

Assessing Customer Brand Co-Creation on Interactive Media in the Beverage Category: A Social Exchange Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines customer brand co-creation in interactive media environments through the lens of Social Exchange Theory. It investigates how brand interactivity and perceived ease of use influence consumer participation, with relationship quality and brand knowledge serving as key mechanisms. Drawing on survey data from active social media users, the findings show that interactive brand features enhance customer engagement by fostering stronger relational bonds. These relationships, in turn, encourage co-creative behaviors such as content sharing, feedback provision, and collaborative design. The study also reveals that participation in cocreation deepens brand knowledge, particularly among consumers with high brand attachment. By integrating cognitive and relational perspectives, this research clarifies how value is jointly constructed in digital brand ecosystems. The results underscore the importance of designing interactive platforms that support reciprocal exchange and meaningful consumer involvement. This paper contributes to brand management and digital marketing literature by empirically validating the role of social exchange dynamics in shaping contemporary co-creation practices....

Keywords:: Brand Co Creation, Interactive Media, Beverage Category, Social Exchange Theory .

INTRODUCTION:

Within extant marketing literature, co-creation of value continues to be seen as one of the most influential concepts (France et al., 2020; Kamboj et al., 2018), particularly since Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000)'s observation that customers are transitioning from passive players to active actors. Co-creation is defined as "the process where two or more parties come together to create value" (Vargo & Lush, 2004). The development of the value co-creation concept has been deeply influenced by the rise of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL). This perspective emphasizes that value does not exist inherently in a product or service; instead, it is created when the customer engages with and uses the offering. In this view, value emerges through the customer's experience and interpretation, making them an essential partner in the creation process (Vargo & Lush, 2004). From a brand management standpoint, scholars increasingly recognize that consumers are not just passive recipients of brand messaging but active participants in shaping brand success. This shift reflects a broader understanding that brands are no longer solely the intellectual property or creations of firms but rather emerge through collaborative interactions between the company and its stakeholders (Merz et al., 2009). In this

light, Wang and Hajli (2014) conceptualize customer brand co-creation (CBC) as the deliberate effort by consumers to jointly build brand value and co-develop personalized brand experiences through the exchange of knowledge and information. Expanding on this, France et al. (2018) emphasize that CBC is fundamentally rooted in interactivity, where both the brand and its co-creators mutually influence one another. These dynamic underscores the 'co' in co-creation, illustrating how value is generated through the active engagement of multiple actors in both direct and indirect ways.

Recently, a few studies in marketing have concentrated on co-creation as a paradigm shift. The concept of co-creation has gained significant attention in the areas of marketing and more recently branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). Many scholars have highlighted the collaborative nature of the relationship between companies and their customers, noting that value is often created through ongoing interaction between both parties. Rather than seeing customers as passive recipients, this perspective emphasizes their active role in shaping brand experiences and contributing to outcomes that benefit both sides (Grönroos, 2006). Building on well-established theoretical foundations, numerous studies have explored the process of co-creation within digital environments, shedding light on both its driving factors and outcomes

(Rubio et al., 2020). In examining the antecedents of co-creation, researchers have paid attention to two key dimensions: the digital platforms facilitating the process such as their technological features and the characteristics of the participants themselves, particularly the motivations that encourage their active involvement in value co-creation. The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WeChat has drawn growing attention from researchers interested in how consumer–brand interactions contribute to value co-creation and consumer brand engagement (CBE). These digital spaces now play a central role in shaping the ways consumers engage with and help shape brand meaning (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2019; Hinson et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2021).

Grounded in robust theoretical frameworks, a growing body of research has examined how co-creation unfolds in digital contexts, highlighting both its underlying drivers and resulting outcomes (Rubio et al., 2020). Scholars have primarily focused on two categories of antecedents: those linked to the digital environment such as the functionality and affordances of the technology used and those related to the individuals engaging in co-creation, with particular emphasis on the motivations that inspire their participation in the value co-creation process (Hinson et al., 2019). Customer engagement in brand co-creation tends to be more accessible and seamless in online settings compared to offline environments, with social networking sites (SNS) serving as a key catalyst for such behaviors (Cheung et al., 2021). In response, companies are increasingly channeling resources into the development of interactive digital platforms that foster meaningful engagement and contribute to brand equity. A notable example is Red Bull’s innovative use of digital media such as the Stratos space jump which combined live streaming with real-time interaction across social media, effectively enhancing customer involvement and reinforcing the brand’s image. This provided an immersive experience and connected the brand with audiences in real-time. This growing trend has sparked increasing scholarly interest in exploring online consumer behavior, particularly the underlying motivations that drive individuals to engage with both other users and brands on social networking sites (Piehler et al., 2021).

Perceived ease of use remains a pivotal factor shaping users’ attitudes toward a given social media platform and their intentions to engage with it (Lohr et al., 2007). For example, the effectiveness and quality of a platform’s user interface play a significant role in influencing consumers’ willingness to adopt and consistently use that platform (Martin-Michiellot & Mendelsohn, 2000). Shin and Shin (2011) argue that how a platform is designed—particularly in terms of visual cues and feedback, plays an important role in guiding users toward correct and confident use. When a social media platform is easy to navigate and interact with, users are more inclined to engage with it, especially when it comes to sharing information. This suggests that simplicity and clarity in user-interface design can meaningfully influence user participation. Prior research has also established a positive association between the perceived ease of use of social media platforms and users’ willingness to share

information within those spaces (Chinje & Chinomona, 2018). Insights from existing literature suggest that the desire to share information is a key motivational factor driving individuals to participate in emerging virtual communities (Meek et al., 2019).

Members of virtual communities engage in bidirectional information exchange on social media platforms, where they may assume the role of both information recipients and active contributors. This dual capacity reflects the interactive and participatory nature of digital environments, enabling individuals to not only access content shared by others but also to generate and distribute their own insights, experiences, and knowledge within the community (Keller, 2013). Such dynamic interactions underscore the collaborative fabric of online brand communities, where value is co-created through ongoing dialogue and shared discourse (Tajvidi et al., 2020). Extant research suggests that information sharing within social media environments is significantly shaped by individuals’ prosocial motivations and their willingness to actively engage in online communities (Hui et al., 2024). Consumers who exhibit a predisposition toward helping others, fostering social connections, or contributing to collective knowledge are more likely to share brand-related information, experiences, and insights on digital platforms (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). This behavior aligns with the principles of social exchange theory, where perceived social benefits such as reciprocity, recognition, and community belonging serve as key drivers of participatory actions (Liang et al., 2011). In the context of brand communities, these prosocial inclinations not only facilitate the dissemination of valuable user-generated content but also enhance the overall co-creation process, reinforcing the relational fabric between consumers and brands in interactive media spaces.

Scholarly literature highlights that a sense of belonging, entertainment value, and perceived usefulness are key antecedents influencing individuals’ intentions to both share and seek information intentions that ultimately translate into actual information-sharing and information-seeking behaviors. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the role of perceived ease of use in shaping these intentions, particularly how it facilitates users’ willingness to engage in such behaviors. While social networks have garnered substantial interest within academic research, limited attention has been given to understanding how users simultaneously engage in both information seeking and sharing within these digital environments. Again, with innovation within the technology space, relationships on interactive platforms continue to be automated in the evolving business environment (Tajvidi et al., 2020). Individuals tend to be more inclined to engage actively in online forums and virtual communities by contributing their personal experiences, sharing knowledge, and offering advice or recommendations for the benefit of other members. Moreover, within interactive platforms, scholars contend that the effectiveness of co-creation efforts is largely influenced by the strength and quality of the relationship between the customer and the firm (Tajvidi et al., 2020). This can be attributed to users’ strong perceptions of trust, satisfaction, and commitment within these interactive

digital environments (Molinillo et al., 2020). While some studies have adopted a relationship marketing perspective to explore the role of relationship quality in social media settings demonstrating its positive influence on consumers' online purchase intentions such investigations remain scarce within the context of the beverage industry. Research indicates that when customers perceive brands as reflections or extensions of their own identity, they tend to develop deeper emotional connections, hold more favorable attitudes toward the brand, and demonstrate greater loyalty in their brand-related behaviors (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019; Cardoso et al., 2022). Research also provides evidence that brand self-congruity has a direct influence on consumers' loyalty-related behaviors (Zhang, 2022).

