What Drives Me There? The Interplay of Socio-Psychological Gratification and Consumer Values in Social Media Brand Engagement

ABSTRACT

The social behavioral perspective is under-researched in the extant literature. This hinders the holistic understanding of social media brand engagement. This study examines the interplay of socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) and consumer values (personal, interpersonal, and fun) on consumer participation in social media brand engagement. The conceptual model in this study is situated on the principles of Uses and Gratifications, Critical Mass, Homophily, and Values theories. Based on an online survey of 713 Facebook users, a structural equation modeling (with Amos 23.0) disclosed insights on the interplay of motivational factors that underlie social media brand engagement. Our findings suggest that socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) drive consumers' engagement with brand pages and brand communities on social media. This relationship is strengthened by the consumer values. These insights serve as an important basis for researchers and practitioners to understand social media brand engagement and its outcomes.

Keywords:

Consumer Values, Social Media, Brand Engagement, Uses and Gratifications, Perceived Homophily, Critical Mass

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of social media in recent times (especially amid the recent Covid19 pandemic) has transformed the acquisition of information, communication practices, and lifestyles of consumers (Dwivedi et al. 2021; Urbonavicius et al. 2021). Admittedly, social media provides a medium for communication, in which case firms could use it to promote some behavioral engagement among users without geographical and time barriers (Dwivedi et al. 2018; Karikari et al. 2017). However, the social behavioral perspective is under-researched in the literature which hinders the holistic understanding of social media brand engagement. Earlier studies (such as; Chahal et al. 2020; Dolan et al. 2019; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Osei-Frimpong et al. 2020) call for further research of online social media brand engagement (SMBE) in relation to motivational drivers and consequences. Drawing on theoretical insights from other fields of inquiry, and focusing on apparel brands on Facebook, our study responds to these calls by studying the interplay of socio-psychological gratification variables and consumer values on online consumer participation. Following Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018, p. 12), SMBE is defined as "*the connection, creation and communication of the brand's story between the firm and consumers (both existing and prospects), using brand or brand-related language, images and meanings via the firm's social networking site resulting from motivational drivers*".

Given the interactive nature of social media platforms, Simon and Tossan (2018) note the importance of extending our knowledge of the gratifications derived by consumers in their SMBE practices. Some studies (e.g., Bazi et al. 2020; Dolan et al. 2019; Oh et al. 2017; Phua et al. 2017) have shed light on the importance and dynamics of SMBE, whereas Calder et al. (2016) call for a need to further explore the socio-psychological process of consumer engagement. Many of these studies have focused on the concept of information sharing on social media platforms (Plume and Slade 2018; Z. Wang 2021) and gratification variables on social media engagement (M. L. Khan 2017). However, the interplay of socio-psychological factors and consumer values on SMBE has not yet been investigated (*see Table 1*). This oversight hinders the holistic understanding of consumer SMBE practices. Hence, it is imperative to study this social behavioral perspective in relation to SMBE, as values are considered to explain behaviors and attitudes relative to individual's decision-making process (Marbach et al. 2019; Vinson et al. 1977). This presents an interesting research opportunity to explore given the socio-psychological movement that drives consumers' motives toward social media use (Karikari et al. 2017). For instance, given the buzz surrounding social media use,

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individuals may be driven by people of similar traits (perceived homophily) (Meyners et al. 2017), the numbers that engage in such practices (perceived critical mass) (Lin and Lu 2011), as well as their self-seeking gratifications (self-status seeking) to feel a sense of belongingness (M. L. Khan 2017). Relatedly, Karikari et al. (2017) call for a need to examine the effects of gratification variables (such as self-status seeking, perceived homophily, and critical mass, etc.) on SMBE and how these could be shaped by consumer values. Findings from this study will give researchers and practitioners insights on the relationship between these socio-psychological gratification variables and consumer values in SMBE.

Consequently, SMBE practices seek to expose participating individuals to the brand through multi-actor interactions (Dolan et al. 2019; Morgan-Thomas et al. 2020; Schaefers et al. 2021). On such platforms, information received from both the firm and participants is likely to influence their beliefs and behaviors toward the brand (including building brand trust and consumer brand purchase intentions) (Cheung et al. 2021; Plume and Slade 2018). For instance, So et al. (2016) assert that such brand engagement practices could strongly influence the building of brand trust among consumers. In particular, while brand trust could be considered as an antecedent to SMBE (Osei-Frimpong et al. 2020), brand trust could as well be considered as an outcome of SMBE (Hollebeek 2011; L. Liu et al. 2018). Given the level of exposure to brands through user engagement on social media platforms, this study examines the cumulative effects of SMBE on behavioral outcomes such as brand purchase intention and brand trust. Taking a quantitative online survey approach, this paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of SMBE by clarifying the interplay of socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) and consumer values (personal, interpersonal and fun dimensions) on consumer participation. Thus, the study seeks to achieve the following research objectives:

- To examine the influence of socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) in SMBE.
- To examine the moderating effects of specific dimensions of consumer values on the potential relationship between socio-psychological gratification variables and SMBE.
- To examine the relative effects of SMBE on brand purchase intention and brand trust.

Karikari et al. (2017) point out the relevance of understanding how these social conversations influence consumer social needs in relation to satisfying their needs for interacting with brands

on social media. Thus, this study makes a number of contributions to the existing literature. First, in response to Dwivedi et al. (2021), Kapoor et al. (2018) and Karikari et al. (2017), this current work takes a social behavioral approach to provide a holistic understanding of SMBE, and fills such an important research gap in the social media marketing literature. We contribute to existing knowledge of the interplay of these socio-psychological factors and consumer values on SMBE, which is understudied in the social media literature. Second, this study draws on theoretical insights from sociology and social psychology (U&G theory, critical mass theory and homophily theory) to explain the types of socio-psychological gratifications (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-seeking status) that drive consumer SMBE practices, and how such effects are moderated by consumer values. This approach, therefore, gives a holistic explanation of the social processes of mass communication in social networks such as SMBE practices, and builds on the basic tenets of U&G theory. Third, our conceptualization in this study has demonstrated that different dimensions of consumer values (C. Xie et al. 2008) exert different interaction effects on consumer behavior towards SMBE practices. Hence, the current work builds on Marbach et al. (2019) and Morgan-Thomas et al. (2020) by establishing how consumer values interact with their socio-psychological factors to influence brand engagement practices on social media, which has received less attention in the literature despite the vast amount of work done in social media research. Fourth, this study has established the mediating role of brand trust between SMBE and brand purchase intention. This is theoretically meaningful, given that participation in SMBE practices would rather influence building consumer-brand trust, and therefore, indirectly influence their purchase intentions.

The paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the theoretical framework of the study leading to the development of our model and hypotheses. We then outline the research methodology and data analysis. The next sections discuss the results and implications for theory and practice and conclude with limitations and future research directions.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G)

Technological advancements in recent times have seen increased research in understanding audience or consumer media choice selection, and their motives and satisfaction in engaging with these social networking sites. As a result, U&G from the social psychology literature has gained traction in computer-mediated communication studies (Ko et al. 2005; McLean et al.

2022), and in social networking research (Phua et al. 2017; Plume and Slade 2018). U&G theory states that people decide to use media based on the ability of specific aspects of the media to gratify their social and psychological needs (Katz et al. 1973; M. L. Khan 2017). U&G is particularly useful in this study as the overarching theory because it focuses on how and why consumers utilize media, like SMBE, with high levels of active participation (Phua et al. 2017; Ruggiero 2000). Accordingly, U&G assumes that the social environment constitutes different motives for gratification which is aided by the interaction of certain basic needs with the individual's personal characteristics (McQuail 1983). Effectively, individual participants' motivations in social presence (e.g., SMBE) are often goal-directed (Osei-Frimpong 2019), which requires a better understanding of the consumer-level drivers and motives of engaging in such practices.

U&G theory has been applied in the context of social media usage research to understand individuals' consumption behaviors (Phua et al. 2017). On this premise, M. L. Khan (2017, p. 238) highlights three important objectives of U&G to include "(1) to explain how people use the media to gratify their needs; (2) to unearth the motives for media use; and (3) to identify the positive and negative consequences of media use". Considering the social and psychological needs to be satisfied by individuals, this study takes a utilitarian view of these behaviors of media gratification. These social and psychological needs include: self-status seeking, social interactions, information seeking, entertainment and convenience motivations (M. L. Khan 2017; Leung 2013).

Essentially, U&G can adequately explain the need fulfillment motives (e.g., self-status seeking) for consumers to use interactive platforms like SMBE. However, its ability to explain the impact of perceived homophily and perceived critical mass is limited. Some critics of this theory argue that consumers are more likely to rely on their habitual patterns when choosing a specific medium rather than by active selection based on their needs (Diddi and LaRose 2006). Further, focusing on consumers' cognitive processes (e.g., audience consumption) and not social processes projects U&G as being too individualistic, hence, limiting its ability to explain social processes of mass communication on platforms such as SMBE (Ruggiero 2000). To address these weaknesses, we use the homophily and critical mass theories to build on the basic tenets of U&G to better clarify the impact of consumers' perceived homophily and perceived critical mass on SMBE respectively. These motivations (sociological and social psychological) are conceptually applicable to how consumers are engaged to participate in a firm's SMBE (Leung 2013). Drawing from past research applications of U&G in social media studies (M. L.

Khan 2017; Plume and Slade 2018), this study takes a different approach to understand how these motivations in engaging with brands on social media are moderated by consumers' values.

2.2 Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)

SMBE is considered an actor-initiated action, which contributes to the firm's activities in promoting their brands to optimize their performance. The extant literature is rife with several definitions of consumer brand engagement. This study adopts Osei-Frimpong and McLean's (2018) definition of SMBE which emphasizes the role of motivational drivers in the interaction between a brand's firm and its consumers. Closely related to this definition, SMBE has been described as consumers' cognitive and emotional involvement as well as behavioral interaction with a brand on its social networking site(s) (Oh et al. 2017). Hollebeek et al. (2014) also affirm consumer brand engagement as a consumer's positive valence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral brand-focused activity related to specific consumer-brand interactions. Similarly, Obilo et al. (2021) consider engagement as a "consumer's positive and negative behavioral interactions with the brand" driven by "multiple high value consumption experiences". These multiple consumption experiences could be driven by the consumers' socio-psychological factors. Hence, on the brand's social networking site, actors are involved in brand-focused activity as part of sharing information, liking, commenting, among others (Osei-Frimpong 2019). This process may be driven by the psychological state of the actor or consumer which can impact on their level of commitment, bonding, and loyalty towards a brand resulting, in further engagement practices (Brodie et al. 2019).

