APPLYING SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY TO THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT
STRATEGY OF A GLOBAL BRAND: THE ROLE OF BRAND- AND USER-GENERATED
CONTENT IN GLOBAL SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

BY

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Abstract

The global marketplace is centred around products and brands that reflect certain identities. Social media can act as vehicles of meaning transfer for social identification between brands and social media users with a global social identity. Recognizing the importance of the psychological and sociological needs that draw social media users to build relationships with global brands, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the relevance of the global social identification process to global social media branding strategy. More specifically, this research considers the role and influence of social group membership dynamics to explore how brand-generated and user-generated content are part of the global social identification process. In that, this research aims to fill the gap where social identity theory has not been applied as a lens through which to understand and evaluate the social media content strategy of a global brand. This gap is important to fill due to the global social media arena's social-centric nature and transparency in displaying social group memberships. An interpretive paradigm was used for this research, with a qualitative case study approach that consisted of interviews with global social media users/global brand representatives and a content analysis of the focal brands social media pages. The study found that the global social identification process on social media consists of two stages, global identity priming and global identity expression. Global identity priming occurs when the psychological and sociological function of global brands is transferred to brand-generated content through a semiotic meaning transfer process. Global identity expression can occur after, as a result of global identity priming, social media users with a global identity categorize the global brand into their in-group. Once in-group categorization takes place, creation and/or sharing of user-generated content with the global brand can be considered an act of identity expression and validation by those with a global identity. This has implications for a global brand's social media content strategy, as the findings revealed that brand-generated content featuring certain symbolic global values facilitates the global social identification process on social media. Moreover, the findings revealed that user-generated content created by social media users for global identity expression purposes is of considerable value to global brands. Understanding how the global social identification process transpires on social media can guide global brands to consider how their content strategy can prime global social identification and meet the identity expression needs of those with a global identity. This has implications for content strategy design, social media interactions and ongoing global brand-user relationships.

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1. Introduction

As globally shared consumption meanings are united through the pathways of international media and technology, global branding has emerged in response to the recognition of market segments that transcend national borders (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Talay, Townsend & Yeniyurt, 2015). Global brands are brands that perceive a globally-open rather than a geographically-limited marketplace, conducting global operations that can be recognized by consumers in many corners of the world (Matanda & Ewing, 2012). Global brands are fundamentally distinct from domestic or 'local' brands in that they have different competencies and skillsets equipped to handle the global marketplace, different branding strategies and consumer bases, and by nature are perceived differently to purely domestic or multi-market brands (Lee, Knight & Kim, 2008). The research domain of global branding strategy in the global marketplace has rapidly evolved in parallel with globalization. As the research domain is relatively new, research has laid the foundations of global branding strategy but is yet to build the walls. The majority of global branding strategy research has been directed towards evaluating the extent to which strategy can and/or should be harmonized or differentiated across cultures (Matanda & Ewing, 2012). The research domain has also established and cemented in literature the importance of cultural differences in global branding strategy, and the complexity of both the global marketplace and the needs of global consumers. Global branding in the global marketplace is significantly meaning-laden, a phenomenon which presents global brand managers with powerful opportunities to harness these meanings to build deep and intimate bonds with global consumers (Akaka & Alden, 2010). As such, global brands can stretch out their arm and reach a cultural mosaic of consumers, many of whom perceive global brands as symbolic of global ideals, global values and a global identity (Holt, Quelch & Taylor, 2004).

A contemporary medium through which they can do this is social media (SM). Social media is a tool through which global brands can interact with global consumers with ease and cost efficiency, awarding them the ability to break down cultural barriers and make redundant geographical borders (Lee, Yao, Mizerski & Lambert, 2015; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). The popularity of social media as a global branding tool has risen so rapidly in recent times that social media research in the global branding strategy domain has been unable to keep apace. For a global brand operating in the global social media sphere, the task of encompassing the culturally-informed consumption meanings of a

diverse global consumer base in their SM content strategy is complicated at its best, perplexing at its worst; global brands and social media are viewed as mismatched, since "social media is often considered as a very personalised, rather than global, medium" (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, p. 58). Social media as a social-centric platform manifests its users' social identities/social group memberships and displays these identities/memberships to their peers, thus social media usership is moulded by social processes that determine users interactions with/behaviour towards the global brands they encounter (Hammedi, Kandampully, Zhang & Bouquiaux, 2015; Ashley & Tuten, 2015), as global brands are symbols of meaning that can represent consumers actual or desired social identities (i.e. Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 1999; Bartsch, Diamantopoulos, Paparoidamis & Chumpitaz, 2016). Despite this complexity and the paucity of research on global social media branding, global brands continue to dive into the social media sphere in order to reap the benefits it provides (such as ease of global reach). Global branding literature has not yet examined global social media branding through the lens of a theoretical perspective that considers the influence of global consumers' social identity expression/management needs on a global brand's SM content strategy. As such, this exploratory research aims to inform the research questions with the application of social identity theory to a global brand's SM content strategy through qualitative research.