In the context of brand co-creation, the strength of the consumer-brand relationship, coupled with a desire to express pride in the brand, plays a pivotal role in motivating engagement. When consumers perceive a high degree of alignment between their self-concept and the brand's identity this psychological resonance fosters a deeper emotional connection. This connection not only enhances brand attachment but also transforms the brand into a vehicle for self-expression (Escalas & Bettman, 2021). As a result, self-congruent customers are more inclined to actively participate in co-creation activities, viewing their contributions as an extension of their personal identity and a means of publicly affirming their brand affiliation (Kressmann et al., 2006; Hoyer et al., 2010). Thus, the motivation to co-create is amplified when consumers see the brand as a reflection of who they are or aspire to be, making self-congruity a key driver of participatory brand behaviors. Customers co-create to express their own identity and their strong congruity with the brand (He & Zhang, 2022), and to be involved with something they feel is worthwhile (Ind et al., 2020). Engaging in co-creation activities allows individuals to express their personal identity and fosters a sense of pride and emotional connection with the brand (Fernandes & de Matos, 2023).

Moreover, the growing adoption and widespread use of social media in emerging markets such as Ghana presents a valuable opportunity for exploring key issues related to brand co-creation within interactive digital environments (Hajli et al., 2017). Indeed, the proliferation of digital technologies and the evolving role of consumers as active participants in brand ecosystems have expanded both the scope and depth of brand interactions. As the boundaries between firms and customers become increasingly porous, opportunities for collaborative value creation are amplified (Payne et al., 2008). In this context, brand interactivity serves as a critical enabler of co-creation. By fostering dialogue, personalization, and real-time engagement, interactive platforms empower customers to contribute ideas, share experiences, and shape brand narratives. This shift not only reflects the changing dynamics of consumer agency but also underscores the strategic importance of interactivity in facilitating meaningful and sustained co-creation behaviors (France et al., 2015). Thus, far from being a mere technical feature, interactivity functions as a relational mechanism that invites and supports consumer participation in the brand-

building process. Scholarly evidence consistently suggests that stakeholder engagement within brand communities enhances both the opportunity and motivation for active participation (France et al., 2015). These communities function as collaborative spaces where shared values, collective identity, and mutual interaction foster a sense of belonging and purpose, thereby encouraging stakeholders to contribute more meaningfully to brand-related discussions and activities (Hatch & Schultz, 2010; O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2010). The reciprocal nature of these interactions not only lowers barriers to involvement but also amplifies perceived social and psychological rewards, reinforcing ongoing engagement. As such, brand communities serve as vital enablers of co-creation by cultivating an environment where stakeholder input is recognized, valued, and integrated into the brand's evolving narrative. Given that brand communities provide both social support and opportunities for active participation and value co-creation (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), they serve as a highly relevant and effective platform for fostering customer brand co-creation (O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2017).

A comprehensive review of co-creation theory reveals that value co-creation is frequently positioned as the primary outcome of co-creation behaviors. While the significance of value co-creation is well-documented, it represents only one dimension of how customer co-creation shapes brand outcomes. Notably, co-creation also plays a critical role in shaping brand knowledge, influencing how consumers perceive and understand a brand. However, this aspect has received comparatively limited scholarly attention, with few studies acknowledging the oversight or emphasizing the relevance of brand knowledge as a meaningful consequence of co-creation (Brodie et al., 2006). The current research addresses the above-discussed research gaps by applying the social exchange theory to assess customers' reasons for their perceived ease of use, information sharing, relationship, on brand interactive platforms that results in brand co-creation. We base our study in beverage category as this is an interesting context to analyze online cocreation because beverage brands like red bull and coke have heavily invested in digital channels and little research in co-creation has been developed in this sector. A key contribution of this study is its investigation into the moderating role of brand community in the relationship between brand co-creation and its antecedents and outcomes. Contemporary research increasingly acknowledges that brand communities are not just passive groups of consumers but active social networks that shape perceptions of value, engagement, and innovation (Dessart et al., 2021). Studies have shown that strong brand communities can amplify consumer responsiveness to personalized services and co-creation initiatives, fostering a deeper sense of identification and loyalty (Schivinski et al., 2020; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). Moreover, digital brand communities on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and brand-owned online forums are recognized for their ability to generate social influence and stimulate customer-driven innovation (Chahal & Rani, 2022).

Despite these advancements, limited empirical research has explored the specific role of brand community as a moderating variable—particularly in online environments where co-creation is encouraged. While scholars such as Iglesias, Ind, and Markovic (2020) and Balaji and Roy (2017) have highlighted the importance of community-based engagement in shaping consumer-brand relationships, the extent to which brand community conditions or amplifies the effects of brand co-creation efforts remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how brand communities may strengthen or weaken the relationships between co-creation inputs (such as interactivity, brand self-congruity, or information sharing) and key consumer outcomes (such as brand knowledge and loyalty). In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the social dimensions of co-creation in today's digitally connected markets. The organization of this research is outlined as follows: we begin with an examination of the existing body of literature related to the core concepts discussed in this article. Subsequently, we establish hypotheses and construct a research model. Following this, we deliberate on the research methodologies employed and outline the outcomes of the study. Lastly, we present a comprehensive discussion, followed by an exploration of the implications, constraints, and potential avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Social Exchange theory to Brand co-creation

Investigation on value cocreation and brand management brought to the front burner the concept of brand co-creation (Tajvidi et al., 2018). Brand co-creation is a multidimensional concept encompassing engagement, value co-creation, and brand intentions (Merz et al., 2009). Social exchange theory is a well-established theory in intense business environment where customer -firm interaction occur. Recent research has shown that social exchange theory can also be used to understand value co-creation and customer retention (Preikschas, Cabanelas, Rüdiger & Lampón, 2017).

The fundamental underlying assumption of social exchange theory is that all interactions within social contexts can be examined as exchanges of both tangible and intangible rewards and resources among individuals (Cook et al., 2021). This premise is rooted in the notion that all relationships inherently involve a give-and-take dynamic (Kaynak & Marandu, 2006, p. 229). According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, p. 890), social exchange involves actions taken with the expectation of receiving favorable responses from others. As per social exchange theory, as individuals engage in interactions over time, such as between customers and employees, there arises a mutual inclination to reciprocate the support and assistance provided by the other party (Blau, 1964). The concept of reciprocity pertains to the sense of obligation to respond in kind when an individual perceives advantages from the actions of another entity (Flynn & Yu, 2021). Consequently, social exchange theory is constructed on the premise that the actions of individuals are interdependent on the behaviors of others (Coulson,

Maclaren, Mckenzie & O'Gorman, 2014). This continual reciprocal dynamic eventually leads to the establishment of transactions and relationships that are mutually beneficial and rewarding (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 890). Utilizing the lens of social exchange theory within the context of brand value co-creation, it is reasonable to anticipate that consumers may experience a feeling of duty manifesting as voluntary actions. This sentiment of being part of a collective stimulates collaborative endeavors, particularly when each participant gains from the interaction (Roberts, Hughes & Kertbo, 2014).

