Enhancing Student-University Relationships through Social Media Brand Communities: An Identity Theories Perspective

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The University of Western Australia

UWA Business School
Marketing Discipline Group

2018
THESIS DECLARATION

I, Momoko Fujita, certify that:

This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in this degree.

This thesis does not contain material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution.

In the future, no part of this thesis will be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of The University of Western Australia and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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The research involving human data reported in this thesis was assessed and approved by The University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (approval #: RA/4/1/7023, RA/4/1/9049, RA/4/1/9208, RA/4/1/7804). Written patient consent has been received and archived for the research involving patient data reported in this thesis.

This thesis contains published work and work prepared for publication, all of which were co-authored.

Date: 19/11/2018
ABSTRACT

Drawing on identity theories, this thesis explores the strategic processes underpinning social media marketing success in a higher education context. Identity theories suggest people have a fundamental need to make sense of who they are, often in a positive light, and seek to fulfil this need by constructing identities from group memberships and social roles. People’s perceived oneness with groups and their emotional significance anchor their relationships with these groups and related entities. The central premise of this research is that the social media ecosystem enables institutions to facilitate opportunities for people to co-create social and role identities and foster sustainable relationships with them.

Building a brand community (or brand page) in social media has become an integral part of stakeholder engagement strategies for many organisations. However, little research has examined what makes it successful beyond likes and follows, creating confusion among practitioners. The higher education sector is no exception, with universities today using social media to enhance the student experience and manage brand visibility, often without solid strategies. While much prior social media marketing research has focused on commercial brands, a university’s social media brand communities (SMBCs) might operate differently, due to the existence of physical communities and reciprocal relationships. This research project sought to address the context-dependent nature of engagement through an identity construction lens, which has not been used in this way previously.

Using an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, a series of qualitative and quantitative studies was undertaken, and these are presented in six papers. Paper 1 and Paper 2 discuss the results of studies that explored the nature of students’ engagement with a university’s SMBCs. Paper 1, through a netnography of a university’s Facebook page, identified four collaborative co-creation tactics demonstrating the empowerment of students and the leadership role played by the marketer. Paper 2 used focus groups to investigate students’ experiences following their university’s social media and found they used it as part of their identity project and acculturation strategy.
Paper 3 examined the role marketers play in driving identity co-creation processes, through a netnography of a university’s Facebook and Instagram pages. The results highlighted the sensegiving role marketer-generated content (MGC) and communications play in influencing students’ motives to construct a university member identity and student-role identity. Paper 4, using the same method and sample, looked at the role of co-created content (CCC), including the curation of user-generated content and co-authored content. University-identity theme CCC was found to allow members to project relevant others’ identity narratives, while sub-group and student-role identity theme CCC seemed to offer opportunities to pursue other important identities through university membership.

Building on Paper 3 and Paper 4, this research project developed two conceptual models and tested hypotheses from these model so as to generalise the findings to broader social institution contexts. Paper 5, through a netnography of Facebook pages from two Australian universities and a national quantitative survey of 410 students, examined the role institutional social media efforts had on identity co-creation. It found content tactics (i.e., symbolic resource integration, hedonic quality and utilitarian quality) and marketer traits (i.e., effort to foster member embeddedness and warmth) influenced member-institution identification through their impact on students’ identification with a brand page and an enhanced image of institutional identity (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige and supportiveness). Finally, Paper 6 surveyed 486 university students in Australia to investigate the role of perceptions about other users participating in an SMBC. It found that seeing other users demonstrating engagement behaviour and recognising similarity led to institutional identification through improved perceptions of brand page sociability and identification with the page. Institutional distinctiveness also mediated the impact other-user engagement behaviours had on member-institution relationships.

This research project contributed a new perspective to the social media marketing literature by demonstrating that organisations can use social media strategically to increase the visibility and accessibility of organisation-owned and member-owned identity resources and to facilitate opportunities for focal members to fulfil their identity needs and reinforce their self-concepts. It also
contributed to the higher education marketing literature by offering in-depth insights into students’ engagement with their university on social media and how this builds meaningful relationships. The research further shed some light on our understanding of identity theories in our democratised digital environment by establishing their utility in explaining the effectiveness of SMBC initiatives. Finally, it provided managers with a holistic framework that should help them design informed social media content and communications strategies and measure relationship outcomes.
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AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION: CO-AUTHORED PUBLICATIONS

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Coordinating supervisor signature:

Date: 19/11/18
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are directly related to the research presented in this thesis.

**Refereed journal articles**


**Accepted for publication in refereed journals**


*ABDC: Australian Business Deans Council Journal Quality List

**Article submitted to a refereed journal**

**Fujita, M., Soutar, G. N., & Harrigan, P.** Enhancing member-institution relationships through social media: The role of other-user engagement behaviour and similarity perceptions

**Conference papers**


CHAPTER 1
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

‘In the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity’.
– Erik Erikson (1968, p. 130)

Drawing on identity theories, this research project explores the strategic processes underpinning social media marketing success in a higher education context. People have a fundamental need to make sense of who they are, often in a positive light, and seek to meet this need by constructing identities from group memberships and social roles. Their perceived oneness with a social category and the emotional significance attached to that membership anchor their relationship with a category and related entities. Informed by these guiding principles of identity theories, the central premise of this research is that social media enables institutions to facilitate opportunities for people to co-create social and role identities and foster sustainable relationships with them.

1.1. Some background to the research

1.1.1. Research problem

Social media and Web 2.0 technologies have dramatically changed consumer behaviour and marketing practice in recent years. As increasingly empowered consumers can now influence the identities and meanings of organisations and brands on social media, marketers face challenges and opportunities in customer engagement (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014), brand management (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, & Bloching, 2013) and relationship management (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013). Higher education is just one sector that must adapt to this evolving environment, as universities and faculties invest in social media initiatives (Barnes & Lescault, 2011; Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014) to engage with diverse groups of stakeholders, strengthen community bonds, facilitate positive student experiences and increase brand visibility.

1
However, incorporating social media effectively into existing strategies is often challenging due to a general lack of evidence as to what makes organisation-initiated social media brand communities (SMBCs) successful and meaningful to the organisation and its constituents. Although scholars have devoted their efforts to the theorisation of customer engagement and related constructs, the relationship between marketing strategies and customer engagement on social media has received limited research attention (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). More specifically, an important research gap exists as to the dynamic role that users’ salient identities might play in their engagement with various strategic components of an SMBC (i.e., content, marketer and other users) and its relationship implications. Managers are also increasingly required to optimise their strategies for different stages of the customer journey (Malthouse et al., 2013). Therefore, they need a framework to understand the types of social media initiatives that are effective in facilitating the relevant customer experience.

This research project was undertaken to address these gaps in theory and practice. The following sections provide further information about these gaps and justification for the research.

1.1.2. Social media marketing and customer engagement

Social media, namely the people’s web (Fournier & Avery, 2011), has revolutionised marketing and communication practices, allowing organisations to reach a large number of consumers at low cost (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) and have dialogic interactions with them so as to build intimate relationships (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Consumers are also empowered by social media to interact with other consumers and take an active role in influencing brand processes (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Chan & Li, 2010; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Moreover, marketers and consumers can share synchronous experiences and archival information on social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Taking advantage of these co-creation opportunities, organisations are building and managing SMBCs strategically to inspire customer engagement and promote positive customer experiences (Gensler et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).
The proliferation of social media has driven the theorisation of customer engagement (CE) and associated constructs such as customer engagement behaviour (CEB), customer experience and engagement marketing. CE is defined as the intensity of a customer’s participation and connection with the organisation- or customer-initiated offerings and activities (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012), while CEB is behavioural manifestations of such psychological state, beyond a transaction (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Customer experiences can be made up of personal engagement, such as hedonic and utilitarian experiences, and social-interactive engagement, such as community experiences (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). Marketing efforts to facilitate and measure these customer experiences that contribute to the organisation’s success is termed engagement marketing (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017). However, the process of social media-based engagement marketing and its relationship implications are under-researched.

SMBCs are embedded in social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Zaglia, 2013) and have a relatively large but flat structure (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014) and unique platform features that allow marketers to control the creation of original content and the curation of user-generated content (UGC). In other words, users’ engagement behaviours in an SMBC can be socially situated and seen by their social networks within or outside the community. In addition, most social media users reveal their personal identities and mere exposure to such identities in an SMBC can influence focal users’ evaluation of a brand (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012). Therefore, it seems users’ identities and associated social contexts have important implications for the nature of their engagement with SMBCs.

1.1.3. Higher education and social media

In many parts of the world, the higher education sector has grown steadily, contributing significantly to the prosperity of society and the economy. Between 2000 and 2014, the number of students participating in higher education more than doubled worldwide, from 100 million to 207 million (UNESCO, 2017). In Australia, university education contributed an estimated $140 billion to the
nation’s economy in 2014. Nearly 1.5 million domestic and international students were enrolled in Australian universities, with 120,000 full-time employees working in the sector in 2016 (Universities Australia, 2018).

In light of global competition and funding restrictions, universities have recognised the importance of relationship marketing (Berry, 1995) that supports the active participation of students in various campus activities and the co-creation of student experiences, life-long relationships and a university brand identity (R. Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Hennig-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001). This approach seeks to generate social and economic benefits (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006), as student retention is important to their transformation and the institution’s bottom-line. Evidence also supports such a view by suggesting the applicability of the brand community, service-dominant logic and customer engagement concepts (e.g., Altswager et al., 2018; Bowden, 2011; McAlexander et al., 2004). Likewise, engaging with diverse groups of students through SMBCs suggests an important relationship marketing avenue, especially because university students are at the forefront of the social media phenomena (Bolton et al., 2013).

While prior social media marketing research has focused on commercial brands (e.g., Ashley & Tuten, 2015; De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012), a university’s SMBCs may operate differently, given the existence of physical communities and personal relationships primarily based on social exchanges (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003; McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2004). The context-dependent nature of engagement should also be considered (Calder, Isaac, & Malthouse, 2016; Jones, Ranaweera, Murray, & Bansal, 2018). That is, the student experience is multidimensional (Sim, Conduit, & Plewa, 2018), as it involves intellectual, sensory, affective and behavioural experiences (Altswager, Dolan, & Conduit, 2018). It is also highly transformative, requiring significant efforts by students if they are to achieve satisfaction (Maringe, 2010).

Meanwhile, students are known to use social media to construct various social identities (e.g., a student, a future engineer, a club member) (Junco, 2014), maintain social capital (Ellison, Steinfield,
& Lampe, 2007) and adjust to academic and social environments (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012). Social media also allows students and staff to be involved in the co-creation of the institutional brand and its meanings (Bélanger et al., 2014). It has been seen as an ideology or social system for institutional stakeholder engagement beyond a marketing tool (Busch, 2011). However, it is unclear how students feel about SMBCs, how they respond to the institution’s efforts to engage with them, and the impact these initiatives has on their social and role identities.

1.2. Research aims

The primary aim of this research project was to understand the strategic processes by which an institution’s social media marketing initiatives can lead to the development of member relationships. The secondary aim was to provide a decision framework that allowed managers and practitioners to develop theoretically informed strategies and to measure the success of their social media initiatives. To achieve, the research used an identity construction lens by integrating key aspects of identity theory (Stryker, 1968) into a social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) (termed identity theories) so as to better understand the dynamic and complex relationships between self and collective in a computer-mediated environment. Information about identity theories is provided in Chapter 2.

Scholars have previously used identity theories to understand the relationship marketing (RM) phenomenon (e.g., Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). RM has established its status as an overarching paradigm for extended domains including co-creation (e.g., Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and customer engagement (e.g., Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012). By adopting the RM approach as a metatheoretical lens, this project ensured the six papers were drawn from theoretically consistent and relevant bodies of literature in these domains that were also suited to address the research questions.
Figure 1.1 shows the basic conceptual model that provided guidance to the project. It explored various strategic components of SMBCs (i.e., antecedents) and identity co-creation mechanisms (i.e., mediators) and examined their influences on member relationships (i.e., consequences). Two models including the dimensions of these components and hypothesised relationships were developed based on the qualitative findings and tested in the subsequent quantitative studies. These models were presented in Paper 5 and Paper 6.

![Figure 1.1. The conceptual model](image)

**1.3. Research methodology**

**1.3.1. Research paradigm**

This research project took a pluralistic stance in making methodological decisions. It specifically adopted pragmatism as a guiding paradigm to conduct the multi-phased mixed methods research. Unlike the positivist and constructionist approaches to research that are driven by ontological concerns (i.e., beliefs about a reality: an objective reality in positivism vs the mentally constructed world in constructionism), the pragmatic approach is outcome-driven and process-oriented (Morgan, 2007). It focuses on generating meaningful knowledge to answer the research question and help solve a practical problem, by accepting different epistemological stances (i.e., understandings of knowledge and knowing) and integrating the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data and methods (Greene & Hall, 2010; Morgan, 2007; Morgan, 2014). This view makes pragmatism a naturally suitable paradigm for mixed methods research (Morgan, 2007; Morgan, 2014), providing a rationale for the research design used in this project. The following section details and justifies this design.
1.3.2. Research questions and design

What makes a university’s SMBCs successful in building student relationships?

In order to answer this central research question, this research project specifically used an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach. An exploratory sequential design leverages the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods, by using qualitative data first to inform a development of theory or hypothesis that can be further examined in quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2014). In this project, a series of qualitative studies using netnography and focus groups was followed by quantitative surveys that used a partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to examine the relationships of interest.

The data were analysed using abductive reasoning, which is a process of moving between induction (qualitative) and deduction (quantitative) to identify useful points of connection between data and theories and to further evaluate the applicability of these theories through testing (Morgan, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016). In the qualitative studies, the researcher identified initial sets of codes based on the review of the literature (and the pilot results) and used them to perform content analysis (deduction) while also allowing new themes and refined theoretical underpinnings to be established from open codes and hermeneutic analysis (induction). In the quantitative studies, the researcher tested hypotheses (deduction) that were developed based on the qualitative findings and the literature.

Figure 1.2 shows a map of the research questions that were asked. The project was organised in three phases, as is summarised in Figure 1.3. The papers within each phase addressed their own focus questions, which provided collective answers to the phase-level question. This design provided several advantages. First, it offered a better understanding of the research problem in multiple dimensions and was seen as appropriate due to the inadequacy of existing knowledge about the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2011). Second, it allowed the researcher to answer a complete range of research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), which were refined as the research progressed through different phases. Third, the qualitative findings generated
valuable insights that would have been missed if only relying on the quantitative approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Fourth, it enabled the researcher to see if the qualitative findings obtained from a small sample could be generalised to a larger sample in a subsequent quantitative study (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2007), providing stronger evidence for the overall conclusions.

**Figure 1.2. The research questions**

**Phase 1: Pilot studies (qualitative) RQ1**
- **Chapter 3** (Paper 1)
  Community practices in SMBCs (netnography) RQ1a
- **Chapter 4** (Paper 2)
  Students’ experiences with SMBCs (focus group) RQ1b

**Phase 2: Main studies (qualitative) RQ 2**
- **Chapter 5** (Paper 3)
  The role of MGC (netnography) RQ2a
- **Chapter 6** (Paper 4)
  The role of CCC (netnography) RQ2b

**Phase 3: Main studies (quantitative) RQ3**
- **Chapter 7** (Paper 5)
  SMBC strategy effectiveness (netnography & survey) RQ3a
- **Chapter 8** (Paper 6)
  Other-user effect (survey) RQ3b

**Figure 1.3. The research design**
1.4. Thesis overview

1.4.1. Phase 1: The pilot studies (qualitative)

Prior to the main studies, two pilot studies were undertaken to explore the nature of students’ engagement in their university’s SMBCs. The purposes of these studies were to look at the phenomenon holistically and to identify key variables and relationships of interest that could be explored in the main studies. These are discussed within the papers that were published from this phase of the project.

*Paper 1: A netnography of a university’s social media brand community: Exploring collaborative co-creation tactics*

The first article (Chapter 3, RQ1a) used a netnography of an exemplary Facebook page of an Australian university to explore the nature of community practices in such an SMBC. An analysis of 112 pieces of content and a 699 corresponding comments and replies supported the existence of value-creating practices in such an SMBC, while highlighting the leadership role played by marketers. Members were empowered to collaborate with the marketers and other members in four ways (i.e., integrating school/student artefacts in visual narratives, co-authoring student and staff brand stories, co-delivering student services and twisting and playing school sub-cultures). The paper contributed to the brand community literature by suggesting social media increases the visibility of meaningful objects and stories, which led to greater engagement and reinforces a sense of belonging and pride.

*Paper 2: International students’ engagement in their university’s social media: An exploratory study*

The second article (Chapter 4; RQ1b) used three semi-structured focus groups to investigate students’ perspective of their experiences connecting with their university on social media. Students were motivated to follow their university’s social media to construct and reinforce social identities and to acculturate to the university and student communities. The instrumental value of the SMBCs, their perceptions about the page administrator and engagement and their relationships with university-
related foci offline drove engagement and reinforced a sense of belonging and pride. The study extended our understanding of student engagement with social media, by showing the relationship implications of a university’s social media efforts.

1.4.2. Phase 2: The main studies (qualitative)

Based on the pilot studies’ results, two qualitative studies were undertaken in the second phase of the project to further explored the strategic drivers of identity co-creation in a university’s SMBCs. Through a netnography of two exemplary Facebook and Instagram pages of an Australian university, the studies sought to identify key variables within each of the strategic components of SMBCs and the relationships of interest that were to be examined in Phase 3.

Paper 3: Capturing and co-creating student experiences in social media: A social identity theory perspective

The third article (Chapter 5, RQ2a) investigated the role MGC shared in a university’s SMBCs played in improving our understanding of content strategy effectiveness. An in-depth analysis of 100 pieces of content (50 from Facebook and 50 from Instagram), including images and videos, and a total of 2,277 corresponding comments and replies, highlighted the sensegiving role of MGC and the authentic characteristics of marketers that allowed members to have a distinctive and positive understanding about themselves and to feel supported and connected. The paper contributed to the social media marketing literature by suggesting some identity-related contextual drivers of engagement and showing identity co-creation processes involved individual sensemaking (i.e., content interaction) and collective sensemaking (i.e., social interaction) in SMBCs.

Paper 4: The strategic co-creation of content and student experiences in social media: An identity theories perspective

The fourth paper (Chapter 6, RQ2b) explored the role CCC, including the curation of user-generated content and co-authored content, played in facilitating meaningful SMBC experiences. An analysis of 100 pieces of CCC (50 from Facebook and 50 from Instagram) and a total of 1,067 corresponding
comments and replies provided further evidence about the sensegiving role played by social media content. The results suggested CCC gives access to other members’ lived experiences through their identity narratives and allows members to pursue other important identities, such as student roles and sub-group member identities, through their university membership. The paper contributed to the social media marketing literature by establishing the core characteristics of CCC, which has been popular in practice but overlooked by researchers, and its impacts on users’ experiences.

1.4.3. Phase 3: The main studies (quantitative)

Building on the qualitative findings from Phase 2, two papers in the final quantitative phase examined the processes through which the strategic components of SMBCs influence identity co-creation and enhance student-university relationships. The variables and relationships of interest identified in the previous phases were integrated to develop and estimate two models, with the aim of generalising the findings to broader social institution contexts. Both papers used a PLS-SEM approach to analyse survey data collected from Australian university student samples.

Paper 5: The two-way acculturation in social media: The role of institutional efforts

The fifth paper (Chapter 7, RQ3a) investigated the impact institutional social media efforts had on identity co-creation and member relationships, using a mixed method approach that included a netnography of two universities’ Facebook pages (200 pieces of content and corresponding comments and replies) and a survey of 410 students. The results found two mediating mechanisms of identity co-creation (through brand page identification and institutional identity image (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness)). The paper contributed to the social media marketing literature by demonstrating the differential effects content tactics (i.e., symbolic resource integration, hedonic quality, and utilitarian quality) and marketer traits (i.e., efforts to foster member embeddedness and warmth) had on these two mechanisms and by suggesting social media allows institutions to adapt to the cultures of its constituents when fostering relationships.
The last paper (Chapter 8, RQ3b) examined the role of other users participating in an institution’s SMBC, through a survey of 486 students. Similar to the results reported in Paper 5, the study suggested there were two mediating identity co-creation processes (brand page-related mediators (i.e., brand sociability and brand page identification) and institution-related mediators (i.e., institutional distinctiveness)). The study found other-user engagement behaviour (OUEB) and similarity perceptions influenced institutional identification. The paper provided additional evidence to our understanding of mere virtual presence effect, by suggesting seeing likeminded others engaging with a brand page has a significant relationship implication for hosting institutions.

1.5. Significance and originality

This research is significant, as the findings offer managers and practitioners a much-needed framework to develop effective social media marketing and communication strategies and to measure their success. Organisational and marketing scholars have previously agreed people’s identification with an organisation or brand yields positive relationship outcomes, such as loyalty and citizenship behaviour (Arnett et al., 2003; Bagozzi, Bergami, Marzocchi, & Morandin, 2012; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). By investigating the processes through which SMBC activities lead to stronger student-institution identification, the insights generated from this research should provide insight as to how to best incorporate social media into an institution’s relationship marketing programs.

Students’ shared experiences and identification with their university and related groups are known to have a long-term impact on their supporting behaviour after graduation (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; McAlexander et al., 2004; McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2006). As such, SMBCs should also provide platforms for the university, alumni and students to stay connected, creating mutual benefits for all. Further, SMBCs allow for the dissemination of authentic campus life, which should help develop a positive institutional brand image and attract future students who can
use social media to obtain a taste of what it is like to be a student at that university. Considering the impacts SMBCs have on various university stakeholder groups, this research should lead to future research in a number of fruitful areas. The findings should also inform future research and practice in broader service contexts where the stakeholder relationships are built on social exchange.

Accumulating the theoretical contributions of the six papers, this research overall makes several original contributions to the body of knowledge. First, by applying identity theories, it adds a new perspective to the social media marketing literature. Prior research into social media strategy effectiveness has used various theoretical perspectives, including uses and gratifications (e.g., Dolan et al., 2016; Jahn & Kunz, 2012), customer equity (e.g., Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012), consumer values (e.g., Carlson, Rahman, Taylor, & Voola, 2017), psychological motivation theory (e.g., Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, & Donthu, 2017) and organisational socialisation (e.g., Liao, Huang, & Xiao, 2017). Extending this line of enquiry, this research is the first to use an identity construction lens to explain what types of strategy can stimulate the co-creation of identity and engagement that builds relationships.

Second, the research contributes to our understanding of identity theories in the new world in which social media technologies empower people to influence the identities of organisations. Although it is well known that people’s identities affect and are affected by the consumptions of brands and media, the extent to which identity theories explain the formation of member-institution relationships mediated by social media has been under-explored.

Third, the research consistently applies the RM approach as a metatheoretical lens across the six studies that drew from the literature in related domains, including co-creation and customer engagement. By leveraging the utility of identity theories in RM research, this project expands the theoretical understanding of identities in these domains, which has previously been limited to the notion of identification (Hollebeek et al. 2014; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).
Fourth, this research offers in-depth insights into students’ engagement with their university on social media to the higher education marketing literature, in which the role of institutional social media efforts has been little explored. It also shows the unique context in which students engage in identity co-creation in their university’s SMBC, improving our understanding of students’ needs, challenges, goals and emotions related to their identity performances.

1.6. The structure of the thesis

The thesis has nine chapters, including this introductory chapter. Its main body is presented as a series of papers (Chapters 3 to 8). Since these six papers were prepared for publication in different journals, each chapter has its own structure, including an abstract, introduction, literature review and/or theoretical framework and sections outlining the research method, findings, discussion, and implications. Likewise, the journals to which these articles have been submitted have different purposes, audiences and manuscript requirements. Thus, each of these chapters is presented in different style and format.

To add a depth of understanding to the review of the literature that examined the underpinning theories (i.e., identity theories) presented in these articles, Chapter 2 provides detailed information about these theories. As discussed earlier, the six papers were developed sequentially and presented in the order in which the studies were undertaken and progressed through the three research phases. Each of the article chapters begins with a brief introduction that provides publication information and explains the paper’s focus and position within the thesis.

The final general discussion and conclusion chapter (Chapter 9) integrates and synthesises the insights discussed in the six papers to provide answers to the central research question. It then presents some overall theoretical and managerial implications, including a strategic decision framework for managers and practitioners, and offers recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON IDENTITY THEORIES

This chapter provides a brief review of the literature on identity theories within psychology and sociology. Since the main theoretical underpinning of this research project was identity construction, each of the six papers presented in Chapters 3 to 8 had its own review of identity theories and related concepts, as well as the phenomenon of interest. Consequently, this chapter provides a historical background to social identity theory (SIT) and identity theory (IT), the two most influential theoretical approaches to understanding group processes that, although they have unique origins, are similar in many aspects.

2.1. Social identity theory (SIT)

2.1.1. The origin of SIT

Henri Tajfel (1978), a social psychologist at the University of Bristol, defined social identity as ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’ (p. 63). Building on this definition and Tajfel and his associates’ research into intergroup relations during the 1960s and 1970s, Tajfel and his student John Turner introduced SIT in 1979. The theory explains the intergroup and intragroup processes that influence a collective sense of self and group behaviour, by suggesting individuals who identify with a group seek to discriminate against out-groups to increase their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This notion suggests one’s self-image is defined largely by the social categories to which they see themselves as belonging and by their perceptions of in-group members.

SIT has not only explained the processes by which ethnocentrism, group conflict, hostility and prejudice might arise but also significantly influenced the development of social psychology research by offering an approach to understanding groupness (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel
& Turner, 1979). The theory was later extended by Turner and his colleagues through self-categorisation theory (SCT) (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner & Oakes, 1997). SCT explains how individuals categorise themselves into different levels and how resulting social and personal identities drive different types of behaviour (see Section 2.1.4.). Hogg and Abrams also made significant contributions to SIT by challenging some of the earlier assumptions of the theory (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Nevertheless, both SIT and SCT see human beings as social animals who are socially embedded and situated (Turner & Oaks, 1997). As such, the SIT approach, including SIT and SCT, integrates sociological understandings of human beings into cognitive psychology to reflect the role social realities have on people’s judgement and behaviour (Deaux, 1993; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000).

To give some background information about the origin of SIT, the experimental studies into the minimal group paradigm conducted by Tajfel and his associates (Billing & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971), which became the foundation of the theory, are discussed. In examining the impact social categorisation has on intergroup behaviour, they investigated the minimal conditions that led to in-group members discriminating against out-groups. People were randomly assigned to two groups and individually asked to allocate monetary points to in-group and out-group members without having contact with each other and knowing who was in which group. People favoured the in-group and tried to maximise the difference between the two groups when given an opportunity to do so, even at the expense of giving up the chance to maximise their own profit. This suggests individuals in a group setting are prepared to sacrifice materialistic benefits as long as they gain more than those in the out-group.

The main conclusion from these studies was that in-group favouritism and out-group derogation could occur in the absence of existing conflicts of interest or interactions between the groups, competition for objective resources (e.g., material or money), interdependent goals, role relationships or interactions between in-group members (Billing & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). In other words, mere awareness of an in-group and out-group created through the process of social
categorisation can lead to intergroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This led Turner (1982) to propose a cognitive redefinition of social groups (i.e., a group can be simply an idea, and this psychological sense of group drives collective behaviour).

In explaining the influences of social identity on group behaviour, SIT holds the following fundamental assumptions:

1. People strive for positive self-concept, by having a positive social identity that provides them with distinctive characteristics;
2. Social identity can be positive or negative, depending on how the group’s status and self-enhancing attributes are evaluated in society;
3. Positive social identity can be achieved through favourable comparisons between the in-group and relevant out-groups which highlight a sense of prestige (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

To further elaborate the social identity construction mechanisms, subsequent sections discuss how three cognitive processes (social categorisation, social identification and social comparison) interact with each other to drive collective behaviour.

2.1.2. Social categorisation, social identification, and accentuation effect

Social categorisation is the most fundamental socio-cognitive process of social identity construction (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Generally speaking, people need to categorise things to cope with the overwhelming amount of information to which they are exposed every day. Likewise, classifying the self and others into social groups (e.g., educational institutions, religious groups or work organisations) or abstract categories (e.g., gender, race or nationality) is a natural and often automatic process. In doing so, people assume typical characteristics of in-group members as well as that of relevant out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For instance, female
managers may apply their knowledge of gender stereotypes to assume they are caring and purpose-driven and that their male counterparts are ambitious and result-driven.

Importantly, the categorisation process produces an *accentuation effect* through which people overestimate in-group similarity and exaggerate out-group differences in strengthening their in-group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1981). That is, people’s actual characteristics are distorted to stereotypes of a group with which they are seen to be affiliated, making it easy to distinguish between in-group (us) and out-group (them) members and to be recognised by others as members of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, female managers may feel connected with other female managers by believing they share similar traits that make them different from male counterparts, although the degrees to which individual managers possess such traits can vary significantly.

Once identified with a group, members start accepting in-group norms, seeing its member characteristics as their own or providing meanings to their membership and behaving like other in-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, social identity is not just constructed in cognitive and emotional terms. People also strive for a social identity that is positively evaluated by others in broader society (Cialdini et al., 1976; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social comparison is, therefore, another critical process through which people seek to enhance their collective sense of self.

### 2.1.3. Social comparison, social identification, and positive group distinctiveness

As noted previously, people have a natural desire to be better than out-groups and, thus, there is a tendency to develop in-group favouritism. They make comparisons between in-group and out-groups to achieve *positive group distinctiveness* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1975) which can ‘protect, enhance, preserve, or achieve a positive social identity for members of the group’ (Tajfel, 1982, p. 24). In other words, social comparison is a strategy used to construct a social identity that enhances self-esteem by owning the fate and value of the in-group as their own (i.e., collective self-esteem)
(Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1975). For instance, when a football team is winning (or losing) games for a season, individual supporters’ sense of self-worth is enhanced (or reduced) through an increased (or decreased) sense of collective self-esteem.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested there were three necessary conditions for positive group distinctiveness. First, the group’s social identity is a salient component of a focal member’s self-concept (e.g., belonging to a university influences how students see themselves). Second, there are salient differences in group attributes that allow for comparisons to enact the evaluative dimension of the social identity (e.g., university rankings). Third, out-groups are seen as relevant and well-suited for comparison (e.g., rival universities in the same city). How members evaluate their group positively or negatively is, therefore, primarily relational (Tajfel, 1982). Specifically, people see a relational benefit in their group membership when the in-group allows for favourable social comparisons that result in positive distinctiveness.

When self-esteem is bound up in membership of a group that has lower status, members of that group can still strive for positive distinctiveness in several ways. Individual mobility is a strategy through which people move to a different group or disassociate themselves from the in-group, whereas social creativity is a strategy through which they adjust comparative situations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For instance, technical college students may decide to transfer to university to gain better social status or use job-readiness as a new comparative point to discriminate against university students, who may be seen to lack practical skills. Alternatively, people can seek to win back positive status through direct social competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, technical college graduates may work hard to outperform university graduates to earn a positive reputation. In sum, people in a social setting are often prepared to make an effort to maintain positive collective- and self-esteem.

Challenging the assumption that self-esteem is the fundamental psychological motive for people to construct a social identity, Hogg, Abrams and their associates argued for the importance of other motives such as self-knowledge, self-consistency and self-efficacy (Abrams & Hogg, 1988, 1990),
self-regulation (Abrams, 1992) and uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Hogg, 2007). In other words, people can strengthen their identification with an in-group when their membership allows them to learn about themselves, maintain a stable sense of self, believe they have abilities to achieve their goals, demonstrate behaviour that is coherent with the in-group’s prototype and feel certain about social situations. The existence of different identification motives suggests the need for further research into the internal mechanisms of social identity construction processes.

2.1.4. Self-categorisation theory (SCT)

Self-categorisation theory (SCT) was introduced by Turner in 1987 as an extension of SIT. It was designed to explain how people define themselves as individuals (who I am) or group members (who we are) and their implications for people’s judgement and behaviour. As discussed earlier, social categorisation is not merely a mechanism through which people make sense of the social world but also a way through which people perceive themselves through the category to which they belong. Recognising the complexity and dynamic nature of the social categorisation processes, SCT suggests categorising the self can result in the personalisation (i.e., personal identity) or depersonalisation (i.e., social identity) of self-image (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994; Turner & Reynolds, 2011).

When discussing self-categorisations, it should be noted that people’s self-concepts are made up of multiple identities as people belong to many groups and categories. Self-categorisations are ‘cognitive groups of oneself and some class of stimuli as the same (identical, similar, equivalent, interchangeable, and so on) in contrast to some other class of stimuli’ (Turner, 1987, p. 44). They are organised in a hierarchy of salience (i.e. the degree of cognitive influence that identity has on the perceiver’s responses to stimuli) and can exist at different levels of inclusiveness, namely:

1. Subordinate categorisation (i.e., the self is categorised as an individual and compared with other individuals);
2. Intermediate categorisation (i.e., the self is categorised into a group which is compared with outgroups);

3. Superordinate categorisation (i.e., the self is categorised as a human being in comparison with other species) (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006).

In understanding which identity guides a person’s judgement and behaviour in a given setting, SCT emphasises the role of situational factors (categorisation context) and the focal individual’s needs and goals at the time of categorisation (Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1994). Based on Bruner’s (1957) accessibility and fit formulation, a category that is readily-accessible and fits well into a given context can become salient and offers a lens through which the self and stimuli are categorised and assigned meaning (Oakes, 1987; Turner et al., 1994; Turner et al., 2006).

A category can fit normatively or comparatively. Normative fit is ‘the degree to which categorising stimuli makes sense in terms of the perceiver’s background theories and knowledge about the world’ (Turner et al., 2006, p. 14). For instance, new employees at a start-up company may make sense of a situation in which everyone in the office is wearing jeans, based on their understanding of technology entrepreneurs. Comparative fit, on the other hand, is ‘the degree to which categorised stimuli have a high meta-contrast’ (Turner et al., 2006, p. 14), which is often the case with inherently contrasting social categories (Turner, 1987). For instance, a mature age student enrolled in an accounting course may identify with other mature age students studying different subjects, rather than with younger accounting students, when age differences are more pronounced than subject area differences (e.g., an orientation event in which most participants are younger students). The salience of categories and meanings attached to them can also change, as people and groups interact and influence each other over time (Turner et al., 1994; Turner et al., 2006), highlighting the interdependent nature of self-categories, personal identity and social identities. Moreover, categorisation contexts can shift constantly, which suggests people engage continuously in categorisation processes so as to reinterpret and reinforce the linking of their identity to their current situation and maintain their relationship with the group (Deaux, 1993).
The *depersonalisation* of self-perception follows the self-categorisation processes (i.e., ‘*shared social identity gives rise to the emergent, psychologically distinctive processes of group life*’ (Turner et al., 1994, p. 460)). Once a social identity becomes salient, focal members create or come to understand the normative attitudes and behaviours that define the group and internalise them by stereotyping themselves and reducing their feelings of being unique individuals (Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1994). Such defining features of a group are a *prototype* that portrays ideal and imagined in-group members (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Consistent with the context-dependent nature of categorisation, a group prototype can change as the context of social comparison changes. This, in turn, can change how focal members see themselves (Hogg et al., 1995; Turner et al., 2006).

Once a group’s prototype is internalised and become in-group norms that are contextually salient, focal members see other members as similar to themselves and a trusted source of information. Consequently, their personal views and actions are influenced by these like-minded others (Turner, 1987; Turner & Raynolds, 2012). They also see the world through the lens of the prototypical members and treat their self and other in-group members as its collective representation, instead of as unique individuals (Hogg et al., 1995; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Depersonalisation produces behaviour that demonstrates group solidarity, support and altruism (Hogg et al., 1995). Moreover, a prototype of a salient category, due to its self-defining nature, can attract member attention and, subsequently, any information about the prototype and the messengers of that information also receive attention (Hogg & Reid, 2006). As such, the internalisation of an in-group prototype and group norms are powerful mechanisms that create social influence, suggesting strong implications for the effectiveness of identity-related communications.

### 2.2. Identity theory (IT)

#### 2.2.1. The origin of IT

Identity theory was introduced in 1968 by Sheldon Stryker, a sociologist at Indiana University, and further developed by Stryker and his colleagues, including Burke and Serpe (e.g., Burke, 1980;
IT is a micro-sociological theory that suggests people’s identities and behaviours are related to their social roles (e.g., student, mother, blood donor etc.) and are reflections of the mutual relationships they have with society (Hogg et al., 1995). The theory’s focus on *role identities* (what one does) as foci of identification is what makes it distinct from SIT, which looks at groups’ social identities (who one is) (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). However, it should be noted the differences between the two theories, as highlighted subsequently, are more about differences in emphasis than nature (Stets & Burke, 2000). They are, in fact, very similar and overlap in many aspects.

IT has its origin in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), which suggests self is constructed through social interactions and, in turn, self shapes social behaviour. It also reflects Cooley’s (1902) suggestion that people’s beliefs about who they are can change depending on the social groups to which they belong. The theory has been developed into two distinctive directions, with one stream focusing on how the structure of self mediates the impact of social structures on social behaviour (e.g., Striker, 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and the other focusing on how the internal dynamics of self-processes influence social behaviour (e.g., Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1981), although these two directions are closely related (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Both streams suggest role identities guide social behaviour and that feelings related to the roles are organised in a hierarchy of salience. These underlining premises of IT are further elaborated in subsequent sections.

### 2.2.2. Role identities

Consistent with the assumptions of SIT and Mead’s (1934) framework, identity theorists agree self is made up of many different identities and that people seek out self-meanings in their identities (Burke, 1980; Stryker 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Role identities include the role positions people occupy in distinctive social structures and role expectations in the social relationships in which these roles are played (Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). For example, a doctor may also be a father, a brother, a son, a cyclist and a dog owner and his doctor-role identity has meaning when
patients and nurses are playing their roles in expected ways. In other words, people’s *identification* with their roles (a process similar to self-categorisation in SCT) (McCall & Simmons, 1978) allows them to realise the meanings attached to the roles through social interactions (Burke, 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Such interactions are spontaneous and reflect the positions and expectations of people’s roles, which create a feedback loop in developing a clearer sense of self (Burke 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Hogg et al., 1995). Moreover, the extent to which people perceive they are satisfactorily performing a role can influence feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Stryker & Serp, 1982). In sum, despite the difference in the foci of identification, both IT and SIT explain the processes of categorising self as a role occupant (in IT) or a group member (in SIT) and incorporating the meanings and beliefs associated with that role or membership.

