

BRAND-RELATED CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA: CONSUMERS AS SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

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SUMMARY

Consumers are increasingly relying on social media to recommend brands to their peers. Consumers produce and upload brand-related content (BRC) to their social media profiles, *acting as social media influencers* (SMIs) when they recommend brands in their content. While consumers differ fundamentally in their motivations for producing and uploading BRC to their social media profiles, many marketing managers do not distinguish between different consumer types on social media, opting for a one-size-fits all approach. Hence, marketing managers lack an understanding of how to use these SMIs' full potential. We develop a framework that shows that consumers are motivated either by intrinsic or extrinsic motivations to produce and upload brand-related content. Moreover, our framework shows that brand-related communication is either brand-focused or passion-focused.

We propose that there are four brand-related consumer types on social media: (1) Brand Opportunists, (2) Brand Adventurers, (3) Brand Referees, and (4) Brand Emotionalists. Marketing managers can turn their consumers into SMIs by presenting their brands as (1) *rewarding*, (2) *relevant*, (3) *easy*, and (4) *unique* or *correct* to experience and interact with.

Additional Notes

This booklet is based on chapter three of Gross's (2020) PhD thesis "*Thumbs up for brands: Influencer marketing in the era of social media.*" We refer the reader to Gross (2020) for a more detailed exposition of this booklet.

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Decades of academic research into opinion leadership, celebrities, and word of mouth has shown that little influences consumers more than a recommendation from a trusted peer. 91% of people trust brand recommendations from families and friends (Statista, 2018). Moreover, consumers increasingly rely on online information and on customer reviews when searching for specific product or brand information (Statista, 2022). Recommendations are one of the best communication types for marketing managers.

Over the past decade, consumers have embraced social media to recommend brands to one another. Increasingly, consumers produce and upload content about brands to their social media profiles. For instance, they take images of themselves wearing the latest Nike sportswear, add captions, and upload this content to their social media profiles. We refer to this social media content as brand-related content (BRC). Schivinski et al. (2020) showed that consumers' perceptions of a hedonic brand image positively affect the consumption of, contribution to, and creation of BRC. While consumers may also perform other brand-related activities on social media, such as consuming BRC (e.g. viewing BRC) or contributing to BRC (e.g. liking BRC), creating BRC (i.e. producing and uploading) is the ultimate level in brand-related activities (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). By doing so, these consumers influence other consumers' attitudes, decisions, and behaviors toward brands (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). These ordinary people or consumers who self-brand on social media to gain influence are referred to as social media influencers (Khamis et al., 2017).

Social media influencers (SMIs) are individuals or groups of individuals who build an audience in the form of followers on their social media profiles (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Gross & von Wangenheim, 2018). They build their follower base by producing and uploading content. They are regular consumers who tell, talk, explain, review, and discuss brands in their social media content. Thus, SMIs have dual roles as marketers and consumers (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). SMIs can be distinguished by their audience's size and their corresponding reach (Kay, Mulcahy, & Parkinson, 2020). Macroinfluencers are individuals with several hundred thousands of followers on their social media profiles, microinfluencers have several ten thousands of followers (Voorveld, 2019), and nanoinfluencers are SMIs with fewer followers than macro- and microinfluencers (Socialpubli, 2019).

SMIs hold great potential for marketing managers, for two reasons. First, marketing communication has been democratized by the rise of social media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Consumers are increasingly using digital and social media to research other consumers' views of brands (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Consumers use social media to talk, review, compare, and discuss brands with other consumers, thereby influencing one another's opinions and decisions. Particularly brand love has been found to strongly impact on consumer engagement (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Junaid, Hussain, Basid, & Hou, 2020), such as the producing and uploading of BRC. By doing so, consumers act as social media influencers. Thus, in their social media influencer role, consumers have become an active part of marketing communication on social media (Goldenberg, Lanz, Shapira, & Stahl, 2022; Lanz, Goldenberg, Shapira, & Stahl, 2019).

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Second, SMIs are generally perceived as trustworthy and credible recommenders of brands (De Jans, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen, Munnukka, Maity, & Luoma-aho, 2020). Consumers believe that they are receiving honest advice on and opinions about brands from people or other consumers they trust (De Jans et al., 2018). In the context of Instagram bloggers, Sashittal and Jassawalla (2020) found that SMIs positively influence the relationships between brands and brand perceptions as well as between consumers and brands. Further, Booth and Matic (2011) showed that bloggers with the smallest audience can be the most influential. But how can marketing managers motivate consumers to produce and upload BRC to their social media profiles? We seek to answer this question.

Brand-related content is a piece of social media content about brands (Gross, 2022). Creating BRC on social media includes producing and uploading BRC to a social media profile (Muntinga et al., 2011). Consumers produce BRC by taking images – reviewing their latest hotel stay, wearing the latest H&M clothes, or commenting on the latest Coca-Cola flavors. However, it's pointless to produce BRC if it's invisible and not made available to others. Marketing managers seek to make BRC available to everyone on social media. Thus, uploading BRC is as important as producing it for consumers in their SMI role. Uploading BRC is a social communication type in which consumers not only make BRC visible to others, but also give them opportunities to generate rich conversations about such BRC. While producing BRC reflects the degree of consumer participation, uploading BRC reflects the degree of consumers' commitment toward brands.