Customer Brand Co-creation

Customer brand co-creation behavior refers to customer-initiated interactions with a brand, emphasizing the behavioral nature of the construct without presupposing specific outcomes or limitations. This conceptualization intentionally focuses on observable customer actions directed toward the brand, distinguishing co-creation as a form of behavior rather than an attitude or procedural framework. By taking a broad, brand-level perspective, this definition considers how such behaviors influence the brand holistically. A central feature of this understanding is the recognition that co-creation is driven primarily by the customer, underscoring its consumer-led orientation. Co-creation behavior ultimately depends on the customer's willingness to engage. What stands out is the interaction that takes place between the customer and the brand, whether it happens directly or through mediated channels. In cases of direct co-creation, the customer actively initiates and participates in exchanges with the brand, playing a more hands-on role in shaping the brand experience. Such direct interactions shape the overall brand experience and may involve participatory activities like engaging in online competitions aimed at enhancing a product. Through these forms of engagement, customers can influence the brand's value proposition and actively contribute to the co-creation of how the brand is perceived and experienced by the wider customer base.

Indirect co-creation refers to customer-driven interactions that occur not through direct engagement with the brand itself, but through the customer's communication and influence within their personal networks. In this form of co-creation, consumers act as brand advocates by discussing, endorsing, or sharing brand-related experiences with friends, family, peers, or online communities—thereby shaping brand perceptions beyond their immediate circle. While the consumer may not be formally collaborating with the brand, their expressed opinions, social media posts, word-of-mouth recommendations, or even spontaneous acts such as complimenting another customer's brand choice in-store, contribute meaningfully to the brand's evolving identity and public image (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). These behaviors—ranging from user-generated content to peer-to-peer brand storytelling—function as indirect yet powerful mechanisms through which brand meaning is disseminated and reinforced in social contexts. Unlike direct co-creation, which involves structured collaboration (e.g., product design input or feedback programs), indirect co-creation emerges organically from consumer agency and social influence. Nevertheless, both forms play a critical role in shaping brand equity, as they

collectively enrich the cognitive and affective associations that constitute customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2013).

Brand Co-Creation on interactive platforms

The rise of online channels has created new opportunities for companies to manage online cocreation encounters. This has led to growing interest in investigating the processes of online co-creation (Frasquet-Deltoro, Alarcon-del-Amo & Lorenzo-Romero, 2019). However, the literature on this topic is still scarce and fragmented (France et al., 2015). While a limited number of conceptual studies have proposed frameworks and research propositions on online co-creation, most of the empirical work has concentrated primarily on its antecedents, with relatively less emphasis on exploring its outcomes. Moreover, existing studies vary considerably in their research contexts and in how key constructs related to online co-creation are defined and operationalized, making it challenging to draw consistent conclusions across the literature.

Antecedents of Brand Co-creation

Consumer experience plays a pivotal role in shaping the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that underlie brand engagement, particularly within the context of co-creation. When consumers are highly involved and actively participate in collaborative brand activities, they develop richer mental schemas and deeper emotional connections with the brand. This experiential foundation enhances their ability and willingness to contribute meaningfully to future value co-creation efforts. Empirical evidence supports this view: Zadeh, Cheah, and Muda (2019) found that prior experience significantly predicts consumers' ongoing participation in value co-creation on social media platforms, suggesting that past interactions inform and reinforce future engagement behaviors. Similarly, Frempong, Sarpong, and Botchie (2020) emphasize that previous involvement in virtual value creation processes not only builds consumer confidence and competence but also serves as a psychological anchor that facilitates continued and more effective co-creative participation. The rise of social media has significantly transformed the way brand content is co-developed between consumers and firms (Frasquet-Deltoro & Lorenzo-Romero, 2018). A growing body of research has explored the unique characteristics of social media, particularly emphasizing its socially driven features like interactivity and user engagement (Rubio et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2021; Tajvidi et al., 2020) and information sharing (Tajvidi et al., 2020). The growing interactivity inherent in social media platforms, coupled with experiences that make customers feel genuinely heard and acknowledged, can foster a sense of active participation in the brand value creation process (Rubio et al., 2020). When consumers perceive that their input is not only received but also valued and integrated into brand decisions, they are more likely to view themselves as meaningful contributors to the brand's evolution. In the context of co-creation, interactivity can facilitate opportunities for customers to participate and be perceived as advocating their co-creation behavior. While much of the existing research on interactivity has focused

on technology-mediated settings, the evolving role of customers as active participants underscores the growing relevance of interactivity at the brand level—across both digital and physical touchpoints. Brand interactivity refers to the degree to which a brand engages in and is open to two-way communication with its audience. It plays a vital role in nurturing customer relationships and has been shown to enhance user perceptions of brand-related platforms. Studies further suggest that when consumers perceive a brand as a reflection of their identity, they tend to form deeper emotional connections, display more favorable attitudes, and demonstrate greater loyalty toward the brand (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that brand self-congruity plays a direct role in shaping consumers' loyalty behaviors, as individuals are more likely to remain committed to brands that align with their self-image (Tran et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022). A strong emotional connection with a brand, coupled with a sense of pride in being associated with it, is often carried into co-creation contexts. In such settings, this bond is expected to strengthen the likelihood that customers who perceive a strong alignment between the brand and their self-identity will actively engage in co-creation behaviors. The strength of the relationship between customers and brands has increasingly captured the attention of both academic researchers and industry practitioners, given its relevance to long-term brand engagement and loyalty. Relationship quality is a key determinant of consumer involvement and interest in products and services. It is understood as the depth and strength of the connection between parties in a relationship (Tajvidi et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2011). Some other academics such as Smith (1998) conceptualizes relationship quality as the overall strength of a relationship, reflecting how well it fulfills the expectations and needs of the involved parties. While much of the existing research on relationship quality has focused on traditional, offline environments (Najjar, 2020; Schumann & Luck, 2023), scholars such as Walsh et al. (2010) contend that the quality of relationships plays an equally vital role in online settings, particularly in fostering consumer retention. They also suggest that the impact of relationship quality dimensions may vary depending on the context.

In online settings, consumers may experience vulnerability due to the high degree of uncertainty. This can be a barrier to relationship formation and development. Therefore, it is important to understand and study the concepts of relationship quality in online contexts, such as the sharing economy. Researchers have conceptualized relationship quality as an abstract and global construct, even though its components are distinct, and consumers may find it difficult to distinguish between them (Athanasopoulou, 2009). In general, researchers agree that relationship quality is a multidimensional construct (Itani et al., 2019; Palmatier et al., 2006). Palmatier et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis and found that the multidimensional constructs of relationship quality, namely trust, satisfaction, and commitment, are the most important drivers of business performance.

Consequences of Brand Co-creation

Customer brand co-creation serves as a powerful mechanism for increasing brand visibility among other consumers, functioning similarly to traditional word-of-mouth communication (Trusov et al., 2009). When considered within the co-creation context, brand exposure can enhance brand knowledge among observers of such activities. Moreover, individuals who actively engage in brand co-creation tend to process brand-related content more deeply, which fosters a stronger cognitive understanding of the brand (Liu & Shrum, 2002). In addition, customers with a strong emotional attachment to a brand often exhibit more comprehensive brand knowledge, reflected in a broader and more nuanced set of brand associations. (M'zungu et al.,2010).

Research Model and Hypothesis development

This study introduces a general and overarching theoretical framework for the antecedents and consequences of brand co-creation on interactive platforms in the beverage category (Fig.1). The framework assess how perceived ease of use positively influences information sharing which in turn affect positively brand page interactivity. Antecedents such as relationship quality, self-congruity are assessed to measure its influence on brand cocreation. In addition, the framework also assesses how brand co-creation result in brand knowledge. This research uses social exchange theory when assessing the antecedents and consequence of brand cocreation. In otherword, the hypothesized relationships between the constructs are developed on the basis of social exchange theory using interactive platforms. In the next section, we present the hypotheses of our study.

