

The influence of perceived social media marketing elements on consumer–brand engagement and brand knowledge

Social-media marketing and brand building

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper investigates the impact of social-media marketing elements, namely entertainment, customisation, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and trendiness, on consumer–brand engagement and brand knowledge.

Design/methodology/approach – Using an online survey, the study collects data in Hong Kong from 214 experienced social-media users, as indicated by their consumption of a durable technology product, a smartphone. We used partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS–SEM) to test the links between social-media marketing elements, consumer–brand engagement and brand knowledge.

Findings – The results reveal that interaction, electronic word-of-mouth and trendiness are the key elements directly influencing consumer brand engagement, then strengthening brand awareness and brand knowledge. This contrasts with the non-significant results found for the influence of entertainment and customisation on consumer–brand engagement.

Research limitations/implications – Having cross-sectional nature, the study focuses on one single product, smartphones, at one location, Hong Kong. Future research may enhance the generalisability of the findings by replication in other countries with diverse cultures, such as countries in Latin America and Africa and examine other industries and other products, such as the service sector and convenience products with a low involvement level.

Practical implications – Marketers may strengthen consumer–brand engagement by using content that is trendy, along with encouraging interaction and positive EWOM on social-media platforms, in order to build strong and positive brand knowledge in consumers' minds.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the branding literature by providing an understanding of the role of social-media marketing elements in the brand-building process. Social media is a marketing channel recognised by its effectiveness in communicating brand-related information and its role as a means to stimulate consumers' brand engagement and brand knowledge. However, how effective these elements are for these purposes remains to be established. By empirically testing a theoretical model, this study confirms that specific social-media marketing elements, namely interaction, EWOM and trendiness, are critical drivers in the brand-building process in Hong Kong.

Keywords Social media marketing, Consumer–brand engagement, Brand knowledge, Brand awareness, Brand image, Hong Kong

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

Consumer–brand engagement (CBE) is an area of marketing research attracting substantial interest (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Dessart, 2017; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019;

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Maslowska *et al.*, 2016). Reportedly, over the next five years, more than 80 per cent of marketers will seek to engage consumers by building a relationship with them, based on the expectation that engaged consumers are likely to visit 40 per cent more per year, adding a 20 per cent premium in terms of profitability (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

Defined as “consumers’ brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity related to focal brand interactions” (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p. 149), CBE is a multidimensional construct with cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Bowden, 2009; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek, 2011; Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Vivek *et al.*, 2012). Research interest ensues from the recognition of the importance of CBE for marketing strategy, encompassing the creation and enhancement of consumer–brand relationships (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Chiang *et al.*, 2017; Hepola *et al.*, 2017).

Acknowledged as a priority area for marketing research (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016; MSI, 2018), CBE is an influential construct for building customer satisfaction, brand love and brand loyalty (Islam and Rahman, 2016) and for improving advertising effectiveness (Yang *et al.*, 2016) and overall business performance (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). Thus, marketers seek to deepen their understanding of how CBE is formed, nurtured and sustained (Calder *et al.*, 2016; Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Schultz and Peltier, 2013). Accordingly, there are calls for strengthening the theoretical framework underpinning CBE with empirical evidence (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016; Islam and Rahman, 2016), especially regarding what concerns its antecedents and consequents (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Arguably, there is a need for empirical research on CBE to enhance understanding of the construct, drivers and methods, such as the use of marketing communications for acquiring and retaining consumers through consumer–brand relationship enhancement.

Inextricably linked to CBE, social media marketing (SMM) involves the development and deployment of marketing strategies using a social-media platform to communicate brand-related information and to manage the relationship with customers (Schultz and Peltier, 2013; Solem and Pedersen, 2016; Thoring, 2011). Indeed, SMM plays a considerable role in influencing consumers’ perceptions towards brands (Keller, 2009; Langaro *et al.*, 2018), and consumers increasingly search for information about products and brands using social-media channels (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Hence, there is the view that SMM strengthens consumers’ brand knowledge more than traditional marketing communications (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Frank and Watchravesringkan, 2016).

Reportedly, 74 per cent of online consumers use social-media platforms (Duggan *et al.*, 2015), and over 50 per cent of the social-media platforms obtain brand-related information by following brand pages (Ismail, 2017). Recent statistical reports assess the global social-media penetration rate at 42 per cent (Statista, 2019a), with more than 3 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2019b). This usage helps explain why over 90 per cent of businesses reportedly include social-media communication in their marketing strategies, by using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube to communicate branded information to consumers (Stelzner, 2014). Businesses use social-media platforms to communicate brand-related information, such as sharing updates and generating feedback, as well as to obtain information about consumers’ preferences and to manage relationships with customers, all of which facilitate building CBE and strong brands (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Thoring, 2011).

Marketers understand SMM’s superiority relative to traditional advertising in communicating with customers and in brand-building activities (Abzari *et al.*, 2014; Knoll, 2016; Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). However, the focus of SMM research to date is mostly on appeals of user-generated content (Shao, 2009), on content analysis (Shen and Bissell, 2013), on creative strategies (Ashley and Tuten, 2015) and on consumers’ behaviour as part of a social-media brand community (Goh *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, SMM is still regarded as a relatively new marketing tool and understanding of how it influences CBE remains limited (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Rohm *et al.*, 2013).

The continued challenges faced by marketers in creating and deploying SMM strategies that are engaging and valuable to consumers justify further study of SMM content and consumer experiences (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). An illustration is the current call for empirical research examining strategies and content leading to CBE, along with the outcomes of CBE (Barger *et al.*, 2016). One particular outcome arousing scholarly interest is brand knowledge, deemed to drive business success by influencing brand loyalty, purchase intention and competitive advantage (Algharabat *et al.*, 2019; Cheung *et al.*, 2019b; Keller, 2016).

This paper investigates the impact of social-media marketing elements, namely entertainment, customisation, interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and trendiness, on consumer–brand engagement and brand knowledge. We proceed by critically reviewing the relevant literature in order to identify research gaps. This leads to the development of a theoretical model, where SMM elements act as drivers of CBE and brand knowledge. The paper then discusses the methodology used and the results of the empirical analysis, followed by implications for theory and practice, limitations and future research directions.

2. Conceptual foundations and hypotheses

A critical review of the literature dealing with SMM, CBE and brand knowledge grounds the subsequent development of the theoretical framework and associated hypotheses used to guide the empirical research into the impact of SMM elements on CBE and brand knowledge.