### 2.2.3. Identity salience and self-verification

Identity salience is *‘the probability that an identity will invoke across a variety of situations or alternatively across persons in a given situation’* (Stryker & Burke 2000, p. 286). As with the assumption of SIT, identity theorists argue role identities within a self are ordered in a hierarchy of salience (Stryker, 1968, 1980), making a perceiver react to cues related to salient identities and produce identity-related behavioural responses (Burke, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Role identity salience also has important individual consequences, including self-definition and commitment to role-related relationships (Callero, 1985; Stryker, 1968). Both IT and SIT acknowledge the importance of individual characteristics (i.e., accessibility) in understanding the process of salient identity enactment. However, IT focuses more on people’s positions in the social structure and the personal networks within which they are embedded, while SIT is more concerned with the relevance and characteristics of situations (i.e., fit) in which salient identities are activated (Stets & Burke, 2000). Highly salient role identities can be activated in the absence of situational cues (i.e., people look for opportunities to enact important identities and act on the situations that allow the identities to be authenticated and reinforced (*self-verification*)) (Burke & Stets, 1999; Swann, 1983). Once a role
identity is activated, people see themselves as representing the role category (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and try to verify and preserve these self-perceptions (Swann, 1983). Stets and Burke (2000) suggested self-verification is similar to depersonalisation in SCT in which the self is seen as representing the group. People perceive themselves through the salient role embodied in a set of shared meanings and norms and behave accordingly so to strengthen their role identity (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Swann, 1983). This also suggests people are motivated to reinforce a salient role identity to fulfil their need to be understood by others in terms of that identity (Swann, 1983). Self-verification (or depersonalisation in SCT) explains two internal processes, namely:

1. The internalisation of the shared standard of the role identity (or prototype in SCT);
2. The demonstration of behaviour that is associated with the role identity (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Burke and Reitzes (1981) argued the standards of both the identity and behaviour need to be socially constructed and commonly held to produce consistent behaviour, suggesting shared meanings and norms connect identity and behaviour. These views support the dynamic relationship between society and self. Specifically, people see themselves through a shared understanding of what it means to play a role in society (i.e., society shapes the self) and demonstrate role-related behaviour that has shared meanings and expectations to endorse the social structure in which the identity is positioned (i.e., the self is influencing society) (Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

In short, people make sense of their social world through a salient role identity and seek to maintain role-related social relationships that are meaningful to their self-concept. Although IT places more emphasis on the meanings attached to role-related behaviour (group membership in SIT) and intra-category processes (inter-category processes in SIT) (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000), IT and SIT agree people strive for a role or social identity that has self-meanings.
2.3. Identity theories and social media

Although research into the identity construction processes in today’s hyper-connected digital world is still developing (Hogg et al., 2017), both SIT and IT researchers agree that various features of social media technologies can create social contexts or structures that influence the salience of identities (Davis, 2016; Spears et al., 2011). For instance, the social identity model of deindividuation effect (SIDE model) developed from the social identity approach paradoxically explains people’s tendency to become more groupish in the visually anonymous and isolated computer-mediated communication environment, as it can make individual differences obscure and thereby drive the depersonalisation process (Spears et al., 2011). Social media also allows people to strategically manage their identities to project themselves for different networks of audiences and to verify these identities and re-affirm the associated social connections through feedback data (Davis, 2014, 2016). These affordances help serve their identity motives, such as self-esteem, belonging and authenticity (Stets & Burke, 2014), suggesting social media can facilitate opportunities to verify the identity meanings and to pursue important identities that are self-enhancing.

In the present research project, it was assumed social media marketing initiatives and other related activities can provide identity stimuli that elicit categorisation and comparison processes. Through these processes, students can develop a shared understanding of an SMBC’s prototype and in-group bias through their pursuit of a positive distinctiveness and the strengthening of their identification with the SMBC and the hosting institution. It is also possible students do not merely construct a social identity for an SMBC and the hosting university but also gain an understanding of the norms and expectations associated with their student-role identity through their interactions with content and other social actors in the SMBC. Thus, understanding SMBC initiatives and other related entities that support students’ role identity are of great importance.
2.4. Summary

This chapter has provided some historical background to SIT and IT as important approaches to understanding group processes and self-concept. Aside from some differences in emphasis, the review has highlighted that SIT (including SCT) and IT are very similar. Both recognise the dynamic, multifaceted and context-dependent nature of identity construction processes and the role self plays in mediating these processes. Business researchers have used the SIT and IT approaches to examine organisational identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998; Van Dick, 2004) and other forms of identification related to relationship marketing success (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). As noted earlier, these concepts are directly relevant to the present research project and, thus, they are integrated into the conceptual frameworks of the six articles provided in the following six chapters.
CHAPTER 3

A NETNOGRAPHY OF A UNIVERSITY’S SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNITY:
EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE CO-CREATION TACTICS


This chapter presents the first pilot study (Paper 1, Figure 3.1.) that examined the nature of community practices in a university’s Facebook page (*RQ1a: What is the nature of community practice in a university’s SMBCs?*). A conference paper was initially developed and presented at the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference in 2015. The present paper was then fully developed and presented at the Global Innovation and Knowledge Academy Conference in 2016, where the authors were invited to submit it to the *Journal of Global Scholar of Marketing Science*. It was published in the journal in 2017.

![Figure 3.1. The position of Chapter 3 (Paper 1)](image-url)
3.1. Abstract

This research explores the nature of collaborative co-creation in a university-initiated social media brand community (SMBC). SMBCs provide significant opportunities to enhance student experiences by facilitating the co-creation of value and brand meanings. However, little is known about what makes organization-initiated SMBCs successful. A netnographic analysis of an exemplary Facebook brand page of an Australian university results in the emergence of four key tactics demonstrated in the collaborative co-creation processes: (1) integrating school/student artifacts in visual narratives; (2) co-authoring student/staff brand stories; (3) co-delivering student services; (4) twisting and playing the school sub-cultures. These findings suggest that a university’s physical community and existing reciprocal relationships provide the contexts of co-creation in the SMBC. Also, the pivotal role of university marketers in inspiring and empowering students and employees to engage in the co-creation process is supported. Further, students are found to adopt various technological and ideological features of social media to personalize their co-creation experiences. This study provides higher education practitioners with a basis for actionable social media strategies and advances understanding of SMBCs in an education services context. In addition, the study demonstrates how netnography can be adopted by practitioners to deepen their understanding of student experiences.
3.2. Introduction

Social media enables consumers to influence brand meanings and to create marketing opportunities and challenges through customer engagement. Organizations today manage their own social media channels and seek to build social media brand communities (SMBCs) that are a distinctive form of online brand communities (Laroche, Bergeron, & Goutaland, 2003; Zaglia, 2013). Organization-initiated SMBCs enable them to augment their brand communications (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Steinmann, Mau, & Schramm-Klein, 2015) and to collaborate with consumers (Kozinets et al., 2010). Understanding co-creation and engagement processes in such communities has increased in importance, as research suggests such processes can have positive marketing outcomes (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Higher education institutions (HEIs) need to adapt to this new world, as they build and manage their social media presence so as to communicate and interact with stakeholders, to promote positive student experiences and to manage brand visibility (Barnes & Lescault, 2011; Bélanger et al., 2014). Given the communal and altruistic nature of universities and because students are often at the forefront of the social media phenomenon, SMBCs provide a significant relationship marketing opportunity for HEIs. However, integrating social media into marketing strategies is challenging, due to the high level of organization-wide commitment and expertise needed to manage brand and customer engagement on social media (Wirtz et al., 2013).

The key research problem is a lack of evidence as to what makes organization-initiated SMBCs successful. Previous research has investigated how brand communities facilitate co-creation (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009) and strengthen relationships between a customer, the brand, the product, the company and other customers (McAlexander et al., 2002; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Yet, social media is fast-evolving and technologically and ideologically different from traditional brand communities (Habibi et al., 2014; Weijo, Hietanen, & Mattila, 2014; Zaglia, 2013). Even different types of social media require marketers to differentiate their engagement strategies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Further, higher education is a highly involved, unique service context spanning online and offline environments. Hence, it may operate differently to commercial brands’ SMBCs. While HEI
communities and reciprocal relationships primarily exist in offline environments (McAlexander et al., 2004, 2006) in which students’ campus experiences are likely to contribute to their online experiences (Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009), online relationships are of increasing importance.

However, much remains unknown about these relationships, which leads to the present study. The study here uses a netnography approach to analyze the Facebook brand page of a leading Australian university so as to explore the co-creation process between relevant social actors, such as the page administrator (or marketer), students and staff participating in the SMBC, and to identify the key tactics used to help the collaborative co-creation of value and university brand meanings.

3.3. Literature review

3.3.1. Co-creation and brand community

The co-creation and service-dominant logic literature suggests interactions and resource exchange between customers and firms are parts of the value co-creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 11) argue “the firm and the consumer are both collaborators and competitors – collaborators in co-creating value and competitors for the extraction of value”, highlighting the importance of engagement platforms that enable dialogue, access, transparency and risk assessment in customer–supplier interactions. Co-creation processes evolve over time and are interdependent between customers and marketers, who are collaborative co-creators (Grönroos, 2011). Such processes involve communication of the brand and engagement with the brand (Payne et al., 2009).

The brand community literature, aligned with consumer culture theory, has long discussed the co-creation concept or “consumer collectives” as the social processes that construct brand meanings and cultural capital (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Brand and traditional communities tend to share common markers, such as “consciousness of kind”, “shared rituals and traditions” and “a sense of moral responsibility” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). In a firm-initiated brand community, a marketer can
strengthen customer relationships by sharing members’ experiences with other members and providing resources and opportunities to socialize (McAlexander et al., 2002). This has led McAlexander et al. (2004, 2006) to suggest a university brand community is the best relationship marketing approach HEIs could use.

Schau et al. (2009) suggest 12 value-creating practices of brand communities, which are classified into 4 thematic categories (“social networking”, “impression management”, “brand use” and “community engagement”). Value-creating practices can operate within the same theme or across different themes to maximize a community’s vitality and values (Schau et al., 2009). Brodie et al. (2013) posit five co-creative behaviors (“socializing”, “advocating”, “learning”, “co-developing” and “sharing”). Such processes are enduring, as individuals may initially join a community to obtain brand-related information but, later, progress to social interactions with other members (Brodie et al., 2013; Schau et al., 2009).

A stream of research focusing on people’s social identification with a brand community suggests a customer’s attitude towards the community is strongly associated with the perceived quality of their relationship with the brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005) and their motives to participate in the community (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). According to social identity theory, individuals make sense of who they are by categorizing themselves into social groups, identifying with the groups based on similarities with other members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A sense of emotional attachment to a group or a brand and positive feelings about membership, such as pride, enthusiasm and belongingness, can drive loyalty and advocating behaviors (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Clearly, influencing members’ construction of social identities is an important strategic issue for marketers.

3.3.2. Co-creation in organization-initiated SMBCs

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010), social media
is “digital” (high reach at low cost); “pro-active” (allowing consumers to take an active role in brand processes); “visible” (allowing other consumers and brands to see customer engagement behaviors); “real-time and memory” (allowing the viewing and sharing of synchronous experiences and archival information); “ubiquitous” (allowing communications anytime and anywhere); and “networks” (allowing consumers to interact with other consumers). These features have enabled many networked individuals from heterogeneous backgrounds, who have multiple consumption interests, to connect through situational interests beyond identity, highlighting the evolving concepts of community and culture on social media (Kozinets, 2015; Weijo et al., 2014).

Despite the prevalence of organization-initiated SMBCs, research focusing on this context is surprisingly limited. Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, and Pihlström (2012), in investigating customer engagement with a gaming brand’s Facebook page, argue members’ community engagement and transactional engagement behaviors are primarily driven by their perceived entertainment benefits. Recent netnographic studies of brands’ official Facebook pages (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013) suggest weaker communal ties between members than were found in previously researched online forums, although community markers still exist. Firm-initiated SMBCs tend to have open and flat structures that require minimum commitment for participation (Habibi et al., 2014), with members more oriented towards the brand and functional benefits than to social interactions (Gummerus et al., 2012). This appears inconsistent with previous brand community research suggesting the importance of altruistic drivers, such as commitment (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007), and a need to create member embeddedness (Porter, Devaraj, & Sun, 2013; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Nevertheless, marketers may better facilitate collaborative co-creation with consumers in an organization-initiated SMBC by influencing attachment to the brand while providing social and functional benefits.

To facilitate meaningful engagement, SMBC content needs to add value. Brand stories, either marketer- or user-generated, can create dialogues and influence the co-creation of brand meanings (Gensler et al., 2013; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). For example, visual narratives, despite being an ancient form of storytelling (Megehee & Woodside, 2010), are particularly influential, as can be seen
in image-sharing social media, such as Instagram. Some research has investigated the drivers of social media branded content popularity, which include the vividness and interactivity of content and positive user comments (De Vries et al., 2012), communication style and pictorial representations (Steinmann et al., 2015), frequency of updates, incentives and experiential, image and exclusivity messages (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). It seems relevancy, authenticity and emotional appeal (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012) drive social media engagement.

3.3.3. Higher education marketing and social media

Higher education marketing is a relatively new area of study defined within a services marketing definition (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). In today’s competitive global marketplace, universities have embraced relationship marketing, which supports the long-term impact of shared student experiences and the co-creation of a university identity (Arnett et al., 2003; Balmer & Liao, 2007; McAlexander et al., 2004). Students are increasingly viewed as customers, lifetime members (Balmer & Liao, 2007) or co-producers of educational experience (McCulloch, 2009). University branding has also attracted research attention (Balmer & Liao, 2007; Pinar, Trapp, Girard, & Boyt, 2011), as university brand image influences prospective students’ choice of institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), satisfaction and loyalty (R. Brown & Mazzarol, 2009) and word-of-mouth (Alves & Raposo, 2007).

Bélanger et al. (2014) note social media’s potential as a platform for institutional branding and student engagement, especially as students are often “digital natives” who use social media as a primary source of information and communication and as the center of their identity and community building (Davis III, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & Gonzalez Canche, 2012). Busch (2011) argues for a “social media ideology” in higher education, in which social media platforms are treated as a social system for stakeholder engagement and not merely as another marketing tool. Previous research has investigated the importance of social media for students’ social capital formation (Ellison et al., 2007), academic engagement (Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013) and satisfaction (Mostafa, 2015).
However, the ideological and technological aspects of social media and the roles played by page administrators, employees and other students have been overlooked in these studies.

Thus, the present study explores the nature of collaborative co-creation in a university-initiated SMBC, which may be influenced by the university community and reciprocal relationships developed in offline environments. Specifically, the study, which is discussed subsequently, seeks answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do value-creating practices, identified in previous brand community studies, exist in a university-initiated SMBC?

RQ2: What are the key collaborative co-creation tactics in such an SMBC?

RQ3: How can social media facilitate collaborative co-creation in such an SMBC?

3.4. Method

3.4.1. Netnography

The rich data available online led to a decision to use a symbolic netnography approach focused on “the online social experience and interaction of particular people’s groups, nations, languages, cultures and identity formations” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 249). Netnography, guided by cultural anthropology traditions, is an adaption of ethnomethodological research to the study of online communities or communities online (Kozinets, 2002, 2010). The present study investigated the latter type of community, as a university brand community exists beyond online interactions and the study’s purpose was to explore a broad communal phenomenon in which offline and online experiences are shared within the SMBC. As human behavior, communities and culture on social media are increasingly fragmented and transformed (Kozinets, 2015; Weijo et al., 2014), netnography has also evolved, allowing researchers to understand complex online social phenomena. Indeed, education researchers have used netnography to investigate issues such as how doctoral students cope with
loneliness (Janta, Lugosi, & Brown, 2012) and the cultures of online language teaching communities (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015).

Netnography can be cost- and time-effective and it allows a researcher to observe naturalistic, unobstructed community interactions (Kozinets, 2010). Here, netnography let us understand how a university and community members used social media for their co-creation processes. A pure observational approach (S. Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Cova & Pace, 2006) was used, with the only participation criterion being following the social media site under investigation, as the researchers were from the SMBC’s university and had local knowledge and cultural understanding.

3.4.2. The research site

The UWA Students Facebook page was the site investigated (www.facebook.com/UWAstudents). Facebook is the world’s most popular social media site, with approximately 1.31 billion users and 54 million pages in July 2014 (StatisticBrain, 2014). Facebook is also the most popular HEI social media marketing channel (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). The UWA Students Facebook page was set up for students and is the university’s most established social media account among numerous other official and affiliated accounts. When the community was selected in May 2014, it had more than 12,000 followers, including current students, staff and past and incoming students. Rich, student-focused content is posted on a daily basis, generating considerable engagement. Thus, the community met the criteria suggested by Kozinets (2010, p. 89) (i.e. “relevant”, “active”, “interactive”, “substantial”, “heterogeneous” and “data-rich”).

The university’s Student Communications team, whose expertise lies in student affairs rather than marketing, manages the page. However, their proximity to the student community and their role in supporting students’ experiences were particularly important to this research. According to one administrator, the team focuses on creating high-quality content and an inclusive, vibrant community feeling. The page is a focal communication platform between the university and its students, and integrates other social media channels, such as YouTube and Instagram.
3.4.3. Data collection and analysis

The researchers actively followed the UWA Students Facebook page from three months before the analysis began in order to become familiar with its cultural context (Kozinets, 2010; Habibi et al., 2014). The Facebook page data-set was extracted and exported to Nvivo using the NCapture browser extension and filtered to extract data from a seven-month period that led to 331 threads (200 initiated by the page and 131 by users) being extracted. Of those, 112 threads that generated 15 or more platform-based engagement activities (i.e., likes, shares, tags and comments) were chosen for analysis. Each of the 112 threads, including corresponding comments and replies, was extracted to a PDF and uploaded to NVivo for coding. These threads originated from the page, which was not surprising, as user posts on a Facebook page seldom appear in other followers’ News Feeds unless they are Facebook friends with each other. A total of 578 comments, including tags, were found and there were 121 replies to these comments.

Initiating posts (or pieces of content) were first classified by media type, such as image, video, text and link (De Vries et al., 2012). An image or a set of images accompanied by a text was the most commonly used medium (97 posts: 87%), followed by videos (9 posts: 8%), links (4 posts: 3%) and text (2 posts: 2%). The netnographic analysis unpacked locally relevant indicators of content strategy, student engagement and co-creation by interpreting the meanings of the social acts in text, image and video content, comments and replies, including “emoji” text. Image and video content allows researchers to grasp cultural contexts (Schembri & Boyle, 2013), as “visual data often convey information and emotional content elided by purely textual and even audio formats” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 106).

In investigating the existence of co-creation practices and community characteristics within the UWA student Facebook page, Schau et al.’s (2009) typology and Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) community markers were used as pre-defined codes (Habibi et al., 2014), which were applied to relevant content and interactions. The analysis also identified the dynamic process in which a practice led to another.
The coding and grouping of the codes were revised multiple times as more suitable interpretations and concepts emerged. A further netnographic induction led to the emergence of four collaborative co-creation tactics that are discussed subsequently, namely: integrating school/student artifacts in visual narratives; co-authoring student/staff brand stories; co-delivering student services; twisting and playing the school sub-cultures.

3.5. Findings

3.5.1. Value-creating practices in a university-initiated SMBC

The analysis confirms the existence of value-creating practices across the thematic categories (Schau et al., 2009) (Table 3.1). The marketer (page administrator) was more active in social networking and community engagement practices (e.g. empathizing and badging) than members and this seemed to trigger members’ impression management, brand use and community engagement practices (e.g. evangelizing, grooming and documenting). This supports the notion of inter-thematic and intra-thematic interactions that increase the community’s vitality (Schau et al., 2009).
Table 3.1. Value-creating practices observed in the UWA Students Facebook page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Practice (Schau et al., 2009)</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming (greeting and socializing with new members)</td>
<td>The number of followers reached at 11,000 – UWA Students: “Oh Hello! Our 11,000th fan!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathizing (offering emotional or physical support to other members)</td>
<td>A student had to ride home in the heavy rain - UWA Students: “Hope you survived the wind gusts, Lisa [pseudonym] [tagged].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifying (rationalizing the devotion to the brand)</td>
<td>In response to a story of a mature age student – Student: “Like her, I am a mature student at UWA too...best thing I ever did!!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelizing (advocating the brand use)</td>
<td>In response to a story of an employee – Colleague: “Todd [pseudonym] is certainly one in a million and a very treasured friend to all of us at the School of Music!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staking (recognizing the diversity in the community)</td>
<td>UWA Students: “Happy Chinese New Year, congratulations you are rich! Wishing you every success and good luck in the year of the Horse from everyone at UWA.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badging (symbolizing memorable brand experiences)</td>
<td>UWA Students create an album for student-generated Instagram photos of graduation ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documenting (detailing brand stories)</td>
<td>In responding to a story of Macca, the pet pig – Member: “Watched Macca grows from the littlest of pigs....”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grooming (improving the use of brand)</td>
<td>A student sharing assignment tips: “Create a calendar and mark out all important dates of assessment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoditizing (distancing/approaching the marketplace)</td>
<td>Filtered water stations were introduced – Student: “It's good to see that this one is actually accessible for someone in a wheelchair.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.2. Collaborative co-creation tactics

Integrating school/student artifacts in visual narratives

The analysis indicates a wealth of rich, unique, cultural artifacts (Rafaeli & Vlaimi-Yavetz, 2004; Schein, 1990) and school symbols (Deal & Peterson, 1999) that were incorporated into visual narratives to signal rituals and shared meanings (Table 3.2). For example, university architecture (e.g. arches and buildings), facilities (e.g. lawns and library), icons (e.g. statues and sculptures), pets (e.g. ducks and peacocks) and events (e.g. graduation and exams) frequently appeared in the image posts.
with captions often delivered in a humorous and mythological way. These objects, when presented in visual narratives, seemed to arouse emotions (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004), as Megehee and Woodside (2010, p. 619) note, “we do not know what we feel (desire, love, hate) until we visualize what we (unconsciously) see.” Corresponding comments suggested this co-creation tactic evokes members’ collective memories (Belk, 2013) and social identities (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004).

Students also contributed visual content through Instagram that captured authentic campus life moments. These user-generated visual narratives (Habibi et al., 2014) promoted group norms and identities through students’ voices, conveying an emotional profile suitable for the artifacts, rather than an ideal emotion an institution might portray (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). The page administrator encouraged students to use a hashtag (#UWAStudents) in their Instagram pictures to make them easy to find and share (or “re-post”) on the Facebook page. By using this hashtag, students signalled their UWA student identities to networks of followers (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). The use of the re-post application allowed the profile picture and handle name of original authors to appear on the Facebook page, adding authenticity to the content.

Co-authoring student/staff brand stories

Co-authoring brand stories or “multi-vocal brand stories” (Gensler et al., 2013) was another common co-creation tactic. Storytelling plays an instrumental role in this community, architecture (e.g. arches and buildings), facilities (e.g. lawns and library), icons (e.g. statues and sculptures), pets (e.g. ducks and peacocks) and events (e.g. graduation and exams) frequently appeared in the image posts with captions often delivered in a humorous and mythological way. These objects, when presented in visual narratives, seemed to arouse emotions (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004), as Megehee and Woodside (2010, p. 619) note, “we do not know what we feel (desire, love, hate) until we visualize what we (unconsciously) see.” Corresponding comments suggested this co-creation tactic evokes members’ collective memories (Belk, 2013) and social identities (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004).
Table 3.2. Examples of school/student artifacts and symbols integrated in visual narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketer-Generated Content</th>
<th>Artifacts and Interpretations</th>
<th>User Comments and Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image1) | • Lawn used for sports, student events and recreation: Shared experiences  
• Heavy rain: Sad feeling – the University misses its students  
Posted when most students were on vacation, with the caption: “Take cover: severe weather warning […] If you’re somewhere sunny and tropical and have no idea what we’re talking about, please send us some marshmallows to toast as we cower under our desks.”  
| ![Image](image2) | • Student card and logo: UWA student identity  
• Peacock(s): the University’s pets and corporate symbol  
UWA Students invited new students to collect their ID cards, while introducing Eddy the peacock, providing opportunity for them to learn about the icon. |
| ![Image](image3) | • “And you think you’ve got it tough – I have to ride from uni back to Freo – right into the mouth of this mofo…” (Sharing their own stories)  
• “it reminds me of uwa so badly 😊.” (Nostalgia) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-Generated Content</th>
<th>Artifacts and Interpretations</th>
<th>Use Comments and Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image4) | • Rainbow: Extraordinary experience  
• Buildings: Attachment to campus  
UWA Students shared the student’s picture as an “Insta Photo of the Week” with the community. |
| ![Image](image5) | • Graduation ceremony card: Emotional attachment to the University felt at the highest  
• University logo: Identification with the University brand  
UWA Students curated student-generated Instagram pictures related to graduation ceremonies into albums on the Facebook page. |
| ![Image](image6) | • “Yay Bayliss Building!” (Expressing his identification with the faculty/building)  
• “Thank you😊 It was pure serendipity!” (Feeling valued) |
| ![Image](image7) | NA |
Students also contributed visual content through Instagram that captured authentic campus life moments. These user-generated visual narratives (Habibi et al., 2014) promoted group norms and identities through students’ voices, conveying an emotional profile suitable for the artifacts, rather than an ideal emotion an institution might portray (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). The page administrator encouraged students to use a hashtag (#UWAStudents) in their Instagram pictures to make them easy to find and share (or “re-post”) on the Facebook page. By using this hashtag, students signaled their UWA student identities to networks of followers (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). The use of the re-post application allowed the profile picture and handle name of original authors to appear on the Facebook page, adding authenticity to the content.

Co-authoring student/staff brand stories

Co-authoring brand stories or “multi-vocal brand stories” (Gensler et al., 2013) was another common co-creation tactic. Storytelling plays an instrumental role in this community, building empathy and memory (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Such stories became powerful when they integrated user-generated brand stories (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The page administrator collaborated with students and staff to promote diversity. These stories were typically presented in a distinctive narrative format, starting with “This is [name of featured person/object]”, followed by a list of useful tips, thoughts and experiences described in his/her own voice. The story of Nathan (pseudonym) illustrates this point:

This is Nathan, who just graduated after 7 years of study receiving […] involved with an enormous amount of clubs […]. Here are the most memorable things Nathan has done during his time at UWA:

[1 to 4: omitted]

5. Meeting many interesting academics and fellow students. Nothing is more exciting than discovering a new friend through a common interest. University teaches you a lot, but I feel most of my best lessons have been learned through casual conversations, optional seminars, meetings or Guild events. It’s incredible how
much you can learn by talking with, and listening to, others. The best advice I could give a new student would be to make the most of the opportunities to discover interesting people.

This post received 122 likes, 4 shares and 10 comments. Interestingly, comments directed to the people featured in such stories often demonstrated an existing friendship or relationship. This can be due to Facebook being primarily a place to connect with friends (Ellison et al., 2007). Such corresponding interactions enrich the story (Gensler et al., 2013), as the following comments show (all names in pseudonyms):

Dave: What a champion! Great photo too Nathan!

Nathan: Thanks Davo I can’t take much credit for the photo (although the costume is all mine)

Chris: The man himself - couldn’t have picked a better student!

Diana: You go, Nathan [tagged]!! 😊

Stories created opportunities for students and staff to recognize their contributions to the university and to share their experiences. For example, a story co-authored by a lecturer led to past students sharing their positive experiences with him: “[…] was very lucky to have him as my supervisor […] Apart from being a [football team] fan, he is an excellent person […] All the best!”; “[…] enjoyed a social media class with him last year. He walks the talk too […] Check him out on Twitter!” In these interactions, a “sort-of-know-each-other” feeling (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) between these students was strengthened by the lecturer joining the conversation: “Thanks for the nice comments guys!” This added credibility to the story introduced in the brand post, potentially influencing the perceived image that the university’s academic staff are responsive and sociable.

Co-delivering student services

The page administrator, students and staff often collaborated to co-deliver student services. Facebook allows such synchronous broadcasting of interactive service delivery in real-time, helping strengthen “we-ness” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) among those who virtually shared the moment of co-creation.
The community strengthened the identity of the UWA student Facebook page as a place where students and administrators help each other mobilize resources and platform features (Ramaswamy, 2009). Indeed, in a post informing students about the release of academic results, the page administrator stayed up all night with students sharing the moment:

Yes today is the day but there’s no need to get excited yet. Just like the previous times we’ve done this, the emails take a fair while to process and you shouldn’t expect them until late tonight. We know you’re keen to find out your results but hang in there because there won’t be any action for quite some time.

This post received 109 likes, 3 shares, 60 user comments (39 tags) and 21 page comments and replies. The professionalism and effort displayed seemed to earn students’ trust (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Some assisted others by sharing expert knowledge obtained through their own experiences (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Porter et al., 2013): “It’s tradition that the results are released at the beginning of [...]” Many students used Facebook’s tag function, through which users invite tagged friends into the discussion. By doing so, the students helped peers learn about important information. Further, UWA Students and some staff members attempted to make this stressful event entertaining (names in pseudonym):

Phil: ITS HAPPENING

Sharon: Hahaha Phil [tagged] you love this whole thing

UWA Students: Nice to see you’re still around Phil [tagged] – wouldn’t be the same without you… 😊

Some showed their situated creativity (Potts et al., 2008) by sharing links to online games and videos to help reduce anxiety: “Here is a game to get you through waiting [link].” When some students received their results, they informed each other: “Check email guys. I got my results”; “Thanks Rachel [pseudonym] […] Hope you got what you wanted😊.” Facebook’s features empowered students to commit resources for the synchronous, collaborative delivery of services (Jaakkola &
Alexander, 2014), while allowing them to have a shared experience of the service encounter (Arnould & Price, 1993).

**Twisting and playing the school sub-cultures**

The colorful history and rituals of the university seemed to enrich the brand community (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Twist or diversion (Aubert-Gamet, 1997; Healy & McDonagh, 2013) was demonstrated by students and the page administrators, indicating their familiarity with student sub-cultures and university memes:

Think of everything the Reid Library has ever done for you. Whether you’ve studied, sheltered, snacked or snoozed in there (or even if you just like the smell of all those books), the least you could do is vote for it in the ‘Australia’s favorite Library’ contest. Get to it.

This post received 77 likes, 3 shares and 7 comments. Students may feel sympathy with the page administrator embracing sub-cultures and become comfortable sharing their own stories. Some expressed their strong attachment to the place: “I’ve given this place so much blood sweat and tears” (11 likes); “Reid is my second home. I think I spend more time here than at my actual home” (4 likes). A few members expressed sarcasm: “Funky carpet smells, not books.” Although negative diversions may result in negative identity co-creation (Healy & McDonagh, 2013), these comments appeared to be funny, emphasizing the only-at-UWA feeling shared by members, while also creating a feedback loop for better services (Healy & McDonagh, 2013).

Similar to twist, playful content and humor helped endorse and advance sub-cultures. In the following prank post that featured a dressed-up statue in the nearby river (Figure 3.2), UWA Students introduced the statue’s historical affiliation with the university and its students, in a humorous narrative:

This is Eliza, ready to take a dive in the Swan River where the Crawley baths used to be. She enjoys swimming and chatting to cormorants, and loves being in fancy dress when she’s the main attraction [...] Eliza’s had more wacky outfits than Lady Gaga… here are some her favorites:
4. Graduations: Everyone at UWA is so nice; I’ve made so many dear friends over the years. Everyone enjoys photographing me, especially when I join them in a graduation gown. Betcha I’m in more graduation photos than the Chancellor! Lots of friends’ photo albums have me in them and that makes me happy.

Photos have been taken from the Photographers in Perth Flickr group and Random Perth. Please send us your own photos of Eliza so she can feel the love!

This post generated 201 likes, 1 share and 8 comments. Common experience and myths many students had regarding the statue were shared by members, creating an opportunity for passive members (lurkers) to read comments and affirm a sense of community (Hartmann, Wiertz, & Arnould, 2015):

I have wondered for three years how people get stuff on that statue… I thought by boat or swimming there (dedication!). But the other week I finally saw someone actually there! Putting new things on her… But she wasn’t wet!! And there was no boat! I’m even more confused now [12 likes and 4 replies].

Figure 3.2. Pictures of Eliza (statue) posted by UWA Students
3.6. Discussion and implications

3.6.1. Theoretical implications

The findings from this study support students as being co-creators of their university experiences and identities (McCulloch, 2009) and that social media can help co-creation. The study contributes to higher education marketing by adding a social media context to our understanding of university brand communities. Value-creating practices were identified and four key themes emerged that underpinned the collaborative co-creation of the university’s brand meanings. It seems a university-initiated SMBC reflects the nature of campus life and the needs of a heterogeneous student community. Student/school artifacts, stories, culture and sub-cultures that have long been shared in the physical university community were evident. These symbolic objects and stories play an important sense-giving role in the collaborative co-creation process by reinforcing student experiences, which are the core of a university brand (Pinar et al., 2011). Social media can dramatically increase the visibility of meaningful objects and stories that remind students they “belong” to the university and the community.

By showing how social media platforms can help collaborative co-creation, the study also contributes to the understanding of the role that social media plays in services marketing, shedding some light on collaborative co-creation in an SMBC context, which can take place online and offline (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Further, marketers can facilitate co-creation (Grönroos, 2011; Payne et al., 2009) by creating meaningful content and member embeddedness (Porter et al., 2013). Finally, social media features, such as hashtags and emoji tags, allow users to personalize their co-creation experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Future research may benefit from seeing if user adoption of such features is creating a new “techno-culture” (Kozinets, 2015) and its impact on collaborative co-creation.
3.6.2. Managerial implications

The study directly informs university management, marketers and student affairs professionals by providing a basis for actionable social media strategies Table 3.3. The study also suggests how netnography is useful in higher education marketing research, offering in-depth insights into student experiences, needs and emotions.

Further, given the open structure of an SMBC that allows anyone to observe and participate, universities should design a co-creation strategy that takes prospective students’ interests into account. Students’ authentic voices can be used to attract prospective students, as such students increasingly visit a university’s social media accounts before and after acceptance (QS, 2015). Collaboration between and among departments and faculties is also critical in co-creating and sharing relevant contents across different social media accounts, as this helps enrich co-creation contexts and student experience-centered branding. Thus, employee engagement is as critical as student engagement (Wirtz et al., 2013), as both parties are responsible for student experiences and student–university relationships.

**Table 3.3. Suggested practices for social media marketing in higher education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-creation tactics</th>
<th>Social media marketing practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating school/student artifacts in visual narratives</td>
<td>Promote hashtags (e.g., on Instagram) to learn about shared student experiences, rituals, sub-cultures, and artifacts and to curate student-generated content; use the understanding of the shared meanings to create relevant and resonant content and to inspire participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-authoring student/staff brand stories</td>
<td>Provide students/staff an opportunity to express their voices and collectively construct brand meanings; align branded communications with the lived experiences of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-delivering student services</td>
<td>Show genuine effort on service delivery through timely and meaningful content; make participation easy and enjoyable through social interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twisting and playing the school sub-cultures</td>
<td>Demonstrate the understanding of the school sub-cultures through playful/entertainment content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6.3. Limitations and future research directions

The exploratory nature of this research supports the view that the study has several limitations. The netnographic analysis focused on one official Facebook page in a well-established university that has a capable team managing the account. As students are likely to follow multiple social media accounts and have platform preferences, and as social media marketing policies and capabilities can differ across universities, future research should examine multiple accounts based on different platforms across several universities. This would allow the identification of a more holistic view of collaborative co-creation in a higher education context, while addressing the possible effects of multiple memberships and delocalization (Weijo et al., 2014).

Similarly, future research should investigate the views of a wider range of stakeholder groups, such as alumni and incoming students, so as to obtain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, the netnographic analysis involved interpretation of visual content and user comments, including emojis and tags, some of which might be interpreted differently depending on context. Although codings were revised, future research could use focus groups or interviews to further validate these findings. This could also help understand the views of “lurkers”, whose consumptive practices may create value (Hartmann et al., 2015), and identify the potential barriers that prevent them from being active participants.
CHAPTER 4
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT IN THEIR UNIVERSITY’S SOCIAL MEDIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY


This chapter presents the second pilot study (Paper 2, Figure 4.1.) that examined the nature of students’ experiences using a university’s social media (*RQ1b: What is the nature of students’ experiences with their university’s SMBCs?*). The paper’s focus on international students’ perspectives reflects the initial focus of the study. However, the findings should apply to university students in general. The paper was published in the *International Journal of Educational Management* in 2017.

![Figure 4.1. The position of Chapter 4 (Paper 2)](image_url)
4.1. Abstract

**Purpose**: The purpose of this paper is to understand the lived experiences of the international students using their university’s social media, through a lens of customer engagement (CE) in the services marketing literature.

**Design/methodology/approach**: A case study was conducted in an Australian university. Three semi-structured focus groups with ten international students, along with a preliminary netnographic analysis of the university’s social media account, provided a rich description of the phenomenon in the real-world context.

**Findings**: The results suggest that these students are likely to engage in their university’s social media as part of their acculturation and social identity construction strategy. Their engagement was cognitive and emotional, being influenced by the instrumental value of the social media page, engagement with campus rituals and artefacts, social identity and bonds with other students and perceptions of the page administrator. Furthermore, these students’ engagement influenced their identification with the university and its student community, manifested in a sense of belonging and pride.

**Research limitations/implications**: The paper contributes to the higher education literature by offering relationship implications of social media CE. Limitations include small sample size and the single institutional context.

**Practical implications**: The paper informs student communication practice, especially the design of university-initiated social media content and policy.

**Originality/value**: Universities and faculties today use social media to engage with students outside classrooms. However, little has been known about how international student sojourners view and respond to such initiatives. The paper addresses this gap by offering insight into how they engage with their university on social media and its relationship implications.
4.2. Introduction

Higher education is an increasingly internationalised, competitive services sector and institutions now encounter unique challenges (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). One such challenge is managing student satisfaction, retention and loyalty. Higher education institutions invest significant resources in undertaking student engagement programs (Zepke, 2015), ensuring quality services are provided (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) and carrying out marketing activities to enhance brand equity (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Many institutions use social media in such programs to facilitate the co-creation of learning experiences (Junco et al., 2013), improve student adjustment (Madge et al., 2009) and develop brand engagement (Bélanger et al., 2014).

Previous studies suggest that social media increases student collaboration, leading to positive learning outcomes (Junco et al., 2013; Neier & Zayer, 2015). However, many institutions do not have a clear strategy for engaging with students on social media outside classrooms and little is known about what makes such initiatives meaningful (Malesky & Peters, 2012). Research into international students’ experiences with their university’s social media is scarce, despite the steady growth in international students numbers worldwide (UNESCO, 2014) and their unique needs for information, social connectedness and cultural experiences (Calder et al., 2016; Chavan, Bowden-Everson, Lundmark, & Zwar, 2014; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011) that universities may be able to address through social media initiatives.