2. Research problem

As social media are visual content-based platforms, a global brand is reflected and manifested in social media through their content strategy (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015). Extant research is in theoretical and empirical starvation when it comes to understanding and guiding the social media content strategy of global brands in the global marketplace (Takran & Ylmaz, 2015). This 'glaring hole' is mainly attributed to the complexity of the research design a study must employ to examine global brands in global or cross-national markets, and a "lack of clear theoretical perspectives" from which to evaluate global social media branding due to the nascence of global social media research (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, p. 58). The latter of these reasons is particularly relevant to the research problem of this study; the research problem is that extant global branding theory has not considered the role and influence of social identification in global social media branding. This role and influence is important to consider because of the recent emergence of literature linking social identification/social group memberships to online branding (e.g. Saboo, Kumar & Ramani, 2016); this literature has proved insightful and valuable to social media branding but is still exploratory and has not yet been extended to global branding. As such, this study aims to contribute to global branding strategy literature by exploring a global brand's social media content strategy in the global marketplace from a social identity theory perspective. Extending the application of theoretical perspectives to social media is important as social media possesses "its own unique characteristics that demand researchers to treat it as a distinct research area" (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013, p. 81), thus its uniqueness as a global branding platform warrants the application of theoretical perspectives that encompass these unique characteristics. The research problem is critical to address as "social media will play an increasingly important role in global advertising strategy" as global brands come to realise the opportunity that social media presents to them to form relationships with the cultural mosaic of consumers found in neoteric international markets (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, p. 59).

3. Literature review

3.1 Global branding in the global marketplace

Global brands are defined as "those that have widespread regional/global awareness, availability, acceptance, and demand and are often found under the same name with consistent positioning, personality, look and feel in major markets enabled by centrally coordinated marketing strategies and programs" (Özsomer & Altaras, 2008, p. 1). This is the most commonly cited definition of global brands in extant literature and encompasses both a marketing standardization perspective and a consumer positioning perspective; extant global branding literature does not commonly use an international sales-based definition as it is purported that this type of definition loses sight of the essence of global branding, which is built upon consumer interpretations rather than recorded sales (Steenkamp, 2014). Although global branding literature is a relatively new body of knowledge (Chabowski, Samiee & Hult, 2013), extant literature has established global brands as powerful symbols of social and cultural meaning in the global marketplace used to represent concepts such as social prestige and modernity (Zhou, Teng & Poon, 2008). The global marketplace is monstrous in size and is bound by requirements of "flexibility, dexterity, market knowledge and speed to address the nuances of evolving consumer preferences, regional trends and economic realities" (Pacyniak, 2017, p. 16). Global brands are challenged in this marketplace by the arduousness of global coordination of strategic branding blueprints across many societies where subtle, camouflaged differences between cultures can play a key role in whether a global brand is cherished or disregarded by consumers. Although significant, this challenge does not triumph over the opportunities the modern global branding environment presents to global brands; Llonch-Andreu, López-Lomelí and Gómez-Villanueva (2016) report that from 2006-2015, the total brand value of the 100 most valuable global brands rose from $1.4 trillion to $3.3 trillion (p. 796), showing that the value of global brands is increasing steadily. Further, the global marketplace is currently in the era of branding 3.0, which sets the context of this thesis (Gómez-Suárez, Martinez-Ruiz & Martinez-Caraballo, 2017). Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) define the branding 3.0 atmosphere as one that possesses a deep understanding that the conversation between brand and consumer must reflect the multi-dimensionality of human beings and recognize their unique emotions, desires and aspirations, rather than perceive them as a group with homogenous needs and spirits. Modern

consumers seek brand relationships and products that inch them closer to their ideal selves, provide them with a sense of direction, and cater to their deep socially-informed psychological desires (Kotler et al., 2010). The prevalence and power of branding 3.0 is reflected through research findings such as those of Hamilton, Kaltcheva and Rohm (2016), who found that brand-consumer relationships, particularly those occurring through social media, parallel the kinetics of actual interpersonal relationships between humans.

