S T A N D A R D TITLE P A G E F O R PROJECTS

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Executive summary

In order for companies to be unique in the highly competitive market, social media and online content implementation has become significantly important. The distinctive characteristics of social media allows for the establishment of variety of platforms, thereby a broad range of venues where users can generate and share content. Therefore, the company-consumer communication has changed, as customers are now empowered and able to influence others, hence become creators of brand messages rather than only passive recipients, as with traditional media. The online content created by consumers can drive product awareness, as it is impactful in the recognition and recall level, while also being influential in regards to purchase decisions. Based on that, many studied have been conducted in relation to user-generated content (UGC), as such can influence the perceptions of actual and potential customers, while the dynamic characteristics of social media platforms allow that to happen. Besides, online content is being fully available to a large number of people. Therefore, this paper has chosen to address the impact of UGC in relation to brand awareness and customer decision-making process. Furthermore, different motivating factors for customer involvement in online user content have also been included.

Continuing, the methodological perspective is discussed, as the paper is applying objective view of reality and the positivistic approach. Moreover, the literature has been gathered using a systematic literature review. In relation to research design, the paper is implying the cross-sectional design, using quantitative survey method for primary data collection. Further, the chosen sampling technique for the study is the non-probability sampling method. The primary data collection led to obtaining 162 survey responses, which were included in the data analysis. Moreover, reliability and construct validity tests were performed using the statistical program SPSS to establish the data validation. Lastly, three multiple linear regression and two bivariate regression analyses were conducted for testing the formulated hypotheses.

The data analyses led to accepting five out of the seven hypotheses. Based on the results, it was found that one out of the three motivating factors for customer involvement in online content was highly significant. The other two factors were determined insignificant, therefore the

hypotheses were rejected. Moving on, it was confirmed that there is a significant relationship between UGC and brand awareness, as well as, between UGC and consumer decision-making process. Additionally, two new connections were established, as it was found that the motivating factors for involvement in online content are significant in relation to both brand awareness and decision-making process, hence providing new insights.

The primary contribution of this paper is to support the findings of previous studies by identifying the positive and significant effect of UGC over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. In addition, the results could be used to gain a better understanding of the type of interactive strategies that can be implemented by companies, in order to increase customers' awareness and influence purchase decisions.

The paper has some limitations connected to implementation of additional variables, the amount of the survey questions, as well as, the sample size. However, the study should still be considered as adding to the already existing literature, as it is supporting the findings of previous studies, and by showing the existing relationships between the phenomena of UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process.

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Abbreviation List

UGC – User-generated content

CBBE – Consumer-based brand equity

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

eWOM – Electronic word-of-mouth

S-O-R – Stimulus-organism-response framework

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research background of the project while including a discussion on the problem formulation. Moreover, the research questions will be defined and presented, followed by a short structure of the project.

1.1. Research background

Social media

Since the rise of the Internet the world has changed in many ways and social media has become a top priority for companies in order to create uniqueness. Because of the high competition, it is important for companies to be able to differentiate themselves, while implementing social media activities. The social media phenomenon is also referred to as consumer generated media. Such media can be described as variation of online information sources which are created and used by customers with the intent of educating each other about companies, brands, products, services, etc. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Other scholars discuss social media by presenting it as a set of Internet-based applications that are constructed on different foundations of Web 2.0, thus allowing the creation of user-generated content (UGC) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Unlike social media, traditional media does not allow the consumer to collaborate, interact, discuss or participate in any way in the creation, distribution and development of content (Laurell and Sandström, 2017). The unique characteristics of social media produce a wide variety of online platforms such as social networking site (Facebook), business networking sites (LinkedIn), video sharing sites (YouTube), collaborative sites (Wikipedia) and more (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Because of that broad range of venues consumers are motivated and enabled to generate and share content between each other, hence increase the availability of content connected to brands, products and companies. Therefore, the company-consumer communication has changed and now customers are able to individually or collectively influence others, thus become creators and distributors of brand information, rather than just passive recipients (Kim and Johnson, 2016).

According to Statista, as seen in Figure 1 below, the worldwide number of monthly active Facebook users in the fourth quarter of 2018 was 2.23 billion users, and it was reported that in the last recorder quarter (the end of 2018) 2.7 billion people were using at least one of the company's core product including Instagram, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp. Under the term

active users fall all of the individuals who have logged into the website during the last 30 days (Statista, 2019).

Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2018 (in millions)
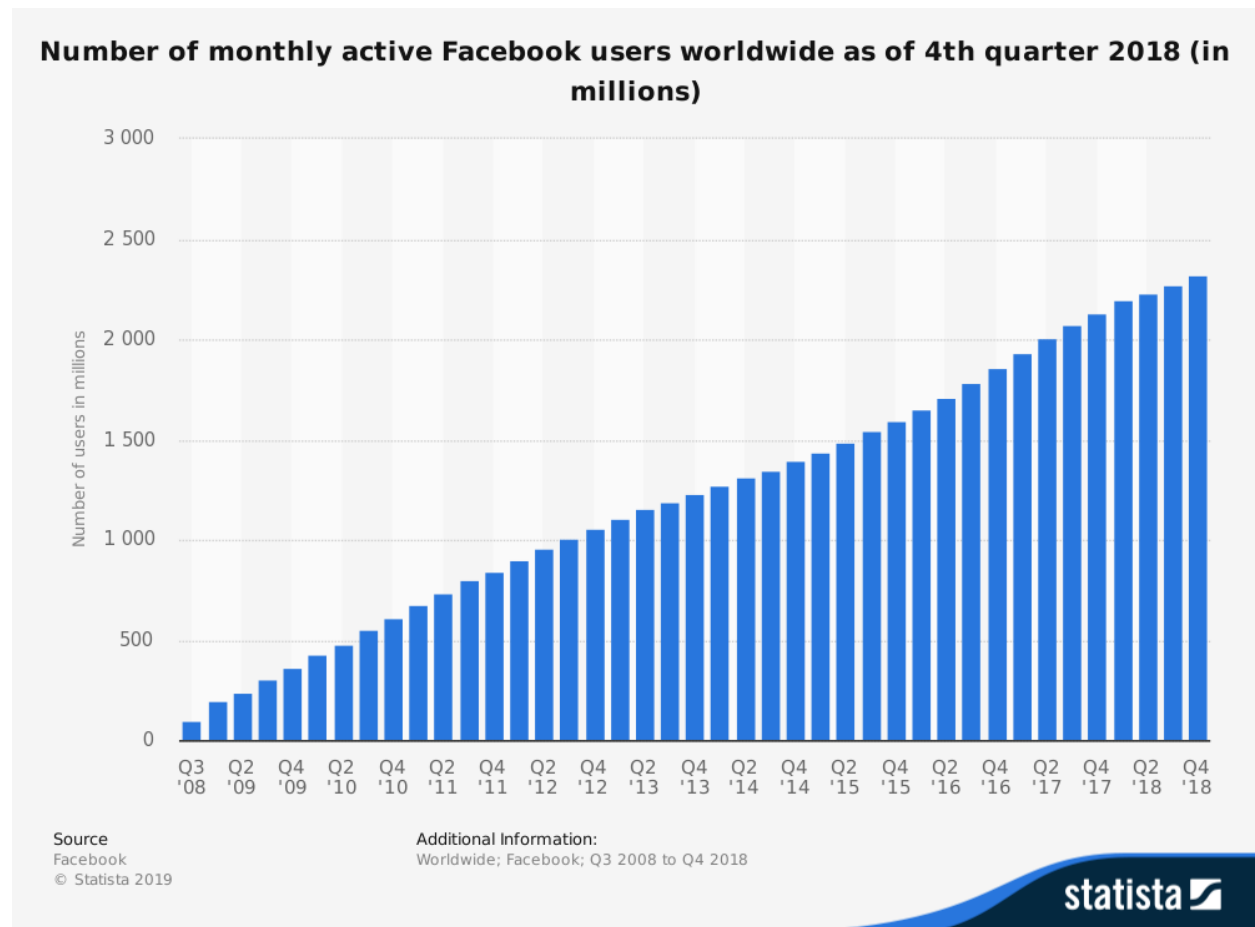
Figure 1. Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2018 (Statista, 2019)

In connection to the multiple types of platforms Figure 2 below shows the most popular social networks as of January 2019 (Statista, 2019).

Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2019, ranked by number of active users (in millions)
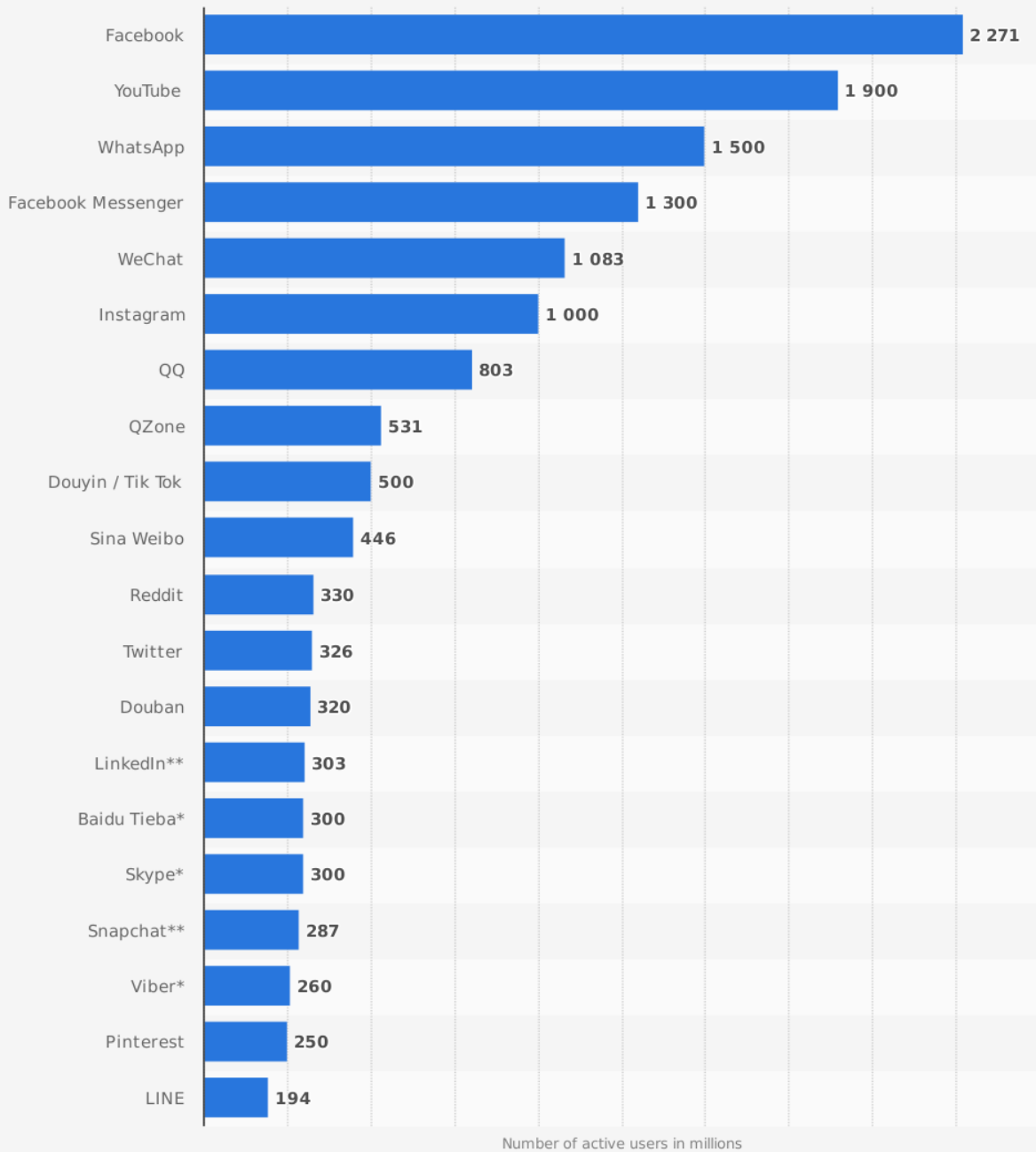
Network	Active users (millions)
Facebook	2 271
YouTube	1 900
WhatsApp	1 500
Facebook Messenger	1 300
WeChat	1 083
Instagram	1 000
QQ	803
QZone	531
Douyin / Tik Tok	500
Sina Weibo	446
Reddit	330
Twitter	326
Douban	320
LinkedIn**	303
Baidu Tieba*	300
Skype*	300
Snapchat**	287
Viber*	260
Pinterest	250
LINE	194

Number of active users in millions

statista

Figure 2. Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2019 (Statista, 2019)

In the above figure according to the statistical analysis Facebook is the leading platform with 2.27 billion monthly active users. The video sharing platform YouTube is second in the list with 1.90 billion users, followed by WhatsApp (1.50 billion), Facebook Messenger (1.30 billion), etc. Platforms as Facebook are really focused on information exchange between the network connections of consumers, thus constantly empowering interactions between people with the implementation of features as status and photo sharing. Other platforms are more concentrated on fast communication (Twitter), on the creation of online communities, as others are highlighting and displaying UGC, etc. (Statista, 2019).

From the written above can be seen that the wide choice of platforms may be aiming for slightly different outcomes, however, all of them are inspiring consumers to be present, connected and involved in online conversations of all kind.

User-generated Content

User content can be defined as all types of online media content that are created, initiated and consumed by different members of the society. Such content can often include brand related messages, hence driving product awareness by increasing recognition and recall, shaping associations in the mind of the customer, and even influencing the purchase decision (Kim and Johnson, 2016). From a company's perspective UGC and social media platforms are directly connecting the company and the consumer, thereby being beneficial in understanding the consumer's purchase and post-purchase decisions, feelings and opinions in relation to brands and products (Rockendorf, 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). In some ways UGC can be seen as more influential than other sources as consumers tend to perceive such content as more trustworthy because it is created and transmitted through online platforms part of their social network (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Such platforms can be Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. and those have an increased influence in people's communication habits and life (Hutter et al., 2013). Furthermore, online networks and UGC give companies opportunities to not only communicate with the end-consumer but also to create conversations, deliver marketing messages while maintain presence in the online market (Evans and McKee, 2010).

1.2. Problem discussion and Research Questions

User content have been the focus for many studies in recent years, as it can be brand related, hence building opinions and perceptions of potential customers and the public, and can have a

strong impact on people because of the real-time dynamic character of the media (Adetunji, Sabrina and Sobhi, 2017; Gensler et al., 2013). Moreover, if UGC is negative can be damaging for the company's reputation and market share, as drama oriented stories, provoking posts, negative experiences and incidents are proved to be more easily recovered from the memory making them dangerous in the recognition and recall stages of brand awareness (Adetunji, Sabrina and Sobhi, 2017; Gensler et al., 2013).

Furthermore, in relation to purchase, post-purchase behaviour and brand awareness social media and UGC have become influential factors because of their availability to a large mass of people, thus leading to possible changes in the decision-making process (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Gensler et al., 2013). However, there are still unanswered questions in the literature to fully understand and integrate social media and user content into different marketing strategies (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Because of that, scholars call for additional research to be undertaken in the area of the effects of UGC over consumers (Adetunji, Sabrina and Sobhi, 2017).

Based on the research background the thesis aims to investigate: **The impact of user-generated content, found on social media platforms, over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process**, through answering the following research questions:

1. *What are the factors influencing consumer involvement in generating UGC?*
2. *What is the impact of UGC over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process?*

These research questions will provide guidance for the literature review and the creation of an a priori framework and hypotheses. Also, the questions will be answered by conducting an empirical research, thus offering more insights into the effects of UGC over brand awareness and decision-making process. In relation to the empirical research UGC will be analysed as both an independent variable and a mediating factor affecting brand awareness and decision-making process being the dependent variables. The relationships between the three variables will be investigated separately, thus showing the effect of UGC over each dependent variable individually of the other. This research will add to the already existing literature connected to

UGC and its impact over consumers, hence elaborate on the importance of online content and social media platforms.

1.3. Project structure

The structure of the paper is consisting of five chapters. The first is introduction including research background, problem discussion and problem formulation. Second is the methodology chapter focusing on research strategy, design and data collection methods. Following is the literature review where empirical papers will be discussed and an a priori framework will be created, showing established connections between theories. Next is the data analysis chapter and the posteriori framework which will show the new recognized connections between variables. Lastly, is the conclusion where the main findings will answer the research questions. Figure 3 below illustrates the project structure.

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│      Introduction       │
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│      Methodology        │
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│    Literature review    │
│    A priori framework   │
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│     Data analysis       │
│  Posteriori framework   │
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│      Conclusion         │
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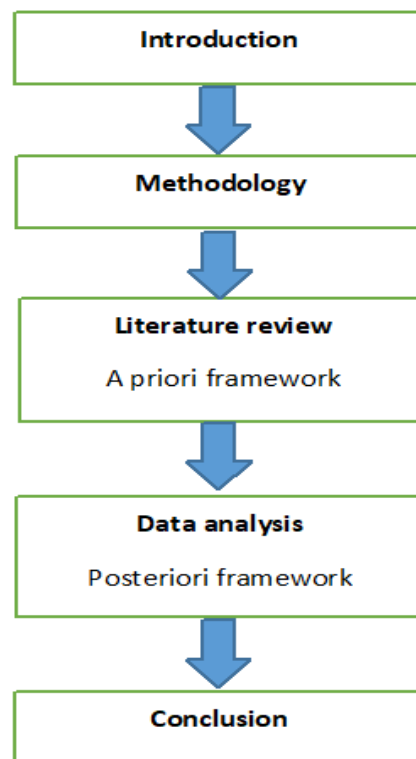
Figure 3. Project structure, self-made

2. Methodology

The chapter presents a closer look at different elements used to write the paper, incorporating the research design, the literature and data collection. The methodology chapter is divided in two parts, being philosophy of science and research design. Throughout the first part, the researcher's view of reality and the literature collection are addressed, while the second part is connected to the primary data collection. The chapter will elaborate on the data collection process by explaining the data sources, the chosen sampling methods, whereas also including a description of the data analysis method.

2.1. Philosophy of science

In this part, the foundations of the paper will be discussed by presenting the approaches creating the core concepts for literature and data collection. Also, the part will include both the ontological and epistemological considerations used to guide the researcher in the writing processes.

2.1.1. Ontological considerations

Ontology is a term used in social science to describe the nature of reality. That can also be explained as the nature of what is investigated by the researcher, as there are two main perspectives. Starting with the first considering the social world as constant and external to the individual, "therefore imposes itself on his or her consciousness", hence being outside of the individual (Kuada, 2012, p.58). The second perspective considers the individual as creating their own social world, therefore being subjective and a product of human understandings, thus "human beings and the social environment codetermine each other" (Kuada, 2012, p.59). These perspectives are called objectivism and subjectivism, as objectivism debates and investigates the gathered data as it really is, by considering facts, hence with no emotional meanings and explanations. Therefore, the gathered knowledge is being independent from social factors, and the research is considered as truthful and unbiased. In regards to the second perspective, subjectivism, personal knowledge, experiences, own perception have a certain impact on gathering and interpreting the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In relation to subjectivism and objectivism Burrell and Morgan (1979) state that, under ontology there are two assumptions, nominalism and realism, which respectively lie under the subjective and objective view of

reality. Starting with nominalism, the authors argue that the social world is nothing more but labels and concepts, used to give a structure to the reality. This assumption does not accept the world as having its own structure, therefore labels and names are used for describing it. In contrast, realism explains the world is exterior to the individual being real and constructed of absolute and tangible structures. Moreover, whether or not the individual names those strictures, they still exist as separate entities (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Furthermore, Burrell and Morgan (1979) debate that "the individual is seen as being born into and living within a social world which has a reality of its own" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.4). Figure 4 below illustrates the assumptions of Burrell and Morgan (1979).

Figure 4. Assumptions about the nature of social science (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.3)

In relation to this research, under ontology, the collection, interpretation and analysis of data and literature will be done through the objective approach, as the facts, information and knowledge gathered need to be presented as they truly are. Hence, the researcher's own perceptions, emotions and understandings will not intervene and affect the outcome of the analysis of data and theories, thus being perceived as unbiased. Moreover, empirical papers under the realism assumption will be used as literature. Also, the analysis of the project will be conducted while holding the perspective that the investigated variables need to be presented as truthfully, as possible, in order to fully understand the underlying connections between them. In this sense, the data will be objectively accessed. Additionally, when discussing realism, there are two characteristics describing it, being critical and direct realism. Direct realism assumes there is almost perfect correspondence between the reality and the terms used to describe it, meaning what is seen and experienced is presenting the reality, thus there is a direct awareness of all objects (Bryman, 2012, p.29). On the other hand, critical realism argues that to understand the social world first the structures within need to be identified. Thus, to be able to comprehend the reality the individual needs to recognise its constant structures (Bryman, 2012, p.29). Simply,

what is observed by the individual are just parts of the whole, thus additional information is required. This research will adopt critical realism, therefore recognising the need of additional information for observing the social world. Besides, critical thinking will be applied assuming that the research is expected to fit parts of the population, thus further research is needed to cover and represent the whole population.