This is a particularly important issue in Australia, as international education is the country’s fourth largest export and enhancing international students’ experiences is a national issue (IEAC, 2013). Most international students in Australia are enrolled in the higher education sector, with 80 per cent from Asian countries (AEI, 2013) and social media seem to play a pivotal role in the formation of their new relationships (Lin, Peng, Kim, Kim, & LaRose, 2012); creating opportunity for universities to engage with such students through this medium and help them adjust to the local environment.
Bridging gaps in the student engagement and services marketing literatures, which rarely interact (Busch, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001), the present research explored international students’ engagement in university-initiated social media through a customer engagement (CE) lens. CE refers to “the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with (an) organization’s offerings and activities, which either the customer or organisation initiates” (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 133). The concept echoes the virtues of relationship marketing (Berry, 1995) and service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) that build customer relationships through value co-creation. CE in online environments is facilitated through computer-mediated entities that enable organisations or brands to better interact with customers (Mollen & Wilson, 2010), while allowing customers to socialise with each other and contribute brand or organisation-related content (Brodie et al., 2013; Van Doorn et al., 2010). This research views students as active citizens and co-producers of their student experiences (McCulloch, 2009; Zepke, 2015) and suggests that CE can be facilitated by student-university, student-student and student-employee interactions within university-initiated social media.

4.3. Social media and CE

Social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Tools include social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, blogs, customer review sites and online forums. Social media can be characterised as “digital” (high reach at low cost), “pro-active” (allowing users to take an active role in an organisation/brand process), “visible” (allowing users and organisations/brands to observe engagement/disengagement behaviours), “real-time and memory” (allowing the consumption and sharing of synchronous user experiences and archival information), “ubiquitous” (allowing interactions anytime and anywhere), and “networks” (allowing users to interact with others) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010, p. 13). These features enable organisations to have reciprocal interactions with stakeholders (Mollen and Wilson, 2010), empowering people to influence brand meanings and build community relationships (Schau et al., 2009).
Despite the engagement discourse about social media marketing practice, its theoretical development is still exploratory. CE is a multi-dimensional construct with cognitive, emotional and behavioural elements (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) define customer engagement behaviours (CEBs) as “a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”. Online CE drivers can be functional, social or brand or organisation related (Wirtz et al., 2013). In social media, CEBs can be demonstrated by liking, sharing and commenting in brand/organisation-related interactions, as well as posting content or messages. Even “lurking” posts and comments without visible actions can be a passive form of engagement (Hartmann et al., 2015). Thus, social media CE is a continuum, depending on context, motivations and stimuli.

4.4. Social media and social identity

While previous studies suggest that identification with a brand can drive CE in that brand’s online community (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001), recent studies have also found that online CE can enhance relationships with a brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014), perhaps because of the enduring nature of the CE process in which relationship qualities are strengthened by repeated engagement (Bowden, 2009). Thus, this research focused on the relationship implications of social media CE, as students’ use of social media influences the formation of various social identities (Junco, 2014; Selwyn, 2009) and social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2012).

Social identity theory suggests that individuals make sense of who they are by categorising themselves into social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and often seek to maintain positive self-esteem through such associations. Indeed, Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 21) argue that “social identification is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate”. A person’s social identification with organisation-related groups (e.g. brand, online communities) and organisations can lead to loyalty and citizenship behaviours (Bagozzi et al., 2012). In higher education, student-university identification influences student commitment, achievement and satisfaction.
(Wilkins, Butt, Kratochvil, & Balakrishnan, 2015) and university brand advocacy (Balaji, Roy, & Sadeque, 2016). Thus, there are positive consequences to student-university identification for students and universities.

During their acculturation, international students can experience a substantial change in their social identities, as they try to cope with uncertainty by associating themselves with local groups (Kashima & Loh, 2006). These social ties help them learn local norms and culture and identify with their host institution (Kashima & Loh, 2006). Such informal learning is also facilitated through social media, as students attempt to adjust to new academic and social environments (DeAndrea et al., 2012). This suggests that universities may influence international students’ identification with other students and the university through designing appropriate social media experiences. Given this, an exploratory study was undertaken to obtain a better understanding of international students’ engagement with their university’s social media. The study examined the ways through which international students engaged with their university’s social media, what the key drivers of their engagement were and how this influenced their social identities.

4.5. Methodology

Since little is known about the phenomenon of interest, a case study of an Australian university was undertaken to explore international students’ lived experiences with their university’s social media. This approach allowed for the in-depth investigation of the contextual conditions that influence the contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Three semi-structured focus groups provided rich, holistic data from diverse groups of international students. By allowing participants to discuss these issues in a flexible way, the focus groups generated spontaneous responses that reflected genuine views, feelings, ideas and impressions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013), while enabling the researchers to understand their norms, shared meanings and processes (Creswell, 2014).
4.5.1. Sample

The focus groups were conducted at an Australian university. So as to tailor the discussions, a netnographic non-participant observation (Kozinets, 2010) of an official Facebook page at the university was first undertaken that used seven-month archival data from the Facebook page. This provided an in-depth understanding of the context that influenced students’ engagement with the page. The Facebook page is the university’s most active, student-focused social media account, which is administered by a team of student affairs practitioners. Most page followers were current students, as the page focused on student life. This observation informed the selection of site content and interactions that were used in the focus groups.

Participants were currently enrolled international students who followed the Facebook page. This ensured that the students were able to share their experiences with the page, which the netnographic analysis had suggested was a high engagement forum. Participants were recruited through a link posted on the page by the administrator, advertising posters on campus and an online platform that allowed students to gain unit credits by participating in research. Participants completed a questionnaire that provided background information prior to the discussions. Ten international students were recruited to form three focus groups, as shown in 4.1, which had homogeneous characteristics to promote cohesion and heterogeneous characteristics to foster different perspectives (Ruppenthal, Tuck, & Gagnon, 2005).
### Table 4.1. Focus group participants’ backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group (no. of students)</th>
<th>Group 1 (3)</th>
<th>Group 2 (3)</th>
<th>Group 3 (4)</th>
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<td>M (1)</td>
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<td>Finance (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Science (1)</td>
<td>Commerce (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of the Facebook</td>
<td>Visit page when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>page under discussion</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>News Feed only (2)</td>
<td>Visit page when needed (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit page regularly (2)</td>
<td>Visit page when needed (1)</td>
<td>Visit page regularly (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of other university-</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
<td>7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related accounts</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>followed</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time following the</td>
<td>4-12 mths (2)</td>
<td>1-3 mths (3)</td>
<td>4-12 mths (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook page under</td>
<td>1-3 mths (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-3 mths (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time at the university</td>
<td>6-11 mths (2)</td>
<td>1-5 mths (2)</td>
<td>1-5 mths (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-5 mths (1)</td>
<td>1-2 yrs (1)</td>
<td>6-11 mths (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2+ yrs (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Australia</td>
<td>6-11 mths (2)</td>
<td>1-5 mths (2)</td>
<td>1-5 mths (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 yrs (1)</td>
<td>2+ yrs (1)</td>
<td>1-2 yrs (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2+ yrs (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.5.2. Data collection and analysis

Participants were asked about their social media use, engagement with the university’s social media sites, perceptions about the page administrator and the content and comments posted on the page and relationships with other students and the university. The focus groups ranged from 60 to 80 minutes and were audio-recorded for transcribing purposes. Pizza and soft drinks were served at the beginning of each session and a $5 gift card was offered to each participant. Probing questions prompted
participants to discuss topics further, while follow-up questions encouraged them to talk about what they had just said (Liamputtong, 2011). The moderator presented five threads from the Facebook page (Appendix F, Table 4.2) that suggested that CE characteristics, and participants were asked to talk about their responses to the content and/or comments in each thread (i.e. Like, Share, Tag, Comment or Do nothing). The aim was to stimulate discussions around potential engagement behaviours and feelings about various engagement objects.

The audio recordings were transcribed and uploaded into the NVivo software package for thematic analyses that were conducted deductively (based on the literature) and inductively (from the individual, within-group and across-group level data). Individual responses in each focus group were open-coded into specific topics and organised into a partially ordered meta-matrix for a constant comparison between participants, while retaining the context of each focus group (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A constant comparison was used for cross-group analysis, highlighting commonalities and differences between the groups. The open codes were axial-coded to themes and patterns related to each research question. By referring back to the literature, the coding and grouping of codes were revised multiple times as suitable themes and concepts emerged (Miles et al., 2014).

4.6. Findings

4.6.1. Engagement behaviours

All students felt that their participation in the Facebook page was passive (lurking). Only one student reported sharing behaviour:

This is not on Facebook, but on Twitter, they posted a picture of a beautiful rainbow [on campus], and I retweeted! (UG2, Group 2, Japan).

Others typically consumed information or visual content on the page, sometimes liking, yet never commenting:

Maybe I just Like (UG, Group 1, China).
Like […] [laughter] scroll and Like (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

Mostly reading to get information […] I haven’t come to press Like YET […] Maybe in the future, I will [laughter] (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

All groups agreed that the images influenced their decision to read the accompanying text:

First, I care about the photo whether it’s interesting or not. First scroll, then if I saw that picture is funny, then I’d decide to read (UG, Group 1, China).

Some participants used Facebook brand pages just to consume content, rather than interacting:

On Facebook page it feels like just another news board […] Instagram is catchier […] like “it’s about students” kind of thing (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

I think it’s more like an information board rather than a communication platform (PG1, Group 1, China).

A few postgraduate participants did not participate:

Actually, I don’t comment or like on any Facebook pages so much at all (PG, Group 3, Germany). I never like or comment on brand pages on Facebook in general.

I don’t see […] need (PG, Group 3, Malaysia).

4.6.2. Engagement drivers

Instrumental factors

Undergraduate participants followed the page to obtain information about academic issues and campus updates:

Just didn’t want to miss important information during the orientation (UG2, Group 2, Japan).

To get information, like how to choose and enrol in units, and payments (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).
Some participants needed information about campus events and social activities so that they could participate in the university community:

When I see event information on the page, then I have opportunity to socialize (PG1, Group 3, China).

I think getting information about a mix of things, like […] what’s actually happening in social activities and events (PG, Group 3, Germany).

The people stories the page administrator co-authored with featured students or staff members were well respected by all the groups. They found these stories, which typically included genuine pieces of advice, inspiring and useful:

There are a lot of people I would never know unless I see that page […] Like “oh, these people are doing this kind of thing” and “yeah, so I can do this kind of thing” or something (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

I can get to know more things from reading their stories (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

Groups 2 and 3 discussed the immediacy and interactivity of Facebook posts in comparison to e-mails. For example, the usefulness of weather warning notifications posted on the page was mentioned:

When there was like a “Perth storm warning” or something like that, they put it on the Facebook page. I feel that’s quite useful especially when you are on Facebook. So, it’s not just about uni (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

Faster information! Because when you are on email, it takes some time to open. For example, during the severe weather warning, I got this notification, so it was good. Useful (PG, Group 3, Malaysia).

Some participants read the comments posted on the page, which were often interactions between students and the page administrator. These comments were seen as credible sources of information:
Comments are useful. I can learn how and when to enrol units from reading the comments […] I can get to know when the exam time table is released, and when I can chose units for the next semester (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

Lots of students say about this lecturer. I saw his profile [story post] on the page, then I wanted to see other people’s comments […] these comments probably reinforced my perception of the lecturer (PG1, Group 1, China).

Engagement with campus rituals and artefacts. Most participants showed their engagement with the rituals and artefacts of the university and its community when integrated into visual narrative content and corresponding interactions. This worked as stimuli to their social media engagement:

Just love the pictures of the ducks! I am walking through the campus, looking forward to meeting something funny like them! (UG, Group 1, China).

After they were exposed to the stimulus material, most expressed their sentiment with and attachment to the objects seen in the threads (Table 4.2):

I like this rainbow one. […] I can recognise the building (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

He [one of the pet peacocks] died recently, ha? So sad! I spent like a whole morning on his blog because just so cute! (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

I like this statue one. Funny [laughter], and I was just wondering why this statue wears clothes (UG, Group 2, Japan).

It’s funny to dress the statue [laughter]. Also here [pointing a paragraph in the story], featuring something to do with uni and student community (PG, Group 3, Germany)
Table 4.2. Written responses to the projective technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Artefacts / Symbols / People</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student card customised for [a pet peacock], informing new students about their cards. Peacocks are the university’s corporate symbol. The page and users share jokes about and attachment to the peacock (s).</td>
<td>Peacock (s), student card, logo</td>
<td>Tag (1)</td>
<td>Like (2)</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do nothing (2)</td>
<td>Comment (1): ‘@user, @user fingers crossed they didn’t look like our previous ones 😊’</td>
<td>Do nothing (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Promotion of the university’s library entering a competition. Comments include commonly shared student experiences with the library.</td>
<td>Library, the smell of books</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
<td>Do nothing (2)</td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tag (1)</td>
<td>Like on a comment (1)</td>
<td>Comment (1): ‘vote’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sharing a student’s Instagram picture of a rainbow over a faculty building.</td>
<td>Lawn, building, faculty</td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
<td>Like (3)</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comment (1): ‘Beautiful picture!’</td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
<td>Do nothing (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Profile of a statue standing along the nearby river. The text includes jokes about the statue’s costumes. Comments include the myth about how this statue gets dressed.</td>
<td>Statute, student rituals, Australian culture, nearby river</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comment: ‘Now I know why the statue wears different clothing every day!’</td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do nothing (1)</td>
<td>Do nothing (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Profile of an Australian student who is known by the Group 2 students</td>
<td>Friend (role)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Like (2)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Profile of a postgraduate international student just completed his thesis.</td>
<td>International Student (role)</td>
<td>Like (2)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Like (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do nothing (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do nothing (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chinese New Year greeting</td>
<td>Chinese zodiac (horse), Chinese characters</td>
<td>Like a user comment (1)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comment (1): ‘[Happy New Year in Mandarin]’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

62
Existing social identity and bond with other students

Some students felt that having a social identity with the student community was an important reason to follow the Facebook page:

I guess a sense of involvement is more important for me than reading the news itself (PG1, Group 1, China).

When participants were asked about the overlap between their personal identity and the identity of other students (including local students) who followed the page, some noted the relevance of the content:

Sometimes I feel I am the same as them or similar to them and feel sympathy to them, but other times I don’t […] It depends on the content (UG2, Group 2, Japan).

It’s like when you want to buy something so you are standing in the line with the people who have the same interest as you [laughter]. […] It’s kind of […] sympathy (PG, Group 3, China).

When I see some posts that related to me, like events and clubs at uni, I feel I am part of that (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

A few also expressed a bond with other students:

By reading some comments, and when I and this particular person have the same thought, I can see a connection (PG, Group 3, Malaysia).

Reading these comments, I feel like I am the same kind of person (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

In addition, when participants found that friends were featured or commented on the page, they actively engaged:

My friend is commenting here! I feel […] a little bit closer after reading his comment (PG2, Group 1, Chinese).

If I saw someone who I know on the post, I would definitely participate in the discussion (UG1, Group 1, Japan).
Perception of the page administrator

Participants were asked about their perceptions of the page host based on what they had observed in the posts and interactions. Some felt that the page administrator was helpful:

Someone knowledgeable because I can see in the comments, they always reply to students’ questions (UG, Group 3, Malaysia).

Someone who likes to share information and knowledge (PG, Group 3, Germany). A very active team leader (PG, Group 3, China).

Others had mixed feelings:

I think it depends on content. For example, with the peacock student card and the library posts, I felt it’s really like my close friend, but sometimes just like a stranger (UG, Group 1, China).

Someone not so important to me. […] Maybe this page is more catered for undergraduate students because HDR (research degree) is more formal (PG, Group 3, Malaysia).

One group felt that the page’s communication style created an identity gap that was a barrier to their engagement, as can be seen in the following interaction:

UG2 (Japan): If the page was more casual […] I would participate more.

UG1 (Japan): That distance […]

UG2 (Japan): Yeah! It’s like a formal writing […] the style?

UG (Indonesia): Yeah, the style. It’s not so casual […] I don’t know.

UG1 (Japan): Stiff.
UG (Indonesia): YES, very stiff! I don’t feel like […] I mean I feel good about knowing the news, but I don’t feel comfortable reading it […] I don’t know why. […] It’s not like a student posting. If it was a student post it would be more different.

However, after being exposed to the stimulus material, some participants’ perceptions changed:

Now I see some comments, I feel like they are more interesting in their comments. […] The way they comment is funny! They put a lot of jokes here. […] feels a bit closer (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

4.6.3. The influence of social media engagement on social identifications

Belongingness

The Facebook page allowed the students to feel socially integrated into the student community in an easy, less confronting way:

When I am on Facebook I feel less barrier […] because (when face-to-face) I just can’t get involved with them (local students) because they are just […] a bit away there (UG, Group 1, China).

On Facebook, I think it’s that outside-class feeling makes me a bit more like I belong […] sort of casual environment (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

Importantly, engaging with the Facebook page or the university’s other social media outlets strengthened their feelings of belongingness and highlighted their enhanced social identities:

Maybe not just this one page, but with all of the [the university] accounts I follow, it gives me a stronger feeling as being a [the university] student (PG, Group 3, Germany)

I feel I belong stronger when I’m on social media looking at some pictures of [the university]. […] Because we get so used to being on campus, everything becomes normal (UG1, Group 2, Japan).
I am a bit more connected with [the university] when I am reading these posts. […] It’s kind of thing to improve my connection with [the university], I guess (PG, Group 3, China).

Some students felt a sense of student community through having shared experiences in the university library sub-culture:

[Reading one of the comments aloud] “funky carpet smell, not books” [laughter]. That is what only [the university] students know about! (UG1, Group 2, Japan).

And, the [library]. I can relate because I KNOW it! I mean, “I know it because I’m a [the university] student” kind of feel [laughter] (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).

Because I spend a lot of time there, the comments are actually quite funny because it’s not just about reading books, but doing something else! (UG, Group 1, China).

_Pride_

Most participants felt a sense of pride when interacting with the page’s stories and pictures. Some felt proud to be a student at the university, justifying their choice or appreciating the privilege of sharing the excellence its members achieved:

And I feel “OK, how lucky I’m here!” […] I feel proud to be part of [the university] because some students are so good (PG, Group 3, China).

Following these Facebook pages has made me feel I’m in the right choice to come to [the university], this is a dynamic school with lots of news happening every day (PG, Group 1, China).

When I get to see the pictures like these on social media, it REMINDS me of how special this place is (UG, Group 2, Indonesia).
Interestingly, social media seems to be an ideal place for international students to share their sense of pride with other students of the university and to feel proud of their status by showing their unique cultural experiences to their friends and family in home nations:

When someone takes a picture like this, ‘Oh my god! This looks great!’ [laughter]. That’s how I feel [laughter] (UG, Indonesia).

YEAH!! I want to show off, feel proud of it! (UG1, Japan).

PROUD, PROUD! Oh there was a time I was trying to take a picture of the sky, and then like I tried to include the [campus] building a bit [laughter]. I just wanted to show a bit [laughter]. […] the feel that I think normal here is interesting to lots of foreign students. Like, during assignments, I’m like I include everything around me doing the assignment (in the pictures). So embarrassing! BUT that’s true [laughter] (UG, Indonesia).

4.7. Discussion

This research examined the nature of international students’ engagement in a university-initiated social media outlet. Various aspects of the outlet’s content and interactions influenced their engagement with the university and its student community. The students engaged with the site as part of their acculturation, although offline interactions still appeared to be of primary interest. Overall, the findings support the notion that computer-mediated communications can supplement and enhance place-based community engagement (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). Through multiple online and offline engagement experiences, students felt more emotionally committed and socially integrated to the university community than through their offline experiences alone.

Students’ engagement with the university’s Facebook page was passive. Lurking was the norm, supporting the general consensus that only a small portion of brand page followers actively participate in the brand community (Gummerus et al., 2012). Another possible explanation is that most students follow more than one outlet, perhaps resulting in a weak commitment to any specific online community.
Most participants were in their first year and may lack the experience and local knowledge needed to contribute (Schau et al., 2009). However, a lack of behavioural engagement does not necessarily mean the members are disengaged, as the vicarious consumptions of others’ social practices can lead to engagement outcomes (Hartmann et al., 2015).

The first engagement driver was the site’s instrumental value (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Students felt that there was strong information value in the content and comments, whether initiated by page administrators or other students. It seems that social media dialogues improve students’ self-efficacy and decrease their uncertainty about the academic and social environments (Chavan et al., 2014; DeAndrea et al., 2012), particularly among younger age groups. Social media’s unique functional advantages, such as the real-time delivery of quality information and the visibility of user comments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010), also motivated participants to engage with the site.

Engagement with campus rituals and artefacts was another key driver of social media engagement. Previous research suggests that students often learn about student culture and learner identity through social media observations and interactions (DeAndrea et al., 2012). This notion was supported here and further extended, as the university’s culture and identity were key engagement objects. Participants enjoyed exploring the university’s rituals and subcultures through the consumption of visual narrative content because the vividness of visual content stimulated multiple senses. These symbolic cues aroused emotions towards the university and the artefacts themselves. Rituals are a vital part of a university’s culture, as they provide meanings and memories and are socializing agents (Manning, 2000). The social media site helped enrich the university’s cultural contexts and international students’ cultural learning experiences, as it allowed the university and its community members to communicate and influence these shared meanings.
The third driver was perceptions of the page administrators, as these perceptions influenced the students’ evaluation of service quality and their attachment to the online community. Before seeing the stimulus material, one group felt that the page administrators’ style was too formal which reduced their identification with the page. This supports the importance of communication style as it impacts on customers’ interactions (Keeling, McGoldrick, & Beatty, 2010). The students’ perception that page administrators tried to offer high-quality content and respond to students’ comments influenced their evaluation of the social media site. Unlike previous research that suggested a university’s use of social media is not always welcomed by students (Malesky & Peters, 2012), this study found that students were supportive of university staff engaging with students on social media.

The fourth driver was students’ social identity and the connection they felt with other students. There was a shared consciousness (Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001) with other students following the page, suggesting that the visibility and interactivity of social media and the presence of other students participating in the online community helped the international students shape and maintain their identities as learners, members of the university and members of a student community. This is particularly important, as for many international students, social and cultural integration is a key determinant of satisfaction (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Finally, students’ engagement with the university’s social media improved their social identification with the university, enhancing their acculturation, as a sense of belonging and pride was reported, which is associated with affective commitment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). When students encountered familiar objects and rituals in the page content and interactions, they felt that they belonged and were connected. As suggested by previous studies (Ellison et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2012), the social media site allowed the students to increase their social capital in an easier, less confrontational way than did face-to-face interactions.
A sense of pride was also an outcome of their emotional engagement with the university’s social media. Tyler and Blader (2003) have suggested “pride and respect, stimulate identification with the group in people’s motivated attempts to develop and maintain a positive social identity” (p. 356). This echoes the aspiration international students have for social distinction in the home countries (Sin, 2009). Students may feel good about themselves because of the perceived quality of their university (Arnett et al., 2003) and its image (R. Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). In addition, international students may feel proud to be studying outside their home countries, where there are many novel things and experiences to show their families and friends back home. Social media seems to be an ideal platform to do this. By demonstrating such engagement on social media, students can justify their decisions to study abroad, which is usually a significant emotional and financial investment.

4.8. Conclusions

4.8.1. Implications

This research bridges some gaps in the student engagement and higher education marketing literature, in which online CE has been under-explored. Student sojourners are a unique group that expect rich cultural learning experiences from their host institution, unlike local students, who tend to focus on obtaining a degree (Chavan et al., 2014). This research suggests that international students are instrumentally and emotionally motivated to engage with their university’s social media and that such engagements help them form a social identity with their host institution. The findings also contribute to the CE literature by supporting some of the findings from previous studies in a higher education service context. The research extends the understanding of student engagement with social media, of which the main focus has been pedagogical engagement (Junco et al., 2013), by adding a student-university identification perspective.
The research provides student affairs professionals and university marketing practitioners with a useful framework for designing social media content and policy. The research highlighted the importance of identifying and understanding students’ motives for connecting on social media. A timely delivery of quality information is critical, especially if managers are to earn trust from new members to the site, while demonstrating a deep understanding of the emotions students attach to their shared experiences and to the rituals and artefacts in the physical environment. Practitioners need to understand what these shared meanings are by observing students’ social media comments and contributions.

From an international student engagement perspective, it is important to understand the “pull factors” (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) that influence students’ choice of host institution and destination. For example, university quality and reputation and host country image can become a source of pride, leading to loyalty (R. Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). Designing social media content around these factors can stimulate international students’ social identification with their university. Finally, given the open-structure of most social media sites, universities may need to design an engagement strategy that takes prospective students into account. There is an opportunity to leverage the authenticity of students’ and alumni’s experiences that are shared on university social media sites, as prospective international students increasingly visit these sites (QS, 2015). Universities can use these rich data to inform future student engagement strategies to sustain their advantage in an increasingly competitive environment.

4.8.2. Limitations and future research directions

Given the study’s exploratory nature and single case study approach, the findings cannot necessarily be generalisable to other institutions; the following limitations can be addressed in the future research. First, the study’s focus was on international students. Future research should compare local and international students’ perspectives to highlight commonalities and differences. This will provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. Second, participants had not contributed content or posted comments
to the university’s Facebook page. While the stimulus materials aided the discussion, talking to students with different engagement experiences would provide a more complete understanding of motivational drivers and engagement outcomes. Future research should interview highly active community members who regularly post comments. Third, most participants were first-year students from North and South-East Asian countries. A larger sample of students from other cultures would yield a more holistic understanding. Finally, the research did not investigate possible changes in the nature of student engagement over time (e.g. course experience), suggesting that a longitudinal study would improve the understanding of this engagement process.
CHAPTER 5
CAPTURING AND CO-CREATING STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA:
A SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE


This chapter presents the first main study (Paper 3, Figure 5.1.) that examined the role of marketer-generated content (MGC) shared on a university’s Facebook and Instagram pages (*RQ2a: What is the role of MGC on identity co-creation in a university’s SMBCs?*). It built on some of the pilot studies’ findings. The paper was published in the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* special issue: ‘Advancing the Theory and Practice of Social Media Marketing’ in 2018.

![Figure 5.1. The position of Chapter 5 (Paper 3)](image)
5.1. Abstract

Drawing on social identity theory (SIT), this research investigates the role of university content strategies on student experiences in social media brand communities (SMBCs). A netnography of a university’s SMBCs sought to grasp the influences of identity cues, narratives, and marketer traits on member reactions. It was revealed that social media content plays an important sensegiving role in meeting members’ need to understand themselves, feel distinctive and positive about themselves, and feel supported and connected. The findings contribute to our understanding of the social media marketing phenomenon and inspire practice in the design of meaningful customer experiences in social media.
5.2. Introduction

Social media technologies have created opportunities to design real-time, context relevant customer experiences (MSI, 2016), including building and managing brand communities in social media (Tuten & Solomon, 2015; Wirtz et al., 2013). A brand community is founded around a nongeographically bound group of people who share common values about a brand (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001), express themselves by using the brand (Cova & Pace, 2006) and cocreate brand meanings (Schau et al., 2009). Social identification can underpin brand community success, as social identity theory (SIT) suggests people make sense of who they are by classifying themselves into actual or symbolic social groups (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Members’ identification with a brand community and the positive feelings they derive from belonging can influence their relationships with the brand, the product, the company and other members (McAlexander et al., 2002), increasing brand loyalty and advocacy (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

Marketers wish to stimulate consumer interactions and influence their social identification with social media brand communities (SMBCs). This can be done through providing relevant and meaningful content, which can be a catalyst for engagement because brand page followers have a genuine interest in interacting with brand-related content (Gummerus et al., 2012). Thus, content creates encounters in which resources are openly exchanged between social actors, contributing to the cocreation of holistic customer experiences over time (Bolton, 2016).

SIT explains how consumer-company relationships are built. However, despite the theory informing relationship marketing success for many years (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2005; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Bagozzi et al., 2012) and potentially impacting on the process through which customer experiences unfold (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012), its role in social media marketing is largely under-explored. Further, there is a need to better understand the content strategies that are likely to facilitate customer engagement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013), an area of research that is still in its early
stage (Ashley & Tuten 2015; De Vries et al., 2012; Steinmann et al., 2015). The present research was undertaken to address these issues.

The challenge to overcome is the heterogeneous nature of customer experiences with social media (Bolton, 2016), which are complicated by the interplays between individual, organizational, and situational factors (Wirtz et al., 2013). Thus, emotionally-charged customer experiences need to be understood in context (Calder et al., 2016). Higher education is a context worthy of such attention, as it is intense and transformative, offers shared consumption experiences (McAlexander et al., 2004), and includes physical communities that play a role in shaping students’ social media use (Ellison et al., 2007). University-initiated SMBCs are usually designed to add to the impact of the physical community (Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014), and most relational exchanges in this context occur in an offline environment. Moreover, university students, who are often digital natives, may use social media to construct various social identities (Junco, 2014) and relationships (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008) through creation, sharing, and consumption of content, participating and playing with other community members (Bolton et al., 2013). Previous research has highlighted the importance of students’ social media use for their self-esteem (Steinfield et al., 2008), social capital formation (Ellison et al., 2007), educational engagement (Junco, 2012), and acculturation (DeAndrea et al., 2012). This research offers additional insight into how students interact with their brand on social media.

We specifically sought to understand how a university’s content strategies might facilitate student experiences in an SMBC. However, before discussing this study, we begin with a review of the literature about SMBCs, content strategies, and customer (student) engagement, followed by SIT and its related concepts that served as a theoretical framework in this case.
5.3. Literature review

5.3.1. Social media brand community (SMBC) and content strategies

SMBCs and brand communities based in traditional online media, such as websites and forums, have some common characteristics, such as members’ positive feelings about the brand and the existence of community-like characteristics (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013). Unlike traditional brand communities, however, SMBCs are embedded in social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, where many networks are connected, often based on offline relationships (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). This means member or any user interactions in an SMBC (e.g., Likes, Shares, comments, and content contributions) are situated in their social contexts and, in most cases, immediately accessible to their contacts that may or may not be members of that SMBC. Such social transmission of brand affinity encourages marketers to manage a *pinball game* in which they use marketing tools to reach targets and empower them to play their roles (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

While previous SMBC research devoted attention to consumer interactions (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013), the role of the marketer in facilitating such interactions received little attention. A handful of studies on Facebook brand pages suggests that the vividness and interactivity of marketer-generated content (MGC) and the sharing of positive comments can drive the popularity of the content (De Vries et al., 2012), while its hedonic and functional values can facilitate customer engagement (Gummerus et al., 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). User-image appeals, exclusivity appeals, animation, and experiential appeals also seem to play a role (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In addition, the use of an avatar on a brand page’s profile picture and a brand’s communication style can influence attitudes toward a brand (Steinmann et al., 2015). What is clear is that these prior studies suggest there is no one-size-fits-all approach to content strategy.
5.3.2. Customer engagement and experiences in social media

Customer engagement is “the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organization’s offerings and activities, which either the customer or organisation initiates” (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 133). While experiences that connect with a customer’s goals can drive engagement (Malthouse, Calder, & Vandenbosch, 2015), feelings experienced during the process can also determine the nature of that engagement (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Uses and gratifications approaches (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) have been widely adopted to identify types of online customer experiences and the drivers of engagement in online brand communities. Online customer experiences are broadly classified into personal engagement (e.g., hedonic, utilitarian, stimulation, and self-esteem experiences) and social-interactive engagement (e.g., participation and community experiences) (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Personal engagement with content (i.e., brand or consumption-related objects) can often stimulate social-interactive engagement (i.e., community-related objects), while the level of consumer participation can change over time (Schau et al., 2009).

Customer experiences in SMBCs can evolve, as customer goals and emotions can be triggered by individual, environmental, and contextual stimuli (Bolton, 2016). Hoffman, Novak, and Kang (2016) suggest customers feel connected with a brand on social media when there is a fit between their motivation focus (promotion vs. prevention), behavior (social vs. nonsocial), and the message presented in a branded content. This supports the idea that prevention focused non-social behaviors (i.e., lurking content and others’ social interactions) in online communities can generate value (Hartmann et al., 2015). Thus, marketing messages may determine the nature of people’s experiences in SMBCs. However, it is not clear which content aspects impact most on perceived relevancy and brand connection.

This review has highlighted the need for a fuller picture of how content strategies impact on customer experiences in SMBCs. Here, we focused on higher education, so as to understand the roles MGC and
social interactions played on students’ experiences with an SMBC. To achieve, we used SIT and related concepts, which are discussed in the next section.

5.4. A theoretical framework

5.4.1. Social identity and identification

According to SIT, people are inclined to assign themselves exemplary features of a social category in social settings (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and often behave consistently with these in maintaining associations with the group and other members (Reed et al., 2012). Social identity has cognitive, affective, and evaluative elements that are activated in different social situations (Ellemers, 1999; Van Dick, 2004). Cognitive social identity refers to people’s self-awareness of group membership (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). The degree to which a member perceives a similarity between self and other group members (identity similarity) is an important driver of social identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). People may also identify with a group based on its perceived functionality (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). For instance, Dholakia et al. (2004) suggested the perceived utility of a network-based virtual community has a strong influence on member identification.

Affective social identity is a sense of emotional attachment or commitment to a group (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002) and the positive feelings attached to membership, such as pride, enthusiasm, and belongingness. A person needs to perceive the traits associated with a group and its members as unique and special (identity distinctiveness) to feel good about membership (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Intense group consumption activities, such as river rafting (Arnould & Price 1993) and brand festivals (Schouten, McAleander, & Koenig, 2007), can facilitate the hedonic customer experiences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) that drive emotionally charged identification with operators (or the brands) (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). Similarly, members of small virtual
communities can become attached to the group through hedonic participations that create entertainment value (Dholakia et al., 2004).

Evaluative social identity is a member’s perception of how others see the group and its membership and is an important source of self-esteem (Ellemers et al., 1999; Hogg & Turner, 1985). People are inclined to associate themselves with successful groups when such affiliation is perceived to give high status (identity prestige) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, alumni donors tend to perceive their university as prestigious (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Students may seek to portray their affiliation with a successful sports team from their university by wearing its merchandise and using “we” to imply ownership of the success, basking in their reflected glory (BIRG) (Cialdini et al., 1976).

Social identification can emerge from symbolic interactions in which people coconstruct meanings through verbal and nonverbal interactions, including the social transmission of shared meanings and concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Thus, sport team identification can be strengthened through group experiences, history and tradition, physical facility and rituals in which fans coconstruct meanings over time (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). Also, strong social identification, through which people internalize group norms and behaviors, can drive their identification with associated objects, ideas, people, and groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, students’ strong identification with their university can influence their identification with its sports teams (Heere et al., 2011).

Previous research has acknowledged the multiplicity of organizational identification foci that create different identities in different group situations (Van Dick, 2004). For example, a student may distinguish between identities as a learner, a university member, and a reference group member and behave differently in a classroom, on campus, and online. Additionally, people identify with their organization more strongly when they see their membership enables them to pursue other important social roles
(Fombelle, Jarvis, Ward, & Ostrom, 2012). For example, students may identify with their university more strongly through peer identification and learner identification, because these identities make them feel they belong and are supported.

### 5.4.2. Identity salience and contextual stimuli

**Identity narrative and cues**

As already noted, people tend to have multiple social identities that can vary in different contexts and change over time. According to Reed et al. (2012), the “factors that increase the salience of a particular identity within a person’s self-concept will increase the probability that the identity will have a subsequent influence on the person’s attitudes and behavior” (p. 313). When symbols, images, and words that suggest a distinctive identity are presented in an advertisement, these external stimuli can temporarily heighten the salience of a relevant identity, and subsequent information is processed according to this identity (Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed, 2002; Reed, 2004). Moreover, “the continuously reinforced array of meaningful associations will in turn strengthen the identity itself” (Reed et al., 2012, p. 315). Thus, identity cues that draw member attention to particular identities can influence their engagement with SMBC content.

Similarly, identity narratives displayed in content may trigger identity salience. Identity narrative is an internally presented story that allows people to make sense of their relationships with the group that has a collective identity story (story of me as a member of my group) and a group story (story of my group) (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, p. 96). The former derives from a member’s thoughts, feelings, and images about the past, present, and future of self, whereas the latter often comes from member’s ideas, emotions, and mental pictures about the group’s past (Ashmore et al., 2004; (A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002). Identity narratives create the content and meanings of the collective identity (Ashmore et al., 2004) and can evoke member’s emotions toward the group through the objects presented
in the narratives (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Thus, identity narratives that increase identity relevance and reinforce associations are likely to be of great importance to SMBCs’ content strategies.

Marketer Traits

Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen (2005) suggested service employees’ characteristics (e.g., personalities, attitudes, or tastes) are important drivers of people’s identification with an organization, as these traits suggest the organization’s values. In particular, the emotions and empathy employees express during encounters contribute to customers’ experiences and have a lasting impact on relationships (Arnould & Price, 1993; Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Similarly, marketers’ enthusiasm and efforts to create quality content help facilitate member engagement and build trust in online brand communities, which, in turn, lead to loyalty and advocacy (Koh & Kim, 2003; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Thus, marketer traits projected in its content and interactions are likely to influence member experiences in the SMBC.

5.5. Method

A netnographic approach was used to unpack locally relevant indicators of social media marketing practice and resulting customer experiences in an organic setting. This was achieved through the interpretation of the meanings of the social acts contained in text, image, and video content and comments published on a university’s Facebook page and Instagram account. Netnography can be cost and time-effective and allows researchers to observe naturalistic, unobstructed community interactions (Kozinets, 2010). Symbolic netnography, which focuses on “the online social experience and interaction of particular people’s groups, nations, languages, cultures and identity formations” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 249) was used here. A pure observational approach (S. Brown et al., 2003) was undertaken to obtain the needed data rather than a participant-observational approach.
5.5.1. Sites

UWA Students Facebook page (www.facebook.com/UWAstudents/) and Instagram account (www.instagram.com/uwastudents/) were used here. Administered by a team of student communications staff at the University of Western Australia, these two accounts are the university’s most established and active SMBCs among many official and affiliated channels. Investigating them provides holistic insights into the content, platforms, social actors, and interactions that influenced their success. Although the primary audience of the SMBCs is current students and employees, recent graduates and incoming students also participate. A variety of rich, student-focused content is posted on a daily basis, generating engagements (i.e., Likes, Comments) to which the page administrators regularly respond. Thus, these SMBCs meet the community selection criteria suggested by Kozinets (2010, p. 89).