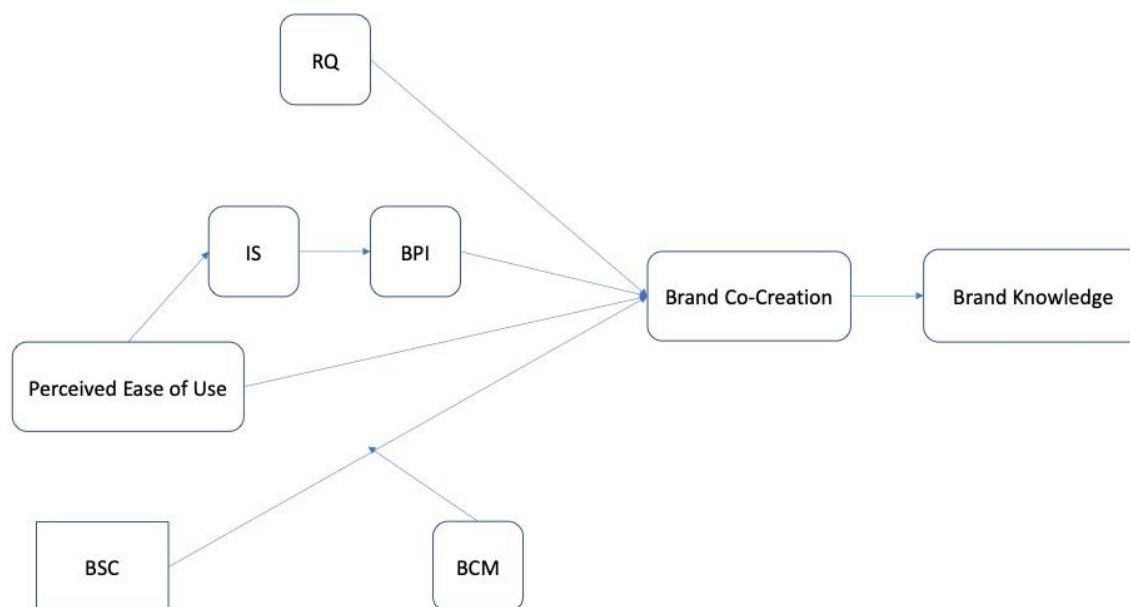


Figure 1. Research Framework.

Development of Hypothesis

Effect of Relationship quality on Brand Co-Creation

With the development of social commerce environments, engaging relationships in online communities run the risk of becoming impersonal, anonymous, and automated. Individuals are generally more motivated to engage in online forums and communities where they feel encouraged to share their knowledge and personal experiences, as well as to provide feedback and recommendations for others to consider. This is due to the fact that they can clearly sense the community's feelings of commitment, satisfaction, and trust. In order to clarify the importance of relationship quality within the setting of social media, Liang et al. (2011) used a relationship marketing lens. They found that it had a favourable effect on the purchasing intentions of online consumers. Similar

research showed that brand connection quality in a social media context has a positive impact on consumers' likelihood of continuing with and recommend using brands. As a result, the degree to which a member of a social commerce community intends to co-create brand value can be predicted by the quality of their relationships. As a result, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H1: Relationship quality will positively affect Brand co-creation on interactive platforms.

Effect of Perceived Ease of use on Information sharing and Brand page interactivity

PEOU is the extent to which a customer finds an interactivity platform and its interface easy to access and use (Moslehpour et al., 2018). Perceived ease of use plays a crucial role in the acceptance of technology, especially given the varying levels of technological familiarity and user competency across diverse populations. A substantial

body of research consistently shows that perceived ease of use has a direct and positive impact on individuals' behavioral intentions to adopt and utilize technological platforms (Dhagarra et al., 2020). While existing scholarship has emphasized that factors such as sense of belonging, entertainment value, and perceived usefulness significantly influence individuals' intentions to share and seek information ultimately shaping their actual engagement in these behaviors, there remains limited empirical attention on how perceived ease of use supports or enhances these intentions. This represents a notable gap in understanding the usability dimension of digital platforms in fostering information exchange. A growing body of research highlights the significance of perceived ease of use in shaping user engagement within digital brand environments. Studies have demonstrated that when technological platforms are intuitive and user-friendly, consumers are more likely to interact with them, particularly in service-oriented contexts such as hospitality (Chen & Chen, 2011). This ease of use reduces the cognitive and psychological effort associated with participation, thereby lowering barriers to engagement. As Jarvenpaa and Staples (2000) argue, a system perceived as simple and accessible encourages users to share information more freely, as it minimizes the perceived risks and effort involved in disclosure. Similarly, Fiore, Jin, and Kim (2005) found that the perceived ease of use of online technologies plays a critical role in shaping consumers' intentions to engage with e-services, serving as a foundational driver of digital interaction. Further supporting this, Kwon and Wen (2010) observed that social networking sites (SNSs) designed for usability tend to foster higher levels of consumer activity and sustained usage. These findings collectively underscore the importance of usability in facilitating active consumer participation. Building on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2 : Perceived ease of use of social networking sites positively influences the intention to share brand-related information through these platforms.

Perceived Ease of Use and Brand Co-creation

Perceived ease of use (PEU), defined as the degree to which consumers believe that using a particular technology will be free of effort, has long been recognized as a central construct in the adoption of technological applications (Davis, 1989). Rooted in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), PEU is widely regarded as a key antecedent to user engagement, shaping behavioral intentions through its influence on perceived accessibility and usability. A substantial body of empirical research has examined the role of PEU in facilitating the adoption of digital innovations, particularly in interactive and service-oriented contexts. However, findings across studies have been mixed, with some confirming its strong predictive power and others reporting negligible effects, depending on context, user familiarity, and domain specificity.

In the realm of user-generated content (UGC), particularly within travel planning, several scholars have emphasized the importance of ease of use in encouraging consumer participation. For instance, Ayeh (2015) found that online travelers' perceptions of ease—encompassing navigation,

interface clarity, and interaction simplicity—exert a dominant influence on their willingness to adopt and contribute to UGC platforms. This suggests that when potential users perceive a system as intuitive and low in cognitive demand, they are more likely to engage in content sharing, review posting, and collaborative decision-making. These insights highlight the contextual relevance of PEU, underscoring its significance not merely as a technical attribute but as a psychological enabler of consumer co-creation in digital brand ecosystems. In contrast, Balouchi et al. (2017) found that ease of use did not significantly influence the adoption of user-generated content (UGC) in travel-related decisions. They attributed this to the respondents' familiarity with internet use, suggesting that usability was not a barrier in this context. Nonetheless, perceived usefulness (PU) has consistently been examined as a key element within the value co-creation experience and will therefore be incorporated into the present study. While existing scholarship has identified constructs such as sense of belonging, entertainment value, and perceived usefulness as key antecedents influencing consumers' intentions to share and seek information—thereby shaping their actual information-sharing and information-seeking behaviors—there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the role of *perceived ease of use* (PEOU) in facilitating these intentions. Despite the established relevance of PEOU in technology acceptance and user engagement (Davis, 1989), its specific influence on participatory behaviors within brand-related digital environments has received limited empirical attention. This is particularly salient in the context of interactive media, where the usability and accessibility of platforms may significantly affect consumers' willingness to engage in co-creative activities. Given that a seamless and intuitive user experience can lower cognitive and behavioral barriers to participation, it is plausible that ease of use plays a critical enabling role in fostering active consumer involvement. This gap in understanding provides a foundational rationale for the present study, leading to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H3 : Perceived ease of use has a significant positive effect on brand co-creation.

Effect of Brand Page Interactivity on Brand Co-Creation

Interactivity is widely conceptualized as the extent to which a dynamic, two-way dialogue can be established among the user, the website, and the brand or company (Sullivan, 1999). This interactive exchange not only fosters a sense of engagement but also enables tailored, personalized experiences, highlighting the intrinsic link between interactivity and customization in digital environments. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of interactivity positively influence users' attitudes toward websites, enhancing perceptions of brand responsiveness and credibility. Furthermore, scholars have established that interactivity serves as a significant predictor of behavioral intentions, including the likelihood of continued engagement, information sharing, and participation in brand-related activities (Zhao & Lu, 2012). Oh (2017) show that interactivity has a linear relationship with user intentions. Higher levels of brand interactivity are anticipated to

foster greater co-creation behaviors by offering more brand-initiated opportunities and incentives for consumer participation. Such interactivity is believed to heighten consumers' interest and deepen their engagement with the brand (Cheung et al., 2020; Van Noort et al., 2012). In the context of brand co-creation, interactivity serves as a key enabler, creating opportunities for customers to actively engage in the process. Moreover, a brand that demonstrates interactive qualities is often perceived as encouraging and supporting individuals' participation in co-creation activities.