3.2 Global branding strategy, symbolism and global consumer responses

Global branding strategy literature has focused mainly on two areas: standardisation versus adaptation in inter-country global branding strategy and brand positioning strategies in the global marketplace (Chabowski et al., 2013). The first area, standardization vs. adaptation, refers to the choice global marketers face to either standardise their global marketing strategy across global market segments, adapt their strategy to each cultural market or attempt the best of both worlds with a hybridisation approach that denotes the "integration of local cultural signs and symbol with global messages and content" (Akaka & Alden, 2010, p. 48). The second area, global brand positioning strategy, is the focus of this study. In their seminal work on consumer culture theory, Alden et al. (1999) identify three alternate brand positioning strategies for global branding: global, local and foreign consumer culture positioning. Global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) is defined by Alden et al. (1999) as a brand positioning strategy that "identifies the brand as a symbol of a given global culture" (p. 77), and built on by Steenkamp (2014) to be defined as "positioning the brand on a set of universal values, beliefs, lifestyles, products, and symbols that are developed through contributions from knowledge and practices in different parts of the world, are present, practiced, and used across the world in a broadly similar way and symbolize a connectedness with the world, regardless of residence or heritage" (p. 15). GCCP can be "seen in advertisements that suggest that consumers around the world use a particular product or brand, as well as those ads that reflect universal values (e.g. peace) or markets (e.g. youth)" (Akaka & Alden, 2010, p. 39). In contrast, a local consumer culture positioning strategy associates the brand with local cultural meanings, whereas a foreign consumer culture positioning strategy associates the brand with a specific foreign national consumer culture (Alden et al., 1999, p. 77).

Literature takes the position that (with the exception of particular global brands that may choose to draw their brand image from local or a specific foreign cultural positioning due to factors such as the nature of the brands core competencies or the nature of industry competition) GCCP is the most common and advisable brand positioning strategy for global branding in the global marketplace (i.e. Akaka & Alden, 2010; Bartsch, Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Zhou et al., 2008; Strizhakova, Coulter & Price, 2008). GCCP is grounded in semiotics theory, which recognizes that signs and symbols are the mechanisms through which meaning is transferred from global brands to global consumers (Akaka & Alden, 2010). Verbal (i.e. language), visual (i.e. aesthetic features) and thematic (i.e. story narration) symbols are used in advertisements to position the brand as a global consumer culture symbol in consumers' minds (De Meulenaer, Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2015). Global brands use symbolism to tell "stories around the world that show distinct personalities (e.g., "outdoorsy" Jeep), project status (e.g., Dolce & Gabbana), and offer memberships in certain brand "clubs" (e.g., BMW)", and these stories are often used by global consumers to express their identities (Strizhakova, Coulter & Price, 2011, p. 349). As this literature stream is still developing, important topics such as the specific global symbols that most strongly influence consumer perceptions of globality are under-researched (De Meulenaer et al., 2015). However, literature has put forward certain symbols that may be particularly representative of GCCP such as the use of English in brand communications as a symbol of modernity and globalization (i.e. Alden et al., 1999) and blue jeans, apple iPods and Western-style hamburgers (Akaka & Alden, 2010).

Consumer responses to global brands have primarily been reported as favourable in extant literature. In the global marketplace, evidence supports the premise that global brands are perceived by many global consumers as a symbol of quality (i.e. Talay et al., 2015; Holt et al., 2004), modernity (i.e. Llonch-Andreu et al., 2016; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010) and social prestige (i.e. Zhou et al., 2008). It is recognized that consumer responses to global brands in particular (as opposed to local or multi-regional brands) are shaped by affective emotions rather than cognitive thoughts (Dimofte, Johansson & Ronkainen, 2008). However, there exists a consumer segment that opposes global branding. Steenkamp and de Jong (2010) report that some consumers oppose the 'bland homogeneity' of meaning-related symbols that stem from Western-born products and brands, which in turn raises affect for local brands from those consumers (p. 19), and Riefler (2012) reports that

parallel to a rise of consumer critiques of globalization comes consumer avoidance of global brands that may be as high as 10% of consumers worldwide (p. 25).

3.3 Global social media branding

The ascendance of technological and digital empowerment in the global marketplace is, in part, responsible for a paroxysm of social media use, with approximately 73% of online individuals frequently using at least one social media platform (Hall-Phillips, Park, Chung, Anaza & Rathod, 2016). Social media can be used as global branding tool; a medium through which global brands can communicate their brand image to a global audience. Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni and Pauwels (2013) interpret the construct of social media as "communication systems that allow their social actors to communicate along dyadic ties" (p. 282). Social media are dynamic, egalitarian, 'living organisms' that require nurturing, management, and constant feeding if they are to be successfully employed in a brand's content strategy (Peters et al., 2013, p. 295). From a user perspective, social media is an expression of one's personality, and a manifestation of oneself (Hammedi et al., 2015). Social media are visceral in that affective emotions often guide user behaviour and attitudes towards other social actors, whether those actors are humans or brands, more than rationality or logic.

