



Effects of social media brand-related content on fashion products buying behaviour – a moderated mediation model

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines in which circumstances consumer's self-congruity moderates the indirect influence of consumer-based brand equity (mediating role) in the relationship between firm-created and user-generated social media content and intention to purchase fashion products.

Design/methodology/approach – In this study, we carried out an online survey with social media users of fashion brands and collected data from 622 participants across two samples to investigate whether consumers' perceptions of equity of fashion brands mediate the relationship between social media brand-related communication created by both firms and users and the intention to buy the fashion brands. The indirect relationship is further moderated by self-congruity.

Findings – The results indicate that (i) brand equity mediates the relationship between social media communication and purchase intentions of fashion products, and (ii) self-congruity moderates the relationship between social media communication types and purchase intentions, such that higher/lower levels of self-congruity strengthen/weaken the impact of social media communication on purchase intentions.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the business and marketing literature by exploring how social media communication, branding, and fashion align with the individual's self-concept and buying behaviour.

Keywords: social media, brand-related content, brand equity, self-congruity, purchase intentions, product endorsement.

Paper type: research paper

Introduction

Market research demonstrates that both women and men regularly visit fashion brand pages on social media for inspiration prior to purchase (Mintel, 2019). Not surprisingly, social media content created by both firms and customers offers an optimal platform for brand value co-creation due to its reach and interactiveness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). Over a one-month period, fashion brands such as H&M (as of October 2021) have recorded an average engagement of 3 million likes and 12 thousand comments through their social media pages, demonstrating the reach social media can achieve (Unmetric, 2021). Similarly, luxury brands such as Burberry, Louis Vuitton, and Victoria's Secret were ranked among the most influential brands on social media worldwide in 2021 with, respectively, 18.5 million, 46.3 million, and 70.3 million followers on Instagram (Sprinklr, 2021).

Fashion is one of the most value-expressive artifacts consumers use to create self-image (Murray, 2015; Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). As fashion brands rely on social media to promote their products, marketing and business scholars continue to study this evolving and dynamic context (Colicev *et al.*, 2018; Onofrei *et al.*, 2022). The current study contributes to this fast-acumulating body of research from a self-image perspective. As individuals prefer brands or products that match their values and their self-image, this study draws on self-congruence theory (Sirgy, 1982) and social media content types, to examine in which circumstances consumer's self-congruity moderates the indirect influence of consumer-based brand equity in the relationship between social media brand-related content types and consumer's intention to purchase fashion products.

Firm-created social media content (hereafter FCC) has been described as part of a firm's content marketing toolkit and has become a well-established and distinct element of integrated marketing communications and brand strategy (e.g., Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2019), which has been proven to influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). A challenge for fashion brands communicating on social media is the unpredictable aspect of user-generated content (hereafter UGC), whether created content is published on the consumers' own social media page (Davicik *et al.*, 2021; Koivisto and Mattila, 2020) or whether this content is shared by others on social media pages and through hashtags (Morra *et al.*, 2018). Although UGC is independent of the firm's control, management of fashion brands demands a holistic approach both in messaging content and channel strategy

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3 (Šerić *et al.*, 2020; Taylor and Costello, 2017). That, in turn, requires social media
4 strategies that align both firm-created and user-generated brand-related
5 communication types (Gómez *et al.*, 2019).
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10 Recently, to address the evolving trends of social media brand-related
11 communication, fashion brands have begun to support user-generated content.
12 Fashion brands provide users with product samples through paid partnerships that
13 motivate users to create content that is aligned with the brand's message via a channel
14 preferred by the consumer (Eagle *et al.*, 2021). Beyond traditional celebrities, brand
15 endorsement on social media involves regular users as well as different types of
16 influencers (Campbell and Farrell 2020), professionals, or other stakeholders that
17 approve and recommend products and brands to consumers (Eagle *et al.*, 2021). By
18 motivating content creators, fashion brands, to some extent, regain control of social
19 media brand-related communication (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Peng *et al.*, 2018).
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27 Whilst past studies reported the effects of social media brand-related content
28 on consumers' perceptions and behaviours towards brands (e.g., Gómez *et al.*, 2019;
29 Morra *et al.*, 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), brand-related content on social
30 media is rapidly evolving, and this requires ongoing research to monitor how
31 consumers respond to those dynamic changes (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Schivinski,
32 2021). The effects of brand communication on social media platforms include a
33 positive impact on various cognitive and emotional brand-related dimensions such as
34 brand awareness (Langaro *et al.*, 2015; Zollo *et al.*, 2020), brand attitude (Lee and
35 Eastin, 2020; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), brand commitment and emotional
36 bonding (Barreda *et al.*, 2020; Filo *et al.*, 2015), brand equity (Schivinski and
37 Dabrowski, 2016), and brand trust (Shareef *et al.*, 2020; Singh *et al.*, 2020).
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46 Moreover, researchers have investigated the influence of social media brand-
47 related communication on key behavioural variables such as brand loyalty (Ebrahim,
48 2020), word of mouth (Ryu and Park, 2020; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), intentions to
49 partake in brand-sponsored events (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019), engagement in non-
50 sponsored brand-related content (Davicik *et al.*, 2021), and purchase intentions (Hutter
51 *et al.*, 2013; Mayrhofer *et al.*, 2020; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Despite the
52 evolving nature of social media brand-related communication, fashion brand
53 executives have received relatively little systematic academic guidance on how to
54 implement new communication techniques in their social media strategies (Kong *et*
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3 *al.*, 2020), which in turn leads to trial and error when it comes to tailoring branding
4 campaigns and evidence-based strategies (Colicev *et al.*, 2018).
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8 **Theoretical background and hypothesis development**

9 *Social Media Brand-Related Communication*

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11 Consumers interact with many actors in the social media environment, including
12 brands and other individuals. Firms use social media to communicate with consumers
13 about their brands and products to create brand awareness and positive brand
14 associations, stimulating conversations about a brand and ultimately encouraging
15 purchase (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018). Social media brand-related communication
16 differs in type and broadly assumes the forms of firm-created content (FCC) and user-
17 generated content (UGC) (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). The former is integrated
18 into the overall brand positioning and creative idea, such that messages are designed,
19 created, and initiated by brands on their official social media pages (Eagle *et al.*,
20 2021; Colicev *et al.*, 2018). Consumers are exposed to FCC either through posts
21 organically shown on their feeds when they follow a brand's social media page or
22 through sponsored advertising and/or retargeting after consumers had any previous
23 online interaction with the brand and/or with a competitor product in the same
24 category (Schivinski, 2019).
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35 Social media FCC is used by fashion brands as one of the methods of
36 conveying brand identity, therefore promoting self-expression. Firm-created content
37 invites users to interact with the brand, and individuals who follow brands on social
38 media create an environment for advocacy of the fashion brand both online and
39 offline (VanMeter *et al.*, 2018). Consumers are motivated to use social media to seek
40 out relevant information about fashion brands trends via FCC on brand-owned social
41 media pages. Content created by firms on social media is, therefore, an effective
42 branding tool due to its demographic targeting capability when compared to other
43 traditional communication channels (Colicev *et al.*, 2019). In this study, the concept
44 of social media FCC is defined as content fashion brands post on their official social
45 media accounts (owned channel) and excludes paid advertising. We hypothesised *a*
46 *priori* that consumers exposed to this FCC are positively influenced in their
47 perceptions of fashion brands and behavior (Colicev *et al.*, 2019; Schivinski and
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Although the creation and dissemination of content on social media is not a new phenomenon, developments in technology have allowed customers to better interact with brands *vis-à-vis* user-generated content (Davicik *et al.*, 2021; Saboo *et al.*, 2016). This type of communication refers to brand-related content that is created by individuals rather than brands (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). To be classified as UGC, it should (a) be public and widely available on social media/online, (b) be created outside professional routines and practices, and (c) be independent in the sense of not being owned by a firm and/or brand (Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery, 2007). User-generated content encompasses all possible independent creation and/or co-creation of brand-related content, which may include comments on the brand's social media profiles, brand endorsements on the consumer's social media profiles, comments on other users' social media profiles, to name a few (Schivinski, 2021; Onofrei *et al.*, 2022). For the purpose of this research, we limit our investigation of UGC to content users of fashion brands post on their own social media accounts.

