

Building a tribe on Instagram: User-generated and Firm-created Content can drive brand evangelism and fidelity

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Abstract

The social media revolution has significantly transformed marketing plans and practices in the business world. Firm-Created Content (FCC) and User-Generated Content (UGC) serve as critical social media communication tools for brands to connect and build relationships with customers. This study investigates the influence of FCC and UGC on affective commitment, brand evangelism, and fidelity. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, this study aims to explore the impact of FCC and UGC on affective commitment, which, in turn, mediates the relationships between these social media communication tools (FCC and UGC), brand evangelism and fidelity. The research, focusing on a coffee-shop chain's FCC and UGC on Instagram, utilizing structural equation modeling to analyze data from a sample of 341 Instagram users in the USA who are Starbucks customers. The findings reveal that FCC and UGC are positively and significantly related to brand evangelism and fidelity. Furthermore, the results suggest that affective commitment mediates the relationship between FCC, UGC, brand evangelism and fidelity, supporting the hypotheses concerning the indirect relationships between social media communication tools, brand evangelism and fidelity.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the literature by examining the underlying mechanism through which FCC and UGC promote brand evangelism and fidelity within the context of the coffee shop industry and on Instagram. The study offers a valuable contribution to the tourism marketing literature by shedding light on the role of UGC and FCC as social media communication tools for coffee brands. These tools can assist coffee marketers in developing varied marketing strategies through social

KEYWORDS Social media marketing; User-generated content (UGC); Firm-created content (FCC); brand evangelism; brand fidelity; Instagram; Instagram

Introduction

The growth of Social Media Marketing (SMM) and the emergence of Social Network Sites (SNS) have been considered catalysts for brand success in recent years. SMM is defined as ‘the strategies that companies use to market products, services, and ideas through SNS’ (Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023, p. 5). Through these strategies, brands aim to share dynamic, interactive, information-rich, entertaining content to improve customer engagement and support brand loyalty (Li, Larimo, and Leonidou 2023; Polat et al. 2023). Creating content is one of these strategies and serves as an effective communication tool through SNSs (Aljarah et al. 2022). This content is a crucial component of any SMM strategy, playing a vital role in capturing audience attention, fostering relationships, and driving sales (Polat et al. 2023). Firm-Created Content (FCC) and User-Generated Content (UGC) represent two forms of social media communication that are generally recognized as subgroups of SMM (Ballester, Ruiz, and Rubio 2021; Dedeoğlu et al. 2020). FCC is an effort organized or accomplished by a company to build customer-oriented content. In contrast, UGC is independent of the company and created by engaged consumers on behalf of the company (Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro, and Fuentes-Blasco 2020).

The proliferation of FCC and UGC has given firms new tools for developing brand content and relationships with their customers (Šerić and Praničević 2018). With the increasing significance of SMM tools, Starbucks has created a notably robust presence on various SNSs, including Twitter (now called X), Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (Shirdastian, Laroche, and Richard 2019; Taucharungroj 2017). For example, Starbucks boasts over 17.8 million followers on Instagram along with 3.130 posts, where its brand activities are noted for being stylish, social, interactive, and non-intrusive. Furthermore, Starbucks leverages UGC through its annual ‘#redcupcontest’ campaign launched in 2014, which encourages customer engagement via sharing hashtags, tagging photos, and commenting, thus fostering customer-brand relationships (Ueland 2020). Starbucks enhances FCC and customer engagement by sharing captivating videos and photos of its products across various Instagram locations (Starbucks 2015). Highlighting the broad impact of SNS, a notable statistic is the existence of more than 327 million posts tagged #food on Instagram, emphasizing the platform’s significant influence (Gabrielli 2020).

Despite the growing popularity of SMM and its considerable impact on consumer behavior, research into how Starbucks’s SMM activities enhance consumer brand relationships remains scarce. For example, the study by Taucharungroj (2017) focused on Starbucks’s Twitter strategy and its impact on other brands, analyzing tweets, retweets, and replies. Shirdastian et al. (2019) qualitatively analyzed tweets to understand the sentiments around brand authenticity related to Starbucks, examining aspects like commitment to

quality, heritage, uniqueness, and symbolism. However, most previous studies have concentrated on analyzing SMM strategies or branding through Starbucks's Twitter activity, leading to a gap in understanding how FCC and UGC on Starbucks's Instagram page foster positive customer-brand relationships. This oversight suggests a significant area for future research, emphasizing the need to explore the effectiveness of Starbucks's SMM strategies on Instagram in cultivating stronger customer-brand connections.

Moreover, the positive effect of FCC and UGC on customer-brand relationships are well documented in the tourism industry, including areas such as destination (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro, and Fuentes-Blasco 2020), leisure activities (Ibrahim et al., 2022) and coffee shops (Sawaftah, Aljarah, and Lahuerta-Otero 2021). However, studies focusing on UGC and FCC within the context of coffee shops and Instagram remain limited (Chen, Huang, and Tham 2021; Shirdastian, Laroche, and Richard 2019; Taecharungroj 2017). In this context, Chen et al. (2021) highlight the ongoing necessity of exploring consumers' experiences and behavior toward café consumption via SNS, particularly on Instagram, due to its growing importance in this niche sector. So, this study identifies a gap in existing literature, as no previous study has investigated the impact of social media communication tools on fostering customer-brand relationships through the use of Instagram pages, particularly those of Starbucks. This oversight presents a significant opportunity for further research, given the platform's centrality in contemporary marketing practices.