This research adopts the perspective that social media is distinctly useful as a branding mechanism for global brands. SM branding is highly cost efficient compared to traditional marketing communication (Choi, Fowler, Goh & Yuan, 2016) and is able to be personalized with ease (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). This is important to global brands in particular, as they face key challenges of coordinating their brand image across global markets, reaching out to consumers across vast geographical distances and managing the distribution of brand messages to consumers in a range of time zones (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). To compete with the higher physical presence that domestic brands are likely to have in their home countries, global brands can turn their efforts to social media. In one (of few) social media studies conducted in a global branding context, it is purported that social media is thus significant for global brands to strengthen relationships with their diverse base of global consumers (Chen, Lin, Choi & Hahm, 2015). Unfortunately for the research domain of global branding, social media is a nascent area that has produced a paucity of research in

a global branding context thus far. As the state of global branding strategy literature is nascent, how the socially constructed meanings and discourses through which global brands are understood on social media can be viewed from a global branding perspective is unmapped territory. As such, most of what we know about global brands actual or ideal social media content strategy in the global marketplace (i.e. the following literature regarding BGC and UGC) is inferred from knowledge of social media branding in a domestic or multi-market context.

A global brand's social media content strategy is a dyad of brand-generated content (BGC) and user-generated content (UGC) (i.e. Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012; Malthouse, Calder, Kim & Vandenbosch, 2016). Social media content strategy can be distinguished from actual social media content in that the content strategy is the blueprint of design for the creation and distribution of content (that is often not transparent to users on social media), whereas content is the outcome of this blueprint. Traditional BGC (also referred to in literature as marketer-generated content) is produced by the brand itself. However, in social media it is common for users of the brand to publicly communicate brand-related information and opinions (UGC) alongside this BGC. While BGC can be produced by the brand at will, UGC cannot; UGC can be influenced but not controlled (Peters et al., 2013). A review of the brand- and user-generated components of social media content strategy follows.

3.3.1 BGC

Peters et al. (2013) denote BGC to comprise of three elements: content quality (i.e. richness and interactivity), content valence (i.e. the emotions the content is able to induce) and content volume (i.e. the frequency of posts) (p. 287). SM content research is in its youth, but has established a number of guiding principles for BGC creation and distribution on social media that brands in general (including global brands) should aim to meet. The personalized and intimate nature of social media necessitates that interactions (as seen through content strategy) between a global brand and global consumers should take the form of an emotion-driven brand-user relationship (Hamilton et al., 2016; Yuksel, Milne & Miller, 2016). BGC is/should be utilized to build and maintain this type of relationship. Further, interacting with brands on social media allows SM users to "express their self-concept and identity, and to be associated with certain groups of people" (Hammedi et al., 2015,

p. 780). Social media use is thus an expression of self-identity, and as such the global brand should consider how it can assist consumers with identity expression through BGC (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Ubiquitous in literature is the revelation that an anthropomorphic branding strategy is primed to capture consumer affection through the brand-generated component of SM content strategy (i.e. Chen et al., 2015; Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016; Kwon & Sung, 2011). Brand anthropomorphism is a strategy that refers to "the attribution of a human form, human characteristics or human behaviour to nonhuman things" (Hudson et al., 2016, p. 29). Brand anthropomorphism invites the very essence of social media; brands espouse human-like traits and mannerisms in attempt to "capitalize on consumers anthropomorphizing tendency and emotional bonding with brands" (Chen et al., 2015, p. 98).

Brand- and user-generated content are engaged in a conversation on social media, in which BGC can be used to influence and incentivize SM users to create and/or share UGC for branding (Ding et al., 2014; Christodoulides et al., 2012). As UGC creation is thought to include identity management as a key motivator (discussed below), the image presented to SM users through BGC can either inspire or deter the user from creating UGC (Malthouse et al., 2016). Thus it has been acknowledged that brands should develop their component of content strategy in such a way that "inspires users to engage, modify and share" the content that is posted (Peters et al., 2013, p. 295). However, little else is known in literature about the nature of the relationship between brand- and user-generated content on social media; nothing is known about this in a global branding context.

3.3.2 UGC

User-generated content possesses three key traits: it reflects creative design, it is not created by working professionals and it is made publically available through online mediums (Christodoulides et al., 2012, p. 55). Research on UGC is "in its infancy in all academic disciplines" and is in dire need to improve social media marketers' comprehension of how it could be used as a global branding tool (Geurin & Burch, 2016, p. 274). The creation and spread of UGC has dramatically changed the way global brands are able to perceive their social media content strategy. As global brands' social media content is now contributed by both the brand and SM users (Kilgour et al., 2015), it is recognized that brands, once authors of the tale between brand and consumer, are now

merely one speaker (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). This entropic power shift from firm to consumer means that empowered SM users are able to post words, pictures and videos to the brand's social media page, are able to tag the brand in posts, and are able to discuss the brand in public online social media conversations (Davis, Piven & Breazle, 2014). Bidirectional communication between brand and SM user entails that brand identity communication on social media is a "co-creational process involving several brand authors who all contribute their stories: firms, popular cultural intermediaries, as well as individual consumers and consumer groups" (Gensler et al., 2013, p. 244).