Individual consumers usually approach UGC from two different perspectives: 1) either consumers create brand-centred content (about brands and products), or they create user-centred content (about themselves using brands) (Kim and Johnson, 2016; Pasternak *et al.*, 2017). In the former, consumers create content to share their opinions on the object of interest. From this utilitarian perspective, the products and/or brands are the primary object of UGC. Whereas in the latter, brands assume a hedonic role and are used for their symbolic meanings to express self-representation (Colicev *et al.*, 2019). The valence of UGC may be positive, with consumers promoting in favour of brands (Schivinski, 2019), or negative, most often reflecting grumbling and complaints (Dessart *et al.*, 2020; Gunarathne *et al.*, 2017). The literature indicates that the valence of UGC is predominantly positive (Colicev *et al.*, 2019; Schivinski, 2021) and significant in building perceptions and driving behaviour (Schivinski, 2019). As for fashion brands, it is expected the valence of UGC to be mostly positive, considering that consumers have a hedonic approach to fashion brands (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Therefore, UGC is used as a platform to communicate brand symbolic meanings on social media, which are congruent with the self (Kim and Johnson, 2016; Pasternak *et al.*, 2017).

The literature sees UGC as a trustworthy communication source, as it is not controlled by the brand and, therefore, not perceived as traditional advertising (Kennedy and Guzmán, 2017; Schivinski, 2021). In relation to fashion brands, the

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3 perceptions of trustworthiness of UGC should still be salient when products are
4 present in the message as consumers use symbolic aspects of fashion brands to
5 convey meaning and express themselves on social media (Colicev *et al.*, 2019;
6 Onofrei *et al.*, 2022). In line with the above, the current study focuses on the positive
7 aspects of UGC and hypothesises that this type of social media communication
8 positively influences consumers' perceptions and behaviour of fashion brands.
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15 *The Mediating Role of Consumer-Based Brand Equity*

16 Research on consumer's perceptions originated in the field of behavioural
17 psychology, with scholars investigating how individual mindsets influence the effects
18 between stimuli, attitudes, and behaviour (Smith and Swinyard, 1983). The notion of
19 individual mindsets was later implemented in consumer behaviour studies, with
20 research being undertaken to understand the role of perceptions and attitudes on the
21 decision-making process (Eagle *et al.*, 2021). The main reasoning is that the
22 consumer's attitudes play an important role in persuasion, with positive perceptions
23 influencing changes in buying behaviour (Eagle *et al.*, 2021).
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31 Consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) is considered in the business literature
32 as one of the main cognitive brand perceptions at the individual level
33 (Chatzipanagiotou *et al.*, 2019). Whilst definitions of CBBE differ (Christodoulides *et*
34 *al.*, 2015), one important idea agreed upon among scholars is that brand equity is the
35 incremental perceived value of a product due to the brand name (Yoo and Donthu,
36 2001). Therefore, we define CBBE as "a set of perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and
37 behaviours on the part of consumers that results in increased utility and allows a
38 brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name"
39 (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010, p. 48).
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46 CBBE evolves from the interactions consumers have with a brand, generating
47 stronger associations regarding brand attributes, benefits, and values
48 (Chatzipanagiotou *et al.*, 2019). With the developments of technology, businesses
49 focus on the development of brand equity online with the aim to benefit from a more
50 personalized contact with consumers (Nunan *et al.*, 2018). Brands, therefore, use
51 social media communication to foster CBBE through brand elements, uniqueness,
52 experiences, and positive perceptions (Moreira *et al.*, 2017; Schivinski, 2021).
53 Tailored brand-related communication consequently enhances CBBE and its power to
54 elicit behaviour on social media (Schivinski, 2019).
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3 Research has evidenced that when consumers identify with a brand, FCC
4 nurtures positive associations and perceptions, improving the value of the brand
5 (Moreira *et al.*, 2017; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). UGC positively influences
6 brand equity, given that the message produces a stronger consumer reaction when
7 compared to traditional advertising (Davicik *et al.*, 2021; Kennedy and Guzmán,
8 2017). Not surprisingly, the scholarly literature informs that the impact of social
9 media brand-related communication on consumers' perceptions of brands varies
10 across firm-created and user-generated, depending on factors such as industry, type of
11 product, and the nature of brand (Colicev *et al.*, 2018; Schivinski *et al.*, 2019).
12 Despite the fact that there is a variation of findings discriminating which source of
13 social media brand-related communication is more effective in creating, shaping, and
14 nurturing consumers' perceptions, there is evidence that both types of content aim to
15 impact consumers' perceived attributes and benefits towards brands (Morra *et al.*,
16 2018; Onofrei *et al.*, 2022). Based on the above, it is anticipated that fashion brand-
17 related content on social media, independently of its source, should positively
18 influence consumers' perceptions of brands (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019; Schivinski and
19 Dabrowski, 2016).

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21 In addition, the literature demonstrates that CBBE is a key predictor of
22 consumer behaviour (Chatzipanagiotou *et al.*, 2019; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2015).
23 There is evidence that CBBE influences consumer loyalty (Godey *et al.*, 2016) and
24 brand re-purchase (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Consumers
25 who express higher levels of CBBE tend to purchase more in comparison to new or
26 moderately loyal customers (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Strong consumer loyalty is also
27 reflected in how individuals actively follow and engage with both FCC and UGC on
28 social media channels (Fernandes and Inverneiro, 2021), suggesting that consumers'
29 positive brand perceptions may play a significant role in explaining how FCC and
30 UGC influence product purchase likelihood (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it
31 is anticipated that consumers who convey higher levels of CBBE should be more
32 receptive to the social media content of fashion brands, directly and indirectly
33 impacting their buying behaviour. Thus:

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H1. CBBE mediates the positive relationship between (*H1a*) firm-created content and (*H1b*) user-generated content on social media and purchase intentions of fashion products.

The Moderating Role of Self-Congruity

Self-congruity is commonly understood in the literature as “congruity between the actual self-image and the product image” (Sirgy, 1982, p. 195). The role of self-congruity has been a subject of extensive research due to its significance in predicting and understanding consumer behavior (Kang *et al.*, 2009; Kressmann *et al.*, 2006).

Self-congruity theory posits that individuals prefer brands or products that match their values and self-perceptions (Sirgy, 1982). The theory builds on the argument that individuals always seek a cognitive balance between personal values, opinions, and behaviours and hence are drawn to products and brands that are consistent with their pre-existing perceptions and beliefs about the self (Czarnecka *et al.*, 2020; Pasternak *et al.*, 2017). Self-congruity theory argues that aspects of self-image are supported (or not) when evaluating brand or product attributes. In other words, individuals tend to prefer brands whose meanings and images are consistent with their self-image and ultimately are in harmony with their sense of social identity (Quester *et al.*, 2000).

Fashion is one of the most value-expressive artifacts consumers use to create self-image (Murray, 2015; Weismueller *et al.*, 2020), whereas social media is currently the most accessible channel for individuals to publicly express their own identity and materialise self-expression (Orehek and Human, 2017; Pasternak *et al.*, 2017). Social media is an important socialisation tool; because it is interactive and personal, it allows individuals to choose what they consume, respond to, or interact with (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Schivinski, 2021).