2.1 Social-media marketing (SMM)

Social media refers to “a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). It is acknowledged as one of the most important communication platforms for brand information because its interactive features enable participatory, collaborative and knowledge-sharing activities (Knoll, 2016; Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Valos *et al.*, 2017), with a greater capacity for reaching the community than traditional media, such as print, TV and radio (Bowen, 2015). Social media includes consumer review sites, content community sites, Wikis, Internet forums (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014) and social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogger and Twitter (Tess, 2013). Arguably, businesses increasingly communicate information about brands through SMM activities, including advertising on social networking sites (e.g. YouTube and Facebook), blogger endorsements, managing user-generated content, all with the aim of building strong and favourable brand knowledge in consumers’ minds (Keller, 2013; Phan *et al.*, 2011; Yu and Yuan, 2019).

Marketers in Asia extensively adopt SMM as their primary type of marketing strategy, aiming at building brand trust, consumer–brand relationship and purchase intention. For example, Chan and Guillet (2011) studied SMM phrases in Hong Kong, recommending a SMM framework for marketers as a guide to drive consumers’ positive perception and repurchase intention. Chan and Guillet (2011) also recommend that marketers prepare updated information and share entertaining videos and photos with consumers, along with providing customised and two-way interactive information. Initiatives such as these are effective in attracting consumers’ attention and building the consumer–brand relationship, thereby strengthening their repurchase intention. Shih *et al.* (2014) studied the SMM strategies of Xiaomi, a leading smartphone brand in China. They found that the fan-centric SMM strategies, comprising the facilitation of entertaining content, customised information and diffusion of online reviews, were useful in building trust and relationships to drive sales revenue. Gao and Feng (2016) studied the gratifications of SMM use in China, arguing that SMM with comprehensive and interactive content helps in building a trustworthy brand image, which drives consumers’ loyalty and purchase intention in turn. More recently, Prasad *et al.* (2019) studied SMM’s

influence on Generation Y in India, concluding that interactive SMM with feedback mechanisms and EWOM about the focal brand play a considerable role in building long-term brand trust and the consumer-brand relationship, thus strengthening consumers' purchase intention. It is apparent that prior studies acknowledge SMM's considerable role in building trust and the consumer-brand relationship, which lead to positive business outcomes in turn.

Given SMM's potential, how to build consumer-brand relationships in a social-media setting has become an important issue for business (Ismail, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2019; Prasad *et al.*, 2017). One significant first step in addressing this issue is to realise that SMM can involve a number of tactics depending on which elements are deployed, namely entertainment, customisation, interaction, EWOM and trendiness (Cheung *et al.*, 2019a; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Tugrul, 2015). We discuss each of these five elements below.

2.1.1 Entertainment. As an SMM element, entertainment occurs when marketers create experiences that customers perceive as fun and playful when using social-media platforms (Agichtein *et al.*, 2008). Entertainment activities, such as games, video sharing and participation in contests, can lead to consumers enjoying their experience on social media, thus motivating their participation in social-media-based brand communities (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Kaye, 2007; Liu and Arnett, 2000; Manthiou *et al.*, 2013). Entertainment can build a sense of consumer intimacy with the brand, strengthening consumers' purchase intention (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, in a social-media context, entertainment represents the extent to which social-media platforms offer interesting, exciting and funny content and information to consumers (Gallaugh and Ransbotham, 2010). Marketers use social media as a means for entertaining consumers and to satisfy their need for enjoyment, by sharing photos and news about products (Lee and Ma, 2012), such as Facebook brand pages with video clips, pictures and stories, which can effectively attract consumers' attention (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Merrilees, 2016).

2.1.2 Customisation. Customisation refers to the extent of tailoring services, marketing efforts and messages to satisfy consumers' personal preferences (Godey *et al.*, 2016), such that the customised services and information search make them easy to use (Kim and Ko, 2012), creating value for a specific consumer or consumer group (Zhu and Chen, 2015). Customisation also facilitates reaching the intended audience, building trust in consumers' minds and strengthening their purchase intention (Martin and Todorov, 2010). Customisation might involve, for example, enabling targeted consumers of luxury brands to design their own products according to their preference (Sangar, 2012) or using social-media platforms to provide customised information and instant replies to consumers' personal enquiries, building customer satisfaction and retention in turn (Chan and Guillet, 2011).

2.1.3 Interaction. Interaction refers to the extent to which social-media platforms offer opportunities for two-way opinion exchange and information sharing (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Ko, 2012). This allows consumers to exchange ideas with like-minded others about specific products or brands on social-media platform (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011), which is arguably more effective than traditional media, such as print, TV and radio (Bowen, 2015). Interaction ability is also a motivating factor for consumers to create user-generated content (Fischer and Reuber, 2011), arguably strengthening their attitude towards brands and purchase intention (Hajli, 2015). The posting of information fitting their targeted social-media users' profile encourages discussion and enhances relationships between consumers and brands (Manthiou *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, this justifies marketers' encouragement of social-media users to participate in the discussions available on social-media platforms (Zhu and Chen, 2015).

2.1.4 EWOM. EWOM refers to communications made by potential, actual or former customers about a product, brand or company using social-media platforms (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). The level of EWOM refers to the extent to which consumers exchange, disseminate and upload information using social media (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017). This includes passing along information about brands, uploading content from a brand page to their blog and sharing opinions with their peers (Chae *et al.*, 2015). Due to EWOM's perceived

trustworthiness, consumers increasingly generate and share unconstrained brand-related information with other social-media users, including friends, peers and the general public (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Reza Jalivand and Samiei, 2012; Wu and Wang, 2011). Positive EWOM builds consumers' positive perceptions towards brands and strengthens their purchase intention (Esch *et al.*, 2006; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Martin and Todorov, 2010). Conversely, negative EWOM leads to less desirable brand-related outcomes, with detrimental effects on consumers' trust, attitude about the brand and ultimately brand equity (Lee *et al.*, 2009; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011).

2.1.5 Trendiness. Trendiness refers to the extent to which a brand communicates the latest, up-to-date and trendy (i.e. "hot topics") information about the brand (Naaman *et al.*, 2011). Consumers increasingly search for and obtain product-related information via social-media platforms because this creates the perception that they are more useful and up to date compared to using traditional channels (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). This usage can assist marketers in providing consumers with the latest information about trending and hot discussion topics, thus creating value for consumers by reducing information search efforts (Becker *et al.*, 2011; Laroche *et al.*, 2013). Trendy information includes updates of brand-related information, product reviews and new ideas about brands initiated by both marketers and consumers, building consumers' brand trust (Godey *et al.*, 2016) and strengthening their positive perception towards the brand (Manthiou *et al.*, 2016).