SMBE can be classified into two main dimensions: community engagement and brand engagement (Brodie et al. 2013; Dessart 2017). Community engagement describes consumers' interaction with other consumers in a particular social media community while brand engagement is the interaction between consumers and the brand's focal firm. To form a brand community, a firm typically attracts a critical mass of participating consumers who engage with the firm and the community members frequently (Dokyun Lee et al. 2018). Community engagement has been found to positively affect brand engagement (Wirtz et al. 2013). This gives credence to this study in unraveling the interplay of consumer socio-psychological factors and consumer values in SMBE practices.

Existing research on SMBE suggests that a firm's brand activities on social media can enhance the consumer base of the brand (K. Xie and Lee 2015). It is further established that SMBE potentially increases brand trust (L. Liu et al. 2018) and positively affects consumers' purchase intentions (I. Khan 2022). To enhance their own desired identities, individuals typically commend their preferred brands, support the development of the brands as well as participate in the brands' communities and with other community members (Dessart et al. 2015). Consumers express appreciation for social media brands and engage with the brand communities through behaviors like posting, 'likes', shares and comments (Osei-Frimpong et al. 2020). They also engage with the brand's online communities by visiting groups and interacting within-group applications (Coulter et al. 2012). Research further shows that SMBE depends on the valence of a consumer's post as well as on the specific means by which the post is positive or negative (Yang et al. 2019). Given the behavioral nature of engagement, this could be linked to participants' values. Brodie *et al.* (2011) consider engagement as context-dependent, which suggests that experiences reported extensively in another context might differ from online SMBE. SMBE could be linked to the consumer's self-image, which is partly driven by their sense of belongingness to a particular social group (Hammedi et al. 2015).

Considering the consumer's social and psychological motives as enshrined in the U&G framework, it is envisaged that consumers involvement in such engagement might present with some complexities, and their level of participation might not be uniformly assigned (M. L. Khan 2017). Essentially, in SMBE, consumers' needs, motives, and goals underscore what drives their participation (Osei-Frimpong 2019; Schivinski 2021). In view of this, while engagement behaviors on social media brand pages could promote relationships, participants have the opportunity to engage with the brand, in which case they could consume and comment, like, and share contents with others (Machado et al. 2019; Osei-Frimpong et al. 2020) whereby a high frequency of such actions could indicate high engagement (Coulter et al. 2012; Schaefers et al. 2021). In another vein, consumers' engagement with brands could be associated with their self-concept, which could also be reflected in differential behaviors among individuals (Sprott et al. 2009) resulting from their social connections. This suggests that while individuals may be driven by their social connections with others to participate in SMBE practices with apparel brands, such effects could be shaped by consumer values.

The increasing use of social media offers the firm a good platform to engage with their customers (Dwivedi et al. 2021; Kapoor et al. 2018), which suggests a need to understand consumer-level factors, social and psychological motives that influence SMBE. While we

acknowledge the extensive research conducted in this area, **Table 1** indicates that there exists a knowledge gap in understanding how socio-psychological gratification variables (including self-status seeking, perceived homophily, and critical mass) in SMBE are reinforced/dampened by consumer values. Hence, in contrast to previous studies, this paper sheds light on the socio-psychological behaviors that drive consumer SMBE practices with particular emphasis on consumer values.

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2.3 Perceived Homophily and SMBE

Perceived homophily has been defined as the amount of similarity perceived to be shared by members of a social group (McPherson et al. 2001). This is underpinned by homophily theory that states that individuals tend to interact with others with similar traits, ideas, likes, and dislikes. A natural extension of this theory is that consumers may tend to connect with others on a medium (e.g. SMBE) based on their usual manner of behavior (habit) (Diddi and LaRose 2006; Ladhari et al. 2020). Similarity and homophily have been used interchangeably in the literature, which tend to explain the psychographic traits or demographic characteristics of individuals participating in a social activity (Ladhari et al. 2020). Meyners et al. (2017) consider perceived homophily as multidimensional, which could be objective (e.g., age, gender, income, education, etc.), as well as be subjective (e.g., lifestyles, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc.). This study focused mainly on the subjective dimension of perceived homophily. The assumption is that participants in a social group tend to interact with similar others and are more likely to conform to certain basic dynamics during the SMBE process (i.e., "Birds of a feather flock together") (Gilly et al. 1998; McPherson et al. 2001). Hence, in SMBE, participants' shared interests and values are likely to influence their participation in such brand interactions (Ayeh et al. 2013b). This also suggests that individuals may favor information and experiences shared by others with some perceived similarities as credible with regard to their likes, dislikes, and values (De Bruyn and Lilien 2008; Meyners et al. 2017). This perceived homophily can be visual or psychological, which tends to project some personality traits such as attitudes and beliefs (Nowak 2013).

Nowak (2013) reports a direct relationship between perceived homophily and an individual's increased social presence or social influence. However, the effect of perceived homophily on SMBE is not known, given that the interest of homophily is considered quite recent in the marketing literature (Ladhari et al. 2020). More recently, Meyners et al. (2017) argue that

geographic space (distance) could be a cue for perceived homophily, suggesting that the closer the participants are, the better their understanding of their similarity traits. Leonhardt et al. (2020) contend that homophily fosters trust among participants on social media brand platforms that indirectly drive their surge in seeking brand related information. In their study, De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) found perceived homophily to increase participants' interest in social communications. Further, Ferreira and Zambaldi (2019) found perceived homophily is associated with consumer engagement in brand communities. Given the perceived homophily among consumers (Ayeh et al. 2013b; McPherson et al. 2001), there is a likelihood that their individual motives could be controlled (Ayeh et al. 2013a) in a manner that could influence their desire to actively participate in SMBE. This study proposes that perceived homophily among other participants in social brand networking sites is more likely to influence their SMBE practices. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: Perceived homophily has a significant positive influence on consumers SMBE

2.4 Perceived Critical Mass and SMBE

Given the increasing number of members participating in online social communities, individuals' attitudes, behaviors and values could be influenced by sharing user-generated information with others. Hence, the success of social media use is not only dependent on the user's interest, consumer values, and behaviors towards technology but other users' responses or the reciprocal interdependence of others (Cameron and Webster 2005; Markus 1987; Marwell et al. 1988). Accordingly, a critical mass of interested and resourceful individuals on social networking sites could put their efforts together to induce a collective action (Marwell et al. 1988; Oliver et al. 1985). This increased adoption of social media by many users could be referred to as critical mass (Sledgianowski and Kulviwat 2009). The critical mass theory posits that "once a certain number or proportion of users (critical mass) have been attracted, use should spread rapidly throughout the community" (Markus 1987, p. 500). This suggests that interactive media, including brand social networking sites, become more useful when more people adopt it. From a sociological perspective, Oliver and Marwell (1988, p. 6) note that the issue of critical mass is "whether there is some social mechanism that connects enough people who have the appropriate interests and resources" to act together in the interest of the firm or brand.

Following Sledgianowski and Kulviwat (2009, p. 76), perceived critical mass in the context of

social networking sites is defined as the "point where the adopter perceives that the site has a significant number of members that he or she can associate with". In this vein, the number of users (critical mass) is collectively accountable for generating and sharing information (Rauniar et al. 2014). Accordingly, perceived critical mass is likely to drive a collective behavioral intention of participants on social networking sites including brand platforms. While critical mass is considered as an important factor in predicting communication technology acceptance (Shen et al. 2013), its influence on SMBE remains blurred. However, it is envisaged that when a critical mass of the media is reached, external benefits to participants become apparent (Lin and Lu 2011), which could be linked to their interest in participating in brand engagement practices. Shen et al. (2013) found a significant effect of critical mass on group norm and we-intention in social community participation. From the critical mass theory perspective (Markus 1987), the increased number of users achieved in social groups (e.g., social brand networking sites) is likely to influence consumers' SMBE practices, thus we hypothesize:

H2: Perceived critical mass has a significant positive influence on consumers SMBE

2.5 Self-Status Seeking and SMBE

SMBE platforms offer consumers the opportunity for self-expression and self-presentation which presents an avenue for participants to seek self-status (Plume and Slade 2018). In light of this, consumer integration needs (credibility, status, and feeling) is considered one of the main gratifications for consumers to engage with brands on social media (M. L. Khan 2017), which also seeks to project a certain level of defined social status on the part of the participant. Essentially, consumers participate in social media to either feel good or to impress others (M. L. Khan 2017). As these social interaction platforms present personal motivations in creating an online identity, self-status seeking has been considered a key U&G motivating factor in such practices (Park et al. 2009), and hence, its usefulness in this study.

Consumer motivations for social media use may be akin to gaining a sense of belonging and an opportunity to connect with others (Karikari et al. 2017), which also reflects in their relative level of 'respect and prominence' in such social groupings (Bendersky and Shah 2013). For instance, consumers expressed the importance of 'establishing their personal identity' and 'gaining respect and support' as some of the determinants of their involvement in such SMBE practices (Leung 2013). This suggests personality traits (such as self-status seeking) are key

determining factors that are more likely to influence individuals towards such practices or behaviors (Khan, 2017). The assumption is that consumers are eager to engage with brands on social media platforms to enhance their self-status and be identified with others. Hinging on Leung (2013), this study posits that the more a person seeks self-status, the more likely that self-status seeking will drive their interest toward engaging with brands and others on a brand social networking platform. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: Self-status seeking has a significant positive influence on consumers SMBE

2.6 Moderation Effects of Consumer Values

Values represent a person's desirable goals, which trigger an action (Solomon 2014) and these are portrayed to "serve as adjustive, ego-defensive, knowledge, and self-actualization functions" (Rokeach 1973, p. 25). Effectively, the consideration of what is important to an individual is dependent on a set of consumer values (Sagiv and Schwartz 2000). Values are defined as, "trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group" (Schwartz et al. 2012, p. 664). In effect, values have been conceptualized to explain behaviors and attitudes relative to an individual's decision-making processes (Kahle 1983; Vinson et al. 1977), and these values are distinguished depending on the motivational goal they convey (Schwartz 1994). As a result, while consumers may be influenced by socio-psychological gratification variables to engage in such social media activities, their values could have interaction effects on such influences. For instance, Kahle (1983) developed a nine-item list of values (LOV) that focus on the individual's daily lives, and serve as a guide to understand consumers' actions, behaviors, and responses to certain practices such as SMBE. This nine-item LOV consists of the following: 'sense of belonging', 'excitement', 'warm relationships with others', 'self-fulfillment', 'being well respected', 'fun and enjoyment of life', 'security', 'self-respect', and 'a sense of accomplishment'.