Consumers are very strategic about what they produce and upload to their social media profiles, because content appears on their profiles and is visible to others in their network (Van Dijck, 2013). Social media profiles shape consumers' online and digital social identities (Van Dijck, 2013). Consumers self-brand by producing and uploading content to their social media profiles (Khamis et al., 2017). The consumer-brand fit is crucial when producing and uploading BRC, because BRC affects both the consumer and the brand (Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Fernández Giordano, & Lopez-Lopez, 2020; Qian & Park, 2021). Importantly, consumers differ fundamentally in their motivations for producing and uploading BRC to their social media profiles.

Self-Determination Theory

People's behaviors, actions, and activities mostly have intrinsic or extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2004). To be motivated is to be moved to do something and to perform certain activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals perform activities either because they are motivated to perform them or because they receive external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2004). The same is true for BRC: consumers are either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC.

Deci and Ryan (1985, p.32) defined intrinsic motivations as "the innate, organismic needs for competence and self-determination." Accordingly to Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivations refer to "doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable." They may lead people to undertake challenges, regulate their drives, and become involved in interesting activities (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Further, intrinsic motivations drive consumers to learn about and shop for brands online (Shang, Chen, & Shen, 2005). Also, intrinsic motivations lead to increased sharing behaviors, such as uploading BRC to Instagram (Kang & Schuett, 2013). It is reasonable to assume that intrinsic motivations lead consumers to learn about brands, to apply and develop their practical skills concerning brands, or to start discussions with others about brands when producing and uploading BRC. For consumers to be intrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC, an activity must satisfy consumers' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

The need for competence encompasses the need to experience oneself as capable of producing desired outcomes (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Consumers need to experience themselves as capable, skilled, and competent at creating desired outcomes, such as producing and uploading BRC. The need for autonomy reflects the experience of choice in the initiation, maintenance, and regulation of an activity in producing desired outcomes (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Consumers need to experience free choice when initiating, maintaining, and regulating the production and uploading of BRC. To be intrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC, these three needs must be satisfied; if not, consumers are extrinsically motivated.

Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 35) refer to extrinsic motivations as "behavior where the reason for doing it is something other than an interest in the activity itself." Extrinsically motivated individuals perform an activity because it leads to external outcomes or rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Here, consumers produce and upload BRC because they receive external rewards from brands, rather than the rewards of engaging in the activity. External rewards of producing and uploading BRC are either a financial reward from a brand (e.g. receiving compensation) or a nonfinancial reward by projecting a brand or product's image to consumers' digital social identities.

THE MOTIVATION MECHANISM

The advantage of concentrating on intrinsic motivations is that consumers are self-motivated to produce and upload BRC to their social media profiles. The activity motivates consumers to produce and upload BRC. These consumers don't need external rewards from brands to produce and upload BRC. BRC motivated by external rewards is more expensive and represents classical advertising. In classical ads, marketing managers pay recommenders (i.e. celebrities, profes-

sional SMIs) to help promote their brands on social media; consumers are likely to avoid or ignore this (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010). Marketing managers don't want their consumers to produce and upload BRC because they pay them, but because consumers love their brands. Building on this, it is reasonable to assume that marketing managers want to focus on facilitating intrinsic motivations so that consumers remain self-motivated to produce and upload BRC.

FOUR CONSUMER TYPES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

To understand what motivates consumers to produce and upload BRC, we interviewed professional and nonprofessional SMIs. SMIs, who master their self-presentation and self-branding strategies on social media, create their own identity, which makes them attractive to marketing managers as endorsers (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). Professional SMIs may be more conscious and may reflect on why and how they produce and upload BRC, while nonprofessional SMIs may have subconscious motives; thus, interviews with both professional and nonprofessional SMIs build a more comprehensive picture of the motivations for producing and uploading BRC. Further, we chose interviews because this research method allows one best to understand consumers' thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Maison, 2018).

We conducted 35 interviews; these form the foundation for our framework. Here, we had three goals. First, we sought to understand why consumers produce and upload posts to their Instagram profiles. We chose Instagram because it is considered as one of the most important social media platforms (Clegg et al., 2022). Second, we explored why they produce and upload BRC and how they can be motivated to do this. Third, we explored their expectations and wishes from brands that motivate them to produce and upload BRC.

The interview findings showed that consumers on social media can be identified and classified based on two dimensions: based on their motivations to produce and upload BRC as well as on the thematic topics they communicate in BRC. Rooted in self-determination theory, our interviews showed that consumers are either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC to their social media profiles. These findings are in line with Ind et al. (2020), who – in the context of online communities – showed that consumers are motivated to participate mostly by intrinsic rewards.