2.1.2. Epistemological considerations

Burrell and Morgan (1979) define epistemology as the ways through which a researcher understands the social world and presents these understandings as knowledge, thus epistemology deals with which knowledge best fits a research. The term epistemology describes the nature of knowledge and the means of knowing, hence being concerned with what a researcher thinks to be the truth. As in ontology, there are two types of views in epistemology, as in the first scholars think that the social world can only be understood through the views and perceptions of the studied individuals, while in the other scholars consider the social world can be explained on its own, making the individual an outside observer (Kuada, 2012). Further, Burrell and Morgan (1979) introduce the assumptions of anti-positivism and positivism to understand the social science nature. The figure below shows the assumptions and their position in regards to the views of reality.
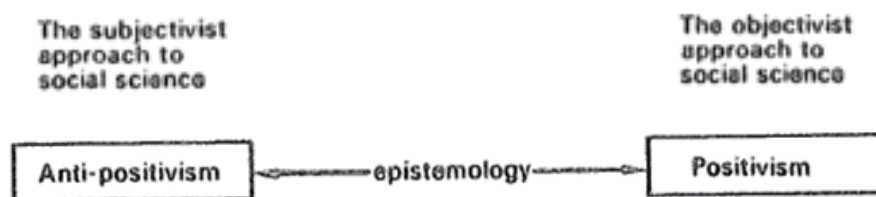
Figure 5. Assumptions about the nature of social science (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.3)

As shown in figure 5 above, the assumption anti-positivism is placed under the subjectivist approach, and positivism, under the objectivist approach. Burrell and Morgan (1979) argue that positivism is trying to explain the relationship between two distinct variables and, in turn, though that relationship to understand what is happening in the social world. Besides, the authors suggest that researching small parts of the social world can lead to gathering sufficient knowledge, hence giving a reasonable explanation in relation to observed phenomena (Burrell

and Morgan, 1979). Also, it is discussed that by implementing the positivist approach into a study both external spectators and the individuals involved share the same view of the social world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Furthermore, Burrell and Morgan (1979) state that, "the growth of knowledge is essentially a process in which new insights are added to the existing stock of knowledge", thus in a research under the positivist approach hypothesis can be made and tested, in order to add knowledge to the already existing information (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.5). On the other hand, Burrell and Morgan (1979) state that, anti-positivism holds the view that the social world can only be fully comprehended by the individuals who are directly involved in the situation, meaning reality is seen as being relative. Moreover, science cannot produce any objective knowledge, as it is accepted that the individual needs "to understand from the inside rather than the outside", hence the social reality is being subjective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.5).

In regards to the two assumptions the report will assume the positivist approach, under epistemological level, as the researcher has chosen the objective approach, under ontology, because the gathered knowledge has to be presented truthfully. The aim of the study is to research a small part of the population in order to find and give an answer to the problem statement, hence explaining the observed phenomena. This will be done by, examining different variables and if there is co-dependence between them. Furthermore, the small part of the population will be represented by adults who are actively using social media platforms for gathering knowledge and information about different brands. With that said, the study will try to find and explain if there is co-dependent relationships between the terms of UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Moreover, three motivating factors influencing the customer involvement in UGC will be included to investigate the extent to which those have an impact over online content.

2.1.3. Method of the research – deductive approach

The extent to which a study is concerned with building on existing theory or testing it raises a question connected to the method of the research. Design refers to two methods being deductive and inductive. Scholars explain that "deductive reasoning occurs when the conclusion is derived logically from a set of theory-derived premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true", while in contrast "in inductive reasoning there is a gap in the logic argument between

the conclusion and the premises observed, the conclusion being 'judged' to be supported by the observations made" (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p.152). It can be assumed that when a study starts by looking at various theories, found by extensive reading of literature, and then develops a strategy to test those, the study is implementing the deductive approach. On the other hand, if a study starts with a throughout investigation and collection of data to explore a phenomenon and then builds on an existing theory the study is applying inductive approach (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). In this case, first an extensive reading of the existing literature is done, thus starting from theories, with the intention to test those into practice, therefore using deductive approach. Moreover, Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), state that deductive approach is most likely to be used under the positivistic approach as it is emphasising on structure, testing of hypotheses and quantification.

Furthermore, the method has significant characteristics, staring with the need to explain causal relationships between variables and concepts. Therefore, a research applying deductive reasoning will include structured methodology enabling replication (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The aim of this research is to test multiple variables and their interdependence, hence concerning the first characteristic of the deductive approach. Moreover, the methodology will be highly structure to allow replication. The second characteristic is that the used variables need to be operationalised to be measured, meaning that to achieve a better understanding the concepts need to be reduced to the simplest possible explanations and elements (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). In relation to operationalization this chapter will include a part with explanations of the different concepts which will be tested, hence enabling the research to measure the variables. And finally, the last characteristic is related to generalisation, as to generalise the findings the sample needs to be carefully selected (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This research will implement the deductive approach as after reviewing the literature a conceptual framework is created. Then, after collecting primary data, in the form of survey, hypotheses will be tested, showing the relationships between the concepts of UGC, brand awareness and decision-making process.

2.2. Social science paradigms

As explained, the social reality can be seen differently depending on the perceptions and considerations of individuals. With that said, it is argued by Kuhn (1970) that every research

follows a common set of understandings in relation to "what kind of phenomenon is being studied, the kinds of questions that are useful to ask about the phenomenon, how researchers should structure their approach to answering their research questions, and how the results should be interpreted" (Kuada, 2012, p.72). Simply, a paradigm represents a group of believes guiding in the ways of approaching, understanding and studying a phenomenon, while interpreting the results. Moreover, the subjective and objective views form multiple paradigm typologies, as two of the most commonly used are Burrell and Morgan's four paradigms (1979) and Arbnor and Bjerke's six paradigms and three methodological approaches (2009).

2.2.1. Burrell and Morgan's typology

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979) a paradigm "is a set of basic and taken-for-granted assumptions which underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorising and ways of working in which a group operates" (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p.140), hence in agreement with the above proposed definition by Kuhn (1970). Burrell and Morgan (1979) present a matrix with four paradigms incorporating diverse research methods to be implemented in multiple areas (Greener, 2008). The matrix of Burrell and Morgan (1979) shows four different ways of viewing the organizational and social world (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), namely radical humanist, radical structuralist, interpretive and functionalist. Figure 6 below illustrates the paradigms.
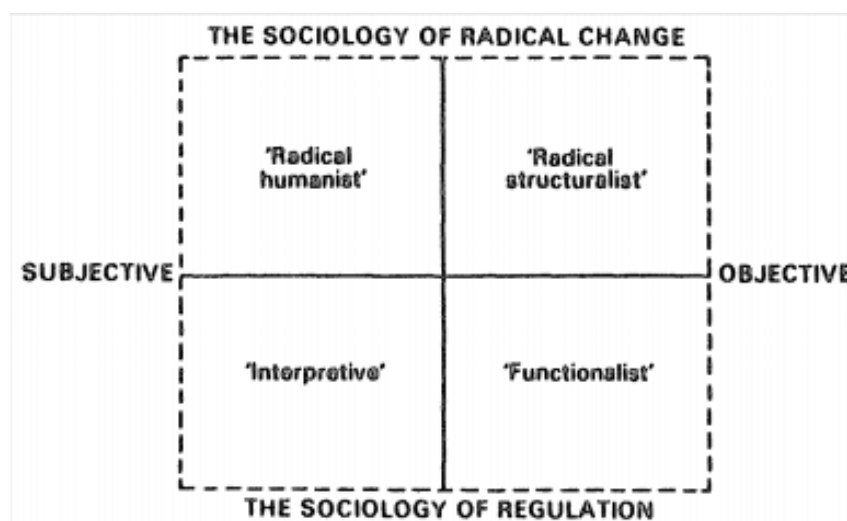
Figure 6. Burrell and Morgan four paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.22)

Burrell and Morgan (1979) recognize not only the subjective and objective views but also add two new conceptual dimensions, the sociology of radical change and the sociology of regulation. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), Burrell and Morgan (1979) construct the four paradigms as each one incorporates assumptions which can be either objective or subjective, and also assumptions connected to the purpose of a scientific research, being either radical change or regulation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The sociology of radical change is dealing with problems of change and conflict, thus allowing a critical perspective of organizations, while the sociology of regulation looks at the nature of social order, hence explaining the ways in which things are done (Kuada, 2012). Each of the four paradigms are shortly discussed below.

- **Radical humanist paradigm** is within the subjectivist and radical change dimensions, hence adopting a critical perspective over organizational life (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). In this paradigm social change is understood in terms of the individual and his/her external world, as reality is socially constructed (Kuada, 2012). The primary focus would be concerned with issues of "power and politics, domination and oppression" thus emphasising on the importance of "social construction, language, processes, and instability of structures and meanings in organisational realities" (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p.142). It is acknowledged that this paradigm integrates grounded theory, hence investigating what have been said (Greener, 2008).
- **Radical structuralist paradigm** is combining objectivist and radical change dimensions (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A research would incorporate a view of constant conflict within society, creating continuous changes (Kuada, 2012). Moreover, a researcher would be trying to understand the structural patterns in work organizations, as "hierarchies and reporting relationships" while investigating the extent to which those can generate "structural domination and oppression" (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p.142). Simply, reality is understood as having a structured power and conflict is inherited, leading to implementing a historical analysis approach (Greener, 2008).
- **Interpretive paradigm** combines subjectivist and regulation dimensions, as primary focus is understanding how people make sense of the world around them, hence looking at the central meanings attached to organisational life (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A research is concerned with experiences and perceptions of the studied

individuals, hence being highly subjective (Kuada, 2012). Organizations are seen through the individual's view (Greener, 2008), therefore incorporating qualitative methods as interviews (Kuada, 2012).

- **Functionalist paradigm** is located in the objectivist and regulation dimensions and a research is concerned with giving rational explanations and recommendations to current structures (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This paradigm is a combination of objectivity and order, as society has a concrete existence and systematic character, hence based on regulations (Kuada, 2012). A key assumption is that organizations are rational entities where logical explanations can offer solutions (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), thus researchers can distance themselves from the studied phenomenon, therefore access it completely objectively (Kuada, 2012). The undertaken approach is rational and problem-solving, hence employing survey method under objective reality (Greener, 2008).

In regards to this research, the most suitable paradigm would be the functionalist, as the purpose is to explain different phenomena and the relationships between them based on facts and logical explanations, leading to finding an answers. Moreover, under ontology and epistemology, it is chosen to follow the objective view consequently making this paradigms to be the best fit, as it is a combination of objectivity and order. Under functionalist paradigm the researcher will be able to distance himself from the investigated phenomena, thus gaining an independent view of the reality and objective assessment of the research. Furthermore, as the approach is rational and the chosen technique for gathering primary data is the survey method, the functionalist paradigm represents the best option for answering the research questions and interpreting the results.

2.2.2. Arbnor and Bjerke's typology

Another typology connected to different paradigms to understand the social reality are the six paradigms and three methodological approaches suggested by Arbnor and Bjerke (2009). The authors distinguish between methods used for analysing a phenomenon and the philosophy of science behind a researcher's understandings, therefore present multiple paradigms and approaches. Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) define a paradigm as the relationship between the researcher's beliefs and the practical use of various methodological approaches, while these

approaches create a framework for a more concrete view towards the study (Kuada, 2012). Figure 7 below shows the six paradigms of Arbnor and Bjerke (2009).
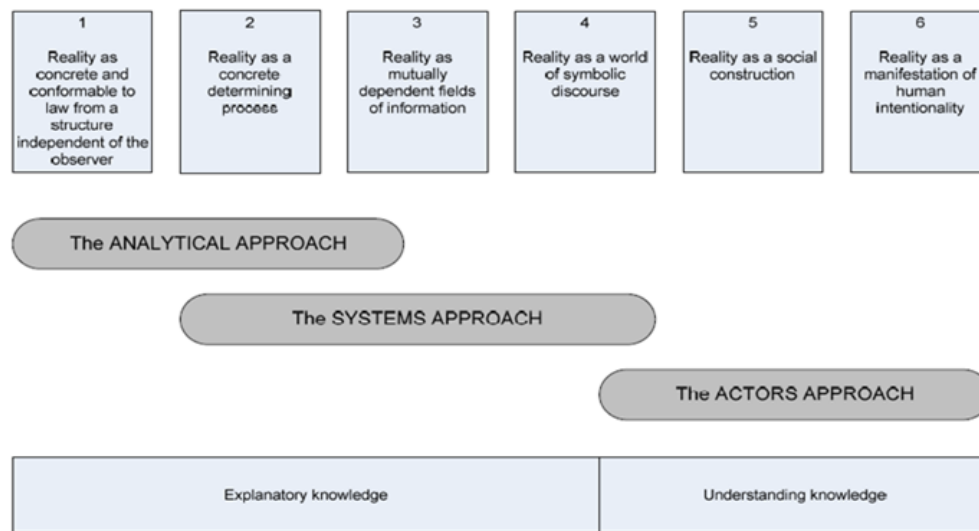
Figure 7. Arbnor and Bjerke's paradigms and methodological approaches (Kuada, 2012, pp.85-88)

It can be seen in figure 7 that, the paradigms are moving from objective to subjective view of reality, hence the ontological and epistemological considerations will also change with the chosen paradigm. Besides, the used knowledge is changing, as the first three paradigms incorporate explanatory knowledge while the last three understanding knowledge (Kuada, 2012). The next part gives a short explanation of the paradigms.

- **Paradigm 1** is fully under objective view, as the social world is seen independent from the observer while the environment is predictable and stable (Kuada, 2012).
- **Paradigm 2** is under objective reality, however, the research is aware there is a possibility of changes in the environment, hence leading to possible irregularities of the studied context (Kuada, 2012).
- **Paradigm 3** is within objective view, but also considering the reality being under constant change somewhat influenced by the individual's mind, thus the researcher is pushed to adapt (Kuada, 2012).
- **Paradigm 4** is placed in the beginning of the subjective view, however, not fully subjective. Here the reality is somehow connected to the actions of the individuals (Kuada, 2012).

- **Paradigm 5** is under subjective view and reality is seen as socially constructed, thus implementing subjective methods for gathering knowledge (Kuada, 2012).
- **Paradigm 6** is completely incorporating subjectivism, as the experiences, meanings and interactions of the individual are leading factors for the research. Moreover, listening, talking and dialog are considered important tools (Kuada, 2012).

After presenting the paradigms, next, the methodological approached of Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) are discussed.

- **Analytical approach** combines the first three paradigms. As the paradigms are strongly objective the approach is objective in its understandings. The reality is independent from the observer, the whole is seen as sum of multiple parts hence the investigated phenomenon can be divided to parts which are to be studied separately. The knowledge is based on facts and logic, therefore conclusions are unbiased, as the researcher is in a neutral position (Kuada, 2012).
- **Systems approach** looks at the studied phenomenon as a combination of elements with various relationships. The approach is combining objective and subjective views, as the view of reality changes, hence incorporating paradigms two, three and four, making the reality objectively accessible. Each system of elements has specific characteristics, and a researcher is examining the way a change in one element can influence the others, and the system itself (Kuada, 2012).
- **Actors approach** has a completely subjective view including fourth, fifth and sixth paradigm. The individual's experiences and beliefs influence the reality, emerging from interactions, hence being socially constructed through sharing of meanings (Kuada, 2012).

Taking the written so far, in relation to Arbnor and Bjerke's typology the chosen paradigms are the first three because the studied phenomena should be objectively assessed while the results have to be unbiased, as the social reality is seen independent from the observer. Moreover, the research will incorporate explanatory knowledge, hence stating facts as they truly are, while trying to explain the reality trough those facts. Besides, it is considered that reality can be under change, to some extent influenced by the individual's mind, therefore the first three paradigms are seen as the most suitable, while giving fullness to the study. Also, because of the chosen

paradigms the researcher will need to adapt to the environment, however, still holding an objective view. Since, the chosen method for data collection is survey the researcher will be objectively accessing and analysing the data, thus excluding own interpretations, therefore subjectivism will not be present. In relation to the methodological approaches the analytical has been chosen, combining the first three paradigms, therefore the generated knowledge will be independent from the subjective experiences and reality of the researcher. The researcher will be separated from respondents, while the studied phenomena will be analysed as individual parts forming the whole. Furthermore, the findings and conclusions will be presented truthfully, as the researcher will be unbiased and take a neutral position throughout the study.

After discussing various social science paradigms the following will be connected to a major difference between Burrell and Morgan's (1979) and Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) typologies. As written, regarding Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigms the functionalist was found to be the most suitable, as for Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) were the first three paradigms and the analytical approach. Both typologies discuss subjective and objective views of reality, however, the paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979) are considered to be inconsistent with each other, therefore cannot be mixed and used simultaneously, hence a researcher can be a part of only one and cannot choose to be in another (Greener, 2008). In contrast with Burrell and Morgan (1979), Arbnor and Bjerke's typology (2009) allows the mixture of paradigms which, in turn, can give richness to the study and improve the chances of finding reliable answers and solutions. Moreover, such combination of paradigms can provide deeper insights of the studied phenomena, while offering the researcher to investigate and examine the reality with more than one assumption in mind, still holding either subjective or objective view. Furthermore, there are several scholars who critically discuss the typology by Burrell and Morgan (1979), stating the boundaries between the paradigms might not be, as clear, as explained by the authors. That would make the borders not as sharp and defined which, in turn, can reduce the depth of theoretical investigation and development (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Additionally, it is suggested the paradigms should not be the leading considerations when choosing a research position but, rather to follow the problem statement, meaning the studied phenomena and environment should guide the researcher in choosing a paradigm. In addition, it is argued by Deetz (1996) that objectivism and subjectivism can be perceived as mutually inherent, indicating each other, hence being complementary to one another (Kuada, 2012). Based on that, it has been decided to choose

one of the typologies for this study, being Arbnor and Bjerke's typology. The combination of paradigms will be beneficial as it will allow to gain more elaborative view of the studied phenomena. That is seen useful, as the study deals with several terms, while creating a mixture of understandings.

2.3. Literature collection

According to Bryman (2012) there are two ways to conduct a literature review, being systematic and narrative method. This paper will employ systematic literature review, since it is discussed by Tranfield et al. (2003) that systematic review can be more reliable in its foundations, as it is based on a comprehensive understanding of what is known about concepts. Therefore, such review is a way of summarizing various findings in different fields (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, a systematic review follows multiple steps in acquiring the necessary literature, as locating and evaluating existing studies, extracting and synthesising the gathered information, hence reporting findings and drawing conclusions (Marinova, 2017). Additionally, Petticrew and Roberts (2009) propose seven steps to be followed in a systematic review, being:

1. defining the research question
2. deciding the type of papers which should be searched
3. conducting a search and finding papers and studies
4. determining which are the most appropriate
5. evaluating the chosen papers
6. examining and synthesizing the gathered knowledge
7. writing and publishing the review (Petticrew and Roberts, 2009)

The above steps were followed to gather the most relevant literature papers and information in regards to the studied concepts. First, the problem statement was defined, while the literature search was conducted using the Aalborg University Library databases, as Science Direct. In situations where additional information was needed Google Scholar was used if information was not found in the university databases. There were three main concepts being UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Those were used interchangeably to identify various relevant papers, as the first search was incorporating the terms of "UGC" and "brand awareness" ending up with a total of 67,702 papers found. The literature was in various formats as journal articles, books, chapters, newspaper articles, etc. Since, this search was too wide the

second search was narrowed by adding the term of "decision-making process" as a keyword, resulting in 43,706 papers. Again, because of the high number of papers a third search was conducted, however, this time with a limitation of choosing "journal articles" as type of papers, in order to gather studies best fitting the research questions. Furthermore, the search was broadened by the term "purchase intention" as it was found that the amount of literature discussing decision-making process was not in the expected quantities, thus purchase intention was added as a keyword, created additional combinations. With this changed criteria the third search ended up with 2,283 papers. Based on the above, with multiple keywords included, it was found that the term "brand awareness" was related to various other terms as brand image, associations, brand reputation, etc., however, those were excluded from the search criteria because were not falling into the purpose of the chosen topic. After the third search even more limitations were added, being "year of publication" in order to have a specific timeline, and language of the search, in this case "English", leading to reducing the found literature to 1,762. The next step was to include the most suitable subjects with the option "subject", on the university library webpage, the amount of found papers was reduced to 463 articles, as the chosen subjects were "social media", "consumer behaviour" and "marketing". Further, the most cited papers, with the most commonly used keywords were chosen leading to finding 167 reliable papers. In addition, next was to refine the search even more by adding two extra keyword of "digital media" and "Facebook" resulting in 73 papers, however, that was still a high number and therefore, the abstracts of the73 studies were read excluding the ones not fully connect to the topic. Finally, 21 articles were considered relevant in terms of studied phenomena, therefore those were chosen for the literature review. Moreover, additional papers, books and websites, as Statista, were used for obtaining a deeper knowledge in some areas.