5.5.2. Data Collection

Following Kozinets’ (2015) suggestion, we closely inspected the two social media accounts to familiarize ourselves with the communal norms for twelve months and contacted the page administrators to ensure ethical conduct. One hundred threads were chosen for the netnographic analysis. Nvivo’s browser extension was used to extract a Facebook dataset for a one-year period, while an Instagram dataset for the same period was manually created in an Excel file that summarized the numerical characteristics of the engagements. The average post engagement rates suggested the Instagram account generated greater engagement than the Facebook page, although the average number of comments and replies was higher on the Facebook page. This could be attributed to a handful of Facebook posts attracting a significant volume of comments and replies, as well as differences in the platforms’ features, norms, and newsfeed algorithms.

Following the method described in Table 5.1, fifty Facebook threads and fifty Instagram threads were chosen, ensuring the MGC pieces generated high engagement and included communications relevant to
the study’s research questions (Kozinets, 2015). Content that had user input (e.g., reposts of student-generated Instagram photos, guest blog articles) was excluded in order to focus on our research objectives (i.e., MGC and corresponding interactions), as the aim was to identify common attributes in these engaging content pieces and find relationships between these attributes and students’ reactions.

Table 5.1. Data collection process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dataset period</td>
<td>22/1/2015 – 15/1/2016</td>
<td>1719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of threads</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>1719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of user engagements</td>
<td>35.82 (average # of likes on post: 26.27, user comments: 2.40, user replies: 1.50, marketer comments: 0.05, marketer replies: 0.38, likes on comments/replies: 5.68)</td>
<td>89.45 (average # of likes on post: 87.91, user comments/replies: 1.54, marketer comments/replies: 0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of followers (X)</td>
<td>15800.29</td>
<td>4506.11 (estimated based on a periodic record, due to the absence of daily figures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average post engagement rate (Y/X)</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select 200 threads (MGC only)</td>
<td>Extract MGC; rank by engagement rate; filter by # of user comments + replies; use top 50</td>
<td>Extract MGC only, rank by engagement rate; filter by # of user comments; use top 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.3. Data analysis

The 100 threads had 100 pieces of content and a total of 2,277 corresponding user and marketer comments and replies. Table 5.2 shows average numbers of followers and interactions. As already noted, the Instagram community generated greater engagement than the Facebook community. The content posted on behalf of university departments did not generate much engagement, suggesting the importance of originality and exclusivity. Finally, a classification of content by media type is summarized in Table
5.3. Notably, on Facebook, images often accompanied text content, while most Instagram images were accompanied by a short caption.

Table 5.2. Average numbers of followers and engagements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Facebook MGC (top 50)</th>
<th>Instagram MGC (top 50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>15690.02</td>
<td>4527.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement rate</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes on posts</td>
<td>72.56</td>
<td>118.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes on comments/replies</td>
<td>44.66</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User comments</td>
<td>16.88</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User replies</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketer comments</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketer replies</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3. Classification of content by media type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content authorship</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Link</th>
<th>Album</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook MGC</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram MGC</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the NCapture browser extension, the 100 threads were extracted from the two accounts, converted to PDFs, and uploaded to NVivo 11 for coding and analysis. A hermeneutic analysis was performed to holistically interpret the meanings of the marketers’ and community members’ social practices by focusing on the guiding research question, while content analysis was applied to parts of the data. A list of provisional codes was developed based on the literature and the researchers’ experience in following the SMBCs. These codes provided a theoretical focus, while netnographic induction (Kozinets, 2015) allowed concepts grounded in the data to emerge. Rose (2012) suggestions were used in the analysis of
visual content, such as images and videos, allowing for a rigorous investigation of the key elements of content production.

Framework matrices for Facebook and Instagram content pieces were created, and content characteristics were summarized into each matrix. This was necessary as the majority of the content pieces were made up of images and videos in which the social acts and meanings had to be annotated before systematic coding could be undertaken, enabling comparisons to be made within and across the two platforms (Miles et al., 2014). The matrix columns included content narrative, objects seen in the visual content, genre, and other technological, compositional, and social aspects of visual content and communication (Rose, 2012), as well as interpretation of communicated content. Creative elements of images and videos (e.g., colors, hues, brightness, etc.) were excluded from analysis due to their complexity.

Following the coding scheme, content pieces, captions, comments, and replies were coded, while new codes were created as new interpretations and concepts emerged. The coding and grouping of codes were revised several times as more suitable themes were developed (Miles et al., 2014). Concepts derived from members’ comments were compared with those extracted from content to examine the resonance of the content (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Based on the coding references and pattern coding, possible relationships between content strategies and member reactions were explored.

5.6. Findings and discussion

5.6.1. Content strategies

Identity narrative and cues: Integration of symbolic resources

It became clear that the content posted in both the Facebook and Instagram communities strongly reflected the role of the student communications team. The SMBCs were the first places students went to learn about the culture of the university and what it meant to be a student, explore services and
opportunities, and seek information and support. Many content pieces highlighted the hedonic nature of the student experience (i.e., aesthetic enjoyment of campus artefacts and entertainment created around campus rituals and traditions). Importantly, we confirmed a strong presence of identity narratives and cues that were categorized into university identity theme and learner identity theme, as can be seen in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4. Classification of identity narratives and cues (number of content pieces coded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative category</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Examples of visual/verbal cues</th>
<th>Theme (membership)</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University artefacts /symbols /places</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Campus pets, facility, architecture, landscape, mascot, surroundings</td>
<td>University identity</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University rituals/traditions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Community events, exams, graduation ceremonies, orientations</td>
<td>University identity</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems/technologies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Learning management system, apps</td>
<td>Learner identity</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic processes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Academic notification, enrolment</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs, opportunities, student life tips, promotions, transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visual content, especially videos, enhanced processing of narratives, providing access to live community experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). University identity themes were prominent in both communities, partly due to a large number of posts in general. Learner identity is the learner role students play at the university, and these cues reflected the formal, authoritative nature of information related to the university’s learning technologies and academic processes. Table 5.5 shows examples of MGC posted on the Facebook and Instagram pages that used university identity and student-role identity themes.
Table 5.5. Examples of university identity theme and learner identity theme content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>University identity theme MGC (Instagram)</th>
<th>Learner identity theme MGC (Facebook)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Description | • Narrative & cues: university symbol (peacock), place (Tropical Grove)  
• Time: during a semester break when students were on holidays  
• Image genre: prank  
• Marketer effort: social networking (greeting/playing)  
• Values: entertainment, symbolic  
• 319 likes, 12 comments | • Narrative & cues: academic process (text: exam timetable), artefacts (campus buildings, trees)  
• Time: one month before exam season  
• Image genre: banner  
• Marketer effort: service delivery  
• Value: information, symbolic  
75 likes, 14 comments, 11 shares |

**Marketer authenticity and effort**

UWA Students demonstrated their efforts to facilitate member embeddedness, deliver services, and socialize with students. Table 5.6 illustrates these traits that were displayed in the content. The most strongly manifested theme was *fostering member embeddedness* which is known to influence members’ beliefs about an organization’s sense of respect for the community (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Specifically, the marketers vividly documented live student and community experiences to narrate shared moments, meanings, and feelings (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009), while highlighting the diversity of the community and empowering members to participate (Schau et al., 2009). Supporting effort
(McAlexander et al., 2002) was also prominent, perhaps due to the formal role the student communication team played as students’ first point of contact. This was demonstrated by providing resources and providing opportunities for students to ask questions, report issues, and give feedback. These traits can affect members’ beliefs about the congruence between their own and the organization’s values (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Further, socializing effort (Schau et al., 2009) was demonstrated through empathetic and playful content. Marketer attempted to stimulate students’ emotions and motives to participate in the SMBCs by creating the touchpoints where they could enjoy interactions and feel comfortable expressing themselves (Teichmann et al., 2015).

In providing meaningful content, the marketers displayed strong enthusiasm, professionalism, and empathy (Ahearne et al., 2005; Koh & Kim, 2003). An analysis of their communication style suggested warmth (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012) across content. Emojis, such as smiling faces and animals, were often used. Even academic updates were sometimes delivered through playful visual content using youth references and humor in an attempt to ease the anxiety and fear students often have about such information. In sum, these characteristics appear to increase students’ belief that the university cared about its students’ identities and values (Fombelle et al., 2012; McAlexander et al., 2002).
### Table 5.6. Illustrations of marketer effort and traits displayed in UWA Students content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fostering member embeddedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Traits: warm, playful | Instagram  
Caption: “If you aren’t here at the @uwastudentguild #uwalinkweek Club Carnival, you're in the wrong place 😜 #uwastudentguild #uwastudents #uwa” (102 likes, 9 comments) | Facebook  
[Aa banner picture saying: “Advice corner”]; Caption: “Returning students, hope you’re enjoying your last week of freedom before classes commence […]. Tomorrow onwards, new students will be wandering around campus trying to get oriented… what’s your best piece of advice for them?” (14 likes, 15 comments/replies, 27 likes on comments) |
| Supporting |
| Traits: competent, warm, playful | Facebook  
Caption: “Feedback about the Arts seminar rooms indicated that chairs were uncomfortable and desks were wobbly […].” (160 likes, 28 comments/replies, 94 likes on comments) | Instagram  
[Altered version of the hip hop musician’s meme]; Caption: “Pssst, #uwaexams results reaching #uwa Webmail inboxes now… 📩 #uwastudents #becausedrake” (185 likes, 11 comments) |
| Socialising | Instagram  
[Showing empathy and support for students sitting their exams] Caption: “Macca [the pet pig on campus] believes in you 🐷 #uwastudents #uwa #uwaexams” (149 likes, 9 comments) | Facebook  
Caption: “Here’s our favourite little hideaway at UWA 😊 What’s yours?” (6.4K views, 138 likes, 33 comments/replies, 27 likes on comments, 19 shares) |
5.6.2. Student experiences in the SMBCs: Sensemaking and collective sensemaking

An analysis of the engagement objects confirmed the identity narratives and content source characteristics noted earlier. Many members demonstrated their engagement by validating the quality of content (e.g., information, story, idea, and creative execution). These contextual stimuli seemed to play a sensegiving role in influencing members’ identity construction. As will be discussed subsequently, some comments explicitly demonstrated an enactment, affirmation, or expression of social identities. Thus, we suggest identity narrative and cues can activate the salience of relevant social identities (Forehand et al., 2002; Reed, 2004), influencing their sensemaking of the meanings presented in the content. Further, engagement with peers and the SMBCs was also demonstrated in member-member and member-marketer interactions. Most member comments were directed to their friends, suggesting members try to understand and enhance the meanings in the immediate social context through a collective sensemaking process. These findings are summarized in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Content strategy to capture and co-create student experiences in a SMBC
The role of MGC

An analysis of members’ comments found the student experiences recounted on the UWA Students SMBCs were generally emotional. Social media seems to help them visualize and intensify their hedonic experiences that involved aesthetic pleasure, peak challenge, fun, and personal growth. Members typically responded to content by validating (e.g., showing acceptance, love, and admiration; advocating, reflecting, playing, and joking) and socializing (e.g., tagging friends to share the content and have a chat around it); often at the same time. Further, highly engaged members enthusiastically used emojis, hashtags, and tags and created and posted content in their comments and replies. This suggests platform features can increase the enjoyment of interactions and allow students to express themselves, play with others, and conform to group norms.

Inspiring university narrative - Story of my university. We suggest the key role that university identity theme content plays in influencing members’ identifications is to inspire members’ internal representations of their university stories. This is not the imposition of an idealized identity, but the offering of resources that help students make sense of the meanings presented in these live community experiences or “stories of my university” (Ashmore et al., 2004). Since most UWA Student followers are current students, they tend to have insider knowledge of and experiences with various aspects of the university, which seem to influence their engagement (Wirtz et al., 2013). Some members explicitly expressed cognitive, affective, or evaluative social identity with the university (e.g., “only at UWA”; “UWA really gets me”; “This is my university”; “come to UWA”; “I miss UWA so badly”). Identity distinctiveness and prestige and memorable experiences are known to drive identification with a group (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), and our findings support the role social media content plays in enacting these relationship-inducing factors, as the examples in the next section show.
**Reminder and new source of identity distinctiveness and prestige.** When university identity theme cues are presented in content, they reinforce students’ perceptions about the distinctiveness and prestige of the university identity through identity associations and object relevance mechanisms (Reed et al., 2012). For example, a Facebook video post about one marketer’s experience with pet ducks (Table 5.7) prompted many responses, showing the students’ identification with the event, as well as their emotions toward the pets.

**Table 5.7. University identity distinctiveness reinforced by UWA Students content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University identity theme Facebook video</th>
<th>Expression of cognitive / affective social identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caption: “From the duckling Cam bloopers reel: the episode in which we are chased. Torpedo Mama Duck: 1 UWA Students: 0” (9.1K views, 221 likes, 71 comments/replies, 76 likes on comments/replies, 11 shares)</td>
<td>“[tagging 3 friends] looks familiar”; “It happened to the best of us [tagging a friend]”; “[tagging a friend] must have been the same duck family 😁”; “Devil duck 🐥haha”; “omg this is me [tagging a friend]”; “[tagging a friend] good to know I'm not the only one”; “[tagging a friend] classic”; “The ducks don't chase me [tagging a friend] because I save their babies from the crows 😊”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, in response to content capturing the aesthetic beauty of the university’s physical environment and artifacts, some members expressed an evaluative social identity by bragging or showing a sense of pride to outgroup members (e.g., “[tagging a friend] daily sight in school”; “[tagging a friend] you have no idea what I have to go through [cuteness of the pets]”). This could be attributed to the perceived prestige of the university identity activated by the content, allowing members to maintain positive self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976).
Interestingly, collective self-esteem was also expressed in response to prank posts that, typically, received extremely high levels of engagement, with some comments expressing evaluative and affective social identities, as illustrated in Table 5.8. Members seem to feel the marketers and the university were congruent with their identities and values (Fombelle et al., 2012; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012); enhancing their self-esteem (e.g., a manifestation of “my university is cool on social media, and I feel good about it”).

**Table 5.8. University identity prestige reinforced by UWA Students content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University identity theme prank (April fool’s joke): posted both on Facebook and Instagram</th>
<th>Expression of affective / evaluative social identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caption: “Will you be in Slytherin or Gryffindor? How about Winthrop or Somerville? Next semester UWA will be adopting a new system where all students will be divided into four houses […]. There’s no sorting hat, but houses will be assigned to students based on the barcode on their student cards. Students that have a bar code ending in A will be in Winthrop, B in Reid, C in Somerville or D in Battye. So get working on your Expelliarmus charms. Stultus Aprilis!” (333 likes, 49 comments/replies, 132 likes on comments/replies, 21 shares)</td>
<td>“[tagging a friend] my Exchange uni &gt; your Exchange uni (or any other for that matter)”; “[tagging a friend] UWA wins at April fools jokes 😂”; “UWA Students is really getting into the April Fools day this year”; “Does this apply retrospectively? Because I am up for a Battye alumni reunion.”; “[tagging a friend] hehe nice one uwa 😎”; “Good stuff guys you’re on a roll today 😄😄😄”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to lived community experiences. The affirmation of bittersweet memories and affective social identity was another common theme, as can be seen in Table 5.9. Interestingly, these comments suggested past students still followed the UWA Students pages to maintain a relationship with the university. Previous research has suggested collective narratives stimulate people’s nostalgic feelings for the past and highlight the meaning of their relationships with a group (A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002) and this seems to be the case here.
University identity theme content also helped defensive sensemaking (A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002). Thus, in response to a post showcasing an upgrade to a campus facility, some members showed mixed feelings (e.g., “This [renovation of a lecture theatre] is awesome and about time, but I feel like squeezing into Ross and Clews rows was a rite of passage for UWA students”; “Generations of quality graffiti gone.”; “[tagging a friend] note the name change [to a library], can’t call it science library”; “[tagging a friend] Scibry will live on forever!”; “It’ll always be science library in our hearts”). By opposing the changes presented in the content, these members affirm their attachment to these objects and concepts, strengthening their identifications through a sense of loss or threat to their identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Table 5.9. Recollection of lived community experience through UWA Students content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University identity theme Facebook video</th>
<th>Expression of affective social identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caption: “Good morning UWA!” (2.7K views, 45 likes, 9 comments/replies, 22 likes on comments/replies, 2 shares)</td>
<td>“I miss this place 😞;” “miss this beautiful campus 😞:/”; “[tagging 2 friends] 😞”; “I miss it so much!!!!”; “I miss studying at UWA 🤩”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providing resources to overcome a peak challenge. The learner identity theme content not only provided members with instrumental support but also a forum in which they could share feelings, issues, and information. Expression of fear, guilt, pensive feelings, and attempts to seek assistance, were seen in members’ comments, as illustrated in Table 5.10. These pieces of content are utilitarian by themselves and activate students’ academic goals (preventive or promotional) (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). However, they also help members’ social interactions with close peers, allowing them to collectively make sense of the meanings associated with their learner identity and engage with the process of overcoming obstacles (Arnould & Price, 1993; Higgins & Scholer, 2009).
Table 5.10. Peak challenge reinforced by UWA Students Facebook content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner identity theme content posted both on Facebook &amp; Instagram</th>
<th>Expression of emotions to perform the identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Caption: “just leaving this here…” (Facebook: 190 likes, 231 comments/replies, 230 likes on comments/replies; Instagram: 213 likes, 20 comments) | “[tagging a friend] feel like I'm about to puke thinking about neuroscience tbh”;
| | “[tagging a friend] I am not mentally prepared for this. I need wine”; “I'm ready to bawl my eyes out”;
| | “[tagging a friend] tonight is the night 😶وبا”; “make sure you're drunk when the email arrives [tagging 3 friends]”; “MY NIGHT IS RUINEDDDDDDDDD [tagging 3 friends]” |}

The role of social interactions

*Increasing pleasure and decreasing pain.* The analysis suggested social interactions in an SMBC can strengthen peer identification (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013), highlighting the fundamental role social networking sites play in building and maintaining peer relationships (Ellison et al., 2007). Most member comments included tagging of peer(s), suggesting they invite a friend(s) to a temporary *space* created by the content and collectively making sense of the issue under discussion. Members’ interactions with other members and marketers make the community experience rich and meaningful because the value of hedonic consumption can increase when shared with others (Arnould & Price, 1993; Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006; Schouten et al., 2007). For example, in times of uncertainty (e.g., academic results notifications or exams), timely posts created a forum in which many members collectively coped with fears, as can be seen in interactions to the announcement post (Table 5.10) (names in pseudonyms):
John: [tagging Jess and Kate]; [visual quote: “MAY THE ODDS BE EVER IN YOUR FAVOR”] (23 likes)

Jess: Holy shitttttttttttt now I’m in panic mode

John: My body is not ready for this. I have no alcohol yet (1 like)

Kate: I’m gonna need more than odds!! Hahah thanks Johhhn! You too💃 (1 like)

Jess: We’ll be fineeeeee!!!!!! 😁😁 in other completely unrelated news, can you guys make sure at my funeral, Harry Potter, mean girls, memes and my general amazingness is mentioned. (2 likes)

John: Sure (1 like)

Kate: Better make that a double Jess! Hahahah go down together hahah (1 like)

UWA Students also posted comments with empathy and humor: “Seems to be lots of nervous types tonight? Is it that bad? We’re gonna need to know how you all go— especially if you can tell us in😭😭 or😭😭😭 or😭😭😭” (11 likes); “Everyone ok? Make a cup of tea, hunker down, and share your best YouTube cat videos with us. We’re here with you😊” (35 likes), stimulating more interactions that built communal relationships. For example, in responding to the marker offering Adele’s music video to comfort a member, this member responded by calling UWA Students “fam” (our people): “Got the whole album playing fam,” suggesting SMBCs help marketers become friends (Arnould and Price 1993) in facilitating student experiences.

5.7. Conclusions and implications

Drawing on SIT, this research investigated the role university’s content strategies played in students’ social media experiences. Given the fragmented understanding of social media marketing success in the literature, our aim was to offer a fuller picture of effective content strategies that facilitate meaningful
engagement. A netnography of the UWA Student Facebook page and Instagram account provided a rich and thick description of the social media marketing phenomenon in a higher education services context.

Overall, the results suggest identity narrative and cues presented in MGC, along with the marketer traits, play an important sensegiving role in meeting SMBC members’ need to understand themselves, feel unique and positive about themselves, and feel supported and connected. These meanings are often vicious until visualized and communicated in stories (Megehee & Woodside, 2010; Weick, 1995), indicating that social media is the ideal platform to facilitate such sensemaking process. Given that individuals tend to allocate their attention to identity-relevant stimuli to make sense of the world in the identity-consistent environment (Coleman & Williams, 2015), it can be concluded that the more unique and specific the identity narrative and cues presented in the content, the greater the chance of attracting their attention in their possibly cluttered Newsfeeds. This is followed by collective sensemaking in which SMBC members engage in social interactions to negotiate and cocreate value and the meanings of their identities.

Our findings illustrated how authentic student experiences were projected and cocreated in the Facebook and Instagram SMBCs to facilitate meaningful engagement. Specifically, university identity theme content inspires members’ internal representations of university stories, reinforcing the university’s distinctiveness and offering access to live community experiences to evoke memories and create emotional attachment. Learner identity theme content, in contrast, provided members with resources to overcome challenges when pursuing their learner role, by providing a forum in which information and feelings can be shared. For many students, a university identity (group identity) and a learner identity (role identity) are both important components of self-concept. Hence, social media provides a strategic avenue for the university to remind and create meaningful identity associations which, in turn, help students enhance their sense of selves (Reed et al., 2012). Further, because SMBCs are embedded in social networking sites, such sensemaking processes are situated in members’ immediate social contexts.
Thus, social interactions with peers and the marketers in the university’s SMBC seem to increase enjoyment and decrease negative feelings when dealing with peak challenges, while strengthening connections with peers and the university.

5.7.1. Theoretical Implications

Although our research context may limit the relevance of the findings, the study makes several theoretical contributions. First, a social identity lens was used to advance our understanding of the social media marketing phenomenon. The importance SIT has in relationship marketing had been well documented (Ahearne et al., 2005; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Bagozzi et al., 2012), and we empirically demonstrated the usefulness of this theory to social media marketing.

Second, our research has added a new line of enquiry into the contextual drivers of customer engagement by investigating the role identity stimuli presented in social media content had on the enactment of salient social identity and the role of marketer traits on customer experiences in an SMBC. The findings suggest visual and verbal cues play a distinctive role (Forehand et al., 2002; Reed, 2004). It was also apparent that, through interacting with MGC, members extract symbolic resources and value that support their identities and develop a feeling of connection with the marketer and the brand (Ahearne et al., 2005; Stokburger-Sauer et al, 2012). Thus, advancing the previous studies suggesting that utilitarian and hedonic content and social interactions drive brand page engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), our research adds the symbolic value of content and the authenticity and affinity of the marketer as important contextual drivers worthy of further investigation.

Finally, this research contributes to our understanding of how digital natives interact with brands on social media (Bolton, 2013), by providing a vivid illustration of how students realize and maintain social capital (Ellison et al., 2007) and construct social identities (Junco, 2014) in their university’s SMBCs.
The use of identity theories to understand how this cohort of consumers builds and makes sense of relationships with their brand and its constituents has added a fresh perspective to the literature.

5.7.2. Managerial Implications

This research offers a practical framework for services organizations wishing to design long-term social media marketing strategies. The identity-based content framework focuses on sensegiving stimuli that are unique to individual organizations and subgroups. Marketers can benefit from using this framework to determine the identity cues and narratives that can be communicated so as to stimulate SMBC members’ sensemaking processes. Recognizing MGC’s role is critical in influencing social interactions and identifications, and therefore our findings are directly applicable to service organizations.

In the context of higher education, our findings have highlighted the importance of capturing and projecting authentic student experiences and emotional engagement in the university’s SMBCs for institutional branding and student recruitment purposes, given that prospective students are increasingly visiting university social media to have a taste of student life (Brook, 2016). It was clear that assisting relevant and meaningful student experiences in social media required a deep understanding of their identities and values. Such understanding of the diverse student community comes from marketers’ own experiences in sharing moments and emotions with the community, and social media is an important avenue through which this can be done. This also requires marketers to be attuned to the physical environment in which most symbolic resources are found in live community experiences. Moreover, marketers’ ability to demonstrate empathy is essential. As the UWA Student case exemplifies, marketers can be good company for students (i.e., friend role) in times of uncertainty, while also a reliable source of information (i.e., service employee role) that helps them be better learners.

In terms of SMBC platforms, Facebook was more suitable for social interactions than was Instagram due to their flexible features that allowed marketers and members to reply to specific users and include
interactive content in their comments. Instagram, on the other hand, was more suitable for content interactions. Thus, the two platforms triggered different social identities, goals and emotions, suggesting they are complementary channels and should be linked.

Finally, managerial support for social media practitioners is critical. They need resources and access to perform their roles as community leader and friend (e.g., time to collaborate with stakeholders for content ideas, opportunities for leadership development, and meaningful performance metrics). Further, an organizational culture that embraces identity cocreation and customer-centred branding, rather than holding a tight control of brand identity, is needed, as achieving authenticity in social media often collides with corporate identity issues. Facilitating meaningful customer experiences is about ensuring congruence between customer identities and brand and organizational identities, and it is here that social media has an important role to play.

5.7.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although focusing on a higher education service context was crucial due to the context-dependent nature of social media marketing, these findings have several additional limitations. First, we used a qualitative, interpretivist method to gain a picture of how content strategies influenced SMBC members’ reactions. Although we revised coding several times to achieve intra-coder reliability, some short comments and images were hard to interpret. Hence, further research confirming and validating our findings through interviews, focus groups, and surveys are desirable. Second, we investigated current customers who identify with the organization. Future research should investigate different groups of stakeholders, such as future customers in other category contexts to highlight commonalities and differences. Likewise, examining the SMBC phenomena in other major platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, would be a valuable addition. Finally, since our research focused on MGC, we did not include cocreated content, such as the sharing of UGC and coauthored articles. Future research investigating the role of cocreated
content, which is increasingly popular, will provide a more holistic understanding of social media marketing.
CHAPTER 6
THE STRATEGIC CO-CREATION OF CONTENT AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: AN IDENTITY THEORIES PERSPECTIVE


This chapter presents the second main study (Paper 4, Figure 6.1.) on the role of co-created content (CCC) shared on a university’s Facebook and Instagram pages (*RQ2b: What is the role of CCC on identity co-creation in a university’s SMBCs?*), which built on some of the pilot studies’ findings. The paper has been published in the *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* special issue: ‘The Impact of Social Media in Marketing’.

![Figure 6.1. The position of Chapter 6 (Paper 4)](image-url)
6.1. Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to enhance the understanding of how co-created content (CCC) can facilitate relevant and meaningful customer experiences in social media brand communities (SMBCs). It investigates the characteristics of CCC and explores the effects they have on member engagement from an identity theories perspective.

**Design:** A netnography of a university's Facebook and Instagram accounts was undertaken to analyse exemplary content co-creation practice and resulting user reactions in an organic setting.

**Findings:** The analysis of CCC confirmed a strong presence of identity narratives and cues that can be categorised into university, sub-group, and student-role identity themes. Members’ identity-consistent reactions highlight that CCC can influence member perceptions of the distinctiveness, prestige, and similarity of the identities they enact. University identity theme CCC allows members to project other member’s identity narrative, while sub-group and student-role identity theme CCC can help increase identity synergy.

**Research limitations/implications:** The paper adds to the social media marketing literature that SMBC members are important integrators of symbolic resources that influence other members’ identity constructions and further their perceived relationships with the organisation and other members. Social media enables marketers to leverage members’ diverse identities to enhance customer experiences. The study’s single context focus may be a limitation.

**Practical implications:** The paper provides a useful framework for designing social media content that facilitates meaningful engagement.

**Originality/value:** The use of identity theories to enhance the understanding of CCC and its role in SMBCs is original. The paper generates new lines of future enquiries to advance theorisation of social media marketing.
6.2. Introduction

The proliferation of social media technologies has created a significant opportunity for marketers to co-create value and brand meanings with customers (Gensler et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Marketers are increasingly involving customers in the creation of content to engage them in their social media brand communities (SMBCs). Starbucks Coffee, for example, has built a successful Instagram SMBC by curating pictures of customers expressing in-the-moment consumption, and rewarding their citizenship behaviour to leverage the authenticity of the SMBC’s content so as to attract other customers. While marketers continue to develop and adopt innovative co-creation strategies, the phenomenon lacks theoretical development. Thus, this study aims to enhance the understanding of how co-created content (CCC) can facilitate relevant and meaningful customer experiences in SMBCs. It investigates the characteristics of CCC and explores the effects they have on member engagement from an identity theories perspective.

Marketing scholars and practitioners have pointed out the important role other customers play in service encounters, as positive perceptions about other customers can influence a focal customer’s evaluation of a brand (Belk, 1975; Karaosmanoglu, Ayse Banu Elmadag, & Jingyun, 2011; McAlexander et al., 2002) and the persuasiveness of brand-related messages other customers communicate (Kelman, 1961; Yi, Gong, & Lee, 2013). Such co-creation of brand meanings has been well documented in the brand community literature (Cova & Pace, 2006; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). A brand community is built around a non-geographically bound group of people who share common brand values and culture (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), express themselves by using a brand (Cova & Pace, 2006), and co-create values (Schau et al., 2009). Social identification is an important construct that underpins brand community success (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) because a community bond and positive feelings associated with membership can lead to brand loyalty and advocacy (Algesheimer et al., 2005).
Despite social identity theory (SIT) informing brand community and relationship marketing success (Ahearne et al., 2005; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi et al., 2012), its application in the nearby SMBC field is surprisingly limited. The challenge facing marketers and researchers in today’s open, large, and heterogeneous online community environment is that diverse groups of networked people are involved with SMBCs in different ways in attempts to fulfil their diverse needs (Habibi et al., 2014; Kozinets, 2015; Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2013; Zaglia, 2013), making it harder to understand the identification mechanisms than those examined in traditionally-researched, homogeneous communities. Thus, SMBC research needs to reflect the multiplicity of identification foci and contextual influences.

Research shows members of a diverse group can feel connected with other members and committed to the group when they perceive their own sense of who they are as individuals and as group members are verified within the group (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). In other words, previous studies focusing on a single identity, such as a brand or organisation, in evaluating the drivers of group identification ignore the existence of potentially more salient identities members may enact (Fombelle et al., 2012). Thus, by embracing members’ diverse identities in an SMBC, a marketer may be able to influence their identity synergy which is created “when individuals’ involvement with an organisation facilitates their pursuit of other important social identities” (Fombelle et al., 2012, p. 587), leading to increased identification with similar members and the organisation (Fombelle et al., 2012). Thus, CCC may stimulate other members’ identity synergy through their engagement with content. Investigating whether this is the case is the second objective of this research.

The study focuses on higher education, which is characterised by a diverse student group, united through their university membership, generally in physical communities. University-initiated SMBCs primarily exist to enhance these physical university communities (Stavros et al., 2014) in which most relational exchanges and shared consumption experiences are facilitated. University students, who are often digital natives (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012), are also likely to use social media to construct a
variety of social identities (Junco, 2014) and improve social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). Thus, this study also offers insight into how students engage with their university on social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013), which has important implications for marketing practice.

6.3. Literature review

6.3.1. Social media brand communities (SMBCs)

SMBCs are initiated on social media platforms such as brand pages (Habibi et al., 2014; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). SMBCs and brand communities based in traditional media, such as websites and forums, share commonalities, including the existence of community-like characteristics (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013). Unlike these traditional brand communities, SMBCs are embedded in the social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, in which numerous networks are connected, often based on offline relationships (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). This means user interactions in an SMBC (e.g., likes, shares, comments and content contributions) are situated in social contexts and, in most cases, are instantly accessible to personal contacts. This social transmission of brand affinity has encouraged marketers to use content to reach customers and get them involved in their SMBCs (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Kozinets et al., 2010).

6.3.2. Co-created content (CCC)

To engage with customers on social media, marketers need to create original branded content or co-create content with their customers; the latter strategy is the focus of this study. The brand community literature emphasises the critical role user-generated content (UGC) and shared brand stories have on the co-creation of brand meanings, identity, and cultural capital (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Consumers are inclined to tell stories about their lived experiences with a brand to make sense of the meanings (Weick, 1995; Woodside et al., 2008), while also contributing content to online communities
for self-presentation and enjoyment (Cova & Pace, 2006; Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). Social media, due to its evolving technological features and networked audiences, can make such content contributions easy and rewarding for users (Teichmann et al., 2015).

Brand information, experiences, and emotions shared by consumers on social media can appear authentic and credible to other consumers (Chiu et al., 2012). Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson (2012) suggest the entertainment and educational values of UGC can drive content popularity, regardless of production quality. Indeed, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) found people watched user-generated travel videos to daydream about foreign experiences and recollect their own past travel experiences. Further, the undirected nature of UGC influences buying decisions more than marketer-generated content does alone (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

In co-creating content, marketers may choose to curate UGC (e.g., reposts on Instagram, retweets on Twitter) or co-author content with consumers (e.g., guest blog articles, customer interviews). In curation, marketers find and select UGC pieces, decide where and when to publish them and what stories to tell about them, ensuring their relevance and interest (Hogan, 2010). In co-authoring, marketers may identify and ask influential individuals to talk about pre-selected topics. Kozinets et al. (2010) suggest blogger character, type of forum, and communal norms can influence the narratives that attract an audience and affect the way members react to its content. This type of word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) approach in online communities needs to resolve communal-commercial tensions by transforming a marketing message into a communal narrative through “language, substance, or tone” to adapt to a community’s norms and expectations (Kozinets et al., 2010). This can be applicable to the management of SMBC relationships, yet it is not clear how members engage with CCC (disseminated by the marketer) of which the effects can be different from UGC (disseminated by users).
To sum up, the literature lacks an understanding of how CCC can facilitate relevant and meaningful customer experiences in SMBCs. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap through an identity theories lens, as outlined in subsequent sections.

6.4. Theoretical framework

6.4.1. Social identity theory (SIT) and social identification

SIT suggests people assign perceived exemplary features of a social group to themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and act consistently with these qualities in maintaining a positive self-defining relationship with the group or other members of the group (Kelman, 1958). Social identity has cognitive, affective, and evaluative elements (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Ellemers, 1999), each activated in different contexts. Cognitive social identity is a self-awareness of the group characteristics that inform self-categorisation in a social setting (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Affective social identity is a sense of emotional attachment to a group and positive feelings associated with membership, such as pride, enthusiasm, and belongingness (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Evaluative social identity is a member’s perception of how non-members see the group, which can influence collective self-esteem (Ellemers, 1999). Strong affective and evaluative social identities influence members’ citizenship behaviours (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Thus, understanding social identification drivers is the key to building a successful community.

Social identification is known to arise from verbal or nonverbal symbolic interactions through which members co-construct group identity meanings (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Weick, 1995). Social interactions help develop members’ identity knowledge and promote identity coherence which, in turn, increase perceived identity similarity, identity distinctiveness, and identity prestige, the key drivers of identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). When members perceive their group identity as similar to their sense of self (unique and special) and providing a good status, they are more likely to see the membership as attractive and feel committed to their relationships with the group (Ahearne et al., 2005;
Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). For example, students may express their identification with a successful sports team from their university by wearing its merchandise and using “we” to imply ownership of that success, basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976). Such identity signalling is a wide-spread phenomenon on social media (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), suggesting SMBC members engage with its content not only to extract symbolic resources but also to present their selves in subtle ways.

6.4.2. Identity synergy and peer identification

People are likely to identify with an organisation when they feel they are supported in achieving their self-defining goals (M. Brown, 1969) and their self-views and identities are accepted by other members of the organisation (Swann et al., 2004). Such perceptions can increase identity synergy, as members see their affiliation with the organisation lets them pursue other important identities (Fombelle et al., 2012). As one’s sense of self has multiple social identities (Stryker, 1980), identity synergy can reinforce a person’s self-concept and create a bond between members with similar identities (Fombelle et al., 2012). The perceived similarity and attractiveness of other customers are important drivers of peer identification or customer-to-customer identification (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011; Yi et al., 2013) which strengthens customer-company identification (Fombelle et al., 2012). For example, MBA students who also work full time may identify with each other and with their university as an enabling agent that supports their career aspirations.

Customers also learn how to behave by observing and interacting with other customers in service encounters (Yi et al., 2013). Kelman (1961) argues people who share similar values with a message source are likely to identify with the source and accept the message. More recently, Thompson and Malaviya (2013) found that, when a group of students was exposed to a user-generated advertisement and came to know the content source was a student from the same college, they were more likely to
identify with the source and to evaluate the message more positively than when the source was an unknown individual. Likewise, SMBCs may facilitate strong social influences from content contributors to members and, subsequently, among existing networks through peer interactions, as they try to make sense of the meanings of these identities.

6.4.3. Identity cues and identity narrative

Advertising scholars maintain that symbols, images, and words that connote a distinctive identity can heighten the salience of a relevant identity and that subsequent information is likely to be processed according to this identity (Forehand et al., 2002; Reed, 2004). Adding to this notion, Reed et al. (2012) argue "the continuously reinforced array of meaningful associations will, in turn, strengthen the identity itself" (p. 315). Further, recent research suggests people pay attention to identity-consistent stimuli in their motivated attempts to make sense of the world in an identity-relevant environment (Coleman and Williams, 2015). Thus, identity cues presented in CCC that draw members’ attention to important identities may influence their engagement with the content.

Similarly, an identity narrative displayed in media content can trigger an audience’s identity salience. Identity narrative is an internally represented story that allows people to make sense of their relationships with a group. Ashmore et al. (2004) suggest two types of narratives related to group identity: collective identity story (“story of me as a member of my group”) and group story (“story of my group”). The former is a member’s thoughts, feelings, and images about the past, present, and future of self, which can be communicated in CCC. The latter is the group’s story that often enacts a member’s ideas, emotions, and mental pictures about the group’s past (Ashmore et al., 2004; A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002). Identity narratives create the content and meanings of collective identity (Ashmore et al., 2004; A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002) and can evoke a member’s emotions towards the group through the associated cues presented in the narratives (A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Therefore,
identity narratives in CCC that increase identity relevance and reinforce associations may influence members’ reactions to the content.

6.5. Method

A netnography was undertaken to analyse locally-relevant indicators of exemplary content co-creation practice and resulting member reactions in an organic setting so as to understand the impact co-created content (CCC) has on students’ experiences in social media brand communities (SMBCs). This was achieved through the interpretation of various identities and meanings of the social acts and cultural artefacts found in CCC and comments published on a university's Facebook and Instagram accounts. Netnography enables researchers to observe naturalistic, unobstructed community interactions (Kozinets, 2010, 2015). The qualitative approach allowed multiple salient identities grounded in the data to emerge. Such identities have otherwise been ignored at the expense of focusing on a single identity (Fombelle et al., 2012). The study used symbolic netnography to investigate “the online social experience and interaction of particular people’s groups, nations, languages, cultures and identity formations” (Kozinets, 2015, p.249). A pure observational approach (S. Brown et al., 2003; Cova & Pace, 2006) was used rather than a participant-observational netnography (Kozinets, 2010), with the only participation being the following of the two social media accounts.