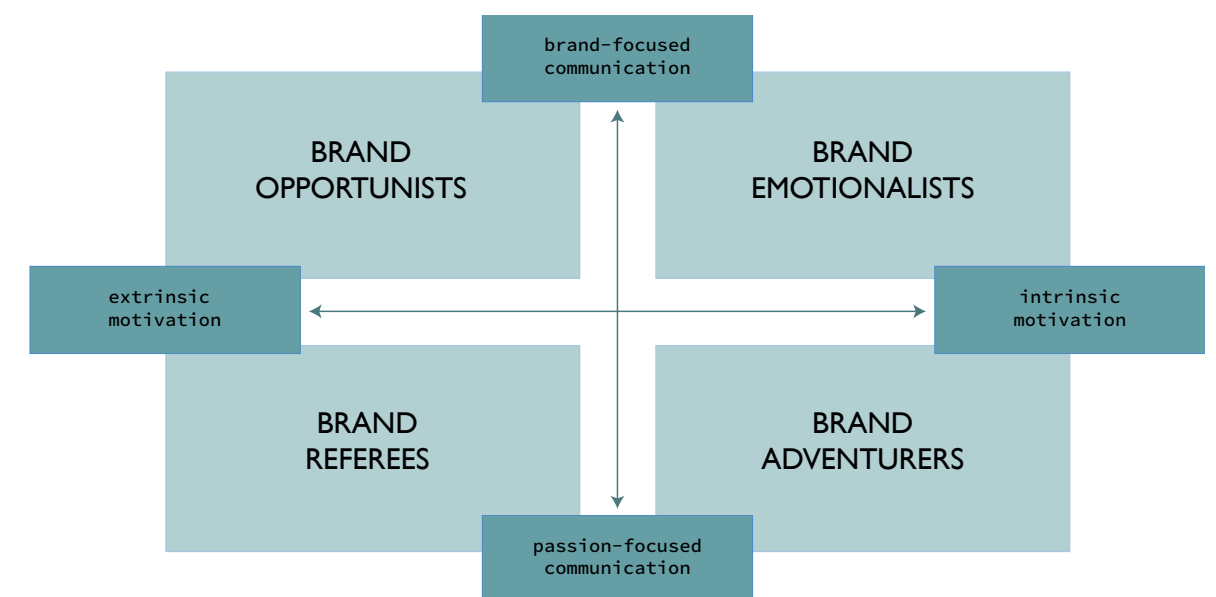
Consumers have different approaches concerning how to represent and focus on brands in their BRC. Hartmann et al. (2019) introduced three brand image types in social media environments. They defined brand selfies as selfies with branded products by an invisible consumer, consumer selfies as selfies with consumer faces appearing with a branded product, and pack-shots as standalone images of branded products. Their work focuses on images, specifically selfies (i.e. consumers taking images of themselves). However, BRC on social media comprise not only visual presentations of brands, but also captions, blog entries, videos, or reviews, allowing consumers to include brands in the communicated messages. Nguyen and Grohman (2020) showed that narrative transportation is a key driver of post-message engagement. Here, consumers convey experiences and stories about or with brands in BRC that goes beyond visually presenting the brand.

FOUR CONSUMER TYPES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In line with previous research, the interviews identified two ways that consumers communicate brands in their BRC. Consumers focus their BRC either around brands or around their own passion. We found that BRC takes two forms: with brands being either the center of attraction of a piece of content or its surrounding focus. We call the former brand-focused communication and the latter passion-focused communication. In the former, consumers aim to tell, talk, and recommend their experiences and stories about brands to others. In brand-focused communication, consumers prominently present, talk about, and recommend brands to others so as to expand and exhilarate themselves. The content explicitly centers around brands and the consumers' stories and experiences of them. An example is consumers who relate their experiences and opinions of a new restaurant on TripAdvisor.

In passion-focused communication, consumers aim to tell, share, and communicate their passion and the resulting experiences with brands to others. Here, consumers present, talk about, and discuss their experiences and stories of certain aspects of their lives with others. The content focuses on their passions, which they want to share, rather than the brands. Brands form a natural part of their experiences and stories of certain aspects of their lives. Brands are organically embedded and communicated in BRC and present the surrounding and supporting context for consumers to be better able to express and explore their passions to others. An example is consumers showing their latest dance moves in an Instagram story while wearing Nike shoes. Figure 1 presents the four consumer types marketing managers encounter on social media.

Figure 1: Four consumer types on social media

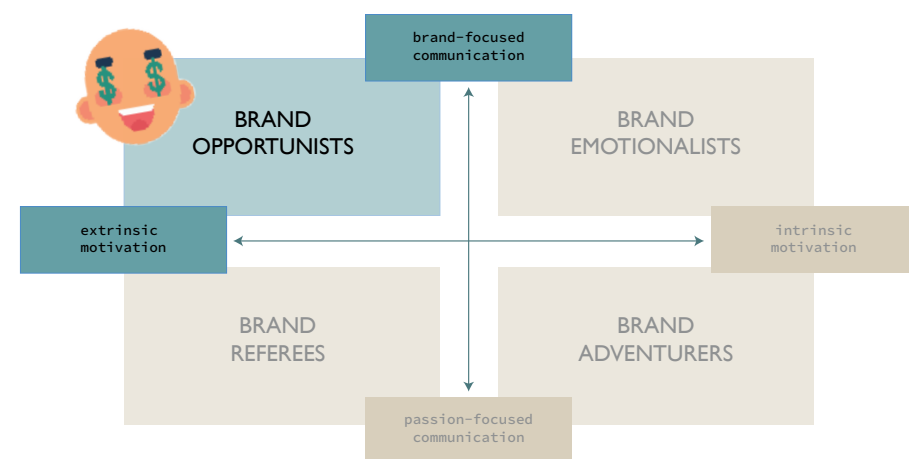


BRAND OPPORTUNISTS

Consumers **expand** themselves through brands and act as **testimonials** on social media.