Clothing and accessories are examples of products that have a significant impact on self-identity congruence (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020), and those effects are expected to be amplified on social media. The social media content of fashion brands, including the content generated by users, is a powerful platform for establishing public identity (Burnasheva *et al.*, 2019). By overtly associating with brands on social media, the likelihood of consumer advocacy for that brand increases, enabling users to be involved in the creation of brand value (VanMeter *et al.*, 2018).

Drawing on self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982), the current study anticipates that the connection between the individual’s self-image and a matching brand perception should directly and indirectly (through CBBE) influence the impact of social media content on the purchase intention of fashion products. Hence, if self-

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3 identity and evaluation of fashion brand attributes match, positive self-congruity is
4 achieved, and the effect of social media communication should be more potent
5 (Pasternak *et al.*, 2017; Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual
6 model, and the following hypotheses summarise the arguments above:
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12 *H2.* Self-congruity moderates the influence of brand-related communication in
13 terms of FCC (*H2a*) and UGC (*H2b*) on purchase intentions of fashion
14 products, both directly and indirectly (through CBBE), with the effects being
15 stronger/weaker for consumers with higher/lower self-congruity.
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20 [Insert Figure 1 about here]
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23 **Method**

24 *Participants and Procedure*

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26 To compute the minimum sample size required for the analysis *a priori*, power
27 analysis was conducted using G*Power (version 3.1.9.6) (Faul *et al.*, 2009). The
28 analysis was based on a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), $\alpha = 0.05$, and pre-set power (1
29 $-\beta = 0.95$), with four predictors (i.e., firm-created content, user-generated content,
30 CBBE, and self-congruity) and four sociodemographic and usage variables (age,
31 gender, social media platform, and fashion brand usage). The calculations yielded a
32 minimum sample size of 129 participants for an expected power of 0.95.
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39 Data were collected online through a survey hosted on Qualtrics
40 (www.qualtrics.com). The survey link was made available to Amazon Mechanical
41 Turk (MTurk) users in the U.S., who declared to actively follow a fashion brand on
42 social media, regardless of the social media platform, following previous studies on
43 consumers perceptions of brand-related social media content (Schivinski *et al.*, 2019;
44 Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). The survey was administered in English, and all
45 instructions used simple and plain language. To control for data quality, the survey
46 included additional measures related to the variables under investigation, which are
47 described in the measures section. Participants in the study were awarded a small
48 monetary incentive (US\$ 0.85). To ensure the quality of the panel data, the
49 recruitment techniques were in line with best practices (Kees *et al.*, 2017) and with
50 past research on MTurk (Pontes *et al.*, 2021, Pontes and Pontes, 2021, Pontes and
51 Hoegg, 2020).
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3 Participants were asked to indicate a fashion brand that they actively followed
4 on any social media platform. To avoid potential response bias and confounding
5 effects, we used a between-group design such that participants were randomly
6 presented with only one of the two types (i.e., FCC OR UGC) of social media brand-
7 related communication based on their declared brands. Participants could take the
8 survey only once. The initial sample comprised 948 social media users. Participants'
9 mean age was 36.51 years ($SD = 10.34$ years) and 45% ($n = 427$) were female.
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17 *Measures*

18 The sociodemographic questions comprised participants' gender (male, female), age,
19 education level, employment status, and household income (in U.S. dollars). In line
20 with recent research (Schivinski, 2021; Schivinski *et al.*, 2021), social media usage
21 was captured by overall daily usage (less than an hour, 1–2 hours, 3–4 hours, and
22 above 5 hours), average minutes spent per session, and usage of social media on a
23 smartphone (no, yes).
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29 In terms of fashion brands, participants were requested to disclose a brand
30 they actively followed on social media. In line with the literature on the perceptions of
31 firm-created and user-generated content, it is assumed that participants declared brand
32 represents a top-of-mind brand when recalling from memory (Schivinski and
33 Dabrowski, 2016) and, therefore, they should be well-familiar with the brand. To
34 verify this assumption, the survey controlled for brand familiarity using a 3-item scale
35 (familiar with, experienced with, and knowledgeable about the brand) adopted from
36 Kent and Allen (1994). The scale was anchored from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5
37 “strongly agree” ($\alpha = 0.72$). Additional control checks included a four single-item
38 scale developed for this study on participants' confidence about recalling the brand
39 (for FCC: “I am confident that I can remember social media posts created by
40 [Fashion Brand]” and “I am certain that I can remember seen social media posts
41 by [Fashion Brand] on their official account on [Social Media Platform]”; for UGC:
42 “I am confident that I can remember social media posts about [Fashion Brand] posted
43 by other users on [Social Media Platform]” and “I am certain that I can remember
44 seen social media posts about [Fashion Brand] posted by other users on [Social Media
45 Platform]”). The above-mentioned scales were rated from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5
46 “strongly agree.” Finally, brand usage was assessed by a single frequency
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3 measurement regarding how often the participant uses/consumes the chosen brand (1
4 “never” to 5 “very often”).

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7 Regarding the levels of engagement with fashion brands on social media,
8 participants were requested to declare i) the most predominant social media platform
9 used to interact with fashion brands (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), ii) the
10 frequency of receiving social media posts about the chosen fashion brand both in
11 terms of FCC or UGC (1 “never” to 5 “very often”), iii) the frequency of receiving
12 social media posts about fashion brands in general (1 “never” to 5 “very often”), and
13 iv) perceived levels of engagement with the fashion brand on social media (1 “never”
14 to 5 “very often”).

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17 Perceptions of FCC and UGC were captured using the scales adopted from
18 Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016). Each scale uses four items to capture participants’
19 perceptions towards brand-related content of fashion products on social media. The
20 Cronbach’s alpha for the scales were $\alpha_{(FCC)} = 0.71$ and $\alpha_{(UGC)} = 0.73$, respectively. A
21 single-dimensional 4-item CBBE scale was adopted from Yoo and Donthu (2001) to
22 capture the overall preference of a fashion brand. The scale yielded a reliability score
23 of $\alpha = 0.75$. To measure the level of consumer’s self-congruity, a 5-item scale was
24 adopted from Sirgy *et al.* (1997). The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = 0.90$. Purchase
25 intention of fashion products was captured by a 3-item scale adapted from Yoo *et al.*
26 (2000) ($\alpha = 0.75$). All the scales were anchored from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5
27 “strongly agree.” The Cronbach’s alpha for all the scales was well above the
28 recommended threshold of 0.70 (Kline, 2011).

29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 *Data Management and Analytic Strategy*

44 The management of the data included inspecting the dataset for (i) missing and
45 unusual values, (ii) univariate normality, and (iii) univariate and multivariate outliers.
46 As a characteristic of panel data, a small number of responses ($n = 21$; 2.2%) had
47 multiple missing values (Goodman *et al.*, 2013) and were removed from the analysis.
48 An additional 305 responses were also removed from the analysis, either due to (1)
49 failing the control checks ($n = 157$; 20.1%) or (2) failing to nominate a valid fashion
50 brand ($n = 148$; 15.9%).