The paucity of research on UGC has focused mainly on exploring the motivation behind its creation and sharing by online users. A novel finding that extant literature, while still nascent, tends to agree on is that because most creators of UGC do not contribute said content for monetary rewards (Wang & Li, 2017), UGC production is mainly intrinsically (rather than extrinsically) motivated (i.e. Sun, Dong & McIntyre, 2017; Halliday, 2016; Christodoulides et al., 2012). Further, a sizeable amount of UGC literature has suggested that the creation of UGC may be a method through which SM users can construct, manage and express their identity, their sense of who they are as a person (i.e. Wang & Li, 2014; Halliday, 2016; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Burmann, 2010; Shan, Ren & Li, 2017; Susarla, Oh & Tan, 2012). Halliday (2016) states that we should "interpret practices in terms of creating UGC as potentially meaning-laden and therefore to do with on-going identity construction as personal transformation", articulating that UGC creation may be part of a self-creation and re-creation process (p. 138). UGC creation/sharing transpires as identity creation because we are in the age of information, thus online information such as UGC is used to create and display identity (Halliday, 2016). Christodoulides, et al. (2012) discuss identity-shaping as a motivator for UGC creation, articulating that online users can engage in identity-shaping by expressing their attitudes through UGC creation, thus shaping their own public perception. This study found that the stronger a consumer perceives that a brand expresses his/her self-concept, the higher his/her involvement with that brand through UGC (p. 61). Moreover, it must be appreciated that while many individuals view UGC on social media sites, only a relatively small number of SM users actually contribute UGC (Malthouse et al., 2016). This does not decrease the worth of UGC as a research topic however, as "it is not uncommon for UGC posted on YouTube or Facebook to garner tens of thousands or even millions of views, likes, shares etc." (Malthouse et al., 2016, p. 441). In fact, the finding that

only a small number of users actively contribute UGC to a brands social media platforms makes it all the more important for global branding strategy literature to explore the motivators behind UGC creation/sharing by global consumers.

While research on the identity expression role of UGC is still in its infancy, the conceptualization that UGC can be a vehicle for identity expression prevails with strength, thus its potential relevance to global social media branding strategy has sufficient cause for exploration. If we ask the question, how can global brands in particular motivate SM users to contribute UGC to their social media pages, we cannot find an answer in extant literature. Extant literature gives no insight as to which SM users may be of high value for global brands to motivate to create/share UGC. Further, the available research on social media content strategy (in particular UGC) has not been conducted in a global branding context, thus has not considered the complexity of the global marketplace, the differences between global and domestic branding and the nature of global consumers. The lack of global SM branding research means that we generalize information conducted in domestic or multi-market SM branding settings to global branding. This is insufficient, as the nexus of multiplexity that is global social media branding needs its own pool of guidance from which to draw enlightenment that is suited to it as a distinct, deserving phenomenon.

3.4 Global social identification and global branding

3.4.1 Social identity theory in a global social media branding context

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) is a social-psychological theory that stems from the premise that individuals perceive themselves in terms of social labels/categories that represent how they appear to others in their social world. Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). As an individual's self-concept guides how they think, feel and behave in regards to their surroundings (Chattaraman, Lennon & Rudd, 2010), their social identity can be thought of as a 'system of orientation' that assists them to define and exist as a function of their place in society (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Before the theory is discussed, it must be firmly asserted that only some aspects of an

individual's identity are socially informed and influenced (Tajfel, 1978). As such, social identity theory can only enlighten our understanding of those aspects that are influenced by social group membership, thus it should inform rather than dictate a global brands social media strategy. Further, an individual may possess many social identities rather than a single, dominant one, certain identities of which may become dominant in certain circumstances or spheres (Tajfel, 1987); global brands can hope to influence, but cannot control, the dominance of these social identities.