This consumer type is purely extrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC. Producing and uploading BRC are means to an end. Brand Opportunists connect with brands on social media when they are rewarded or compensated for it. Rewards include monetary and nonmonetary compensation. They show

themselves with certain brands because they seek to enhance their own image or because they get paid to do so. Brands are the focus of their BRC. Brand Opportunists' relationships to brands are purely opportunistic. They buy and use brands that best allow them to *expand* themselves.



One male interview partner is a typical Brand Opportunist. He uploads posts to his Instagram profile that allow him to show others his photography skills. Yet he is not a professional photographer. Brands help him to self-position and enhance his image as a photographer. He is extrinsically motivated to

produce and upload posts about brands, because he uses brands that allow him to enhance himself. He perceives his relationship with brands as purely opportunistic. The first things he looks for is how his personal brand expands from the brand he uses in his BRC. He states:

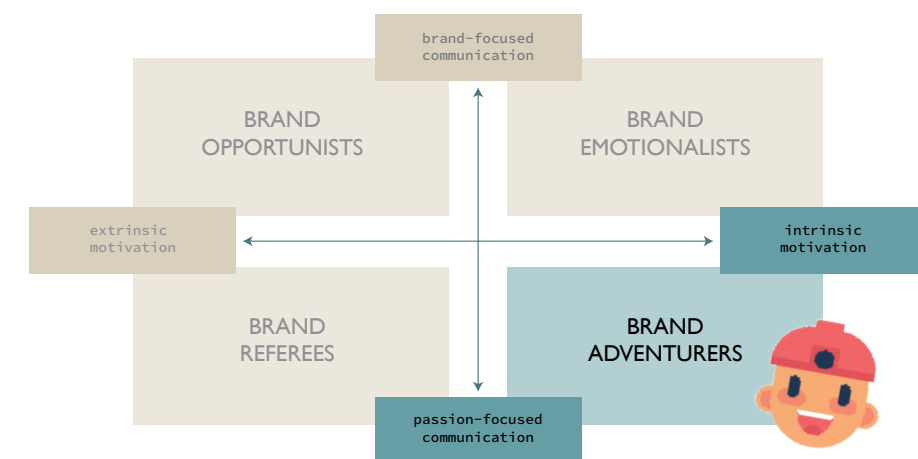
"I must benefit more from being associated with the company than the company itself [when producing and uploading BRC]. For products, I evaluate whether I like [the company's products] and whether I can profit from them. If it's a cool product, I produce and upload BRC for sympathy. If not, I evaluate whether I can stand behind the product and how much the company is willing to invest."

BRAND ADVENTURERS

Consumers **explore** themselves through brands and act as **narrators** on social media.

This consumer type is intrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC. They love to share certain aspects of their lives on social media, such as hobbies and important tasks. They mainly share aspects of their lives they are passionate about. Brands form a natural part of their life. Similarly, brands are a natu-

ral part of their BRC and present the surrounding and supporting context of their stories. Their relationships to brands are organic. These consumers buy and use brands that allow them to *explore* their adventures and passions.



Another interviewee uses his Instagram profile to share his passion about winter sports and snowboarding. He's a typical Brand Adventurer. He looks for adventures in brands that allow him to explore and experience his passion for snowboarding. He

produces and uploads BRC for brands he relates to and uses in his daily life and when engaging in winter sports. He cares about a natural relationship with brands, including a connection to and sympathy for brands. He says:

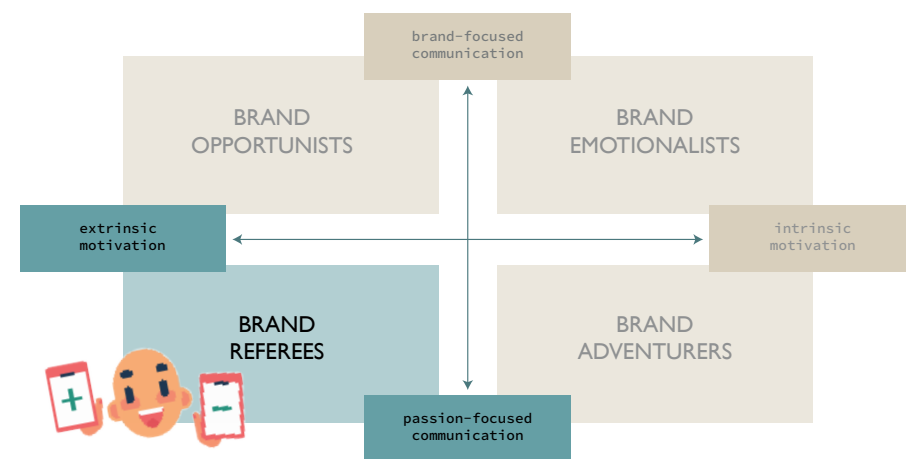
"I must have a connection to the brand. The brand's humanity is very important to me. I must be able to connect the brand with my daily life and hobby. These are usually brands I have experience with and that suit me. [...] I want to experience and live the brand. A brand's products are more valuable to me than money from the brand."

