**RESEARCH AIM:** To understand the motivation for creating positive branded UGC, and the resulting consequences for the User, to inform good practice in social media community management

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

- **a.** To identify content creators in a brand community
- **b.** To evaluate the extent of their UGC activity across brands
- **c.** To explore the motivations underlying content creating behaviour
- **d.** To appraise the effects on the User of having their UGC used by the brand
- **e.** To identify the characteristics of self-selecting social media brand advocates
- **f.** To make recommendations for the management of UGC and its contributors in online brand communities.

When members of the public express themselves online, the term ‘User Generated Content’ (UGC) can be used to describe the phenomenon (Boyd and Ellison, 2018). Additionally, ‘User Generated Branding’ (UGB) has been defined by Burman & Arnhold as “…the strategic and operative management of brand related user-generated content (UGC) to achieve brand goals” (2010a). In practical terms this requires that marketers identify and reuse naturally-occurring content created by users and also invite or stimulate their audience to post content for them to reuse. This may take a variety of forms such as photography, video, text and is usually on a social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Vries and Gensler, 2017).

This research concerns the use of UGC as part of the content strategy for organisation’s social media feeds. The digital marketing team at Lidl has been using UGC extensively in recent years, in keeping with practice in the Universities sector (Piggins, 2015) and more widely in Social Media Marketing (Gallegos, 2017; Feldwick, 2018). The nature of the relationship between the creator and the brand has not been extensively investigated. Online users are considered self-aware and their online identities can often be complex reflections of themselves (Azraq, Najens & Vliegenthart, 2015). It is thought that Functional theory is critical to understanding motivation and behaviour. It describes four personality functions; utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive and value-expressive (Katz, 1960). These four motivational types were used by Daugherty et al (2008) to explore the evolution to create branded content but did not go so far as to investigate the feedback loop to investigate what happens if the brand talks back.

More recently, Crowston and Fagnot (2017) explored the drivers for creating UGC. This work was helpful in describing motivations around the concept of ‘Helping Theory’ and a model was proposed to describe levels of contribution to the joint effort. Their stage theory will be adapted for this inquiry. A key outcome of Crowston and Fagnot’s work (2017) was that recognising the phases of contribution (initial, sustained and ended) had implications for practitioners managing UGC projects. A range of commercial tools for managing Branded UGC are coming to market – Taggbox, Stackla, Blesk, TAP – which would seem to offer Brand Community Managers a systematic way of harnessing and developing UGC, however there has been little research into the effect on the contributing consumer. TAP have consulted with the Researcher and have expressed an interest in the findings of this study.

Understanding how to stimulate and motivate users into content production is central to the decisions about how to recruit, retain and reward content producers, so research findings in this area will have a contribution to knowledge and a commercial application both in my own institution and more broadly in Digital Marketing practice.

As a contribution to knowledge, the study will investigate the feedback loop to investigate what happens if the brand talks back. To do this, the research objectives have been structured around understanding motivations and then investigating the resultant content activity. The research methodology will therefore explore the feedback loop (Boyd and Ellison, 2018). Additionally ‘User Generated Branding’ (UGB) has been defined by Burman & Arnhold as “…the strategic and operative management of brand related user-generated content (UGC) to achieve brand goals” (2010a). In practical terms this requires that marketers identify and reuse naturally-occurring content created by users and also invite or stimulate their audience to post content for them to reuse. This may take a variety of forms such as photography, video, text and is usually on a social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Vries and Gensler, 2017).

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