Scholarly inquiry into interactivity has predominantly taken place within technology-mediated environments, where digital platforms facilitate dynamic exchanges between brands and consumers (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Wirtz, Hein, & Will, 2013). However, as the role of the customer has evolved from passive recipient to active participant in brand discourse, the significance of interactivity has expanded beyond digital interfaces to encompass brand interactions across both online and offline contexts (Liu & Shrum, 2002). In this evolving landscape, brand interactivity is best understood as the degree to which a brand demonstrates willingness and capacity to engage in reciprocal, two-way communication with its audience (Ha & James, 1998). This interactive exchange not only fosters a sense of dialogue and responsiveness but also serves as a foundational mechanism for building and sustaining customer relationships (Merrilees & Fry, 2003). Empirical evidence further supports its role in shaping favorable consumer perceptions, particularly in digital settings, where interactivity is consistently linked to more positive attitudes toward brand websites and enhanced user engagement (Vashisht & Chauhan, 2017; Daems et al., 2019). As such, interactivity emerges not merely as a technical feature, but as a strategic relational asset in contemporary brand management. Despite the above some studies have looked at brand interactivity as positively facilitating the impact of brand engagement on brand co-creation behaviour. Hence this study proposes that:

H4. Brand interactivity has positive effect on brand co-creation

Effect of Self-Congruity on Brand Co-creation

Strong brand identification has been linked to co-creation behaviour, according to studies by scholars (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Kennedy & Guzman, 2016). According to these studies, consumers who see brands as extensions of themselves have more positive brand views, stronger connections with brands, and greater brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006). Additionally, there is proof that brand self-congruity has a direct impact on consumers' loyalty behaviours (Spratt et al., 2009). In the co-creation setting, it is believed that this powerful brand relationship and desire to display brand delight will increase the self-congruent customer's willingness to engage in co-creation behaviour.

Customers collaborate to express their own identities, their strong brand affinity, and to be a part of something meaningful (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Co-creation practises improve a person's ability to express themselves

and take ownership of the brand (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Hoyer et al., 2010). So, it is suggested that co-creation behaviour may serve as a vehicle for the customer's self-expression when there is high brand self-congruence between them and the brand. Consequently, to show their passion for the brand through client co-creation, clients need higher levels of brand self-congruity. Hence

H5. Brand self-congruity has positive effect on brand co-creation.

Effect of brand co-creation on brand knowledge

Customer engagement in brand co-creation functions as a powerful form of organic brand communication, generating visibility and awareness among other consumers in a manner analogous to traditional word-of-mouth (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). When consumers observe or are exposed to peers' co-creative contributions—such as user-generated content, product feedback, or collaborative design initiatives—they gain indirect yet meaningful interactions with the brand. This exposure enriches their mental representations of the brand, thereby enhancing their overall brand knowledge.

Moreover, for those who actively participate in co-creation, the process demands higher levels of cognitive engagement. As individuals contribute ideas, reflect on brand values, and collaborate in shaping brand narratives, they engage in deeper information processing, which strengthens their comprehension and internalization of the brand (Liu & Shrum, 2002). This active involvement fosters a more elaborate and structured network of brand associations. This effect is further amplified among consumers with strong emotional bonds to the brand. Research indicates that higher levels of brand attachment are associated with more developed and nuanced brand knowledge, as these consumers are more likely to attend to, process, and retain brand-related information (Low & Lamb, 2000; Merrilees & Miller, 2010).

This concept can be meaningfully extended to the brand co-creation context to support deeper theoretical insights. Accordingly, brand co-creation is believed to contribute to a richer understanding of the brand. Customers who actively engage in co-creation are likely to develop more sophisticated brand knowledge structures, leading to the following proposition: H6. Customer brand co-creation behaviour leads to increased brand knowledge.

Moderating role of brand community

Studies on online brand communities underscore the pivotal role of strong brand–consumer relationships in driving co-creation behaviors (Ind et al., 2013). These communities offer brands a range of strategic advantages, such as fostering product innovation, promoting a more user-centric brand identity, and reinforcing the brand's core values (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). They also serve as platforms for customers to actively co-create value by expressing their brand voice (Healy & McDonagh, 2013). At their core, brand communities are composed of individuals who share a common admiration and affinity for a brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). According to Muñiz and O'Guinn, such communities are characterized by a sense of belonging, shared rituals and traditions, and

a collective sense of moral responsibility. These features help cultivate stronger emotional ties and deeper commitment among members, ultimately enhancing brand value (Zhou et al., 2012).

Engaging in brand communities often enhances the likelihood that customers will participate in co-creating value with a brand, as these platforms offer both support and opportunities for such involvement (O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2010). However, while brand communities can play a strong facilitating role, they are not strictly necessary for co-creation to occur. Customers can still contribute to shaping and enriching the brand experience even if they are not formally part of a brand community. However, France et al. (2015) conceptually suggested that brand self-congruity may positively influence brand co-creation, although this relationship was not empirically tested in their study. Hence this study goes on the tangent of empirically accessing the efficacy of that proposition. Hence;

H7. Brand community moderate the relationship between self-congruity on brand co-creation

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a self-administered online survey in English to collect data from a convenience sample of Ghanaian consumers who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Ghana was selected for this research given its steadily growing internet penetration and active digital engagement. As of January 2024, Ghana had 17.86 million internet users, with social media users accounting for 6.6 million, representing approximately 20.1% of the population (Statista, 2024). Ghanaian users spend an average of 3 hours per day on social media, with platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok being particularly prominent (DataReportal, 2024). Social media has become an increasingly important space for consumers in Ghana to interact with brands, express preferences, and engage in value co-creation behaviors.

The focus of this research is on the beverage sector, a dynamic and competitive industry in Ghana with significant brand visibility on social media platforms. Beverage companies—ranging from local brands like Voltic and Alvaro to global brands such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi—actively use social media to drive customer engagement and brand loyalty through promotions, user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and community engagement campaigns. This industry was selected due to its high frequency of consumer-brand

interaction, the emotional and lifestyle associations it often promotes, and the increasing tendency of consumers to participate in co-creating brand meaning online.

Consistent with recent studies on social media engagement and brand co-creation (e.g., Hutter et al., 2013; Popp & Woratschek, 2017; Dessart et al., 2020), this study seeks to explore how Ghanaian consumers engage in co-creation activities with beverage brands through interactive media, framed through the lens of Social Exchange Theory. The use of an online survey allows for efficient data collection from a digitally active population, capturing real-time insights on how social media interactivity facilitates co-creative behavior within the beverage sector.

MEASURES

All latent constructs used in this study as indicated in Table 1 were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which served as the primary instrument for capturing consumer perceptions within the beverage sector of an emerging economy like Ghana. The scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, offering respondents a balanced range of options that are both cognitively manageable and analytically robust. This design provides a structured yet accessible means for participants to express agreement or disagreement with specific statements, without introducing unnecessary complexity that could compromise response quality. In contexts such as Ghana—where varied levels of digital and survey literacy exist—this scale strikes an effective balance between precision and respondent ease, making it particularly well-suited for consumer research.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement framework, all items were adapted from previously validated scales in the literature, each with strong psychometric support, including high Cronbach's alpha values in prior studies. The construct of brand self-congruity was measured using items adapted from De Vries and Carlson (2014), while brand interactivity was assessed using the scale developed by Labrecque (2014). Consumer co-creation behavior was measured using the widely cited framework from Yi and Gong (2013), and brand knowledge was assessed through items adapted from Keller and Swaminathan (2020). In addition, brand community involvement was measured using scales from Algesheimer et al. (2005) and Zhou et al. (2012), capturing both affective and behavioral dimensions of community engagement.