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53 To inspect the data for univariate normality, the skewness and kurtosis were
54 calculated for all items of the survey. The computations yielded no absolute values of
55 kurtosis > 8 or skewness > 3 for any of the items (Kline, 2011). In terms of univariate
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3 outliers, the standardized composite sum scores were computed for all the latent
4 variables in the study. The benchmark to consider a case as a univariate outlier was a
5 score of ± 3.29 standard deviations from a latent variable's z -score. The adopted
6 benchmark includes around 99.9% of the normally distributed z -scores for
7 unidimensional latent variables (Field, 2017). No cases were deleted.
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12 Finally, we inspected the data for multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis
13 distances and the critical value for each case (values were based on the Chi-square
14 distribution) (Field, 2017), which resulted in no further exclusion of participants. The
15 overall final sample size comprised 622 participants. They were evenly presented in
16 the two social media content condition: $n_{\text{FCC}} = 311$ (50%) and $n_{\text{UGC}} = 311$ (50%).
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22 *Statistical Analyses*

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24 The statistical analyses encompassed the following stages: (i) descriptive analysis of
25 the structure of the sample, (ii) correlational analysis across the variables included in
26 the study, (iii) mediation analysis, and (iv) a moderated mediation analysis using the
27 IBM SPSS macro – PROCESS (models 4 and 8; Hayes, 2018). PROCESS is widely
28 used in social sciences for computing complex models that include both mediating
29 and moderating variables. To date, PROCESS is still the recommended instrument to
30 calculate advanced models that specify moderated mediation processes (Field, 2017;
31 Hayes, 2018). The macro is based on linear regression analysis; therefore, the
32 Variation Inflation Factors (VIF) were inspected to determine potential
33 multicollinearity issues with the data. All VIF coefficients were less than or equal to
34 1.87 (CBBE), which are well below the threshold of 10, evidencing no
35 multicollinearity issues (Field, 2017). Finally, the inferences about the conditional and
36 indirect effects for the statistical analysis were based on percentile bootstrap
37 confidence intervals ($n = 10,000$ samples; 95% lower and upper percentiles)
38 significantly different from zero (Hayes, 2018; Hayes and Scharkow, 2013). All
39 analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 26.0.
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53 **Results**

54 *Descriptive Statistics*

55 Participants had a mean age of 36.45 years (SD = 10.26 years, min. = 19 years, max.
56 = 74 years) and 44.1% were female ($n = 274$). Furthermore, 54.7% of the participants
57 ($n = 340$) completed at least some college education, 85% ($n = 529$) were employed
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3 full-time, and 20.4% ($n = 127$) had an annual household income of 50,000 to 60,000
4 U.S. dollars.

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6 In terms of social media usage, 46.6% ($n = 290$) of the participants spent about
7 1–2 hours a day on social media, with an average of 28.61 minutes spent per session.
8 About 92.6% ($n = 576$) of the sample used social media on a smartphone. The most
9 used social media channels to follow fashion brands was Instagram (59.5%; $n = 370$)
10 and Facebook (23%; $n = 143$). Most participants regularly received firm-created
11 (91.5%; $n = 569$) or user-generated (78.9%; $n = 491$) social media brand-related
12 content for the recalled brand and other fashion brands (92.6%; $n = 576$).
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19 Participants shared their opinions on 168 brands covering various types, such
20 as sports brands (e.g., Nike, Adidas) and premium fashion brands (e.g., Dolce &
21 Gabbana, Burberry). Finally, 22.8% ($n = 142$) of the sample declared very engaged
22 with the recalled fashion brand.
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27 *Purchase Intentions*

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29 Correlates of purchase intentions with all the main variables of the study were
30 analysed by using Pearson correlations (r). To facilitate statistical calculations, the
31 mean aggregated score for each latent variable was computed. Overall, purchase
32 intention was positively associated with FCC ($r = 0.70$; $p < 0.001$), CBBE ($r = 0.58$; p
33 < 0.001), UGC ($r = 0.57$; $p < 0.001$), and self-congruity ($r = 0.47$; $p < 0.001$).
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38 Age significantly correlated with FCC ($r = -0.09$, $p < 0.01$) and self-congruity
39 ($r = -0.06$, $p = 0.10$). Gender significantly correlated with purchase intentions
40 ($r_{\text{FEMALE:1}} = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$) and CBBE ($r_{\text{FEMALE:1}} = -0.06$, $p = 0.10$). The use of social
41 media platforms did not correlate with any key variables, whereas he
42 usage/consumption of fashion brands significantly correlated with all key variables,
43 ranging from $r = 0.22$ (self-congruency; $p < 0.00$) to $r = 0.51$ (for purchase intentions;
44 $p < 0.001$). The direction and significance of the correlations are in line with previous
45 findings (Schivinski *et al.*, 2021; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). The correlation
46 matrix, reliability scores, means, and standard deviations for all variables are reported
47 in Table 1.
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57 [Insert Table 1 about here]

58 *Hypothesis Testing*

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3 To test the conceptual model and postulated hypotheses, four models were estimated.
4 The first two models tested *H1*; hence, a mediating model was specified to include the
5 effects of FCC (Model 1a) and UGC (Model 1b) on purchase intentions of fashion
6 products through CBBE. The results comprise direct, indirect, and total effects across
7 the variables.
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12 Two follow-up models were specified to explore *H2* and therefore account for
13 the moderating role of self-congruity on the mediating influence of CBBE on the
14 relationship between FCC (Model 2a) and UGC (Model 2b) and purchase intention of
15 fashion products. In line with previous research on social media behaviour
16 (Schivinski, 2021; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020), all models controlled for age, gender,
17 social media platform, and brand usage.
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22 The main results for the moderated mediation model consist of three parts: (i)
23 mediator and dependent variable model, (ii) conditional direct effect analysis, and (iii)
24 conditional indirect effect analysis. The mediator variable model was specified to
25 calculate the effects of both social media content types and self-congruity on CBBE.
26 The dependent variable model was specified to test the effects of both social media
27 content types, self-congruity, and CBBE on purchase intentions of fashion products.
28 The conditional direct effect analysis was specified to test the influence of both FCC
29 and UGC on purchase intentions of fashion products at the mean of self-congruity, as
30 well as plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean. Similarly, the
31 conditional indirect effect analysis was specified to test the effects of both FCC and
32 UGC on purchase intentions of fashion products through the mediation of CBBE at
33 the mean of self-congruity and plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean.
34 To facilitate interpretation, only the main results are reported. Table 2 summarises the
35 full results.
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48 *Mediation Analysis*

49 The results for Model 1a ($F_{(6, 304)} = 66.88, R^2 = 0.56, p < 0.001$), after controlling for
50 age, gender, social media platform, and fashion brand usage revealed that FCC
51 positively influenced CBBE ($\beta = 0.59, p < 0.001$); in turn, CBBE positively predicted
52 purchase intention of fashion products ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$). Regarding the indirect
53 effects, FCC positively influenced purchase intention of fashion products, when
54 consumers hold favourable CBBE perceptions of fashion brands ($ind.\beta = 0.13$; 95%
55 CI [0.06, 0.20]).
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The results for Model 1b ($F_{(6, 304)} = 49.75, R^2 = 0.49, p < 0.001$), after controlling for age, gender, social media platform, and fashion brand usage, were consistent with Model 1a. Thus, UGC positively influenced CBBE ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$), which in turn positively predicted purchase intentions of fashion products ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$). The indirect effect was statistically significant and different from zero ($ind.\beta = 0.13; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.06, 0.21]$). Taken together, it can be concluded that CBBE mediates the effect of both FCC and UGC on consumer's intentions to purchase fashion products. This provides support to *H1*.

Moderated Mediation Analysis

Model 2a examines the effects of FCC on purchase intentions after the inclusion of self-congruity as moderator and controlling for age, gender, social media platform, and fashion brand usage. The results for the mediator variable model ($F_{(7, 303)} = 39.00, R^2 = 0.47, p < 0.001$) and the dependent variable model ($F_{(8, 302)} = 49.85, R^2 = 0.56, p < 0.001$) yielded results that were consistent with those from the mediation analysis (i.e., the models excluding self-congruity; see Table 2 for the breakdown of effects).

Regarding the conditional direct effect on the mediating variable, the effects of FCC on brand equity were positive and significantly different from zero, based on the self-congruity values at the mean (M) and at ± 1 standard deviation. The effects were stronger for low self-congruity ($M - 1 \text{ SD}, \beta = 0.56; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.42, 0.70]$) compared to average ($M (0), \beta = 0.46; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.57]; \Delta = -0.10$) and high self-congruity ($M + 1 \text{ SD}, \beta = 0.36; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.22, 0.51]; \Delta = -0.20$). These results indicate that an increase in self-congruity results in a stronger direct impact of FCC on brand equity (see Figure 2). In turn, the conditional direct effect analysis accounting for the effects of FCC on purchase intentions was not statistically significantly different, as the confidence interval covered zero ($95\% \text{ CI } [-0.10, 0.12]$).