Consumer values are explained as a relatively individual stable factor that interacts with pertinent environmental factors, and shapes a consumer's use of social media (Karikari et al. 2017). Accordingly, Schiffman et al. (2003) allude to the importance of understanding the relationship between consumer values and the use of any complex consumer technology. Hence, taking into account the behavioral nature of SMBE, it could be argued that consumers' interest to participate in this practice may be reinforced or dampened by their individual values. As a point of departure from previous works that have examined consumer values as a predictor of technology use (Schiffman et al. 2003) or online communities and consumer engagement

(Mai and Olsen 2015; Simon and Tossan 2018), this study seeks to establish the interaction/moderation effect of consumer values. In line with Marbach et al. (2019), given the importance of consumer values on human behavior, it could be argued that the strength of the relationship between these socio-psychological variables on SMBE might depend on consumer values.

Consequently, values drive an individual's beliefs, which defines how consumers respond to the social environment or marketing-mix variables (Egri and Ralston 2004), making it interesting to understand how this plays out in the firm's SMBE. Further, given the buzz surrounding SMBE practices from the socio-psychological perspective, could such effects on consumer participation be reinforced or dampened by consumer values? This is not clearly established in the literature. For instance, Simon and Tossan (2018) explain how consumer-brand sharing values serve as social gratification driving consumers engagement with brands on social media platforms. However, its relative interaction effects of the association between socio-psychological gratification variables on SMBE has not yet been established in literature. Accordingly, the interaction effects of consumer values on consumer engagement is theoretically grounded (Marbach et al. 2019), however, such studies are scarce in the literature. While Marbach et al. (2019) studied the moderating effects of personal values on the relationship between personality traits and online consumer behavior, we examine the moderating effects of consumer values on the relationship between socio-psychological factors and SMBE.

Previous studies have argued that Kahle's nine-item list of values scale could have three underlying dimensions (e.g., Kamakura and Novak 1992; C. Xie et al. 2008), in which case, similar or related values are put together under each dimension. Hence, consistent with Kamakura and Novak (1992) and C. Xie et al. (2008), this study adopts the three-dimensional structure of values and labels them; *personal, interpersonal,* and *fun*. The personal dimension pertains to self-directed values and contains values like; self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment, and self-respect. On the other hand, the interpersonal dimension of consumer values focuses more on the interrelations with others. This dimension relates to values like; the sense of belonging, being well respected, security, and warm relationships. The third dimension, fun is intended mainly for amusement, and this relates to values like; excitement, and fun and enjoyment. It is expected that this three-dimensional structure of values could have differing interaction effects on consumer participation behaviors toward SMBE.

Given the conflicting reports in the literature in relation to the effects of consumer values on internet use behaviors (e.g., Karikari et al. 2017; Schiffman et al. 2003), this study posits that consumer values will reinforce the effect of the socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) on SMBE. On this premise, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H4: Personal dimension of consumer values significantly moderates the effects of (a) perceived homophily, (b) perceived critical mass, and (c) self-status seeking on SMBE*

> *H5: Interpersonal dimension of consumer values significantly moderates the effects of (a) perceived homophily, (b) perceived critical mass, and (c) self-status seeking on SMBE*

> *H6: Fun dimension of consumer values significantly moderates the effects of (a) perceived homophily, (b) perceived critical mass, and (c) self-status seeking on SMBE*

2.7 Consequences of SMBE

SMBE could generate compelling interactive experiences with the brand among participants (Mollen and Wilson 2010), which is likely to influence consumers' beliefs and behaviors toward the brand (Chu and Kim 2011). Considering the cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions of brand engagement, consumers are likely to immerse themselves in the engagement process and as a result, strengthen the customer-brand relationship (Trivedi et al. 2018). This could also arouse their interest in the brand and subsequently result in enhancing intention to purchase the brand (Hollebeek et al. 2014; Lu et al. 2016). Lu et al. (2016) define purchase intention as a customer's intention to purchase a particular brand in a marketplace. In line with previous studies (e.g., Osei-Frimpong 2019), we argue that SMBE is likely to result in brand purchase intentions on the part of the consumer in the marketplace. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H7: Social brand engagement practices have a significant positive influence on consumer brand purchase intentions*
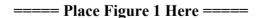
Online SMBE presents several opportunities to the firm in relation to brand performance (Machado et al. 2019). In this study, participant's involvement in SMBE is expected to lead to brand trust and brand purchase intentions. Brand trust has received much attention in research in recent years and particularly with regard to the social and online environment (Laroche et

al. 2013; Dongwon Lee et al. 2015). Trust is considered an important factor influencing consumers' decision to purchase from a brand. In this regard, brand trust could be viewed as an outcome of a successful social media brand engagement practice (Habibi et al. 2014; L. Liu et al. 2018; So et al. 2016). Brand trust is defined as the "willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001 p. 82). SMBE implies a series of interactions among multiple actors, and through this practice, a relationship with the brand is built over time, which is likely to allay consumer doubts and provide further information to enhance trust levels (So et al. 2016).

In a similar vein, it could be argued that enhancing the brand trust levels of consumers is more likely to result in brand purchase behaviors. Previous studies (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Laroche et al. 2013; Dongwon Lee et al. 2015) have conceptualized brand trust as an antecedent to brand loyalty. Lu et al. (2016) note that consumers' participation in social media brand engagement is likely to project some level of trust leading to positive attitudes towards the brand, which could eventually result in high purchase intention behaviors. The general argument is that, while brand trust influences brand loyalty and positive attitudes toward the brand, these could as well result in a brand purchase (Netemeyer et al. 2004). Similarly, Nicolaou and McKnight (2006) found a significant effect of trust on usage intentions. Consequently, the continuous interactions on brands' social media platforms are more likely to build information and trust among participants (So et al. 2016), which in turn could influence consumer behaviors toward brand purchase. Hence, this study posits that building brand trust as a result of SMBE practices is likely to positively enhance consumer brand purchase intention; thus, these hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Social media brand engagement has a significant positive influence on brand trust

H9: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media brand engagement and consumer brand purchase intention

Following the above conceptual model development, we propose our hypothesized research model in Fig. 1 below:

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3.0 METHODOLOGY

An online survey was designed to examine and enhance our understanding of the SMBE phenomenon. Participants following apparel brands on Facebook were selected. Facebook was

selected as our initial search and observation revealed that firms engage, share, and interact brand-related content with their followers on such a platform. Further, it is seen as the "most ubiquitous example of social media" as compared to other platforms (Ferguson et al. 2015, p. 305) where top brands maintain platforms to connect with customers (Dokyun Lee et al. 2018). Furthermore, Facebook supports SMBE by facilitating customers' relationships with others and the brand (Coulter et al. 2012). More so, apparel brands (see **Appendix 2** for examples from Woodin and Nallem) were selected because of their trendy nature and the fact that it aligns well with individual lifestyle and values. In particular, the Ghanaian fashion designs (i.e., made in Ghana fabrics) were selected as they are becoming trendier and popular within the Ghanaian market. Ghana has a collectivist cultural orientation that projects specific ideals that shed light on belongingness and respect for social hierarchies (Osei-Frimpong et al. 2019), which makes it an ideal context to study the socio-psychological process of SMBE. In all, we conveniently selected 1250 consumers who follow and engage with apparel brands from the Ghanaian fashion designs on Facebook in Ghana. The research instrument was pre-tested with 25 respondents prior to the main study. These respondents were drawn from the population defined for the main study. Analysis of the data from the pre-test revealed that all scale items measured well with the corrected item-total correlation of > 0.3, and a Cronbach alpha $\alpha > 0.7$, which suggests the robustness of the scale and justification of their inclusion in the final survey instrument (McLean and Osei-Frimpong 2019).

3.1 Data Collection

Using an online questionnaire, data were collected from respondents with experience in interacting or engaging with apparel brands on Facebook. Following Lin and Lu (2011), we posted messages regarding the online questionnaire on Facebook. Specifically, following Marbach et al. (2019), permission was granted from selected popular Ghanaian fashion apparel brands' Facebook pages to share a link to the questionnaire with relevant information to members on such platforms. In order to avoid replications, respondents' identity was checked when questionnaires were received using their e-mail and Internet Protocol (IP) address. Including an inclusive and exclusive question on the questionnaire, consumers with some experience in following apparel brands on Facebook for a minimum of six months were selected as respondents and interviewed. Respondents' confidentiality was ensured. Out of the 1250 participants that responded to the messages posted on Facebook, 754 qualified respondents completed the questionnaire. Preliminary data screening led to 713 useable

questionnaires, which represents a response rate of 57%. Table 2 presents detailed characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study.