On the other hand, the impact of FCC and UGC stems on customer-brand relationships – such as brand loyalty, brand equity, willingness to pay more, and engagement – has been highlighted in recent tourism and hospitality research (Aljarah et al. 2022; Dedeoğlu et al. 2020; Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro, and Fuentes-Blasco 2020). Several scholars have explored the role of UGC and FCC in improving consumer behavior within the coffee shop industry. For example, Aljarah et al. (2022) examined the impact of UGC and FCC on online brand advocacy and customer engagement of coffee shop Twitter pages through a scenario-based experimental design. Additionally, Ibrahim et al. (2022) have demonstrated that FCC and UGC significantly predict of customer engagement – evidenced by likes, shares, and comments on coffee shop Facebook pages. However, these studies have not fully addressed how social media communication tools like UGC and FCC can improve cognitive and behavioral aspects of relationship maintenance, thereby enhancing firm profits (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020) and sustaining brand relationships (Grace, Ross, and King 2018). While SMM research has provided valuable insights into the ramifications of UGC and FCC, there have been calls for further investigations into their various downstream effects, particularly their impact on pro-brand behaviors (Aljarah et al. 2022; Polat et al. 2023). This gap suggests a critical need for research focused on how UGC

and the FCC influence actions that go beyond mere purchasing, thereby actively benefiting brands through brand fidelity and evangelism. Brand fidelity refers to the “consumer’s behavioral and cognitive ‘effort’ towards relationship maintenance as a true indication of their emotional attachment, over and above that which may be self-reported“ (Grace, Ross, and King 2018, p. 586). Meanwhile, brand evangelism is defined as dynamic customer behavior that involves buying, recommending, disseminating word of mouth (WOM), recruiting others to use, and defending the brand by disparaging competing brands (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). Assessing the role of brand fidelity and evangelism within SNSs has become a crucial yet relatively new area of study in the tourism and SMM context (Grace, Ross, and King 2020; Nkoulou Mvondo et al. 2022). However, our understanding of how UGC and FCC influence these behaviors remains limited. Consequently, there is a need for brands to craft effective UGC and FCC strategies to stimulate brand fidelity and evangelism among their followers (Polat et al. 2023). Yet, no study focusing on the coffee house sector and the Instagram context has specifically explored the role of FCC and UGC in increasing pro-brand behaviors. Furthermore, this research responds to the latest call from systematic literature reviews within the tourism context for a more extensive examination of the effects of UGC and FCC on pro-brand behaviors, specifically focusing on brand evangelism and fidelity (Polat et al. 2023).

However, these relationships may not be direct, and the interactions on SNSs need a specific mechanism to produce outcomes. For example, Šerić and Praničević (2018) identified an indirect effect of UGC on brand loyalty within the fast-food industry, mediated by affective commitment. While previous research has examined the role of affective commitment, there remains a notable gap concerning how FCC and UGC influence brand evangelism and fidelity through affective commitment, particularly on Instagram (Aljarah et al. 2022) and within the service industry (Dedeoğlu et al. 2020), with a specific focus on the coffee shop sector (Ballester, Ruiz, and Rubio 2021). Thus, this study aims to explore the impact of FCC and UGC on brand evangelism and fidelity, with a particular emphasis on affective commitment as a key mediating mechanism. These observations in the SMM literature indicate the potential for a mediating effect of affective commitment between social media communication (UGC and FCC) and two pro-brand behaviors (brand evangelism and fidelity) – an effect that has not yet been explored.

Using the ‘stimulus (S) – organism (O) – response (R)’ (SOR) model as the theoretical basis, this study aims to examine the impact of FCC and UGC on affective commitment, and its subsequent effect on brand evangelism and fidelity. By so doing, the present study endeavors to bridge this gap in the literature by addressing the following research questions (RQs).

RQ1. How do FCC and UGC influence brand evangelism on Starbucks' Instagram pages?

RQ2. How do FCC and UGC influence brand fidelity on Starbucks' Instagram pages?

RQ3. How does affective commitment mediator the relationship between UGC and pro- brand behaviors (brand evangelism and fidelity)?

RQ4. How does affective commitment mediator the relationship between FCC and pro- brand behaviors (brand evangelism and fidelity)?

The structure of this paper is ordered as follows. First, we provide the theoretical back- ground, present a concise literature review, and develop the hypotheses delineating the proposed relationships among FCC, UGC, affective commitment, brand evangelism, and fidelity. Following the methodology section, we then present and discuss the results, including the contributions and implications of this research.

Research conceptual framework, literature review, and development of hypotheses

Research conceptual framework

The SOR model – (Stimulus–Organism–Response)

The framework used in this study, the SOR model, was first examined within the context of environmental psychology by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. The SOR model serves as an underpinning theory, positing that specific characteristics of an environment (S) affect the inner states of customers (O), which in turn, prompt specific behaviors (R) (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). In the context of the tourism domain, the SOR model indicates that SMM tools act as a stimuli that affect the internal state of the customer, such as brand trust and brand loyalty, potentially influencing their intention to revisit (Ibrahim et al., 2021). The current paper considers UGC and FCC as stimuli that engage consumers via Instagram. The 'organism' component of the SOR model, representing the affective and cognitive state of customers (specifically affective commitment in this study), is posited as a mediator between the stimuli and the resulting behaviors.