BRAND REFEREES

Consumers **express** themselves through brands and act as **judges** on social media.

These consumers are extrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC. They use brands to tell, show, and demonstrate their expertise and competencies about certain aspects in their lives. They rate, review, and compare brands to competitors. By judging brands,

they seek approval, appreciation, and recognition from other consumers. Thus, brands are the center of attraction in their BRC. Their relationships to brands are judgmental. These consumers buy and use brands that allow them to *express* themselves to others.



One female interviewee is an example of a Brand Referee. Her Instagram profile seeks to show what she does, where she is, and who she's with. It reflects what's happening in her life. She uses brands to show her experience and competence with certain brands.

She likes to inspire other people and to help them in their decision-making processes. She produces and uploads posts about brands because they allow her to better self-express to others. She rates, judges, and evaluates brands in her BRC. She said:

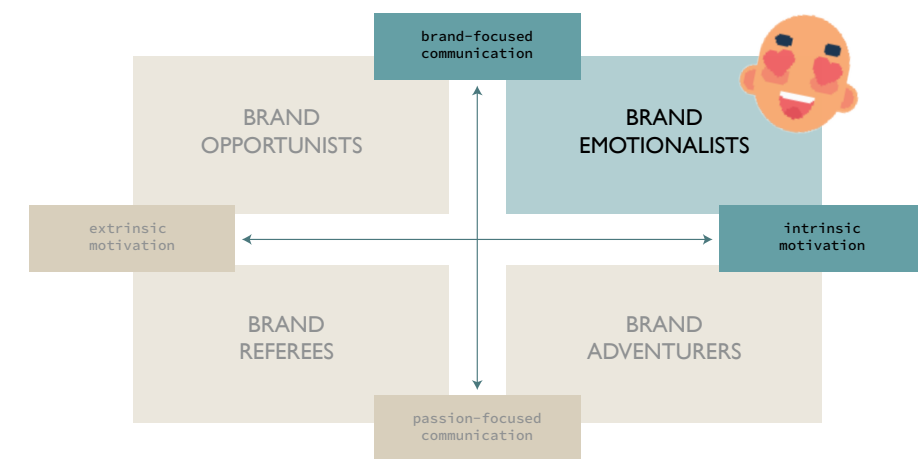
"I like to help other people to avoid buying something that's not worthwhile. If I say 'it's not worth it,' I'd like to spare people who see [my BRC] from buying these products [...] If I tell people 'hey, this is really good,' for example an acne cream, I'm giving my honest opinion and helping them. By doing so, I help someone to find the perfect cream, so that they can have great skin. My motivation is to help people with [my BRC]. My main motivation is curiosity and to test new [brands]. I want to have my own opinion [of a brands], not an opinion formed by the Internet."

BRAND EMOTIONALISTS

Consumers **exhilarate** themselves through brands and act as **party animals** or **crashers** on social media.

This consumer type is intrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC. They feel strongly about brands, which leads them to vent their positive and negative feelings and emotions about brands to others. Brand Emotionalists have two polar opposites: *Brand Lovers*, who actively preach a brand's values and meanings and

even stand up for it. In contrast, *Brand Haters* actively criticize and denounce the brands they dislike or even hate. Their relationships to brands are emotional and personal. These consumers (do not) buy and use brands that allow them to *exhilarate* themselves to others.



One example of a Brand Lover was a male interview partner who simply loves brands. His Instagram profile is about fashion and lifestyle. He's very open-minded toward brands. He's intrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC because brands allow

him to exhilarate himself. While he actively communicates the values, meanings, and advantages of these favorite brands, he only does this for brands he feels strongly about. Brands must suit him, his lifestyle, and values perfectly. He said:

"[Brands] must suit me. [My Instagram profile] is what I stand for with my name, and this is the biggest criterion for me to produce and upload [BRC]. [...] I think it's great to be a brand ambassador for a few selected brands."

FROM NONPROFESSIONAL TO PROFESSIONAL
SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Our findings also showed that marketing managers may enable consumers to develop from non-professional SMIs to professional ones, for two reasons. First, consumers have the possibility to earn more money by producing and uploading BRC to their social media profiles. Second, cooperation with brands helps consumers to foster their self-brand's credibility. Consumers are associated with the brand's values in their BRC, which strengthens their own reputation. As a result, consumers are more attractive for other marketing managers to recommend their brands. Thus, our framework applies to both *non-professional* and *professional* SMIs.