===== **Place Table 2 Here** =====

3.2 Measures

Drawing from the literature, the adapted scale items were slightly modified (but with caution) or developed to fit the study context. In addition, the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (unless specified) that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In particular, Kahle's (1983) list of values (LOV) was adapted by asking respondents to rate how important (1 *"very unimportant"* to 5 *"very important")* each of the following nine LOV elements are in their daily lives in relation to their involvement in SMBE: "(a) sense of belonging, (b) excitement, (c) warm relationships with others, (d) self-fulfillment, (e) being well respected, (f) fun and enjoyment in life, (g) security, (h) self-respect, and (i) a sense of accomplishment". Prior to providing the list of values, this instruction was given: "The following is a list of values or important things that individuals consider in their daily lives. Please study the list carefully and then rate each item on how important it is in your daily life with regard to following brands on social media." Again, drawing from Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018), a five-item scale was adapted to measure SMBE, whereas, Perceived Homophily was measured with a four-item scale adapted from Ayeh et al. (2013a) and Gilly et al. (1998) on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all similar) to 5 (extremely similar). For instance, *considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the other participants*. A four-item scale was drawn from Sledgianowski and Kulviwat (2009) and Rauniar et al. (2014) was adapted to measure Perceived Critical Mass. We developed a four-item scale from M. L. Khan (2017) and Leung (2013) to measure Self-Status Seeking. Also, Brand Trust was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Habibi et al. (2014). Brand Purchase Intention was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Hollebeek et al. (2014) and Lu et al. (2016). **Appendix 1** presents scale items adapted in this study and their factor loadings.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data was initially screened and also performed some preliminary analysis using SPSS 23.0. The preliminary analysis was performed to assess the normality and reliability of the

constructs. The data appeared normal and the various scales recorded a Cronbach alpha > 0.7. Following C. Xie et al. (2008), the list of values were grouped under the three dimensions, namely; *personal* ("self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment, and self-respect"), *interpersonal* ("sense of belonging, being well respected, security, and warm relationships"), and *fun* ("excitement, and fun and enjoyment").

Model Estimation Procedure

As part of measures to ensure robust results, we performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation in principal component analysis given the modifications made in some of the scales. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.852 with a p-value < .0001 for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results also revealed no evidence of cross loading, hence, the items loaded well on their intended constructs. Further, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the model conducted using AMOS 23.0 revealed a reasonably fit to the data ($\chi^2_{(458)}$ = 1084.440 p = .0001, χ^2/df = 2.368; GFI = 0.917; CFI = 0.960; RMSEA = 0.044), and the standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.50 for all items.

In addition, a precaution that was taken to minimize common method bias (CMB) was to reduce item ambiguity by mixing the order of the construct scale items throughout the questionnaire, and as well as using different scale types (Chang et al. 2010). A further test was also conducted in AMOS by introducing a common latent factor to the CFA model by assigning it with all the items of the constructs included in the model. Analysis of the variance revealed an average variance explained of 0.74 with regard to the indicators of the principal constructs as compared to 0.12 in relation to the common latent factor, and in which case they were mainly insignificant. The insignificance of the common latent variance suggest CMB is unlikely to be present in the data (Ranaweera and Jayawardhena 2014). Further, multicollinearity of all the variables was checked using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The results presented a highest VIF value of 1.993, which is below the threshold value of 3 (Hair et al. 2014), hence, the data did not violate the assumption of multicollinearity.

Furthermore, following Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant and convergent validity of the measures were checked. The results presented in Table 3 suggest that convergent validity is satisfied given that the average variance extracted (AVE), as well as construct reliability values, exceeded the threshold values of 0.50 and 0.70 respectively. Further analysis also indicated that discriminant validity of the data was satisfied, given that the AVE values for

each construct were greater than the square of their correlations (Hair et al. 2014). The results also indicated the absence of cross-loadings among the items.

===== **Place Table 3 Here** =====

3.5 Structural Model

The model was first estimated without the moderating variables using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS 23.0 to test hypotheses H1a-c. SEM was chosen given its statistical integrity as compared with other approaches like multiple regression analysis (Byrne 2010). Further, in SEM, all of the relationships in the hypothesised model are tested simultaneously, which adds to the robustness of the results. The goodness-of-fit indices are considered satisfactory ($\chi^2_{(20)}$ = 39.696, p < 0.05, χ^2/df = 1.985, GFI = .988, AGFI = .972, CFI = .989, RMSEA = .037, PCLOSE = .888). The fit indices, GFI, AGFI, CFI values are above the threshold of 0.9, whereas RMSEA is less than 0.08 (Ghosh and Jhamb 2021). Table 4 presents the results of the structural model estimation.

===== **Place Table 4 Here** =====

3.6 Results

In relation to the control variables, age (β = .068, p < .05) and frequency of use (β = .068, p < .05) had significant influence on SMBE as presented in Table 4, suggesting that consumer's age and frequency of use/engagement affect their SMBE practices. However, gender and level of education, do not have any influence on participant's SMBE practices. The results indicate that the socio-psychological gratification variables significantly drive consumers' SMBE practices. Hence, supporting hypotheses H1 (β = .320, p < .0001), H2 (β = .264, p < .0001), and H3 (β = .239, p < .0001) suggest that perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking influence consumers' behaviors toward their participation in SMBE. Further, while SMBE significantly enhances brand trust on the part of the customer (β = .512, p < 0.001), SMBE had no influence on a consumer's intention to purchase the brand (β = .044, p > 0.05), hence, supporting hypothesis H8 while rejecting hypothesis H7. This suggests that SMBE practices are likely to allay any doubts relating to the brand on the part of the customer as they learn from other customers as well as the firm's responses, hence building brand trust.

3.7 Mediation Test

The mediation was tested following Zhao et al. (2010) criteria. Zhao et al. (2010) discount the myths surrounding our understanding of mediation as full, partial, or no mediation. They argue that these classifications are misleading, and further suggest three patterns consistent with mediation to include: complementary mediation, competitive mediation, and indirect-only mediation. Zhao et al. (2010) explain indirect-only mediation as the existence of mediated effect when in actual sense, there is no direct effect. This suggests that the mediation hypothesis will be supported when there is a significant indirect effect. Hence, following Zhao et al. (2010), we focused on the significance of the indirect effect to ascertain whether or not there is a mediated effect of brand trust as specified in hypothesis H9. The mediation test was performed in AMOS 23.0 with a two-tailed significance from 1,000 bootstrapping runs. Further, we calculated the indirect effect by multiplying the standardized direct effect between SMBE and Brand Trust, and the standardized direct effect between Brand Trust and Brand Purchase Intention. From the AMOS output, the standardized lower bound and upper bound indirect effects were $\beta = .344$ and $\beta = .458$ respectively with a significant p-value of 0.001. In supporting hypothesis H9 ($\beta = .396$, $p < 0.001$), the result indicates that brand trust mediates the relationship between SMBE and brand purchase intention.

3.8 Interaction Effects of Consumer Values

The moderation test was conducted hierarchically in AMOS 23.0 following Xanthopoulou et al. (2007). In line with Ranaweera and Jayawardhena (2014) and McLean and Osei-Frimpong (2017), we changed the continuous independent (Perceived Homophily, Perceived Critical Mass, and Self-Status Seeking) and moderating variables (Personal, Interpersonal, and Fun dimensions of Consumer Values) through mean centering. Following this, multiplying the independent variables and the moderating variables using SPSS 23 created the interactive terms. The following interactive terms were created: 'Perceived Homophily X Personal dimension of Consumer Values'; 'Perceived Homophily X Interpersonal dimension of Consumer Values'; 'Perceived Homophily X Fun dimension of Consumer Values'; 'Perceived Critical Mass X Personal dimension of Consumer Values'; 'Perceived Critical Mass X Interpersonal dimension of Consumer Values'; 'Perceived Critical Mass X Fun dimension of Consumer Values'; and 'Self-Status Seeking X Personal dimension of Consumer Values'; Self-Status Seeking X Interpersonal dimension of Consumer Values'; Self-Status Seeking X Fun

dimension of Consumer Values'. The dependent variable (SMBE) was regressed on the independent variables (Perceived Homophily, Perceived Critical Mass and Self-Status Seeking), the moderator (Personal dimension of Consumer Values, Interpersonal dimension of Consumer Values, and Fun dimension of Consumer Values), and the interactive terms. Table 5 presents the detailed moderation results.

<div align="center">===== Place Table 5 Here =====</div>

The results (Table 4, model 3) indicate that the personal dimension of Consumer Values duly positively moderates the significant association between Self-Status Seeking motivation and SMBE ($\beta = .113$, $p < 0.05$). This also suggests that the effect of Self-Status Seeking motivation on consumer participation in SMBE is strengthened or shaped by their self-directed values including self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment, and self-respect, hence, supporting hypothesis H4c as illustrated in Fig. 2.

<div align="center">===== Place Figure 2 Here =====</div>

The interaction effect reported here suggests that personal dimensions of consumer values mainly strengthen the inherent motives of the consumer in establishing their personal identity and gaining respect and support. However, the personal dimension of Consumer Values had no interaction effects on the association between perceived homophily and perceived critical mass and SMBE, hence, rejecting hypotheses H4a and H4b respectively. The lack of interaction effects of the personal dimension of consumer values on perceived critical mass and perceived homophily is, however, quite surprising. The assumption is that values directed at self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment and self-respect, should resonate with others' actions or involvement in SMBE activities. The lack of these interaction effects suggests that while consumers' participation in online activities could be enforced by their values (Schiffman et al. 2003), the motivation of participating in such activities as a result of others is not driven by the personal dimensions of consumer values.

From Table 5 (models 4 & 5), the interpersonal dimension of consumer values strengthened the effects of perceived homophily and perceived critical mass on SMBE. Supporting hypotheses H5a ($\beta = .158$, $p < 0.05$) and H5b ($\beta = .140$, $p < 0.05$) suggest that the interpersonal dimension of consumer values ("sense of belonging, being well respected, security, and warm relationships") shapes their behaviors in participation in SMBE activities. In this case while perceived homophily and perceived critical mass motivate consumers to engage with brands

on social media, such gratifications are strengthened by the individual's sense of belonging, warm relationships, and a feeling of being respected by others on such platforms. The significant interaction effects are illustrated in Fig. 3 and 4 respectively.

===== **Place Figure 3 Here** =====

===== **Place Figure 4 Here** =====

However, hypothesis H5c (β = .290, p > 0.1) was not supported suggesting that the interpersonal dimension of consumer values does not moderate the relationship between self-status seeking and SMBE. The lack of interaction effect of interpersonal dimension of consumer values on self-status seeking is rather unexpected, given that the quest of seeking to belong, and feel respected, should somehow enforce the effect of self-status seeking on SMBE. However, the result suggests that while self-seeking status is driven inherently, such gratification is not driven by consumer values directed at a "sense of belonging, being well respected, security, and warm relationships".