The next section discusses the five SMM elements in the theoretical model used in this paper and depicted in figure 1 to examine the impact of SMM on CBE.

2.2 Social-media marketing and consumer-brand engagement

Conceptualised as a psychological state that involves consumers' passion for the brand, arising from the strength of consumer-brand relationship (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*,

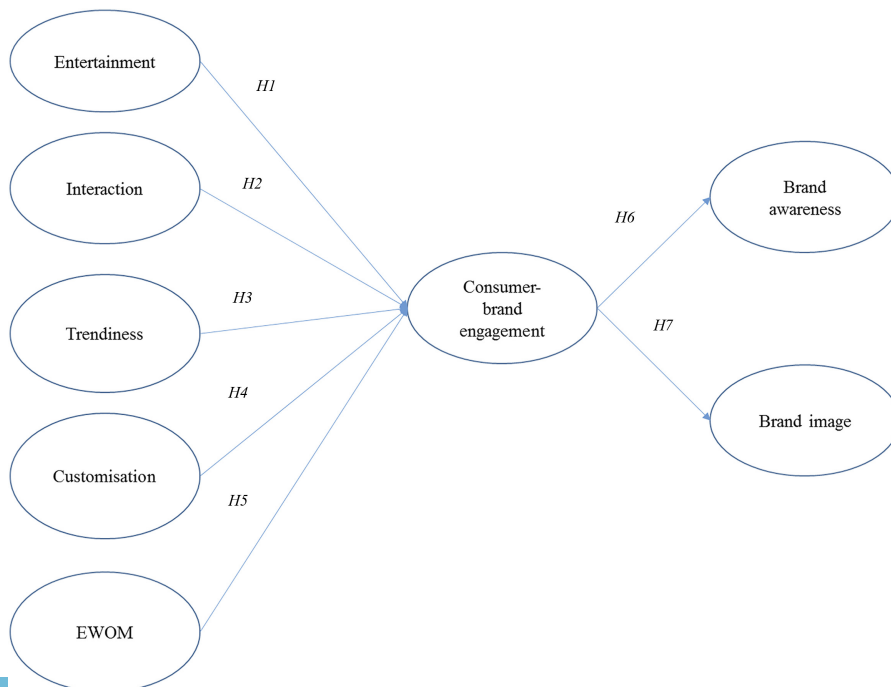


Figure 1. The theoretical model for this research

2014), CBE is an emerging concept in marketing in both practical and academic domains (France *et al.*, 2016). The concept refers to “consumers’ specific level of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790) and is seen as critical in affecting consumer behaviour (Bowden, 2009), including self-brand connection, purchase intention and brand loyalty (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Leckie *et al.*, 2016).

The literature attends to CBE’s antecedents and consequents, including the potential impact of social-media brand communication on CBE and brand knowledge. For instance, Schulz and Peltier (2013) argued that social media should be an effective platform for strengthening interaction between consumers and brands, thus contributing to CBE. Following the propositions of Schulz and Peltier’s (2013), Barger *et al.* (2016) recommended attention to content on social media in order to encourage consumers to engage with posts in the social-media-based brand community, thus strengthening CBE. Swani *et al.* (2013) found that consumers are more likely to engage with brand posts that include feelings that are less commercial in nature. De Vries *et al.* (2012) argued that interactive and multisensory brand posts have a positive influence on CBE, strengthening brand popularity. Simon and Tossan (2018) posited that brand–consumer social sharing value has a significant impact on CBE, recommending the strengthening of consumers’ brand community belongingness and consumer–brand intimacy.

In summary, the suggestion is that businesses can enhance CBE and strengthen consumer–brand relationships by using social-media platforms (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). The leading view of CBE in the marketing domain argues for the importance of interactive consumer experiences and consumer–brand relationships in building CBE (Bento *et al.*, 2018; Habibi *et al.*, 2014; Hollebeek, 2011), along with encouraging marketers to create brand experiences by using different forms of SMM (Barger *et al.*, 2016; De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Simon and Tossan, 2018). This supports SMM as an antecedent in our theoretical model.

Consistent with the earlier discussion on the elements of SMM, brand communications with entertaining elements perceived as fun and playful (Agichtein *et al.*, 2008; Ashley and Tuten, 2015) encourage consumers to exert greater cognitive effort to understand more about the brand (Barger *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, entertaining SMM content can provide fun and interesting information to consumers, arguably strengthening their affection for a brand (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Ismail, 2017). For example, the literature indicates that brand pages with games, anecdotes, contests, giveaways, dynamic animations, pictures and videos are perceived as fun, exciting and flashy, creating excitement and fulfilling consumers’ needs for aesthetic enjoyment and emotional release, such that consumers are encouraged to consume the brand-related content (De Vries *et al.*, 2012; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). Brand pages’ entertainment value translates into positive consumer experiences, thus building consumers’ psychological immersion in the brand (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; France *et al.*, 2016; Merrilees, 2016) and strengthening CBE. This provides the basis for hypothesis 1:

H1. Entertaining SMM content is related to consumer–brand engagement.

SMM can provide customised, brand-related information that fits customer needs (Rohm *et al.*, 2013). Compared with traditional (broadcast) messages, customised messages are more influential in arousing attention and generating satisfaction because consumers prefer to read relevant information on social-media platforms (Schulze *et al.*, 2015). Thus, on social-media platforms, marketers provide information related to consumers’ preferred products and brands for them to search through to satisfy their personal needs, including price, product attributes and features. This can strengthen the perceived value of a brand page and build consumers’ trust in the brand (Ko and Megehee, 2012; Dehghani and Tumer, 2015; Ismail, 2017), arguably enhancing consumers’ cognitive understanding of the brand. In addition, when a brand offers customised services according to consumers’ preferences, this

can have a positive impact on the perceived benefits of the brand, along with enhancing their affection for the brand (Phan *et al.*, 2011).