2.4. Research design

The research design of a study is referred to as "the action plan or blueprint" to be followed (Kuada, 2012, p.57). Therefore, it is used as a guidance to the researcher, in order to choose the appropriate research method. Also, it provides a logical explanation of the activities, hence allowing the reader to follow the process. Moreover, a research design assists the reader in seeing the connections between different parts, as the proposed research questions, the data collection method, the analysis and the conclusions. The research design forms the basis for the

primary data collection (Kuada, 2012). According to Bryman (2012) there are five types of research designs being experimental, cross-sectional also known as survey design, longitudinal, case study and comparative. Furthermore, other scholars explain that the research design of a paper has to be chosen based on the availability of data and to be within manageable limits, as time and competences (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010). In relation to this research the chosen design is the cross-sectional, therefore investigating and analysing different connections and patterns among multiple variables (Bryman, 2012). For this to be done a quantitative research through survey will be implemented regarding the influence of UGC over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Besides, three motivating factors for customer involvement in UGC will be discussed in relation to their effect, and also in regards of their influence over brand awareness and decision-making process through UGC.

2.4.1. Data sources

There are two types of data sources according to Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad (2010), namely primary and secondary. Both can be used in research, as primary sources are defined as "original sources from which the researcher directly collects data that have not been previously collected", while secondary are considered to be data sets that has been previously collected for a different purpose, which does not need to be connected to the research at hand (Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.86). Secondary sources have also been previously analysed, therefore are presented through statistical statements and reports. Additionally, those are not limited in time, as the researcher does not need to be present during the collection process because the data has already been gathered (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010). In contrast with secondary sources, primary data is "first-hand information" which needs to be collected, analysed and then interpreted (Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.86). Searching for already existing data can save time and is easily accessible, seen as a cost efficient solution. Even though the data may not have been collected to answer the current research questions, secondary sources are considered to be practical and valid (Hair et al., 2015). Such characteristics are referred to as advantages, however, primary sources may have higher collection cost, however the data is specifically customized for the research problem, hence being completely relevant (Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad, 2010). Therefore, this paper will implement primary data collection through survey method so the data set will be specifically collected for the purpose of the research, thus meeting

the needs of the study. However, secondary data will also be used, in the form of research papers discussed in the literature review, hence guiding the researcher in gaining knowledge and understanding of the studied concepts.

2.4.2. Survey method

Since, the research will use the cross-sectional design, a quantitative data collection method will be employed, hence gathering numerical data using structured surveys to obtain primary data. Such data can vary from opinions and attitudes to general information as gender, income, age, etc. Moreover, survey method is used to obtain data from large number of participants in a quick and convenient way (Hair et al., 2015). With that said, structured surveys are easy to manage with pre-defined and concrete questions, they are cost-efficient, less time-consuming and inexpensive to analyse, therefore chosen for the report. In addition, the questions are given to every respondent with the same wording and order (Kothari, 2004). An approach for collecting survey data is by implementing the self-completion method, including multiple ways of survey distribution as mail, email, the internet, etc., in order to measure key characteristics of individuals, phenomena and more. Additionally, surveys are completed without the researcher being present, making them free from the interviewer's bias as there is no direct contact between participants and researcher (Hair et al., 2015; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). However, there is the assumption that respondents have the knowledge and motivation to fulfil the survey by themselves. Also, in connection to this paper, the researcher is aware that response bias can be present, as there is no information if the intended individuals have completed the survey, if the questions have been answered in the proposed order, and if participants might have asked others for opinions and advices (Hair et al., 2015). On the other hand, there are many advantages of survey method, as enabling reach to broad geographical areas, being inexpensive compared to personal interviews, allow to contact difficult to reach individuals. Further, participants can fill out the survey in their own time, with higher anonymity, hence respondents can be willing to give more accurate personal, economic and sensitive information (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). There are specific steps to be undertaken being: determine the type of data required, define the variables which are to be studied based on the theoretical concepts, construct the survey questions, choose the amount of questions and structure of the survey and, last, pre-test it in order to find if there are mistakes and correct them (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010).

2.4.3. Survey questions design

First, the concepts have to be clearly defined, followed by choosing the method of measurement. Second, the type, amount and wording of the survey questions should be though through, together with the questionnaire sequence and general layout. Moreover, only questions related to the studied phenomena and research objectives have to be included. Furthermore, the researcher must pay attention to the length, structure and coding of the questions to achieve high quality responses and a good response rate, hence simplifying the data collection process and the statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2015).

In regards to questions type, two types have been recognized by Hair et al. (2015), namely open and closed-ended questions, as the design of the latter is perceived to be more difficult and time consuming, hence making those question expensive to design. However, closed-ended questions can also be pre-coded making the data collection, the data input and the data analysis easier and less expensive. Additionally, such questions are mainly used in quantitative studies (Hair et al., 2015), therefore this question type has been chosen for this study.

Moving on, throughout the survey there can be different subtypes of questions such as general and research topic questions. The research topic questions are designed to gather information about the topic of the study, hence typically asking respondents about their beliefs, opinions, behaviours, etc. Besides, these questions are usually grouped into various sections making it easier for participants to answer, while maintaining interest and avoiding confusion (Hair et al., 2015). It is acknowledged that early questions can influence the response of later questions, therefore general questions are asked early and more specific ones later in a survey. This type of sequencing from general to specific is known as the funnel approach (Hair et al., 2015). In the case of this research, the funnel approach is used as in the beginning of the survey more general questions are asked, connected to the participants' social media usage and involvement in UGC, while the research topic questions are left for the later part, hence preventing confusion and influence towards given responses. Also, some of the questions connected to the studied phenomena have been grouped together to create coherence throughout the survey, while keeping the interest of respondents.

Hair et al. (2015) propose specific guidelines in preparing survey questions, starting with that the questions must be written in an understandable language, avoiding use of technical terms unless necessary. The questions should be short and straight to the point, so misunderstandings are

avoided because long questions can be confusing, thus resulting in higher nonresponse rate. Moreover, the scholars state that "higher error rate is a result of respondents' tending to answer long questions before fully reading them because they are in a hurry to complete the questionnaire", therefore making the questions short and simple can lower that type of error (Hair et al., 2015, p.281). Next, the wording should be concise and clear in meaning, as unfamiliar words and multiple meanings can lead to different interpretation depending of the participant. What is more, leading questions should be avoided, as those encourage particular responses. Lastly, double-barreled questions should not be used, as those include more than one issue making interpretation difficult. In such questions it is hard to determine to which issues is the respondent reacting to, therefore creating misunderstandings (Hair et al., 2015).

For the survey of the report, the questions have been written in an easy and familiar language to the participants, with no unnecessary technical term and jargons. The questions are short in length while being simple, since long questions can result in various types of errors, create confusion and nonresponse. Furthermore, the questions are carefully worded with specific attention to avoid leading questions, as those can influence respondents in a direction, hence create various biases. It is recognized that including more than one adjective, variable, term, issue, etc. in a question would make it double-barreled, therefore such combinations of concepts had been avoided throughout the survey.

What is more, in self-completion surveys there should be instructions about the way to answer questions which are clear, understandable and consistent. It is stated that such instructions are often made in bold and capital letters, hence being distinguished from the rest of the survey (Hair et al., 2015). In regards to the current survey, instructions are given for the questions about the theoretical concepts of UGC, brand awareness, decision-making process and motivating factors. Moreover, the instructions are written in capital, bold letters thus being noticeable by participants.

2.4.4. Operationalization of measurements

As stated earlier in the chapter, under research design, when implementing deductive approach the studied concepts need to be concretized to be measured, making them easy to understand (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). In the case of this research, there are multiple variables to be tested, being the motivating factors behind consumer involvement in online content, followed

by UGC, brand awareness and decision-making process. Therefore, those concepts must be strictly defined, thus avoiding misinterpretations. Table 1 below presents the operationalized concepts and sub-concepts with definitions. Those are later included in the survey and the a priori framework.

Concept	Sub-concept	Defined as	Survey questions	Source
Motivating factors for customer involvement in UGC	Self-concept	The opportunity given to individuals to express themselves by sharing their understandings, ideas, views and opinions with others through online content	I feel good expressing myself online My choice of brands says a lot about me I share my point of view/opinions about brands by writing comments/reviews	(Christodoulides et al., 2012)
	Co-creation	The feeling a brand is co-created with consumers, hence motivating consumers to participate in UGC	I enjoy creating online content about brands I want to be able to have online conversations with brands I feel more connected to brands which respond to their customers	(Christodoulides et al., 2012)
	Sense of community	The feeling and perception that a brand facilitates a community	I communicate with other people online because of a shared interest	(Christodoulides et al., 2012)

			I am more willing to engage online when I am part of a community	
			I feel a sense of community when I share my experiences about brands	
Online content	User-generated content (UGC)	"-content that is made publicly available over the Internet; -content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort; -content created outside professional routines and practices"	I believe that user reviews are more honest than information from the company	(Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.34)
			Online reviews lower the risk of disappointment when I have not tried a brand before	
			I would trust more a review from an average person than an expert	
			I trust comments from people who have bought the brand/product	
Phenomena influenced by UGC	Brand awareness	The ability of customers to recall and recognize a brand, as part of a specific category. Also, related to the probability of the brand	I can recognize the brands I like	(Hutter et al., 2013; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015;
			I can remember the advertising of a brand I like	
			If I am a fan of a brand I remember it often	

			name appearing in customers' mindsets.	I can easily describe the brands I like to a friend	Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1992)
				I feel familiar with products of the brands I buy	
	Consumer decision-making process	The consumer decision-making process is encompassing "the various steps a consumer passes through when making a purchase decision"	I feel good buying a product that has positive reviews	(Hutter et al., 2013, p.343; Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012)
			If most of the reviews are positive I will buy the product	
			User comments and reviews have in the past influenced my decision	
			Online reviews and ratings help me decide if I should buy a product or not	
			If most of the reviews are negative I will not buy the product	

Table 1. Operationalization of Measurements, self-made

2.4.5. Sampling method

There are two types of sampling methods being probability and non-probability and based on Greener (2008) through probability sampling the sample is chosen using a random selection, meaning that every unit of the population has a known chance of being selected. Such sampling method has low sampling error and is considered representative. In comparison, the non-probability sampling does not use random selection resulting in some units of the population

having a higher chance of being chosen than others, hence the probability of choosing a unit is unknown (Greener, 2008; Hair et al., 2015). In non-probability sampling the researcher uses subjective methods, as personal experience and expert judgement in order to select the units of the sample (Hair et al., 2015). According to Bryman (2012), there are three main sampling techniques used under non-probability sampling being convenience, snowballing and quota sampling, as the first is using a sample which is available to the researcher, with the snowballing technique the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of respondents who have been considered as relevant to the study, and then uses those connections to establish contacts with other participants, and the third technique uses a sample which is chosen based on particular variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc. (Bryman, 2012). Regarding this research the non-probability sampling method is chosen, specifically the snowballing sampling technique in order to gather the primary data. This sampling is chosen based on researcher's considerations in relation to accessibility and availability of the sample, as well as considerations connected to time limitations and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, it is discussed by Bryman (2012) that the snowballing sampling can be seen as the most reasonable to be used when there is no sampling frame of the population from which the sample should be taken, or in situations where it is difficult to create a sampling frame. Moreover, it is stated by Bryman (2012) that even if the researcher can create a sampling frame, if the population is shifting, hence changing constantly, the frame will be inaccurate because of those changes in sample units. Because of that, the snowballing sampling technique is used based on the reasoning that it is difficult to identify the members of the desired population, and even if such members can be identified, their numbers are changing hence making it impossible to have a concrete list of units.

The chosen sample consists of younger generations of participants, who are digitally skilled with knowledge of online user content. Additionally, the respondents have active profiles on and are using social media platforms as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. A big part of the respondents was addressed through Facebook and LinkedIn, while another part was contacted via their university student emails, as the secretary's lists of student groups were used to have a wider reach for gathering data. Furthermore, the sample size for this research is based on considerations connected to the nature of the research problem and also to limitations, as time and reach of the survey. Moreover, attention should be given to the geographical range of participants, as it is chosen to contact individuals who are located in the borders of Denmark. Because of those

reasons it is decided that a good sample size will fall between 150 and 250 respondents. For collecting the primary data the survey was send to a total of 245 respondents. However, out of the 245 send surveys 83 were not fulfilled, being just distributed, therefore considered as unusable, and thereby excluded from the total. That led to obtaining a total number of 162 responses which were included in the data analysis and hypotheses testing. Based on those numbers, the response rate of this study is 66%, as the total number of surveys collected (162) was divided by the total number of surveys send (245), thus obtaining the above mentioned rate. Moving on, when considering sampling techniques it needs to be acknowledged that there are different errors that can occur. Starting with, sampling error representing "the difference of results between a sample and that of the whole population" (Greener, 2008, p.49). Another error is non-sampling error which is again concerning differences between sample and population, however, those differences are based on errors of the wording of the survey questions, non-responses, etc., as non-response arises when a participant does not respond to the survey (Greener, 2008). With that in mind, it is recognized that in this research there will be non-responses as not all of the contacted individual will participate in the survey which, in turn, will lead to non-sampling error being present. Moreover, the wording of some questions might not be fully and correctly understood from all participants, again leading to creating some non-response error. In relation to sampling error, such will be observed in the study, however, as stated by Hair et al. (2015) when incorporating non-probability sample there is no statistical method for measuring the sampling error. Furthermore, according to Bryman (2012) there are two more types of error being data-collection and data-processing error, as the former is "connected with the implementation of the research process" (Bryman, 2012, p.205), usually arising from poor wording of questions, flaws in administration instruments and data gathering techniques. The latter, data-processing error, typically occurs from incorrect coding of the respondents' answers (Bryman, 2012). Even though, those errors are not directly connected to the chosen sampling method, they still need to be recognized as important. In the case of this study both data-collection and data-processing errors might be present, as the researcher is aware that mistakes can arise during the data coding, while some of respondents might give faulty answers based on misinterpretation of some questions. However, the asked questions are not addressing sensitive and private topics, therefore it can be assumed that respondents will have no motivation to protect themselves, hence provide dishonest information.

2.4.6. Pre-testing of survey

Another important part related to conducting a survey is the pre-testing process. It is stated by Hair et al. (2015) that a pre-test assist the researcher in evaluating the accuracy and consistency of the responses. A pre-test is conducted by addressing a sample which has similar characteristics as the target population, then those respondents complete the survey in the same manner as during the actual data gathering. After completing the survey the respondents should be asked clarifying questions in relation to all of the survey parts, the wording and meaning of the questions, the given instructions, the layout, etc., so the researcher can confirm that each question is clear in meaning and wording, understandable and relevant. It is considered that pre-testing in relation to consumer surveys is relatively easy as there is a large number of available and possible participants (Hair et. al., 2015). In the case of this research, a pre-test was conducted with a small sample in order to gather feedback. Based on that feedback, changes in the survey were made as the wording of some questions was made more precise, also in other questions additional clarifying words were added, as stating a specific time limit. Furthermore, the instruction text connected to the Likert scale questions was rewritten, hence being clearer. Additionally, some of the Likert scale items were combined, so that respondents can fully understand their meanings, preventing boredom and perception the survey would take too long time to be fulfilled.

2.5. Data analysis method

For the data analysis different statistical techniques will be employed using multiple SPSS statistical tools, as SPSS is the most commonly used statistical program (Greener, 2008). However, before testing the hypotheses the data was coded with numerical representations and abbreviations. Therefore, the Likert scale questions were presented with values from 1 being "strongly disagree" to 5 stating "strongly agree". Moreover, the items were coded with labels as SC1, SC2, etc. depending on the statement's purpose and the related variable. The codes can be found in Appendix 2, as for the questions which were not Likert scale, the coding was based on amount of answer options, hence the answers had numerical values, while the questions were labelled with abbreviations.

Moving on, for the hypotheses testing different statistical tools will be used. First a multiple linear regression analysis will be performed, showing the relationships between the three

independent variables, being the motivating factors for customer involvement in online content, and the dependent variable of UGC. This analysis is used to measure linear relationships and is one of the most commonly used techniques, while considered a realistic model as the prediction of one variable depends on multiple factors (Hair et al., 2015). Furthermore, the R^2 will be discussed, as it represents the percentage of the variation in the dependent variable being explained by the independent variables. Also, the F ratio and the significance level of the model will be explained. Additionally, the regression coefficients are calculated for each of the independent variables showing its individual relationship with the dependent variable. These values show which independent variable is significant predictor of the dependent, hence enabling the researcher to evaluate their relative influence. This significance will show if the formulated hypotheses should be rejected or accepted. The last step will be to discuss the coefficients Beta, in order to understand the relative effect of the independent variables over the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2015). After conducting the multiple regression analysis, two simple linear regression analysis will be performed in order to test if UGC has a positive impact on brand awareness, and a positive effect over decision-making process. The simple linear regressions will be used to show if there is a relationship between one independent and one dependent variable, again discussing the R^2, the significance of the model, the regression coefficients with the coefficients Beta. Lastly, two more multiple regression tests will be performed with the purpose of investigating if the three motivating factors have an effect over brand awareness and decision-making process through UGC, seen as a mediating factor. Again, the same statistic values as above will be discussed to explain the relationships.

However, before conducting the hypotheses testing the data quality needs to be examined. The next part will address the issue of data reliability and variability by conducting the statistical tests of Cronbach's Alpha and Bivariate correlation (Hair et al., 2015; Bhattacherjee, 2012).

2.6. Reliability and Validity Test

In order for the analysis to be conducted the data has to be representative and to measures the concepts in an accurate and consistent way. Therefore, reliability and validity are discussed, as reliability refers to the consistency of the data, while validity to the accuracy (Hair et al., 2015). Validity is assessing the extent to which "a construct measures what it is supposed to measure" (Hair et al., 2015, p.257). Moreover, reliability is concerned with the consistence of the findings

and is often associated with multi-item scales, as Likert scale questions (Hair et al., 2015). Hair et al. (2015) state that, the strength of association between scales shows the data reliability, and if the coefficient is below 0.6 the reliability is poor, as if it is from 0.8 to < 0.9 is very good. However, a coefficient above 0.95 is considered too high, hence the data becomes unreliable. For acquiring a good dataset the reliability coefficient needs to indicate that respondents have answered the questions consistently. Also, there are guidelines for ensuring reliability: the items in a scale should be minimum three, should be positively correlated and the ones with a score lower than 0.30 should be considered for removing (Hair et al., 2015). With that in mind, the reliability of this study is calculated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in SPSS. As it can be seen in figure 8 below the obtained value for Cronbach's Alpha is 0.887 presenting the data is reliable.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.887	.886	23

Figure 8. Cronbach's Alpha, SPSS output

However, under the table "Item-total statistics" in SPSS (see Appendix 4 for full table) one of the discussed guidelines is not met, as three of the items have a "Corrected Item-Total Correlation" coefficient below 0.30, meaning those should be considered for removing (See Figure 9 below). Therefore, it was decided to remove them and test the data again.

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

Brand awareness: I can recognize the brands I like	78.35	122.863	.269	.415	.886
Brand awareness: I can remember the advertising of a brand I like	79.00	122.311	.195	.380	.889
Decision making: If most of the reviews are negative I will not buy the product	78.60	121.334	.258	.419	.887

Figure 9. Item-total statistics, SPSS output

Based on the new calculations, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient increased to 0.891 showing the data is highly reliable, hence presenting a good strength of association, while not exceeding the 0.95 limit. Figure 10 below shows the newly calculated coefficient.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.891	.891	20

Figure 10. New Cronbach's Alpha, SPSS output

Moving on, validity is discussed as there are different approaches through which a researcher can access the validity. Construct validity is one approach and "is an assessment of how well a set of scale items matches with the relevant content of the construct that it is trying to measure" (Hair et al., 2015; Bhattacherjee, 2012, p.59). There are two steps that need to be performed so a construct validity is confirmed, called convergent and discriminant validity. The first shows "the

extent to which the construct is positively correlated with other measures of the same construct", while the second is "the extent to which the construct does not correlate with other measures that are different from it", and both are objective and based on numerical scores (Hair et al., 2015, p.258). Therefore, construct validity is chosen, to provide objective and truthful answers. Convergent and discriminant validity are usually assessed together through a bivariate correlation test, thus checking if there is high correlation between the indicators of one/related constructs, while establishing if there is low correlation between the indicators of two unrelated constructs (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Thus, a bivariate correlation test was conducted in SPSS.

Correlations

		Total_cocreation	Total_community	Total_selfconcept	Total_ugc	Total_brandawareness	Total_desicionmaking	What is your monthly household income before taxes?
Total_cocreation	Pearson Correlation	1	.648**	.714**	.332**	.471**	.378**	-.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.723
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Total_community	Pearson Correlation	.648**	1	.589**	.257**	.368**	.364**	.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.001	.000	.000	.629
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Total_selfconcept	Pearson Correlation	.714**	.589**	1	.351**	.458**	.320**	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.163
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Total_ugc	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.257**	.351**	1	.346**	.532**	.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000		.000	.000	.959
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Total_brandawareness	Pearson Correlation	.471**	.368**	.458**	.346**	1	.340**	.042
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.593
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Total_desicionmaking	Pearson Correlation	.378**	.364**	.320**	.532**	.340**	1	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.623
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
What is your monthly household income before taxes?	Pearson Correlation	-.028	.038	.110	.004	.042	.039	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.723	.629	.163	.959	.593	.623	
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 11. Bivariate correlation analysis for construct validity, SPSS output

Taking the first construct "co-creation", it can be seen that the correlation coefficients between it and its related constructs of "community" and "self-concept" are highly correlated and positive, with values of 0.648 and 0.714, hence confirming convergent validity. Regarding discriminant

validity, the same construct "co-creation" is negatively correlated, with value of -0.28, to the construct of "monthly income", as expected because the two should not be correlated with each other, thus showing discriminant validity. Moreover, the correlation values of "monthly income" and the other constructs included are also low, meaning the amount of variance accounted for is little, therefore providing discriminant validity. Furthermore, it can be seen that the significance level of the correlations is high when the constructs are somewhat connected, while the significance level of the unrelated constructs is low, therefore proving construct validity.