On the other hand, Table 5 (models 7 & 8) indicates that the fun dimension of consumer values ("excitement, and fun and enjoyment") strengthened the effects of perceived homophily and perceived critical mass on SMBE, hence, supporting hypotheses H6a (β = .103, p < 0.05) and H6b (β = .109, p < 0.05). The significant moderation effects as illustrated in Fig. 5 and 6 suggest that consumers' perceived excitement, fun and enjoyment to be derived among persons with similar traits and with several others makes it more interesting for consumers to engage in SMBE activities. On the contrary, the fun dimension of consumer values had no interaction effect on the relationship between self-status seeking and SMBE. The results indicate that as consumers seek to participate in SMBE activities with others, the anticipated excitement, fun and enjoyment propels them to actively engage.

===== **Place Figure 5 Here** =====

===== **Place Figure 6 Here** =====

Post Hoc Analysis

To check whether there are differences in relation to the relationship between SMBE and brand purchase intention, we conducted a post-hoc analysis involving a multi-group analysis of participants' frequency of visit to the brand's social media platform. In this case, the data was

grouped into high/low frequency of visit. Following Karikari et al.'s (2017) procedure, a multi-group analysis was conducted to determine any potential differences between customers with high frequency of visit and those with low frequency of visit to the brand's social media platform on the paths examined in AMOS 23.0. The validity of the model across the frequency of visit groups was supported. However, the analysis indicates differences in the relationship between SMBE and purchase intention. There was a significant relationship between SMBE and purchase intentions for the high frequency of visit group to the brand's social media platform (β = .203, p < 0.001). On the contrary, there was no significant relationship between SMBE and purchase intentions for the low frequency of visit group to the brand's social media platform (β = .033, p > 0.05).

4.0 Discussion

This study proposes an integrated framework of SMBE encompassing consumer values (personal, interpersonal, and fun dimensions), U&G motivation variables, perceived homophily, and perceived critical mass (socio-psychological gratification variables). We develop a framework that draws on sociology and social psychology to identify the role of these variables in SMBE, given that consumers' values guide their actions, interest and behaviors toward these social interactions. This study, therefore, responds to Kapoor et al. (2018) and Karikari et al.'s (2017) call by taking a social behavioral approach to understand participant SMBE practices and its consequences, and therefore, makes a novel contribution to the social media engagement literature.

The findings suggest the essential role of these socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-seeking status) in influencing consumers' behaviors toward SMBE practices. Further, the interaction effects of consumer values (personal dimension, interpersonal dimension, and fun dimension) on the relationship between these socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, critical mass, and self-status seeking) and SMBE added an interesting perspective to the holistic understanding of brand engagement on social media. The results suggest that the effects of perceived homophily and perceived critical mass on SMBE are duly moderated by interpersonal and fun dimensions of consumer values, whereas the personal dimension of values only moderates the effects of self-status seeking on SMBE. This study provides interesting dimensions with regard to SMBE by establishing the moderating effects of

consumer values in a research domain where these variables have mainly been used as antecedents to social media use (e.g., Karikari et al. 2017). Compared with Chu and Kim (2011) and Simon and Tossan (2018), the current work establishes the important roles of motivating variables including perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking on SMBE in consonance with the consumers' values.

Examination of the moderation effects of the personal dimension of values on the gratification variable (self-status seeking) and its association with SMBE revealed a significant interaction effect. In line with Bendersky and Shah (2013) and Plume and Slade (2018), consumers consider 'establishing their personal identity' and self-respect critical in participating in social groups, which aligns well with their individual values (Schwartz et al. 2012). This finding therefore, confirms this assertion and it is strongly argued that self-status seeking motivation effect on SMBE is significantly strengthened by their personal dimension of values. This suggests consumers find it gratifying to participate in SMBE taking into account their level of self-status seeking motivations. On the contrary, interpersonal and fun dimensions of consumer values do not have any moderating effect on the association between self-status seeking and SMBE. Hence, this study establishes that self-status seeking aligns with the personal dimension of consumer values, and hence, deemed as 'self' driven.

Following the assumptions of critical mass theory (Markus 1987), the confirmation of hypotheses H2 suggests that consumers are largely motivated by the greater adoption of participants in online SMBE practices. Similarly, and in line with De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), perceived homophily significantly influenced consumer SMBE practices, suggesting that consumers are driven to such platforms given the similarities they might share with others. Further, such effects are strengthened by consumers' interpersonal and fun dimensions of values. This affirms that while consumers are motivated to participate on such social media platforms when the site is highly patronized by their peers or other users who might share similar traits or characteristics, such behaviors are further strengthened by their values that seek to give them a sense of belonging, excitement, fun and enjoyment, sense of being well respected. This work, therefore, corroborates with Cameron and Webster's (2005) assertion that when a certain number of users are achieved in social groups (e.g., brand social networking sites), member participation in such interactions increases, and this largely attracts more members to the group.

Surprisingly, consumers' SMBE practices had no significant direct effect on their intention to purchase the brand. The lack of a direct effect challenges previous works that have established

a direct relationship between SMBE and brand purchase or usage intentions (e.g., Hollebeek et al. 2014; Osei-Frimpong 2019). Ideally, multiple actor interactions on such platforms should elicit some confidence in the consumer to purchase the brand having followed it on its social media platform. However, this study contends that consumers' SMBE does not necessarily influence their intention to purchase. While this could be attributed to the fact that, purchase behaviors could be influenced by several other factors on the part of the customer, consumers on the other hand may have different interests and motives in following brands on social media. However, a post hoc analysis indicates differences in high and low frequency of visit groups to brand's social media platform in relation to the effect of SMBE on purchase intention. Participants with who frequently engage with the brand on the social media platform tend to be more inclined to purchasing the brand as compared to participants with low frequency of visit. The results of the post hoc analysis affirm Schaefers et al.'s (2021) findings that suggest that participants who were more active on the brand's social media platform tend to exhibit higher purchase intentions.

Although there is a lack of direct effect between SMBE and brand purchase intention, the new information acquired and learned experiences shared on such platforms builds brand trust on the part of the consumer. The results indicate a significant relationship between SMBE and brand trust. The general assumption is that brand trust is related to consumer-shared beliefs that align their perceptions toward the reliability of the brand. Consequently, the shared information and experiences on the brand social networking site are likely to project a positive image that influence the participants' cognitive beliefs about the accuracy and completeness of the information provided, which builds consumer trust towards the brand. While there is lack of direct effect between SMBE and brand purchase intention, the findings establish an indirect significant effect through brand trust. Accordingly, while consumers keep engaging with brands on social media platforms, the trust that is built eventually result in purchase behaviors.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, our conceptualization integrates the socio-psychological gratification variables and moderating effects of consumer values to make a significant contribution to the SMBE literature. The current work sheds light on what drives consumers to engage with brands on social media. Thus, from a social behavioral

perspective, this paper extends on Karikari et al. (2017) and Dolan et al. (2019), by examining the socio-psychological gratification variables that drive SMBE practices and how these are strengthened by consumer values. This study brings to light constructs drawn from sociology (critical mass), and social psychology (self-status seeking, perceived homophily, consumer values), and has established how these drive SMBE (from the digital marketing perspective). Responding to Kapoor et al. (2018) and Dwivedi et al. (2021), we contribute to existing knowledge of the interplay of these socio-psychological factors and consumer values on SMBE, which is understudied in the social media literature.

Second, we make a major theoretical contribution to the existing U&G and SMBE literature. A new dimension of social media research is presented by utilizing uses and gratifications theory, critical mass theory, and perceived homophily theory in our conceptualization. To address the limitations of U&G in explaining the social motivations of consumers' SMBE practices (Ruggiero 2000), this study draws on the assumptions of critical mass theory and perceived homophily theory. This approach, therefore, gives a holistic explanation of the social processes of mass communication in social networks such as SMBE activities. For instance, a collective action is induced by a critical mass of interested and resourceful individuals in social networking (Marwell et al. 1988), which serves as a motivation to connect enough people to act together in the interest of the brand. Extending on M. L. Khan (2017), Phua et al. (2017) and Morgan-Thomas et al. (2020), this study has established that perceived critical mass and perceived homophily are gratification variables that drive consumers to engage with brands on social medial platforms.

Third, this study established the interplay of perceived critical mass, perceived homophily, and consumer values in driving the participation in SMBE practices. Among the three dimensions of consumer values (C. Xie et al. 2008), interpersonal and fun dimensions stirred up the effects of perceived homophily and perceived critical mass on SMBE. However, the personal dimension ("self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment, and self-respect") had no interaction effect. This suggests that the influence of critical mass and perceived homophily on consumer participation in SMBE practices align well with the interpersonal and fun dimensions of consumer values, which are deemed as 'other' and 'fun' driven. Hence, consumers respond to brand sites by engaging and sharing information with similar others to satisfy their sense of belonging, excitement, fun and enjoyment etc. This study has teased out the different dimensions of consumer values (C. Xie et al. 2008) and established that gratifications that are self-driven or inherent are shaped by the personal dimensions of values, whereas gratifications

that are externally driven are shaped by the interpersonal and fun dimensions. This contributes to the inconclusive research results on the effects of consumer values on internet use behaviors. Additionally, this study is among the very limited studies (e.g., Marbach et al. 2019) that have examined the interaction effect of consumer values on SMBE and differentiates if from previous works that have largely examined personal values as antecedents. Our conceptualization in this study has demonstrated that different dimensions of consumer values exert different interaction effects on consumer behavior towards SMBE practices. Hence, in response to Marbach et al. (2019), this study has established how consumer values interact with their socio-psychological factors to influence brand engagement practices on social media.

Fourth, this study argues that participation in SMBE practices would rather influence building consumer-brand trust, and therefore, indirectly influence their purchase intentions. It also argues that consumer SMBE practices do not necessarily or directly drive consumer purchase intentions. Hence, the findings presented in this study indicate the important mediating role of brand trust between SMBE and brand purchase intention. The confirmation of brand trust as a mediating variable (between SMBE and brand purchase intention) is theoretically meaningful given that higher brand engagement or interactions with actors is more likely to build trust in the relationship (So et al. 2016), and consequently result in enhancing consumer behaviors such as intentions to purchase the brand. Further, our post hoc analysis adds to the discourse on the effects of volume and frequency of engagement with brands on social media platforms on brand outcome behaviors. Therefore, while it is important to increase traffic on such platforms, the frequency of engagement is particularly important.