6.5.1. Sites

Since CCC can be a curation of user-generated content (UGC) or co-authored content, these types of content had to be available. Following a preliminary observation, the UWA Students’ Facebook page and Instagram account were chosen. Administered by a team of student communications professionals, they are the university’s most established and active pages among numerous official and affiliated accounts. The Facebook page focuses on co-authored student stories, while the Instagram account has evolved through the curation of student-generated content. Investigating these two communities provided
holistic insights into the nature of CCC and resulting interactions (with the content, the source, other members, the marketer, etc.) that appeared to influence social identifications. The primary audiences of the pages are current students, but employees, recent graduates, and incoming students also participate. A variety of rich, student-focused content is posted on a daily basis, generating engagement (e.g., likes, comments, shares). Thus, these SMBCs meet the community selection criteria recommended by Kozinets (2010, p. 89), which are relevant, active, interactive, heterogeneous, substantial, and data-rich.

6.5.2. Data collection

The engagement metrics available from the Facebook page and Instagram account were utilised to select the most appropriate sets of data to answer the research questions. Table 6.1 summarises the characteristics of both datasets and the screening process. NVivo’s browser extension was used to extract the Facebook dataset for a one-year period (January 2015 to January 2016), while the Instagram dataset for the same period was prepared by manually entering data in an Excel file. Next, all the threads were ranked by engagement rate (i.e., the average number of user engagements per post on a given day, divided by the total number of page followers on the day). Finally, 50 Facebook and 50 Instagram threads were selected for further examination, ensuring these data included “particularly insightful or representative communications” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 171).

6.5.3. Data analysis

The 100 threads consisted of 100 pieces of CCC and a total of 1,067 corresponding comments and replies (Facebook: 456; Instagram: 611). As shown in Table 6.2, which summarises the quantitative characteristics the data, the Instagram community had more engagement (engagement rate: 3.77%) than did the Facebook community (0.52%).
Table 6.1. Characteristics of the datasets and screening process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria/process</th>
<th>Facebook CCC</th>
<th>Instagram CCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dataset period</td>
<td>22/1/2015 – 15/1/2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of threads</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of engagements per thread (Y)</td>
<td>50.10 (likes on post: 41.93; user comments: 2.59; user replies: 0.88; likes on comments/replies: 4.73)</td>
<td>89.54 (loves on post: 88.12; user comments/replies: 1.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of followers (X)</td>
<td>15,787.61</td>
<td>4,561.64 (estimated based on periodic records due to absence of daily figures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average post engagement rate (Y/X)</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>2.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select 100 threads</td>
<td>Ranked by engagement rate; filtered by # of user comments + replies ≥ 4; selected 50</td>
<td>Ranked by engagement rate; filtered by # of user comments ≥ 6; selected 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2. Quantitative characteristics of the Facebook and Instagram data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Facebook CCC (n=50)</th>
<th>Instagram CCC (n=50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average # of followers</td>
<td>15,703.12</td>
<td>4,486.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average engagement rate per thread</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
<td>3.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of likes/loves on post</td>
<td>61.80</td>
<td>156.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of likes/loves on comments/replies per thread</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of user comments per thread</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>11.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of user replies per thread</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of marketer comments per thread</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of marketer replies per thread</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 summarises the classification of CCC by source type (curated or co-authored). It should be noted that most Facebook posts were #humansofuwa stories, which are the page’s signature content series used to showcase the university’s offerings and values through the lived experiences of students and staff.
The marketers co-authored these pieces of content with selected members of the university, typically asking for their advice and experiences. Instagram posts, on the other hand, were curations of member-generated pictures and videos containing the hashtag #uwastudents, which allows the marketers to discover them.

Table 6.3. Classification of CCC by source type (curated UGC or co-authored)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMBC platform</th>
<th>Curated UGC</th>
<th>Co-authored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 summarises the classification of CCC by media type. Image content was by far predominant in both the Facebook and Instagram communities. Notably, on Facebook, images were often used to accompany the text content, while most Instagram images were accompanied by a short caption and several hashtags.

Table 6.4. Classification of CCC by media type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMBC platform</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Link</th>
<th>Album</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 100 threads were extracted from the sites, converted to PDFs, and uploaded into NVivo 11 for coding and analysis. A hermeneutic analysis was performed to holistically interpret the meanings of the social practices performed by the marketers and community members by focusing on the guiding research question, while content analysis was applied to parts of the data. A list of provisional codes was developed based on the literature and the researchers’ experiences following the SMBCs. These codes provided a theoretical focus, while netnographic induction (Kozinets, 2015) allowed for the emergence
of concepts grounded in the data. Following Rose’s (2012) visual analysis framework, all the images and videos were examined in terms of the sites of production, visual itself and audiencing.

As part of the cultural immersion process (Schembri & Boyle, 2013), framework matrices were created to summarise the content characteristics. This was necessary, as most pieces of content included visual elements in which the social acts and cultural meanings needed to be annotated (Rose, 2012; Schembri & Boyle, 2013) before proceeding to systematic coding, enabling comparison within and across the threads and communities (Miles et al., 2014). The matrix columns included content narrative, objects and cultural artefacts seen in visual content, genre and other technological, compositional, and social modalities of visual content production and communication (Rose, 2012), as well as an interpretation of motives and the communicated values of the content. Creative elements in the images and videos (e.g., colours, hues, brightness etc.) were excluded from analysis for complexity reasons (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Following the coding scheme, the visual text, captions, comments, and replies were coded; new codes were created as new interpretations and concepts emerged. The coding and grouping of codes were revised as more suitable themes were developed (Miles et al., 2014). Concepts identified in member comments were compared with those found in content pieces to examine the resonance of the messages to the audience (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Further, based on the number of coding references and pattern coding, possible relationships between content and member reactions were explored.

6.6. Findings

6.6.1. Identity cues and identity narratives: Integration of symbolic resources

The analysis of the Facebook and Instagram content pieces confirmed a strong presence of identity narratives and cues that could be categorised in three themes (university, sub-group, and student role identities), as shown in Table 6.5. Multiple identities were expressed in most content pieces that often
had a central identity, based on formal membership (e.g., the engineering faculty) or role (e.g., university student role), with other identities adding some personal details (e.g., baker, cat lover, Law & Order fan).

It also appears many content contributors simultaneously expressed their identifications with the SMBCs by using campaign hashtags (e.g., #uwabirds, #uwaexams) and tailoring content for other members.

Table 6.5. Classification of identity narratives and cues used in CCC (the number of content pieces coded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central narrative category</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Examples of visual/verbal cues</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University rituals/traditions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Community events, graduation ceremonies, orientations</td>
<td>University identity</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University artefacts /symbols /places</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Campus pets, facility, architecture, landscape, mascot, surroundings</td>
<td>Facebook: 9 Instagram: 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs/opportunity &amp; participants</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Exchange students, campus residents</td>
<td>Sub-group identity</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses/units/subjects &amp; participants</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Podiatry student, engineering student</td>
<td>Facebook: 33 Instagram: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers pathways &amp; graduates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Science graduate, commerce graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student rituals/memes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Procrastination, exam fears</td>
<td>Student-role identity</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student artefacts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Study notes, Macbook, coffee</td>
<td>Facebook: 6 Instagram: 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student tips</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Study tips, life hack</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University identity theme narratives and cues were prominent in the Instagram CCC (Table 6.6), which could be partly due to a large number of posts in this category and the marketers leveraging UGC to showcase the authentic cultural experiences. These content contributors often expressed strong affective social identities, such as enthusiasm and pride, by advocating the physical environment of the university, such as the campus aesthetics and the entertainment offered by adorable pets.
Table 6.6. Examples of university identity theme content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content (Instagram CCC)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| [Image] | • Narrative and cues: university artefact (Jacaranda trees) and ritual (exams)  
• Time: during the exam period  
• Image genre: landscape  
• Engagement behaviour: expressing pride and enthusiasm, advocating the university, socialising with other members  
• Marketer intention: promoting the aesthetic beauty of the university campus  
• 283 likes, 8 comments |
| Caption: **uwastudents**: “Repost @[contributor handle name]: "Stop and smell the roses" they say... More like "stop and admire the beautiful Jacaranda trees at UWA"... I'm really grateful that I study at a very beautiful & tranquil university... I ❤️ UWA. Please appreciate this beauty my fellow students... try to be optimistic & good luck for the rest of ur exams!!! 😊 PROGMEM #uwa #uwastudents #uwaexams #morning #beautiful #purple #tree #summer #unistudents #beautifulcampus #perth #flowers #happy #grateful iandeng#hayfever #allergy #asthma #pharmacology” |  
| [Image] | • Narrative and cues: university symbol (clock tower) and ritual (end of exam celebration)  
• Time: right after exams ended  
• Image genre: prank  
• Engagement behaviour: entertaining, expressing creativity and excitement, socialising with the university  
• Marketer intention: celebrating the milestone with students  
• 172 likes, 10 comments |
| Caption: **uwastudents**: “We don't know what this is but does it really matter? 🦇وافق Repost @[contributor handle name]: Cats fly when exams are finished 🦇 See you next year, UWA 🕒 #uwastudents #uwaexams #uwa” |  

Sub-group identity theme was most frequently observed in Facebook CCC due to the popularity of co-authored stories (Table 6.7). In expressing a sub-group identity, contributors often reflected and advocated their experiences when participating in the group, detailing advantages, information and advice for other students to stimulate their interests and aspirations. These stimuli suggested the identities
of the university-related groups with which members were formally affiliated (e.g., faculty, student association, residential college).

Table 6.7. Example of sub-group identity theme content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content (Facebook CCC)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This is Tracy</em> [pseudonym], in her second year of studying to be a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine. [...] undergraduate degree in music performance [...]*. Having such a big change in study areas has been challenging, but she's glad she did it. She also enjoys […], baking, cats, computer games and drowning her sorrows in gin. [...] watch heinous amounts of Law &amp; Order SVU during exam periods [...].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✷ Narrative and cues: course (podiatric medicine) and participant background (postgrad, having a big change, likes baking, cats etc.), student ritual (procrastination)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We first noticed Tracy through her pictures on Instagram [...] ask her for five things we probably don’t know about Podiatry at UWA:</td>
<td>✷ Time: during a semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. We exist! Pod students spend most of their time over at [...]</td>
<td>✷ Image genre: selfie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We have a student podiatry clinic! [...] open to the public, but we’d love to see more UWA students and staff? [...]</td>
<td>✷ Engagement behaviour: advocating the course, sharing information, expressing pride and enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Our scope of practice goes well beyond [...] amazing how some bad knees or backs can be due to problems with your feet!</td>
<td>✷ Marketer intention: promoting the course, fostering member embeddedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. [...] spend time with your patients and see the results your treatment has made. It’s a pretty great feeling seeing a patient walk out of an appointment pain-free when they weren’t before.</td>
<td>✷ 115 likes, 12 comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We have a lot of fun! We are a fairly small cohort, [...] have an active student society; PMSS. We organise social sports [...] a dinner dance each year. We also love a good foot pun [...].</td>
<td># humansofUWA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a picture of Tracy covering her face with a skeleton model]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student-role identity theme narrative and cues represent the societal role of university students in general and were strongly manifested in Instagram CCC (Table 6.8). These contributors captured and shared various moments and feelings of being a university student, and this type of content was mostly hedonic (i.e., expression of pleasure or pain). For example, the entertainment appeal was prominent in the meme
and prank content, where humour was used to share in-the-moment feelings associated with the symbolic concepts such as procrastination and struggles.

Table 6.8. Examples of student-role identity theme content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content (Instagram CCC)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caption: uwastudents:  “Throwback to last night 🎨😊 Repost @[contributor handle name]: I think I have taken essay planning to a whole new level. I need help. 😞 #themstudyfeels uwastudents essaywriting #longnightahead #uwa”</td>
<td>• Narrative and cues: student artefacts (notes, pens) and ritual (essay planning) • Time: during an assessment peak week • Image genre: narrative • Engagement behaviour: entertaining, seeking help, expressing creativity • Marketer intention: stimulating discussion/ideas about essay planning • 121 likes, 7 comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caption: uwastudents: “Pro tip 🍫☕ Repost @[contributor handle name]: Poor Uni student top tip no. 1: when you can't afford a $4.50 hot choccie, split a $3.20 choc chill with a friend + 2 free cups + microwave for 2 mins = 🍫</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#whenthosehotchocciecravingsgotyoulikeohwheremydollarsat #uwastudents #hotchoccies @idrinkhotchocolatesperth #netflixandchocchill” | • Narrative and cues: student artefact (Choc Chill) and life tip (money saving) • Time: during a semester • Image genre: narrative • Engagement behaviour: sharing tip, expressing ingenuity, entertaining • Marketer intention: promoting the ingenuity of the community member • 150 likes, 12 comments |

6.6.2. The role of co-created content (CCC) on student experiences in university SMBCs

The analysis of member comments confirmed their identity-consistent reactions to the identity theme content illustrated earlier. Specifically, some member comments clearly demonstrated an enactment, affirmation and expression of various salient identities, including the university, sub-groups and student
role identities. Interestingly, member comments were often directed to close friends through tagging, suggesting these members try to understand and/or enhance the meanings in their immediate social context, while also performing a friend role to maintain existing relationships. Thus, the study found identity cues and narratives, along with source characteristics, can attract audience attention and increase the salience of relevant social identities, influencing the subsequent evaluation of the content (Coleman & Williams, 2015; Forehand et al., 2002; Reed, 2004; Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). Further, the thematic analysis resulted in the emergence of two key themes related to the role of CCC on student experiences (i.e., projecting other members’ identity narratives and creating identity synergy).

6.6.3. Projecting other member’s identity narrative – story of a member of my university

University identity theme content seems to help broaden and deepen members’ collective understandings of the university’s past, present, and future (Ashmore et al., 2004; A. Brown & Humphreys, 2002). Members’ mentally represented narratives were vividly articulated, especially in visual content, giving other members and the marketers access to lived student experiences and the special feelings associated with being a member of the university. As the following examples show, such type of content seems to remind members of their identities and serve as a new source of university identity distinctiveness.

Reminder and new source of university identity distinctiveness. When university identity theme cues are presented in content, they seem to reinforce students’ perceptions of the distinctiveness of the university identity through increased identity knowledge and coherence (Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014; Reed et al., 2012). For example, an Instagram post about one member’s lived experience with a pet kookaburra prompted some members’ emotional responses, demonstrating their identifications with the event, as well as their attachment to the pet(s) (Table 6.9). This suggests university identity theme content, with an aid of visual narrative, can help members make sense of the meanings attached to the membership through other member’s lived experience and identity narrative (Ashmore et al. 2004; Weick, 1995), and
develop identity-associated discourse that can enhance the cultural meanings (Reed et al., 2012). It also inspired some members to explore various attractions on campus with their friends, enacting their friend role: “[tagging a friend] let’s do this [borrow popular DVD series from the university library]! Screw classes”; “[tagging a friend] I want to do this [a morning yoga class on campus]!”; “[tagging a friend] we need to get up there [the clock tower]!!”

Table 6.9. Illustration of CCC reinforcing perceived university identity distinctiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University identity theme content</th>
<th>Member reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>“He got my last piece of chilliz chicken the other day 😏”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>“[tagging a friend] look! it’s Bob’s cousin Katsu”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>“Remember this guy [tagging a friend]” - “omgsh I will never forget that time 😏” [tagging the friend back]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>“[tagging a friend] This is the cutest picture! I love the Kookaburras at UWA, they are so friendly 😊” - “[tagging the friend back] yep except when I’ve got food in my hand! Haha he’s my Reid cafe buddy”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6.4. Creating identity synergy: opportunities to pursue other important identities

As people tend to evaluate the meanings of their group identities by looking at other members (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011). Sub-group and student-role identity theme content can help enhance members’ identity synergy by increasing member perceptions of communal/organisational support (Fombelle et al., 2012). Specifically, sub-group identity theme content reinforced perceived identity distinctiveness and prestige of the group and created opportunities for members to affirm existing relationships. Meanwhile, student-role identity theme content highlighted perceived identity similarity. These findings are elaborated as follows.
Reinforcing perceived sub-group identity distinctiveness and prestige. Similar to the role of university identity theme content, sub-group identity theme content reinforced the perceived distinctiveness and prestige of the group identities that were important to some members, strengthening their attachment to the group and increasing collective self-esteem (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Ellemers, 1999). This was demonstrated by some sub-group members expressing a sense of pride and enthusiasm for their group and fellow members: “Go [a music student, the content source]! #welovemusic #theway”; “#dentlyf [dental student life].” Others demonstrated their evaluative social identities for a sub-group by publicly announcing their affiliation with the group, and successful fellow members (Cialdini et al., 1976) featured in the #humansofuwa stories: “Whoa! Two UWAIRS [UWA International Relations Society] plugs in a day!!”; “UWA Politic Club represent!”; “UniMentor represent!! Woohp woohp!!” This type of content might also have signalled the marketer’s effort to create member embeddedness (Porter & Donthu, 2008), as demonstrated in some comments directed to content sources: “[tagging the featured friend] u #famous”; “BNOC [big name on campus]”; “can I have your autograph please [tagging the featured friend].” These comments seem to indicate that getting featured in the UWA Students SMBCs can be part of their cultural experience that has a distinctive meaning. Moreover, potential sub-group members also validated the value of sub-group identity theme content (e.g., information, story, idea): “great read! I’m applying [for the exchange program] this afternoon!! Xx”; “Great stuff. Inspiring”; “Good compelling reasons [for doing Honours]. You sold me.”

Creating opportunities to affirm existing member relationships. Sub-group identity theme content, especially the #humansofuwa stories, strengthened existing relationships between the featured member and other members. Some close friends of featured members expressed a sense of pride in their friendships and advocated them, as illustrated in the following comments on a story about Zoe [pseudonym] and her ways to not burn out during the semester: “What an inspiring and driven young woman you are, Zoe [tagged]. So proud X”; “HD for the tips Zoe [tagged]”; “Wow Zoe. I feel emotional
reading this. You're amazing […].” Interestingly, some members contributed to the co-creation of stories by adding personal experiences with the featured members:

[A professor of Chemistry who shared her wisdom] was one of the few lecturers at UWA that I can truly say that managed to incorporate her passion into her teachings […].

This man [an engineering student who shared his top tips for essay writing] is a fundamental genius, his seemingly infinite charm and technological ingenuity provides him with […].

[Adding #6 to a roommate’s story about 5 things she always has on her desk] 6. [a residential college] room crew - before studying [tagging the featured member] needs the procrastinative (if that’s a word) support that we offer to get her through the emotional rollercoaster that is exams […].

In response to these warm or playful comments affirming existing relationships, featured members often replied to show their gratitude for the comments, socialised with friends and/or thanked UWA Students for sharing content with the rest of the community: “Thank you!! xxx it helps that I have such amazing people surrounding me!!”; “Woohoo thank you!! Got a personal shoutout from the amazing #uwastudents team”; “Sorry but no - im too famous to give autographs [tagging the friend commented]”; “[tagging the friend commented] I feel so famous.” As such, CCC can generate social interactions between content sources and their existing friends, helping strengthen peer identification.

Highlighting perceived identity similarity. Student-role identity theme content, especially those meme posts shared in the UWA Students Instagram community, attracted members expressing their identifications with the universal concepts presented in the posts and with the content contributor, often reflecting and confessing their own experiences, situations and feelings (Table 6.10). Many members seem to find the ridicule, daydreaming and motivations presented in these posts relatable and symbolic, helping them make sense of and cope with peak challenges associated with student-role identity (e.g., procrastination, exam stress, financial struggle). These members may perceive the emotional profiles
presented in these posts as congruent with their actual identities (e.g., struggling/average student identity), which can make them react and feel according to these identities (Coleman & Williams, 2013).

Table 6.10. Illustration of CCC highlighting identity similarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instagram CCC: student-role identity theme</th>
<th>Member reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Caption: uwastudents: “Everyone still surviving mid-sems? 😓 Repost @[contributor handle name]: 😓 #uwastudents #UWA #midsems” (207 likes, 16 comments) | “[tagging a friend] u!!!!!”  
“A stat mid semester in two days... haven't even watched any of the lectures yet”  
“Haha #truestory or when you finish, think you did well and everyone else is still on the first or second page, you frown and guess your entire exam has to be wrong 😞”  
 “[tagging a friend] my life”  
“[tagging a friend] haha so something I would think!” - “[tagging a friend] hahahaha me too! Used to speed up and freak out...” |

6.7. Discussion and implications

Drawing from identity theories, this research investigated the characteristics of co-created content (CCC) and how it facilitates meaningful member experiences in social media brand communities (SMBCs). A netnography of the UWA Students Facebook page and Instagram account offered a rich and thick description of the social media marketing phenomenon in a service organisation context.

Overall, the findings suggested SMBC members are important integrators of symbolic resources that can influence other members’ identity constructions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Weick, 1995) and further their perceived relationships with the university and other members (McAlexander et al., 2002). CCC can help enhance perceived identity synergy by ensuring the authentic representation of the multiple identities members pursue (Fombelle et al., 2012). Moreover, the interactive and immediate nature of social media
enables an increase in the affinity and proximity of the content source (i.e., users and/or marketer) (Kelman, 1961; Yi et al., 2013) and the visibility of other members’ identity narratives (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009) which, in turn, can strengthen the authenticity and contextual relevance of the CCC to members. As illustrated in Figure 1, these key aspects of CCC can enact social interactions and members’ self-defined identity needs as they seek to maintain (positive) social and personal identities (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

![Diagram of Determinants of CCC, Identity need fulfilment, and Relationship strength]

**Figure 6.2. A proposed model for strategic co-creation of content and identity construction in an SMBC**

Although the study’s context may limit the relevance of these findings, it makes several theoretical contributions. First, identity theories were used to enhance the understanding of content co-creation and the SMBC phenomena. It seems CCC provides SMBC members with an important symbolic motivation to know about themselves, feel unique and good about themselves, and feel supported in their attempt to
fulfil self-defining needs (M. Brown, 1969; Fombelle et al., 2012; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). These findings demonstrate the usefulness of identity theories as a way to examine the effectiveness of social media content strategies.

Second, the study investigated the possible impact that contextual stimuli presented in social media content had on the enactment of salient social identities. This study found support for the notion that members extract symbolic resources and values through their interactions with CCC, while also developing a feeling of connection with the content source. Thus, identity narratives and cues, along with the authenticity and affinity of content source, can be important contextual stimuli to the effectiveness of content co-creation strategy.

Finally, the study informed how identity synergy can be created (Fombelle et al., 2012) in an SMBC context. Findings highlighted the existence of multiple salient social identities expressed in CCC and member comments. In particular, sub-group identity theme content helped members pursue sub-group identities by reinforcing their distinctiveness and prestige. Student-role identity theme content also contributed to identity synergy by highlighting the cultural meanings associated with being a university student. Importantly, what brought them together was their university acting as an enabling agent (McAlexander et al., 2004), suggesting that, by interacting with CCC, members can reinforce their self-concepts and strengthen their connection with peers, similar others and the university.

6.7.1. Practical implications

While CCC’s role is critical for social media marketers in influencing interactions and identifications, the findings from this study are also applicable to practice in other service contexts. The UWA Students case suggests CCC that highlights the diversity of members’ social identities can increase identity synergy. By ensuring the diversity of identities is represented in CCC, marketers can maintain an
SMBC’s continuity (Thomas et al., 2013), while signalling their efforts to create member embeddedness (Porter & Donthu, 2008).

The findings also propose ways to encourage content contributions and interactions from members. As UWA Students demonstrated, SMBCs can be designed in such a way that contributors enjoy the co-creation process, feel empowered to entertain and educate other members and get instant gratification. Such efforts signal marketers’ genuine intention to facilitate positive customer experiences (McAlexander et al., 2002; Porter & Donthu, 2008), to help reinforce members’ role clarity, and to provide rewards for positive behaviours (Bolton, 2016). Promoting hashtags for easy contribution, and commenting to contributors by using humour, emojis, social media-specific expressions, and a warm tone can help marketers demonstrate their knowledge of and respect for their audiences, their identities and their values (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Further, the way audiences react to CCC seems to be different from one platform to another, as was the case for UWA Students. For example, the curation of user-generated content (UGC) seems to be more accepted on Instagram, partly due to the well-adopted use of hashtags, suggesting the platform is suitable to leverage the more authentic and nuanced identities students express (e.g., procrastinator, regular user of a specific study area on campus). In contrast, Facebook page followers expect greater input from the brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). Thus, tailoring content tactics to different platforms to best leverage member readiness to react to identity-relevant stimuli (Coleman & Williams, 2015) may improve customers’ social media experiences.

Finally, in order to implement these suggestions, managerial support for employees who engage in social media marketing is critical. There needs to be an organisational culture that embraces identity co-creation and customer-centred branding, as achieving authenticity on social media platforms often collides with a corporate identity that management may impose.
6.7.2. Limitations and future research

Although focusing on a higher education service context has allowed for a vivid illustration of the phenomenon under enquiry, this may limit the study’s generalisability. Results should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study used a qualitative, interpretative method to grasp a rich picture of CCC and its influence on SMBC members’ reactions. Although coding was revised multiple times to achieve intra-coder reliability, the meanings of some short comments and images were hard to interpret. Hence, further research confirming and validating these findings through additional methods such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys will reinforce these claims. Second, the study focused on current customers who identify with the organisation through formal membership relationships. Future research should investigate different groups of stakeholders, including potential customers, in other contexts, to highlight commonalities and differences. Finally, this study focused on CCC; marketer-generated content (MGC) was excluded from the analyses. Investigating both CCC and MGC would provide a more holistic understanding of social media marketing success. Likewise, examining other SMBC platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube would be a valuable contribution.
CHAPTER 7

TWO-WAY ACCULTURATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA:
THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS


This chapter presents the third main study (Paper 5, Figure 7.1.) that examined the role of institution’s social media efforts (i.e., content tactics and marketer traits) in building member relationships ($RQ3a$: How do social media marketing efforts influence the processes of identity co-creation in building student-university relationships?). It built on the findings from Paper 3 and partly Paper 4 and is designed to generalise the findings to broader social institution contexts. The paper has been accepted for publication in the Technological Forecasting and Social Change special issue: ‘Acculturation in the Social Media: a myth or reality? Analysing social media led integration and polarisation’ and is expected to be published in 2019. Aspects of this paper were presented at the 10th AMA SERV SIG Conference in 2018.

Figure 7.1. The position of Chapter 7 (Paper 5)
7.1. Abstract

The affordances of social media have enabled organisations and members to negotiate and co-construct their identities. Despite the original conception of acculturation as a reciprocal process of cultural change, how an organisation adapts to the cultures of its members and how members react to the institutional efforts remain under-researched. Drawing from the literature of identity construction, this paper conceptualises two-way acculturation in social media and investigates the role of institutional efforts in building member relationships. We employed a mixed methods approach consisting of a netnographic analysis of university Facebook pages and a quantitative survey with a sample of 410 students to examine how brand page identification and the institutional image (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness) mediate the relationship between the social media marketing efforts and member-institution identification. The results show that, overall, content tactics (i.e., symbolic resource integration, hedonic quality, and utilitarian quality) and marketer traits (i.e., effort to foster member embeddedness and warmth) not only strengthen member engagement but also help shape an attractive image of the institution. This paper advances our understanding of identity construction and acculturation in social media while also adding a nuanced understanding of the effects of individual tactics to social media marketing theory and practice.
7.2. Introduction

Social media technologies have created an opportunity for people to shape the identities of social institutions. As a consequence, one of the major challenges for organisations operating in this democratised environment is a loss of marketing control (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Specifically, the maintenance of legitimacy and value systems is increasingly becoming a demanding task. Progressive organisations are responding to this social change by learning to adapt to the digital culture in which collaboration, transparency, and authenticity are valued. Indeed, the popularity of inbound marketing, in which an organisation attracts and retains its audience through valuable and relevant social media content that serves their needs (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), highlights the strategic value of an audience-centric approach to organisational bottom lines.

Social media provides marketers with an essential platform for learning and engagement, allowing them to understand audiences on a personal level and to integrate such understandings into their communications; thereby building reciprocal relationships (Gensler et al., 2013). For example, Dove and Old Spice, despite their low-involvement product category, have successfully engaged emerging ‘digital crowds’ by integrating the distinctive gender ideologies of these networked cultural groups into their branding and social media communications (Holt, 2016). We consider such a phenomenon as two-way acculturation and argue that, just as individuals assimilate or integrate into a group, organisations can acculturate to their audiences by leveraging the power of social media.

Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) originally defined acculturation as ‘those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups’ (p. 149). Despite its emphasis on the reciprocal nature of the phenomenon, most research focuses on one side of acculturation (i.e., how individuals adjust to a dominant culture), neglecting its interactive, dynamic, and emerging
nature (Chirkov, 2009). However, the importance of taking a two-way perspective is increasingly recognised, as the ubiquity, interactivity, and networked environment of social media facilitate the collaborative co-creation of content and social interactions; allowing organisations and stakeholders to openly negotiate and reinforce their identities and relationships (Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2018, 2019; Voyer, Kastanakis, & Rhode, 2017). Moreover, given the growing importance of empathy to organisational performances (Parmer, 2015) managing two-way acculturation in social media may present a strategic avenue for total corporate communications (Balmer, 2017), organisational socialisation (Louis, 1980), symbolic management (Clark, 1972), and institutional maintenance (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010).

However, little is known about what makes two-way acculturation in social media successful and meaningful to organisations and their audiences. The present research seeks to answer this question, by drawing on identity construction theories. The theories have often been used by organisational and marketing researchers to explain social relationship formation (e.g., Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Arnett et al., 2003). However, their application to the organisational use of social media is surprisingly limited (Fujita et al., 2018). Our approach is based on the premise that people need to define themselves to make sense of the social world (Tajifel & Turner, 1986), and that organisations set the stage for them to fulfil this fundamental need (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). We expect people are attracted to an institution when their identity motives are satisfied through their interactions with content, other members, and marketers on the institution’s social media.

More specifically, this research has three objectives. First, we qualitatively and quantitatively examine the role social media marketers play as a face of the institution, an area that deserves more scholarly attention (Liao et al., 2017; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Second, the research seeks to contribute a more nuanced understanding of strategy effectiveness to the social media marketing literature. Prior studies have investigated the drivers of brand page success from various perspectives, such as uses and
gratifications (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), consumer values (Carlson et al., 2017), customer equity (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012), organisational socialisation (Liao et al., 2017), and psychological motivation theory (Swani et al., 2017). This research attempts to further this line of enquiry from a fresh perspective (i.e., identity construction), by exploring the influences content tactics and marketer traits have on institutional images and brand page identification. Following Dutton et al.’s (1994) definition of organisational images which is seen to consist of perceived organisational identity (what a member believes about the organisation) and construed external image (what a member believes outsiders think about the organisation), we focus on the relationship-inducing characters of institutional images (Arnett et al. 2003). Understanding the contexts in which particular social media tactics are more impactful than others will better inform marketing decisions. Third, we establish a framework to help marketers understand how two-way acculturation might underpin their strategic and tactical efforts to engage with members or customers on social media.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. We first review the literature about identity construction and social media marketing to conceptualise two-way institutional acculturation. Next, we identify three key content tactics (i.e., symbolic resource integration, hedonic quality, and utilitarian quality) and two marketer traits (i.e., effort to foster member embeddedness and warmth) demonstrated by institutional marketers in their acculturation efforts. We then develop and test a model to see how these efforts might influence institutional images (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness) and brand page identification, in driving institutional identification. The methods used, findings, discussion, and conclusions are then presented.
7.3. Theoretical background

7.3.1. Identity construction, identity processing, and organisational identification

Identity construction is a recursive process in which people develop an identity through verbal and nonverbal symbolic interactions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Weick, 1995), which then shapes and reinforces their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). People identify with an organisation when they perceive it has qualities that satisfy their higher-order needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994). Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) suggest a broad range of central motives to explain why individuals construct an identity, including a need to define themselves in a positive light (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a need to express themselves (Shamir et al. 1993), and a need to feel valued by others (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003; Turner, 1982), suggesting identity motives can be internally or externally focused.

Identity construction involves the processing of an identity while it is a salient part of the self (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Reed et al., 2012). The salience of an identity increases when:

(a) more opportunities exist to enact and receive feedback about the identity (social connections), (b) more identity-relevant possessions and resources are available to enact the identity well (possessions and media connections) and (c) more positive and self-enhancing feedback is received about that enactment (esteem) (Kleine et al., 1993, p. 226).

When people strongly identify with an organisation and internalise its characteristics, they are likely to remain loyal and engage in citizenship behaviours (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, it is essential for organisations to facilitate opportunities for socialisation and sensemaking (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Clark, 1972; Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995) through which members gain identity-relevant possessions, media connections, social connections, and self-enhancing feedback. For example, social institutions, such as universities, might facilitate such opportunities to
remind members of their affiliation and stimulate an enactment of member identity by organising social events, introducing rituals and artefacts, disseminating updates, and celebrating achievements.

7.3.2. Social media marketing, affordances of social media, and two-way acculturation

A growing body of research supports the positive impact social media marketing efforts have on customer engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Swani et al., 2017) and brand equity creation (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012). This is attributed to quality content and resulting social interactions creating positive user experiences that, in turn, augment the value of a focal product, service, idea, and/or membership. Evidence also suggests social media marketing efforts can increase customer loyalty (Godey et al., 2016; Jahn & Kunz, 2012) and satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2017), which drives advocacy (Carlson et al., 2017; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Thus, the institutional use of social media is a strategic requirement for the maintenance of value systems and stakeholder relationships.

Social media enables people and organisations to easily access the social and cultural processes of identity co-creation beyond geographical and time boundaries (Genler et al. 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Specifically, social media technologies provide organisational and individual users with the ability to make their performances, experiences, knowledge, and narratives visible, editable, persistent, and associable (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Visibility facilitates others’ understandings and provides easy access to others’ resources (Treem & Leonardi, 2013), while reminding people of their affiliations (Dutton et al., 1994). When content and social interactions are editable, participants can better craft the messages they hope to convey; facilitating more purposeful, relevant, and personalised communications (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Persistent communication is accessible after it was originally presented, enabling individuals and organisations to analyse past interactions, grow content in collaboration (Treem & Leonardi, 2013), and make more identity-relevant possessions accessible (Belk, 2013). Finally,
associations are developed between and among individuals, organisations, and content (Treem & Leonardi, 2013), allowing them to build and reinforce social connections and media connections.

Based on the review of the literature, we argue the affordances of social media create the ideal conditions for social identities to become salient. In this sense, two-way acculturation is a technologically-enabled process of identity co-creation and cultural change through which meanings, resources, and narratives are openly exchanged and integrated between an organisation and its people. In this environment, marketers integrate the meanings, resources, and narratives provided by their audience to create identity-relevant content and demonstrate authentic communication. These efforts, in turn, can drive member engagement with the brand page (Godey et al., 2016; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Liao et al., 2017), while signalling the values and identity of the organisation (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Indeed, recent research suggests relevant content shared on an institution’s social media stimulates member expressions of identity narratives and the sharing of identity cues (Fujita et al., 2018, 2019). Verbal and non-verbal social interactions facilitated through organisational efforts can also help members develop identity knowledge and promote identity coherence over time, strengthening the linking of this identity to their self-concepts (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994).

We, therefore, suggest social media marketers’ efforts to adapt to and engage with their audience will help enact brand page identification and institutional images that are meaningful to their self-concept. These will, in turn, strengthen members’ identification with the institution, stimulating the acculturation process. To investigate whether this is the case, we develop a research model that is discussed in subsequent sections.
7.4. Research model development and hypotheses

7.4.1. Institutional image: Distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness

Optimal distinctiveness theory suggests people seek to balance opposing fundamental needs in social groups and situations, as they have needs for uniqueness and inclusion (Brewer, 1991). When they perceive a social group to be distinctive from other groups and allowing them to satisfy these opposing needs through membership (i.e., being different from out-groups but similar to in-group members at the same time), this group’s identity becomes meaningful, and they identify with the group (Brewer, 1991; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

People also strive for a positive evaluation of self that enhances self-esteem (Kunda, 1999). If members believe their group has prestigious qualities that are hard for out-groups to obtain (e.g., a university that has many Nobel Prize recipients, a city voted the world best place to live), associating with that group gives them good personal status (March & Simon, 1993) and a sense of pride (Cialdini et al., 1976). This, in turn, motivates people to identify with the group and internalise its characteristics (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Moreover, people like to believe their group values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). When they feel their personal values are validated and that they are supported to achieve self-defining goals, such perceptions of support can drive their identification with the group (Swann et al., 2004). In turn, they become motivated to support the group’s welfare (Arnett et al., 2003; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Taken together, we hypothesise that:

H1. Perceived (a) distinctiveness, (b) prestige, and (c) supportiveness of an institution positively influence members’ identification with the institution.
7.4.2. Brand page identification

People also identify with a brand community when a common interest in the consumption of a brand gives them a sense of belongingness and kinship with other members (Algesheimer et al., 2005). As consumers and organisations are connected through a chain of personal, relational, and collective identities (Bagozzi et al., 2012), members’ identification with an online brand community can influence their identification with a larger brand community (Ren et al., 2012), the brand itself (Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012) and, ultimately, the organisation (Bagozzi et al., 2012). Since a social media brand page is a form of brand community, this suggests:

H2. Members’ brand page identification positively influences their institutional identification.

7.4.3. Content tactics

Symbolic resource integration

It is well known that brand community members are motivated to participate in the co-creation of symbolic resources that give meanings to their membership (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Organisational scholars also discuss how such resources can be created and maintained by institutions to reinforce the salience of these identities and portray distinctive institutional images (Clark, 1972; Dacin et al., 2010). Symbolic resources can be classified into spiritual (e.g., myths, sagas), physical (e.g., artefacts, landscape), and social domains (e.g., rituals, traditions) (Markovitzky & Mosek, 2005). Access to these resources is the key to newcomers’ psychological adjustment to a new environment (Dacin et al., 2010; Markovitzky & Mosek, 2005) and increasing pleasure and pride in organisational life (Clark, 1972).

When symbols, images, and words that connote the distinctive identity of a social group are presented in media content, these can heighten the salience of the identity, and subsequent information is likely to be
processed according to this identity (Forehand et al., 2002). People also tend to pay attention to identity-consistent stimuli, trying to make sense of the world in an identity-relevant environment (Coleman & Williams, 2015). Indeed, recent research suggests symbolic resources available in social media content can attract members’ attention and stimulate sensemaking and socialisation (Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2017b; Fujita et al., 2018; Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2019). As more interactions around symbolic features of the group become available in social media, it also increases the visibility of the group (March & Simon, 1993) in members' social networks, which may consist of both insiders and outsiders to the group. This, in turn, creates opportunities for members to affirm its prestigious group status. Thus, it is likely an attractive group image is reinforced through such content.