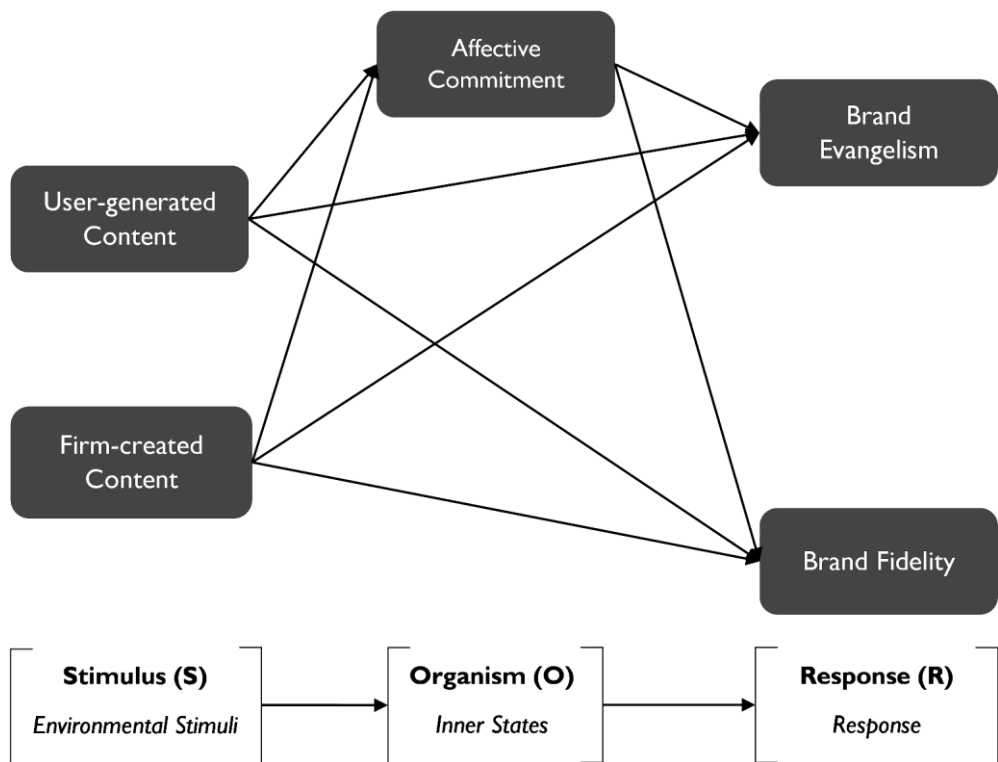


Figure 1. The research model.

Brand fidelity and brand evangelism are regarded as the responses (R) in this model. Hence, as shown in Figure 1, the primary hypothesis of this model is that UGC and FCC (S) may impact affective commitment (O), which in turn, can influence brand fidelity and brand evangelism as responses (R).

Literature review

Firm-created content and User-generated content

SMM is an integral part of a company's marketing strategy, offering new tools for interacting and engaging with customers. The sources of FCC and UGC differ and highlight several content types. UGC is defined as 'media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and is primarily distributed on the Internet' Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright 2008, p. 19. UGC encompasses any content created and shared by a brand's audience, serving as a powerful tool to leverage their creativity and passion (Polat et al. 2023). UGC customizes the brand for relevance, builds trust by valuing customer opinions, and

creates valuable, informative content (Aljarah et al. 2022). UGC appears in various forms, including visuals (e.g., images, photos, infographics, and memes), written content (e.g., reviews, testimonials, blog posts, and social media comments), inter-active content (e.g., live Q&A sessions, contests, and polls), and videos (e.g., testimonials, unboxing videos, and tutorials) (Ahn 2023; Aljarah et al. 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright 2008; Polat et al. 2023). Tourists, for example, contribute to the creation of UGC for tourism brands in various formats, such as giving restaurant recommendations, uploading destination photos, tagging friends, or sharing posts about coffee shop (Kim, Park, and Kim 2021; Polat et al. 2023). The tourism industry, particularly through videos, benefits significantly from UGC. A recent systematic literature review emphasized the importance of user-generated videos and encouraged marketers to improve video quality (sound, image, editing) to boost engagement and interaction (Polat et al. 2023). Additionally, employing creative advertising tactics like TikTok challenges and video contests featuring the destination's charm can effectively attract tourists (Polat et al. 2023, 2024).

Moreover, FCC is the content produced by a firm to market itself and foster customer relationships. FCC tools provide accurate and up-to-date information about the brand and its offerings, thereby building enduring customer relationships (Dedeoğlu et al. 2020). The digital content produced by firms may include texts, posts, photos, and videos, all aimed at promoting the brand (Ballester, Ruiz, and Rubio 2021). FCC is critical in solving customer dissatisfaction problems and creating positive interactions between customers and service providers (Aljarah et al. 2022; Kim, Park, and Kim 2021). Therefore, marketers have the opportunity to offer deeper interactive communication through various content, such as live chat, chatbot for general inquiries, and personalized seller recommendations (Ahn 2023). An effective example of FCC is Marriott Hotels, which utilized Twitter for sponsored promotions and events to attract new followers (Kim, Park, and Kim 2021). Their success lies in content that resonates well with consumers, as evidenced by the immediate positive response to Marriott's branded content (Kim, Park, and Kim 2021).