Table 1. Outer Loading Results

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)
Brand CoCreation		
BCC1	0.873	20.866
BCC2	0.95	40.497

BCC3	0.93	35.066
Brand Community		
BCM1	0.712	9.818
BCM2	0.835	11.898
BCM3	0.935	14.528
BCM4	0.837	12.017
Brand Interactivity		
BINT1	0.85	45.76
BINT2	0.87	45.39
BINT3	0.729	9.239
BINT4	0.824	48.78
Brand Knowledge		
BKN1	0.781	15.032
BKN2	0.828	26.285
BKN3	0.897	58.862
BKN4	0.826	19.051
BKN5	0.871	41.688
BKN6	0.839	27.424
Brand Self-Congruity		
BSC1	0.779	8.989
BSC2	0.947	22.303
BSC3	0.805	10.919
BSC4	0.816	10.531
Information Sharing		
INFOS1	0.91	62.33
INFOS2	0.831	10.433
INFOS3	0.867	10.261
INFOS4	0.795	6.393

Perceived ease of Use PEOU1	0.85	45.76
PEOU2	0.904	70.03
PEOU3	0.876	45.39
PEOU4	0.855	13.924
Relationship Quality RQU1	0.807	10.399
RQU2	0.853	14.542
RQU3	0.76	9.52
RQU4	0.846	12.842

RQU5 0.832 12.443

RQU6 0.783 6.302

RQU7 0.734 10.094

Note: RQU= Relationship Quality, PEOU= Perceived Ease of Use, INFOS=Information

Sharing, BSC= Brand Self-Congruity, BINT=Brand Interactivity, BCM= Brand Community,

BCC= Brand Cocreation, BKN=Brand Knowledge

Source(s): Developed by Researchers

For constructs related to technology and interaction, perceived ease of use was measured using items adapted from Al-Adwan et al. (2013) and Venkatesh and Bala (2008), reflecting user perceptions of digital brand engagement. The construct of relationship quality—treated as multidimensional—was operationalized using modified items from Garbarino and Johnson (1999), Morgan and Hunt (1994), and Palmatier et al. (2006), encompassing trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Finally, information sharing was assessed using established scales from Liang et al. (2011) and Hajli et al. (2017), emphasizing voluntary consumer disclosure within digital brand environments. Together, these validated and contextually adapted instruments formed a robust measurement framework for examining the interplay between ease of use, information sharing, relationship quality, and co-creation behaviors on interactive brand platforms. This approach ensures methodological rigor while capturing the complex yet meaningful pathways through which Ghanaian consumers engage with beverage brands online.

Data Collection and Sampling

Data for this study were collected through a structured online survey administered to consumers engaged with beverage brands in Ghana. A digital questionnaire was created using Google Forms, incorporating validated measurement items adapted from prior scholarly studies. The final instrument included 36 items covering eight core constructs: Relationship Quality (RQU), Information

Sharing (INFOS), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Brand Self-Congruity (BSC), Brand Interactivity (BINT), Brand Community (BCM), Brand Co-creation (BCC), and Brand Knowledge (BKN). The questionnaire was divided into nine sections, including screening criteria, brand affiliation, demographic data, and the construct-specific measurement items. The target population consisted of male and female consumers residing in Ghana, representing a diverse mix of age, educational background, and income levels. In line with the study's focus on digital brand co-creation, screening questions were employed to ensure that only respondents who were active users of social media and members of online brand communities affiliated with beverage brands (via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) were included. A pilot test involving a small group of respondents was conducted to evaluate the clarity and relevance of items. Feedback from the pre-test phase informed minor revisions, thereby enhancing content validity before launching the full-scale data collection. The survey was administered over a three-month period, with WhatsApp used as the primary channel for distribution. The survey link was circulated across two university-based WhatsApp groups in Accra and a graduate school WhatsApp group primarily composed of working professionals. In addition, participants were encouraged to share the survey within their networks through a snowball sampling approach.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Professional Studies, Accra's Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Ethics Committee (Reference

Number: UPSARCC877). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured before respondents completed the questionnaire. A total of 249 responses were received. After cleaning for incomplete or invalid entries, 219 completed questionnaires were retained for analysis. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, normality checks, and latent variable extraction in accordance with recommended procedures (Hair et al., 2012). The unit of analysis was consumers who regularly engage with beverage brands via interactive digital platforms. All respondents were Ghanaian adults aged 18 years and above, and all had experience using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, and had some level of engagement with online brand communities. The final sample was composed primarily of female respondents (60%), with a large majority (97.7%) between the ages of 18 and 34 years. Most participants were well-educated, with 61.2% holding a university degree, and 78.1% employed full-time. In terms of brand familiarity, 55% of respondents identified non-mainstream beverage brands as their most engaging online platforms, while 40% cited Coca-Cola, and 5% selected Red Bull. Social media engagement was high, with 39.5% using Facebook for 2–3 hours daily, 35.9% for more than 4 hours, and 24.5% using it for about 1 hour per day. Given this high level of digital activity (see Pfeil et al., 2009), the sample was deemed highly appropriate for exploring brand co-creation behaviors in interactive media environments, especially within the Ghanaian beverage industry (Zadeh et al., 2019).

FINDINGS

To test the proposed hypotheses, we employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), incorporating a 5,000-sample bootstrap procedure to assess the robustness of the parameter estimates. Given the exploratory and predictive nature of the study, particularly in a context involving multiple latent constructs, we selected Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the most appropriate analytical technique. PLS-SEM is well-suited for models that include both formative and reflective constructs and is especially effective when the objective is theory development rather than theory confirmation. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0, applying a two-tailed significance test to evaluate the statistical relevance of path coefficients. In the first stage, we assessed the measurement model by performing performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis

(CFA), ensuring that each construct met established thresholds for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The approach also allowed us to evaluate the internal consistency of the constructs using composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values. This methodological approach ensures the robustness of the model and supports the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data.

Mitigating Common Method Bias and Data Analysis Approach

This study implemented multiple strategies to minimize the potential impact of common method bias. First, participants received guidance during the questionnaire completion process through additional support, despite the availability of a pre-existing Google Form. This approach aimed to enhance both accuracy and understanding among respondents. Additionally, ensuring clarity and precision in the survey indicators was a key consideration. Podsakoff et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of reducing ambiguity to mitigate common method bias, which involves carefully reviewing each statement to ensure its intended meaning is clear and unambiguous. Another strategy employed in this study was assessing multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). All VIF coefficients were below the threshold value of 5, confirming the absence of strong correlations among independent variables and ruling out concerns related to multicollinearity.

MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT

To evaluate the measurement model, factor loadings for all items exceeded 0.71 and were statistically significant, indicating strong individual item reliability (see Table 1). Internal consistency was assessed using both Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability measures, with all values exceeding 0.80—comfortably above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70—demonstrating a high level of reliability across the constructs (see Table 2). Convergent validity was confirmed through the average variance extracted (AVE), with all constructs reporting values above the recommended 0.50 cutoff (see Table II). Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (1981), which requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. This condition was met in all cases, supporting the distinctiveness of the constructs included in the model (Hair et al., 2012).