Further, symbolic resources available on a brand page can stimulate collective sensemaking in which members discuss the meanings of the organisation’s identity and affirm their status as organisational insiders (Fujita et al., 2018). When a brand page becomes a meaningful agent for organisational sensemaking and socialisation, members accrue social and cultural capital (Karoui, Dudezert, & Leidner, 2015) and, hence, are more likely to strengthen their identification with the online community. Together, this suggests:

**H3.** Perceived level of symbolic resources in an institution’s brand page content positively influences perceived (a) distinctiveness and (b) prestige of the institution and (c) brand page identification.

*Hedonic content*

Evidence suggests social media marketing efforts, including the entertainment aspect of a brand page, have a positive influence on brand image (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012). Recent research also shows hedonic content with a high degree of entertainment or aesthetic quality, when shared in an institution-initiated social media, can suggest a good sense of humour or aesthetics (Fujita et al., 2018, 2019). Subsequent interactions generated through hedonic content may also reinforce such a distinctive
image. People are also often motivated to share hedonic content to entertain their contacts on social media, with goals of self-expression and enhancement (Berger, 2014). As more positive feedback is received on the hedonic content posted on a brand page, the group will become more visible in members’ social networks. Thus, such content may serve as means of gaining personal status and endorsing a perception of group prestige. Moreover, people identify with an online community when they perceive a high level of entertainment through participation (Dholakia et al., 2004). Similarly, the hedonic value of brand page content is known to drive member engagement with the page through increased page use (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), suggesting:

**H4.** Perceived hedonic quality of an institution’s brand page content positively influences perceived (a) distinctiveness and (b) prestige of the institution and (c) brand page identification.

*Utilitarian content*

Research suggests a marketer’s effort to create informative and useful content in an online community can influence members’ belief about the sponsor’s genuine interest in their goals and wellbeing (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Similarly, the utilitarian content posted on an institution-initiated brand page may signal the institution’s supportive attitude and attractive values. Moreover, many people join an online community primarily to fulfil their functional needs and are likely to strengthen their identification with the community when such needs are satisfied through participation (Dholakia et al., 2004). Recent studies also support the importance of the utilitarian value of the brand page content to fan engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Liao et al., 2017; Gummerus et al., 2012). As the affordances of social media increase the opportunity for brand page followers to access others’ knowledge and experiences, this may help reinforce a community feeling, suggesting:

**H5.** Perceived utilitarian quality of an institution’s brand page content positively influences perceived (a) supportiveness of the institution and (b) brand page identification.
7.4.4. Marketer traits

Effort to foster member embeddedness

Service employees’ characteristics are known to influence customers’ perceptions of organisational values (Ahearne et al., 2005). Similarly, a marketer’s efforts to foster member embeddedness (e.g., facilitating interactions, creating an inclusive atmosphere) within an online community can influence members’ belief about the sponsor’s sense of shared values and respect for them (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Such efforts can also help strengthen members’ identification with an online community (Liao et al., 2017). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H6. The perceived effort of a marketer to foster member embeddedness on an institution’s brand page positively influences perceived (a) supportiveness of the institution and (b) brand page identification.

Warmth

The emotions and empathy service employees express during encounters are known to contribute positively to the customer experience, often allowing them to form personal relationships with customers (Arnould & Price, 1993). Warm brands are also more likely to create an emotional attachment (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a virtual community leader’s enthusiasm is known to increase people’s sense of community (Koh & Kim, 2003). Similarly, warm characteristics displayed by marketers in social media may signal a supportive, caring institutional image. Such traits may also increase perceptions of social presence which can drive social media brand engagement (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). Thus, it can be suggested:

H7. The perceived warm personality of a marketer on an institution’s brand page positively influences perceived (a) supportiveness of the institution and (b) brand page identification.
These hypotheses led to the model shown in Figure 7.2 that was examined in the present research.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 7.2. The role institutional efforts play in two-way acculturation in social media**

[Note: As our research focuses on the role of institutional efforts, and to simplify the presentation of the hypotheses, the model is presented in a linear way. However, the identity construction process seems to be dynamic and recursive (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).]

7.5. Study I

We first undertook a netnographic analysis of two Australian university Facebook pages to confirm the presence of the content tactics and marketer traits discussed in the previous sections. We then explored indicators of the relationships between these efforts and institutional image that were shown in members’
comments. The higher education context was seen as a good match for this study’s focus on reciprocal identity co-creation, especially given university students’ use of social media. The qualitative data also informed the development of a new scale (Symbolic Resource Integration) and the adjustment of some existing scales that were used in the subsequent quantitative study.

7.5.1. Data collection and analysis

Sites
Facebook page A is targeted at a broad regional university community, but the main audience is current students. The university marketing team manages the page in collaboration with students. There is a linked blog site from which student-generated articles feed to the page. Facebook page B is targeted at current students at an established university in an urban area. The university’s student communications team manages the page in collaboration with students. These two pages meet the site selection criteria suggested by Kozinets (2010, p. 89), as they are relevant, active, interactive, heterogeneous, substantial, and data-rich.

Analysis
We analysed 200 pieces of content (50 pieces of user-generated content and 50 pieces of marketer-generated content from each of the two pages) along with corresponding comments that were published between 2015 and 2016. We selected the threads based on their relevance to the research questions (Kozinets, 2015) and engagement rates (i.e., total # of likes, comments and shares/total # of followers on a given day) that were seen as indicators of engaging content (Fujita et al., 2018). Following the conceptual framework, we coded the images, videos, text, and comments, with the NVivo 11 program assisting in this process.
7.5.2. Findings and discussion

Content tactics and marketer traits

The suggested content tactics and marketer traits were strongly evident in the data, as is summarised in Table 7.1. Symbolic resource integration was the most frequently observed content tactic in both pages, followed by hedonic quality, although most content pieces used hybrid tactics to maximise the opportunity for engagement. Importantly, the use of promotional content was rarely observed. In both pages, the content was not simply created by the marketers, but also co-created by students, employees and other members of the community, supporting the notion of brand story co-creation (Gensler et al., 2013). For example, a curation of student-generated Instagram pictures and co-authored stories of students or staff members were frequently used and generated many engagements (i.e., likes, comments, shares). These findings showed successful social media marketers know what is meaningful for their diverse audiences and integrate such knowledge into content design. By doing so, marketers validate the identity meanings, resources, and narratives communicated by members and create an association between these features and the shared values of the institution.

The marketers’ effort to foster member embeddedness and warm characteristics were displayed in both the content and comments, frequently using emojis, youth expressions (e.g., fam, bae) and local language (e.g., acronyms for online tools, nicknames for facilities) to adapt to the student culture (Fujita et al. 2018). These efforts help create intimacy between marketers and members as well as among members (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). The marketers’ efforts to orchestrate positive member experiences, in turn, seemed to signal the authenticity and affinity of the institution’s identity. These findings add to the roles employees play in service encounters (Arndoul & Price, 1993; Ahearne et al. 2005), as social media technologies empower marketers to read and react to members’ needs and emotions in context, while also making encounters accessible to other members who may form impressions of the institution by observing these interactions.
### Table 7.1. Some content tactics and marketer traits on university Facebook pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic/trait</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic resource integration</td>
<td>A picture of a student rugby player, in celebrating the success of two students and two alumni playing in the national team: ‘We’ll be cheering loud and proud for [university name] students [names] and alumni [names] ahead of the Rugby World Cup final. Go get ‘em! #AssieAssieAssie’ (Page A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student-generated LipDub video, in sharing the authentic moments of student life and residential student ritual: ‘Word on the street is that the Inter-College LipDub Competition is done and dusted! We've just seen [college name]’s entry... any news from [4 other college names]?’ (Page B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonic content</td>
<td>An aesthetic student-generated Instagram picture of a sunset captured on campus: ‘The walk might be epic but the view from the hill on [campus name] is worth it! #[university name]life photo of the week captured by [student name] #sunset’ (Page A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A humorous marketer-generated video of a swan shaking off the water by a nearby river (Taylor Swift’s song ‘Shake it off’ in the background): ‘Stressed about exams? Shake it off, shake it off! (T-Swift ft. a [university name] swan with an itch)’ (Page B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian content</td>
<td>A link to an academic staff blog article on how to stay healthy during busy exam times: ‘Good luck to all our students submitting their final assessments and sitting exams over the next couple of weeks. ‘To keep your brain working as well as it can, you should be eating regular meals throughout the day and should never skip breakfast’, says [author name]. You can find more tips on looking after yourself here: [URL]’ (Page A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An announcement about class enrolment: ‘We've heard that many of you understandably don't want to be bothered on your holidays. If you decide you'd rather let CAS do all the work for you, just sit back and [...]. New students, just ensure you've completed the enrolment steps and the system will take care of the rest. However, for those who have external commitments and want to take charge of their time, enter your class preferences [...].’ (Page B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort to foster member embeddedness</td>
<td>Welcoming new distance education students and facilitating interactions: ‘Over 7,000 new students will be joining the [university name] Distance Education community this year. Where will you be logging in from?’ (Page A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing an international student story to embrace the diversity in the student community: ‘This is [student name], an international postgrad from South Africa, and originally from Botswana. He’s doing a MSc in Environmental Science, [...] enjoy countryside life with animals and of course community volunteerism. He’s a fan of badminton, Nelson Mandela’s Long Walk to Freedom, [...] speak and write at least 3 languages – Setswana, Shekgalagarhi and English [...].’ (Page B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Showing empathy to a distance education student lives in a remote area: ‘Regional areas do have a unique set of challenges and needs. We're happy to be able to help you on your journey back into pathology and hope you have a wonderful year with [university name] 😊 Don’t hesitate to contact us if you have any questions!’ (Page A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to comfort students who shared a long evening nervously waiting for their semester results to be emailed: ‘Hi Facebook fam, it's been a long ride and we've been through the highest highs and the lowest lows together tonight. Let's huddle [...]’ (Page B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Member reactions**

We also analysed members’ comments to identify indicators of the suggested institutional image dimensions (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness). The results, which are summarised in Table 7.2, suggested institutional social media efforts can stimulate recollection of group experiences and identity association, allowing members to (re)negotiate an institutional image that makes them feel unique and esteemed (Fujita et al., 2018). However, a supportive image of the institution was difficult to observe in members’ reactions. Rather, members seemed to signal a feeling of being supported, by validating the useful content or expressing gratitude to marketers responding to their comments.

In both pages, content with a high level of symbolic resources and hedonic quality seemed to enact a distinctive and prestigious institutional image, while stimulating social interactions and emotional engagement. For example, as was the case in previous studies (e.g. Fujita et al., 2018, 2019), members tagged other members to collectively make sense of meanings, while also signalling the attractive identity association created by the content. In some extreme cases, members expressed their pride in the success of the institution or in those members featured in the content; basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976). The data also illustrated how entertainment could help emotionally-charged experiences in social media create values (Godey et al., 2016) and engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Together, these findings suggest symbolic resources in content can stimulate an enactment of identity, while the content’s hedonic quality may create a sensation in which members validate the institution’s authentic sense of shared values.

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest institutional efforts in social media help enact members’ motives to enhance self and collective esteem in a social context by offering sensemaking cues (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Fujita et al., 2018, 2019). These cues are in line with concepts of identity-relevant possessions, social connections, media connections, and esteem (Kleine et al., 1993). The findings also highlight how social media can make the process of identity co-creation visible (e.g., open access to
symbolic interactions), editable (e.g., purposeful comments and content), persistent (e.g., building stories on archival data), and associable (e.g., connecting content with user profiles). Importantly, the findings established indicators of two-way acculturation in social media, providing support for hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b and possible support for H5a, H6a, and H7a.

**Table 7.2. Institutional image found in members’ comments on university Facebook pages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompted image</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
<td>Reacting to content with high levels of symbolic resources: ‘I love spring because it’s the time I finally get to do some exercise by running away from the magpies at [university name]’ (Page A); ‘Da fuqqqqqq HAHAHAHAHA only at [university name]’ (Page B) Reacting to hedonic content: ‘[Tagging friends] how can you not love [university name]?’ (Page A); ‘[University name] just gets me’ (Page B)</td>
<td>Members evaluate, affirm and reinforce the university’s distinctive features and value congruence to feel unique and special about themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>Reacting to content with high levels of symbolic resources: ‘Very proud of all the students and the hardworking staff who helped get them there!’ (Page A); [University name] has some of the most beautiful grounds. Just the other day I checked out the [garden name] and fell in love :) (Page B) Reacting to hedonic content: ‘[Tagging a friend outside the university] are you jealous this is what my uni life will be like… hopefully’ (Page A); ‘[Tagging friends outside the university] This is my university’ (Page B)</td>
<td>Members evaluate, affirm and reinforce the university’s social status and the significance of their membership to feel proud and esteemed about themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportiveness</td>
<td>Reacting to utilitarian content: ‘Toppest tip – know your stuff!’ (Page A); ‘These study tips are boss [tagging a friend]’ (Page B) Responding to the marketer trying to foster member embeddedness: ‘I’ve already studied my bachelor through [university name] so they were a natural choice for my master program! Brilliant teachers and brilliant support!’ (Page A); ‘Thanks u rock’ (Page B) Responding to the marketer demonstrating warmth: ‘Can’t wait! Thanks for making me/us all welcome!’ (Page A); ‘Appreciate the support 🙌’ (Page B)</td>
<td>Members evaluate, affirm and reinforce the university’s willingness to understand their students at a personal level and to offer instrumental and emotional support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.6. Study II

7.6.1. Data collection and analysis

Sample

Following Study I, we used an online survey to test our model. Respondents were university students in Australia who self-identified as followers of their university’s social media page and were sourced from the PureProfile consumer panel. The decision to use a consumer panel was made based on our anticipation that page followers directly recruited through such pages might give very positively skewed responses (Porter & Donthu, 2008). We sampled active and passive followers, with most indicating they regularly checked page activities and occasionally liked the content, but rarely engaged in social interactions or made content contributions. As most Facebook brand page followers are ‘lurkers’ in reality (Gummerus et al. 2012), our sample was deemed appropriate for this study.

We used screening questions to ensure respondents were currently enrolled at an Australian university, followed at least one official or affiliated social media account of their university, and could recall their experiences when using the selected university page. To achieve this, we asked respondents to indicate their university name, provide the name of the social media account they referenced during the survey (Porter & Donthu, 2008), and take a moment to reflect on their experiences using this page by writing some positive and negative aspects of the page. This allowed us to verify the account names provided by searching the names and visiting the pages to ensure their existence (Porter & Donthu, 2008). As a result, 410 qualified responses from 40 Australian universities were identified as usable for analysis. Table 7.3 shows the sample’s background characteristics. The gender imbalance in the sample could be due to the gender ratio of the panel registered with PureProfile (60% female), a great portion of disqualified responses from males, the fact that there are more female university students in Australia (55.4% female:
Department of Education and Training, 2017), and the general tendency of females to respond to online surveys more than males (G. Smith, 2008).

Table 7.3. Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># of university pages followed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>Type of the social media page selected</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Page for university community</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or above</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>Page for student community</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of university enrolled at</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page for discipline community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of 8</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Group of 8</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time at the university</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-11 months</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-23 months</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>Page membership duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>2-6 months</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7-11 months</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More than 2 years</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

We used multi-item, seven-point Likert-type scales to measure the model’s constructs (Figure 7.2). Existing scales were adapted to reflect the research context and a few new items were added to incorporate the qualitative findings. We developed a new scale for the ‘Symbolic Resource Integration’
construct, as there was no suitable scale to measure the construct. We followed recommended procedures (Churchill, 1979) by conducting an informal interview with a university’s social media page administrator; consulting prior research into brand community, symbolic management, community engagement, and acculturation. Building on previous research by Fujita et al., (2018), we then observed the tactics and member reactions through the netnography (Study I) and developed indicators. Finally, we pretested the model with a sample of 100 students from an Australian university, and the constructs showed evidence of validity and reliability, after removing some items. Table 4 shows a list of the items used in the main survey.

Common method bias (CMB)

We controlled for common method bias, which could impact on the relationships between the constructs (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), through procedural and statistical methods. The procedural methods consisted of fully randomising the question/item order by placing them in different sections of the survey and refining item wordings as a result of the pilot study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Statistically, we used Harman’s single-factor test and found no single factor exceeded the threshold of explaining more than 50% of the total variance. We also used a full collinearity approach, which showed the average full variance inflation factor (AFVIG) was 2.05, which is less than the suggested threshold level of 3.3 (Kock, 2015). These results suggest CMB was not a major issue in this study.

Analysis

A component-based Partial Least Squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach was used here, with the SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2014) program being used to estimate the model. PLS-SEM was chosen because:

1. PLS-SEM works well with smaller sample sizes and complex predictive models and has less-stringent sample distribution (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012).
2. The statistical power of PLS-SEM is greater than covariance-based SEM (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017).

3. PLS-SEM is suitable for non-normal data distribution and exploratory research, such as that undertaken here (Hair et al., 2012).

4. PLS-SEM considers the total variance of the measurement indicators when estimating the model (Hair et al., 2017).

### 7.6.2. Results

#### Measurement properties

The measurement model results and their psychometric properties are shown in Table 7.4. All of the measurement items loaded significantly onto their respective factors and were well above the threshold level of 0.60 and all associated t-statistics were significant (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The reliability and convergent validity of the constructs were satisfactory, as the composite reliabilities all exceeded the recommended value of 0.70 and the average variance extracted scores all exceeded the threshold value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2012).

**Table 7.4. The measurement model and the psychometric properties of the scales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs and measurement items</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>ρ</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Identification (IID)</strong> (Mael &amp; Ashforth, 1992)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone criticises [university name], it feels like a personal insult.</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>34.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very interested in what others think about [university name].</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>38.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I talk about [university name], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>35.06</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The successes of [university name] are my successes.</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>32.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone praises [university name], it feels like a personal compliment.</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>51.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Page Identification (BPI)</strong> (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a strong sense of belonging to the group that the page represents.</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>21.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I identify strongly with the page.</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>25.83</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The page is like a part of me.</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>28.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The page has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>38.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I feel a strong connection with other users of the page. (new item)</strong></td>
<td>0.77 30.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctiveness (DIS)</strong> (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)</td>
<td>[University name] has a distinctive identity.</td>
<td>0.82 35.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] is unique.</td>
<td>0.88 67.60</td>
<td>0.89 0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] stands out from its competitors.</td>
<td>0.87 62.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prestige (PRS)</strong> (Mael &amp; Ashforth, 1992)</td>
<td>People in my community think highly of [university name].</td>
<td>0.80 34.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is considered prestigious in my community to be a student of [university name].</td>
<td>0.85 46.09</td>
<td>0.90 0.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] is considered one of the best universities.</td>
<td>0.87 57.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most people would be proud when their children attend [university name].</td>
<td>0.80 38.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportiveness (SUP)</strong> (Eisenberger et al., 1986)</td>
<td>[University name] strongly considers my goals and values.</td>
<td>0.85 52.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help is available from [university name] when I have a problem.</td>
<td>0.78 27.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] really cares about my well-being.</td>
<td>0.85 41.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform to the best of my ability.</td>
<td>0.84 47.37</td>
<td>0.94 0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] cares about my general satisfaction at the university.</td>
<td>0.83 45.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[University name] cares about my opinions.</td>
<td>0.88 61.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Symbolic Resources (SYM)</strong> (Developed in this study)</td>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos of the university’s campus, landmarks, pets and objects that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td>0.85 50.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos of campus events and activities that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td>0.87 55.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s nice to find stories about the university’s traditions, myths, history and rituals that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td>0.75 23.91</td>
<td>0.91 0.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s nice to find stories about the achievements of the university and its members on this page.</td>
<td>0.84 46.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos showing moments of student life on this page.</td>
<td>0.80 40.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hedonic Quality (HED)</strong> (Jahn &amp; Kunz, 2012)</td>
<td>The content of the page is fun.</td>
<td>0.80 25.73</td>
<td>0.89 0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is useful.</td>
<td>0.86 53.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is pleasant.</td>
<td>0.78 34.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is entertaining.</td>
<td>0.86 57.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utilitarian Quality (UTL)</strong> (Jahn &amp; Kunz, 2012)</td>
<td>The content of the page is helpful.</td>
<td>0.85 47.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is useful.</td>
<td>0.87 59.69</td>
<td>0.91 0.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is functional.</td>
<td>0.85 51.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content of the page is practical.</td>
<td>0.84 42.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effort to Foster Member Embeddedness (EFT)</strong> (Porter &amp; Donthu, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The administrator of the page seeks the opinions of users.  0.85  58.35
The administrator of the page encourages users to contribute to the page.  0.82  40.35
The administrator of the page allows users to have direct contact.  0.72  17.91
The administrator of the page makes an effort to make users feel a part of the community.  0.83  45.10
The administrator of the page acknowledges the contributions of users. (new item)  0.76  25.76

**Warmth** (WAR) (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page creates warm feelings among users.</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>34.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is very loveable.</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>43.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is amusing. (new item)</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>38.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is caring. (new item)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>49.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 7.5, the measurement model had discriminant validity, as the square root of the AVE score for each construct exceeded the correlations between that construct and all of the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 7.5. Discriminant validity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>DIS</th>
<th>EFT</th>
<th>HED</th>
<th>PRS</th>
<th>SUP</th>
<th>SYM</th>
<th>IID</th>
<th>UTL</th>
<th>WAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BPI</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HED</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUP</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYM</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IID</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTL</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAR</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: Square root AVE is in italics on the diagonal. Correlations are below diagonal.]

**Structural model and hypothesis testing**

Predictive validity was assessed using explained variance. The $R^2$ value of the ultimate dependent variable (institutional identification (IID)) was 0.63, while the $R^2$ value for brand page identification
(BPI) was 0.57, which led to large effect sizes for these variables (~ 25%, Cohen, 1992). The $R^2$ value for distinctiveness (DIS) was 0.41, while the $R^2$ value for prestige (PRS) was 0.38 and the $R^2$ value for supportiveness (SUP) was 0.38, which led to medium effect sizes (~ 9%, Cohen, 1992). The goodness-of-fit (GoF) value for the study was 0.49, which exceeds the threshold value of 0.36 for large effects (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, & Van Oppen, 2009). These results suggest the model had good overall predictive validity. The average variance accounted (AVA) for the ultimate dependent variable was 0.63, which is greater than the cut-off value of 0.10 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Thus, the structural model had adequate explanatory power. The blindfolding results show the cross-validated communalities ($H^2$) for all of the constructs were higher than the threshold level of 0.0 (Fornell & Cha, 1994), while the cross-validated redundancies ($F^2$) for BPI, DIS, PRS, SUP and IID had relatively high values (Chin & Newsted, 1999). These results suggest the model also had good predictive ability.

Table 7.6 shows the coefficients of the model’s paths, their t-values and the $R^2$ of each endogenous construct. The t-values were computed using a bootstrapping resampling method with 1500 resamples. Most of the hypotheses were supported. The results showed distinctiveness ($\beta = 0.15$, p < 0.001), supportiveness ($\beta = 0.24$, p < 0.01) and brand page identification ($\beta = 0.48$, p < 0.001) significantly affected institutional identification, supporting hypotheses H1a, H1c and H2. The level of symbolic resources (SYM) positively impacted distinctiveness ($\beta = 0.36$, p < 0.05) and prestige ($\beta = 0.45$, p < 0.05), supporting hypotheses H3a and H3c. Hedonic quality (HED) significantly affected brand page identification ($\beta = 0.22$, p < 0.05), distinctiveness ($\beta = 0.35$, p < 0.001) and prestige ($\beta = 0.22$, p < 0.05), supporting hypotheses H4c, H4a and H4b. Utilitarian quality (UTL) significantly affected supportiveness (SUP) ($\beta = 0.33$, p < 0.001) and brand page identification ($\beta = 0.10$, p < 0.05), supporting hypothesis H5a and H5b. The results also showed effort to foster member embeddedness (EFT) significantly affected supportiveness ($\beta = 0.31$, p < 0.001) and brand page identification ($\beta = 0.20$, p < 0.05),
supporting H6a and H6b. Finally, Warmth (WAR) significantly affected brand page identification ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H7b.

### Table 7.6. Structural model results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesised paths</th>
<th>Standardised coefficient</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a: DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: PRS → IID</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c: SUP → IID</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: BPI → IID</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>10.51</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a: SYM → DIS</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: SYM → BPI</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.42 NS</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3c: SYM → PRS</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a: HED → DIS</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b: HED → PRS</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4c: HED → BPI</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5a: UTL → SUP</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5b: UTL → BPI</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.02**</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6a: EFT → SUP</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6b: EFT → BPI</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.003**</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7a: WAR → SUP</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.115 NS</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7b: WAR → BPI</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: * implies $p<0.001$; ** implies $p<0.05$; NS implies non-significant]

#### 7.6.3. Discussion

Overall, the survey results support our contention that institutional efforts in social media positively influence member relationships by prompting members’ enactment of institutional images that are important to their self-concept (Dutton et al. 1994; Ashforth & Schinnoff, 201), and driving their identification with the brand page. Of the three content tactics, hedonic quality influenced perceived distinctiveness and prestige, as well as brand page identification. This is in line with recent studies
suggesting entertainment and aesthetics not only create engagement (Carlson et al., 2017; Jahn & Kunz, 2012) but also positively influence a brand’s image (Godey et al., 2016). Similarly, symbolic resource integration was effective in reinforcing perceived distinctiveness and prestige of the institution. These findings confirm our qualitative findings and suggest social media helps enhance people’s self-concept by increasing the visibility of meaningful group identity features and enabling an easy association of these features through increased identity-relevant possessions (Belk, 2013; Kleine et al., 1993; Reed et al., 2012).

The utilitarian quality of content was found to be effective in strengthening perceived support, by signalling a sense of shared values and respect for members (Poter & Dhonthu, 2008), allowing the institution to demonstrate reciprocity (Arnett et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 2001), and motivating them to perform their role identities within the organisation (Fujita et al., 2019). It also influenced brand page identification, supporting its critical roles in attracting newcomers seeking information (Schau et al., 2009) and creating a sense of community by making members’ knowledge and experiences accessible (Treem & Keonardi, 2013).

However, we did not find symbolic resource integration influenced brand page identification. One reason could be a delocalisation effect resulted from multiple community memberships (Weijo et al., 2014). That is, members may be loosely attached to a particular brand page because they are free to follow other pages offering similar content, suggesting an opportunity for future research.

The effort to foster member embeddedness influenced a supportive image of the institution and brand page identification. Further, a marketer’s warm characteristics seem to drive members’ identification with the page, which can be augmented by the editability affordance of social media that enables personalised and purposeful communications in context (Treem & Keonardi, 2013). However, the relationship between warmth and supportiveness was not supported, suggesting simply being friendly
and approachable may not be enough to enact an institution’s shared values and identity. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate the importance of marketer traits in increasing the salience of their presence and other members’ presence in technologically mediated environments (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). These traits are also known to drive members’ relationships (Ahearne et al., 2005; Poter & Dhonthu, 2008; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012) and so are also critical socialisation agents in two-way acculturation.

Finally, we found institutional image and brand page identification strongly influenced institutional identification, supporting most prior studies (Arnett et al., 2003; Bagozzi et al., 2012; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). However, contrary to these studies, we did not find a significant relationship between prestige and institutional identification. One reason could be that the prestigious image of a university might not always indicate the identity is meaningful to students’ sense of self, a suggestion that should be investigated in the future research.

**7.7. Conclusions and implications**

Drawing on theories of identity construction and inspired by the original, yet under-researched conception of acculturation as a reciprocal process of cultural change, this research sought to contribute to a better understanding of two-way acculturation and identity co-creation in social media. We qualitatively contextualised institutional efforts and member reactions through a netnographic analysis and conducted a survey to investigate how different content tactics and marketer traits influenced institutional identification. Overall, the research demonstrated the processes through which institutional efforts in social media lead to an enhancement of member relationships. These efforts are essential identity co-creation agents that facilitate opportunities to endorse and add identity-relevant possessions and social connections and to improve esteem. Further, content can serve as sources of identity-relevant
media connections (Klaine et al., 1993). As such, marketers operating in evolving social media environments have a vital *sensegiving* role to play in managing the two-way acculturation ecosystem.

7.7.1. *Theoretical implications*

This research sought to understand the technology-enabled phenomena of two-way acculturation, by focusing on marketer’s roles. Despite the reciprocal nature of the acculturation phenomena and the co-creation opportunities enabled by social media, the process through which member-institution relationships are built has received limited scholarly attention. Our application of an identity construction perspective helped address these voids, by suggesting identity co-creation in an institution’s social media is an important mechanism in making two-way acculturation meaningful for both the institution and their people. In this sense, our findings shed some light on the advancement of acculturation and identity theories in the new democratised technological environment.

Our second objective was to investigate the differential effects of social media marketing efforts. Previous research used a second-order construct to measure the impact of such efforts collectively (Carlson et al., 2017; Godey et al., 2016). In contrast, this research contributed a more nuanced, tactical-level understanding to theory and practice by qualitatively and quantitatively exploring how different tactics can be used to create engagement and strengthen the institutional images that build relationships. In particular, the introduction of symbolic resource integration as ways of learning what is meaningful to members and demonstrating such understanding in social media content has generated a new line of research enquiries.

Finally, our focus on the institutional context and the integration of management and marketing literature responded to a call for more investigations on the affiliation dimensions of social identification (Cardador & Pratt, 2006). Further, there has been a lack of research into the detraditionalisation of social intuitions and its impact on member identities (McAlexander, Dufault, Martin, & Schouten, 2014). Thus, this paper
contributes to our understanding of the institutional use of social media in broader member relationship contexts, such as engagement of employees or residents.

### 7.7.2. Managerial implications

An understanding of the two-way acculturation process provides social media managers with a framework for designing more effective strategies, by informing the contemporary practices of clarifying organisational core values, setting meaningful objectives, developing audience personas, and defining value propositions. As outlined in Figure 7.3, managers seeking to use social media to enhance member relationships should consider influencing their audience’s evaluation, affirmation, and reinforcement of the institution’s images (distinctiveness, prestige, supportiveness) so they resonate with their desired self (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016) and stimulate their identification with the brand page. To implement these strategies, managers should use appropriate content tactics (e.g., symbolic resource integration, hedonic content, and utilitarian content), try to foster member embeddedness, and demonstrate warmth in their communications for better impact.

**Figure 7.3. Strategic framework for identity-based social media marketing**
Importantly, serving an audience’s identity motives requires marketers to have a deep understanding of their needs, challenges, aspirations, and values. These identity-related resources can be observed in members’ interactions and user-generated content in social media, as was the case in the Facebook pages we investigated. Thus, institutional marketers might benefit from conducting a netnography as part of their audience persona development process, which will enable them to achieve more authentic and relevant communication. For example, higher education practitioners might gain insights from a range of sources, not simply from the channels they manage. There are student-initiated social media accounts from which they can gain more specific and deeper understanding of students in different segments (e.g., first-year students, international students, mature-age students, engineering students), as participants can be more active in these smaller online communities (Dholakia et al., 2004).

Further, having a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of tactics might give managers a focus on addressing specific identity motives in context. Not all social media brand pages have the same goals, nor do they cater to the same needs. Different social media platforms also have different norms and cultures that need to be followed. For example, the curation of user-generated pictures is well accepted on Instagram (i.e., hedonic quality + symbolic resource integration). Facebook brand page users, however, might expect more input and information from the organisations/brands they are following, as well as entertainment and relatable content (i.e., utilitarian quality + hedonic quality + symbolic resource integration). As such, our flexible approach, when compared to a one-size-fits-all approach, should help managers achieve more purposeful communication and make more efficient use of resources, while meeting the expectations of a heterogeneous audience in different stages of the engagement cycle.

In higher education contexts, our framework helps optimise content tactics according to the salience of students’ situated identities. For example, students during exam times might find stress management tips and subsequent discussions generated through the content on their university’s Facebook page more relevant and meaningful than Instagram pictures of campus events. As their student-role identity tends
to be more salient in such times than does their university member identity, focusing on offering helpful content and encouragement on social media might not only help them feel and perform better but also help the institution maximise the opportunity to enhance relationships through reciprocity. As such, an understanding of two-way acculturation can guide the effective planning of social media marketing and communication activities in maintaining the relevance and legitimacy of the institution.

7.7.3. Limitations and future research

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, our research context (i.e., the Australian higher education sector) and its focus on formal members of an institution may limit generalisability. This suggests an opportunity for future research to investigate the phenomenon with different stakeholder groups in different sectors in different cultures. Second, there may be other influential tactics that we did not investigate in this study. Likewise, the paper focused on the marketer’s role. However, there may be other influential social actors, such as other members, media, employees, and governments (Voyer et al., 2017). Thus, further investigations might offer a more holistic understanding of two-way (or multi-way) acculturation in social media. Third, given the diverse nature of social media experiences, there may be moderating variables that influence the hypothesised relationships. Thus, further refinement of the model is recommended. Finally, we used a cross-sectional survey to investigate the enduring process of acculturation. Since identities and images develop over time, our findings would be further validated through a process-oriented design incorporating longitudinal studies and/or field experiments.
CHAPTER 8

ENHANCING MEMBER-INSTITUTION RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA:
THE ROLE OF OTHER-USER ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR AND SIMILARITY PERCEPTIONS

The paper entitled “Enhancing member-institution relationships through social media: The role of other-user engagement behaviour and similarity perceptions” by Fujita, M., Soutar, G. N., Harrigan, P. (2018) has been submitted to an international journal.

This chapter presents the last main study (Paper 6, Figure 8.1.) that examined on the role of other-user engagement behaviour (OUEB) and similarity perceptions in an SMBC in building member-institution relationships (RQ3b: How do perceptions about other users of an SMBC influence the processes of identity co-creation in building student-university relationships?). It builds on the findings from Paper 4 and partly Paper 3 and is designed to generalise the findings to broader social institution contexts.

Figure 8.1. The position of Chapter 8 (Paper 6)
8.1. Abstract

Social media has empowered people to influence the identities of traditional institutions, which were once given and protected. However, little is known about how this occurs in an institution’s brand page setting and about its impact on existing member relationships. In examining the role perceptions about other users of a brand page plays on focal users’ identity construction, we found seeing other users demonstrating engagement behaviour and recognising similarity led to institutional identification, through an increased perception of brand page sociability and identification with the page. Institutional distinctiveness also mediated the impact of other-user engagement behaviour on member-institution relationships. These findings suggest traditional institutions can use social media strategically to increase the visibility and accessibility of member-owned identity resources so as to facilitate opportunities for focal members to reinforce their self-concepts. This research contributes to the emerging literature on engagement marketing and informs managers of identity-based social media initiatives.
8.2. Introduction

In light of marketization, traditional social institutions such as universities, religious organizations, professional associations, and political parties are increasingly giving up the power to build identities to their constituents (McAlexander et al., 2014; Seregina & Schouten, 2017). Making use of social media marketing so as to remain relevant to the changing needs of members is one such manifestation of detraditionalization. Whether intended or not, the visibility of individual users’ background information and their actions exhibited on a brand page allows focal users to make inferences about their identities (Naylor et al., 2012) and to integrate these interpretations to evaluate the identity of the brand or organization (Gensler et al., 2013). Indeed, social media facilitates more frequent, immediate, and larger-scale exposures of people affiliated with an institution to the audience than was previously possible, resulting in marketers losing control over the dissemination of messages (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013) and making it difficult to maintain value systems and legitimacy that were once stable.

Meanwhile, consumers in service encounters have long been regarded as important contextual drivers of the focal consumer experience (Argo, Dahl, & Manchanda, 2005; Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk, 1975). Other-consumer effects are a form of social impact that is defined as “any of the great variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior, that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of other individuals” (Latané, 1981, p. 343). For example, the retail shopping experience can be influenced by crowding, discussion with other shoppers, shopping group size (X. Zhang, Li, Burke, & Leykin, 2014), and the similarity (Kwon, Ha, & Im, 2016) and citizenship behavior (Yi et al., 2013) of other shoppers. Further, the brand community literature has well documented the significance of brand fans’ resource contributions to the co-creation of brand meanings that benefit members (e.g. McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Unlike traditional
online communities based on a forum or chatroom, however, people often reveal their true identities in social networking sites where brand pages are embedded. Thus, a collective influence of brand page users can have broad implications for stakeholder relationships (Labrecque et al., 2013), requiring organization-wide effort to adapt to the new user-centric culture.

Taking advantage of consumer empowerment and social influence, progressive organizations are embracing customer engagement marketing (i.e., “the firm’s deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure a customer’s voluntary contributions to its marketing functions, beyond a core, economic transaction” (Harmeling, Moffett et al., 2017, p. 312)). This approach focuses on designing and managing initiatives around consumer-owned resources (i.e., knowledge, creativity, personal social connections, ability to attract similar others (Harmeling, Moffett et al., 2017; Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2016; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014)). Combined with the visibility, interactivity, and networked audiences of social media, engagement marketing allows marketers to leverage consumers’ authentic social identities to increase the relevancy and affinity of the brand (Gensler et al., 2013). In social institutions, most social exchanges and symbolic interactions occur in the physical community (Arnett et al., 2003). Thus, social media initiatives that integrate and augment member-owned resources generated offline may yield particularly fruitful outcomes.

8.2.1. The purpose of this study

Despite the advantage of social media-based engagement marketing, little is known about the process through which perceptions of relevant others participating in an institution-related brand page influence focal users’ identity construction and whether such other-user effects can be converted to member-institution relationships. This lack of understanding has made it difficult for marketers to design engagement strategies that have a sustainable impact (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; Gensler et al., 2013). To address these voids in theory and practice, we drew on identity construction theories. Our
approach was based on the premise that individuals have a fundamental need to define themselves, often in a positive light, and to affiliate themselves with groups that allows them to fulfil this need (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). We expected the visibility of other users’ identities on a brand page would facilitate the processing of social identity for the page community and for the institution, through which focal users define and reinforce a self-concept (a sense of who I am).

Specifically, this research had four key objectives. First, we sought to contribute to the engagement marketing literature by focusing on the role perceptions of other users of a brand page plays on focal users’ relationships with these pages and their hosting organizations. Among the different types of social media, brand pages such as those on Facebook and Instagram that are directly managed by organizations are the gold standard in marketing practice today. Although researchers have started to obtain a good understanding of the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in brand page environments (e.g., Gummerus et al., 2012; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Jahn & Kunz, 2012), the dynamic social influence of users within this organization-initiated environment has rarely been investigated (Harmeling, Moffett, et al., 2017; Naylor et al., 2012; Stephen, 2016). Our focus on other-user effect in a brand page setting is particularly timely, as consumers are increasingly educated about influencer marketing practice in social media, creating a need for a more sustainable approach to authenticity management (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2018).