In terms of the conditional indirect effects (moderated-mediation), the influence of FCC on purchase intentions through CBBE was statistically significant different from zero at low ($M - 1 \text{ SD}, ind.\beta = 0.12; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.05, 0.20]$), average ($M (0), ind.\beta = 0.10; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 0.16]; \Delta = -0.02$), and high self-congruity ($M + 1 \text{ SD}, ind.\beta = 0.08; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.14]; \Delta = -0.04$). While the individual indirect effects were significant for all levels, the index of moderated mediation ($coeff. = -0.03$) evidenced no moderated mediation, as the confidence interval covered zero ($95\% \text{ CI } [-0.074, 0.006]$). These results reveal that, while the effect of FCC on purchase

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3 intentions was mediated by CBBE, this mediation effect was not moderated by self-
4 congruency.
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7 Model 2b accounted for the effects of UGC on purchase intentions of fashion
8 products specifying self-congruity as moderator, and controlling for age, gender,
9 social media platform, and fashion brand usage. The results for the mediator variable
10 model ($F_{(7, 303)} = 31.34, R^2 = 0.42, p < 0.001$) and the dependent variable model ($F_{(8, 302)} = 39.08, R^2 = 0.50, p < 0.001$) closely align with those from the mediation analysis
11 (see Table 2 for details).
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17 As per the conditional direct effect analysis on the mediating variable, the
18 results supported the effects of UGC on brand equity. Apart from the effect of low
19 self-congruity, which was not statistically significant ($p = 0.24$), the effects were
20 smaller for average self-congruity ($M(0), \beta = 0.29; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.17, 0.41]$) than for high
21 self-congruity ($M + 1 \text{ SD}, \beta = 0.49; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.63]; \Delta = 0.20$). The results
22 suggest that an increase in self-congruity amplifies the direct impact of UGC on
23 purchase intentions (see Figure 2). The conditional direct effect accounting for the
24 effects of UGC on purchase intentions was not significant, as the confidence interval
25 covered zero (95% CI [-0.16, 0.08]).
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33 Finally, in terms of the conditional indirect effects (moderated-mediation), the
34 influence of UGC on purchase intentions through CBBE accounting for different
35 levels of self-congruity was statistically significant and different from zero. The
36 indirect effects were smaller for low self-congruity ($M(0), \text{ind.}\beta = 0.07; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.14]$) than for self-congruity ($M + 1 \text{ SD}, \text{ind.}\beta = 0.11; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 0.20]; \Delta = 0.04$). No indirect effects were found for low self-congruity (95% CI [-0.04, 0.10]).
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43 The moderated mediation index ($\text{coeff.} = 0.07$) supported a moderated mediation
44 process, as the confidence interval did not cover zero (95% CI [0.01, 0.14]).
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51 Discussion

52 *Theoretical Contribution*

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54 Social media has strongly impacted the ways in which brands communicate with
55 consumers (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). It plays a significant role by allowing
56 individuals to socially shape attitudes and perceptions (France *et al.*, 2020), co-create
57 brand value (Fan *et al.*, 2020; Varma *et al.*, 2016), and most importantly, use the
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3 brand to express themselves (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). This flow of communication is
4 particularly helpful in the context of fashion brands, as consumers frequently use
5 fashion to express their identities (Zhu *et al.*, 2019).
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8 Despite the relevance of social media brand-related communication, the
9 literature so far has mainly focused on understanding the aspects of FCC and UGC
10 that influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Colicev *et al.*,
11 2019). There is little knowledge on how individual differences influence consumer's
12 response to social media brand-related communication (Gómez *et al.*, 2019).
13
14 Considering this view, the current study contributes to the literature by drawing on
15 self-congruence theory (Sirgy, 1982), which understands consumer's use of brands as
16 a tool for self-expression to explore the interplay between brand-related content,
17 brand equity, and social media. More specifically, this study reveals the
18 circumstances under which consumer's self-congruity moderates the influence of
19 FCC and UGC on their perceptions of fashion brands (in terms of brand equity), and
20 consequently, their intention to purchase fashion products.
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29 The findings indicate that both FCC and UGC directly and positively
30 influence CBBE, which in turn influences the purchase of fashion products. These
31 findings are in line with previous studies, which find that the consumer's decision-
32 making process is driven by intuitive thinking and positive brand perceptions
33 (Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán, 2020; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020).
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38 The current study also contributes to the literature by exploring the role of
39 self-congruity in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviour, as self-image has
40 important implications for theory and practice in the field of fashion branding. The
41 findings reveal that higher/lower levels of self-congruity moderate the direct
42 relationships between both types of social media brand-related content and CBBE,
43 where higher/lower levels of self-congruity weaken/enhance the effects of social
44 media content on CBBE. More specifically, the moderating effect is particularly
45 pronounced at higher levels of self-congruity for UGC. These findings are in line with
46 existing evidence that demonstrates that UGC is overall more effective than FCC
47 (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016; Colicev *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, consumers, who
48 have higher levels of self-projections and identification with the brand, will be more
49 susceptible to UGC pertinent to the brand. However, the effect of self-congruity is
50 only limited to user-generated content, as consumers are equally susceptible to firm-
51 generated content regardless of their levels of identification with the brand.
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3 Our findings should not be interpreted without the consideration of contextual
4 factors. The moderated mediation results revealed that for fashion brands, CBBE
5 operates in an ecosystem with the consumer's self-congruity. Consumers' perception
6 of brand equity plays an important role in mediating the positive impact of social
7 media content on their behavioural responses, with the mediating role of CBBE being
8 stronger for UGC, and more pronounced when consumers hold higher levels of self-
9 congruity. This is revealed in the interaction between user-generated social media
10 brand-related content and self-congruity, which demonstrated that the indirect effects
11 of this social media communication type on purchase intention through CBBE was
12 exponentially stronger when the consumers levels of self-congruity with the brand
13 increase.
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22 In summary, this study contributes to the literature by showing that, for
23 fashion brands, tailored, individual-relevant content relevant to the brand on social
24 media is a strong predictor of positive attitudes, which could result in a greater
25 purchase propensity.
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30 *Managerial Contribution*

31 The current study supports the idea that consumers tend to follow fashion brands on
32 social media whose meanings are consistent with their self-image and that consumers
33 will consequently express their own identity and materialise self-expression through
34 buying behaviours (Orehek and Human, 2017). This concept is of great importance
35 when accounting for the new trends of social media brand-related communication
36 (Peng *et al.*, 2018). By trying to align social media brand-related content with their
37 marketing objectives, firms are in direct contact with content creators (e.g.,
38 celebrities, influencers) and through product/brand endorsements (Alvarado-Karste
39 and Guzmán, 2020; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020).
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48 Based on the findings presented in this paper, therefore, we recommend that
49 FCC should still be considered as an important choice for communication for fashion
50 brands when reaching out for their target audiences and, preferably, using cross-media
51 channels (Fernandes and Inverneiro, 2021). Our recommendation is based on the
52 finding that FCC influences consumers' purchases intentions regardless of the level of
53 self-congruency, which suggests that fashion brands are able to communicate brand
54 value and meaning without being concerned about how individual differences may
55 alter the processing of the message meaning.
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3 Our findings also show that the influence of UGC is a function of one's level
4 of self-congruency with fashion brands. This finding suggests that brands should look
5 into partnering with users from an influencer marketing perspective. This approach
6 was proven to be effective for fashion brands to build presence and trustworthiness on
7 social media (Jin *et al.*, 2021). Firms should aim to understand the level of influencer-
8 follower affinity as followers with lower self-congruity levels are less likely to be
9 influenced by user-generated content. In support of this notion, previous research
10 shows that self-influencer congruence leads consumers to mimic influencers who they
11 admire (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Xiao *et al.*, 2021). For this reason, consumers pay
12 particular attention to the recommendations of influencers that they consider as their
13 role models, especially for the industries for which brands are used as an extension of
14 the self (e.g., the automotive industry) (Belk, 2013).