Summing up, customised SMM can influence the building of cognitive experience and affection in consumers' minds driving activation (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Merrilees, 2016), such that consumers are more willing to consider the focal brand as their primary choice in their decision-making process (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018). This leads to hypothesis 2:

H2. Customisation is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Interactive social-media brand pages encourage communication between brands and consumers, influencing the generation of positive perceptions towards a brand (Ismail, 2017). Providing a link to the official brand website, along with encouraging the sharing and dissemination of brand-related information amongst consumers, can enhance interactivity (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014). Marketers may also encourage consumers' participation, including the submission of their stories, posting comments and subscribing to (i.e. following) a brand page (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). These engagement activities amongst consumers are important in strengthening interactions between consumers and brands (Hanna *et al.*, 2011), ultimately improving consumers' cognitive understanding of the product attributes and brand benefits (De Vries *et al.*, 2012; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014).

Social-media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and WeChat, also allow consumers to exchange their ideas with like-minded others about specific products or brands, strengthening a common interest between consumers and firms (Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Such interactions may ultimately result in higher levels of enthusiasm and subsequent development of affection (Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Leckie *et al.*, 2016), by enabling consumers to provide their opinions to firms, thus helping firms to improve the quality of their goods and services (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Consumer-brand interaction also assists brands with their new-product development process, when consumers are active in sharing their ideas and feedback related to new products (Hidayanti *et al.*, 2018; Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). This sharing promotes customer satisfaction and strengthens brand trust and purchase intention (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Laroche *et al.*, 2013). Improved customer satisfaction may convert into activation and subsequent development of CBE (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Merrilees, 2016; Nguyen Van Thang *et al.*, 2016). This leads to hypothesis 3:

H3. Interactivity is related to consumer-brand engagement.

The advancement of social media has increased the number of consumers who evaluate brands and products based on EWOM (Ananda *et al.*, 2019; Wu and Wang, 2011). This arguably has a positive effect on their evaluation of goods and services, compelling consumers to invest more cognitive effort in reading EWOM (Krishnamurthy and Kumar, 2018). Given the perceived trustworthiness of social-media platforms (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017), the creation and sharing of EWOM amongst consumers builds up a sense of closeness and emotional relationship between brands and consumers (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Chae *et al.*, 2015), generating positive feelings amongst consumers (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). Hence, EWOM availability on social-media platforms and its use assists in creating positive brand experiences and favourable emotions for the brand, thus strengthening the consumer-brand relationship. This leads to hypothesis 4:

H4. EWOM is related to consumer-brand engagement.

Consumers feel motivated to consume trendy information about brands on social-media platforms in order to keep up to date with the latest developments about brands and with knowledge about relevant trends (Gallaughar and Ransbotham, 2010). Brand trendiness may contribute to a perception of the brand as a leading brand, motivating consumers to search for the latest information on brand pages, thus contributing to building a positive brand

experience in consumers' minds. Particularly, trendiness discussion topics and the latest product news available on a brand's Facebook fan page effectively facilitate consumers' initiative to discuss them with peers, thus strengthening consumers' cognitive presence in brand-related interactions and assisting in developing positive brand perceptions (Chan *et al.*, 2014; Gallagher and Ransbotham, 2010). Therefore, the trendier the information carried by social-media brand pages, the more effective they can be in engaging consumers (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). As such, trendiness information helps attract consumers' attention, evoking positive feelings and driving loyalty intention (Liu *et al.*, 2019). This underpins Hollebeek's (2011) argument that the strengthening of consumers' cognitive and emotional presence contributes to strengthening consumer-brand engagement, which leads to hypothesis 5:

H5. Trendiness is related to consumer-brand engagement.

2.3 Consumer brand engagement and brand knowledge

Brand awareness is a critical component of brand knowledge (Keller, 2016), referring to the ability of potential consumers to recognise/recall a brand in their minds, thus helping in associating products with brands (Aaker, 1991). Understood as a precondition for brands to be included in consumers' consideration set during the decision-making process (Langaro *et al.*, 2018; Su, 2016), brand awareness ensues from consumers' repeated and memorable exposure to the brand (Aaker, 1991; Kim *et al.*, 2018). This exposure is generated by brand elements, such as brand name, slogan and packaging (Keller, 2013), along with advertising in various forms (Datta *et al.*, 2017; Yoo *et al.*, 2000) and interactive experience gained through the process of CBE (Brodie *et al.*, 2013).

Brand awareness has two sub-dimensions as follows: brand recognition and brand recall (Keller, 2009). Brand recall refers to consumers' ability to retrieve the brand from their memory when associated with specific product categories or usage situations (Keller, 1993). Brand recognition refers to consumers' ability to draw on prior exposures to identify a brand (Keller, 2010). As discussed earlier, increasing levels of CBE encourage the delivery and sharing of brand-related information amongst consumers. This strengthens interactions between consumers and brands (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hanna *et al.*, 2011), by attracting their attention and therefore strengthening their ability to recall the brands in their minds, thereby increasing brand awareness (Keller, 2013; Langaro *et al.*, 2018). This leads to hypothesis 6:

H6. Consumer-brand engagement is related to brand awareness.

Comprising attributes, benefits and attitudes, brand image refers to the set of associations attached to the brand in consumers' memory, reflecting how the brand is perceived in the mind of consumers (Keller, 1993) and how it differs from competitors' brands (Webster and Keller, 2004). Brand attributes are the descriptive traits and features that characterise a brand, reflecting what consumers think about that brand (Keller, 2001). Brand benefits refer to consumers' perceived value (e.g. functional, experiential and symbolic) related to brand attributes (Keller, 2013). Brand attitude refers to consumers' evaluations and judgments of the brand attributes and benefits, representing the composition of all relevant brand elements and experiences in consumers' memory (Keller, 2010).

Brand image is an important factor in the brand-building process due to its influence on consumers' brand preference (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995), which relates positively to the brand's ability to charge a premium price (Persson, 2010). Thus, brand image can contribute to future profits (Chen and Chang, 2008) and to on-going brand loyalty (Hart and Rosenberger, 2004; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005).

Following Keller (2013), consumers always consider brands with a strong and favourable brand image as a primary option in their decision-making process. This encourages marketers to strengthen CBE using various channels to create strong and positive brand

experiences (De Vries and Carlson, 2014). Arguably, the interaction between consumers and brands incurred during the process of building CBE is an input in the formation of brand image (France *et al.*, 2016). Hence, increasing CBE contributes to strengthening consumers' cognitive understanding of the product attributes and brand benefits, improving customer satisfaction and subsequent development of the customer–brand relationship (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Rohm *et al.*, 2013), ultimately strengthening the perceived credibility and likability of the brand, hence brand attitudes (Barger *et al.*, 2016). In addition, a brand can strengthen CBE by reacting and responding to consumers' content in the social-media-based brand community, thereby helping consumers to solve problems. The emotional attachment to a brand built through the CBE process enhances a strong and positive brand attitude (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011), thereby strengthening brand image (Chahal and Rani, 2017; Nguyen Van Thang *et al.*, 2016). This leads to hypothesis 7:

H7. Consumer–brand engagement is related to brand image.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection and sample

To examine the hypothesised relationships, a self-administrated online survey collected data from a convenience sample including the population of interest, comprising all consumers who are familiar with smartphone with a Facebook account in Hong Kong. Hosted on the online-survey platform Qualtrics, the survey took around 10 min to complete.