Second, we measured other-user effects by focusing on the focal user’s awareness of other-user engagement behavior (OUEB: e.g., socializing and helping each other, sharing stories and experiences, contributing and endorsing content) and perceived similarity with them. These perceptions can be shaped through indirect (lurking) and direct social interactions or even through lurking only (Hartmann et al., 2015). Although previous research has paid much attention to focal users’ direct social interaction experiences (e.g., Hajli, 2014; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012), most social media users seem to spend more
time on passive consumption than socializing with others (Bolton et al., 2013). Thus, this research takes a more realistic brand page experience into account.

Third, the present research sought to advance our understanding of the identity co-creation processes enabled by social media, which have only been explored qualitatively (e.g., Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Voyer et al., 2017). While social identity theory has been used to inform relationship marketing and brand community success for many years (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2005; Arnett et al., 2003; Bagozzi et al., 2012), its application to the close field of social media-based engagement marketing is surprisingly limited (Fujita et al., 2018; Harmeling, Palmatier, Fang, & Wang, 2017). This research, therefore, examined the dynamic process through which focal users integrate identity-related resources provided by other users to strengthen identification with the organization.

Finally, we investigated how social media marketing might be adapted by social institutions that face a problem of disaffected members leaving their institution due to a loss of identity resulting from consumer empowerment (McAlexander et al., 2014). Despite the potential of social media to augment member-institution relationships, scant research has been examined this important issue, creating confusion among managers and researchers on appropriate strategies and policies. This research, therefore, sought to inform practice by determining ways to leverage the identities of relevant others to influence focal users’ identification with their institutions, while minimizing the risk of creating an identity gap.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We first provide a theoretical background to this research and develop a conceptual model and hypotheses. We then discuss the method used, estimate the model and test the hypotheses to examine the relationships between perceptions of other users (i.e., other-user engagement behavior (OUEB) and similarity), mediating constructs (i.e., brand page sociability, brand page identification, and institutional distinctiveness), and institutional identification. The results and implications are then discussed.
8.3. Theoretical background and research hypotheses

8.3.1. Social identity construction in organizations

Social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). People become motivated to construct a social identity for an organization when it is perceived to have an attractive image that enhances their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994). For example, students may strengthen their identification with their university through the achievements of its sports teams, as this makes them feel good about themselves, even though they have not contributed to these successes (Cialdini et al., 1976).

Identity construction in an organization is a recursive sensemaking process in which members acquire identity knowledge and validate the identity through verbal and nonverbal symbolic interactions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Weick, 1995). Through this process, they develop a clearer and stable sense of situated self that allows them to feel and behave in ways that are consistent with their understanding of who they are (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Identity construction requires the processing of the identity while it is a salient part of the self (Kleine et al., 1993; Reed et al., 2012). A number of factors can increase identity salience, namely:

1. The number of opportunities that exist to enact and receive feedback about the identity (social connections).
2. The number of identity-relevant possessions and resources that are available to enact the identity well (possessions and media connections).
3. The number of positive and self-enhancing feedback received about that enactment (esteem) (Kleine et al., 1993, p. 226).
People who identify strongly with their organizations and hold its characteristics as their own are likely to show loyalty and demonstrate citizenship behaviors (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Therefore, it is critical for organizations to facilitate opportunities that allow members to increase identity-related social connections, possessions, media connections, and self-esteem. Recent research on group marketing has demonstrated the importance of building conditions that increase member awareness of their affiliation to a group and expose them to group norms (Harmeling, Palmatier, et al., 2017). For example, a university may organize social events, share stories about campus rituals and artefacts, distribute community news, and celebrate milestones and achievements, so as to enhance member relationships. Social media makes it easy for institutions to facilitate all of these initiatives, while also making it easy for constituents to access and contribute identity resources. Thus, we suggest the affordances of social media facilitate more frequent opportunities for an institution’s social identity to become salient in focal members’ sense of self, stimulating the identity construction processes.

8.3.2. Brand page identification

People also develop a social identity for a brand community (Algesheimer et al., 2005) when a common interest in the consumption of the brand gives them a shared consciousness (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) and a sense of belongingness and kinship with its members (McAlexander et al., 2002). Indeed, brand community identification anchors the vitality of the community (Schau et al., 2009) and its members’ bonds with other members, the products they use, the brand, and the organization (McAlexander et al., 2002). Similarly, people identify with an online community when they see functional and entertainment value (Dholakia et al., 2004) and social recognition value (Hartmann et al., 2015) with it. They are also inclined to identify with a brand that enhances their self-concept (He, Chen, Lee, Wang, & Pohlmann, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).
VanMeter, Grisaffe, and Chonko (2015) have suggested people’s attachment to a social media platform develops from their experiences using it to connect with others, recollect the past, stay informed, relax and enjoy, seek advice from others, feel supported by others, enhance a personal life, and influence and help others. These elements of attachment may also be the case with a brand page (or a social media brand community) given its role in facilitating identity construction (Fujita et al., 2018) and community and brand engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). Thus, we expect users will identify with the brand page to fulfill various needs that are self or other-directed.

8.3.3. Brand page sociability

Sociability is a degree to which users feel an online environment facilitates valuable social interactions (H. Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014). The ability to reach networks and interact with other people is the fundamental premise of social media. Through social interactions, brand community members exchange social and cultural capital and establish a social structure and relationships that provide meanings to their lives (Hajli, 2014; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brand page followers are also more likely to engage with a page when they perceive such socialization benefits (Carlson, Rahman, Voola, & De Vries, 2018; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Evidence also suggests that sociability of a firm-hosted virtual community drives member-community identification (Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz, & Algesheimer, 2009). If a brand page is perceived to facilitate socialization opportunities that help members build identity knowledge and fulfill needs for inclusion and self-verification, the importance of the page may increase as an enabler of identity enactment (Fombelle et al., 2012). Thus, we suggest:

H1. Brand page sociability is positively related to brand page identification.
8.3.4 Perceptions of other users

Other-user engagement behavior (OUEB)

People are inclined to learn how to think and behave by observing and interacting with others in social settings. Social information processing theory suggests “individuals, as adaptive organisms, adapt attitudes, behavior, and beliefs to their social context and to the reality of their own past and present behavior and situation” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, p. 226). Accordingly, customers in service encounters constitute an important social context (Belk, 1975) from which focal customers develop statements about what relevant others think and do and, in turn, produce similar attitudes and behavior (Yi et al., 2013). The visibility of other users’ engagement behavior and their resulting reactions in social media can increase social information processing exponentially in brand page environments.

Research suggests online community members gain a locally-relevant understanding of the community’s shared purposes and social structure, not only through active participation but also by observing other members’ participation behavior (Hartmann et al., 2015; Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006). Evidence has also shown non-participating consumers who observe relevant others contribute to product development and are likely to identify with the organization if its user-driven philosophy allows them to vicariously experience the sense of empowerment held by contributing users (Dahl, Fuchs, & Schreier, 2015). Indeed, the interactive features of social media, combined with smartphone-based multimedia technologies (e.g. camera, video editing apps), allow consumers to share their stories easily and to experience other consumers’ worlds by engaging in visual storytelling. Consequently, focal users can form a connection with the storytellers through empathy and imagery (Pera & Viglia, 2016). Elaborative imagery can facilitate a substitute sensory or emotional experience that creates access to actual consumption benefits (MacInnis & Price, 1987), suggesting observation is an important way to enhance consumption experiences. Further, information exchanged between consumers in online brand communities can
reduce uncertainty about the brand or the organization (Adjei et al., 2010), suggesting such benefits might also help reduce identity ambiguity and motivate focal users to further engage with the community.

In sum, it is evident the community process, empowerment, pleasure and uncertainty reduction users experience through the consumption of OUEB can result in social and relational benefits. OUEB can also influence identity co-creation by promoting social interactions that create synergy between the identities of individuals, the brand and the community (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). The process of identity co-creation helps increase a shared understanding of the group’s goals among members, which drives their identification with the group (March & Simon, 1993). We, therefore, argue greater and more frequent exposures to OUE on a brand page increase perception of the page as an important socialization agent and a source of identity enactment, which suggests:

**H2.** The perceived level of OUEB on a brand page is positively related to (a) brand page sociability and (b) brand page identification.

*Similarity*

Perceived similarity can be defined as the extent to which individuals perceive others to be similar to themselves in terms of personal attributes and characteristics (B. Smith, 1998). It is well known that people tend to hold more favorable attitudes towards similar others than they do towards dissimilar ones. The similarity-attraction paradigm suggests attraction to similar others is preceded by the reward one receives from the reinforcement of his/her values, goals and perspectives (Byrne, 1971) and a feeling of being liked by them (Nelson, 1966). Social identity theory also underpins such group dynamics, by suggesting people associate themselves with similar others to fulfil their needs for a clear and stable sense of self, inclusion and esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). Further, a similarity in a current social role can lead to attitudinal similarity and increase perceptions of shared goals (March & Simon, 1993). For example, MBA students can develop similar attitudes and identify with each other because
they go through a distinctive set of educational programs and may experience similar career challenges and rewards.

Research suggests similarity to other customers is positively related to focal customers’ emotional attachment to an organization (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011) and excitement for consumption activities (Kwon et al., 2016). Likewise, social media can facilitate strong social influences among users who are perceived to be similar to each other. Thompson and Malaviya (2013) found that, when students saw a user-generated advertisement and were told the source was a student from the same college, they evaluated the message more positively than when an unknown individual was the source. Even passive exposures to pictures of demographically similar users on a brand page can have a positive influence on brand evaluation, due to the inferred similarity evoked through such images (Naylor et al., 2012).

Taken together, it is likely being aware of similar others participating in a brand page reduces barriers to social interactions (B. Smith, 1998), making it easy to develop feelings of kinship with other users, even without direct interactions (Hartmann et al., 2015; Naylor et al., 2012). Moreover, positive reinforcement of self-concept through likeminded others may influence focal users’ evaluation of the page as an enabling platform for the construction of an important identity (Fombelle et al., 2012), leading to their identification with the page, which suggests:

H3. The perceived similarity of other users of a brand page is positively related to (a) brand page sociability and (b) brand page identification.

8.3.5. Institutional distinctiveness and identification

According to optimal distinctiveness theory, people come to identify with a group in their attempts to balance two opposing fundamental needs (i.e. a need for differentiation from others and a need for inclusion) (Brewer, 1991). In other words, when people perceive a social group to be distinctive from
other groups and can satisfy needs through membership (i.e., being different from out-groups but similar to in-group members at the same time), the group identity becomes an important element of their self-concept and their identification with the group is strengthened (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Brewer, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994). Previous research has suggested distinctiveness is an important driver of organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and brand identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), which suggests:

**H4.** Institutional distinctiveness is positively related to institutional identification.

For a social identity to help strike a balance between self-concept and membership, the distinctiveness of the group identity needs to be *shared* (Brewer & Silver, 2000). Clark (1972) argued a collective understanding of a formal institution’s distinctive identity (or an *organizational saga*) involves narratives initiated by members and an embodiment of the shared narratives in the institution’s core values and practices. For example, universities may signal distinctive identities through employee citizenship behaviors, unique programs, loyal alumni, student subculture, symbols, rituals, artefacts and traditions, all of which might stimulate an enactment of emotional attachment and a sense of pride among those members who believe the saga (Clark, 1972). A member’s perception of shared distinctiveness can be developed throughout a lifetime of membership and it is likely social media is an increasingly important platform through which to facilitate this process.

Recent research on identity co-creation in institution-initiated social media suggests the increased visibility of and better accessibility to identity-related stimuli, including other members participating in the social media community, are creating more opportunities for users to experience and reinforce institutional distinctiveness (Fujita et al., 2018). Likewise, OUEB on an institution’s brand page can provide focal users with means of gaining a shared understanding of identity-related possessions and
social connections (Kleine et al., 1993). This may, in turn, reinforce the distinctive image of the institution through the liking of users displaying engagement behavior on the page, suggesting:

H5. The perceived level of OUEB on a brand page is positively related to institutional distinctiveness.

Evidence suggests customers’ identification with a brand community strengthens customer-company relationships (Bagozzi et al., 2012) and drives customer citizenship behavior (Algesheimer et al. 2005). As an organization and its constituents are connected through a chain of personal, relational, and collective identities (Bagozzi et al., 2012), brand community identification can lead to identification with the brand (Zhou et al., 2012) and the organization (Bagozzi et al., 2012). The social media marketing literature also suggests customer engagement has a positive effect on a brand page and on brand image (Godey et al., 2016), self-brand connections (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and brand loyalty (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). On an institution-initiated social media page, members are likely to engage in the page’s activities as part of their acculturation and identity projects (Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2017a). Thus, those who identify with the brand page may see it as a meaningful technological artefact or a unique feature of the institution that reinforces its distinctive identity, which suggests:

H6. Brand page identification is positively related to (a) institutional distinctiveness and (b) institutional identification.

These hypotheses led to the model shown in Figure 8.2 that was examined in the present research, which is discussed in subsequent sections.
8.4. Method

8.4.1. Sample

An online questionnaire was used to obtain the needed data. Respondents were Australian university students who self-identified as followers of their university’s official or affiliated brand page(s) and were members of the PureProfile consumer panel. The decision to use a consumer panel was made based on our anticipation that brand page followers directly recruited through such pages were likely to give positively skewed responses (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Here, we sampled active and passive followers, with most indicating they regularly checked page activities, occasionally liked content but rarely engaged in social interactions or contributed content. As most brand page followers are lurkers (Gummerus et al., 2012; Hartmann et al., 2015) whose perceptions were of interest in this study, the sample was deemed appropriate.
Table 8.1. Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of university-related brand pages followed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Type of the brand page selected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Page for university community</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Page for student community</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or older</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Page for discipline community</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of university enrolled at</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page for functional area</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of 8</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Page for club/society</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Group of 8</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Page for informal group</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time at the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page platform</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-11 months</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-23 months</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Page membership duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6 months</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2-6 months</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11 months</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7-11 months</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>More than 2 years</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page usage (1: Never – 7: Always)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check page posts</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with content (e.g., Like, comment on content)</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with the page (e.g., comment to the page, send a message)</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with friends (e.g., Tag, comment, Like a comment, share)</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with other users (e.g., Like user-generated content, comment to other users)</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute content/information (e.g., share tips, use a university hashtag in a photo)</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: SD: standard deviation]
Screening questions at the beginning of the survey ensured respondents were enrolled at an Australian university, followed at least one official or affiliated brand page of their university and could recall their experiences with the university-related page they used most. To achieve this, respondents indicated their university, provided the name of the page they used most and were asked to take a moment to reflect on their experiences by writing some positive and negative aspects of the page. This approach allowed us to verify the page names provided and validate their existence by searching for and visiting these pages (Porter & Donthu, 2008). As a result, 486 usable responses from 40 universities across the country were obtained. Table 8.1 shows the sample’s characteristics. The gender imbalance could be due to the PureProfile panel’s gender ratio (60% female), more disqualified responses from males, the fact that there are more female university students in Australia (55% female, Department of Education, 2017), and females’ tendency to respond more often to online surveys (G. Smith, 2008).

8.4.2. The measures

Seven-point Likert-type strongly disagree to strongly agree scales were used to measure the items that made up the model’s constructs. The scales, which are shown in Table 8.2, were adapted from existing scales so as to reflect the research context. In this case:

The ten-item other user similarity (SIM) scale was adapted from Karaosmanoglu et al.’s (2011) other customer similarity scale. Following their suggestion, the two aspects (demographic and psychographic similarity) were aggregated, and the construct was modelled as a unidimensional scale with two items (i.e., the two aggregated scale scores).

- The four-item brand page sociability (SOC) scale was adapted from Jahn and Kunz’s (2012) social interaction value scale.
- The five-item brand page identification (BPI) scale and the three-item distinctiveness (DIS) scale were adapted from Stokburger-Sauer et al.’s (2012) brand identification research.
The six-item institutional identification (IID) scale was adapted from Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) organizational identification scale.

The other-user engagement behavior (OUEB) scale was developed in this study following Churchill’s (1979) procedure. Prior research into online brand community practices (e.g., Hartmann et al., 2015; Schau et al., 2009) and customer engagement behavior (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014) were reviewed, as was previous research into user engagement in university social media by Fujita et al. (2018), from which an initial set of ten items were obtained. These items were included in a pre-test that used a sample of 111 students from an Australian university. An initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed evidence of unidimensionality, reliability and validity after four items were removed. Consequently, the remaining six items were used to measure OUEB in the main sample and its measurement properties in the larger data set were examined in more detail, as outlined in the results section.

8.4.3. Common method bias

As the online survey was the only source of data, common method bias (CMB) was controlled through procedural and statistical methods. The procedural method included randomizing the order in which respondents saw the items and refining item wordings after the pilot study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Statistically, Harman’s single-factor test was used to see whether the first factor was below the suggested threshold of 50%. We also used a full collinearity test (listed in Table 8.2) to see whether the constructs’ variance inflation factor (VIF) scores were below the suggested 5.0 threshold (Hair et al., 2012).

8.4.4. Analysis

A partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling approach was used to estimate the suggested model. The WarpPLS 6.0 program (Kock, 2017) was employed in this case. PLS, which takes the total
variance of measurement indicators into account when estimating the model (Hair et al., 2017), was seen as well suited for this study, given its exploratory nature, its complex and prediction-oriented model and the likelihood that the items would not be normally distributed (Hair et al., 2012). The PLS regression algorithm was used for the outer model analysis (i.e., the measurement model) and the linear algorithm was used to estimate the structural paths (Kock, 2017). The p-values used were one-tailed values, as all of the relationships were hypothesized to be positive (Roldán & Sánchez-Franco, 2012).

8.5. The results

8.5.1. The measurement properties of the constructs

Table 8.2 shows the measurement properties of the scales. All individual items loaded significantly onto their respective factors, with the standardized loadings exceeding 0.60, which were above the acceptable level for an exploratory study (Hair et al., 2012). All of the constructs were reliable and had convergent validity, as their composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70 and their average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2012).

The discriminant validity of constructs was assessed by examining the items’ cross-loadings, using Fornell-Larcker’s criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the constructs’ full collinearity VIFs (Kock, 2015; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Each item loaded highest on its intended construct (Chin, 1998) (the loading matrix is available from the authors) and the square root of the AVE score for each construct exceeded the respective inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), as can be seen in Table 8.3. The constructs’ full collinearity VIFs, which were computed by WarpPLS, were also satisfactory, as they were all below 5.00. These results suggested discriminant validity could be assumed for all of the constructs and that they can be safely used when estimating the relationships of interest in the suggested model.
### Table 8.2. The constructs’ measurement properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs and measurement items</th>
<th>Loading (t-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other User Engagement Behavior [OUE] (developed here)</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.87, AVE:0.54, FVIF: 2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE1: People talk about their experiences on this page.</td>
<td>0.81 (19.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE2: People tell stories on this page.</td>
<td>0.77 (18.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE3: People express emotions and feelings on this page.</td>
<td>0.68 (16.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE4: People share tips and ideas on this page.</td>
<td>0.75 (18.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE5: People support each other on this page.</td>
<td>0.74 (17.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE6: People endorse content on this page.</td>
<td>0.63 (15.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarity [SIM] (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011)</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.90, AVE: 0.63, FVIF: 2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Similarity [DEM]</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.88, AVE: 0.58, FVIF: 3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM1: Other users of the page are similar in age to me.</td>
<td>0.73 (17.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM2: Other users of the page have a similar lifestyle to me.</td>
<td>0.83 (20.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM3: Other users of the page have similar social status to me.</td>
<td>0.85 (20.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM4: Other users of the page have similar education to me.</td>
<td>0.80 (19.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM5: Other users of the page have similar income to me.</td>
<td>0.77 (18.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychographic Similarity [PSY]</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.89, AVE: 0.60, FVIF: 3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY1: Other users of the page have a similar character to me.</td>
<td>0.74 (17.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY2: Other users of the page have similar appearance to me.</td>
<td>0.75 (18.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY3: Other users of the page have similar values to me.</td>
<td>0.76 (18.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY4: Other users of the page have a similar background to me.</td>
<td>0.79 (19.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY5: Other users of the page have similar life achievements to me.</td>
<td>0.77 (18.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability [SOC] (Jahn &amp; Kunz, 2012)</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.90, AVE: 0.68, FVIF: 2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC1: I can meet people like me on this page.</td>
<td>0.82 (20.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC2: I can meet new people like me on this page.</td>
<td>0.85 (20.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC3: I can find out about people like me on this page.</td>
<td>0.80 (19.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC4: I can interact with people like me on this page.</td>
<td>0.83 (20.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Page Identification [BPI] (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)</strong></td>
<td>CR: 0.91, AVE: 0.67, FVIF: 3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPI1: I feel a strong sense of belonging to the group that the page represents.</td>
<td>0.84 (20.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPI2: I identify strongly with the page.</td>
<td>0.87 (21.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPI3: The page embodies what I believe in.</td>
<td>0.73 (17.66)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BPI4: The page is like a part of me. 0.81 (19.61)
BPI5: The page has a great deal of personal meaning for me. 0.83 (20.28)

**Distinctiveness [DIS]** (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)  
*CR: 0.89, AVE: 0.73, FVIF: 1.97*
- DIS1: [University name] has a distinctive identity. 0.82 (20.08)
- DIS2: [University name] is unique. 0.87 (21.34)
- DIS3: [University name] stands out from its competitors. 0.87 (21.22)

**Institutional Identification [IID]** (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)  
*CR: 0.90, AVE: 0.59, FVIF: 2.44*
- IID1: When someone criticizes [university name], it feels like a personal insult. 0.82 (20.04)
- IID2: I am very interested in what others think about [university name]. 0.79 (19.30)
- IID3: When I talk about [university name], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’. 0.73 (17.71)
- IID4: The successes of [university name] are my successes. 0.75 (18.20)
- IID5: When someone praises [university name], it feels like a personal compliment. 0.84 (20.41)
- IID6: If a story in the media criticized [university name], I would feel embarrassed. 0.65 (15.43)

[Notes: All loadings were significant at p < 0.001 level; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted; FVIF: full collinearity variance inflation factor.]

Table 8.3. Discriminant validity and descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>OUE</th>
<th>DEM</th>
<th>PSY</th>
<th>SOC</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>DIS</th>
<th>IID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other user engagement</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic similarity</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychographic similarity</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.755</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociability</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.549</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand page identification</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td>0.722</td>
<td>0.817</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional identification</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.524</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.729</td>
<td>0.639</td>
<td>0.767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Notes: Square root of AVE for the constructs are shown in italics on the diagonal. Correlations are below the diagonal. SD: standard deviation.]

As can be seen in Table 8.3, respondents were somewhat positive about the various constructs, as all of the means were above the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 4.00 on the seven-point scale used). The highest mean was for university distinctiveness (4.94) and the lowest for brand page identification (4.14). All of
the standard deviations exceeded 1.00, suggesting there was sufficient variation to warrant further examination of the relationships of interest.

8.5.2. Estimating the structural model

As noted earlier, the two similarity aspects (demographic and psychographic) were each aggregated to create an overall similarity construct with two items. The other constructs were measured using the items shown in Table 8.2. The structural model was estimated using the Stable3 resampling method, which is the default in WarpPLS. This approach obtains estimates of actual standard errors that are consistent with and, in many cases, more precise than those gained through bootstrapping (Kock, 2017). Tenenhaus’s goodness-of-fit (GoF) index in this case was 0.61, which was well above the 0.36 threshold for large effects (Wetzels et al., 2009), suggesting the relationships were sufficiently strong to examine further.

Figure 8.3 shows the structural model estimates, including the $R^2$ values for the model’s endogenous variables and the paths’ standardized coefficients. Predictive validity was assessed using explained variance ($R^2$). OUEB and similarity, together, explained 59% of the variance in sociability. These two variables, together with sociability, explained 61% of the variance in brand page identification. OUEB and brand page identification explained 41% of the variance in distinctiveness, while 59% of the variance in institutional identification was explained by its antecedents. These results suggest the structural model predicted its endogenous constructs well. This was supported by the Stone-Geisser’s $Q^2$ coefficients, as all were considerably greater than zero (Chin, 1998).

As can also be seen in Figure 8.3, all of the hypotheses were supported, as all of the path coefficients were significant well beyond the 0.001 level. OUEB ($\beta = 0.46$) and similarity ($\beta = 0.41$) were both significant drivers of sociability, supporting H2a and H3a. Sociability, in turn, strongly influenced brand page identification ($\beta = 0.37$), supporting H1, while OUEB ($\beta = 0.24$) and similarity ($\beta = 0.28$) also impacted positively on brand page identification, supporting H2b and H3b. Brand page identification
significantly affected distinctiveness ($\beta = 0.50$) and institutional identification ($\beta = 0.54$), supporting H6a and H6b. Distinctiveness was also positively impacted by OUEB ($\beta = 0.19$) while strongly influencing institutional identification ($\beta = 0.33$), supporting H5 and H4.

[Note: *** $p < 0.001$.]

**Figure 8.3. The structural model estimates**

Following the procedure recommended by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010), the indirect effects of the two independent variables (OUEB and similarity) on the ultimate dependent variable (institutional identification) were assessed. As all of the direct and indirect effects needed to be assessed in a single model (Carrión, Nitzl, & Roldán, 2017), direct paths were included from OUEB and similarity to institutional identification, although these paths were not hypothesized. As can be seen in Table 8.4, the total effects of all the possible paths from OUEB and similarity to institutional identification were significant (OUE on IID: six paths, $\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$; SIM on IID: five paths, $\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), while the direct effects were not significant (OUE $\rightarrow$ IID: $\beta = 0.02$, $p = 0.37$; SIM $\rightarrow$ IID: $\beta = 0.04$, $p = 185
Overall, the results suggest full mediation effects via sociability and brand page identification and through distinctiveness.

**Table 8.4. Mediation test results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>P value</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUE → IID</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>Non-significant direct effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE → SOC → BPI → DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>Non-significant indirect effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE → SOC → BPI → IID</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE → BPI → DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>Non-significant indirect effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE → DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Mediation (p &lt; 0.05 level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUE → BPI → IID</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total effect of OUE on IID</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM → IID</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>Non-significant direct effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM → SOC → BPI → DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>Non-significant indirect effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM → SOC → BPI → IID</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Mediation (p &lt; 0.01 level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM → BPI → DIS → IID</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Non-significant indirect effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM → BPI → IID</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total effect of SIM on IID</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**8.6. Discussion and implications**

Social media technologies have empowered people to influence the identities of traditional social institutions, which were once given and protected. However, little has been known about how this occurs in an institution’s brand page setting and its impact on members’ relationships. The present research sought to contribute to a better understanding of other-user effect and to shed light on identity-based social media initiatives that drive engagement marketing success. To achieve this, we investigated the process by which perceptions of relevant others participating in an institution-related brand page influenced focal users’ identity construction and its impact on member-institution relationships.
The results suggest that seeing other users demonstrating engagement behavior and recognizing similarity with them can lead to focal users’ identification with an institution, through a more positive perception of brand page sociability and greater identification with the page. Institutional distinctiveness also mediated the impact OUEB had on institutional identification. These findings provide support for our suggestion that the affordances of social media, especially the visibility of other users, facilitates identity processing, allowing focal users to integrate meaningful identity resources provided by relevant others to construct a social identity that enhances their sense of self. The findings also suggested a brand page and the institution are both important enabling entities through which focal users fulfil fundamental identity needs (i.e. inclusion and distinctiveness), suggesting the dual impact other users have on focal users’ relationships with the brand page and with the institution.

In terms of the identity construction process, sociability partially mediated the effects of OUEB and similarity on brand page identification, highlighting the fundamental role social media plays as a socialization platform that builds communal bonds. The existence of direct effects suggested the presence and actions of relevant others can be enough to make focal users attach to a page community (it does not always require them to see social interaction value in it). Alternatively, these perceptions may be related to other factors or to an increase in other value aspects of the page (e.g. entertainment and information values enacted by user resources) that strengthen brand page identification. Thus, other potential mediating processes could be examined in future research. Here distinctiveness fully mediated the impact of OUEB and partially mediated that of brand page identification on institutional identification, suggesting focal users can fulfil a differentiation need when other users and their resources and the brand page itself are making membership meaningful and self-enhancing.

This research contributed to the customer engagement marketing literature by responding to a call for research into the influence other customers situated in a digital environment have on focal customers’ experiences (Gensler et al., 2013; Stephen, 2016) and provided additional evidence to prior research on
mere virtual presence (Naylor et al., 2012). Despite the widely-accepted use of brand pages, little has been known about the dynamic social influence of relevant others within this organization-initiated strategic environment. Against this backdrop, we found perceptions of other users significantly influenced brand page sociability and brand page identification. Regardless of resource contributors’ intentions and audience’s conscious awareness, social media exponentially increases the visibility of their background information and actions, creating opportunities for the focal audience to increase a shared understanding of the community’s identity through social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and the liking of similar others (Byrne, 1971). Social media also facilitates easy access to resource contributors’ lived experiences through empathy and imagery (Pera & Viglia, 2016). These identity processing opportunities, in turn, strengthen the salience of social identities for the page community and, further, for the hosting organization. In sum, aligned with the norm-based influence of a consumer group (Harmeling, Palmatier, et al., 2017), it seems brand page users create a collective influence on focal users’ sense of self by voluntarily making their identity resources visible and accessible. They are therefore distinctively different from individual influencers, who are also ordinary users but are incentivized by brands and, hence, more prone to authenticity tensions (Audrezet et al., 2018).

Our second contribution is a better understanding of indirect social interactions in a brand page setting. Specifically, we have empirically measured focal users’ awareness of OUEB and perceived similarity with them, which are shaped through lurking and direct social interactions or even through lurking only. While previous studies have found pro-social consequences of direct social interaction experiences in social networking websites in general (e.g., Hajli, 2014; Wang et al., 2012), research examining the realistic use of an organization-related brand page (i.e., passive consumption) has been scarce (Hartmann et al., 2015). Our sample reflected this tendency towards passive engagement, with the results
demonstrating significant relationships with OUEB and similarity. Further, the OUEB scale was developed in this study, adding novelty to the findings and generating a new line of future enquiries.

The study’s third contribution was the use of identity construction theories to underpin our examination of the process through which member-institution relationship can be built from social media experiences, offering promising rationales for engagement marketing initiatives. Despite the advantage of social identity theory and related concepts in explaining relationship marketing and brand community success, its use in social media marketing research has been limited to the consequences of identification (e.g., loyalty, purchase intention), neglecting the usefulness of its antecedents (i.e., identity motives) in elaborating strategic drivers of user engagement that builds sustainable relationships. This research, therefore, responded to a call for research integrating a theoretical lens of identity construction to advance our understanding of user engagement in social media (Gensler et al., 2013; Harmeling, Palmatier et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2012).

Finally, our focus on a social institution context has enriched the social media marketing literature in which most studies have investigated the phenomena in commercial product/service contexts. Given the necessity of relationship marketing for the prosperity of institutions that are primarily built on social exchange and reciprocal relationships (Arnett et al., 2003), this research offers evidence for the viability of social media marketing in such contexts. Institutions are increasingly adapting to the power shift created by marketization, resulting in some members experiencing identity crises (McAlexander et al., 2014). This research offers additional evidence to the importance of status and belonging in resolving identity ambiguity (Seregina & Schouten, 2017) and sheds light on how the identity gap can be bridged through social media in retaining members. Drawing from the identity salience conditions suggested by Kleine et al. (1993), our findings suggest the presence of similar constituents participating in an institution’s brand page can strengthen identity-relevant social connections and that the availability of
meaningful user-owned resources through OUEB can increase identity-relevant possessions and media connections in enhancing existing social relationships.

8.6.1. Managerial implications

Our findings should help social media managers understand the unique role brand page users play in achieving engagement marketing success. Arnett et al. (2003) argued institutions seeking to build a sustainable relationship with members should put their effort into strengthening links between members’ social identities and organizational identity. Consistent with this view, the present research should help the development of social media strategies grounded in identity-based relationship marketing. The greatest practical challenges engagement marketing faces today are the development of effective initiatives to encourage user-owned resource contributions, to manage and optimize resources and to measure their impact (Harmeling, Moffett, et al., 2017). There are also two important considerations for traditional institutions seeking to leverage other-user effect that are discussed subsequently, namely:

1. Members’ existing social relationships and their experiences in the physical community environment.

2. Large institutions like universities have many social media accounts managed by different functional areas and sub-groups.

Based on our findings, we suggest several ways to leverage OUEB and similarity in engagement marketing.

Motivating engagement behavior

Our findings strongly point to the importance of motivating user-owned resource contributions, not only for value co-creation but also for identity co-creation. Designing initiatives to organically attract and reward participation and voluntary contributions from intrinsically motivated members will create a
ripple effect on passive users’ engagement. The first and the most important consideration in motivating user participation is to have a consistent supply of highly relevant and valuable content that empowers the audience to pursue important identities (Fombelle et al., 2012) in a broad context of their institution. For example, a university’s graduate research school might create content around common challenges and rewards experienced by PhD students to stimulate discussion and help them collectively make sense of the feelings associated with that identity. This will also anchor the institution’s supportive attitudes towards student success in fostering student-university relationships (Fujita, Harrigan, Roy, & Soutar, 2018).

Second, managers can maximize member experience and, hence, participation by creating a synergy between digital, social, and offline encounters (Bolton et al., 2018). For example, professional associations can encourage participants at conferences and training events to tweet about their experiences and interact with each other by placing an event hashtag on online and offline collaterals and actively using it in their tweets. Such experiential marketing efforts can also increase identity processing opportunities by motivating the audience to revisit the own experience and to visit others through the during- and post-event content and resulting OUEB available in social media.

Third, participation and contributions need to be seen as easy, enjoyable, and rewarding, and social media technologies can help with these aspects. For example, a university’s student life office can ask students to post pictures of their study space, share their study rituals or express their feelings about upcoming exams in emojis, to make them feel empowered and get them involved in the identity co-creation process. Contributors should also receive instant gratification through marketer reactions (e.g., comment, Like), which will not only motivate subsequent engagement but also reinforce members’ role clarity in the page community and increase the chance of initiating OUEB that can be seen by more users.
Maximizing the visibility and accessibility of relevant resources to the right audience

The presence and actions of active users need to be highly visible and accessible to passive users. The right user-owned resources must be readily-available to the right audience to maximize identity co-creation opportunities. Managers can use page analytics to monitor who is engaging with what type of content and tailor content for that segment so as to optimize the chance of getting engagement reactions.

Large social institutions may have heterogeneous follower-base with their corporate brand page. For example, a university’s Facebook page may attract diverse stakeholders including current and future students, alumni, employees and industry partners. In such a case, a question arises as to how to increase similarity perceptions among people who have different backgrounds and needs. While no straight answer is clear, a corporate page might focus the institution’s identity that brings such differences together. Since diversity in members’ social identities can increase identity synergy (Fombelle et al., 2012), a corporate page’s content should focus on stories of diverse stakeholders, as well as that of the institution itself. In this way, marketers can maintain the continuity in the page community (Thomas et al., 2013), while signaling their efforts to create member embeddedness (Porter & Donthu, 2008).

Some members may prefer a sub-group page (e.g., faculty’s page) over that of the institution, depending on the relevance and benefits of the page, as was the case with our sample. It is therefore important to ensure sub-group pages are available and have content that focuses on relevant sub-group identities so as to increase similarity perceptions and attraction and to give access to more meaningful identity resources to those who need better clarity in their roles (e.g., newcomers) or are not seeing attractiveness in the parent institution’s identity image.

8.6.2. Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations that might be examined in future research. First, we used a cross-sectional survey to investigate the evolving process of identity co-creation. Future research should
validate our findings and build on them through longitudinal studies, as an identity can develop or diminish over time and, thus, might involve non-linear growth effects. Such an approach can also help generate valuable insight into boundary conditions in which a member of an institution faces an identity crisis or other adverse consequences as a result of other members’ involvement in identity co-creation (McAlexander et al., 2014), an important issue that is worthy of research attention.

Second, our sample included formal members (i.e., current students) of Australian universities. There are other stakeholders (e.g., alumni, staff and future students) who might have different identity needs and also use social media to connect with their institutions and related groups. Although our findings are logically generalizable to broader organizational contexts, future research replicating this study in different product or service brand contexts with varying groups of stakeholders will ensure a more holistic understanding of the relationships of interest.

Third, there may be additional constructs capturing perceptions of other users, such as the extent to which a focal user has known other users offline. Likewise, there may be other important mediators of the relationship between perceptions of other users and institutional identification. For example, future research could examine the extent to which OUEB influences beliefs about page hosts’ user-centric philosophy (Dahl et al., 2015) and sense of respect (Porter & Donthu, 2008) in strengthening their identification with the organization.

Finally, given the diverse nature of social media experiences, there may be moderating variables that influence the hypothesized relationships. For example, future research might see whether attitude towards diversity in a brand page’s follower base moderates the effect similarity has on sociability and brand page identification, as those who are open to diversity may see continuity in a heterogeneous community through access to resources owned by dissimilar others (Thomas et al., 2013). Thus, refinements to the model are needed to expand future research avenues.
CHAPTER 9

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter draws together the findings from the six empirical articles (Chapters 3 to 8) and presents an integrative discussion and synthesis of the insights obtained so as to examine the overall significance of the present research. The chapter first summarises and discusses the key findings from each of the six papers and suggests how the main arguments were developed and validated sequentially. The conclusion section provides answers to the central research question, namely:

*What makes a university’s SMBC successful in building student relationships?*

Finally, some overall theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and future research directions are discussed.

9.1. Summary and discussion of key findings

9.1.1. The nature of students’ engagement in their university’s SMBCs (RQ1)

The present project began with two pilot studies that explored the nature of students’ engagement with their university’s SMBC to provide some guidance in answering the central research question and identifying variables and relationships of interest. These pilot studies sought to answer some initial research questions, namely:

*RQ1. What is the nature of students’ engagement in their university’s SMBCs?*

a. *What is the nature of community practices in such SMBCs?* (Paper 1)

b. *What is the nature of students’ experiences with such SMBCs?* (Paper 2)
Paper 1 (Chapter 3, RQ1a) explored the nature of community practices in a university’s SMBC through a netnography of an exemplary Facebook page of an Australian university. It confirmed the existence of Schau et al.’s (2009) value-creating practices in such a community, while highlighting the greater level of initiatives and leadership demonstrated by the marketer than had been found in previous online brand community research. Four collaborative co-creation tactics emerged that reflected existing personal relationships and social structures within the university and student communities. In sum, social media seemed to empower students to co-create their university experiences and related identities.