Brand evangelism

Brand evangelism signals the success of a brand and highlights a vital factor in enhancing customers' purchasing choices (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). According to Harrigan et al. (2020), brand evangelism involves recommending the brand to others, disseminating WOM, recruiting others to use the brand, and defending the brand against competing brands. Previous research by scholars such as Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) and Nyadzayo et al. (2020) claimed that brand evangelism goes beyond simple recommendations; it involves customers sharing their positive experiences and

actively trying to convince others to buy the brand. Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) further explain that brand evangelism combines positive emotions and behaviors toward a brand with anti-brand behaviors toward competing brands. Drawing from the previous literature, we define brand evangelism as encompassing three main activities: (1) the dissemination of brand-related experience by customers, (2) efforts by customers to encourage others to use the brands, and (3) actions aimed at preventing others from choosing and consuming competing brands.

Brand fidelity

The term ‘brand fidelity’ has been identified as a multidimensional cognitive and behavioral concept that explores consumers’ actions when they develop a strong commitment to or affection for a brand (Grace, Ross, and King 2020). Brand fidelity is defined as a construct encompassing four dimensions: ‘the consumer’s faithfulness to a brand, manifested through various behaviours (i.e., accommodation/ forgiveness – performance and price) and cognitions (i.e., derogation of alternatives and cognitive interdependence) that maintain relationship stability and durability’ (Grace, Ross, and King 2018). Behaviorally, brand fidelity is expressed through accommodation/forgiveness and a willingness to make sacrifices, such as customers supporting the brand despite differences in performance or price (Grace, Ross, and King 2018). Cognitively, brand fidelity refers to the customer-brand relationship, emphasizing personal ownership and an understanding of the brand’s strengths and weaknesses. In this research, the authors have used the short scale that Joshi and Garg (2020) used, which considered ‘one item each for accommodation/forgiveness based on price, derogation of alternatives, and cognitive interdependence’. Drawing on previous literature, we define brand fidelity as the degree to which a customer engages in behaviors and cognitions activities that involve forgiving and offering provision to a brand, especially during price variations, regarding the brand as irreplaceable, and/or advocating for a brand in the face of criticism.

Development of hypotheses

UGC and pro-brand behaviors

Members of online communities can significantly influence each other’s opinions, ideas, and positions on a particular subject by providing feedback (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). Highly engaged customer groups, known as ‘brand evangelists’, ‘brand zealots’, or ‘brand fanatics’, are becoming increasingly important for brand managers in today’s competitive consumer

market” (Nyadzayo, Leckie, and Johnson 2020). On SNSs, consumers with high levels of engagement are more likely to exhibit evangelistic tendencies, as these platforms enable them to express their opinions and create brand-related content, such as recommendations, posts, stories, comments, and likes (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). Several studies examined the central stimuli of pro-brand behaviors (e.g., brand fidelity and evangelism), including brand love, satisfaction, and commitment (Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013; Grace, Ross, and King 2020; Joshi and Garg 2020; Nyadzayo, Leckie, and Johnson 2020). Prior studies within the tourism and hospitality industry context demonstrated that UGC is an essential determinant of pro-brand behaviors. For instance, Sawaftah et al. (2021) claimed that brand defense and behavioral engagement are significant outcomes of digital content marketing – encompassing both FCC and UGC – in coffee shops’ social media. Therefore, the authors suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *UGC positively influences brand evangelism*

Hypothesis 2. *UGC positively influences brand fidelity*

FCC and pro-brand behaviors

FCC provides customers with a thematic framework for effective communication with their preferred brands (Ballester, Ruiz, and Rubio 2021). As demonstrated by Sawaftah et al. (2021), consumers are more likely to support a brand if they are attached to it through Facebook, check the posts of their networks, get involved with it differently, recommend it, and share content with contacts. Moreover, a brand’s fidelity towards its customers becomes particularly evident when it resolves problems quickly, greets customers with friendly, efficient employees, listens to the customer’s concerns, pro- motes human interaction, and offers generous return policies and guarantees (Grace, Ross, and King 2020). To this end, brands deploy interactive strategies, utilizing engaging, current, and stylish materials, to motivate brand evangelism, enhance over- all customer experiences, enduring brand fidelity, and motivate them to generate content through SNS (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020; Matzler, Pichler, and Hemetsberger 2007). As a result, the likelihood of brand fidelity increases when consumers are satisfied with the performance of the brand’s transactions and when its reliability has been proven (Joshi and Garg 2020). Additionally, previous studies have shown that FCC positively impacts customer brand relationships such as brand equity, customer engagement, and brand defense (Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023). Furthermore, clear and transparent FCC communications encourage the creation of UGC, enabling hospitality businesses to enhance behavioral engagement and build pro-brand behaviors like brand defense. Thus, this study posits the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. *FCC positively influences brand evangelism*