Finally, this study takes a social behavioral approach to explain the interplay of gratification factors and values which drive participants' involvement in SMBE and its consequences which is under-researched in social media marketing literature. Here, examining the interplay of socio-psychological variables and consumer values shed new insights into our understanding of consumer social media brand engagement practices.

4.2 Practical Implications

In addition to providing significant theoretical contributions, this study also suggests some implications for practice or managers.

For instance, Kahle (1983) nine-item list of values (LOV) adopted in this study focus on the

individual's daily lives, which seek to project the consumers' actions, behaviors, and attitudes toward certain practices such as SMBE practices. This suggests that managers within the apparel industry could engage in social media communication practices that appear to be linked to the consumers' values and will be of interest to their shared needs and beliefs. For instance, managers should adopt creative strategies to attract the attention of social media users by sharing interesting messages, videos, and pictures regarding their apparel brands in order to ignite reactions and active interactions from followers. When creating such communication contents, managers must consider trending issues that could excite and drive traffic to their platform. They must also consider the sentiments of their target demographic audience they look to engage through their communications on social media. This is important because the brand's position on important issues and what they state to be doing about it will likely affect consumers' perception about the brand.

Further, in relation to the influence of perceived homophily on SMBE, managers should project cues that would cultivate a sense of perceived similarity with participants on such platforms. In line with Ayeh et al. (2013a), managers could also segment their users based on their perceived homophily or similarity that aligns with user expectations to encourage increased engagement. Accordingly, apparel firms can also improve the level of consumer engagement with their brand by carefully selecting appropriate social media influencers to associate with and benefit from their large followers with shared similarities. Further, as managers of brands, it is important to target the appropriate consumer groups by creating appropriate content on the platforms they are most likely to engage with their peers. For example, brand channels and videos about toys get the most subscriptions, likes and comments when hosted on YouTube (kids). Pages for apparel brands for matured consumers will likely get more engagement on Facebook while brands for millennials will attract more engagement on Instagram. Managers must always scan the social media landscape for new trends among specific target audiences that share similar needs.

In addition, brand stories or comments from the firm should be well-coordinated and align well with positive experiences shared by other consumers. It is therefore imperative that managers of apparel brands following the assumptions of critical mass should adopt strategies that could drive traffic to their brand social media platforms. For example, in benefiting from a collective action induced by a critical mass of interested and resourceful individuals (Oliver and Marwell 1988), managers should encourage consumers to share rich content (images, videos) of themselves in the brand's apparel which can be shared as an official post by the brand through

their official branded social accounts. Such user-generated content helps to increase the value and relevance of the content as it is likely to appeal directly to other followers drawing on the importance of critical mass. In addition, active user engagement is critical as this could project the image of an active audience (M. L. Khan 2017). Further, brand managers should bring diversity and interest on their social media platforms to stir up frequency of visit and continuous engagement. In this instance, a fair mix of firm-generated contents and user generated contents should equally be encouraged and driven.

Additionally, in an attempt to drive traffic to their brand's social networking site, managers should create the awareness of their social media handles in all their communication platforms develop stimulating content to attract more people to their sites. Further, engagement should be continuous, fun, and exciting as part of their marketing efforts, and here firms could organize an interesting contest on their brand pages to drive traffic and interest of the participants. Given the potential it presents in building brand trust, firms are encouraged to use social media platforms to engage actively with customers and prospective customers, responding to each consumer comment in a personal manner in context of the conversation, not only does such action enhance engagement but also increases the long-form nature of the post's thread and increases brand exposure. Consequently, the social media brand engagement (reviews, likes and comments) of a consumer's peers would be more likely to stimulate trust than those on the retailer's website. This is partly due to perceived homophily as well as familiarity with the individual posting the comment. Essentially, managers should pay more attention to participants' views or opinions and respond in a manner that would enhance users' experiences on such platforms to contribute to the building of brand trust.

Furthermore, the results also suggest a managerial implication for the developers of social media platforms to facilitate how easily brand firms can customize their pages to attract SMBE from various target groups. The essence of social media is to facilitate easy accessibility for all users to communicate on a common service domain. This may limit the ability of brand firms to customize their communication contents to suit different consumer groups with common interests and motivations for brand engagement. However, the social media platform, though common to everyone should be designed to support the consumer brand engagement needs of firms. Currently, firms utilize functions like brand groups on social media platforms. Similar functionalities must be developed for the purposes of driving SMBE. This is a challenge for social media software developers to meet as the demand from firms to customize their activities to stimulate consumer brand engagement increases.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides important insights into SMBE, this study has some limitations. The study employed a cross-sectional research approach that could likely present some limitations in fully understanding the effects of consumer values in our model, making it difficult to draw conclusions about causality. More importantly, with regard to the non-significant relationship between SMBE and purchase intentions, further research is encouraged in this endeavor to help explain the non-significant direct relationship established in this study. Hence, further research is encouraged using a more conclusive research design to help explain the non-significant association between SMBE and purchase intention. Further research is also encouraged to examine the interplay of the socio-psychological variables and consumer values, in particular, to help explain the observed variations in the interaction effects of the three dimensions of consumer values (personal, interpersonal and fun) on SMBE, which in turn could present more insights to extend on our current work. Further, while we focused on the subjective dimension of perceived homophily in this study, future research could compare the effects reported here to the objective dimension of homophily.

While this study mainly focused on Facebook brand pages of apparel brands, future works could examine these dynamics on various social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram etc.) and compare the effects. Also, future research could extend our study by examining what drives consumers' continuous participation in SMBE. In such studies, it will be interesting to examine the moderation effects of specific brand characteristics or categories (e.g., status brands vs. utilitarian brands, local brands vs. global brands, etc.), creative strategies of the firm through firm-generated contents, as well as other market characteristics on SMBE. Future studies could explore outcomes of SMBE such as; enhancing consumer-based brand equity, reducing the risk of churn, creating brand ambassadors, subjective wellbeing (on the part of the customer), etc. In addition to the socio-psychological factors examined, future research could focus on how platform identification, sense of belonging, and personality trait constructs could drive their engagement practices. Further, it will be interesting to learn how firms could integrate artificial intelligence in their social media marketing activities to better understand consumers' responses, and content interactions, and how these could stir up their socio-psychological motivations in continuous engagement practices.

Finally, this study assumed the utilitarian view of these behaviors of media gratification. This limits the scope of the study as it does not consider the hedonic and social benefits of participating in such practices. Future research is encouraged to examine the interplay of these

socio-psychological variables and consumer values from the hedonic and social benefit perspectives.

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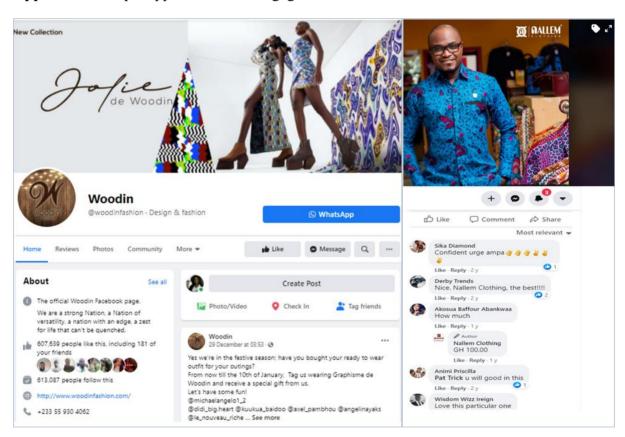
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Appendix 1 Scale Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Perceived Homophily (Ayeh et al. 2013a; Gilly et al. 1998)		**0.861**	**0.675**
Considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the other participants on the brand's social media platform?	0.814		
Considering your brand experiences on the social media platform, how similar are you and the other participants?	0.821		
Considering your viewpoints on the brand's social media platform, how similar are you and the other participants?	0.905		
Considering your outlook on values, how similar are you and the other participants on the brand's social media platform?	0.730		
Social Brand Engagement (Osei-Frimpong and McLean 2018)		**0.927**	**0.717**
I follow apparel brands using social media	0.777		
I participate in the apparel brands' activities on social media	0.899		
I participate in the brand activities on social media to enable me share my experiences with others	0.859		
I participate in the brand activities on social media to enable me reach personal goals	0.893		
I participate in the brand activities on social media due to the emotional attachment I have for the brand	0.798		
Self-Status Seeking (M. L. Khan 2017; Leung 2013)		**0.946**	**0.816**
To impress others	0.917		
To feel important	0.948		
To establish my personal identity	0.896		
To gain respect and support	0.849		
Perceived Critical Mass (Rauniar et al. 2014; Sledgianowski and Kulviwat 2009)		**0.830**	**0.551**
A good number of my friends participate in brand activities on social media	0.794		
Many people I interact with participate in brand interactions on social media	0.706		
People I know participating in social brand activities will continue to do it in the future	0.759		
Participating in online social brand activities is popular among my friends	0.706		
Consumer Values (Kahle 1983; Karikari et al. 2017; C. Xie et al. 2008)			
Personal Dimension of Consumer Values		**0.906**	**0.764**
Self-fulfilment	0.846		
Sense of accomplishment	0.947		
Self-respect	0.824		
Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values			
Sense of belonging	0.739	**0.886**	**0.662**
Being well respected	0.911		
Security	0.876		
Warm relationships	0.711		
Fun Dimension of Consumer Values		**0.892**	**0.804**
Excitement	0.923		
Fun and enjoyment	0.870		
Brand Trust (Habibi et al. 2014)		**0.815**	**0.595**
This is an honest brand	0.822		
I trust this brand	0.750		
This brand is safe	0.740		

		0.866	0.620
Brand Purchase Intention (Hollebeek et al. 2014; Lu et al. 2016)			
I am likely to purchase brand X following my engagement with the brand	0.693		
Even if another brand has the same features as brand X, I would prefer to purchase brand X	0.852		
If there is another brand as good as brand X, I prefer to purchase brand X because of my experience with brand X	0.888		
If another brand is not different from brand X in any way, it seems smarter to purchase brand X because of my knowledge on the brand	0.698		

Appendix 2 Sample apparel and user engagement on Facebook

(Left) Example of an apparel brand's Facebook Page (Woodin). (Right) Example of an apparel firm's post and subsequent user engagement with that post (Nallem). Example is not necessarily from our data.