"I love to travel and explore new places on my mountain bike, surfboard, and skis. I love to share my passion on social media. When I'm planning a new outdoor tour, I directly ask brands if they want to support me. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to afford these trips. Of course I only work with brands that really suit me. I'm very strict about this."

Marketing managers encounter four types of consumers on social media: (1) Brand Opportunists, (2) Brand Adventurers, (3) Brand Referees, and (4) Brand Emotionalists. While Brand Opportunists and Brand Referees are extrinsically motivated to produce and upload BRC, Brand Emotionalists and Brand Adventurers are intrinsically motivated. Brand Opportunists and Brand Emotionalists produce content about brands. In contrast, Brand Adventurers and Brand Referees produce content about their passions which naturally come with brands. Hence, the these

An example of a Brand Adventurer who had developed from a nonprofessional to a professional SMIs was an interviewee who enjoys nature and sports. She was never a professional athlete. About a decade ago, she started uploading images of her experiences of for instance weekly mountain bike tours through Canada or Norway. She now has more than 15,000 followers on her Instagram profile, and her passion has evolved into her profession. Cooperating with brands such as Salomon and Bold Cycles allow her to afford these adventures. She was and remains a Brand Adventurer. She said:

four consumer types seek for different activities in brands. Brand Opportunists want to *expand* themselves, Brand Adventurers want to explore themselves, Brand Referees want to express themselves, and Brand Emotionalists want to exhilarate themselves through brands. In Table 1, we summarize the four consumer types that marketing managers encounter on social media, their motivation mechanism based on self-determination theory, and provide concrete examples of each consumer type on social media.

FROM NONPROFESSIONAL TO PROFESSIONAL
SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Table 1: Summary of consumer types on social media

	BRAND EMOTIONALISTS	BRAND ADVENTURERS	BRAND REFEREES	BRAND OPPORTUNISTS
MOTIVATION FOR PRODUCING AND UPLOADING BRC	Intrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation
MAIN TOPIC OF COMMUNICATION	brand - centered communication	passion - centered communication	passion - centered communication	brand - centered communication
THE MOTIVATION MECHANISM	Some consumers have a strong emotional connection to a brand. They either love or hate a brand. Being part of a certain brand community or being an explicit opponent of a certain brand community is a key aspect of their identity and (social media) personality. Communication on certain brands via social media is therefore an important way for Brand Lovers and Brand Haters to express themselves and share their opinions.	Brand Adventurers love to share certain aspects of their lives (e.g. hobbies, important tasks) on social media. Brands generally form are a natural part of consumers' lives. Thus, they also play a certain role in the stories consumers tell about their lives.	Brand Referees choose brands that allow them to demonstrate their expertise about certain aspects of life. By judging brands on social media they seek recognition from other consumers.	Brand Opportunists connect with brands on social media if they are rewarded. They show themselves on social media with a certain brand because they want to enhance their own image or because they get paid to do this.
EXAMPLE	Brand Lover Members of a MINI car owners club who produce videos and photos about their social events and share them on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp.	Brand Hater Vegetarians who shoot a video against a burger restaurant chain (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King) and share it on Facebook and YouTube.	Brand Referee Tourists who travel to Dublin and visit the Guinness Brewery and rate this experience on TripAdvisor.	Brand Opportunist People who make a selfie in front of a car whose brand is perceived as cool (e.g. Porsche, Tesla) and post this on Instagram or WhatsApp.

MOTIVATING CONSUMERS TO ACT AS SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Our interview findings identified several practices that worked when motivating consumers to produce and upload BRC to their social media profiles. Marketing managers can extract more from their marketing communication, particularly from their social media marketing efforts, when motivating specific consumer types to produce and upload BRC to their social media profiles. In Table 2, we summarize the roles of the four consumer types in communication

on social media, and the recommended approaches to these consumers. While not exhaustive, it gives marketing managers an extremely useful starting point for how to strategically embed which consumer type(s) into their social media communication. We show that marketing managers extract more from their marketing communication when presenting their brands as rewarding, relevant, easy, or unique/correct to experience and interact with.

Motivating Brand Opportunities

Brand Opportunists buy or use brands as long as they are rewarded or compensated. They create attention and interest for brands among other consumers. Consumers produce and upload BRC about brands whose values they want to be associated with. However, marketing managers may not want their brands to be related or associated with these consumers. As a result, the main risk here is the hijacking of brands by the wrong consumers.

Marketing managers should reward and seek to control Brand Opportunists. They should present brands as *rewarding* to experience and interact with. Examples of instruments and actions are promotion and prevention, such as using co-branding, deploying branded locations, or offering monetary compensation. Brand Opportunists act by posting (un)suitable *testimonials* on social media. One interview partner said the following about when he considers producing and uploading BRC:

“A main criterion [to produce and upload BRC] is how much effort I have to expend in relation to my compensation. Compensation is not only the payment, but also how much I can profit from the company or how much the company harms me.[...] I either get a reward or a product. When receiving a product, I evaluate whether I like the product, if I profit from the product and its association and if this is in relation to my performance and my effort [to produce and upload a post]. If I’m paid, I see if I can stand behind this company and what they do, and how much freedom I have.”