Hypothesis 4. *FCC positively influences brand fidelity*

Social media communication and affective commitment

Affective commitment is defined as ‘consumers’ emotional attachment to brands due to their connection and identification with them’ (Meyer, Allen, and Gellatly 1990; Ibrahim and Aljarah 2023). State that affective commitment develops through previous experiences, increasing positive relationships between consumers and brands. By posting content on SNSs, brands can strengthen their emotional ties with followers, encouraging them to engage with sponsored content and purchase branded products (Sawaftah, Aljarah, and Lahuerta-Otero 2021). In other words, the effective interactions and connections on SNSs produce emotionally attached and highly committed customers (Šerić and Praničević 2018). Studies have confirmed that UGC and FCC are vital drivers of customer-brand relationships. Furthermore, Cheung et al. (2021) revealed that consumer involvement with emotional and rational UGC is positively connected to their desire to purchase and intention for future consumption. Specifically in the restaurant sector, Šerić and Praničević (2018) pointed out that UGC has positive and direct effects on brand trust and affective commitment, as well as an indirect impact on brand loyalty. Therefore, this study suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5. *UGC positively influences affective commitment*

Hypothesis 6. *FCC positively influences affective commitment*

The mediation of affective commitment- brand evangelism

Brand interactions that satisfy the consumers foster long-term relationships and deep commitments (Belanche, Casaló, and Guinalú 2013). Affective commitment represents a key mechanism in transforming social media brand interactions and value co-creation into greater engagement behaviors, such as brand promotion or evangelism (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). Previous research highlights the indispensable role of affective commitment in converting consumer brand experience and interactions into improved brand relationship behaviors, including brand trust and loyalty (Ibrahim and Aljarah 2023; Šerić and Praničević 2018). SNSs provide a conducive environment for these interactions. When a consumer develops a strong brand commitment, this loyalty can progress to brand advocacy, where the consumer acts as a brand champion, encouraging others to purchase the brand (Sawaftah, Aljarah, and Lahuerta-Otero 2021). Recently, Nkoulou Mvondo et al. (2022) confirmed that customers’ interactions and participation in value co- creation with brands

enhance their feelings of fulfillment and affective commitment, encouraging a desire for a long-term relationship and generating brand evangelistic behaviors towards the brand. Thus, we develop the following hypotheses:

H7: *Affective commitment positively affects brand evangelism*

H7a: *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between UGC and brand evangelism*

H7b: *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between FCC and brand evangelism*

The mediation of affective commitment – brand fidelity

Pervious marketing literature has highlighted the predictive strength of affective commitment on customer responses such as intention to re-purchase, willingness to pay more, and fidelity (Grace, Ross, and King 2020; Jones et al. 2010). Previous studies on consumer- brand relationships have indicated that consumers' protective actions maintain this relationship, with emotional commitment serving as an essential evaluative process that enhances brand fidelity (Grace, Ross, and King 2020). Furthermore, these interactions facilitate consumers' affective commitment, thereby improving brand outcomes (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2020). As result, consumers who actively engage in brand communities by posting messages, replying to comments, and interacting with other users are more likely to develop a higher commitment to the brand. This commitment supports the maintenance of the relationship and increases and brand fidelity (Grace, Ross, and King 2018). Hence, the study presents the following hypotheses:

H8: *Affective commitment positively affects brand fidelity*

H8a: *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between UGC and brand fidelity*

H8b: *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between FCC and brand fidelity*

Research methodology

Sampling and procedures

The study employed a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. Data from respondents were gathered using the crowdsourcing platform Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), as noted by Sawaftah et al. (2021). The survey link was shared on the Mturk platform, offering a financial reward to those who participated. Survey takers who finished the questionnaire were required to input an exclusive code to claim their incentive. The target respondents are individuals over 18 years old who are active followers of Starbucks' Instagram account in the USA. The study used the non-probability and convenience sampling technique. Despite challenges associated with convenience sampling, it was chosen for several key reasons (Sarstedt et al. 2018): ease of recruitment from a specific population of Starbucks customers in the USA, cost-effectiveness, and the method's previous successful use studies related to the SMM field (Aljarah et al. 2022; Ibrahim and Aljarah 2023). This study implemented a set of screening questions to ensure the sample aligned with the research objectives, mitigating potential drawbacks of non-probability sampling. Moreover, Sarstedt et al. (2018) indicated that non-probability sampling relies on personal judgment and convenience, rather than random selection when choosing units from the population. This approach necessitates careful sample design and analysis to minimize any potential biases.

Participants were invited to answer questions about their engagement with the Starbucks brand, including activity on the brand's page, ratings, reviews, and recommendations regarding products and services. Data collection began with a pre-questionnaire screening to select participants based on specific criteria. Initially, individuals older than 18 were asked to confirm their use of Instagram. Secondly, respondents were required to be active followers with experience interacting on Starbucks' Instagram account. Thirdly, they needed to have visited a Starbucks coffee at least once in the past two months. The questionnaire included attention checks to ensure data quality. Respondents who did not pass these checks were excluded from subsequent data analysis. Two attention-check questions were incorporated into the survey, which took place in mid-September 2022. Out of the 421 responses received, 80 were deemed invalid for failing to meet the study's requirements, demonstrating a lack of attention, or providing inconsistent answers throughout the survey. Ultimately, a total of 341 complete and valid surveys were collected.

Measurement development

The social media communication items and scale were adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) and consist of four items each for measuring UGC and FCC. The affective commitment items and scale were adapted from Belanche et al. (2013) and consisted of four items. Brand evangelism was measured using four items adapted from Matzler et al. (2007), and brand fidelity was measured using three items adapted from Joshi and Garg (2020).