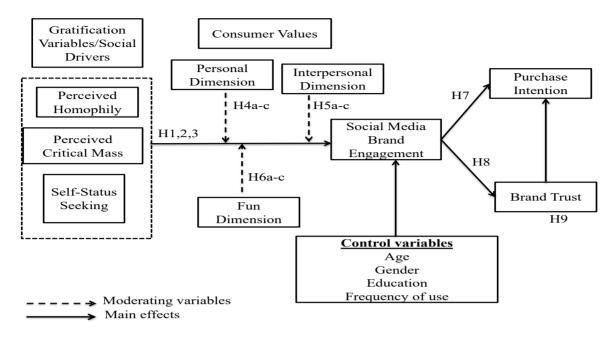## FIGURES

Figure 1: Hypothesised Model

Figure 2: Moderation effect of Personal Dimension of Consumer Values (PCV) on the Relationship Between Self-Status Seeking (SSS) and Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)
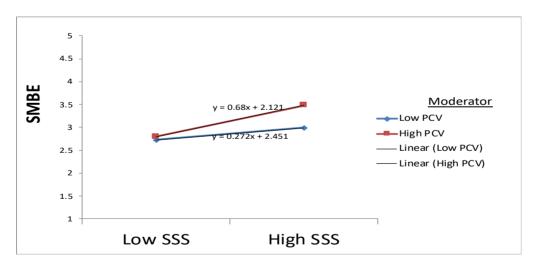
Figure 3: Moderation effect of Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV) on the Relationship Between Perceived Homophily (PH) and Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)
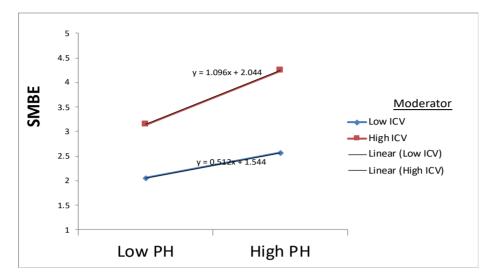

Figure 4: Moderation effect of Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV) on the Relationship Between Perceived Critical Mass (PCM) and Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)
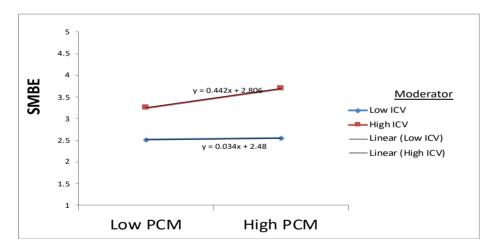
Figure 5: Moderation effect of Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV) on the Relationship Between Perceived Homophily (PH) and Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)
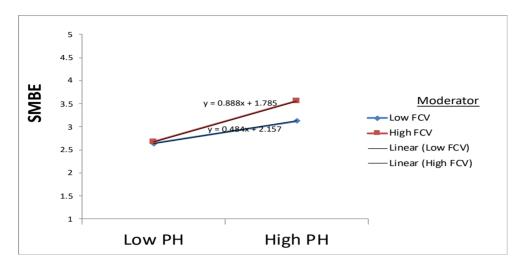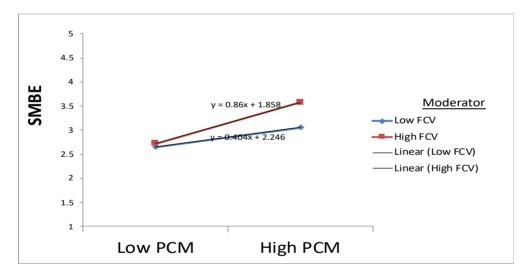

Figure 6: Moderation effect of Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV) on the Relationship Between Perceived Critical Mass (PCM) and Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)

TABLES

Table 1 Stream of research on consumer social media brand engagement

Reference	Construct	Research type	Antecedents	Moderators	Key findings
This study	Social media brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Perceived subjective homophily, critical mass, self-status seeking	Consumer values (personal, interpersonal, and fun dimensions of consumer values)	The findings suggest a significant influence of the socio-psychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, self-status seeking) on SMBE. The findings also indicate interpersonal and fun dimensions of consumer values duly moderate perceived homophily and perceived critical mass – SMBE association, whereas, personal dimension of consumer values only moderates self-status seeking – SMBE association. SMBE had no significant direct effect on brand purchase intention. However, brand trust mediates the relationship between SMBE and brand purchase intention.
Wongsansukch aroen (2022)	Customer engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Community relationship management, relationship marketing orientation	N/A	The researcher found that community relationship management and relationship marketing orientation's key success factors indirectly affected brand loyalty by mediating customer engagement and brand trust.
Lim et al. (2022)	Customer engagement	Literature review	N/A	N/A	Based on a combination of bibliometric and thematic analyses of 861 customer engagement articles published in 377 Scopus-indexed journals between 2006 and 2020, this study shows the major trends in article, author, country, and journal performance, as well as the past, present, and future thematic trends of customer engagement research.
Cheung et al. (2021)	Customer brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	consumer-consumer interaction and consumer-brand interaction	N/A	The findings demonstrate the importance of two forms of consumer participation (i.e. consumer-consumer interaction and consumer-brand interaction) in strengthening the consumer brand engagement dimensions. Whereby cognitive engagement is an influential driver of consumers' ongoing search behavior, while emotional engagement and behavioral engagement are significant predictors of the repurchase intention of consumers.
X. Liu et al. (2021)	Customer engagement	Empirical (big data analytics)	Luxury brand's social media marketing	N/A	Based on the analysis of big data retrieved from a 60-month period on Twitter (July 2012 to June 2017) (3.78 million tweets from the top 15 luxury brands) the researchers found that entertainment, interaction, and trendiness dimensions of a luxury brand's social media marketing efforts significantly drives customer engagement. On the other hand, the customization dimension does not significantly increase customer engagement.
Obilo et al. (2021)	Consumer brand engagement	Empirical (Survey design)	Involvement	N/A	The researchers found that the consumer brand engagement (CBE) scale developed by Hollybeek et al. 2014, though reliable and valid as an instrument, did not truly capture the engagement concept. They further introduce and validate a new instrument for measuring the engagement concept.

Schivinski (2021)	Consumer brand engagement	Empirical (Predictive modelling)	Five rules related to the low, medium, and high levels of consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related social media content	N/A	The study results revealed 5 different cognitive patterns (rules) that drive brand-related social media engagement. Each rule was made up of behavioural engagement discriminating low, medium, and high levels of consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related social media content. The rules were used to portrait five subtypes of consumers based on their social media behaviour.
Schaefers et al. (2021)	Social media brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	N/A	N/A	The findings show that as the positive impact of engagement behaviour on brand outcomes declines at higher engagement levels, marginal utility of engagement volume diminishes. The diminishing returns on engagement volume is attenuated by the variation across performed activities. The findings further suggest that to maximize brand performance on social media platforms, companies should also encourage engagement variety.
Z. Wang (2021)	Consumer brand engagement	Empirical (survey based)	Brand page post characteristics and perceived content	N/A	The study suggests that brand page post characteristics and consumers' perceived content positively affect attitudes and engagement. The findings also validate and apply consumer brand engagement in the context of social media brand pages with multiple brands.
Bazi et al. (2020)	Customer engagement	Empirical (interview based)	Brand news, post quality, and celebrity endorsement, brand love, brand ethereality, entertainment, design appeal, actual self-congruency, status signalling, enhance and maintain face, perceived brand quality, ease of use and convenience	N/A	The researchers developed a theoretical framework for the motivations of customers' cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement with luxury brands. The study identified 13 motivations for customers to engage with luxury brands on social media. The motivations are grouped into six macro-dimensions: perceived content relevancy (brand news, post quality, and celebrity endorsement), brand-customer relationship (brand love, and brand ethereality), hedonic (entertainment), aesthetic (design appeal), socio-psychological (actual self-congruency, status signalling, and enhance and maintain face), brand equity (perceived brand quality), and technology factors (ease of use and convenience).
Chahal et al. (2020)	Social media brand engagement	Empirical (Survey design)	social, user-based and firm-generated factors	N/A	The findings of the study suggest that SMBE is a multidimensional construct which comprise of (a) utilitarian, (b) hedonic, and (c) social dimensions. The study further identified the following antecedents of SMBE (a) social factors (social identity and tie-strength), (b) user-based factors (service, product and price information, hedonic motives, and prior experience with SM), and (c) firm-generated information (personalized advertising, mass advertising, promotional offers, and price information). SMBE had a positive effect on brand equity.
Osei-Frimpong et al. (2020)	Social media brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Consumer brand knowledge, Perceived social pressure, and brand trust	Perceived social relatedness	The findings reveal a significant relationship between the examined antecedents (brand knowledge, perceived social pressure and brand trust) and SMBE. Examination of the moderation role of PSR revealed significant interaction effects on the relationship between brand knowledge and SMBE, as well as perceived social pressure and SMBE. The findings also suggest a lack of interaction effect of PSR on the relationship between brand trust and SMBE.