3. Literature review

This chapter will discuss different variables and which will be used for giving an answer to the problem statement. The beginning will present an overview of social media and the reasons behind the social media usage of customers. Furthermore, brand equity definitions will be included with focus on the significance of brand awareness, followed by a part about the customers' motivating factors for involvement in UGC. Afterwards, the consumer decision-making process will be explained, finishing with addressing in detail the relationship and impact of UGC over brand awareness and the decision-making process.

3.1. Social media

The importance of social media as a marketing channel has been enhanced because it offers both companies and customers a new way of communicating with each other (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Social media promotes engagement and relationship building between consumers, thus giving them the opportunity to become co-creators of brand value, while increasing their power to influence brands and present challenges to brand managers (Hutter et al., 2013). Other characteristics of social media are its wide demographic appeal and rapidly growing popularity making it a mass phenomenon. Moreover, it provides opportunities for users to create and distribute content which can be related to different topics as brands, products, services leading to companies no longer being the primary source of brand information and communication. It has been noted from scholars that consumers tend to consider social media and consumer content as more trustworthy compared to traditional communication tools used by companies (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Therefore, with the growing relevance of social media its marketing potential for brands also increases, hence companies are trying to engage with customers, understand them and influence their perceptions by disseminating positive brand information (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Hutter et al., 2013). The Web 2.0 context allows the development of social media platforms where interactions are the main objective, thus challenging the understanding of what is a media audience. Such platforms differ from other communication channels because of their capability to activate and retain large amounts of brand information that is in memorable formats, while being available to users at any point of time (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). Because of that, social media users are able to experience brands through "lenses that are larger in depth and breadth" (Langaro, Rita and de

Fátima Salgueiro, 2015, p.162). Social media is used by consumers for different reasons as peer communication, maintaining loneliness (Correa, Hinsley and de Zuniga, 2010), information seeking (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schafer, 2012), fun, being part of a community, etc. (Rauniar et al., 2013). Socialization is proven to be a common characteristic for people who use social media heavily, as users can deliberate, be part of random topics, read and update themselves with information about brands, products, companies, etc. Socialization can influence the decision-making process because of the opinions and advices given from peers and online communities about brands and products (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012).

Consumers use social media platforms as Facebook, Twitter, etc. to create multiple social interactions and content which, in turn, adds value from a marketing perspective. Such content is distributed and seen from millions of people, hence generating value (Berthon et al., 2012; Rauniar et al., 2013). Social media can be used for maintaining loneliness by keeping interactions. Many users use social websites in order to communicate with people they know or to make themselves feel less lonely by participating in online discussions, groups, communities (Correa, Hinsley and de Zuniga, 2010). As mentioned, fun is also a reason for user participation and can be expressed by simple actions as sharing posts with personal moments, pictures, thus bringing joy to the user. Moreover, keeping updated with news and information can be considered as fun for different individuals, hence using social media platforms (Rauniar et al., 2013).

3.2. Brand equity

The value of a brand has become increasingly important because of the constant pressure over companies to compete globally. Value creation is an important objective and, in recent years, the knowledge about consumers and brands is considered to be a key component of that value creation, therefore incorporating models implementing such knowledge has become necessary for firms. Moreover, the overall value build by a brand is theorized as brand equity, leading to branding being central in a wide range of strategies (Hsu, Oh and Assaf, 2011).

In regards to defining brand equity there are different perspectives, however, most are from customers' standpoint, thus suggesting that the power of a brand is located in the mind of the consumer. There are two main authors who have developed the basis of the consumer-based

brand equity (CBBE) concept, those being Keller (1993) and Aaker (1992) (Buil, Martínez and de Chernatony, 2013, p.63).

Starting with Keller (1993), defining brand equity as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993, p.8). This scholar, suggests that there are two types of CBBE, namely being positive and negative. When a brand has a positive equity consumers are reacting more favourably towards the product and the way it is marketed. In contrast, if customers are less positive towards the marketing of a product, then a brand is having a negative CBBE (Keller, 2013). In the definition given by Keller (1993), there are three main concepts being differential effect, brand knowledge and consumer response to marketing efforts. The first concept, differential effect, is a result of comparing the consumer responses of the marketing of a product and the responses towards the same marketing of an unnamed version of that same product (Keller, 1993). The second concept, brand knowledge, is considered to be the source of unique value that brands have which, in turn, can impact the profitability and gross margins of a company. Brand knowledge as a construct is cognitive, hence consisting of the knowledge consumers store in their memories in regards to brands. Within brand knowledge, brand awareness and image are considered to be particularly important because are created and maintained through the marketing efforts of a brand, therefore defining brand knowledge (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). Finally, consumer response can be explained by the behaviour and preferences of customers in relation to the different marketing mix activities (Keller, 1993).

The second author Aaker (1992), defines brand equity by using a cognitive psychology approach stating that CBBE is "a set of brand assets and liabilities; linked to the brand's name and symbol; can subtract from, as well as add to, the value provided by a product or service; provides value to customers as well as to a firm" (Aaker, 1992, p.28). Under assets the author considers the concepts of brand awareness, associations, loyalty and perceived brand quality. However, other property brand assets such as trademarks and patents should also be included (Aaker, 1992).

Based on the above definitions, there are three main approached for measuring brand equity. The first one is connected to the views of Keller (1993) and Aaker (1992), thus measuring the components and outcomes of brand equity based on the opinions and purchase behaviours of customers. Both authors have presented multiple case studies arguing that CBBE directly measures the brand-related marketing activities of a company, hence forming the first approach.

The second approach is measuring brand equity through the assets and cash flow of a brand, thus being based on financial outcomes (Hsu, Oh and Assaf, 2011). Although the financial approach is presenting the monetary value of a brand, that value is a result of consumer responses, hence being connected to customer perspectives (Buil, Martínez and de Chernatony, 2013). Lastly, the third approach is considering brand equity by combining both of the previous methods, as it is implementing the financial and marketing perspectives together (Hsu, Oh and Assaf, 2011).

In conclusion, one of the most important constructs of brand knowledge is accepted to be brand awareness, as stated by Keller (1993). Even though, Aaker (1992) does not specifically mention and refer to the term brand knowledge, this author also suggests the high relevance of brand awareness. Therefore, brand awareness is important when trying to understand consumers' purchase decisions, as these depend on brands being recalled from all product options, while consumers recognizing and having positive feelings towards that brand. As a result, establishing positive brand knowledge leads to forming the right cognitive structures in the consumers' mind, hence resulting in shaping strong brands (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyse if and to what extent UGC influence both brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Because UGC is created, implanted and distributed from users towards users the construct of brand awareness, as a part of brand equity, will be taken and analysed from consumer perspective in relation to opinions, perceptions and understandings.

3.3. User-generated Content definitions

Studies suggest that consumers participate in the creation of UGC because of different reasons such as self-promotion, hope of changing the public's perceptions and opinions, enjoyment and fun, while the growth of social media platforms as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. enhance the popularity of UGC among users, thus increasing online brand communications (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Besides that, UGC can be produced in many forms as consumer reviews and recommendations, which are many times considered to be very impactful, hence increasing its persuasive power compared to professionally created content. Moreover, with the ease of sharing and the dynamic environment of the different social media platforms online users are becoming key creators of various types of brand-related content (Chari et al., 2016). Furthermore, because user-created content tents to be considered more reliable and informative, compared to company

created content, the consumers' decision-making process and opinions are affected (Plank, 2016).

Scholars argue that, UGC usually includes brand-related topics (Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian, 2012) and therefore can rise product and brand awareness, leading to influencing the consumers' decision-making process (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Additionally, Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012), add that UGC can be seen as a summary of all the ways in which people use social media because it is created, changed, consumed and distributed collaboratively or individually. According to a study from Christodoulides et al. (2012), UGC is all online published material which is not professionally made and is reflecting an effort (Chari et al., 2016). Other scholars define user content as created by the public and including "any form of online content created, initiated, circulated, and consumed by users" (Kim and Johnson, 2016, p.98). Finally, UGC is defined by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) as content which is showing to some extent a creative effort, not being professionally produced and is publicly available on the Internet (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.34).

In summary the UGC definitions can be written as:

- "UGC is published content that is created outside of professional routines and practices. It may be individually or collaboratively produced, modified, shared and consumed, and can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media" (Smith, Fischer and Yongjian, 2012 p.103)

- "UGC is identified as any material that is created outside professional practices, reflects effort, and is publicized online" (Chari et al., 2016, p.1072)

- "According to the definition provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, UGC is defined as the following:
  o content that is made publicly available over the Internet;
  o content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort;
  o content created outside professional routines and practices" (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.34)

- "UGC refers to media content created by members of the general public and includes any form of online content created, initiated, circulated, and consumed by users" (Kim and Johnson, 2016, p.98).

Based on the above, this study will follow the definition of OECD adopted by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), thus considering UGC as media content that is available online, produced by anyone, reflecting some amount of effort, and not being created for professional purposes.

3.4. Motivating factors for customer involvement in User-generated Content

Under this part, different motivators for consumers' participation in creating online user content will be discussed based on a research made by Christodoulides et al. (2012). Those scholars have argued that there are different motivating factors which influence consumers and encourage them to create content, hence the study is investigating if **self-concept**, **sense of community** and **co-creation** affect customers and their level of involvement in brand content. The authors argue that UGC can represent a way in which companies can build relationships with their customers. (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Furthermore, the findings of another study suggests that consumers contribute to content creation for different reasons, as "self-promotion, intrinsic enjoyment and hope of changing public perceptions" (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.34), thus confirming the assumptions made by Christodoulides et al. (2012). Moreover, from customer's perspective UGC is considered to be more reliable than professionally created content, hence negative content can be very damaging for brands (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Starting with **self-concept**, the authors base their assumptions on previous studies where UGC is considered to give individuals the opportunity to express themselves by sharing their understandings, ideas and views with others. It is discussed in the paper that the social dimensions and nature of UGC can create a scene for customers to develop new identities while self-presenting themselves, which in turn can reward the participation with recognition from peers, thus enhancing the self-concept. Furthermore, UGC is seen as a way through which consumers can express their behaviours and attitudes, in regards to different topics, which can seem agreeable to others, thus online content is having an identity-based component (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Additionally, Christodoulides et al. (2012), point out that brands can represent podiums for self-expressing, which is a fundamental part of the self-concept. Continuing with **sense of community**, the authors discuss online communities because the members of such can be seen as creating brand value, through activities as producing online content. It is argued that, community interactions and development can often be described as social motivating factors for the creation of UGC. Moreover, it has been found that individuals

who are part or feel as a part of online community can be highly motivated, be emotionally connected to a brand, thus identify themselves with that brand (Christodoulides et al., 2012). The last motivating factor **co-creation** is being defined as the participation of customers leading to producing value for the company, at any point of the value chain. Co-creation can be also explained as consumers having the perception that a brand is co-created, which in turn heighten their participation in online content about that brand, hence co-creation is the result of the created value by customers (Christodoulides et al., 2012). The authors elaborate even more stating that "co-creation encompasses all situations wherein consumers collaborate with companies or other consumers to generate value such as online content" and that the growing consumer participation in brand-related conversations shows the high interest in collaboration (Christodoulides et al., 2012, p.4). Furthermore, the scholars argue that through co-creation consumers see themselves as an important part of the value chain and can even affect where, when and how such value is created. Hence, individuals are no longer satisfied with only the experiences and the company-created content but they want to shape their own opinions "through co-created content such as UGC" (Christodoulides et al., 2012, p.5). As a result, the communication between customers and companies is changed and individuals have access to the value creation process which gives them encouragement to create online content and change the perception of co-creation (Christodoulides et al., 2012).

The findings of this paper are an empirical evidence of the importance of UGC and its effect over consumers, their perceptions and opinions about brands. In relation to the motivating factors for creating content the study demonstrates that self-concept, sense of community and co-creation have a positive impact on involvement in UGC. Moreover, it is suggested that creating online content can have a positive impact over brand equity's components including brand awareness (Christodoulides et al., 2012).

3.5. The consumer decision-making process

Customers make choices and take decisions about products and brands on daily basis and when a decision is made it means an outcome will follow. Those outcomes differ in their level of importance, thus the decision-making process will also differ depending on the situation (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012). With that being said, the next part will briefly discuss

the levels of consumer decision-making, followed by four views of the decision-making, leading to presenting the consumer decision-making model and its stages.

3.5.1. Levels of decision-making

Depending on the importance of the outcome decisions can be grouped into three categories being: **routinized response behaviour**, **limited** and **extensive problem-solving**. On the routinized response behaviour level the consumer has already experienced the brand, product, service, etc. and has an established criteria through which he/she can evaluate the purchase. On this level the needed information is minimum in order to review the already existing knowledge, hence those purchases are mostly based on routines. The limited problem-solving level requires established basis of information, however, the individual cannot immediately take a decision about the purchase or to choose a brand, and therefore needs to gather additional information to be able to take a final decision. And the last level, extensive problem-solving, is where the customer needs a big amount of information to evaluate the purchase. This level usually includes important decisions, as buying an expensive or technical products or decisions that imply long period of commitment (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

3.5.2. Four views of decision-making

It needs to be mentioned that there are different views connected to the decision-making process. Those four views are used in order to understand better why people behave in certain ways. Starting with **the economic view**, consumers are seen as taking rational decisions, however, this view is often rejected and criticized by many researchers, as for customers to be fully rational they need to be aware of all available products and alternatives, correctly evaluate all advantages and disadvantages for the alternatives, and finally to identify the best option. Therefore, because individuals are limited in their knowledge, skills, habits, values and goals the economic view becomes unrealistic (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012). The second view is in opposition to the economic view, namely **the passive view**, stating that people are fully irrational and impulsive purchasers, as the main drawback of this view is that it does not recognize the importance of the consumer in the decision-making. The third view is **the emotional** one, which considers consumers as impulsive, basing their decisions on different feelings as joy, happiness, fear, hope, etc. when making a purchase. Such emotions are considered to be the most important

in the decision-making rather than considering other alternatives, and as a result less attention is given towards information search. Moreover, the customers' moods are also from importance in this view, as those can influence when and where people shop and their reaction towards brands, advertising, products, etc. (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012). And the final view is **the cognitive** describing customers as problem-solving oriented. In this view individuals as receptive or are actively searching for different products which can enhance their quality of live and fulfil a need. This view can be seen as being between the economic and passive, as customers do not have complete knowledge, thus cannot make perfect choices, however still search for information to take a reasonable decision. The cognitive view sees consumers as information processors evaluating the information about selected brands. During the information gathering consumers are aware that they cannot collect all existing data, hence stopping the search when there is sufficient information for making a satisfactory decision (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

3.5.3. The model of consumer decision-making process

Nowadays consumers take decisions connected to brands on daily basis and therefore have to find a way to cope with the increasing amount of information. They develop habits which can be seen as shortcuts when making a decision, hence managing the large quantity of mental information. Scholars consider such shortcuts to be represented from brands because those can simplify purchase decisions and give reassurance, as they connect choices with knowledge, satisfaction, experiences, etc. Henceforth, brands guide consumers when making a decision, thus being an important part in the decision-making process (Hutter et al., 2013).

Based on the previously explained views of decision-making this part will present a model of consumer decision-making process, incorporating the cognitive and to some extent the emotional views. The model consists of three distinct stages being: **the input**, **process** and **output stage** (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012). Figure 12 below shows the model and the three stages.
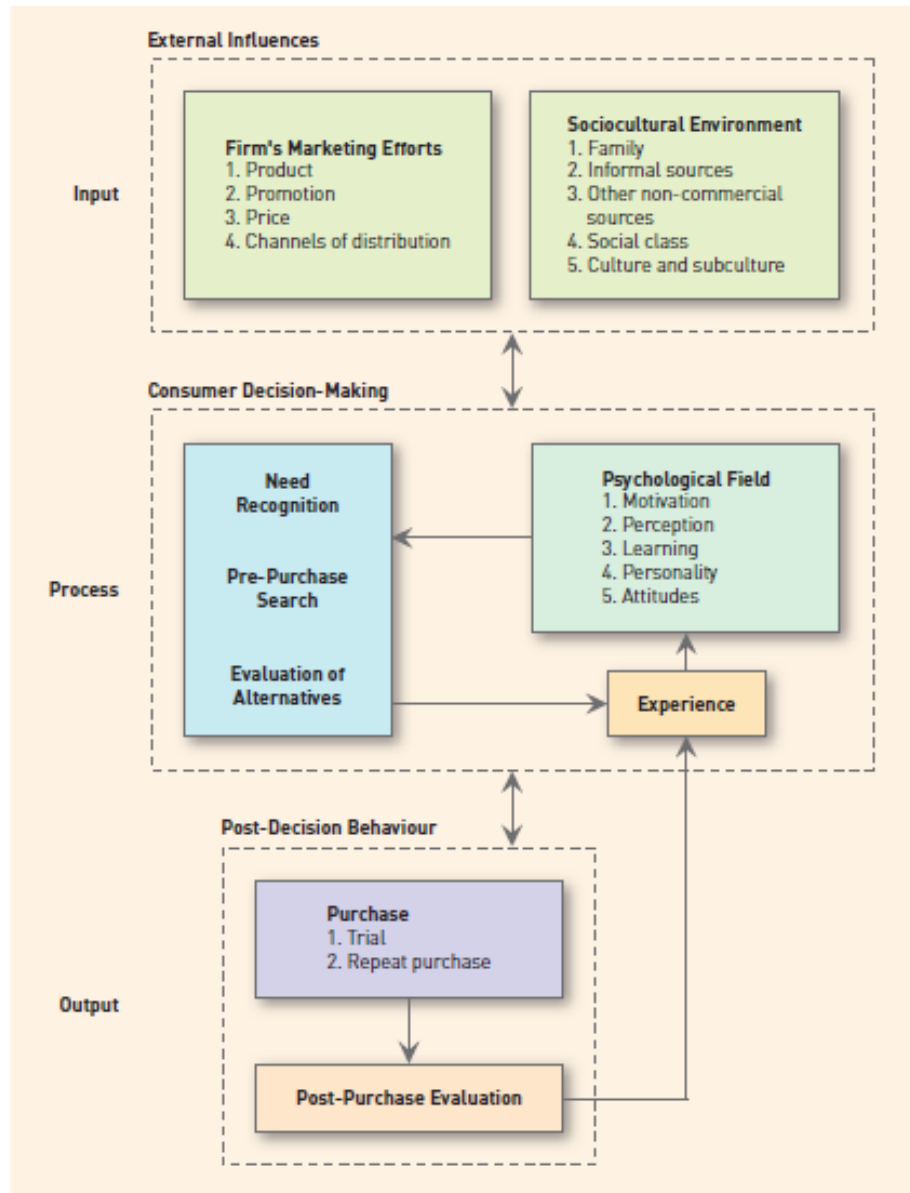
Figure 12. A model of consumer decision-making process (Schiffman, Kanuk and Hansen, 2012, p.69)

The consumer decision-making process can be defined as encompassing "the various steps a consumer passes through when making a purchase decision" (Hutter et al., 2013, p.343). The first stage, **input** is connected to external influences seen as sources of information about a product/brand that can affect the values and behaviours of consumers. This stage impacts the consumer's recognition of a product need and consists of marketing mix activities, as price, promotion, etc. and non-marketing external sociological influences, as comments from friends, family, non-commercial sources, etc. (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012). In regards to non-

commercial sources, it needs to be acknowledged that such can be comments, reviews, rating and other types of online content found on the Internet which is posted and shared from experienced consumers. Those customers can be part of online special-interest discussion groups, brand communities, etc. giving their opinions and perceptions about products and brands, hence creating online content. Moreover, culture and social class are also recognized parts of the sociological influences and have an impact on the evaluation of a product, leading to the decision to buy or not. With that said, the company's marketing efforts and the influence of society, friends, family, peers, etc. are inputs that consumers use in their choices of product and purchase decisions (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Moving on, the second stage **process** is concerned with the way customers make decisions. This part shows that making a decision consists of three subparts being: *need recognition*, *pre-purchase search* and *evaluation of alternatives*. Furthermore, customers are affected from internal factors as perceptions, attitudes, motivation, etc. being part of the physiological field, as shown in figure 12 above (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Starting with *need of recognition*, as first subpart, occurring when customers have an issue, meaning when they realize they need or want a product. Consequently, there are two types of problem recognition styles – actual state type, referring to customers who realize they need a product because the one they own fails to provide satisfaction, and desired state types, concerning customers whose decision-making process is activated because of the desire to own something new (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Continuing with the second subpart, namely *pre-purchase search*, starting with the consumer realizing the need of a product to give them satisfaction. Under this part, customers usually try to recollect past experiences with the company, brand and product in order to make a comparison and gain information to make the decision. However, when the consumer does not have previous experience, he/she will start a pre-purchase search for gathering relevant information. In many cases individuals are combining both past experiences and new sources of information. Sometimes, people might not have a fully specific memory of a particular brand or product as of the lack of experience, however, similar choices made in the past can also be used as points of reference. With that said, it is important to point out that when individuals are gathering external information the Web 2.0 technologies, all the online content created and spread by users, and different online platforms have a great impact on the pre-purchase search. In many situations

rather than visiting a shop consumers prefer to find information online though different media platforms as official websites, social media platforms, review websites and more. Such platforms can provide a great amount of the needed information, as prices, reviews, comparisons, specifications, advices, etc. about the considered products and services (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Lastly, the third subpart is *evaluation of alternatives*. When evaluating alternatives a lot of customers use two types of information: a list of brands which are considered as choices and the criteria through which those brands will be evaluated. The list of brand choices is also referred to as the evoke set and is distinguished from the inept set, consisting of brands that are excluded because are perceived as unacceptable, and the inert set containing brands which are seen as not having any advantages. As a result, the evoke set contains the brands that the consumer can remember, recognize and find acceptable for the purchase. Moreover, the experience and knowledge gained from evaluating alternatives, in turn, affects consumer's motivation, perceptions and attitudes (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Finally, the last part of the decision-making process is called **the output stage** and is a combination of two post-decision activities: *purchase behaviour* and *post-purchase evaluation*. In connection to purchase behaviour there are three types of purchases made by customers, starting with trial purchase when the product is bought for a first time for evaluation, thus being the exploratory phase of purchase behaviour. Following is the repeat purchase usually suggesting that consumer's needs are met and the product or brand are adopted, and finally, is the long-term commitment purchase being related to the concept of brand loyalty, as a metric for brand equity (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Moving on, the post-purchase evaluation is when consumers estimate the product performance in regards to their expectations. Additionally, this evaluation also depends on the importance of the decision to the consumer and the experiences the product/brand give during usage. With that said, there are three possible outcomes of evaluation, as the first is when performance matches expectations, thus causing neutral or positive feelings. The second is when performance exceeds expectations, hence leading to satisfaction, while forming future possibility for buying the product or using the brand. And the third outcome is when performance fail to satisfy expectations resulting in customer dissatisfaction (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Hansen, 2012).