Paper 2 (Chapter 4; RQ1b) sought to understand student’s perspectives of their SMBC experiences. Focus groups suggested students were motivated to connect with their university on social media as part of their acculturation and social identity construction strategies. The instrumental value of social media content, engagement with offline communities and related objects, bonds with other students, and perceptions of the page administrator played key roles. Students’ SMBC experiences also seemed to influence their identification with the university, which was seen in a sense of belonging and pride. The findings suggested there was a strong link between students’ identity needs and their engagement with their university on social media.

Overall, these pilot studies supported the suitability of the identity construction lens as a way to explain the phenomenon of interest. They also suggested social media content, marketers and other users played unique roles in driving meaningful engagement and identity co-creation. Further, existing offline social relationships offered the contexts that led to identity co-creation in SMBCs.

9.1.2. The strategic drivers of identity co-creation in a university’s SMBCs (RQ2)

Following the pilot studies, a larger qualitative phase (Phase 2: Papers 3 and 4) examined the strategic drivers of identity co-creation in university SMBCs. Both studies used a netnography of two exemplary
SMBCs based on Facebook and Instagram. The insights obtained from the pilot studies led to a number of research questions that were addressed in these two papers, namely:

**RQ2. What are the strategic drivers of identity co-creation in a university’s SMBCs?**

- **a. What is the role of marketer-generated content (MGC) shared in such SMBCs?** (Paper 3)
- **b. What is the role of co-created content (CCC) shared in such SMBCs?** (Paper 4)

Paper 3 (Chapter 5; RQ2a) focused on the role of MGC shared in such SMBCs. While the entertainment, aesthetics and functional benefits of MGC were evident, it was found identity cues and narratives presented in content (i.e., symbolic resource integration) gave students opportunities to make sense of the meanings attached to their student-role identity and university member identity. Marketer’s authentic characteristics were also seen in MGC and social interactions and these stimulated positive member reactions and participation. Further, members engaged in collective sensemaking through social interactions following content interactions, which increased the pleasures and decreased the pains associated with students’ identity performances. The results suggested MGC and subsequent social interactions played an important sensegiving role in meeting students’ needs for self-definition, self-esteem, self-verification and inclusion.

In Paper 4 (Chapter 6; RQ2b), the role of CCC, including the curation of user-generated content and co-authored content, was explored. As with Paper 3, hedonic and utilitarian qualities were the key attributes of the engaging content. Likewise, the sensegiving role of CCC was evident, with university identity allowing members to project other member’s identity narrative and sub-group and student-role identity themes CCC helped students pursue other important identities. The affinity and similarity of content contributors made CCC relevant and meaningful. Consistent with Paper 3, the results suggested CCC facilitates collective sensemaking through social interaction and influences perceptions of identity
distinctiveness and prestige. Further, SMBC members were important integrators of the symbolic resources that influence focal members’ identity constructions and their relationships with the university, sub-groups and relevant others.

Taken together, these two papers suggested the symbolic, hedonic, and utilitarian aspects of SMBC’s content (both MGC and CCC), marketers’ traits (effort to foster embeddedness, warmth) and the presence and actions of relevant others were the key strategic drivers of identity co-creation that contributed to the development of student-university relationships.

9.1.3. The influence identity co-creation in an SMBC has on student-university relationships (RQ3)

Building on the findings from Papers 3 and 4, the final quantitative phase (Phase 3) of the main studies (Papers 5 and 6) examined the processes through which social media marketing efforts and other users participating in a university’s SMBC influenced student-university relationships. The variables and relationships of interest identified in previous phases were integrated to develop and test conceptual models so as to generalise the findings to broader social institution contexts. A number of research questions were specifically examined in these two papers, namely:

RQ3. How does identity co-creation in a university’s SMBC influence student-university relationships?

a. How do social media marketing efforts influence such processes? (Paper 5)

b. How do perceptions about other users of an SMBC influence such processes? (Paper 6)

Paper 5 (RQ3a; Chapter 7) sought to confirm the answers to a previous research question (RQ2) and to further explore the differential effects of social media marketing tactics. The results supported the earlier findings by showing content tactics (i.e., symbolic resource integration, hedonic quality and utilitarian quality) and marketer traits (i.e., effort to foster member embeddedness and warmth) impacted on institutional identification in two different ways (i.e. through an increased level of identification with the
SMBC and through an enhanced image of the institutional identity (i.e., distinctiveness, prestige, and supportiveness)). The results also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each tactic in driving these two processes. Overall, the paper demonstrated the processes through which institutional social media efforts could yield stronger member relationships. Importantly, when members felt their institution’s social media efforts enabled them to define themselves, feel good about themselves and feel understood and connected, they were likely to reciprocate by strengthening their identification with the institution.

Finally, Paper 6 (RQ3b) investigated the role other users play in an SMBC. A national survey of Australian university students suggested positive perceptions of other-user engagement behaviour (OUEB) and similarity led to stronger institutional identification, as seen in increased levels of brand page sociability and identification with the page. Institutional distinctiveness also mediated the effect OUEB had on institutional identification. These findings suggested the presence of likeminded others and their engagement behaviour in an SMBC were important contextual drivers of member-institution relationships. That is, intendedly or unintendedly, social media makes user-owned identity resources visible and accessible to focal users at an exponential scale, facilitating opportunities for them to add these resources to their social identities for the SMBC and the institution so to reinforce the meanings attached to the membership. In sum, other users should be considered as an indirect strategic driver of social media-based engagement marketing success and the visibility of their identity resources should be proactively managed.

Overall, these two papers confirmed the strategic drivers of identity co-creation suggested in Phase 2 of the project and provided further evidence for the identity co-creation mechanisms through which social media marketing efforts and other-user effects could lead to stronger student-university relationships.
9.2. Conclusions

9.2.1. What makes a university’s SMBC successful in building student-university relationships?

Drawing on identity theories, this research project explored the strategic processes underpinning social media marketing success in a higher education context. Students were found to be motivated to construct and maintain an identity that was self-defining and self-enhancing and made them feel included and understood, and their university’s SMBCs helped them satisfy these fundamental psychological needs. Their perceived oneness with the social category represented in an SMBC and the emotional significance attached to that category membership anchored their relationship with the SMBC and further the hosting institution. Throughout the six empirical papers presented in this thesis, the guiding principles of identity theories provided plausible explanations of how member-institution relationships are formed through SMBCs.

It became evident that the social media ecosystem provides opportunities for an institution and its students to co-create identities at an exponential scale and foster sustainable relationships. This research also suggested content strategies, social media marketers, and other users participating in an SMBC have unique sensegiving roles to play. They create conditions for a social or role identity to become a salient part of the focal audience’s self-concept, thereby influencing their engagement with the SMBC and perceptions of the institution’s identity image. The strategic use of social media, in this sense, is about creating opportunities for an audience to see the world and themselves through the identity of the group or role to which they belong. More specifically, what makes social media marketing successful and meaningful to both parties is an institution’s ability to:

1. Understand students’ goals, challenges, values and the emotions related to their identity performances.
2. Understand the online and offline social structures and associated entities, cultural meanings, norms and expectations that shape identity performance.

3. Incorporate such understandings into social media content and communications so as to adapt to their culture and elicit identity-resource contributions.

Student-owned identity resources available on social media provide a rich source of data for an institution to deepen their understandings of students. Student-university relationships are formed through these dynamic, recursive and complex processes that address students’ identity needs and strengthen the link between their identities and the institution’s identity (Arnett et al. 2003). By illuminating these reciprocal processes of identity co-creation in social media, the present research project contributed to theory and practice in a number of ways, as is outlined in subsequent sections.

**9.2.2. Overall theoretical implications**

In addition to the theoretical gaps addressed in each of the six articles, the present research project as a whole made several key contributions to theory. First, the project’s identity construction lens offered a new perspective to the social media marketing and customer engagement literature, by demonstrating that users’ salient identities and identity motives are intertwined with the ways in which they evaluate the relevance and meaningfulness of content and related entities. Previous research has used various theoretical perspectives to examine social media strategy effectiveness, such as uses and gratifications (e.g., Jahn & Kunz 2012; Dolan et al. 2016), consumer values (e.g., Carlson et al., 2017), customer equity (e.g., Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012), organisational socialisation (e.g., Liao, Huang, & Xiao, 2017) and psychological motivation theory (e.g., Swani et al., 2017). However, little attention has been paid to users’ identities as an underlying mechanism for their engagement with an SMBC (Zaglia 2013; Naylor et al. 2012). This research was the first to use an identity construction lens to determine what kinds of social media marketing initiatives might lead to sustainable relationships, how and why so. From
this perspective, social media’s strategic role is to facilitate opportunities for marketers to increase the visibility and accessibility of institution-owned and member-owned identity resources that, in turn, allow focal members to reinforce their identities and sense of self.

Second, this research shed light on our understanding of identity theories in our new democratised digital environment in which people are empowered to influence the identities of organisations. The idea that consumers’ identities influence their responses to marketing stimuli and their consumption decisions is not new, nor is the idea that people consume media and brands to construct identities. Researchers have also used identity theories to conceptualise organisation identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael 1989; Pratt 1989) and relationship marketing success (e.g., Arnett et al. 2003; Bhattacharya et al. 2003). More recently, SIT and IT scholars have begun to discuss the influences that social structures created by social media technologies have on the salience of identities (Davis, 2016; Spears et al., 2011). However, little was known about the extent to which the premises of identity theories held in light of human-machine-organisation interactions. Through the six studies, it became evident that people are not the only ones who have gained the power. Social media was found to allow organisations to place themselves in members’ social worlds and engage with them on a personal level and in a much more authentic way than any other marketing channels. Indeed, it facilitates opportunities for both parties to see the world and themselves through each other’s identities.

The six articles provided compelling evidence for the importance of integrating the psychological and sociological traditions of identity theories (Stets & Burke, 2000) to reflect the dynamic and reciprocal nature of human-organisation relationships enabled by social media technologies. SIT supports that people identify with an organisation when it has a self-enhancing identity (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and is seen as supporting other important identities they have (Fombelle et al., 2011). IT suggests that social media makes multiple levels of social structures accessible to a focal user (e.g., friend group, student club, university, and student role), facilitating an array of identity-relevant situations in which she/he
enact different identities simultaneously (Davis, 2016). Integrating these views, this research demonstrated that the strategic components of an SMBC could provide identity stimuli and social structures that elicit the categorisation processes, facilitating opportunities for members to verify both their social and role identities and re-affirm associated meanings. These processes led to stronger identification with the SMBC and the hosting institution through the fulfilment of identity needs, including belonging, distinctiveness, prestige and support. As such, this project has established the utility of the identity theories perspective as an integrated approach to understanding the social process of identity co-creation and pursuit of self-enhancing identities in an organisation-initiated social media environment.

Third, the research consistently applied the RM approach as a metatheoretical lens across the six studies that drew from related domains, including co-creation and customer engagement (CE). By leveraging the utility of identity theories in RM research, this project expanded the theoretical understanding of identities in these domains, which had previously been limited to the notion of identification as one of the dimensions of CE (Hollebeek et al., 2014) or a driver of co-creation practices (Schau et al., 2009). It became evident that one’s social and role identities have more to play in influencing customer experiences. Specifically, the project highlighted the role of SMBC content and marketer in facilitating the symbolic, hedonic and utilitarian experiences, supporting the notion of personal engagement, and the role of other users in driving community experiences, hence social-interactive engagement (Calder et al., 2009). Moreover, by illuminating the role that SMBC content, marketer and other users play in identity enactments, this project contributed to the theorisation of engagement marketing (Harmeling, Moffett et al., 2017), in which the process of social media-based engagement marketing and its relationship implications were previously under-researched.

Finally, this project enriched the higher education marketing literature by offering in-depth insights into students’ engagement with their university on social media. Prior research has examined students’
personal use of social media (Ellison et al., 2007; Mostafa, 2015; Junco et al., 2012). However, the unique role of university-related SMBCs (or brand pages) was previously largely under-explored. While much prior social media marketing research focused on commercial brands, a university’s SMBCs could operate differently, due to the highly transformative and diverse student experience (Maringe, 2010; Altschwager et al., 2018; Sim et al., 2018) and the existence of physical communities and reciprocal relationships. By addressing this context-dependent nature of engagement (Jones et al., 2018), the project improved our understanding of the motives of university students, who are often digital natives, for connecting with their university on social media and how their identities shape and are shaped by their experiences with the SMBC. The qualitative findings in particular, offered vivid illustrations of students’ needs, challenges, goals and emotions and how these factors related to their identities as university members, students and sub-group members. Further, the project highlighted the important role students’ multiple salient identities play on their SMBC experiences and feelings of connection with peers, other users, the marketer and the university. It also demonstrated how these identities could be activated through content strategies to create identity synergy.

9.2.3. Overall managerial implications

In addition to the managerial implications and recommendations discussed in the six papers, the present project overall provided managers with in-depth insights into the strategic processes of identity co-creation and relationship formation in social media. With these insights, managers should be able to make theoretically informed decisions and communicate the effectiveness of their strategies and rationales for engagement metrics to internal stakeholders so as to justify their social media initiatives.

There is no doubt social media will continue to be the discourse of marketing and the driving force of change for individuals, organisations and society. Given the importance of having an effective strategy to navigate this evolving environment, this thesis also offers a holistic framework (Figure 9.1) that
integrates the project’s key findings (Papers 3 to 6; Chapters 5 to 8). This framework, along with the conceptual models developed, suggests identity-based social media marketing strategies and ways to measure member relationship outcomes. Although primarily designed for the higher education sector, with examples focused on current students, these recommendations are applicable to broader organisational and stakeholder contexts.

![Diagram of the identity-based social media marketing strategic framework](image)

**Figure 9.1. An identity-based social media marketing strategic framework for institutions**

As with any strategic plan, the institution’s goals should inform the goals of its social media marketing initiatives to ensure its core values are represented in every touchpoint. Institutions seeking to strengthen member relationships should consider two aspects of social media strategies, namely:

1. Strengthen SMBC relationships (members’ perceptions of brand page sociability and their identification with the page).
2. Reinforce the institution’s identity image (perceived institutional distinctiveness, prestige and supportiveness).

As was seen in the present project, both aspects can be addressed simultaneously in a single campaign. For instance, a lip dub video contest may strengthen SMBC relationships through increased participation and social interactions, while reinforcing the institution’s distinctive image through the increased visibility of symbolic resources owned by participating students.

For each strategy, managers should consider leveraging the strengths of specific content tactics (MGC or CCC, symbolic resource integration, hedonic, utilitarian) and marketer traits (foster member embeddedness, demonstrate warmth) that are directly controllable. Perceptions about other users could also be leveraged by designing tactics that encourage engagement behaviour from those users who are part of the target audience. This will ensure their identity resources are visible and accessible to the rest of the audience.

When developing content, relevant identity resources should be linked to the prototype (Turner et al., 1987) of the SMBC to ensure inferred identities appear authentic to the audience. For instance, in an announcement about exam timetables, using a picture of an actual exam venue, where sitting an exam is seen as a rite of passage for students, may help make the post more relevant and meaningful than would a stock photo of study objects. Content tactics could also be optimised according to the salience of the audience’s identities in specific times or social contexts (Turner et al., 1987). For example, it is possible students would more likely to be ready to enact their student-role identity during exam times than in non-peak times. Thus, the temporarily salient identity may make them pay greater attention to utilitarian content addressing the needs and challenges associated with performing that identity. If content is seen as relevant and valuable, they are likely to reciprocate and form a supportive image of the institution’s identity.
Taken together, the frameworks and insights offered in the present project should be useful in guiding the effective planning and assessment of social media marketing initiatives and allow institutions to build, maintain and enhance member relationships in a sustainable and mutually beneficial way.

9.2.4. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Although some of the limitations identified in the earlier studies were addressed in the later studies, the present project as a whole has limitations that suggest important future research avenues. The next section outlines such limitations and makes some recommendations for future research.

First, the two quantitative studies conducted in Phase 3 (Papers 5 and 6) were cross-sectional, which could limit their causality claims. Since identity construction can have dynamic, non-linear and recursive aspects (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), the relationships investigated should be validated through longitudinal and experimental studies. An interesting question related to this issue is the extent to which an event or change in existing social relationships outside an SMBC contributes to a change in the hypothesised relationships. Because identity salience can be sensitive to the availability of enactment opportunities (Kleine et al., 1993), situational cues (Turner et al., 1987) or changes in the position of the identity in the social structure (Burke, 1980), what happens outside an SMBC could alter the meaningfulness of identity-related resources available in the SMBC. Although Papers 3 and 4 supported this point qualitatively (i.e., students’ identities were primed by offline events such as exams and graduations prior to their engagement with related content online), it was not further examined in the subsequent quantitative studies. Investigating this issue further would also better inform managers of offline/online initiatives that could complement their social media marketing efforts, as was discussed in the managerial implication section.

Second, there may be other important social media tactics that were not examined here. For instance, promotional content was not a variable of interest, as the engagement rates for the posts of this nature
examined in Paper 3 were generally low. Although seen as having a negative impact, such as members’ belief about a page host’s opportunism (Poter & Donthu, 2008), recent research suggests the effect persuasive social media advertisements have on customer engagement can vary, depending on perceiver’s attachment to an SMBC (Weiger, Hammerschmidt, & Wetzel, 2018). There are also other potentially influential traits of social media marketers (e.g., communication styles) and additional variables that could contribute to other-user effects (e.g., offline relationships) that were partially discussed in Paper 2. Moreover, there may be other influential stakeholders who impact on focal members’ engagement. For instance, Paper 1 found students evaluated employee contributions to CCC positively, especially those who knew the employees being featured expressed their identification with them. Research also supports the influences of external stakeholders (e.g., media, governments) can have on stakeholder and brand identity co-creation processes (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Espersen, 2017; Voyer et al., 2017). Future research examining these additional aspects would offer a more holistic understanding of social media strategy effectiveness.

Third, although not investigated here, it is possible perceptions of content and other users could be correlated. That is, consuming CCC that is seen as having hedonic, utilitarian and/or symbolic benefits may lead to favourable perceptions of other members. Because CCC has inputs from other members, it can contribute rich and authentic information about the SMBC’s prototype (Turner et al., 1987). In such a case, positive perceptions about other users might also lead to an overestimation of the quality of CCC through an increased level of SMBC identification, due to accentuation effects (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While the roles CCC and MGC play were examined qualitatively in Papers 3 and 4, they were not validated quantitatively in the subsequent studies. Consequently, they are a fruitful area of future research.

Fourth, SMBCs are more open and have more loosely connected members than do traditional online communities (Habibi et al., 2014), which suggests SMBC experiences are likely to be more heterogeneous and diverse. Thus, the models examined here should be refined to examine this issue,
while also making them more parsimonious for future investigation. In addition to the suggestions made in Papers 5 and 6, possible moderating constructs include institutional identity knowledge and self-institution identity coherence (Bhattacharya et al., 2003), as these could moderate the impact some SMBC drivers have on institutional identity image and SMBC identification.

Fifth, although the unique social environment in which a university’s SMBC operates was a research gap of interest, future research should replicate these studies in different research contexts with stakeholders who have different relationships with organisations to examine the findings’ generalisability. Examining the influence one group of stakeholders have on another group’s identity (e.g. alumni on current students, employees on future students) in an organisation’s SMBC could also improve our understanding of multi-stakeholder identity co-creation (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017) and suggest how undesirable outcomes might result from social media-led collisions between different stakeholder identities. This will lead to a fruitful line of future research into the dark side of engagement in social media, and further the understanding of the two-way (or multi-way) acculturation concept developed from this project.

Finally, while this project highlighted the usefulness of identity theories in social media marketing research, the theorisation of computer-mediated identity processes is still in its early stage, suggesting there are promising areas of future research (Hogg, 2017). In particular, extending Davis’s (2016) suggestions, the dynamic relationships between self and social categorisation, identity salience, multiple identity enactments, identity verification, depersonalisation and customer engagement, mediated by digital communication technologies, could be examined to advance our understanding of digital consumers and evolving marketing practice.
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LIST OF APPENDICES

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Appendix A. Glossary and abbreviations

**Brand page identification:** The extent to which a part of self-concept is defined in terms of a perception of belonging to an SMBC or a brand page as a representative of a social group.

**Co-created content (CCC):** A social media content strategy in which a marketer curates user-generated content (e.g., re-tweets) or co-authors content with users (e.g., guest blog articles) and disseminates through owned media channels (e.g., brand pages).

**Hashtag:** A word or phrase preceded by the # symbol to define messages relating to a particular topic.

**Identity theory (IT):** A theory that suggests people’s identities and behaviours are related to their social roles and are reflections of the mutual relationships they have with society (Stryker, 1968).

**Lurker:** A social media site user who consumes content and discussions but does not actively participate or contribute.

**NCapture:** A web browser extension that allows a researcher to capture online content such as web pages, PDF documents, and social media posts for analysis in QSR NVivo.

**Newsfeed:** Updates posted by those on a friends list and from groups and pages to which one has subscribed.

**Marketer-generated content (MGC):** Social media content created and disseminated by a marketer.

**Other-user engagement behaviour (OUEB):** Perceived levels of engagement behaviour, which is brand or organisation-focused rather than transactional (Van Doorn et al., 2010), demonstrated by other users participating in an SMBC.
**Role identity:** The role position that an individual occupies in a distinctive social structure and role expectations in the social relationships in which the role is played (Stryker 1968).

**Social identity:** “Part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978 p. 63).

**Social identity theory (SIT):** A theory that explains the intergroup and intragroup processes that influence a collective sense of self and group behaviour. The theory suggests individuals who identify with a group seek to discriminate against out-groups to increase their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

**Social identification:** The extent to which a part of self-concept is defined in terms of a perception of belonging to a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

**Self-categorisation theory (SCT):** An extension of SIT. It explains how people define themselves as individuals (who I am) or group members (who we are) and their implications for people’s judgement and behaviour (Turner, 1987).

**Social media brand community (SMBC):** A brand community or fan page on a social media site created and managed by a designated user(s) who represents a non-individual identity (e.g., a university or university-related group in this research).

**Tag:** A process of making a link to a user’s profile/page or reminding the user/page of an update (the tagged user/page will be notified).

**Two-way acculturation:** A technologically-enabled process of identity co-creation and cultural change through which meanings, resources, and narratives are openly exchanged and integrated between an organisation and its people.
Appendix B. Netnography procedure (Papers 1, and 3 to 5)

Adapted from Kozinets (2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>In this research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inspiration</td>
<td>Reflect on the role of the researcher in actual life.</td>
<td>The researcher was interested in the topic also as a marketer and a student in her real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Investigation</td>
<td>Formulate research questions.</td>
<td>Section 1.3.1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Information</td>
<td>Raise ethical considerations.</td>
<td>The impractical issue of informed consent (is social media private or public?). Ensure the anonymity of personal profiles and that direct quotes are not easily traceable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interview</td>
<td>Identify potential communities and discuss with the key contacts.</td>
<td>The researcher discussed key issues with the page administrator of the UWA Students Facebook page and Instagram account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inspection</td>
<td>Evaluate the suitability of the chosen site(s).</td>
<td>Follow Kozinets’ (2010) criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Interaction</td>
<td>Join the community and (participate if intended) and create a research website.</td>
<td>The researcher had already been following the accounts for 16 months before data collection. No intention to post comments in order to avoid possible undesirable influence of the researcher presence on the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Immersion</td>
<td>Experience embedded cultural understanding.</td>
<td>Close observation (the researcher would “Like” some content or comments) and field notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Indexing</td>
<td>Data collection (an adequate, manageable amount of high-quality data).</td>
<td>Extract structured datasets via NCapture and load to NVivo. Clean them in Excel. Use those threads that generated high levels of engagement based on the metrics available (e.g., likes, comments, shares). PDF the threads for coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Iteration</td>
<td>Interpret the analysis continuously and seek insight.</td>
<td>Thematic analysis through re-coding, grouping and re-grouping of data, and going back to the literature, site, and field notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Instantiation</td>
<td>Discuss the findings.</td>
<td>Discuss the findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Integration</td>
<td>Implications and conclusions.</td>
<td>Implications and conclusions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A netnography of a university’s social media brand community: Exploring collaborative co-creation tactics

Momoko Fujita, Paul Harrigan & Geoffrey Soutar

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Appendix D. Article front page (International Journal of Educational Management)
Appendix E. Focus group protocol

1. Introduction

Hello and welcome! I’d love to thank you all for taking the time to help me out today. My name is Momoko, and I am a postgraduate student in the UWA Business School. I’m currently working on my research project about international students’ experiences following their university on social media. Today I’d love to hear how you, as UWA students, think about, feel about, and use (or not use) UWA’s official social media accounts, especially the UWA Students Facebook page. I mostly want to hear from you, what your thoughts and opinions are.

We will be meeting for about sixty minutes, more or less. We won’t be taking any breaks because I don’t want to take up too much of your time. So please feel free to go to the bathroom if you like, or to grab some pizza and soft drinks. This is more like a casual chat so please relax and make you feel comfortable.

I am recording our discussion today. This is just for me to use so that I don’t miss any ideas that are shared. No one else will hear the recording, and I will be transcribing today’s discussion without using your names. If I quote anyone in my dissertation, your names won’t be used either. Please take turns speaking one at a time so that I can easily understand the recording. Any questions so far? OK, let’s go around the table and introduce ourselves. Just give your first name, where you’re from, and what degree you are studying.

2. Focus Group Discussion

Social Media / Facebook Intensity

- How do you learn about campus news? How do you stay updated on what’s going on at the UWA?
- What social media platforms do you use on a daily basis?
- How much time do you spend on all of the social media every day?
- What do you do on those platforms? (Probe: Do you use it to seek out information, entertainment, socially to keep up with friends, to find others like you, to seek out a community, etc.?)
- (Follow Up) How about Facebook?
- How often do you use Facebook? How much time do you spend?
- How would you feel when you haven’t logged onto Facebook for a while?

UWA official / affiliated social media accounts – Community identification
Let’s discuss your level of involvement with the UWA social media accounts.

- Which accounts do you interact with the most and why?
- Why did you become involved with these? (i.e. what were the needs)
- (Follow Up) How did you become involved with these accounts?
- (Probe: When did you find out about the accounts? Was it before coming here, once you were accepted, once you got to campus, etc.?)
- What do you get out of your involvement with the UWA’s social media? (i.e. what are the gratifications)
- (Follow Up) Tell me about what you get out of these interactions that you couldn’t get out of face-to-face interaction with the UWA staff?

**UWA Students Facebook page identification**

OK, let’s talk about the UWA Students Facebook Page.

- How many times did you check the UWA Students Facebook page or posts within the last 2 weeks?
- How much time did you spend on average when you check the page or posts?
- How and why did you become involved with these? (i.e. what were the needs)
- (Probe: When did you find out about the accounts? Was it before coming here, once you were accepted, once you got to campus, etc.?)
- What do you get out of your involvement with the UWA Students Facebook page? (i.e. what are the gratifications)
- (Follow Up) Tell me about what you get out of these interactions that you couldn’t get out of face-to-face interaction with the UWA staff?

**Customer Engagement / Community Practices**

- What do you normally do on the UWA Students Facebook page?
- (Probe: Just reading posts? Checking pictures? Liking? Commenting?)
- What makes you do so?
- (Probe: If you actively post comments/share content, what motivates you to do so?)
- What are you getting or expect to get out of interacting with the page or other users of the page?
- (Probe: Do you feel more connected, valued, fun, full-filling or satisfied? If you only read posts, do you still feel connected with the UWA Students and its followers?)
Content / Community Practices / Brand stories

- What do you think about the content posted by UWA Students?
  - (Probe: Any particular type of posts you like? Pictures, videos, link…etc? What kind of information do you find useful or irrelevant? What resonates with you the most?)
- How about the interactions between the UWA Students and users, and between the users?
  - (Probe: Do you read others’ comments and replies at all? Are the discussions where someone is asking questions and getting answers useful for you solving your own issues/questions?)
- Tell me about a personal story or memory that stands out in your experience with the UWA’s social networking accounts.

(Completion association: Project 5 contents selected from the Phase 1 analysis on the screen, and hand printed materials to each participant. Ask them to specify what actions they would take (or not) on each, and if commenting, ask them to write what they would comment on.)

Thank you, everyone. Let’s share your favourite one in turn, and please tell us what you like about the content.

Role of Marketer / Community Practices

- When you are checking the content or comments posted by the UWA Students, how strong do you feel that they care about you and are willing to offer some help if you ask for?
  - (Probe: Do you feel that the UWA Students are responsive, reliable, welcoming and supportive?)
- Do you feel that you are part of the UWA community when you are checking the content, comments and user interactions on the UWA Students Facebook page?

Social identity

Cognitive social identity

If the UWA Students was a person who is on Facebook as you see in the UWA Students Facebook Page, what is he or she like? (Personification association: Can you please write the characteristics down on the paper?)

- (Probe: Male or female? How old? What is the relationship with you? What profile or even story can you think of?)
- (Follow up: Thank you. Let’s share what we’ve got.)
- What degree your self-image overlaps with the identity of the UWA community as you perceive it?
• (Probe: How strongly do you see yourself as a UWA student? Or do you think more strongly that you are an international student?)
• How would you express the degree of overlap between your personal identity and the identity of the UWA community when you are actually part of the community and engaging in community activities on social media?
• (Probe: Is belonging to the UWA community on social media an important reflection of who you are? Does engaging in the UWA community activities on social media make you feel you are a UWA student?)

Affective social identity
• How attached are you to the UWA student community offline and on social media?
• How strongly would you say your feelings of belongingness are toward the community offline and on social media?

Australian University Identity
• How strong do you feel you are an important member of the UWA community offline and on social media?
• (Probe: Do you think your views, skills and background are valued by other members of the community? Or do you rather feel you don’t have much to offer to the UWA community?)

3. Conclusions

That was my last question. Do you have anything that you wanted to add, or didn’t have a chance to say? Or any questions? OK, let me take a minute to tell you about my research. As I’m sure you may have guessed, I’m interested in how international students are using the University’s social media activities to develop campus experience. I want to learn about how common it is for international students to be involved with the University’s social media efforts and if you are involved. I’m particularly interested in understanding why you are and what you get out of it.

If you have any follow up questions in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you very much for your help, and I hope you enjoyed the discussion.
Appendix F. An example of the stimulus material used in the projective technique (Paper 2)

Your Action(s):
1. Do nothing
2. Like
3. Share
4. Tag
5. Comment or tag & comment (please write down what you would comment on):
CAPTURING AND CO-CREATING STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Momoko Fujita, Paul Harrigan & Geoffrey N. Soutar

To cite this article: Momoko Fujita, Paul Harrigan & Geoffrey N. Soutar (2018) CAPTURING AND CO-CREATING STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 26:1-2, 55-71, DOI: 10.1080/10696679.2017.1389245

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2017.1389245
Appendix H. Acceptance letter (Qualitative Market Research)

Decision Letter (QMR-01-2017-0049.R3)

From: AWhiting@clayton.edu
To: momoko.fujita@research.uwa.edu.au, paul.harrigan@uwa.edu.au, geoff.soutar@uwa.edu.au
CC:

Subject: Qualitative Market Research - Decision on Manuscript ID QMR-01-2017-0049.R3

Body: 16-Oct-2017

Dear Ms. Fujita,

It is a pleasure to accept your manuscript entitled "The strategic co-creation of content and student experiences in social media: An identity theories perspective" in its current form for publication in Qualitative Market Research. This letter.

By publishing in this journal, your work will benefit from Emerald EarlyCite. This is a pre-publication service which allows your paper to be published online earlier, and so read by users and, potentially, cited earlier.

Please go to your Author Centre at https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/qmr (Manuscripts with Decisions for the submitting author or Manuscripts I have co-authored for all listed co-authors) to complete the copyright assignment form. We cannot publish your paper without this. All authors are requested to complete the form and to input their full contact details. If any of the contact information is incorrect you can update it by clicking on your name at the top right of the screen. Please note that this must be done prior to you submitting your copyright form. If you would like more information about Emerald’s copyright policy, please visit the Information & Forms section in your Author Centre. If you have an ORCID please check your account details to ensure that your ORCID is validated.

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Thank you for your contribution. On behalf of the Editors of Qualitative Market Research, we look forward to your continued contributions to the Journal.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Anita Whiting
Guest Editor, Qualitative Market Research
AWhiting@clayton.edu

Date Sent: 16-Oct-2017
Appendix I. Acceptance letter (Technological Forecasting and Social Change)

Decision Letter - Accept: 06 November 2018

Ref: TFS_2017_1278_R2
Title: Two-way acculturation in social media: The role of institutional efforts
Journal: Technological Forecasting & Social Change

Dear Dr. Roy,

I am pleased to inform you that your paper has been accepted for publication. Now that your manuscript has been accepted for publication it will proceed to copy-editing and production. Thank you for submitting your work to Technological Forecasting & Social Change. We hope you consider us again for future submissions.

Kind regards,

Dorothy Yen
Special Issue Managing Guest Editor
Technological Forecasting & Social Change

Comments from the editors and reviewers:
- Reviewer 2

All my comments have been addressed satisfactorily and I wish the authors all my best.

Have questions or need assistance?
For further assistance, please visit our Customer Support site. Here you can search for solutions on a range of topics, find answers to frequently asked questions, and learn more about EVISE® via interactive tutorials. You can also talk 24/5 to our customer support team by phone and 24/7 by live chat and email.

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Appendix J. Online survey questionnaire (Papers 5 and 6 combined)

STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

This project is conducted by Momoko Fujita, as part of her PhD research project under the supervision of Dr Paul Harrigan and W/Prof Geoff Soutar at the University of Western Australia.

You have been invited to participate, and your involvement is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the survey at any time. The questionnaire will require approximately 15 minutes to complete.

If you agree to participate in the survey, please complete the questions that follow. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the email address provided below.

Kind regards,

Dr Paul Harrigan
Marketing Discipline Group
UWA Business School, M263 UWA
35 Stirling Highway, Crawley 6009
Tel: 6488 1979 | Email: paul.harrigan@uwa.edu.au
In which university are you currently enrolled?

- ANU
- UC
- ACU
- CSU
- Macquarie
- SCU
- UNE
- UNSW
- UON
- UOW
- USYD
- UTS
- UWS
- CDU
- UQ
- Bond
- CQU
- Griffith
- JCU
- QUT
- USQ
- USC
- Adelaide Uni
- Flinders
- UniSA
- UTAS
- Deakin
- FedUni
- La Trobe
- Monash
- RMIT
- Swinburne
- UniMelb
- VU
- Curtin
- ECU
- Murdoch
- Notre Dame
- UWA
- None of the above or not currently enrolled

Think about your university's social media, including pages/accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Youtube etc. How many [university name] social media pages/accounts (e.g. page(s)/account(s) managed by the university, your faculty/school, service departments etc.) are you following?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10 or more

Can you recall your experiences using at least one of the [university name] social media pages you are following?

- Yes (please enter the name of the page you use the most): __________________________
- Not sure.
About the [university name] social media page you use the most: [account name as identified]

Please indicate the social media platform on which the selected page is hosted.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Other (please specify)

How long have you been following the page?

- Less than 2 months
- 2-6 months
- 7-11 months
- 1-2 years
- More than 2 years

How often did you engage in each of the following activities on the page in the previous 2 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check page posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with content (e.g., Like, comment on content)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with the page (e.g. comment to the page, send a message)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with friends (e.g., Tag, comment, Like a comment, share)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with other users (e.g., Like user-generated content, comment to other users)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute content/information (e.g., share tips, use a university hashtag in a photo)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please take a few moments to reflect on your experiences with the [university name] social media page you use the most.

What do you like about the page? [open ended answer]

What do you dislike about the page (if any)? [open ended answer]

The following section is about the [university name] social media page you use the most AND the university in general.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos showing the student culture and sub-cultures that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The page embodies what I believe in.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The successes of [university name] are my successes.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is exciting.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is amusing.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have a similar character to me.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People joke about their struggles on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] has a distinctive identity.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page acknowledges the contributions of users.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform to the best of my ability.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People 'tag' their friends to content on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people would be proud when their children attend [university name]</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone praises [university name], it feels like a personal compliment.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos showing moments of student life on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The page is like a part of me.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is pleasant.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is caring.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] is unique.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar appearance to me.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page tries to cater for diverse users.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] does not have a good reputation in my community.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People express emotions and feelings on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can meet people like me on this page.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if I did the best work possible, [university name] would fail to notice.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a story in the media criticized [university name], I would feel embarrassed.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is helpful.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The page has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Option 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page seeks the opinions of users.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is entertaining.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page are similar in age to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People seeking to advance their careers should downplay their association with [university name].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People share tips and ideas on this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar values to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] stands out from its competitors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can meet new people like me on this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] cares about my general satisfaction at the university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos of the university’s campus, landmarks, pets and objects that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a strong connection with other users of the page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page creates warm feelings among users.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is useful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have a similar background to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page encourages users to contribute to this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] shows very little concern for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have a similar lifestyle to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in my community think highly of [university name].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say nice things about members of the university on this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find out about people like me on this page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When other universities are recruiting new students, they would not want students from [university name].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How long have you been a student of [university name]?

- [ ] Less than 6 months    - [ ] 2-3 years
- [ ] 6-11 months           - [ ] More than 3 years
- [ ] 12-23 months
Are you an Australian or international student?

- Australian student
- International student

Please indicate your gender.

- Female
- Male
- Not listed (please specify) ________________________________
- Prefer not to answer

Please indicate your age range.

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-29
- 30 or above

Thank you for completing the questions so far!

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When someone criticises [university name], it feels like a personal insult.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is functional.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is very loveable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is considered prestigious in my community to be a student of [university name].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to see pictures/videos of campus events and activities that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page allows users to have direct contact.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar social status to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People support each other on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] strongly considers my goals and values.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar life achievements to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can interact with people like me on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] cares about my opinions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a strong sense of belonging to the group that the page represents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very interested in what others think about [university name].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to find stories about the university’s traditions, myths, history and rituals that people recognise on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is practical.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is emotional rather than rational.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] is considered one of the best universities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar education to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talk about their experiences on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page asks users for help.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People endorse content on this page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help is available from [university name] when I have a problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I identify strongly with the page.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I talk about [university name], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to find stories about the achievements of the university and its members on this page.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content of the page is fun.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page is approachable.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People from other universities look down at [university name].</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People ‘Like’ or comment on content on this page.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[University name] really cares about my well-being.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrator of the page makes an effort to make users feel a part of the community.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other users of the page have similar income to me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People tell stories on this page.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>