Respondents' demographic profiles

Overall, 197 (57.8%) of the respondents were female; 117 (34.3%) were between 25 and 34 years of age; 261 (76.5%) were Caucasian; 176 (51.6%) had an undergraduate degree, and 134 (39.3%) had a master's degree. Additionally, 149 (43.7%) spent more than 4 hours per week on the Internet, and 121 (35.5%) spent 3 to 4 hours weekly on the Internet. Meanwhile, 194 (56.9%) used Instagram 1 to 5 hours weekly.

Results

Measurement model: assessment of reliability and validity

The study used SPSS and AMOS for statistical analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the scales, with values ranging from .80 to .87, above the cutoff point of .70 as suggested by Nunnally (1978) (see Table 1). The validity of the measurement model was confirmed using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Following the approach by Hair et al. (2010), fit indexes were evaluated to confirm the validity of the measurement instrument. All model fit indicators exceeded conventional threshold levels ($\chi^2 = 1.8 < 3.00$; CFI = .96 > .90; NFI = .91 > .90; RMSEA = .04 < .08). The standardized loadings for all items across each construct were significant at the level of .05 (see Table 1). One item was dropped from the scale measure of the UGC variable because its factor loading was less than .50, based on the CFA results. All composite reliability (CR) values exceeded .76, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for all concepts exceeded the .50 threshold. These results show that the measurements don't include convergent validity problems (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table 1. Summary of the measurement model.

Variable	Item	Loading	Cronbach's
UGC			.80
	UGC1	.63	
	UGC2*	-	
	UGC3	.70	
	UGC4	.84	
FCC			.88
	FCC1	.86	
	FCC2	.69	
	FCC3	.79	
	FCC4	.89	
Affective commitment (AFEC)			.84
	AFEC1	.71	
	AFEC2	.81	
	AFEC3	.85	
	AFEC4	.71	
Brand evangelism (BEVN)			.82
	BEVN1	.72	
	BEVN2	.71	
	BEVN3	.71	
	BEVN4	.82	
Brand fidelity (BFI)			.86
	BFI1	.82	
	BFI2	.83	
	BFI3	.69	
*Items dropped from the study.			

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

	CR	AVE	FCC	UGC	AFEC	BEVN	BFI
FCC	0.884	0.658	0.811				
UGC	0.769	0.529	0.283***	0.728			
AFEC	0.853	0.594	0.236***	0.304***	0.771		
BEVN	0.829	0.550	0.322***	0.268***	0.251***	0.741	
BFI	0.869	0.625	0.431***	0.298***	0.323***	0.136*	0.791

A discriminant validity test was conducted to confirm that items were strongly associated with their respective indicators. Table 2 shows that the AVE values were higher than .5 acceptable (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The study used common method bias since the data was collected from a single source. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's one-factor test, wherein all the study constructs are combined into a single factor. The results presented that the unrotated single factors explain only 23.43% of the variation, which is lower than the 50% threshold, demonstrating that common method bias is not a concern for this study (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Structural model testing

The study used AMOS-structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. All model fit indicators stated satisfactory values, indicating a good fit for the hypothesized structural model (CMIN2/df = 1.83 < 3.00; CFI = .96 > .90; NFI = .91 > .90; RMSEA = .04 < .08). SEM was used to test the study's hypotheses (Table 3). The research hypothesized in H1 and H2 that UGC affects brand evangelism and brand fidelity, respectively. As exposed in Table 3, the results prove the significance of two hypotheses: H1 ($\beta=.13$, $p \leq 0.05$) and H2 ($\beta=.17$, $p \leq 0.05$). Consequently, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. The study posits that FCC is positively associated with brand evangelism and fidelity. The study confirms these relationships between FCC and pro-brand behaviors: brand evangelism – H3 ($\beta=.16$, $p \leq 0.001$), and brand fidelity – H4 ($\beta=.34$, $p \leq 0.001$). Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were also supported. Hypotheses 5 and 6, which propose that both UGC and FCC significantly positively affect affective commitment (H5: $\beta = .29$, $p < 0.001$; H6: $\beta = .14$, $p < 0.01$), representing. Additionally, the impacts of affective commitment on brand evangelism and brand fidelity (H7 and H8) are significantly positive (H7: $\beta = .11$, $p < 0.05$; H8: $\beta = .22$, $p < 0.01$).

Mediation results

The mediation results were tested by using Model 4 of PROCESS SPSS (Version 3.3), developed by Andrew (2013) (see Table 3). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) ($N = 5000$) was estimated (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007). The results showed that the indirect effect of UGC and FCC on brand evangelism through affective commitment are statistically significant (H7a: $\beta = .04$, CI [.013, .079]; H7b: $\beta = .03$, CI [.009, .063], respectively), thus supporting Hypotheses 7a and 7b. The bootstrapped

results also indicated that the indirect effect of UGC and FCC on brand fidelity through affective commitment was statistically significant (H8a: $\beta = .069$, CI [.028, .122]; Hb: $\beta = .04$, CI [.016, .092], respectively). Thus, hypotheses 8a and 8b were supported.

Table 3. Hypotheses results.