Taking the written above, the next two parts of the study will consider and investigate the effects of UGC over brand awareness and the consumer decision-making process. Brand awareness will be taken from consumers' perspective and as a part of CBBE, while the consumer decision-making will be discussed in relation to the previously explained stages. Moreover, the parts will implement, examine and use as evidence various empirical papers, in order to find explanations of the relationships between the studied terms, finishing with summarization of findings for each part.

3.6. User-generated Content and Brand awareness

Both Aaker (1992) and Keller (1993) define brand awareness and discuss its importance in their explanations of CBBE. The definition of brand awareness by Keller (1993) is stating that awareness "is related to the strength of the brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions" (Keller, 1993, p.3). Further, Aaker (1992) defines brand awareness as the ability of customers to recall and recognize a brand, as part of a specific category. He suggests that, in the customer's mindset first there is no awareness which increases to recognition, and then into recall. Moreover, Aaker (1992) argues that, brand awareness is one of the most mentioned assets and metrics of brand equity, while being a key concept in measuring success of a brand, therefore essential for companies (Hsu, Oh, and Assaf, 2011). Additionally, Keller (1993) suggests that awareness is related to the probability of the brand name appearing in customers' mindsets, hence also considering recognition and recall as the two dimensions forming brand awareness (Keller, 1993). Brand recognition is explained as the individual's ability to identify and recognize a brand before purchase because the brand has been previously observed, seen or heard of. The second dimension, brand recall is referred to as the individual's capability to correctly recover the brand from the memory (Keller, 1993). In addition, Aaker (1992) argues that, on recognition level, achieving brand awareness can be a signal for the individual's commitment towards the brand, while it can strengthen the sense of familiarity with that brand. Besides, on the recall lever, brand awareness is further influencing the customer's brand choice, hence affecting which brands should and should not be considered for purchase (Aaker, 1992). As mentioned, brand awareness can reinforce brand familiarity, thus placing the brand into the consumer's consideration set, while increasing brand liking and giving choice advantage (Hsu, Oh, and Assaf, 2011). Other

scholars point out that, high amount of individuals use brands as decision heuristics, hence brand awareness should be considered as a key factor affecting their choice, as known and familiar brands have higher chance of being chosen in comparison with unknown brands (Hoyer and Brown, 1990). Moving on, Keller (1993) concludes brand awareness has an important role in consumer decision-making process because of three reasons. First, it is important that consumers think about a brand when making a purchase, falling into the category of that brand. In such situation, rising awareness means the brand will have a higher chance of being included into considerations (Keller, 1993). Second, "brand awareness can affect decisions about brands in the consideration set, even if there are essentially no other brand associations" with that brand, showing consumers tend to buy familiar and well-known brands (Keller, 1993, p.3). Furthermore, in regards to low involvement products and situations it has been shown that basic awareness can be enough for influencing the choice of the consumer, thus choosing the brand even if well-formed attitudes are missing. Lastly, awareness affects the consumer decision-making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations which, in turn, form brand image (Keller, 1993). It is stated that, "a necessary condition for consumers to create associations with the brand is the presence of the brand in consumers' minds" (Hutter et al., 2013, p.345). After the brand is present in memory, the strength of that presence defines how easily different information can be connected to the brand, thus developing brand image (Hutter et al., 2013).

After determining what is brand awareness and its importance, next different empirical papers investigating UGC in relation to awareness will be addressed. Scholars consider social media platforms, as Facebook and Twitter, to be important tools for creating awareness, as such present opportunities for brand-related online content to be easily generated and shared with groups of customers and peers (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Additionally, in their study Barreda et al. (2015), argue that social media is highly used for sharing experiences, searching information, henceforth leading to individuals perceiving online content as more reliable than official media. It is also recognized that, customers with high brand awareness can more easily recommend a brand (Barreda et al., 2015). Therefore, it is debated by Arora and Sharma (2013) that, the reach of shared information is much greater than in the past, as social media platforms offer the possibility for customers to easily distribute content with unfamiliar individuals. Besides, another study suggests that visual posts are easier to recognize and recall, hence influencing consumers

to generate and spread them, resulting in creating online content (Alhaddad, 2015). A research by Hutter et al. (2013) investigates the effects of social media user interactions and online content on brand awareness. The scholars recognise that social media platforms can be used as a way to present brands to individuals, thus increasing and building brand awareness. Moreover, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is also discussed in order to show that one of the main reasons for social media usage is the desire for communication, thus creating UGC. Therefore, the authors follow the assumption that when individuals are highly active online, in connection to a brand, their page commitment will be higher, thus achieving positive awareness (Hutter et al., 2013). Because of that, the degree of involvement in social media platforms can be seen as an indicator of brand awareness. The findings of the study are strong arguments of the relevance of social media, in regards to managing a brand, because of the positive effect of consumer's social media engagement and online content on brand awareness and consumer decision-making (Hutter et al., 2013). Continuing, Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schafer (2012), have conducted a study in relation to the effect of user-generated social media communication on brand awareness, and point out that such online communications and content are out of company's control and reach. Moreover, both positive and negative UGC carry brand information which can be useful to the individual during purchase decisions, hence increasing brand awareness, regardless of the form of the content (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schafer, 2012). It is suggested from scholars that when social media communications and online content are managed correctly a positive effect can be seen on brand awareness which, in turn, can build favourable brand image. Also, online communities and their content help consumers in understanding the brand and the product, while increasing the sense of belonging and distributing positive brand messages (Khajuria and Rachna, 2017). The study of Khajuria and Rachna (2017), provides an evidence that UGC and social media brand communications are significant predictors of brand awareness, and the developing of brand associations. It is concluded that, age can influence the way in which UGC and online communications impact the individual's brand awareness, and that those phenomena can be used for creating awareness and feeling of attachment (Khajuria and Rachna, 2017). Furthermore, virtual interactivity is discussed in another paper, as a feature and characteristic of social media platforms, as Twitter, because such provide many functions of interactions, thus offering options for relationship building with consumers. Virtual interactivity shows the importance of the communication between users, while allowing them to create and distribute

online content. It is argued that, interactivity impacts awareness by contributing to recognition and recall, in order to connect the brand to the consumer, while offering many-to-many communication. Also, interactive posts increase the chances of a brand to gather likes. Therefore, social media platforms are considered as tools for accomplishing customer engagement by allowing the creation of content, hence creating conversations with targeted consumers and increasing brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2015). A study by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), points out that because of the growth of social media platforms the popularity of UGC has also increased. Those scholars refer to some of the previously discussed studies, as a starting point of their research while basing their assumptions on the findings, as it is observed by Bruhn et al. (2012) that the perception of communication, in social media context, can positively affect brand perceptions, and as it is noticed by Hutter et al. (2013) that there is a strong association between consumers' engagement with an online brand page and the perception of brand awareness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). In their research Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), identify a positive impact of UGC on brand awareness and associations because such content is perceived as more reliable, hence individuals become less likely to change the brand. Moreover, the findings indicate that buyers consciously distinguish among company and user-generated content and that people are strongly relaying on the opinions of their friends, family members and other online users when gathering products information, as those sources are considered more trustworthy. However, the scholars recognize that there is a difference in the effects of UGC on brand awareness depending on industry type, as people tent to evaluate products and brands in a different way, based on industry (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Finally, in the conclusion of the paper Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), recommend to managers to incorporate UGC and social media as part of the communication strategy, as social media platforms provide multiple ways in which consumers are able to create, interact and share brand-related content, thus improving and even increasing CBBE, including brand awareness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Another paper is referring to former studies pointing out that increases in brand communication efforts directly relates to improving awareness, as awareness is achieved through repeated exposure to brand elements, as logo, slogan, name, etc., hence impacting the recognition level, and "broader scope of exposure to category and usage-related cues", thus influencing the recall level (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015, p.149). Moving on, in the context of social media, active users are highly subjected to brand content, as logos, usage

information, etc. and therefore are somehow pushed to engage with the brand by taking actions as commenting, liking, sharing, creating new content and more. Those increased consumer-brand relationships are influencing brand awareness, and due to this the authors are expecting the influences to be on both recognition and recall level. On recognition level because of the higher amount of exposure, and on recall level because of the stronger exposure to brand-related content. The findings of the paper confirm that active user participation, as contributing to and creating UGC, influence the individual's awareness, showing that when users engage online with brands their recognition and recall levels become enhanced. This study is an empirical evidence of the positive and significant effect of user content on brand awareness, while it identifies social media platforms as effective communication channels which can be used for improving brand perceptions, with potential impact on revenue (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015).

- **Summarization of findings for brand awareness**

In a paper by Hutter et al. (2013), the findings show evidence of the relevance of social media and online content as it is found that the customer's fan page engagement is in a strong correlation with brand awareness and consumer decision-making, thus proving that social media content is impactful and relevant. Moreover, in another study by Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer (2012), it is confirmed that both positive and negative UGC carry brand information which can be seen as useful to consumers, therefore increasing awareness regardless of the form of that content. Khajuria and Rachna (2017), also observe that UGC and social media brand communications are predictors of brand awareness and can develop brand associations. Furthermore, the content produced by online communities can create and increase feelings of attachment, thus helping consumers connect to the brand (Khajuria and Rachna, 2017). Additionally, other scholars are discussing virtual interactivity as a social media platform feature, indicating that interactivity represents many-to-many communication and can contribute to the recognition and recall levels of awareness, thus connecting brand and consumer. Therefore, social media platforms are tools for enhancing customer engagement by participation in UGC, resulting in influencing brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2015). In their research Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), have determined that UGC positively influence brand awareness and associations. Besides, results show that consumers are knowingly differing between UGC and professionally created content. What is more, in regards to source credibility the study shows that individuals are strongly relaying on the opinions of family, friends, and other users as those are

perceived as more trustworthy (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). The conclusion of another paper points out that contributing to and creating UGC influence the individual's brand awareness, thus through online engagement with brands the recognition and recall levels will be increased. In addition, the authors identify social media platforms as effective communication channel which can be used for improving brand perceptions (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015).

3.7. User-generated Content and decision-making process

Consumers share experiences and opinions about brands in different online forms such as reviews, ratings, comments, recommendations, etc. on multiple social media platforms. However, all of those brand-related UGC appearing in social media can play the role and function as eWOM. There are existing studies which have examined the behavioural consequences of online word of mouth and content in various contexts, as consumer reviews websites, personal blogs, etc. It has been found that UGC and eWOM can influence the attitudes of consumers towards products, the decision-making process and purchase intentions along with the willingness to recommend a brand. Moreover, characteristics of the online content, as its sentiment have been found to influence product attitudes in different ways as positive and somewhat negative reviews can strengthen consumers' attitudes, while fully negative ones can increase undesirable behaviour (Kim and Johnson, 2016). With that in mind, a study by Kim and Johnson (2016), is incorporating the Stimulus-organism-response framework (S-O-R) to explain the influence of brand-related UGC on consumer's attitudes and behaviour. The framework exemplifies that when UGC (S) is encountered in social media platforms, that can arose emotional and cognitive responses in an individual (O) and those internal conditions influence the consumer's behaviour, decision-making and purchase intention (R), which are related to the brand, while the information is being processed (Kim and Johnson, 2016). The authors point out that, former researches implementing the framework in online environment have concluded that UGC is liked to decision-making and purchase intention. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that brand-related UGC can increase the interest of new consumers and motivate them in learning about the brand, hence potentially influencing their future purchase intentions. In regards to future purchase intentions and decision-making process it is stated that those are connected to consumers acting favourably towards the brand, based on different information stimuli as online

content related to that brand. An explanation of the relationship between UGC, eWOM and decision-making can be that such content gives individuals the opportunity to gain knowledge of brands, and to store that knowledge in their consideration sets. As mentioned, the consumer's consideration set consists of all brands that a consumer thinks of when deciding to make or not a purchase, as any of those brands can be recalled for a future purchase (Kim and Johnson, 2016). The findings state that, consumers' responses to UGC were related to brand sales, in the form of impulse buying, purchase decisions and future purchase intentions, to relationship building, as brand engagement, and the creation of content, as information pass-along and recommendations. As a result, brands should provide online venues where customers can communicate and connect while contributing to the brand by initiating and sustaining conversations and engagement, leading to increase in sales and company-customers relationships (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Another paper by Malthouse et al. (2016), explores if online content that produce customer engagement can increase purchase behaviours and affect decision-making. The authors state that, there are previous studies exploring various motivations behind consumers' contribution to create brand-related content. Based on those previous researches, customers engage in the creation of UGC in order to express personal identity, supporting the findings of Christodoulides et al. (2012), to have social interactions, to gather information, to distribute knowledge, or just because of entertainment (Malthouse et al., 2016). Also, it is recognized that a lot of the research connected to effects of UGC on decision-making has incorporated how such content influence others, as different researches examine product reviews and show that rating and reviews can influence pre-purchase search, product search, choice and the overall sales. Furthermore, it is also observed that not only characteristics regarding the produced content but also personal characteristics of the creator have an impact on the receiver (Malthouse et al., 2016). Moving on, a study by Park, Lee and Han (2007), investigates the effect of UGC, in the form of online consumer reviews, on purchase intentions and decision-making by acknowledging that the quantity and quality of online content are important characteristics affecting consumers and their information-processing. The authors state that, review quantity refers to the number of online reviews and review quality to their content. Since there is no standard format for online reviews, rating, etc. it is established that the review quality varies from short to long and from objective to subjective. Therefore, a high quality review is accepted to be giving evaluation based on actual facts, while being persuasive and logical in its wording. On the other hand, in regards to review

quantity, the amount of reviews can be taken as showing the popularity of the product, brand, etc., as the number of rating and reviews present the number of customers who have used the brand, product, etc. (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). In the paper, UGC is considered to have a dual role, as both recommender and informant. As recommender because it provides recommendation from previous customers, while as informant because it gives user-oriented information. Moreover, it is also recognised that consumer-created content is seen as more reliable than company-created information, as previous customers offer more honest evaluations from user's point of view making them more trustworthy, hence supporting the findings of Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015). Furthermore, information produced by consumers is more consumer-oriented, understandable and familiar to other users, as it describes different usage situations, product/service advantages and disadvantages and consumers' personal feelings or satisfaction from customer perspective (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). The findings of this research show that both quality and quantity of UGC, as online reviews, have an effect over purchase intentions and decision-making. On one hand, the higher number of reviews increases purchase intentions, as it indicates that the brand, product, etc. popularity. On the other hand, online content that is logical and based on facts has a strong and positive effect on decision-making and purchase intentions (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). In addition Park, Lee and Han (2007), conclude that low-involvement customers are mainly affected by review quantity, while high-involvement customers are influenced by both review quality and quantity. The authors argue that this can be explained by the role of reviews as recommender because even though low-quality reviews do not contain much useful information those still show that many people have bought the brand or product, hence increasing purchase intentions. Therefore, high-involvement customers are influenced by review quality, while review quantity affects them, as the amount of reviews is perceived to be a signal of product approval, thus again influencing decision-making and purchase intentions (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). A different paper also investigates social media platforms and UGC in regards to purchase decisions. Those scholars state that, online platforms can be seen as public forums where consumers express their own voices, as well as, gather product information in the form of consumer content that can facilitate their purchase decisions and alter the information-processing. In particular, social media peer communication and content, as form of consumer socialization, is being discussed as having an impact on decision-making which, in turn, affects the marketing strategies of brands. The paper points out that,

social media and especially social media platforms provide a virtual space for users to communicate freely, as also discussed by Barreda et al. (2015) in connection to virtual interactivity, hence making such media an important tool for customer socialization (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012). Wang, Yu and Wei (2012) suggest that, social media offers three conditions which encourage socialization. Starting with, providing communication tools making socialization easy and convenient. Second, the growth in number of users who decide to search for information and help online, thus social media having an influence over their consumption related decisions. And third, social media platforms facilitate education because of the high quantity of users who act as agents, hence offering large amounts of brand/product information and evaluations in short period of time. Moreover, the authors refer to previous studies that have consistently indicated that UGC and peer communication have an impact on consumer attitudes towards advertising and decision-making, thus influencing attitudes towards brands (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012). The paper is also considering a form of online peer influence, referred to as informational influence which drives individuals to seek information. Such knowledge can be gathered from well-informed peers or learnt by observing behaviours. Furthermore, when individuals are new in a group, community, brand, etc. they can be under informational influence, hence relying on everything learnt and observed from other users to determine their level of product/brand involvement, which ultimately can affect their attitudes and purchase decisions (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012). The findings show peer communication and content, in social media setting, positively influence decision-making and customers' purchase intentions. On one hand, there is a direct effect as consumers conform to the group's norms. On the other hand, the impact is indirect by strengthening their product involvement. Additionally, the authors offer practical implementations suggesting that companies should use social media in order to respond effectively to consumers. Such activities will engage users in online conversations, hence contribute to understanding their needs while building relationships during the purchase and post-purchase process (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012).

- **Summarization of findings for decision-making process**

In a study by Kim and Johnson (2016), the findings show that the responses consumers have in regards to UGC are related to brand sales, as impulse buying, purchase and future purchase decisions, to relationship building, as brand engagement and the creation of content, as information pass-along and recommendations. Those scholars suggest to companies to provide

venues where consumers can connect and communicate, hence contributing to the brand by imitating conversations and engagement (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Another research state both quality and quantity of UGC, as online reviews, have an effect over purchase intentions and decision-making. Those scholars determine that review quantity increases purchase intentions by showing that the brand is popular, while reviews which are based on facts and logic make a strong impression, thus having a positive effect on decision-making (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). Furthermore, Wang, Yu and Wei (2012) also find that online peer communication and content influence decision-making and purchase intentions in two ways, being directly by consumers conforming to the rules of a group, and indirectly by strengthening their product involvement. Those authors offer to companies to use social media to effectively communicate with consumers, thus increasing engagement which will result in better understanding of customers' needs and build relationships throughout the purchase and post-purchase process (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012).

3.8. Developed hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the found connections between the variables of UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process the following hypotheses are formulated:

- **Hypothesis 1**: Self-concept has a positive influence on the customer's involvement in creating UGC.

- **Hypothesis 2**: Co-creation has a positive influence on the customer's involvement in creating UGC.

- **Hypothesis 3**: Sense of community has a positive influence on the customer's involvement in creating UGC.

- **Hypothesis 4**: User-generated content has a positive influence on brand awareness.

- **Hypothesis 5**: User-generated content has a positive influence on consumer decision-making process.