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24 When integrating UGC as a part of their branding communication strategy,
25 fashion brands should benefit from the recent guidelines on how social media
26 influencers are obliged to reveal that their posts are endorsed (ASA, 2018) and closely
27 align endorsed user-generated content with firm-created content. This notion is
28 supported by Nash's (2019) study of social media's effects on consumer decision-
29 making processes, which shows that both types of communications have an
30 amplifying effect on decision-making. Ultimately, this practice may be enhanced by
31 combining UGC and FCC along with customer-based brand equity, consumer
32 behavioural engagement on social media (in terms of clicking, commenting, sharing,
33 liking; see Schivinski, 2019) into a series of events strategized by using owned and
34 paid social media (Colicev *et al.*, 2019). However, brand managers and executives
35 should acknowledge that consumer's decision-making process is complex and that the
36 affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses to fashion brands jointly reflect the
37 self. Therefore, brands should guide and support content creators when implementing
38 endorsement strategies. Altogether, findings from this paper should help fashion
39 marketers to manage their brands more effectively on social media.
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53 *Limitations and future research*

54 Although carefully planned and executed, this research is not without limitations. The
55 findings need to be considered cautiously, given the single industry being
56 investigated, sample characteristics (e.g., respondents were constrained to one
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3 country), and the constructs (e.g., CBBE) being accessed without a nuanced
4 consideration of potential sub-dimensions (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010).
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7 Future studies could extend the findings by manipulating both social media
8 content types and exploring the effects in a controlled, laboratory setting. Future
9 studies could also include potential mediating constructs suggested in the literature
10 but not yet empirically validated on behavioural outcomes, such as consumer online
11 activities (i.e., COBRAs) (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016), and further explore specific brand-
12 related variables relevant to the fashion industry (e.g., brand image and brand attitude)
13 and other industries and sectors. Moreover, validating this model in various cultural
14 contexts is crucial, as there is evidence that consumer engagement and usage of social
15 media platforms differ across countries (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019) and cultures
16 (Kitirattarkarn *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, examining the effect of social media brand-
17 related content in other contexts, such as not-for-profit industries, universities, and
18 federal institutions, could also be an important research avenue given the importance
19 of social media communication for various organisational types (e.g., Pizzuti *et al.*,
20 2020; Quiroz Flores *et al.*, 2021).
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31 Future research could use structural equation modelling to replicate and
32 extend findings from this research. To ensure statistical power, a larger sample size
33 would be preferred and preferably estimated using a Monte Carlo simulation (Muthén
34 and Curran, 1997). Furthermore, the examination of generational cohort effects on the
35 interactive effects between social media content, brand communication, and self-
36 congruity is also important, given the important differences in values, attitudes, and
37 behaviours across generations (Krishen *et al.*, 2016). Finally, future research may
38 benefit from using time series data and longitudinal designs, which can shed
39 additional light on the effects of self-congruity and social media content (Kaur and
40 Anand, 2021).
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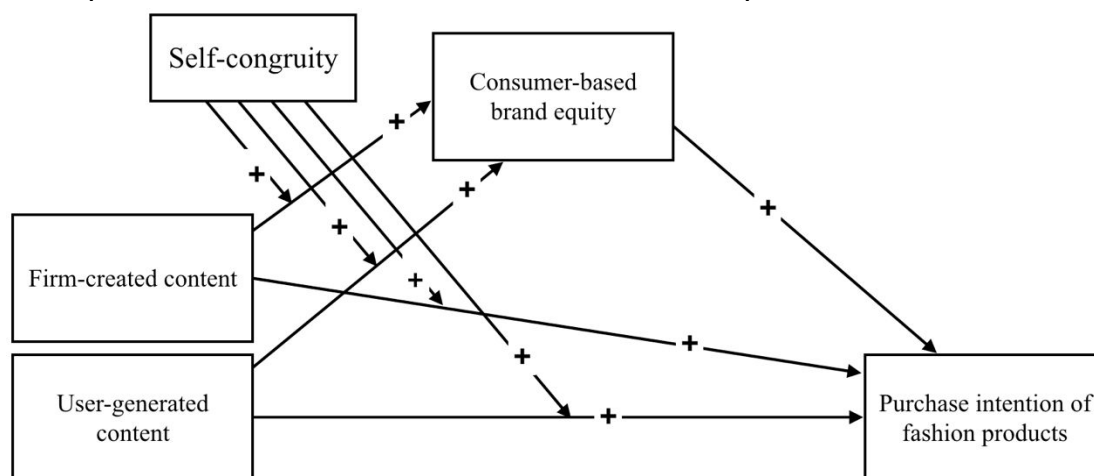
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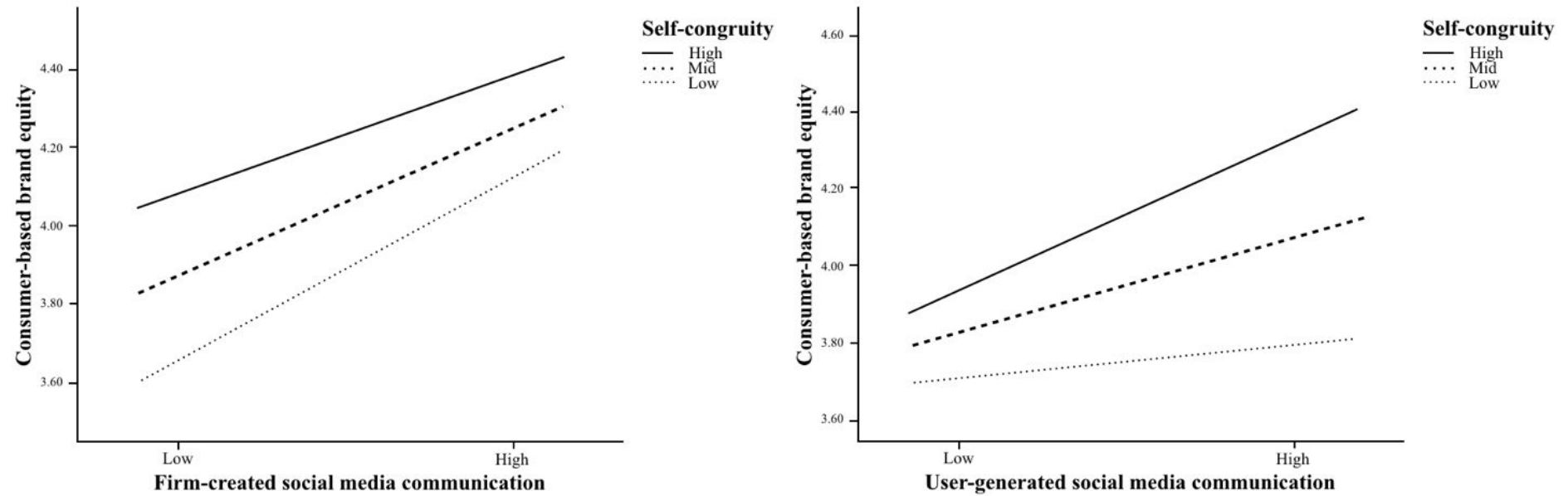
Figure 1
Conceptual model of the moderated mediation relationship



Notes: The model predicts that firm-created and user-generated social media brand-related content will be positively related to consumer-based brand equity, which will subsequently increase the consumer's intention to purchase fashion products. However, self-congruity should moderate the relationship between social media content types and purchase intention, such that higher/lower levels of self-congruity increase/decrease (i) the direct impact of social media content on purchase intention; and (ii) the indirect impact of social media content through consumer-based brand equity on purchase intention of products on social media. Hypotheses are not included in the figure for ease of reading.