Morgan-Thomas et al. (2020)	Consumer Engagement	Exploratory design with qualitative data	N/A	N/A	The findings show how the digital materiality of the engagement ecosystem generates new kinds of engagement practices including uncovering, appropriating, and cultivating. The paper gives theoretical insights into the status of digital technologies in consumer engagement.
T. Wang and Lee (2020)	Customer engagement		Advice seeking, self-image expression, fashion involvement	N/A	The findings show that advice seeking, and self-image expression positively impact behavioral customer engagement dimensions. The effect of fashion involvement is salient only when gender difference is integrated. Brand intimacy was found to be affected by the three dimensions of customer engagement (consumption, contribution and creation) to varying degrees.
Gómez et al. (2019)	Social media brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Social media brand involvement, social media brand communication	N/A	The findings show that the influence of social media brand involvement on social media brand engagement is stronger than the influence of social media brand communication. The findings further show that, interaction and attention are the most relevant components of social media brand engagement, followed by enthusiasm, identification, and absorption.
Machado et al. (2019)	Consumer-based brand equity; customer engagement		Brand gender (Masculine brand personality trait, and feminine brand personality trait)	N/A	The study results suggest that brand gender has an indirect effect on consumer-based brand equity through consumer engagement on brand Facebook pages and brand love.
Marbach et al. (2019)	Consumer engagement in online brand communities	Empirical (quantitative survey design)	Personality traits (extraversion, openness, altruism)	Personal values (conservation and self-enhancement)	The findings indicate that three personality traits (extraversion, openness, and altruism|) positively influenced online consumer engagement (OCE), whereas perceived value (social value and aesthetic value were found to be outcomes of OCE. The personal values of conservation and self-enhancement moderate the relationships between the three identified personality traits and OCE
Simon and Tossan (2018)	Customer engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Brand-consumer social sharing value (comprising of brand intimacy, brand individual recognition, brand influence, and brand community belonging), satisfaction, brand gratitude	N/A	The study conceptualizes and validates a scale for the construct brand-consumer social sharing value. The study further established that satisfaction and brand gratitude, seen as media-driven variables, mediate the impact of Brand-Consumer Social Sharing Value on virtual media engagement.
Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018)	Social brand engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Social presence	Firm-generated content, consumer commitment	Firm-generated content and consumer commitment duly moderated the relationship between social presence and social brand engagement
M. L. Khan (2017)	Social media engagement	Empirical (survey design)	Seeking information, giving information, self-status seeking, social interaction, relaxing entertainment (U&G)	N/A	Drawing from the U&G framework, consumers or users of social media have multiple motivations to use YouTube among different types of users.

Oh et al. (2017)	Consumer engagement behavior in social media	Empirical (web scraping)	Personal and interactive consumer engagement behaviors	N/A	There exists a significant positive correlation between consumer engagement behavior (CEB) and gross revenue. The findings show that CEB in social media significantly affects economic performance.
Phua et al. (2017)	Consumer brand engagement on social networking sites	Empirical (survey design)	Most frequently used social network site	Attention to social comparison, SNS trust, tie strength, and homophily	Based on the uses and gratifications theory (UGT), the study investigates how the frequent use of four SNS influences various brand community-related outcomes. The findings further suggest that attention to social comparison, SNS trust, tie strength, and homophily had a significant moderation effect on the relationship between frequent use of each SNS to follow brands, and brand community-related outcomes.
Mai and Olsen (2015)	Consumer participation in virtual communities	Empirical (survey design)	Resultant conservation value dimension and extraversion. Attitude as a mediator	N/A	Applying and extending on the value-attitude-behavior (VAB) model, the resultant conservation value dimension had an indirect effect on participation in virtual communities through attitude. On the contrary, extraversion had a direct effect on consumer participation in virtual communities but not effect on attitude.
Dessart et al. (2015)	Consumer engagement in online brand communities	Empirical (qualitative content analysis)	Customer engagement in online brand communities	N/A	Identifies the three key engagement dimensions to be cognition, affect and behaviors. To develop their own personal identities, individuals engage in online communities in social network platforms with other individuals and brands.
Ashley and Tuten (2015)	Social media marketing and customer engagement	Empirical (qualitative content analysis)	Creative Strategies/appeals, channels	N/A	Creative strategies (experiential, exclusivity, image) are associated with customer engagement. Also, frequent updates and incentives are considered essential for customer participation
Hollebeek et al. (2014)	Consumer brand engagement in social media	Empirical (mixed methods)	Consumer involvement	N/A	Consumer brand 'involvement' acts as a CBE antecedent, consumer 'self-brand connection' and 'brand usage intent' represent key CBE consequences
Habibi et al. (2014)	Brand community engagement	Empirical (netnography)	Dimensions of social media brand communities	N/A	The study utilizes online data to explore the existence of social media brand communities. Five unique and relevant dimensions of social media brand communities were identified and discussed: social context, structure, scale, content, and storytelling as well as myriads of sub-brand communities.

Table 2 Characteristics of respondents

Respondent Characteristics	Frequency (n)	%
Gender		
Male	342	48.0
Female	371	52.0
Age (in years)		
20 – 29	276	38.7
30 – 39	216	30.3
40 – 49	134	18.8
50 – 59	87	12.2
Education		
Senior High School	86	12.1
Higher National Diploma	95	13.3
Professional Qualification (e.g., ACCA, CIM, etc.)	116	16.3
Bachelor's Degree	276	38.7
Post-graduate Qualification	140	19.6
Frequency of visit to brand social networking page		
Multiple times daily	305	42.8
Once-daily	131	18.4
Multiple times weekly	107	15.0
Once weekly	102	14.3
At least once a month	68	9.5

Table 3 Validity and construct reliability measures

	CR	AVE	BPI	PH	CMA	SES	FCV	PCV	ICV	SMBE	BT
Brand Purchase Intention (BPI)	0.866	0.620	**0.788**								
Perceived Homophily (PH)	0.861	0.675	0.155	**0.822**							
Perceived Critical Mass (PCM)	0.830	0.551	0.184	0.545	**0.742**						
Self-Seeking Status (SSS)	0.946	0.816	0.015	0.454	0.525	**0.816**					
Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV)	0.892	0.804	0.009	0.012	0.034	0.007	**0.897**				
Personal Dimension of Consumer Values (PCV)	0.906	0.764	0.534	0.177	0.218	0.023	-0.011	**0.874**			
Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV)	0.886	0.662	0.015	0.025	-0.016	0.005	-0.051	0.031	**0.814**		
Social Media Brand Engagement (SMBE)	0.927	0.717	0.178	0.348	0.281	0.169	-0.014	0.505	-0.046	**0.847**	
Brand Trust (BT)	0.815	0.595	0.682	0.207	0.272	0.045	0.055	0.573	-0.011	0.217	**0.771**

CR – Construct Reliability; AVE – Average Variance Extracted

Table 4 Structural parameter relationships

Paths	Standardized coefficients			
	β	t-value	R^2	Test Result
Perceived Homophily →Social Media Brand Engagement (H1)	.320***	7.304	0.192	Support
Perceived Critical Mass →Social Media Brand Engagement (H2)	.264***	5.533		Support
Self-Status Seeking →Social Media Brand Engagement (H3)	.239***	5.626		Support
Social Media Brand Engagement → Purchase Intention (H7)	.044ns	0.902	0.578	Reject
Social Media Brand Engagement →Brand Trust (H8)	.512***	15.865		Support
Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	.773***	26.296		
Control variables				
Age → Social Media Brand Engagement	.068**	2.019		
Gender→ Social Media Brand Engagement	-.004ns	-.110		
Education→ Social Media Brand Engagement	-.036ns	-1.069		
Frequency of visit→ Social Media Brand Engagement	.076**	2.122		

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.05$, ns – non-significant; β – Standardized Path Coefficient*

Table 5 Moderation results

Path	γ	t-value	β	R^2
Model 1:				
Perceived Homophily → SMBE	.042	0.240	.047ns	.170
Personal Dimension of Consumer Values (PCV) → SMBE	-.317	1.788	-.232ns	
Perceived Homophily X PCV → SMBE (H4a)	.018	1.439	.341ns	
Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 73.595, p < 0.05, GFI = .984, AGFI = .968, CFI = .989, RMSEA = .040				
Model 2:				
Perceived Critical Mass → SMBE	.320	1.649	.318ns	.167
Personal Dimension of Consumer Values (PCV) → SMBE	-.006	-0.028	.004ns	
Perceived Critical Mass X PCV → SMBE (H4b)	-.021	-0.335	-.080ns	
Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 61.310, p < 0.05, GFI = .981, AGFI = .962, CFI = .987, RMSEA = .034				
Model 3:				
Self-Status Seeking → SMBE	.238	2.745	.318**	.290
Personal Dimension of Consumer Values (PCV) → SMBE	.141	2.048	.195**	
Self-Status Seeking X PCV → SMBE (H4c)	.102	2.158	.113**	
Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 55.506, p < 0.05, GFI = .986, AGFI = .972, CFI = .992, RMSEA = .030				
Model 4:				
Perceived Homophily → SMBE	.402	2.870	.456**	.357
Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV) → SMBE	.688	5.646	.581***	
Perceived Homophily X ICV → SMBE (H5a)	.146	2.182	.158**	
Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 67.873, p < 0.05, GFI = .979, AGFI = .959, CFI = .984, RMSEA = .037				
Model 5:				
Perceived Critical Mass → SMBE	.119	2.107	.129**	.335
Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV) → SMBE	.469	3.211	.402**	
Perceived Critical Mass X ICV → SMBE (H5b)	.102	2.583	.140**	
Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 58.602, p < 0.05, GFI = .982, AGFI = .964, CFI = .985, RMSEA = .032				

Model 6:

Self-Status Seeking → SMBE	-.278	-2.586	-.396**	.365
Interpersonal Dimension of Consumer Values (ICV) → SMBE	.413	4.611	.346***	
Self-Status Seeking X FDCV → SMBE (H5c)	.049	1.723	.290ns	

Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(23)}$ = 46.826, $p < 0.05$, GFI = .985, AGFI = .971, CFI = .989, RMSEA = .038

Model 7:

Perceived Homophily → SMBE	.343	2.167	.388**	.165
Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV) → SMBE	.117	2.122	.115**	
Perceived Homophily X FCV → SMBE (H6a)	.101	2.410	.103**	

Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 91.777, $p < 0.05$, GFI = .978, AGFI = .958, CFI = .987, RMSEA = .049

Model 8:

Perceived Critical Mass → SMBE	.316	3.566	.315***	.166
Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV) → SMBE	.148	2.048	.157**	
Perceived Critical Mass X FCV → SMBE (H6b)	.114	2.274	.109**	

Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 53.343, $p < 0.05$, GFI = .986, AGFI = .974, CFI = .996, RMSEA = .028

Model 9:

Self-Status Seeking → SMBE	.101	0.729	.134ns	.305
Fun Dimension of Consumer Values (FCV) → SMBE	.160	1.506	.131ns	
Self-Status Seeking X FCV → SMBE (H6c)	-.071	-1.884	-.199ns	

Model fit indices: $\chi^2_{(34)}$ = 53.343, $p < 0.05$, GFI = .986, AGFI = .974, CFI = .996, RMSEA = .028

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.05$, ns – non-significant; γ – Unstandardized Path Coefficient; β – Standardized Path Coefficient**