An invitation to participate in the survey and the link to the questionnaire was posted on several Facebook brand fan pages of consumer electronics, personal care products, sportswear etc. for 12 weeks in the first quarter of the year. Information was given about the purpose of the study, its being cleared by university ethics and about voluntary participation. Those who agreed to participate nominated a focal smartphone brand they were familiar with prior to answering questions about their perceptions of the nominated brand.

Regarded as “Asia’s World City”, Hong Kong is an appropriate location for conducting social-media and branding research because it is an international city with a multicultural, highly sophisticated free market economy (Barnes *et al.*, 2009; Merrilees *et al.*, 2018). As one of the most smartphone-friendly markets in the world (E-marketer, 2017), Hong Kong is particularly appropriate for this study due to its retail sector for consumer electronics, such as smartphones that are well developed (Liao and Shi, 2009; Ng, 2014). This sector serves sophisticated consumers who are experienced and demanding (Chan *et al.*, 2016) and also receptive to innovative technology with high economic status and education (Lee, 2014). Consumers are equipped with significant knowledge of international brands (Tam and Elliott, 2011), including the major smartphone brands (the focal product category in this study), which are available in major retail outlets.

The smartphone has become one of the most important products for Hong Kong consumers and an essential part of daily life (Ng, 2014), with more than 90 per cent of consumers using smartphones to search for information, to facilitate their learning, to read newspapers and to interact with their peers (Lam and Duan, 2012). The smartphone penetration rate reached 85.8 per cent in Hong Kong in 2016 (Census and Statistics Department, 2017), with the number of smartphone users expected to exceed 6.1 million by 2022 (Statista, 2019c).

Smartphones qualify as a high-involvement product due to their duration of ownership, with replacement cycles approaching three years (Conwell, 2018; Drumm *et al.*, 2017; Duckette, 2018) and due to their centrality in many users' everyday lives as they wake up and go to bed checking their smartphones (Drumm *et al.*, 2017). Given smartphones' popularity, a number of empirical studies in brand management have focused on

smartphones (e.g. [Djarmiko and Pradana, 2016](#); [Hsu et al., 2018](#); [Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017](#)). In sum, the smartphone is appropriate for studies related to branding, as is the present case.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire featured 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), using measurement items adopted from previous studies concerning SMM and brand management (see [table I](#) for the items). Operationalising SMM as a multidimensional construct, with the SMM elements treated as distinct variables, measurement of the SMM elements included four items for entertainment, five items for customisation, four items for interaction, three items for EWOM and three items for trendiness, all adopted from [Kim and Ko \(2010\)](#). Also conceptualised as a multidimensional construct, CBE was operationalised as a second-order, type I reflective–reflective construct, with cognitive processing, affection and activation dimensions ([Islam et al., 2018](#)), using ten items adopted from [Leckie et al. \(2016\)](#). Regarding brand knowledge, five items adopted from [Langaro et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Godey et al. \(2016\)](#) measured brand awareness, with seven items adopted from [Reza Jalivand and Samiei \(2012\)](#) and [Godey et al. \(2016\)](#) being used to measure brand image. Finally, we collected information on education, gender and age to control for respondent heterogeneity.

4. Results

4.1 Respondent profile

This study collected 214 useable responses from respondents who were social-media users. The sample comprised a roughly equal split of males (54 per cent) and females (46 per cent), who were aged between 18 and 65 (mean = 31–35 years), with 66.3 per cent aged between 18 and 35. Most respondents were employed full time (72.4 per cent) and educated in university (46.7 per cent) or had completed other forms of tertiary education (36 per cent).

All respondents were experienced users of social media and Facebook, 71.5 per cent of respondents had held a Facebook account for six or more years, 43.5 per cent of respondents accessed Facebook 6–10 times a day on average and 17.3 per cent of respondents were signed into Facebook all of the time. Other popular social-media networks were WeChat (78.5 per cent) and Instagram (75.2 per cent), followed by LinkedIn (69.6 per cent), Flickr (33.2 per cent), Weibo (25.7 per cent) and Twitter (17.3 per cent).

Regarding the focal product category, all respondents owned the focal product at the time of data collection. For brand stimuli, 56.5 per cent of respondents nominated Apple as their most familiar smartphone brand, followed by Samsung (26.2 per cent) and Sony (8.4 per cent), with the remainder being Asus, HTC, LG and Huawei. Respondents' smartphone involvement level was high (mean = 5.32 out of 7), confirming smartphones as a high-involvement product.

Overall, the sample profile is broadly representative of social-media users in Hong Kong and suitable for the purposes of this research.

4.2 Data analysis

The analysis featured partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS–SEM) using SmartPLS v3.2.8 ([Ringle et al., 2015](#)), using the 5,000-bootstrap procedure. PLS–SEM is appropriate for this study as it is suitable for analyses where the goal is to predict key target constructs and constructs measured by a large number of indicators ([Haenlein and Kaplan, 2004](#); [Hair et al., 2017](#)), along with being suitable for studies with smaller sample sizes (e.g. ≤ 500) ([Hair et al., 2017](#)). The repeated indicator approach was used for modelling the second-order CBE construct ([Hair et al., 2017](#)).