Table 2. Variable correlations Matrix, AVE and CR

	Alpha	AVE	CR	RQU	PEOU	INFOS	BSC	BINT	BCM	BCC
RQU	0.8	0.69	0.89	1						
PEOU	0.871	0.76	0.9	0.76	1					
INFOS	0.85	0.54	0.91	0.63	0.71	1				
BSC	0.83	0.56	0.8	0.61	0.59	0.51	1			

BINT	0.822	0.56	0.82	0.62	0.65	0.77	0.52	1		
BCM	0.82	0.57	0.78	0.54	0.46	0.44	0.43	0.55	1	
BCC	0.917	0.83	0.94	0.54	0.51	0.41	0.54	0.48	0.57	1
BKN	0.84	0.707	0.93	0.38	0.34	0.36	0.29	0.42	0.72	0.51

Note: RQU= Relationship Quality, PEOU= Perceived Ease of Use, INFOS=Information Sharing, BSC= Brand Self-Congruity, BINT=Brand Interactivity, BCM= Brand Community, BCC= Brand Cocreation, BKN=Brand Knowledge
Source(s): Developed by Researchers

Structural Model Results

Based on the structural model results presented in Table 3, the hypotheses were assessed by analyzing the standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values. These findings provide empirical support for several of the proposed relationships, particularly those involving brand cocreation and its antecedents and outcomes.

The relationship between brand self-congruity (BSC) and brand co-creation (BCC) emerged as statistically significant ($\beta = 0.226, p = 0.003$), supporting the hypothesis that consumers who perceive alignment between their self-image and a brand are more likely to participate in co-creation activities. Similarly, relationship quality (RQU) had a strong and significant influence on brand co-creation ($\beta = 0.333, p < 0.001$), indicating that the strength and positivity of the consumer-brand relationship enhances co-creation behavior.

However, not all hypothesized paths were supported. For instance, the path from brand community (BCM) to co-creation (BCC) was positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.124, p = 0.162$), suggesting that mere community affiliation may not be sufficient to trigger co-

creation unless other factors are present. Likewise, the direct path from brand interactivity (BINT) to co-creation was insignificant ($\beta = 0.088, p = 0.252$), questioning assumptions about the automatic influence of interactive features on deeper consumer engagement outcomes. Interestingly, brand self-congruity (BSC) significantly influenced both brand community engagement ($\beta = 0.558, p < 0.001$) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) ($\beta = 0.344, p < 0.001$), suggesting that congruent brand identities not only foster community engagement but also enhance consumers' cognitive evaluations of platform usability. Perceived ease of use also had strong, significant effects on both brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.518, p < 0.001$) and information

sharing ($\beta = 0.547, p < 0.001$), implying that when consumers find platforms easy to navigate, they are more likely to interact and share brand-related content.

Brand co-creation (BCC), in turn, had a very strong and significant effect on brand knowledge (BKN) ($\beta = 0.689, p < 0.001$), reinforcing the argument that participatory brand behaviors enhance cognitive brand structures. This aligns well with existing literature suggesting that co-creation deepens brand understanding and loyalty.

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Remarks
BCC -> BKN	0.689	13.166	0	S
BCM -> BCC	0.124	1.398	0.162	R
BINT -> BCC	0.088	1.147	0.252	R
BSC -> BCC	0.226	2.945	0.003	S
BSC -> BCM	0.558	8.71	0	S
BSC -> PEOU	0.344	4.112	0	S
INFOS -> BCC	0.122	1.836	0.066	R
PEOU -> BINT	0.518	7.964	0	S
PEOU -> INFOS	0.547	9.495	0	S
RQU -> BCC	0.333	4.432	0	S

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The model's explanatory strength was assessed using the R² values (see Table 4). Brand co-creation (R² = 0.477), brand knowledge (R² = 0.472), brand interactivity (R² = 0.265), information sharing (R² = 0.296), and perceived ease of use (R² = 0.114) all exceeded the recommended benchmark of 0.10 for consumer behavior research (Chin, 1998), with several approaching or surpassing the 0.20 threshold that indicates a high explanatory level in this field (Vock et al., 2013). These results affirm that the model holds meaningful predictive power for understanding how consumer-brand interactions unfold in digital spaces.

Table 4. R – Squared Adjusted Original T statistics P sample (O) ((O/STDEV) values

BCC	0.477	8.489	0.000
BCM	0.308	4.237	0.000
BINT	0.265	3.861	0.000
BKN	0.472	6.577	0.000
INFOS	0.296	4.544	0.000
PEOU	0.114	1.902	0.057

Note: RQU= Relationship Quality, PEOU= Perceived Ease of Use, INFOS=Information Sharing, BSC= Brand Self-Congruity, BINT=Brand Interactivity, BCM= Brand Community, BCC= Brand Cocreation

Source(s): Developed by Researchers

Although not hypothesized, the finding also shows that notably, the indirect path (see Table 5) from brand self-congruity (BSC) through perceived ease of use (PEOU) to information sharing (INFOS) was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.188, t = 3.368, p = 0.001$), suggesting that when consumers perceive alignment between their self-image and the brand, it enhances their perception of ease, which subsequently promotes their willingness to share brand-related information. This underscores the pivotal role of user-friendly interfaces in translating brand consumer alignment into active engagement. Another important indirect effect observed was the pathway from brand self-congruity through brand co-creation (BCC) to brand knowledge (BKN) ($\beta = 0.155, t = 3.060, p = 0.002$). This finding illustrates that when consumers feel a psychological connection to the brand, it fosters their participation in brand co-creation activities, which in turn enriches their understanding and internalization of brand knowledge. It supports the notion that identity-driven engagement mechanisms are essential for cultivating deep brand comprehension.

Further, the influence of relationship quality (RQU) on brand knowledge (BKN) was found to be significantly mediated by brand co-creation ($\beta = 0.229, t = 3.792, p = 0.000$). This highlights that quality relational exchanges between consumers and the brand contribute meaningfully to co-creation processes, which eventually foster stronger knowledge structures about the brand in the consumer's mind. However, several indirect effects were not statistically significant. For example, the extended mediation chain from brand self-congruity → perceived ease of use → brand interactivity → brand co-creation → brand knowledge ($\beta = 0.011, t = 0.966, p = 0.334$) did not reach

significance, indicating that the inclusion of multiple mediating variables may dilute the strength of the effect across this pathway.

Table 5. Mediation Effect

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	T	P values
BSC -> PEOU -> INFOS	0.188		3.368	0.001
BSC -> BCC -> BKN	0.155		3.06	0.002
INFOS -> BCC -> BKN	0.084		1.79	0.074
RQU -> BCC -> BKN	0.229		3.792	0.000
BSC -> PEOU -> BINT -> BCC -> BKN	0.011		0.966	0.334

BSC -> BCM -> BCC -> BKN	0.048		1.212	0.226
BSC -> PEOU -> INFOS -> BCC -> BKN	0.016		1.305	0.192
BSC -> PEOU -> BINT	0.178		3.036	0.002

Note: RQU= Relationship Quality, PEOU= Perceived Ease of Use, INFOS=Information Sharing, BSC= Brand Self-Congruity, BINT=Brand Interactivity, BCM= Brand Community, BCC= Brand Cocreation, BKN=Brand Knowledge

Source(s): Developed by Researchers

Finally, the analysis confirmed that brand community (BCM) plays a meaningful moderating role in the relationship between brand self-congruity (BSC) and brand co-creation(see Table 6). Specifically, the interaction effect ($\beta = 0.174$) indicates that when consumers strongly identify with and actively participate in a brand community, the positive influence of their self-image alignment with the brand on co-creation behaviors becomes significantly stronger.

Table 6. Moderation Effect

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Moderation
BSCx BCM -> BCC	0.174 7.519		0.000	Yes

Note:Brand Self-Congruity, BCM= Brand Community, BCC= Brand Cocreation **Source(s):** Developed by Researchers

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore how customer brand co-creation (BCC) on interactive media platforms is shaped by a series of antecedents, using Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the conceptual lens. Our findings offer nuanced insights into the mechanisms driving customer engagement and value creation in digital brand ecosystems, particularly in the context of interactive media within an emerging market. The results affirm that brand self-congruity (BSC) significantly predicts brand co-creation ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.003$). This suggests that consumers who perceive a close alignment between their own identity and the brand are more inclined to actively engage in co-creative behaviors. This aligns with previous research indicating that identity congruence strengthens customer commitment and participation (Liu et al., 2022). Moreover, the relationship quality (RQU) between the consumer and the brand also strongly predicted co-creation behaviors ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing SET's proposition that reciprocal, trust-based exchanges yield stronger engagement outcomes (Palmatier et al., 2006).