A "process typical of all humans" is to divide their social world into categories and build their self-esteem by favourably comparing their in-groups to their out-groups (Eisenbeiss, Blechschmidt, Backhaus & Freund, 2012, p. 12). The in-group, a group with which a person socially identifies (i.e. belongs to), is compared to the out-group, a group with which a person does not identify. The reason behind this, as argued by Tajfel (1978), is that in the socially constructed world, realising positive or negative value of an in-group must come from comparing the in-group with the out-group, as "no social group is an island" (p. 66). The individual feels kinship with their in-groups and feels a sense of incompatibility to their out-groups. A social identity has the most influence on an individual's behaviour and attitude when that identity is salient (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity salience posits that individuals have multiple social identities that are meaningful to them and that these identities are arranged hierarchically, with identities that are more salient in this hierarchy being more meaningful to the consumer, thus more likely to affect or determine consumer attitudes and behaviour towards branded products (i.e. Arnett, German & Hunt, 2003; Zhang & Khare, 2009; Reed, 2002). The sum of one's social identities is called an individual's 'social self-schema' (Forehand, Deshpandé & Reed, 2002, p. 1086). If an individual possesses a certain identity as part of this self-schema, this identity can be activated by symbolic priming, where symbolism is used to signal membership of certain social groups. When reminded of an aspect of social group membership (for example, the meaning and/or importance of the membership), an identity can become an "activated conceptual structure in a consumers working self-concept" (p. 255). Examples of identity primes are reference group symbols and images/words related to the in-group (Forehand et al., 2002). Identity primes may be explicit or implicit, such that an individual may be consciously aware of their social identification or they may unknowingly respond to advertising cues that subconsciously activate a particular identity in the back of their mind (Chattaraman et al., 2010). Symbolic priming can be used to induce both initial social categorization and ongoing identity

salience when the symbolism reappears. The more salient a certain social identity is, the higher likelihood the individual will engage in "behavioural choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity", such as identity-congruent product choices and brand responses (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Individuals largely own and purchase products that are representative of their most salient social identities, avoid brands and other stimuli that contrast with these identities, and hold more favourable attitudes of brands that represent these identities. This is because engaging in identity-congruent behaviour enhances the individual's self-esteem, while engaging in identity-incongruent behaviour lowers it (Arnett et al., 2003). Consumers are also said to own objects (i.e. brands) related to a social identity as a form of 'identity reassurance' (Bartsch et al., 2016, p. 3631).

Social accentuation is a result of identification with an in-group, where "when classified as a part of a group, peoples features seem to more closely match their classification rather than any differences they have" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 31). A 'group' is defined by Tajfel (1978) as "a body of people who feel that they are a group" (p. 28). This definition should be held at the centre of every application of social identity theory, as it must be remembered that a group is not necessarily defined by people outside of that group or by society; it can be defined by the group members themselves. Modern social groups can range "from demographics (e.g., African American), social roles (e.g., parent), and shared consumption patterns (e.g., dieters), to identifiers created by marketers (e.g., Pepsi generation)" (MacInnis, Park & Priester, 2014, p. 124). Further, an individual's social identity is comprised of three constructs: self-awareness of group membership (cognitive component), evaluation of valence of this membership (evaluative component) and emotional involvement in the membership (affective component) (i.e. Eisenbeiss et al., 2012; Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Shen, Cheung & Lee, 2013). The cognitive dimension of social identity is shown through self-categorization, where group members are self-aware of membership and are able to distinguish similarities and differences between themselves and members of the out-group (Dholakia et al., 2004). The evaluative dimension of social identity is determined by the sense of self-worth an individual receives from this awareness of group membership, which takes on a positive valance if the individual derives positive self-esteem from group membership (Dholakia et al., 2004). The emotional dimension of social identity is comprised of "attachment or affective commitment" to the group, and stems from emotional involvement that enhances loyalty towards in-group members (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 245). Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk (1999) argue

the emotional (affective) component of social identity as being the primary driver of behaviour in terms of group membership. The authors argue that mere self-awareness of categorical group membership does not mean individuals will view this positively or wish to act in accordance with group norms. As such, social identification is thought to be primarily used in literature "to refer to a feeling of affective commitment to the group (the emotional component), rather than the ability to distinguish between members of different social categories (the cognitive component)" (p. 29).

A key idea that is grounded in consumer culture theory is that an individual's identities are defined and enacted upon in relation to consumption of brands/products because the cultural marketplace is centred around brands/products that reflect certain identities (Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These brands and products adopt a psychological and/or sociological 'symbolic function' in that they "enable consumers to signal affiliation with (or exclusion from) social collectives, and thereby convey a desired social identity" (Dennhardt, 2013, p. 13; Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017, p. 196). Upon activation of a particular social identity, that social identity becomes the frame of reference through which an individual perceives their consumption world (Maitner, Mackie, Claypool & Crisp, 2010). For example, MacInnis et al. (2014) in their book on brand relationships ask us to:

'Consider the social identity of "athlete." A consumer might adopt this social identity and use its associated evaluative content [e.g., perceptions of what an athlete thinks (attitudes) and does (behaviours)] as the basis to form an attitude (e.g., attitude toward Nike sports shoes or attitudes toward exercise). This process is likely to result in a collectively anchored attitude that is formed via identification processes and is held, expressed, or used as a guide for behaviour in order to establish, maintain, or even communicate that social identity to others' (p. 133).