Construct	Loading	t-value	Alpha	Composite reliability
<i>Entertainment</i>				
The content found in brand X's social media seems interesting	0.93	58.60	0.96	0.97
It is exciting to use brand X's social media	0.97	137.33		
It is fun to collect information on products through brand X's social media	0.96	108.77		
It is easy to kill time using brand X's social media	0.91	37.27		
<i>Customisation</i>				
It is possible to search for customised information on brand X's social media	0.87	38.46	0.91	0.93
Brand X's social media provide customised services	0.85	36.06		
Brand X's social media provide lively feed information I am interested in	0.85	30.05		
It is easy to use brand X's social media	0.86	41.34		
Brand X's social media can be used anytime, anywhere	0.86	39.81		
<i>Interaction</i>				
It is easy to convey my opinion through brand X's social media	0.88	36.46	0.91	0.94
It is easy to convey my opinions or conversation with other users through brand X's social media	0.91	52.07		
It is possible to have two-way interaction through brand X's social media	0.88	32.32		
It is possible to share information with other users through brand X's social media	0.88	42.71		
<i>Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)</i>				
I would like to pass information on brands, products or services from brand X's social media to my friends	0.94	78.42	0.95	0.97
I would like to upload content from brand X's social media on my Facebook page or my blog	0.95	67.71		
I would like to share opinions on brands, items or services acquired from brand X's social media with my friends	0.96	115.52		
<i>Trendiness</i>				
Content found on brand X's social media are up to date	0.96	119.26	0.93	0.96
Using brand X's social media is very trendy	0.92	64.28		
The content on brand X's social media is the newest information	0.94	71.19		
<i>Consumer-brand engagement – Cognitive processing</i>				
Using this brand get me to think about brand X	0.80	24.39	0.86	0.92
I think about brand X a lot when I am using it	0.78	22.39		
Using this brand stimulates my interest to learn more about brand X	0.81	33.05		
<i>Consumer-brand engagement – affection</i>				
I feel very positive when I use Brand X	0.90	52.74	0.94	0.96
Using brand X makes me happy	0.90	551.16		
I feel good when I use brand X	0.88	43.68		
I am proud to use brand X	0.78	32.76		
<i>Consumer-brand engagement – activation</i>				
I spend a lot of time using brand X compared with other brands	0.79	20.75	0.90	0.94
Whenever I am using smartphones, I usually use brand X	0.85	34.25		
I use brand X the most	0.83	31.38		
<i>Brand awareness</i>				
I am always aware of brand X	0.89	35.96	0.94	0.96

(continued)

Table I.
Outer model results

Table I.

Construct	Loading	<i>t</i> -value	<i>Alpha</i>	Composite reliability
Characteristics of brand <i>X</i> come to my mind quickly	0.93	70.54		
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of brand <i>X</i>	0.90	45.94		
I can remember brand <i>X</i> often	0.89	37.36		
I can recognise the characteristics of brand <i>X</i>	0.91	63.26		
<i>Brand image</i>			0.94	0.96
In comparison to other brands, products of brand <i>X</i> are of high quality	0.87	47.00		
This brand has a rich history	0.84	35.73		
I can reliably predict how this brand will perform	0.85	34.32		
Brand <i>X</i> is a leading company	0.89	42.89		
Brand <i>X</i> has extensive experience	0.85	38.48		
Brand <i>X</i> is a good representative of the industry	0.91	55.38		
Brand <i>X</i> is a customer-oriented company	0.84	26.93		

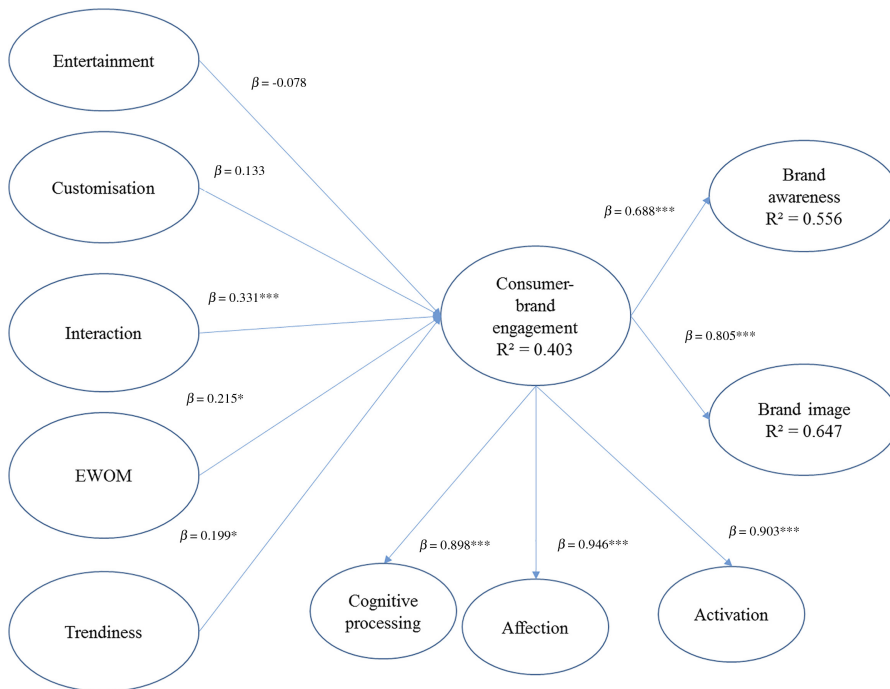
Data analysis featured two stages as follows: (1) the assessment of reliability and validity of the measurement (outer) model and (2) the assessment of the structural (inner) model, examining the path coefficients, *p*-values and R^2 values. To assess the reliability of each latent construct, the individual item loadings, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were evaluated (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The results confirmed that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability of each construct exceed 0.91 (see table I), indicating a good level of internal consistency (Nunally and Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the loading of each item was greater than 0.70, and all but two items had loadings greater than 0.78. All outer model loadings were highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Finally, the three first-order CBE loadings (see figure 2) were strong (> 0.89) and also highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

The convergent validity of the model was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE scores of all constructs were greater than the recommended 0.50 threshold (see table II), thus satisfying the AVE criterion (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Assessment of discriminant validity used the criterion of Fornell-Larcker (1981). As reported in table II, the square roots of the AVEs for the latent constructs were larger than the corresponding latent variable correlations; hence, discriminant validity was achieved (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

4.3 Inner (structural) model results

We examined the hypotheses for the relationships posited in the conceptual model using the inner (structural) model results. Hypothesis testing involved examining the *t*-values, standardised coefficient beta values and coefficient of determination (R^2 value). A hypothesis was accepted when the *t*-value was larger than critical value (i.e. $t \geq 1.96$, $p \leq 0.05$), using a two-tailed test. In order to test the significance of both the measurement and structural models, the 5,000-bootstrap procedure was used (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

As presented in figure 2 and table III, the results support five of the seven hypotheses. Regarding the relationship between SMM elements and CBE, the impact of interaction on CBE was the strongest ($\beta = 0.331$, $p = 0.000$), followed by EWOM ($\beta = 0.215$, $p = 0.013$) and trendiness ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.018$), supporting h3, h4 and h5. However, the impact of entertainment on CBE was negative and non-significant ($\beta = -0.078$, $p = 0.339$), whilst the impact of customisation on CBE was weak and non-significant ($\beta = 0.133$, $p = 0.236$); therefore, h1 and h2 were not supported. The influence of CBE on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.688$, $p = 0.000$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.805$, $p = 0.000$) was strong and significant, supporting h6 and h7.