Figure 2

Self-congruity moderates the relation between social media brand-related content types and consumer-based brand equity



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Table
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations across variables

Variables	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1. Firm-created social media brand-related content	0.71	4.07	0.52	–				
2. User-generated social media brand-related content	0.73	3.97	0.53	–	–			
3. Consumer-based brand equity	0.75	4.02	0.58	0.61***	0.53***	–		
4. Self-congruity	0.90	3.90	0.65	0.54***	0.59***	0.54***	–	
5. Purchase intention of fashion products	0.75	4.22	0.55	0.70***	0.57***	0.58***	0.47***	–
Gender (Ref: Female = 1)	–	–	–	0.03	-0.02	-0.06*	0.02	-0.06*
Age	–	–	–	-0.09*	0.01	-0.02	-0.06*	-0.02
Social media platform	–	–	–	-0.06	-0.08	0.01	-0.06	-0.05
Brand usage (FCC; UGC)	–	3.86; 3.77	0.76; 0.79	0.30***	0.38***	0.29***; 0.39***	0.22***; 0.38***	0.40***; 0.51***

Note: Sample FCC comprises effects of column 1: *n* = 311; Sample UGC comprises effects of column 2: *n* = 311; Overall sample comprises effects of columns 3, 4, and 5: *n* = 622. ****p*-value < 0.001, ***p*-value < 0.01, **p*-value < 0.10.

Table 2
Mediation and moderated mediation analysis effects

	<i>MODEL 1A: FCC (n = 311)</i>				<i>MODEL 1B: UGC (n = 311)</i>			
H1. Mediation analysis	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
<i>Outcome variable: Consumer-based brand equity</i>								
Age	0.02	0.01	0.63	0.52	-0.03	0.01	-0.81	0.41
Gender (Ref: Female = 1)	-0.07	0.05	-1.64	0.10	-0.03	0.05	-0.21	0.83
Social media platform	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.96	0.09	0.02	1.91	0.05
Brand usage	0.10	0.03	2.32	0.02	0.22	0.03	4.31	0.001
Social media brand-related content type	0.59	0.05	12.61	0.001	0.45	0.05	8.95	0.001
<i>Outcome variable: Purchase intention</i>								
	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Age	0.02	0.01	0.55	0.57	-0.01	0.01	-0.31	0.75
Gender (Ref: Female = 1)	0.01	0.04	0.09	0.92	-0.05	0.04	-1.41	0.15
Social media platform	0.03	0.01	1.01	0.30	-0.05	0.01	-1.27	0.20
Brand usage	0.18	0.02	4.58	0.001	0.27	0.03	5.89	0.001
Social media brand-related content type	0.51	0.05	10.40	0.001	0.31	0.05	6.34	0.001
Consumer-based brand equity	0.22	0.04	4.68	0.001	0.28	0.04	5.79	0.001
<i>Total effects</i>								
	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Social media brand-related content type on PI	0.64	0.04	15.68	0.001	0.44	0.04	9.59	0.001
<i>Indirect effects</i>								
	ind. β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	ind. β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Social media brand-related content type \rightarrow CBBE \rightarrow PI	0.13	0.03	0.06	0.20	0.13	0.03	0.06	0.21
<i>MODEL 2A: FCC (n = 311)</i>								
<i>MODEL 2B: UGC (n = 311)</i>								
H2. Conditional process analysis	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
<i>Mediator variable model: Consumer-based brand equity</i>								
Age	0.01	0.01	0.43	0.66	-0.01	0.01	-0.32	0.74
Gender (Ref: Female = 1)	-0.08	0.04	-1.76	0.07	-0.01	0.05	-0.24	0.80
Social media platform	0.01	0.02	0.71	0.47	0.03	0.02	1.48	0.13
Brand usage	0.07	0.03	2.28	0.02	0.12	0.03	3.43	0.001
Social media brand-related content type	0.46	0.05	8.26	0.001	0.29	0.06	4.67	0.001
Self-congruity	0.24	0.04	5.89	0.001	0.31	0.05	5.74	0.001
Social media brand-related content type \times Self-congruity	-0.13	0.06	-2.11	0.03	0.32	0.07	4.39	0.001

1 <i>Conditional direct effect analysis of social media communication</i>									
2 <i>on CBBE at values of self-congruity (M_{centered} ± SD)</i>									
3	β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
4	M - 1 SD	0.56	0.07	0.42	0.70	0.09	0.08	-0.06	0.25
5	M (0)	0.46	0.05	0.35	0.57	0.29	0.06	0.17	0.41
6	M + 1 SD	0.36	0.07	0.22	0.51	0.49	0.07	0.35	0.63
7 <i>Dependent variable model: Purchase intention</i>									
8		β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
9	Age	0.01	0.01	0.57	0.56	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.99
10	Gender (Ref: Female = 1)	0.01	0.04	0.11	0.91	-0.08	0.04	-1.80	0.07
11	Social media platform	0.01	0.01	0.97	0.33	-0.02	0.01	-1.41	0.15
12	Brand usage	0.13	0.02	4.52	0.001	0.17	0.03	5.37	0.001
13	Social media brand-related content type	0.54	0.05	9.96	0.001	0.26	0.05	4.73	0.001
14	Consumer-based brand equity	0.22	0.04	4.47	0.001	0.23	0.04	4.87	0.001
15	Self-congruity	-0.01	0.03	-0.22	0.82	0.12	0.05	2.57	0.01
16	Social media brand-related content type × Self-congruity	0.01	0.05	0.18	0.85	-0.03	0.06	-0.60	0.54
18 <i>Conditional direct effect analysis of social media communication</i>									
19 <i>on PI at values of self-congruity (M_{centered} ± SD)</i>									
20		β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
21	M - 1 SD	0.53	0.06	0.40	0.66	0.28	0.07	0.14	0.42
22	M (0)	0.54	0.05	0.43	0.64	0.26	0.05	0.15	0.37
23	M + 1 SD	0.54	0.06	0.41	0.68	0.24	0.06	0.11	0.36
24 <i>Conditional indirect effect analysis of social media</i>									
25 <i>communication on PI at values of self-congruity (M_{centered} ± SD)</i>									
26 <i>Mediator = CBBE</i>									
27		ind. β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	β	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
28	M - 1 SD	0.12	0.03	0.05	0.20	0.02	0.03	-0.04	0.10
29	M (0)	0.10	0.03	0.04	0.16	0.07	0.03	0.01	0.14
30	M + 1 SD	0.08	0.02	0.03	0.14	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.20
31		Coeff.		Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Coeff.		Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
32	Moderated mediation index	- 0.03		-0.07	0.01	0.07		0.01	0.14

35 **Notes:** FCC = firm-created social media brand-related content, UGC = user-generated social media brand-related content, CBBE = consumer-based brand equity, PI =
36 purchase intention of fashion products; M = mean, SD = standard deviation, ind. β = indirect beta, CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit, Boot =
37 bootstrap, SE = standard error; Bootstrap sample size = 10,000.