Further, Westjohn, Singh and Magnusson (2012) bring to light the role of signs and symbols in displaying and reinforcing social identity. Global brand managers can symbolically link their brand to specific social identities in order to attempt to enhance brand-consumer relationships as a function of brand-consumer identity congruity (MacInnis et al., 2014), which can be a particularly powerful branding tool if this builds a connection with consumers that is strategically positioned around a certain lifestyle (Reed, 2004). Social group memberships are important to global branding as

consumers consider which social groups a brand represents when interacting with them on social media (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013; MacInnis et al., 2014). As such, social identity theory has been strongly linked to brand-consumer interactions, and is beginning to be utilized in a social media setting. However, research has not yet explored how social identification, or which social identities in particular, could be relevant to a global brand's social media content strategy (i.e. BGC and UGC). This research gap is especially important to global social media branding as SM is hypersocial in that social interaction, social connectedness, belonging and identity formation are at its core (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney & Waters, 2014), thus on social media, social symbolism and social groups are transparent. This, combined with the idea that global brands can be representative of certain social identities, could imply that SM users may be inclined to engage in identity management through their global brand interactions. This is significant because social identification/social identity expression could be important for the user-generated component of a global brand's SM content strategy due to the notion that UGC is mainly intrinsically motivated, thus it cannot simply be purchased by global brands. The next section will explore a particular social identity that may be relevant to global SM branding: a global social identity.

3.4.2 Global social identity

Jain and Griffith (2011) acknowledge that due to foreign cultural exposure through international media, individuals can develop "a sense of belonging to a global culture, that is world-citizens" (p. 321). This can occur as common elements of local cultures converge, or when international media develops and spreads cultures that are not anchored in any one location, but are world-relevant (Alden et al., 1999). As such, a particular social identity that could be relevant to global branding is global identity. Global identity has been explored in international marketing literature, with authors adopting similar but subtly different definitions of the concept. Zhang and Kare (2009) broadly define possessing a global identity as "identifying with people around the world" and report that individuals with a global identity hold positive attitudes towards the inherent human similarities of people across the globe (p. 525). Westjohn et al. (2012) build on this, conceptualizing individuals with a global identity as possessing a globally-oriented mind-set, which includes an "openness to divergent cultural experiences, a willingness or curiosity to learn about how the world works, the ability to adapt and recognize complex interconnections, and the ability to understand the world

with all its complexity, diversity and ambiguity" (p. 63). Further, Lin and Wang (2016) define a global identity as "mental representations that prompt individuals to adopt positive attitudes towards globalization, be interested in global events, and feel a part of and identify with the global community" (p. 484). Individuals possessing a global identity take an interest in global issues, feel a sense of global interconnectivity, embrace foreign influence and view global trade and business positively (Weinlich, 2016, p. 212). They are often modern and cosmopolitan, with a strong technological competence (i.e. Jain & Griffith, 2011; Westjohn, Arnold, Magnusson, Zdravkovic & Zhou, 2009; Westjohn et al., 2012). Further, literature takes the position that personality traits often predispose individuals to possessing a global identity, as those with a global identity have often been found to possess similar traits. For example, the personality trait 'openness to experience', defined as a preference for variety and a curiousness about how the world works, has been found to be strongly associated with global identity, as has extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness (i.e. Westjohn et al., 2012, p. 62). The orientation towards globalness found in individuals with a global identity "draws from social identity theory, which suggests that a consumers reference group is not domestically anchored but rather emerges in reference to a global world" (Bartsch et al., 2016, p. 3630). Further, it is widely and clearly acknowledged in literature that individuals can use global brands to reinforce their global identity (i.e. Bartsch et al., 2016; Xie, Batra & Peng, 2015; Westjohn et al., 2012; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008; Strizhakova et al., 2008; Strizhakova et al., 2011). Alden et al. (1999) discuss how global consumers buy certain global brands to display their group membership in specific global groups, such as teenager, business elite or cosmopolitan. Bartsch et al. (2016) build on this to reveal that consumers who possess a global identity often perceive global brands as a source of strength through which they can feel connected to the global world, emphasising the powerful symbolic meaning that global brands can possess. Despite the development of the literature regarding global social identity, in-depth research of the 'identity-expression benefits' that a global brand can receive from global identity reinforcement through brand purchasing/interactions is lacking (Xie et al., 2015, p. 51). As such, the ways in which a global brand can or should respond to the identity-expression needs of consumers with a global identity, in addition to the ways in which global brands may be able to harness these needs to enhance their global branding strategy, are not known. Moreover, literature has asserted that most consumers with a global identity respond very positively to GCCP symbolism (i.e. Bartsch et al., 2016; Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017; Strizhakova et al., 2011). In accordance with prior social identity research,