Note(s): paths significant at * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 2. Conceptual model results

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	AVE	Square root of AVE
1. Entertainment [^]	1							0.89	0.94
2. Customisation [^]	0.40	1						0.74	0.86
3. Interaction [^]	0.22	0.72	1					0.79	0.89
4. Electronic WOM	0.52	0.45	0.43	1				0.90	0.95
5. Trendiness	0.43	0.62	0.41	0.12	1			0.88	0.94
6. Consumer-brand engagement	0.25	0.56	0.58	0.40	0.41	1		0.70	0.83
7. Brand awareness	0.25	0.53	0.45	0.16	0.54	0.74	1	0.82	0.90
8. Brand image	0.25	0.45	0.53	0.34	0.42	0.81	0.69	0.75	0.86

Note(s): [^] = first-order CBE dimension

Table II. Construct correlation matrix and AVE

The R^2 values were used to evaluate the explanatory power of the conceptual model (see figure 2). The R^2 values for CBE ($R^2 = 0.403$), brand awareness ($R^2 = 0.556$) and brand image ($R^2 = 0.647$), along with the average variance accounted for (AVA) being 0.535, suggest that the model explains a meaningful amount of variation in the endogenous variables. The R^2 values exceed the recommended criterion benchmark of R^2 values in a model being greater than 0.10 (Chin, 1998), with a value of 0.20 considered high for consumer behaviour studies (Vock et al., 2013).

The results also demonstrate the significant indirect effects of most of the SMM elements on brand knowledge. The indirect effects of interaction, EWOM and trendiness on brand

Table III.
PLS-SEM analysis of
conceptual model

Relationship	Path coefficient	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
<i>SMM elements → CBE</i>			
Entertainment → CBE	-0.078	0.96	0.339
Customisation → CBE	0.133	1.19	0.236
Interaction → CBE	0.331	3.70	0.000
EWOM → CBE	0.215	2.49	0.001
<i>Trendiness → CBE</i>			
CBE → brand knowledge	0.199	2.36	0.018
CBE → brand awareness	0.688	13.06	0.000
CBE → brand image	0.805	22.11	0.000
<i>Control variables</i>			
Education → brand awareness	0.046	1.12	0.263
Gender → brand awareness	0.146	2.89	0.004
Age → brand awareness	-0.051	1.07	0.286
Education → brand image	0.013	0.34	0.737
Gender → brand image	-0.007	0.16	0.877
Age → brand image	-0.014	0.34	0.734

awareness were 0.227 ($p = 0.000$), 0.148 ($p = 0.010$) and 0.137 ($p = 0.022$), respectively, whilst the indirect effects of interaction, EWOM and trendiness on brand image were 0.266 ($p = 0.000$), 0.173 ($p = 0.014$) and 0.161 ($p = 0.021$), respectively. However, the indirect effects of entertainment and customisation on brand awareness were -0.054 ($p = 0.335$) and 0.091 ($p = 0.240$), respectively, whilst the indirect effects of entertainment and customisation on brand image were -0.063 ($p = 0.340$) and 0.107 ($p = 0.233$), respectively. The results reveal that the indirect effects of entertainment and customisation on brand awareness and brand image are weak and non-significant.

5. Implications, limitations and recommendations for further research

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study reveal that SMM elements play a considerable role in building CBE and brand knowledge. This study finds that interaction, EWOM and trendiness are key drivers in strengthening CBE, which drives brand awareness and brand image, partially confirming the findings of prior literature (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Ko, 2010; Kim and Lee, 2019). Therefore, interaction, EWOM and trendiness should be thought of as means of raising consumers' cognitive processing, affection and activation towards the focal brand (Kim and Johnson, 2016; Merrilees, 2016; Pentina *et al.*, 2018) and deemed effective in influencing consumers' brand perceptions (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Simon and Tossan, 2018).

The findings also reveal that CBE has a strong and positive impact on brand awareness and brand image, confirming the importance of CBE in building brand knowledge (Keller, 2013). In addition, the findings demonstrate the indirect effects of interaction, EWOM and trendiness on brand awareness and brand image. This further justifies the use of social-media content with interactive elements, EWOM and trendiness posts in the brand-building process (Cheung *et al.*, 2019a; Godey *et al.*, 2016; Seo and Park, 2018).

Inconsistent with previous studies' findings (e.g. Barger *et al.*, 2016; De Vries *et al.*, 2012; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014), the impact of entertainment on CBE was non-significant, suggesting that entertaining content on social media is not a brand-building factor for a high-involvement product, such as smartphones. This result can be explained by the nature of customer value, following Holbrook's (2000) argument that consumers' experience with entertainment content can be regarded as a passively absorbed experience, such that

firm-initiated entertainment content may not have a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of brands. Applied to the social-media context, although social-media brand communication with entertaining elements may be attractive, the entertainment value of reading such social-media brand communication arises from a passive appreciation. Therefore, following [Yoshida et al. \(2018\)](#), entertainment value may be a self-oriented, passive pleasure, referred to as passive consumption in the information search process. Since CBE involves an active and effort-intensive behaviour, the passive consumption of entertainment content on social-media brand pages is not as important in influencing CBE.

The non-significant relationship between customisation and CBE is also inconsistent with previous studies' findings ([Ko and Megehee, 2012](#); [Schulze et al., 2015](#)). Again, drawing on [Holbrook \(2000\)](#), customised and standardised experiences have similar impacts on consumers' satisfaction because they are both useful in building consumers' positive perceptions, helping to explain our finding that customised content is not effective in building CBE.

Finally, level of involvement may also explain the non-significant relationship between customisation and CBE. The mean of respondents' involvement with a smartphone was 5.32 out of 7, representing a high involvement level. When consumers are highly involved, they value access to more information about products and brands, such as detailed product comparisons and spend more time developing an expectation or idea about a brand ([Chen and Tsai, 2008](#)). However, following [Krishnamurthy and Kumar \(2018\)](#), highly involved consumers tend to prefer general and more comprehensive information rather than customised information. As a smartphone is a high-involvement and standardised product, highly involved consumers prefer to read comprehensive information and specifications in their decision-making processes, rather than expecting customised information. Thus, customised SMM content may not directly influence CBE in the high-involvement, smartphone context of this study.