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RESPONSE TO REVIEWER#3

Recommendation: Minor Revision

Comments:

R3.CA: *“I am excited to see the changes throughout the paper: that includes the expanded methodological section, presentation of the findings, and the focused approach to theorizing with a clear definition of the key concepts and types of social media content. These improvements enable me to recommend this study for publication given some revisions big and small. My sincere hope is that the suggestion explained below will help the authors and in improving the paper so, that it could be eventually accepted for publication. There is a lot to like about the revised paper, e.g. the examples of fashion brands’ social media activity now scattered throughout the introduction, the earlier introduction of the fashion industry as a research context in response to my earlier comments, etc.”*

Answer: We thank the Reviewer for the kind words and comments on our research. We have carefully addressed the introduction, so the examples provided (as requested in the previous review by Reviewer #2) would read more naturally.

R3CB: *... “Yet, the paper keeps on mystifying readers with some “endorsed products” never mentioned anywhere beyond the title)”*

Answer: Thank you. All the mentions of endorsement were removed from the text.

Additional Questions:

R3C1A: *“The topic is one of the most important and most actively studied in Marketing literature. Not surprisingly, there have been quite a few similar studies (e.g. Colicev et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Onofrei et al., 2022). Thus, a clear research question, study purpose and contribution statements are necessary to have on the first page of the introduction.”*

Answer: Thank you for the valuable feedback. We have now updated the introduction to better reflect the importance of the topic and how our research contributes to the body of knowledge. This now reads at the second paragraph of the introduction, as it follows:

“Fashion is one of the most value-expressive artifacts consumers use to create self-image (Murray, 2015; Weismueller et al., 2020) and its reliance of social media makes it one an important research topic for marketing and business scholars (Colicev et al., 2018; Onofrei, Filieri, and Kennedy, 2022). The current study contributes to this fast-cumulating body of research from a self-image perspective. As individuals prefer brands or products that match their values and their self-image, this study draws on self-congruence theory (Sirgy, 1982) and social media content types, to examine which circumstances the consumer’s self-congruity moderates the indirect influence of consumer-based brand equity in the relationship between social media brand-related content types and consumer’s intention to purchase fashion products.”

R3C1B: *“Overall, I suggest re-visiting the Introduction concerning the study motivation. E.g. I am not sure how many people in 2022 even remember what magazines were (p.1 str.7). Then, the immediate transition from the popularity of social media to user-generated and firm-created content seems a little rushed (p.1 str.14).”*

Answer: Thank you. We have revisited the first paragraph and followed the Reviewer's suggestion. It reads much stronger now. The updated text follows:

Market research demonstrates that both women and men regularly visit fashion brand pages on social media for inspiration prior to purchase (Intel, 2019). Not surprisingly, social media content created by both firms and customers offers an optimal platform for brand value co-creation due to its reach and interactiveness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016).

R3C2: "The theoretical background for this study appears to be solid. One obvious issue is that the theoretical and methodological part of the paper overwhelmingly relies on just a couple of publications (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016; Schivinski et al., 2019) cited repeatedly on every page. Given that neither of these publications is seminal in the field, one can only wonder what might be a reason for citing them so excessively. I suggest enhancing the theoretical background on social media brand management and content marketing by engaging with some of the seminal work in the field (e.g. de Vries et al., 2012; Dessart et al., 2015; Felix et al., 2017; Gensler et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2016; Mochon et al., 2017), as well as with some of the latest developments in the field (e.g. Onofrei et al., 2022)."

Answer: The references were added as recommended.

R3C3A: "The authors refer to a priori power analysis for calculating the sample size using G-Power and then the PROCESS macro for regression-based moderated mediation analysis. I have re-created the power analysis and it looks good for a mediation analysis at the first glance (linear multiple regression, fixed model, R² increase with four predictors and four covariates, 0.15 effect size). One problem is that G-Power is no good for a MODERATED mediation in the first place since PROCESS uses bootstrapping to construct confidence intervals. Thus, Monte Carlo simulations must be used instead for power analysis and sample size calculations (see Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Muthén & Muthén, 2002)."

Answer: We agree with the Reviewer regarding the use of Monte Carlo simulations for estimating power analysis and sample size calculations. Although Monte Carlo is preferred when using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), G*Power is yet widely used for regression-based modelling using composite variables.

Since this research uses PROCESS Macro for SPSS as the main statistical package, we decided not to report a Monte Carlo simulation. The main reason was to facilitate the reproducibility of the study and analysis.

The above was addressed in the limitations and further studies section of the paper as it follows:

Future research could use structural equation modelling to replicate and extend findings from this research. To ensure statistical power, a larger sample size would be preferred and preferably estimated using a Monte Carlo simulation (Muthén and Curran, 1997).

R3C3B: "Recruitment and data collection using Amazon MTurk is not wrong per se. Yet, there are well-known issues with Amazon MTurk data quality as well as documented best practices for ensuring data quality on this platform (Kees et al., 2017)."

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3 **Answer:** Thank you for the constructive feedback. Kees et al., 2017 is indeed a benchmark for
4 data collection with Mturk. This literature and guidelines are familiar to the research team, and
5 they are always used when we collect data on the platform. This was now added to the text as
6 it follows:
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9 *To ensure the quality of the panel data, the recruitment techniques were in line*
10 *with best practices (Kees et al., 2017) and with past research on MTurk (Pontes*
11 *et al., 2021, Pontes and Pontes, 2021, Pontes and Hoegg 2020).*
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14 4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions
15 adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: The authors deserve credit for their
16 clear and detailed report of the statistical analysis and the findings, including data management
17 procedures.
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19 **R2C5.** *“The study carries a promise of an impactful managerial contribution. If the significant*
20 *differences between user-generated and firm-generated content were found with references to*
21 *self-congruity moderator and brand equity mediator that would provide valuable clear*
22 *guidance for social media strategists. So far, that potential has not been fully realized. The*
23 *managerial contribution in the current form suggests managers should employ UGC to work*
24 *with influencers and FCC for all other purposes. These suggestions seem quite shallow for it*
25 *would be almost impossible to avoid using use UGC when working with influencers anyway.*
26 *The practicality of the paper might be enhanced by infusing UGC and FCC along with*
27 *customer-based brand equity into a social media chain of events developed regarding Owned*
28 *and Paid social media (Kübler et al., 2019; You et al., 2015).”*
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32 **Answer:** Thank you. We have revised the managerial contribution of the paper. Overall, it was
33 enhanced with influences strategies linked to UGC, hence:
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35 *Our findings also show that the influence of UGC is a function of one’s level of*
36 *self-congruency with fashion brands. This finding suggests that brands should*
37 *look into partnering with users from an influencer marketing perspective. This*
38 *approach was proven to be effective for fashion brands building presence and*
39 *trustworthiness on social media (Jin, Ryu, and Muqaddam, 2021).*
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42 And therefore, the discussion was extended as suggested:
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44 *...Ultimately, this concept may be enhanced by combining UGC and FCC along*
45 *with customer-based brand equity, consumer behavioural engagement on social*
46 *media (in terms of clicking, commenting, sharing, liking; see Schivinski, 2019)*
47 *into a series of events strategized by using Owned and Paid social media*
48 *(Colicev et al., 2019).*
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51 **R2C6.** *“The paper is well written and easy to read. Yet, some editing is advisable, such as*
52 *getting rid of unnecessary introductory clauses in many sentences. E.g. p.4 str.22: “As a*
53 *characteristic of social media...” makes the sentence quite wordy when it could just start*
54 *directly from “Consumers are exposed to FCC...”.* The last sentence on p.6 str.59 could just
55 start directly from “UGC positively influences...” and drop the redundant “Similarly, research
56 has found that...”. “The love for prolonged and multilayered introductory clauses makes some
57 of the sentences almost incomprehensible. E.g. p.18, str. 33-40: “This concept is of great
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3 *importance when accounting for... where firms are... and through ... by trying to align...".*
4 *Those should be at least six separate sentences for a reader to comprehend which concept is*
5 *important, where, when and through what."*
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8 **Answer:** We thank you for pointing out the editing advise. We have now revised the text and
9 the sentences are shorter and more focused.
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