MOTIVATING CONSUMERS TO ACT AS SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Motivating Brand Adventurers

Brand Adventurers buy or use brands as long as they consider them relevant and popular. Brands should suit consumers’ lives in a natural and organic way. They help other consumers to understand the values, meanings, and benefits of brands in relation to other brands. However, consumers may misinterpret the values and meanings of brands in comparison to their competitors. Further, consumers may also marginalize brands by talking about their competitors but excluding them in their stories. Thus, marginalization and misinterpretation of brands are the main risks that accompany Brand Adventurers.

Marketing managers should ensure that their brands form active parts of Brand Adventurers’ lives. They are advised to present their brands as *relevant* to experience and interact with. An example of an instrument and action is content marketing generally. Specifically, marketing managers should let consumers test their products and services, invite them to branded experiences, or collaborate with them for advertising content. Brand Adventurers act as *narrators* of good and bad stories about brands. Another interview partner said this about how marketing managers motivate him to produce and upload content about their brands:

“I enjoy [producing and uploading content] for [brand X] the most. I’m connected to it. There’s trust on both sides. Once or twice a year, I can join them to test their products, which I appreciate a lot. Through such events I put more energy into my posts and I am more present. I can not only live my hobby, but also experience and live the brand: Their appearance, who they hire, who their employees are. The brand’s humanity is a big and important part.”

Motivating Brand Referees

Brand Referees buy or use brands as long as these meet their needs, wants, and desires, and fulfill their expectations. They help other consumers to become familiar with brands so that they consider these brands in their purchase decision processes. However, Brand Referees may focus not only on the positive aspects of brands. They may also critically reflect on brands or may even evaluate and judge brands negatively. Thus, concerning Brand Referees, negative evaluations and judgments of brands are the main risks for marketing managers.

Marketing managers are well advised to welcome Brand Referees. They should present their brands as *easy* to experience and interact with. An example of an instrument is customer satisfaction management, with examples of actions being distributing free samples, products, and services, installing an easy-to-use feedback system, or even responding to complaints on and implementing service recovery systems. Brand Referees act as *judges* on social media. One interview partner explained how marketing managers motivate her to produce and upload BRC thus:

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“Brands motivate me to produce and upload posts for them if they send me their products. Money is not the main focus here. [...] If the brands are interested in me trying out and reviewing their products, I would definitely produce and upload posts for them. I can then also tell others that the brands contacted me and told me that they want me to test and review their products.”

Motivating Brand Emotionalists

Brand Emotionalists (do not) buy and use brands as long as they have a strong emotional connection to those brands. Brand Lovers buy and use a brand no matter what – even if it makes mistakes. In contrast, Brand Haters don’t buy or use brands at all. The main risk associated with Brand Lovers is that brands are used by too many consumers or the wrong ones, turning it in an uncool brand. The main risk associated with Brand Haters is the initiation and supporting of online firestorms. Especially in the social media era, marketing managers may experience negative word of mouth and/or online firestorms (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2014).

Marketing managers should reciprocate Brand Lovers’ love and should be responsive to Brand Haters. They should present their brands as *unique* to Brand Lovers and as *correct* to Brand Haters to experience and interact with. An example of an instrument for Brand Lovers is community marketing, while example actions include co-creating products and services, offering limited editions of products and services, providing exclusive information and VIP events, or one-to-one communication. The main instrument for Brand Haters is brand protection. Actions include monitoring the brand’s meaning in real-time, making and establishing a strong brand, or employing PR specialists 24/7. Brand Lovers act as *party animals* on social media, and Brand Haters as *party crashers*. An interviewee described one of his best brand experiences:

“My most positive experience was with [brand X]. [Brand X] is one of my favorite brands. I was invited to a VIP weekend in the mountains. It was a really great experience. The experience was unique, and you felt like a star. I produced and uploaded posts of the event to my Instagram profile because of the whole experience.”

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Table 2A: The four consumer types’ roles in marketing communication

	BRAND EMOTIONALISTS	BRAND ADVENTURERS	BRAND REFEREES	BRAND OPPORTUNISTS
ROLE IN COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA	Brand Lovers act as <i>party animals</i> for brands.	Brand Haters act as <i>party crashers</i> against brands.	Brand Referees act as <i>judges</i> of brands. They make positive or negative judgements about a brand.	Brand Opportunists act as (un)suitable <i>testimonials</i> for brands.
Main role in other consumers’ purchase decision process	Brand Lovers actively preach the values of a brand and stand up for them (e.g. they fight for a brand during an online firestorm).	Brand Haters actively criticize and denounce a brand.	Brand Referees help to familiarize other consumers with a brand so that they consider the brand in their purchase decision processes.	Brand Opportunists create attention and interest for a brand among other consumers.
Buying behavior	Brand Lovers buy or use the brand even if it makes mistakes.	Brand Haters do not buy or use the brand.	Brand Referees buy or use a brand as long as their needs/wants are met and their expectations are fulfilled.	Brand Opportunists buy or use a brand as long as they are rewarded.
Main risks	Becoming an uncool brand (from niche cool to mainstream cool). Being loved by wrong consumers.	Initiation of and support for an online firestorm.	Negative valuation of a brand.	Hijacking of a brand by wrong consumers.