5.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial point of view, this study calls on marketers to consider the use of SMM to enhance CBE and brand knowledge. Rather than regarding SMM as simply another advertising channel to reach consumers ([Chan and Guillet, 2011](#)), SMM is an important tool for helping build CBE and brand knowledge ([Algharabat et al., 2019](#); [Cheung et al., 2019b](#); [Ismail, 2017](#)).

The findings reveal that interaction, EWOM and trendiness are relevant SMM elements for building CBE and brand knowledge for high-involvement products, such as smartphones. Hence, marketers should benefit from incorporating interactive content that is current and trendy and from encouraging positive EWOM. This is expected to stimulate consumers' cognitive processing, affection and activation ([Chan et al., 2014](#); [Chu and Kim, 2011](#); [Chu et al., 2018](#); [Hollebeek et al., 2016](#)), ultimately strengthening consumers' brand knowledge. Thus, the recommendation is that marketers should allow (and assist if needed) consumers to get to what they are searching for, such as details of EWOM on particular products ([Krishnamurthy and Kumar, 2018](#)), thus encouraging consumers to spread EWOM voluntarily.

It is also recommended that marketers seek to influence consumers' emotional response towards a brand by managing their social-media activities effectively ([Seo and Park, 2018](#)), potentially by rewarding consumers who actively share their EWOM with information comprehensiveness, value-added information and information understandability on various social-media platforms ([Sijoria et al., 2018](#); [Wang et al., 2012](#)). Hence, marketers should consider using a variety of social-media platforms through which consumers can share their experiences and referrals with others. Applied in Asian contexts, this practice has succeeded in strengthening CBE and purchase intention ([Choi et al., 2016](#)).

Marketers should also consider developing SMM programs that make use of the interactive features of social networking sites. Marketers can do this by positioning their social-media brand pages as a platform that offers advice to solve consumers' problems in using their branded products and welcoming users into a social-media-based brand community of consumers, where the participants can develop a sense of connection within the brand community (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Simon and Tossan, 2018). Improved interactivity of social-media brand pages may ensue from initiating contests to persuade consumers to leave their ideas for improvements of existing products or for new product developments to compete in exchange for gifts (Chan and Guillet, 2011). Contests have proven effective in encouraging consumers' participation, thus contributing to driving consumers' positive brand knowledge (Chan and Guillet, 2011).

In the case of the smartphone industry, marketers might consider the SMM strategies of Xiaomi. Xiaomi interacted with fans to discuss product features and company development, fomenting the creation of a group of "fever fans" on social-media brand community to build a strong consumer-brand relationship (Shih *et al.*, 2014).

An effort to offer more trendy information is also justified, namely about the latest product information, consumption and product usage and updated knowledge on related industries (Ramadan *et al.*, 2018). In Asia, this has strengthened consumer-brand relationships, driving purchase intention and positive business outcomes (Kim and Ko, 2010; Seo and Park, 2018). Trendiness is effective in increasing the likelihood of consumers visiting social-media brand pages, strengthening CBE and building strong and positive brand knowledge in consumers' minds (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Harrigan *et al.*, 2017). Marketers can enhance trendiness by frequently updating their social-media brand pages to reflect the latest news and offerings, attracting consumers' attention and positive emotions towards the social-media brand pages and the focal brand (Chan and Gillet, 2011).

Finally, although entertainment and customisation did not have a significant influence on CBE for smartphones, the collective influence of the five SMM elements on CBE was meaningful ($R^2 = 0.417$). Therefore, considering the synergistic interaction potential amongst SMM elements (Ismail, 2017; Seo and Park, 2018), it is recommended that marketers consider including all five SMM elements as part of their SMM activities, although they should look to prioritise their resource allocations to those elements that are more important for their product context.

5.3 Theoretical contributions

SMM strategies are regarded as a strong contributor to form strong and favourable brand knowledge in consumers' minds (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Godey *et al.*, 2016; Keller, 2013), and an increasing number of empirical studies have examined the theoretical and practical implications of the deployment of SMM for brand building (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Ko, 2012; Seo and Park, 2018). Yet, the effect of the different elements of SMM on CBE and brand knowledge remains unclear, requiring both theoretical and empirical investigation.

Seeking to address the noted theoretical deficiencies this study makes two major contributions. First, the study develops a theoretical framework to examine the importance of SMM elements in the brand-building process, confirming that interaction, EWOM and trendiness are critical drivers of CBE and brand knowledge. Second, the study distinguishes the relative importance of individual SMM elements in building CBE, thus contributing to the literature by identifying the more important individual brand-building elements in the SMM construct.

In the context of a high-involvement focal product, smartphone, the findings demonstrate that the influence of interaction ($\beta = 0.331$) on CBE and brand knowledge is the strongest, followed by EWOM ($\beta = 0.215$) and trendiness ($\beta = 0.199$). Consequently, interaction, EWOM and trendiness merit careful attention when planning SMM activities.

The study also found that CBE has a strong and significant effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.688, R^2 = 0.556$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.805, R^2 = 0.647$). This result means that CBE should not only be thought as a means of raising brand recall and recognition but also as an important factor in building brand image. Specifically, the findings reveal that the influence of CBE on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.691$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.808$) is strong and significant, justifying the importance of CBE in the brand-building process. Consequently, discriminate use of SMM elements may strengthen consumers' cognitive processing, affection and activation, assisting with building strong and positive brand knowledge in consumers' minds.

5.4 Limitations and future research directions

A cross-sectional design and the availability of data collected at a single location, Hong Kong, limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should consider longitudinal studies and comparisons between countries, to enhance generalisability.

The focus of the study is only on smartphones, a high-involvement technological product. This limits the applicability of the findings to other product categories, particularly those with a lower involvement level. Future research could broaden the number of product categories and control for products with various involvement levels in order to facilitate generalising the findings to wider contexts. In addition, future research might consider the influence of other theoretical constructs or potential moderators (such as consumer experience) on the SMM elements and/or on the constructs investigated in this study.

Finally, this study focused on SMM effectiveness but did not examine any impact of traditional marketing elements, either jointly with SMM or separately. Future research might compare the relative impact of SMM elements and traditional marketing elements, such as traditional advertising and distribution intensity, to identify which marketing variables exert a more effective effect on CBE and brand knowledge.

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