- **Hypothesis 6**: The three motivating factors positively influence brand awareness through UGC.

- **Hypothesis 7**: The three motivating factors positively influence the customer's decision-making process through UGC.

4. A priori framework

Based on the above literature, the following part presents an a priori framework with the purpose to summarizing the findings, by giving a visual representation of the relationships between the variables of UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Moreover, different motivating factors influencing the creation of UGC will be included in the framework, thus illustrating the most important connections found from the literature. Furthermore, those relationships have been used to create the hypotheses which will be later tested with the use of primary data. That primary data will be gathered through the survey method and the survey questions will be related to the relationships from this framework, while being based on the established hypotheses. Following is a short explanation of the a priori framework, which is illustrated in figure 13 on the next page. Starting with the left side of the figure, different motivating factors for customer involvement in UGC are included based on a research conducted by Christodoulides et al. (2012). The factors are self-concept, co-creation and sense of community, and are part of the framework because it has been acknowledged that those stimuli encourage customers to participate in content creation. Further, UGC gives people the opportunity to express themselves by sharing their opinions, ideas, identities, etc. (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Continuing, in the middle of the framework is UGC, as such is affected and created based on the three motivating factors, while being influential in relation to brand awareness and decision-making process. Furthermore, on the right side of the framework, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process are incorporated because, as found from the literature these phenomena are influenced in multiple ways by UGC. The figure below shows the a priori framework, hence a better understanding of the connections and hypotheses can be achieved.
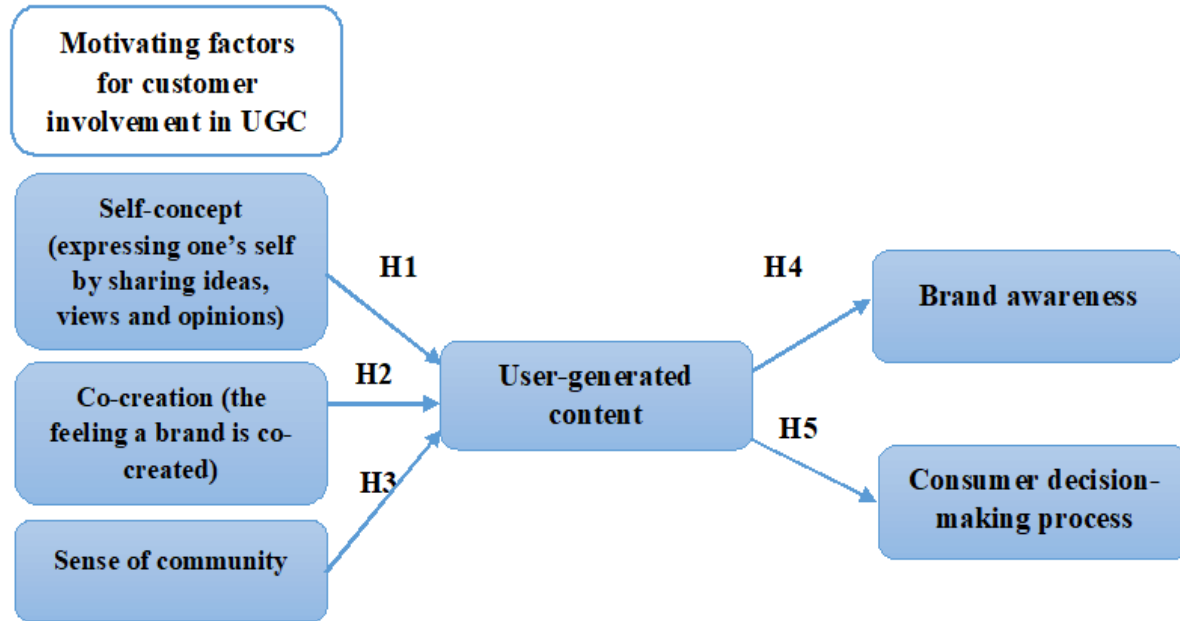
Figure 13. A priori framework based on Literature review, self-made

5. Data Analysis

This chapter is connected to the analysis of primary data, as in the beginning descriptive statistics are used to show the data distribution. Additionally, the chapter includes a discussion of the statistical analysis in relation to the hypotheses. The hypotheses are tested with the SPSS program, hence accepted or rejected based on the findings.

5.1. Descriptive Data

One way the data was collected was with an online survey distributed on Facebook and LinkedIn, as social media platforms because such are used on daily basis by a large number of consumers, and at the same time used as marketing channels by companies. Moreover, those platforms provide a wide range of consumer online content such as videos, reviews, ratings, comments, etc., while users can participate by sharing, liking, commenting, etc. The figure below shows the global digital population for April 2019.
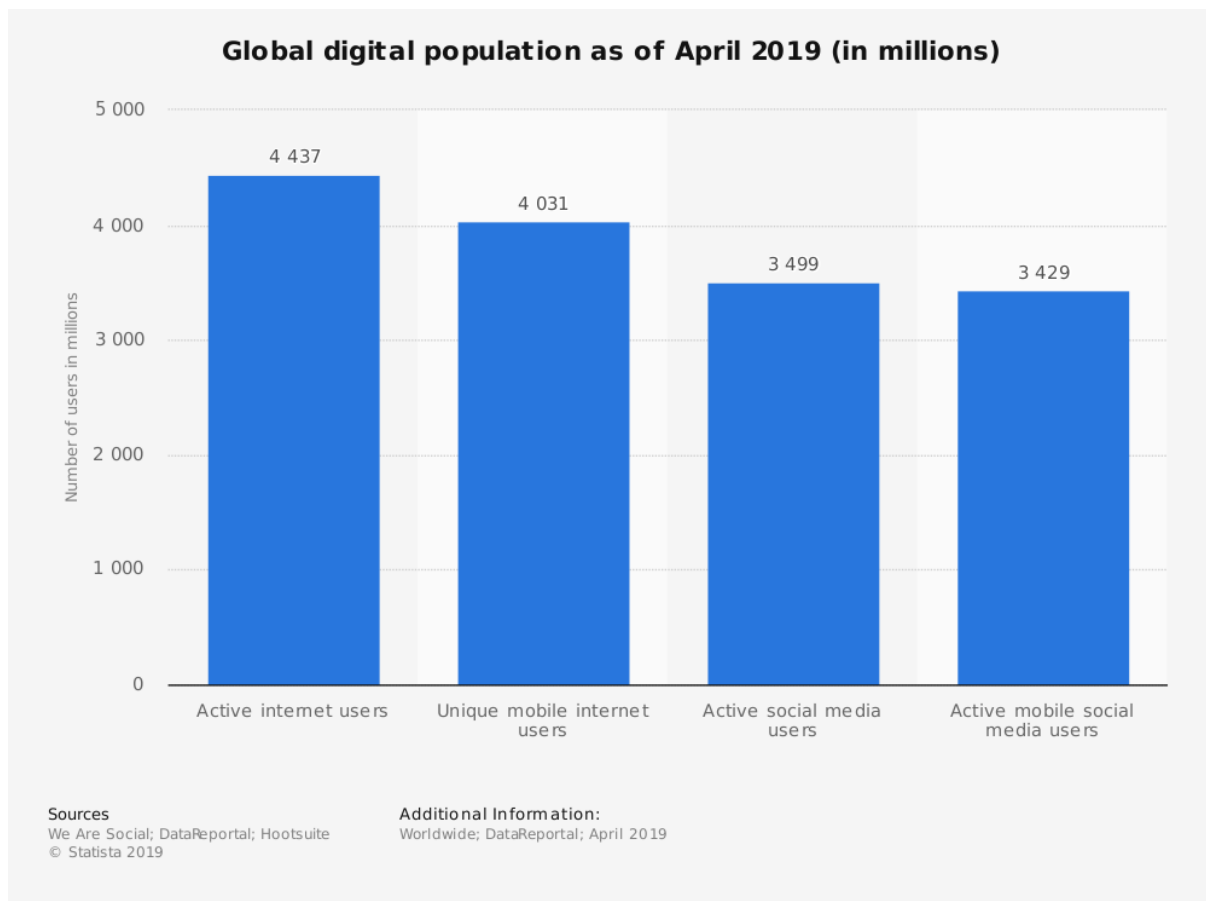

Figure 14. Global digital population as of April 2019 (Statista, 2019)

Figure 14 illustrates the number of active internet users being almost 4.4 billion people which is representative of around 58% of the global population (Statista, 2019). The figure also shows the amount of active social media users being nearly 3.5 billion for the same period, thus demonstrating the high importance and influence of social media. Furthermore, another part of the data was gathered by emailing the survey link to multiple groups of Aalborg University students, targeting younger and digitally-skilled generations.

Moving on, the data collection process was performed in the period of 3 weeks, from the 15th of April to the 6th of May 2019 using SurveyXact, and a total of 162 responses were gathered. In regards to gender, 57% of the participants are female and 43% male, out of which 39% are from Denmark, 38% from Bulgaria and the rest of 23% have chosen the option "other" (see Appendix 3). The majority of respondents, namely 46% are of age 25-34 years old, followed by 37% at age from 18 to 24, while only 17% are above 35. In relation to income, the majority have a low income of less than 10.000 DKK (36%), followed by 29% with a medium income of 10.000 to 20.000 DKK. Moreover, only 12% and 23% have, respectively, an average monthly income between 21.000 to 30.000 DKK and high income of 31.000 DKK or above, as shown in figure 15 below. However, this percentages might be a result of that many participants are of young age and might be students or newly graduated, as the survey was send to various student groups.

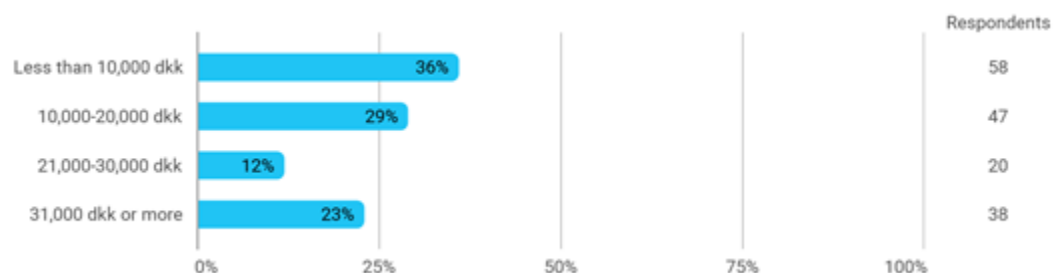**What is your monthly household income before taxes?**

Figure 15. Descriptive statistics for monthly household income, SurveyXact output

Next, connected to social media usage and platforms the respondents were asked if they use social media platforms as Facebook, where all 162 respondents have answered positively, hence confirming they are active users. Furthermore, the participants were asked to state their daily use of social media in hours and, as it can be seen in figure 16 below, 59% use social media between

1 to 3 hours, 17% less than an hour, 22% between 4-6 hours, while only 2% are active 7 hours or more. The numbers show that people are social media active on daily basis, hence being openly participating in social media platforms, as LinkedIn and Facebook.

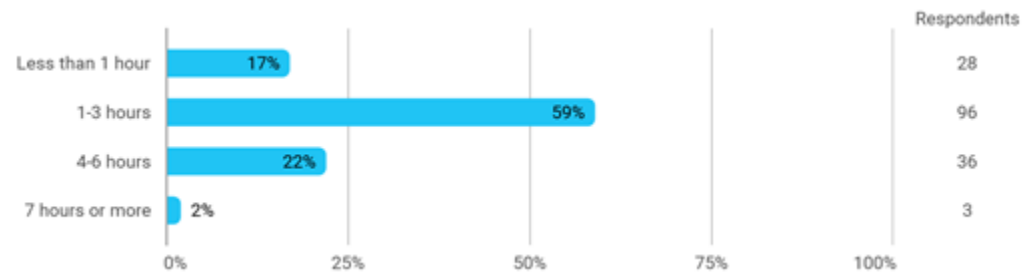**How many hours per day do you use social media?**

Figure 16. Descriptive statistics for active social media hours, SurveyXact output

The next question was related to UGC and the way the respondents participate in such and four answer options were given (see Appendix 3). To this question the responses are somewhat concentrated on one of the options of "liking the post", as 64% have chosen it. The rest of the answers are divided between the other options as 9% state "usually with writing comments", 13% "sharing the post" and 14% have chosen "none of the above". These percentages indicates the majority of respondents would like a post when they decide to express their online participation. However, in the following question, again related to UGC, the responses demonstrate that the larger part of respondents have contributed in creating online content in the past year, as 38% state have written an online review 2-5 times, 12% have chosen 6-9 times, 3% have selected 10 times or more, and 15% have created a review once, leaving 32% with the answer "never", as illustrated in figure 17 below. By combining the answers together it can be seen that 68% of the total 162 participants have created online reviews in the last year, hence showing the high customer involvement in online content, as reviews and ratings.

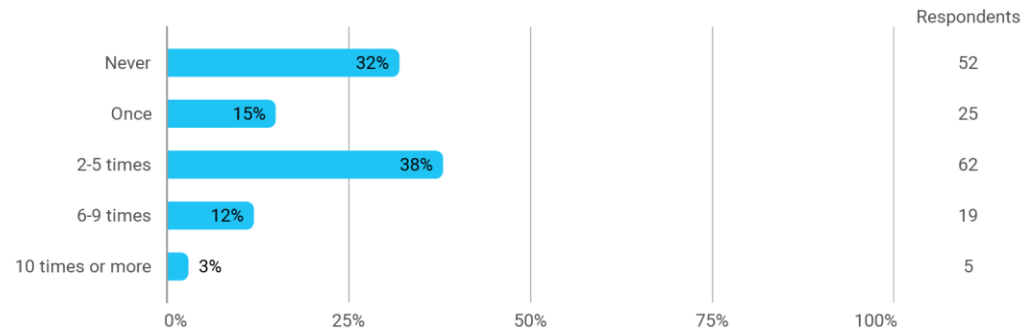**How many times in the last year have you written an online review?**

Figure 17. Descriptive statistics for online review creation, SurveyXact output

Additionally, a question related to the effects of online content over respondents' opinions about brands was used (see figure 18 below), where 61% have stated they are influenced from online reviews and ratings, while only 7% have chosen the option "no", showing the strong effect of UGC on consumers' perceptions of brands. The rest of the participants have selected that they are affected in their opinions when "most comments are negative" with 23% and "when most comments are positive" with just 9 %, highlighting the high influence of negative content and eWOM.

Do online reviews/ratings affect your opinion of a brand?
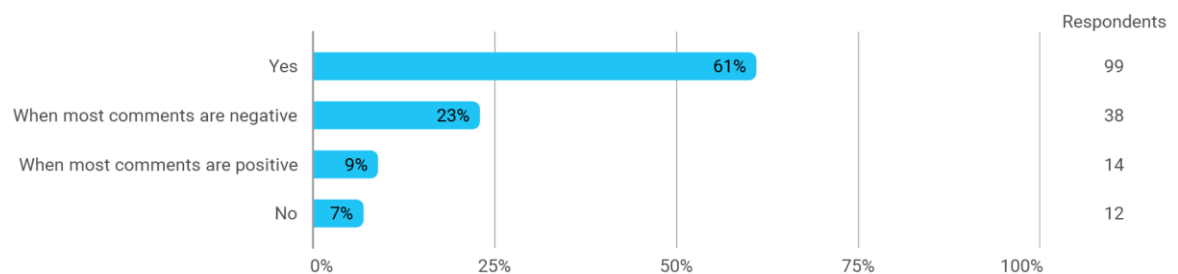
Figure 18. Descriptive statistics for effect of online content, SurveyXact output

5.2. Hypotheses Testing

Under this part, the hypotheses will be tested. The part is divided into five subparts so the data analysis can be structured.

5.2.1. H1, H2 and H3

First a multiple linear regression analysis is performed including the independent variables of "self-concept", "sense of community" and "co-creation" as motivating factors for customer

70

involvement UGC, and the dependent variable of "UGC". Figure 19 below exhibits the initial results of the analysis.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics	
					R Square Change	F Change
1	.370[a]	.137	.120	2.30913	.137	8.347

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total_community, Total_selfconcept, Total_cocreation

b. Dependent Variable: Total_ugc

Figure 19. Multiple regression analysis, Model summary for H1, H2 and H3, SPSS output

As seen in figure 19 the R^2, also known as multiple coefficient of determination, measures the strength of the overall relationship between the tested variables (Hair et al., 2015). Hair et al. (2015) state that, in multiple linear regression the R^2 represents the amount of variation in the dependent variable, in this case "UGC", associated with all of the independent variables taken together and included in the model, in this case "self-concept", "co-creation" and "sense of community". The indicated R^2 for this regression model is 0.137, hence 13.7% of the variation in "UGC" can be explained by the three independent variables. However, R^2 does increase when more independent variables are added, therefore to avoid overestimation of the impact of variables the adjusted R^2 can be used, as it calculates the R^2 based on the number of independent variables included (Hair et al., 2015). The adjusted R^2 for the regression is 0.120, meaning 12% of the variation of "UGC" is explained by the independent variables, thus indicating only a slight overestimation.

Moving on, the "ANOVA" table, figure 20 below, shows the regression model is statistically significant with F ratio of 8.347 and probability level of 0.000.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	133.528	3	44.509	8.347	.000[b]
	Residual	842.472	158	5.332		
	Total	976.000	161			

Figure 20. Multiple regression analysis, ANOVA table for H1, H2 and H3, SPSS output

The probability level of 0.000 means that the chance of the regression results to be due to random events, instead of a true relationship between variables, is 0.000 (Hair et al., 2015). Therefore, the motivating factors of "self-concept", "sense of community" and "co-creation" do predict weather a customer is going to be involved in creating UGC, hence it can be stated that there is a significant relationship between the tested variables.

Next, the "Coefficients" table is discussed as this section shows which independent variables are significant predictors. If some of the regression coefficients are not statistically significant, then the particular variables are not good predictors of the chosen dependent variable. Moreover, to measure the strength of the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent one the standardized coefficient Beta should be discussed (Hair et al., 2015). Figure 21 below illustrates the "Coefficients" table for the discussed regression model.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	11.425	.789		14.480	.000
	Total_selfconcept	.221	.107	.225	2.072	.040
	Total_cocreation	.146	.108	.156	1.351	.179
	Total_community	.022	.092	.024	.236	.814

Figure 21.Multiple regression analysis, Coefficients table for H1, H2 and H3, SPSS output

As it can be observed in the "Sig" column the independent variable of "self-concept" is significant with value of 0.04 being below the required 0.05, hence it can be concluded that the perception of customer's self-concept is significantly related to the involvement in UGC. Additionally, looking at the "Standardized Coefficients Beta" it can be noted that "self-concept" is most closely associated with "UGC" having a Beta coefficient of 0.225. The other two

independent variables of "so-creation" and "sense of community" have significance levels of respectively 0.179 and 0.814, above 0.05, while their Beta coefficients are 0.156 and 0.024 meaning those variables are not significant predictors of "UGC". Furthermore, according to Hair et al. (2015) the Beta coefficient shows how much the dependent variable would change for every unit of change in the independent variable. Hence, in H1 the Beta coefficient presents the relative relationship between customer's self-concept and UGC, showing the estimated increase of UGC associated with increase of one unit in customer's self-concept being 0.225.

To conclude, in the multiple linear regression analysis connected to hypotheses H1, H2 and H3, only H1 is accepted as the level of significance is 0.000 below the required 0.05, hence confirming H1 and demonstrating that self-concept has a positive impact on customer involvement in creating UGC. The H2 and H3 with significance levels of correspondingly 0.179 and 0.814 are rejected, as their significance is above 0.05.

5.2.2.   H4

Continuing, a bivariate linear regression is performed to test H4, hence including one dependent variable "brand awareness" and one independent variable "UGC". H4 is concerned with examining if there is a relationship between the two concepts. Figure 22 below illustrates the model summary.

Model Summary[b]

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | |
					R Square Change	F Change
1	.346[a]	.120	.114	1.78203	.120	21.717

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total_ugc

b. Dependent Variable: Total_brandawareness

Figure 22. Bivariate regression analysis, Model summary for H4, SPSS output

In this regression R^2 shows the amount of variation in the dependent variable that is associated with one independent variable (Hair et al., 2015). In this case, "UGC" accounts for 12% of the total variation in "brand awareness". Next, the ANOVA table shown in figure 23 below will be

addressed, as it contains important aspects as F ratio, regression and residual sum of squares, as well as, probability level.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	68.967	1	68.967	21.717	.000[b]
	Residual	508.101	160	3.176		
	Total	577.068	161			

a. Dependent Variable: Total_brandawareness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total_ugc

Figure 23. Bivariate regression analysis, ANOVA table for H4, SPSS output

First, addressing the "Sum of squares" column showing the amount of variance in "brand awareness" that is associated with "UGC" under the "regression sum of squares" being 68.967, also referred to as explained variance. The rest of the total variance in "brand awareness" is not related to "UGC" being referred to as unexplained variance, or "residual sum of squares". This is important, as according to Hair et al. (2015) the F ratio results from comparison between the explained and unexplained variance of the model. The F ratio is showing the statistical significance and the larger it is, the more of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent one (Hair et al., 2015). As shown in the above figure the F ratio for the discussed model is 21.717 indicating highly significant model with probability level of 0.000, thus showing a significant relationship between the tested variables.