Interestingly, while brand community (BCM) was positively linked to co-creation, the effect did not reach statistical significance ($\beta = 0.124$, $p = 0.162$). This suggests that belonging to a brand community alone does not necessarily lead to active co-creation unless additional motivational drivers are activated. Similarly, the direct impact of brand interactivity (BINT) on co-creation was not significant ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.252$), questioning the assumption that interactive features alone generate meaningful engagement. These findings resonate with insights from Popp and Woratschek (2016), who argue that interactivity must be accompanied by psychological

investment and value alignment to translate into co-creation. On the cognitive side, brand self-congruity significantly influenced perceived ease of use (PEOU) ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < 0.001$) and brand community participation ($\beta = 0.558$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers who identify strongly with a brand not only perceive it as easier to use but also feel more comfortable and willing to engage within its digital communities. Perceived ease of use, in turn, significantly shaped both brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.518$, $p < 0.001$) and information sharing (INFOS) ($\beta = 0.547$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the crucial role of usability in encouraging broader participatory behaviors. These pathways affirm the role of technology acceptance constructs in shaping engagement outcomes, as seen in studies like Davis et al. (1989) and Venkatesh and Bala (2008).

Co-creation itself significantly predicted brand knowledge (BKN) ($\beta = 0.689$, $p < 0.001$), emphasizing that participatory customer roles directly enhance understanding, memory, and awareness of brand attributes. This finding echoes recent literature showing that active engagement fosters deeper cognitive structures around brands (Merrilee, 2016; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Van Nguyen et al., 2021). In addition to the direct paths, several significant indirect effects were identified. For example, brand self-congruity had a meaningful indirect effect on information sharing through perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.188$, $t = 3.368$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that when users feel the brand aligns with their identity, they are more likely to perceive the platform as user-friendly and, consequently, more likely to share brand-related content. Another important pathway was from BSC through co-creation to brand knowledge ($\beta = 0.155$, $t = 3.060$, $p = 0.002$), reinforcing the idea that identity-based engagement cultivates deeper brand understanding.

Furthermore, relationship quality had a strong indirect effect on brand knowledge through cocreation ($\beta = 0.229$, $t = 3.792$, $p < 0.001$), further validating the importance of strong relational bonds in facilitating brand learning and value creation. These indirect pathways support the tenets of Social Exchange Theory, illustrating that the perceived mutual benefits from brandconsumer exchanges drive both action and cognition. Lastly, the interaction effect confirms that brand community (BCM) moderates the relationship between BSC and co-creation ($\beta = 0.532$), suggesting that when consumers are embedded within brand communities, the impact of identity alignment on co-creation becomes significantly stronger. This finding supports recent calls to investigate the nuanced role of community dynamics in digital engagement strategies (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2020).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to brand co-creation literature by advancing the application of Social Exchange Theory (SET) in understanding how interactive digital platforms foster brand value creation. By integrating psychological constructs such as brand self-congruity (BSC) with technological affordances like perceived ease of use (PEOU) and brand interactivity (BINT), the findings provide new theoretical insights into how consumers develop and sustain brand relationships in online environments. This approach addresses calls for more integrative frameworks in consumer-brand interaction research (Cheung et al., 2021; Tuskej & Podnar, 2018; Brodie et al., 2013; Merz et al., 2009). One key theoretical advancement is the confirmation that brand self-congruity acts as a central psychological driver of co-creation behavior. This supports earlier work on identity-based brand relationships (Sihvonen, 2019; Burmann et al., 2023; Japutra et al. 2019), but our findings deepen this understanding by showing that self-congruity not only influences direct behavioral outcomes (such as co-creation) but also exerts indirect effects via system-level constructs like perceived ease of use and community engagement. These results highlight the complex, layered nature of customer-brand relationships in digital environments, where psychological alignment fuels both platform-level evaluations and social behavior.

The study also provides a nuanced view of the role of digital platform usability in shaping interactive behavior. Perceived ease of use significantly influenced both brand interactivity and information sharing, reaffirming the foundational assumptions of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) but extending them within a co-creation context. This aligns with recent scholarship advocating for greater attention to user experience as a precursor to value cocreation in online communities (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Interestingly, the lack of a significant direct relationship between brand interactivity and cocreation challenges the assumption that simply embedding interactive features guarantees deeper consumer involvement. This finding supports recent critiques suggesting that interactivity does not always translate into meaningful engagement unless it is coupled with motivational drivers (e.g., perceived value, emotional relevance) (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004;

Hollebeek et al., 2014; Cheung et al., 2020). Thus, our results emphasize the importance of aligning technology design with user identity and relational quality to fully activate co-creative behavior. Furthermore, the model highlights the mediating role of brand co-creation in the relationship between relationship quality and brand knowledge. This suggests that co-creation is not merely a behavioral endpoint but also a critical link that deepens consumers' cognitive understanding of the brand. This aligns with Vargo and Lusch's (2008) service-dominant logic, which positions co-creation as the core mechanism through which value is realized.

Finally, the study confirms the moderating role of brand community in enhancing the link between self-congruity and co-creation. This affirms the social embeddedness of co-creation and supports prior findings that active brand communities strengthen the psychological brand attachment that drives participatory behavior (Lee & Hsieh, 2022; Hung, 2014; Algesheimer et al., 2005). As such, the model offers a refined understanding of how individual identity, platform usability, and social belonging interact to shape brand value co-creation.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this study offer valuable guidance for brands operating in digitally connected consumer markets, particularly in emerging economies such as Ghana. First, the strong influence of brand self-congruity on co-creation behavior highlights the importance of brand positioning strategies that resonate with consumers' self-concept. Marketers must prioritize authentic, identity-relevant messaging that allows consumers to see their values and aspirations reflected in the brand. This can be achieved through personalized content, inclusive storytelling, and culturally sensitive campaigns that acknowledge local norms, identities, and aspirations. Second, the significant relationship between perceived ease of use and both brand interactivity and information sharing suggests that digital interfaces must be designed with clarity and simplicity. Given that many Ghanaian consumers engage with brands through mobile platforms, ensuring seamless navigation, low data consumption, and responsive design is essential for enabling participation in brand communities. Usability is not merely a technical concern but a strategic one—it directly influences consumers' willingness to interact and share content, thereby contributing to brand visibility and value.

Third, the findings call attention to the role of relationship quality in fostering co-creation and ultimately enhancing brand knowledge. Brands should invest in relational strategies that go beyond transactional communication to include empathy, responsiveness, and consistency in interactions. This could include dedicated social media teams that respond to queries in realtime, personalized feedback loops, and loyalty programs that recognize and reward long-term brand engagement. Moreover, the insights on brand communities provide practical direction for community managers and brand strategists. While community affiliation alone did not significantly influence co-creation behavior, its moderating effect suggests that active community participation enhances the

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impact of brand identity alignment. This means that brands must not only build communities but actively foster participation through interactive events, peer-to-peer conversations, and co-designed content. Encouraging user-generated content, facilitating discussions among brand fans, and recognizing community contributors can strengthen the collective identity and boost co-creation dynamics.

Importantly, the study provides evidence that brand co-creation is not just a branding buzzword but a strategic asset that contributes to consumers' brand knowledge. This reinforces the business case for co-creation initiatives such as contests, customer reviews, co-design opportunities, and ambassador programs. These efforts not only build engagement but also cultivate informed and loyal consumers who act as brand advocates. Finally, the insights from this study are timely for marketers navigating the rapidly evolving digital landscape in Africa. As social media becomes a dominant channel for brand communication and community building, understanding the mechanisms that drive consumer co-creation is essential. By leveraging identity alignment, relational quality, and intuitive platform design, brands can position themselves as co-creators of value alongside their customers.

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