	Relationship		beta	S.E	p	Result
H ₁	UGC	BEVN	.13	.060	*.029	Accepted
H ₂	UGC	BFI	.17	.081	*.032	Accepted
H ₃	FCC	BEVN	.16	.044	***	Accepted
H ₄	FCC	BFI	.34	.061	***	Accepted
H ₅	UGC	AFEC	.29	.078	***	Accepted
H ₆	FCC	AFEC	.14	.056	** .009	Accepted
H ₇	AFEC	BEVN	.11	.050	*.028	Accepted
H ₈	AFEC	BFI	.22	.069	** .001	Accepted
Mediation analysis						
			Indirect relationship			
Relationship			beta	CI Low	CI High	Result
H7a: UGC- AFEC -BEVN			.04	.013	.079	Supported
H7b: FCC- AFEC -BEVN			.03	.009	.063	Supported
H8a: UGC- AFEC -BFI			.069	.028	.122	Supported
H8b: FCC- AFEC -BFI			.04	.016	.092	Supported

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Discussion

The research aims to understand the effect of FCC and UGC on brand evangelism and fidelity through the mediating role of affective commitment. The results explain that FCC and UGC have positive relationships with brand evangelism and fidelity, and these relationships are mediated by affective commitment. The study's results are consistent with those from previous tourism research, which has revealed the positive influence of social media communication (FCC and UGC) on pro-brand behaviors such as online brand advocacy (Aljarah et al. 2022) and brand defense (Sawaftah, Aljarah, and Lahuerta-Otero 2021). This study builds upon these earlier findings, suggesting that SMM activities may stimulate consumer responses that extend beyond re-purchasing and recommending to others (Dedeoğlu et al. 2020; Šerić and Praničević 2018).

The findings showed that FCC positively and significantly affects brand evangelism and brand fidelity. Consumers perceive the FCC as a reliable source for learning about the brand's values, mission, and offerings, which fosters positive attitudes and trust (Kim, Park, and Kim 2021; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2014). This trust is crucial, as consumers are more likely to advocate for brands they trust and understand. Moreover, FCC provides

content that brand advocates can easily share and amplify, extending the brand's reach beyond traditional marketing efforts (Aljarah et al. 2022). An engaging and informative FCC can cultivate a sense of community among consumers, encouraging interaction and positive electronic WOM (Kim, Park, and Kim 2021). This sense of belonging further strengthens brand loyalty and advocacy. By tying these elements together, the argument underscores how effectively maintained FCC on Instagram pages can positively influence trust, advocacy, and community, ultimately fostering brand evangelism and fidelity. In a broader context, these novel findings align with studies conducted by Harrigan et al. (2020) and Sharma (2021), which demonstrate that customers who are cognitively and emotionally connected with tourism brands are likely to convince others to engage with the brand and generate positive online recommendations.

This study unveils a positive and significant impact of UGC on brand evangelism and brand fidelity, indicating that UGC enhances interaction and participation, thereby augmenting brand awareness and engagement (Aljarah et al. 2022). UGC sparks conversations and fosters deeper connections with potential customers by showcasing shared experiences and interests (Polat et al. 2023), promoting brand advocacy as individuals feel committed to endorsing something they value. Consumers place greater trust in real-life users' activities and content on social media pages than in brand-produced content, making positive UGC a powerful tool for validating the brand's claims and boosting its credibility (Kotler 2016). As a result, satisfied customers sharing positive experiences and brand-aligned content become effective brand ambassadors. This result aligns with prior studies in the tourism context, which emphasize the critical role of UGC in strengthening customer-brand relationships and encouraging pro-brand behavior in SMM (Aljarah et al. 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2022).

The result demonstrates that FCC and UGC can motivate consumers not only to endorse the brand to others but also to defend it against criticism (Grace, Ross, and King 2020; Nkoulou Mvondo et al. 2022). It confirmed significant indirect relationships between social media communication and pro-brand behaviors via affective commitment. These findings enrich the SMM literature by highlighting the critical role of affective commitment in mediating the effects of social media stimuli such as FCC and UGC on outcomes like brand evangelism and fidelity. These results are consistent with earlier studies exploring the mediating role of commitment between SMM tools and brand loyalty (Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023 ; Nkoulou Mvondo et al. 2022). Additionally, previous literature focusing on luxury and fast-fashion brands have highlighted the impact of SMM tools on WOM and loyalty, mediated by engagement (Nyadzayo, Leckie, and Johnson 2020).

Theoretical implications

The study presents several theoretical implications in the SMM context. First, there has been relatively limited attention on how UGC and FCC influence and improve pro-brand behavior within the tourism context. Existing studies that delve into the impact of FCC and UGC on enhancing the relationship between brands and customers have predominantly examined the level of customer engagement with the coffee shops brand on platforms such as Facebook pages and Twitter (Ibrahim et al. 2022; Aljarah et al. 2022). Nevertheless, merely analyzing how SMM tools impact cognitive and behavioral aspects of Instagram does not provide a comprehensive understanding. The findings of this study reveal that UGC and FCC have the potential to fortify brand evangelism and brand fidelity by establishing a consistent and captivating brand image, imparting knowledge to customers, nurturing engagement, providing exclusive content, and addressing customer feedback (Aljarah et al. 2022; Ballester, Ruiz, and Rubio 2021; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2014). This study advances our understanding by exploring UGC and FCC as catalysts for pro-brand behaviors among Starbucks coffeehouse brands on Instagram, making a unique contribution. The existing literature on SMM within the tourism sector has not fully elucidated how UGC and FCC on Instagram can lead to robust pro-brand behavior, specifically regarding brand evangelism and brand fidelity.