Following, the regression coefficients are addressed, shown in figure 24 below.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.792	.873		8.923	.000
	Total_ugc	.266	.057	.346	4.660	.000

Figure 24. Bivariate regression analysis, Coefficients table for H4, SPSS output

Here, attention is given to the "Unstandardized Coefficients Beta" presenting the regression coefficient for "UGC" being 0.266, thus interpreted as for every unit increase in "UGC" there will be an increase of 0.266 units in "brand awareness" (Hair et. al., 2015). Also, the column "Sig" is important as it shows the statistical significance of the regression coefficient for "UGC" being 0.000, thus under the required 0.05 level, therefore "UGC" is a significant predictor of "brand awareness", hence confirming H4. However, the relationship between "UGC" and "brand awareness" is positive but only somewhat strong, as the model is significant but the R^2 is 0.120 being somehow low. It is apparent there should be focus on the effects and impact of UGC on brand awareness, however, UGC might not the only factor influencing awareness, therefore others should also be considered in order to improve and increase consumers' brand awareness. To sum up, H4 is accepted as the level of significance is 0.000, being below 0.05, hence demonstrating that UGC has a positive impact on customers' brand awareness, and that there is a relationship between these two variables.

5.2.3. H5

A second bivariate regression is included to test H5 concerned with the relationship between the independent variable "UGC" and the dependent variable "consumer decision-making process". Same as above, the metrics of R^2, F ratio, probability level and regression coefficients will be addressed throughout. Figure 25 below shows the tables of Model summary, ANOVA and Coefficients grouped together.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	F Change
1	.532[a]	.283	.278	2.10746	.283	63.047

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	280.017	1	280.017	63.047	.000[b]
	Residual	710.625	160	4.441		

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
	Total	990.642	161			

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	7.252	1.033		7.022	.000
	Total_ugc	.536	.067	.532	7.940	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Total_desicionmaking

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total_ugc

Figure 25. Bivariate regression analysis for H5, SPSS output

Starting with R^2 showing that "UGC" accounts for 28.3% of the variation in "consumer decision-making process", hence 28.3% of the variation in the dependent variable is associated with the independent one. Second, when looking at the ANOVA table, the F ratio represents the statistical significance of the model, and in this case the F ratio is 63.047 which makes the model highly significant. Moreover, the probability level of 0.000, seen in the ANOVA table, also demonstrates significant relationship between the tested variables of "consumer decision-making process" and "UGC". Following, in the regression coefficients table the "Unstandardized Coefficients Beta" for "UGC" has a value of 0.536, thus demonstrating that there is an increase of 0.536 units in "consumer decision-making process" for every unit increase in "UGC" (Hair et. al., 2015). This Beta coefficient represents the strength of the relationship between the two variables, therefore showing the unit increase of the dependent variable when there is an increase in the independent. Furthermore, the column "Sig" indicates the statistical significance of the independent variable "UGC" is 0.000 being below 0.05 level making "UGC" significantly related to "consumer decision-making process". Hence "UGC" is a highly significant predictor of the dependent variable, therefore supporting H5. Summing up, H5 is accepted thus confirming UGC has a positive impact on consumer decision-making process.

Continuing, the last two hypotheses connected to UGC having a mediating effect, will be tested with two additional multiple linear regressions, including one dependent and several independent

variables. In the following the hypotheses are discussed separately from one another, in order to gain more comprehensive understanding of the results.

5.2.4. H6

This multiple regression analysis incorporates the motivating factors for customer involvement in UGC as independent variables, while brand awareness is being taken as the dependent variable. Therefore, the independent variables of the model are "self-concept", "sense of community" and "co-creation". Figure 26 underneath shows the Model summary, the ANOVA and the Coefficients tables for the regression model. Furthermore, the statistical measures of R^2, adjusted R^2, F ratio, probability level, and regression coefficients will be addressed.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change
					Change Statistics	
1	.504[a]	.254	.240	1.65055	.254	17.941

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	146.628	3	48.876	17.941	.000[b]
	Residual	430.440	158	2.724		
	Total	577.068	161			

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.896	.564		14.001	.000
	Total_selfconcept	.176	.076	.233	2.310	.022
	Total_cocreation	.192	.077	.267	2.494	.014
	Total_community	.041	.066	.057	.615	.539

a. Dependent Variable: Total_brandawareness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total_community, Total_selfconcept, Total_cocreation
Figure 26. Multiple regression analysis for H6, SPSS output

As shown the R^2 for the regression is 0.254, thus measuring the strength of the overall relationship between the variables. Also, the R^2 of the model indicates that 25.4% of the variation in "brand awareness" can be explained and associated with the independent variables of "self-concept", "co-creation" and "sense of community" considered together. However, in order to prevent overestimation in the model the adjusted R^2 is also looked at and it is presenting just a minor overestimation, as its value is 0.240, hence accounts for 24% of the variation in "brand awareness". Continuing, in the ANOVA table the F ratio of 17.941 indicates the model is statistically significant with a probability level of 0.000. It can be concluded that the three independent variables predict brand awareness, as there is an overall significant relationship. Next, the coefficients table demonstrates which independent variables are statistically significant predictors of the dependent, and as it can be seen, under the column "Sig", the variables of "self-concept" and "co-creation" are significant with values of respectively 0.022 and 0.014, being below the 0.05 level. Based on that, it can assumed that customer's self-concept and the level of co-creation are considerably related to consumer's brand awareness. When looking at the "Sig" for "sense of community", this independent variable is not significant with value of 0.539, hence above the 0.05 level, therefore not being a strong predictor of "brand awareness". Furthermore, the coefficients table presents the strength of the relationships between the variables with the "Standardized Coefficients Beta" column. Here, it can be noted that "co-creation" is most closely associated with "brand awareness" with value of 0.267, followed by "self-concept" with value 0.233, and lastly is "sense of community" with the lowest value of 0.057. These values show the unit increase in the dependent variable of "brand awareness" when there is an increase in each of the independent variables.

In conclusion, H6 is accepted as the overall model is highly significant with probability level of 0.000. Even though the variable "sense of community" is not found to be a significant predictor of "brand awareness" on its own, the combination of all three variables in the model is significant. The hypothesis is concerned with finding if the three motivating factors grouped and considered together are influential, through UGC, and because of that the multiple linear regression for H6 shows the variables are significant in relation to brand awareness.

5.2.5. H7

The last hypothesis, H7, again includes the three motivating factors for customer involvement in online content as independent variables, while "consumer decision-making process" is the dependent variable. The below figure 27 illustrates the multiple linear regression tables, as well as, the statistical measures of R^2, adjusted R^2, F ratio, probability level, and regression coefficients discussed underneath.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics	
					R Square Change	F Change
1	.411[a]	.169	.153	2.28303	.169	10.687

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	167.113	3	55.704	10.687	.000[b]
	Residual	823.529	158	5.212		
	Total	990.642	161			

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	11.117	.780		14.250	.000
	Total_selfconcept	.051	.105	.051	.480	.632
	Total_cocreation	.204	.107	.216	1.912	.058
	Total_community	.180	.091	.193	1.973	.050

a. Dependent Variable: Total_desicionmaking

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total_community, Total_selfconcept, Total_cocreation

Figure 27. Multiple regression analysis for H7, SPSS output

Starting with the R^2 of 0.169 indicating that 16.9% of the variation in "consumer decision-making process" can be explained by the three independent variables. Again, the adjusted R^2 is also considered, and as seen in the figure it is 0.153 hence advocating for just a slight overestimation. Furthermore, the ANOVA table shows that the model should be considered as significant because of the F ratio of 10.687 and probability level of 0.000, thus showing there is a true relationship between the tested variables, and the model is not due to random events. Hence, the three motivating factors do predict the consumer decision-making process, as there is a solid overall relationship. However, the "Sig" column shows that only "sense of community", considered on its own, is a significant predictor of the dependent variable of "consumer decision-making process" with value of 0.050, being right at the maximum of the allowed level of 0.05. The rest of the independent variables, taken separately, are not statistically significant with values of 0.632 and 0.058 for respectively "self-concept" and "co-creation". Additionally, the "Standardized Coefficients Beta" column represents that "co-creation" has the highest association with the dependent variable with beta value of 0.216, while "sense of community" is second with value 0.193 and "self-concept" is last with beta of 0.051. As mentioned previously, these beta values show the amount of unit increase in the dependent variable if an increase occurs in the independent variables of the model.

To summarize, H7 is accepted as the complete model is significant with F ratio of 10.687 and probability level of 0.000, being below the required level of 0.05. That is demonstrating the independent variables are important in regards to consumer decision-making process. Besides, as with the previously discussed H6, this hypothesis is also concerned with the influence of the three motivating factors in combination, rather than separately. Therefore, even though two of the variables have insignificant levels, still all variables collectively are found to be significant.

To recap, H1, H4, H5, H6 and H7 are accepted, while H2 and H3 are rejected. The following table 2 presents the accepted hypotheses.

	H1	H4	H5	H6	H7
F ratio, Sig.	8.347/ 0.040				
F ratio, Sig.		21.717/ 0.000			
F ratio, Sig.			63.047/ 0.000		

F ratio, Sig.				17.941/ 0.000	
F ratio, Sig.					10.687/0.000

Table 2. Accepted hypotheses, self-made based on SPSS output

6. Discussion and Posteriori framework

Based on the analysis a new conceptual framework is developed and will be explained in this part. Moreover, the findings from the hypotheses will be discussed.

Starting with hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 connected to the three motivating factors for customer involvement in generating UGC, namely self-concept, sense of community and co-creation. As explained in the literature, those factors influence and motivate consumers in creating content. As stated by Christodoulides et al. (2012) the feeling of community, the sense a brand is co-created and the expression of one's self affect customers. The aim of the hypotheses was to test if there is a relationship between the three motivating factors, considered separately, and UGC. The reason behind choosing those variables was based on the findings of Christodoulides et al. (2012) that sense of community, self-concept and co-creation have a positive impact on involvement in UGC. However, the regression analysis performed in relation to H1, H2 and H3 showed that only H1 should be accepted, stating self-concept truly has a positive impact on UGC, as the findings pointed out that this is the only factor which was statistically significant. Furthermore, the overall regression model was significant indicating that all factors combined influence UGC, however, the coefficients for "sense of community" and "co-creation" failed to be significant predictors of customer involvement in online content. These results somehow oppose the findings of Christodoulides et al. (2012). Nevertheless, the regression itself, with all three factors, showed significance which does support the conclusions made by the authors. Therefore, it needs to be clarified that the findings might have been influenced by the study context, as the survey respondents were simply asked to consider if they would feel a certain way, or take an actions in particular situations by rating their answers from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Thus, this situation could have been with generally low involvement conditions in comparison with other satiations, where the respondents are actually part of an online community, or actively create and review brand related UGC. In such situations the participants might be more motivated, hence the factors would be stimulated. So, it is possible that if respondents were put in a different situation, such as an experimental design, the outcome might have been fully supporting the conclusions made by Christodoulides et al. (2012). Moving on, H4 was related to testing if UGC has an impact on brand awareness. This hypothesis was based on multiple studies, as it was found by Hutter et al. (2013) that social media and

online content are in strong correlation with brand awareness. Other scholars acknowledge that both positive and negative content have influence over awareness, as both can be used by consumers in developing brand perceptions (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012). Additionally, many-to-many communication held on online platforms can contribute to the recognition and recall levels of awareness (Barreda et al., 2015), while Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) and Khajuria and Rachna (2017) determine that UGC positively influence and predict brand awareness, as consumers strongly rely on opinions of family, friends, and others as those are perceived more trustworthy. Hence, H4 was tested with a bivariate linear regression analysis. The results showed that the hypothesis should be accepted, hence supporting the theories from the literature and acknowledging the findings by the above scholars. However, the results indicated that there might be other variables which need to be considered as impactful over awareness. That was based on the results that the relationship between the two variables is partially strong as the adjusted R^2 was in the lower percentages.

The fifth hypothesis was concerning the relationship between UGC and consumer decision-making process. Here, the dependent variable was the decision-making process and the independent UGC, again implementing a bivariate regression analysis. This hypothesis was developed based on findings from various papers, as it was confirmed by Park, Lee and Han (2007) that both quality and quantity of UGC impact consumer's purchase intentions and decision-making. Furthermore, Kim and Johnson (2016) argued that the customer's responses in regards to UGC have influence over sales and purchase intentions, while Wang, Yu and Wei (2012) observe that online peer communication influence decision-making in two ways, by increasing product involvement and by customers conforming to a group. Furthermore, Hutter et al. (2013) suggest that UGC found on customer's fan pages is related to decision-making process. The performed regression analysis confirmed H5, as the model was found highly significant with probability level of 0.000 and F ration of 63.047, showing UGC has a strong impact over decision-making process. It was found that UGC's Beta coefficient was also really strong with a value of 0.536. Therefore, the results fully support the findings of the literature, hence indicate the strong relationship between UGC and customers decision-making process. Continuing, H6 and H7 were developed as it was considered that, as the three motivating factors have an influence over UGC, those might also have an impact over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process, through UGC. In those hypotheses UGC was seen as a

mediating factor. Taking the literature in mind, H6 was concerned with testing if there is a relationship between self-concept, sense of community, co-creation and brand awareness, while H7 was looking for a relationship between the same stimuli and decision-making process. Therefore, for both hypotheses multiple linear regression analyses were performed. In relation to H6 is was found that the relationship is significant with probability level of 0.000, while self-concept and co-creation had the strongest impact over awareness, with "Sig" values lower that 0.05 level. Only sense of community was not a strong predictor of brand awareness as its "Sig" value was 0.539. Even though, one of the independent variables was not having a strong effect over the dependent variable, the three factors taken together demonstrated a significant relationship, therefore confirming H6.

Next, H7 was tested with the same type of regression analysis and it was determined that it should be accepted as the probability level was significant (0.000 value), hence confirming there is a relationship between the three independent and the dependent variables. In this regression only one of the independent variables, namely sense of community, showed a significant value of 0.050 when the variables were considered separately. The other two motivating factors were observed to have insignificant values, however, the model as a whole was significant therefore the hypothesis was accepted. It needs to be mentioned, that in both H6 and H7 some of the independent variables, considered alone, were not significant predictors of the dependent variables but the hypotheses were exploring the relationships between the motivating factors combined together and the dependent variables, and because of that reason both H6 and H7 were confirmed.

To sum up, by accepting H1 it is shown that customer's self-concept is strongly related to involvement in online content. That suggests customers are more involved in user content when it is connected to brands which allow them to define and express themselves creatively. The findings show that the factors of sense of community and co-creation do not have a significant relationship with UGC. These results could be based on that UGC is not created by the branding and marketing activities of a company, hence consumers would not feel as co-creators of the brand when participating, as UGC is created by users. Moreover, it is possible that if the content was created by the brand the relationship would have been more significant, thus co-creation becoming more influential towards consumers' involvement. Furthermore, the low significance of "sense of community" could be explained as consumers who engage in brand related UGC

already feel some sense of community, therefore they are active and willingly participating in content creation. Therefore, it can be assumed that what leads customers to feel sense of community and co-creation is not only the level of involvement in UGC, but also the brand itself and the context of Web 2.0. Furthermore, the findings show that UGC has a positive impact on brand awareness and consumer decision-making process, by accepting H4 and H5. These relationships show that customers are likely to consider brands as being part of their consideration set for purchase and keep them in memory when there is UGC for those brands, hence showing the strong connection between online content and customer perceptions. Accepting the hypotheses is an evidence of the importance of UGC, while online content brand campaigns, if carefully managed can enhance awareness and increase purchases, while social media platforms can be used to spread brand messages. Finally, accepting H6 and H7 suggests that there is a significant relationship between customer's self-concept, feeling of community and co-creation, and both brand awareness and decision-making process. This shows that a brand can enhance awareness and increase purchase intentions through strong UGC campaigns and conversations which are, in turn, influenced by customers' perceptions of co-creation, community and self-concept. These insights provide additional information of the ways in which UGC can be utilized, in order to build positive brand awareness and influence decision-making, by implementing strategies based on customers wants, needs and input.

As mentioned above, a new framework was developed to give a visual representation of the relationships from the analysis. Figure 28 below illustrates the connections between the variables of self-concept, sense of community, co-creation, UGC, brand awareness and consumer decision-making process.
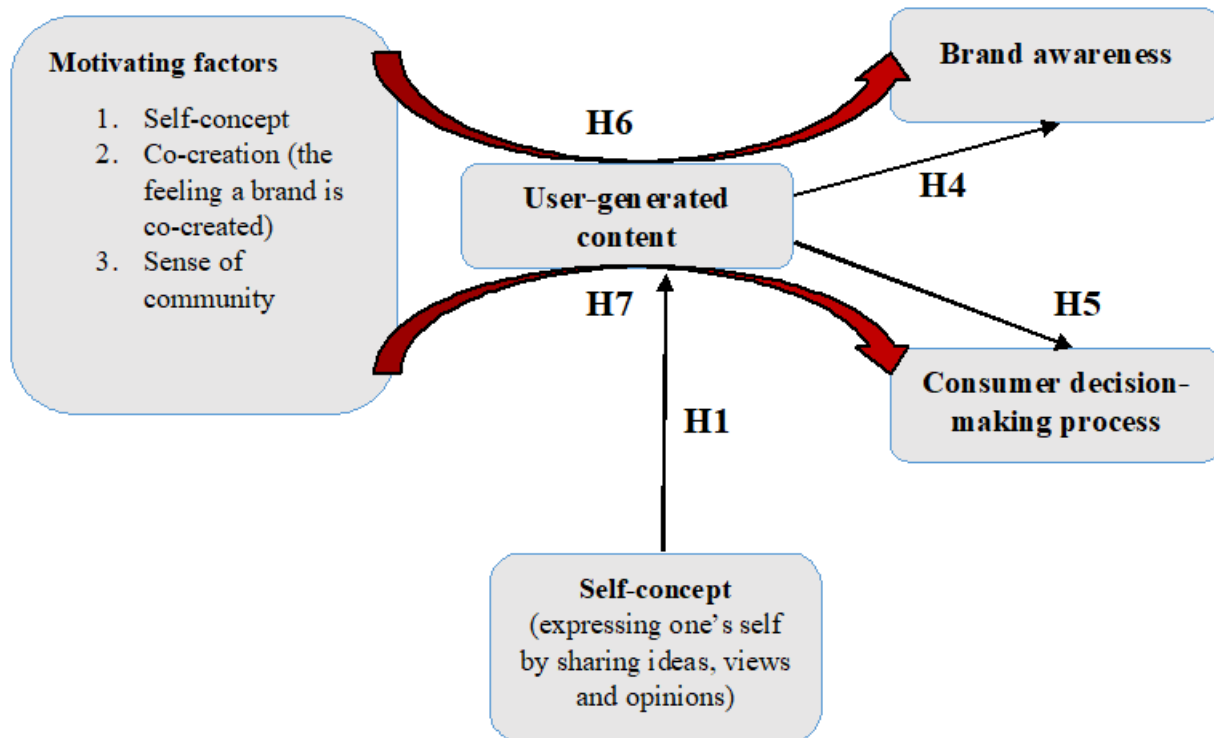
Figure 28. Posteriori framework based on Analysis, self-made

Starting with the left side of the figure, it can be seen that the motivating factors for customer involvement in online content have been grouped together, as those are considered in combination with each other in H6 and H7. As discussed, it was found that the three factors have a relationship with brand awareness and decision-making process. Moving on, in the middle the position of UGC remains the same, as it was in the a priori framework. However, it can be seen that there is another variable added, namely self-concept, as it was found that only H1 out of the first three hypotheses was accepted. Therefore, self-concept was added to the framework as a separate entity influencing UGC. Lastly the right side of the framework is also changed, as now there are two additional relationships added, being H6 and H7, showing the three motivating factors' impact over brand awareness and decision-making process. Additionally, the relationship between UGC and brand awareness remains unchanged, as H4 is accepted, as well as, the relationship between UGC and consumer decision-making process as H5 is also confirmed.

7. Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion of the research, hence giving answers to the two research questions related to the purpose, which is to investigate: **The impact of user-generated content, found on social media platforms, over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process**. Moreover, different theoretical and managerial implications are addressed, together with the limitations of the study.

7.1. Research questions and Main findings

The paper included two research questions, as the first one was: "*What are the factors influencing consumer involvement in generating UGC?*" aiming to explore the different motivators for customers in order to be involved and influenced from online content. Based on the gathered literature, researchers have found that there are multiple motivating factors for customer participation in content. The customer's self-image, the feeling of community and the perception that a brand is co-created between the company and the consumers are three of the most recognized factors. Therefore, their influence was analysed and according to the findings the aspects combined do have a significant effect over involvement in online content. However, it is also found that customer's self-concept is the strongest predictor of UGC and because of that it was considered the most impactful.