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HOLISTIC SOCIAL MEDIA
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Table 2B: Recommended approach to incorporate the four consumer types in marketing communication

BRAND EMOTIONALISTS		BRAND ADVENTURERS		BRAND REFEREES		BRAND OPPORTUNISTS	
APPROACH TOWARD CONSUMERS	Reciprocate Brand Lovers' Love.	Respond to Brand Haters.	Be a part of Brand Adventurers lives.	Welcome Brand Referees.	Reward and seek to control Brand Opportunists.		
	Present brands as unique to experience and interact with.	Present brands as correct to experience and interact with.	Present brands as relevant to experience and interact with.	Present brands as easy to experience and interact with.	Present brands as rewarding to experience and interact with.		
Strategic approach	Community marketing	Brand protection	Content marketing	Customer satisfaction management	Promotion and prevention		
Examples of instruments and actions	• Co-create products and services. • Offer limited editions of products and services. • Provide exclusive information. • Invite them to events with VIP treatment. • Communicate in person.	• Monitor brand meanings in real-time. • Make your brand robust (do not offer areas of attack (do the right things right). • Consider criteria for purposeful remedies. • Make use of legal options. • Employ PR specialists 24/7.	• Let them test your products and services. • Invite them to branded experiences. • Use content marketing. • Collaborate with them (e.g. idea contests).	• Distribute free samples of products and services. • Install easy to use-feedback-systems. • Operate complaints management- and service recovery-systems.	• Use co-branding. • Deploy branded locations. • Offer monetary compensation (e.g. sweepstakes).		

The rise of social media can democratized marketing communication (Kietzmann et al., 2011). As part of their daily social media lives, consumers – in their role as social media influencers – talk, discuss, exchange, and rely on information about brands on social media. By doing so, they influence other consumers’ attitudes, behaviors, and decisions. Unsurprisingly, consumers also increasingly use information about brands on social media when making purchase decisions (Chen, 2020). Consumers produce and upload content about brands to their social media profiles, whether or not they are actively addressed by marketing managers. Thus, marketing managers need a social media communication strategy that (1) generally embeds consumers in their SMI role and (2) addresses the different consumer types’ various motivations in personalized ways.

The following example illustrates how a brand motivates each consumer type with different approaches so as to actively embed these SMIs into its marketing communication.

Brand Opportunists: Coca-Cola offers the possibility to personalize bottles. These customizable bottles allow consumers to put a special name or personal message on a classically-shaped glass bottle. In particular, consumers use these customizable bottles as gifts for others. In doing so, Coca-Cola presents its brand as *rewarding* to experience and interact with. With the hashtags *#mycoke* and *#shareacoke*, thousands of consumers took pictures of their personalized Coca-Cola bottles and uploaded these to their Instagram accounts.

Brand Adventurers: Coca-Cola regularly launches campaigns that allow consumers to express themselves as artists. With these campaigns, the brand ensures that it makes the brand sociable and valuable by addressing topics that most people relate to. These campaigns are particularly relevant to people who live and experience their passion with the help of Coca-Cola. For instance, in the *#RefreshtheFeed* campaign in November 2018, Coca-Cola shared more than 100 original images from street artists who embrace the brand’s core values. These artists were able to live their passion – drawing – and show their creative skills with Coca-Cola’s help.

Brand Referees: Coca-Cola presents the brand as easy to experience and interact with. This is particularly important to Brand Referees. Coca-Cola gets consumers to use different hashtags, such as *#coca-cola* or *#coke*. Further, Coca-Cola branded locations on festivals, bookable event spaces, and the Christmas Coca-Cola truck. These branded locations make it very easy for Brand Referees to experience and interact with Coca-Cola and to share their judgments with their followers.

Brand Lovers: Coca-Cola presents the brand as *unique* to experience and interact with. Coca-Cola regularly invites consumers to private VIP events that allow them to experience the brand. These are often combined with special giveaways.

Brand Haters: Coca-Cola is honest and transparent about its softdrinks’ ingredients. Thus, Coca-Cola at least partially protects its brands from Brand Haters who criticize and denounce Coca-Cola for its ingredients.

Embedding a specific or single consumer type in social media communication will help marketing managers to generate richer conversations about their brands on social media. However, it is only by using a holistic social media strategy that marketing managers will be able to communicate brand messages effectively *and* efficiently.

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The University of St. Gallen (HSG) was founded as a business academy in 1898 – in the heyday of the St.Gallen embroidery industry and is nowadays a School of Management, Economics, Law, Social Sciences, International Affairs and Computer Science. The first lecturer was held in 1899. The practice-oriented approach and integrative view have characterized the education HSG offers since those early days. Today, HSG are one of Europe's leading business school and is EQUIS, AACSB and AMBA accredited. HSG has 200 international partner universities. The students have the option to gain a double degree in cooperation with other universities or to spend and exchange term

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