The second novel contribution of this study is the advancement of understanding regarding the validity of the SOR model among coffee shop customers in the tourism context. Drawing on various theoretical lenses and models, such as the SOR model, social learning theory, elaboration likelihood model, attachment theory, and source credibility theory, prior research within the SMM domain of the tourism industry has explored the various consequences of UGC and FCC (Aljarah et al. 2022; Sawaftah, Aljarah, and Lahuerta-Otero 2021). Based on the SOR model, This study illuminates that both FCC and UGC stimuli influence the organism's affective commitment, which, in turn, contributes to the development of brand evangelism and fidelity on the Instagram pages of coffee house brands. To date, no study has integrated UGC, FCC, affective commitment, brand evangelism, and brand fidelity into a comprehensive model to investigate the interconnections among these constructs. By doing so, the current study enriches our understanding of the relationships between Instagram's social media communication strategies and pro-brand behavior through the lens of the SOR model.

This study provides empirical support for the mediation effect of affective commitment on the relationship between social media communication (UGC and FCC) and pro-brand behavior (brand evangelism and brand fidelity), an area not previously explored in the tourism context. Previous studies have mainly focused on uncovering the direct relationships between UGC, FCC, and their respective outcomes. However, several scholars have suggested that other mediator variables may influence this link (Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro, and Fuentes-Blasco 2020). Addressing this gap, the current study analyzed affective commitment as a mediator. It confirms that UGC and FCC directly affect brand evangelism and brand fidelity and also indirectly affect these behaviors through affective commitment. In line with the SOR model, organism characteristics are considered as a mediating link between stimuli from social media communication (UGC and FCC) and the outcomes of pro-brand behavior in the hospitality context. As a result, this study introduced and validates the concept of affective commitment as a crucial mediator, thereby offering support for the tenets of the SOR model.

Managerial implications

The study suggests several implications for marketing managers who utilize SMM activities to improve the affective commitment of their customers and enhance their responses to the brand's social media messages beyond loyalty and WOM. First, it suggests that marketing managers should strike a balance between two types of online content to cultivate customers' affective commitment. These managers may produce content that resonates with their customers and evokes emotions, thereby increasing their commitment to the brand. Additionally, marketing practitioners can develop engaging and entertaining content that motivates customers to share it with their communities. Conversely, marketing managers can design programs, contests, and games that are positively perceived by their customers, encouraging them to share or generate their content.

Secondly, the study confirms the role of FCC and UGC in developing pro-brand behaviors, including brand evangelism and fidelity. Marketing managers who use FCC effectively will benefit from their customers' responses, such as defending the brand and persuading others to use it. Marketers should attempt to enhance brand evangelism and fidelity by focusing on FCC and UGC strategies. For instance, by gaining a deep understanding of their brand's audience, marketers can discover insights into their interests and needs, allowing for the creation of content that is both tailored and relevant. This customization should consider the characteristics and trends of the specific audience, as well as the unique features of each social media platform.

Furthermore, utilizing creativity in content creation involves experimenting with various formats and types of content to ensure the brand's content remains

distinct and captivating. Consistent posting is essential for maintaining your audience's interest and fostering a strong connection with the brand. Customers should feel valued and respected every time they interact with your brand. This means being responsive to their needs, resolving issues quickly and efficiently, and going the extra mile to make them appreciated. In addition, marketers should ensure ample opportunities for interaction by promptly responding to comments and questions from their audience, thus contributing to creating a sense of belonging and loyalty. Loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, recommend your brand to others, and pay a premium for your products and services.

Limitations and future studies

The study presents several limitations. First, its cross-sectional survey nature limits our understanding of how affective commitment, along with customers' brand evangelism and fidelity, may change over time. Future studies may consider longitudinal, experimental, or content analysis methods to understand better the relationships between SMM activities, and customer responses. Second, the study focused on the Starbucks brand and Instagram. Consequently, the finding might not be generalizable to other brands or SNS such as Twitter (now called X) or Facebook. Future research could explore the influence of FCC and UGC on various tourism and hospitality products and services. This analysis could encompass diverse segments like the sharing economy, destinations, travel agencies, fast food, food delivery apps, and health tourism. Third, the study includes affective commitment as a mediator between FCC and UGC and customers' responses. Future studies could investigate the mediating role of online engagement (e.g., liking, sharing, commenting), types of customer engagement (active, passive), source homophily, credibility, perceived enjoyment, customer inspiration, customer happiness, and brand love in the relationship between social media communication (UGC and FCC) and two pro-brand behavior (brand evangelism and fidelity). Additionally, future studies could explore variables that provide fresh insights into the influence of UGC and FCC on consumer behavior, such as sharing intention, intention to follow, continuing intention, intention to recommend, customer experience, customer advocacy, customer citizenship behavior, and brand defense.

Furthermore, previous research has provided limited evidence concerning the antecedents of UGC and FCC. Future research efforts could focus on leveraging technology and diverse technical and digital tools to implement UGC and FCC effectively. This might involve utilizing company or technological resources, SMM capabilities, promotional strategies, product strategies, and adapting to turbulent market environments (market/technological turbulence). Finally, the study utilized the Starbucks

brand for its sample and MTurk for data collection. This method may diminish the generalizability of the study findings to a broader population. Future studies could examine whether different sampling methodologies yield varying outcomes and explore alternative data collection methods to gather responses.

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