The second research question was: "*What is the impact of UGC over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process?*" concerning the concept of brand awareness, as part of customer-based brand equity, and the concept of decision-making process through which consumers go when deciding to buy or not a product. According to the literature, online content produced by peers, friends, other users, etc. is seen as more reliable in comparison with information provided by companies, leading to consumers thrusting more such content. Furthermore, it is found that social media platforms are in multiple ways influencing consumer preferences and opinions of brands, therefore companies' social media presence have become important, in order to develop and maintain the brand for the consumer. Thus, social media platforms and UGC have been considered as influential. In relation to the data analysis there were two hypotheses examining the relationships between respectively UGC and brand awareness, and UGC and the decision-making process. The analysis of both showed that UGC is influential over the discussed concepts, however, it was found that the strongest impact was over

the consumer decision-making process. Furthermore, in regards to the relationship between online content and brand awareness it was observed that UGC does have a significant association with awareness.

7.2. Theoretical contributions

The primary contribution of this paper is to support the already existing literature by identifying the positive and significant effect of UGC over brand awareness and consumer decision-making process. Additionally, the findings show the importance of social media platforms as communication channels, while indicating UGC's significance in regards to consumer perceptions and opinions.

All in all, it can be concluded that the three motivating factors of self-concept, sense of community and co-creation do influence consumer participation in UGC, as self-concept is with the strongest effect. Nevertheless, the range of factors which might be significant to customers can be extremely broad, therefore suggesting there are more aspects to be considered and addressed, in order to determine all reasons for customer involvement in UGC. Still, this research confirms the assumptions based on the literature, as it shows the significant combined effect of the motivating factors over UGC. What is more, the study adds to the existing information by indicating that self-concept is with the highest consequences, therefore implying consumers are highly motivated to create brand content when feeling as they can express themselves through that brand.

In regards to the influence of UGC over brand awareness and decision-making process it was found that both relationships exist, as the first relationship supports multiple findings of other studies acknowledging the importance of UGC, and its effect over consumer purchase intentions, attitudes, behaviours and sales. Therefore, UGC is perceived as an influential source of information. The relationship between brand awareness and UGC was not as strong as the previous one, indicating UGC is only one of the variables influencing consumer's brand awareness. Therefore, additional factors might need to be included in order to given more elaborative explanations. Nevertheless, the analysis clarify the existence of relationships between the tested variables.

Moreover, prior findings are extended by this research as it shows that two main streams of theories can be combined, namely the motivating factors for customer involvement in UGC

having an influence over brand awareness and decision-making process, hence showing the invisible relationships between the concepts occurring through UGC, therefore indicating the strong impact of UGC in the social media environment. These relationships were tested and the findings showed that associations between the concepts do exist. Further, the relationships can be seen as an important contribution to explanations of consumer behaviour in relation to online content, social media platforms and marketing, and to the effects of various customer motivators on the customer decision-making process.

Also, this study shows the applicability of brand-related UGC in respect to social media platforms and the online presence of a brand. Furthermore, including the whole consumer decision-making process creates a more complete approach in regards to the effects of UGC over brands, instead of incorporating specific outcomes, as sale numbers or purchase history.

7.3. Managerial implications

These findings could be utilized by companies in order to implement interactive strategies to increase brand awareness and purchase intentions, while building a stronger relationship with consumers, based on their needs and input. First, since self-concept was established as the most significant motivating factor a strategy encouraging self-expression and creativity, through involvement and participation in UGC, can have a positive impact on brand awareness, while being related to the decision-making process. Moreover, co-creation should be reinforced, therefore creating ongoing dialogs between company and consumers, hence enhancing customer participation in brand-related activities. Also, focus should be put on creating sense of community and belonging within consumers through participation in online content, as that would heighten the customer identification with the brand. Further, that would also increase and build stronger relationships among consumers, hence improving communication between people with similar interests, thus producing more positive brand related UGC. What is more, UGC should be constantly monitored in order to avoid damage, to add value to the brand, and to understand consumers better through their unfiltered input and perceptions, while implementing those in relation to brand awareness and to increase sales.

This paper provides an empirical evidence of the importance of UGC related to brands awareness and consumer decision-making process, showing that UGC is capable of influencing consumers in their opinions of a brand. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the perceptions of co-

creation, sense of community and the customer's self-concept are important areas influencing consumers in their involvement in content, as well as, having an impact on awareness and the decision-making process. From a managerial perspective, the findings of the paper show the relevance of social media platforms and the user content for brand management, as the importance of UGC towards brand awareness and decision-making is indicated, and seen as integral part which should be used in different communication strategies.

7.4. Limitations

First, a lower number of Likert items were used to measure some of the constructs of the conceptual framework, which was presented in the paper. Therefore, adding further items in the measurement model can give more elaborative results and enhance the findings. However, since those constructs were used to measure the reliability and validity, and provided satisfactory numbers this limitation did not have a serious influence over the present study. Another limitation is concerning the use of demographic variables into the analysis, as income, gender, etc. Including those variables could have provided valuable insights into the perceptions and behaviours of the respondents in connection to their usage of social media platforms and opinions about UGC, hence influencing their brand awareness and decision-making process. Next, the study did not include potentially impactful variables such as UGC credibility, which can have an effect over creating and keeping the respondents' interest in UGC. Adding such variables can identify other factors that have a significant impact over customers' perception of UGC, brand awareness and decision-making process. Moving on, a limitation is seen in the amount of survey questions, as those were limited in order to prevent confusion and boredom of participants. Furthermore, the respondents were predominantly young with a rather high level of social media platform usage, thus the findings can be somehow restricted, thereby different age and usage groups could be studied in order to compare findings. Additional limitation is connected to analysing a larger sample of the population in multiple countries, hence providing stronger generalization and validation of the findings. However, the number of participants in this study was limited by time restrictions, and even though the sample size is not fully representative it should still be considered as valid, thus giving an adequate inputs related to the studied topic.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Appendix 1 - The survey

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

I am a student from International Marketing at Aalborg University, currently writing my master thesis about the effects of online content on consumers.

To complete the survey you will need approximately 5-10 minutes, and your answers will be fully anonymous and confidential.

The gathered responses will only be used for the purpose of this research.

Thank you in advance.

Your time and effort is appreciated.

What is your gender?

(1) ❑ Male

(2) ❑ Female

What is your age?

(1) ❑ Below 18

(2) ❑ 18-24

(3) ❑ 25-34

(4) ❑ Above 35

What is your home country?

(1) ❑ Denmark

(2) ❑ Bulgaria

(3) ❑ Other

What is your monthly household income before taxes?

(1) ❑ Less than 10,000 dkk

(2) ❑ 10,000-20,000 dkk

(3) ❑ 21,000-30,000 dkk

(4) ❑ 31,000 dkk or more

Do you use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.?

(1) ❑ Yes

(2) ❑ No

How many hours per day do you use social media?

(1) ❑ Less than 1 hour

(2) ❑ 1-3 hours

(3) ❑ 4-6 hours

(4) ❑ 7 hours or more

In what way do you participate in online posts?

(1) ❑ Usually with writing comments

(2) ❑ With sharing the post

(3) ❑ With liking the post

(4) ❑ None of the above

How many times in the last year have you written an online review?

(1) ❑ Never

(2) ❑ Once

(3) ❑ 2-5 times

(4) ❑ 6-9 times

(5) ❑ 10 times or more

Do online reviews/ratings affect your opinion of a brand?

(1) ❑ Yes

(2) ❑ When most comments are negative

(3) ❑ When most comments are positive

(4) ❑ No

Below are number of statements, please read each one and rate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel good expressing myself online	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
My choice of brands says a lot about me	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I share my point of view about brands by writing comments/reviews	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoy creating online content about brands	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I want to be able to have online conversations with brands	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I feel more connected to brands which respond to their customers	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I communicate with other people online because of a shared interest	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I am more willing to engage online when I am part of a community	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I feel a sense of community when I share my experiences about brands	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

Below are number of statements, please read each one and rate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I believe that user reviews are more honest than information from the company	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
Online reviews lower the risk of disappointment when I have not tried a brand before	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I would trust more a review from an average person than an expert	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust comments from people who have bought the brand/product	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

Below are number of statements, please read each one and rate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I can recognize the brands I like	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I can remember the advertising of a brand I like	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
If I am a fan of a brand I remember it often	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I can easily describe the brands I like to a friend	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
I feel familiar with products of the brands I buy	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

Below are number of statements, please read each one and rate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel good buying products that have positive reviews	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
If most of the reviews are positive I will buy the product	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
User comments and reviews have in the past influenced my decision	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Online reviews and ratings help me decide if I should buy a product or not	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑
If most of the reviews are negative I will not buy the product	(1) ❑	(2) ❑	(3) ❑	(4) ❑	(5) ❑

9.2 Appendix 2 - Coding of survey

Variable name	Responses	Coding
(gender)	Male	1
	Female	2
(age)	Below 18	1
	18-24	2
	25-34	3
	Above 35	4
(country)	Denmark	1
	Bulgaria	2
	Other	3
(income)	Less than 10,000 dkk	1
	10,000-20,000 dkk	2
	21,000-30,000 dkk	3
	31,000 dkk or more	4
(smpuse) - Do you use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.?	Yes	1
	No	2
(hourday) - How many hours per day do you use social media?	Less than 1 hour	1
	1-3 hours	2
	4-6 hours	3
	7 hours or more	4
(howpar) - In what way do you participate in online posts?	Usually with writing comments	1
	With sharing the post	2
	With liking the post	3
	None of the above	4
(writerev) - How many times in the last year have you written an online review?	Never	1
	Once	2
	2-5 times	3

	6-9 times	4
	10 times or more	5
(opinion) - Do online reviews/ratings affect your opinion of a brand?	Yes	1
	When most comments are negative	2
	When most comments are positive	3
	No	4
SC1 (self-concept) - I feel good expressing myself online	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
SC2 (self-concept) - My choice of brands says a lot about me	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
SC3 (self-concept) - I share my point of view about brands by writing comments/reviews	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
CO1 (co-creation) - I enjoy creating online content about brands	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
CO2 (co-creation) - I want to be able to have online conversations with brands	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3

	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
CO3 (co-creation) - I feel more connected to brands which respond to their customers	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
COM1 (sense of community) - I communicate with other people online because of a shared interest	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
COM2 (sense of community) - I am more willing to engage online when I am part of a community	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
COM3 (sense of community) - I feel a sense of community when I share my experiences about brands	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
UGC1 - I believe that user reviews are more honest than information from the company	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
UGC2 - Online reviews lower the risk of disappointment when I have not tried a brand before	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4

	Strongly agree	5
UGC3 - I would trust more a review from an average person than an expert	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
UGC4 - I trust comments from people who have bought the brand/product	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
BA1 (brand awareness) – I can recognize the brands I like	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
BA2 (brand awareness) - I can remember the advertising of a brand I like	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
BA3 (brand awareness) - If I am a fan of a brand I remember it often	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
BA4 (brand awareness) - I can easily describe the brands I like to a friend	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5

BA5 (brand awareness) - I feel familiar with products of the brands I buy	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
DM1 (consumer decision-making process) - I feel good buying products that have positive reviews	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
DM2 (consumer decision-making process) - If most of the reviews are positive I will buy the product	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
DM3 (consumer decision-making process) - User comments and reviews have in the past influenced my decision	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
DM4 (consumer decision-making process) - Online reviews and ratings help me decide if I should buy a product or not	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5
DM5 (consumer decision-making process) - If most of the reviews are negative I will not buy the product	Strongly disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly agree	5

What is your gender?

	Respondents
Male — 43%	70
Female — 57%	93

What is your home country?

	Respondents
Denmark — 39%	63
Bulgaria — 38%	62
Other — 23%	38

In what way do you participate in online posts?

	Respondents
Usually with writing comments — 9%	14
With sharing the post — 13%	22
With liking the post — 64%	104
None of the above — 14%	23

9.4 Appendix 4 - Reliability statistics, SPSS output

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	162	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	162	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.887	.886	23

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Self-concept: I feel good expressing myself online	79.14	113.683	.555	.523	.880
Self-concept: My choice of brands says a lot about me	79.14	116.292	.402	.303	.885
Self-concept: I share my point of view about brands by writing comments/reviews	79.78	110.133	.603	.656	.878
Co-creation: I enjoy creating online content about brands	80.05	113.414	.589	.725	.879
Co-creation: I want to be able to have online conversations with brands	79.05	109.066	.624	.633	.877

Co-creation: I feel more connected to brands which respond to their customers	78.39	113.556	.623	.573	.878
Community: I communicate with other people online because of a shared interest	78.98	114.906	.434	.505	.884
Community: I am more willing to engage online when I am part of a community	79.08	113.677	.538	.584	.880
Community: I feel a sense of community when I share my experiences about brands	79.46	110.996	.659	.655	.876
UGC: I believe that user reviews are more honest than information from the company	78.48	118.077	.410	.566	.884
UGC: Online reviews lower the risk of disappointment when I have not tried a brand before	78.43	118.719	.436	.493	.883
UGC: I would trust more a review from an average person than an expert	79.31	119.010	.327	.261	.886
UGC: I trust comments from people who have bought the brand/product	78.40	117.098	.501	.441	.882
Brand awareness: I can recognize the brands I like	78.35	122.863	.269	.415	.886
Brand awareness: I can remember the advertising of a brand I like	79.00	122.311	.195	.380	.889
Brand awareness: If I am a fan of a brand I remember it often	78.57	117.104	.520	.519	.881

Brand awareness: I can easily describe the brands I like to a friend	78.35	116.813	.553	.588	.880
Brand awareness: I feel familiar with products of the brands I buy	78.57	119.253	.421	.386	.884
Decision making: I feel good buying products that have positive reviews	78.60	119.383	.442	.398	.883
Decision making: If most of the reviews are positive I will buy the product	78.88	117.177	.501	.525	.882
Decision making: User comments and reviews have in the past influenced my decision	78.43	116.867	.506	.610	.881
Decision making: Online reviews and ratings help me decide if I should buy a product or not	78.48	117.034	.514	.612	.881
Decision making: If most of the reviews are negative I will not buy the product	78.60	121.334	.258	.419	.887

9.5 Appendix 5 - Literature review table

Author	Year	Method	Participants	Country	Concepts
Kim, A. and Johnson, K. *Power of consumers using social media: Examining the influences of brand-related user-generated content on Facebook.*	2016	Online survey, Visual stimuli simulating Facebook fan pages were developed and included as a part of the self-administered questionnaire.	The sample consisted of 533 participants Individuals who were 18 years old and older with a Facebook account were recruited from online panel members obtained from a marketing research company specializing in consumer surveys.	No information	Examining the influences of brand-related UGC on Facebook.
Schivinski, B. and Dabrowski, D. *The impact of brand communicati on on brand equity through Facebook.*	2015	Three different industries were used in this study, namely, non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and mobile network providers. The industry selection was based on considerations regarding relevance and variance criteria. The data was collected through standardized online survey on Facebook.	Total of 302 valid questionnaires. The majority of the items in the study were adapted from relevant literature and measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly 'agree" (7). The profile of the sample represented the Polish population, which are	Poland	Social media and brand communication, UGC, consumer-based brand equity (including brand awareness, associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty), relationship between customer-based brand equity dimensions.

			using social media frequently.		
Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S. and Füller, J. *The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook.*	2013	The study was set up in co-operation with the car brand MINI. A link to an online questionnaire was posted on the MINI Facebook brand page.	311 respondents	Germany	Brand page commitment, UGC, brand awareness, eWom, purchase intention
Khajuria, I., and Rachna. *Impact of social media brand communications on consumer-based brand equity.*	2017	Structured questionnaire	The collected data was presented from 220 Facebook users	No information	Social media brand communications, UGC, Customer-based brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty)
Christodoulides, G., Jevons, C., & Bonhomme, J. *Memo to marketers. Quantitative evidence for change: How user-generated content really*	2012	In-depth interviews and questionnaire that was subsequently developed, targeting customers engaged in brand-related UGC. The data was collected via	5 interviews with industry experts and 202 survey respondents. The experts' job titles included brand development director, marketing strategist, marketing	New York city, USA	UGC, drivers for UGC, UGC and brand equity (

affects brands?		email and direct messaging.	futurist, and consumer insights manager.		
Smith, A., Fischer, E. and Yongjian, C. *How Does Brand-related User-generated Content Differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?*	2012	A content analysis, thus systematically comparing the content of communications. Postings were screened to ensure that they were produced by consumers and did not have an apparent commercial objective. Only posts published by consumers between June 1, 2010 and January 25, 2011 were sampled.	None, but the data is presented: In total, 600 brand-related UGC posts were collected. Posts represented the range of UGC types found on each site. For example, on Twitter, tweets, retweets, and replies were all collected. On Facebook, status updates, wall posts, forum contributions, pictures, and videos were all collected. On YouTube, videos and comments were both collected.	No information	UGC, social media sites, Promotional Self-presentation, brand centrality, Brand sentiment, brand equity dimensions
Langaro, D., Rita, P. and de Fátima Salgueiro, M. *Do social networking sites contribute for building brands? Evaluating*	2015	A survey was conducted with Facebook users in November 2012.	In total, 1066 users have accessed the link and 203 have completed the questionnaire	Portugal and Brazil	Social networking sites (SNSs) have attracted increasing attention from brands, which look at the platform as a communication channel to reach

the impact of users' participation on brand awareness and brand attitude.					their audiences. Despite their growing adoption, there are no concrete implications for brands. The study addresses this opportunity proposing a model that evaluates the impact of users' participation in SNSs on brand awareness and brand attitude, the two main pillars of brand knowledge. The study focuses on brand like pages in Facebook, the most used SNSs platform for brands.
Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V. and Schafer, D. *Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation?*	2012	A total of 393 data sets from three different industries, namely tourism, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals, were generated using a standardized online-survey.	393 respondents	No information	The purpose of the paper is to investigate the relative impact of brand communication on brand equity through social media as compared to traditional media. It aims at: investigating whether both communication instruments have an impact on consumer-based brand equity;

					comparing the effect sizes of the two communication instruments; and separating the effects of firm-created and user-generated social media communication.
Wang, X., Yu, C. and Wei, Y. *Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework*	2012	Survey data from 292 participants who engaged in peer communications about products through social media	292 respondents	No information	Consumer socialization through peer communication using social media websites has become an important marketing issue through the development and increasing popularity of social media. Guided by a socialization framework, this article investigates peer communication through social media websites; individual-level tie strength and group-level identification with the peer group as antecedents; and product attitudes and purchase decisions as outcomes.
Malthouse, E., Calder,	2016	The used data sets are the	No information	Canada	The use of social media

B., Kim, S. and Vandenbosch, M. *Evidence that user generated content that produces engagement increases purchase behaviours*		AIR MILES Rewards Program which is a Canadian coalition loyalty program that captures both UGC participation and ongoing purchase behaviour. The data record activity on the AMRP social media site from 1 January 2010–28 February 2011.			environments that enable consumers to engage with a brand is of increasing interest. In particular, contests in which consumers create UGC offer the potential of actively engaging consumers with a brand and thereby directly affecting consumer purchases. This research demonstrates that prompting consumers to create UGC that engages consumers in actively thinking about a brand does affect actual buying decisions
Park, D., Lee, J. and Han, I. *The Effect of On-Line Consumer Reviews on Consumer Purchasing Intention: The Moderating*	2007	Experiential design - A virtual shopping mall site was provided for each subject. The mall contained both seller-created information about the target	352 college students participated	No information	Online consumer reviews, functioning both as informants and as recommenders, are important in making purchase decisions and for product sales. Their persuasive

Role of Involvement		product and consumer reviews The experimental product was a portable multimedia player			impact depends on both their quality and their quantity. This paper uses the elaboration likelihood model to explain how level of involvement with a product moderates these relationships. The study produces three major findings: the quality of on-line reviews has a positive effect on consumers' purchasing intention, purchasing intention increases as the number of reviews increases
Barreda, A., Bilgihan, A., Nusair, K. and Okumus, F. *Generating brand awareness in Online Social Networks.*	2015	An online, self-administered questionnaire was created and the link was sent to a systematic random sample.	No specific number was given, but the survey was send to 10,000 random users. In relation to ethnicity, 66% were Caucasian, 15% African American, 5% Asian, another 5% Hispanic and the rest did not specify their ethnicity.	USA	Online social networks, brand awareness and online social networks, The impact of virtual interactivity (VI) on brand awareness, The impact of system quality on brand awareness, The impact of information quality on brand awareness.

| Hsu, C., Oh, H. and Assaf, A. *A Customer-Based Brand Equity Model for Upscale Hotels* | 2011 | First, qualitative studies as focus groups, expert reviews, and a pilot study were used to develop preliminary scales. Second, the luxury hotel industry segment was selected as target sample. Consumer survey was conducted with travelers staying at the participating hotels to collect data for validating the proposed model. | First focus group – 7 Chinese men Second focus group – 8 foreign travelers Customer survey – 1346 participants | China | The authors propose a customer-based brand equity model for use in global branding efforts and research, based on a series of qualitative and quantitative studies. They find new dimensions of brand equity that need to be considered by researchers. Components of brand equity generated from literature review and focus groups are ordered in theoretical relationships and the model structure is assessed against rival structures. |