions with customers are critical to building social capital to strengthen and sustain the brand. Social capital can be successfully built and nurtured through engaging content and positive interactions through social media channels.

Paper 4, titled 'Social commerce promotes sharing economy: a case study of Mercari, Japan', by Mitsunori Hirogaki, the author investigated Japanese consumers' attitudes toward social commerce and the factors influencing their participation behaviour. The study focused on social commerce classified as peer-to-peer sales platforms, which is undergoing drastic rapid market expansion in Japan. Data was collected from 1,000 participants who frequently sell (also buy) their goods via social commerce sites. The participants were from all districts and all major cities of Japan. The questionnaire survey data was analysed using logistic regression analysis to identify their motives for participating in social commerce. The results showed that demographic factors and the motivation to participate in a sharing economy have a significant impact on the motives

when engaging in social commerce. Interestingly, the authors found that economic motivation had no significant effect when engaging in social commerce sites. These results will be useful for the effective entry of social commerce businesses and marketing strategies into Japan.

Paper 5, titled 'Online branding strategies of Saudi Arabian bakeries: a qualitative approach', by Raghdah Aljuwaiser and Panayiota J. Alevizou, sheds some light in online retail branding in the bakery sector. As the owner manager is considered pivotal in developing and operationalising the online branding strategy the authors interviewed seven owner managers of SME bakery brands operating in Saudi Arabia. The findings indicate a fragmented and inconsistent use of online branding strategies amongst bakery retailers which may be clouding their brand identity and creating additional resource requirements. The paper contributes to the knowledge on SMEs' online branding through a qualitative approach and from an owner manager perspective.

Paper 6, titled 'The bridge to higher education – scaffolding the transitional experience of prospective higher educational learners using a small online course', by Gianpaolo Vignali, Rachel Studd and Daniella Ryding builds on the conceptions of students transitions theory identified by Gale and Parker (2014) This paper provides a case-study approach to further understand how the transition from secondary to higher education can be best managed. The adjustment for learners at the pre-enrolment stage of higher education (14–17 year age groups), has been denoted as problematic. The authors address a skills development gap, to provide new insights for prospective learners in what to expect at university before they arrive. A newly developed small online course (SOC) is created for a discipline specific course at the University of Manchester, combining Gale and Parker's (2014) conception transition literature, with a mixed methods, longitudinal study undertaken with a group of key stakeholders. The theoretical contributions provide an extension of Gale and Parkers (2012) framework, depicting an embryonic stage ( $T_0$ ), designed to support prospective students during the university selection process building a sense of belonging. Practical implications of implementing the SOC demonstrates an increase in student applications and a rise in key information sets (KIS) data for the courses concerned. Building bridges of understanding with this age group requires linkages from their existing knowledge, the new academic discipline, to their future working careers, by conveying employability as a set of identifiable skills.

Paper 7, titled 'Understanding sporting brands and entrepreneurship using netnography and social network analysis', by Alex Fenton, Keith D. Parry, Wasim Ahmed and Simon Chadwick aims to demonstrate that data derived from social media networks can enhance entrepreneurship in SMEs, providing tools and guidance for entrepreneurs. The authors' present a double case of two sporting SMEs and utilise a distinctive blend of quantitative data from social network analysis using NodeXL, followed by a qualitative analysis using netnography to gather data. The authors propose that using social media data in this way can create new insights for social commerce in order for SMEs to better understand consumer interactions.

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