research has concluded that a global identity (and the thought patterns, emotional reactions and brand preferences that are associated with it) can be made salient through situational cues (e.g. signs and symbols) if the individual in question possesses that identity in their social self-schema (i.e. Zhang & Kare, 2009; Jain & Griffith, 201l; Strizhakova et al., 2011). The higher salience a consumer's global identity has, the higher likelihood they have of responding positively to global brands, taking interest in global brand activities and purchasing global brand products. Zhang and Khare (2009) showed this through their findings that participants who had their global identity primed through brand cues found global brands more attractive than local brands, all else equal. As individuals with a salient global identity tend to favour global brands and respond the most positively to GCCP symbols/advertisements, they could potentially be a key group for global brands to engage with and encourage to play an active role in their SM content strategy. Further, as UGC can be a form of identity expression, the research domain could benefit from an exploration of how this could transpire for SM users with a global identity in particular, and what the implications of this could be for a global brand's SM content strategy.

4. Research gap, purpose and questions

As articulated above, the research gap this study aims to fill is the gap where there currently exists no research that explores if/how global social identification could transpire in a global social media branding context, and how brand- and user-generated content could relate to this. As such, the research objective of this study is to explore the relevance of global identity (and social media users that possess this identity) to the brand-generated and user-generated components of a global brand's SM content strategy. Social identity theory is an appropriate lens through which to inform and evaluate a global brand's SM content strategy because of the social-centric nature of social media, where social group memberships are transparent for SM users to see. Social identity theory should be utilised to study the parts of the self that are socially informed (Reed, 2002), thus the theory can be extended to investigate how these parts manifest themselves through global brand-user interactions in a social media branding setting. In this, this research responds to a call for social media studies to adopt a firm perspective (e.g. branding) in order to advance/optimize strategies on social media (Alves, Fernandes & Raposo, 2016). Further, the application of social identity theory represents a move towards acknowledging the value of theoretical perspectives that reflect the complex relationships humans develop with facets of their social world (as is reflected by the nature of branding 3.0) (Kotler et al., 2010). As such, the above research gap is important for the discourse of global branding as a whole, to orientate it towards more deep, relationship-enhancing theoretical perspectives that may contribute to global branding strategy formulation. The research questions utilized to explore this gap are as follows:

Research questions:

1. How can a global brand use BGC to socially identify with SM users who have a global identity as part of their social self-schema?

2. How can this social identification affect or influence UGC creation and/or sharing by SM users with a global identity?

5. The research process

5.1 Research paradigm

A research paradigm consists of the assumptions and beliefs a researcher adopts and holds about the nature of a research project (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). This research used interpretivism as its chosen paradigm to guide the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions and the actions that were taken for data collection and analysis. Interpretivism aims to understand the subjective experiences and situation-specific meanings held by individuals, in their full complexity and intricacy, from the point of view of the individuals who are experiencing this meaning themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The interpretivist approach heavily weighs subjective/contextual factors and relationships between phenomena, and values individual differences in the interpretation of phenomena as being representative of multiple socially constructed truths (Ang, 2014). This opposes a positivist paradigm, under which there is one objective, pre-existing truth for researchers to discover. What would under positivism be considered a bias is an important part of the research process under interpretivism; interpretive research relies on the researchers subjective knowledge, experience and worldviews to understand and analyze the data (Sandberg, 2005). As such, the researcher plays a critical role in understanding and expressing the motivations, beliefs and behaviour of the participants through the research process.

 5.1.1 Research ontology

Ontology can be thought of as considering and exploring the nature of reality, and involves determining what is, or can be said to be, 'real' (Koch, 1999, p. 21). A relativist ontology was used in this research, as is common within the interpretive paradigm, which insists that there are multiple important and meaningful realities that people can experience, each of which depends on the contextual and subjective experiences of each person in the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). The experiences and feelings of people in the social world are considered real and true under a relativist ontology, as reality is created through human subjectivity, thus the meaning of reality can be changed through human consciousness (Sandberg, 2005). This contrasts with

positivistic ontological perspectives where there is one true and measurable objective reality. The researcher's role under a relativist ontology is to enquire into and understand the subject's experience of reality as it is experienced by the subject (Sandberg, 2005). The researcher must take the subject's lived experience as real, true and important, and proceed with the role of gaining an in-depth understanding and appreciation of this experience (Koch, 1999).

5.1.2 Research epistemology

Epistemology refers to the consideration of what can be said to be 'known', and asks the question "how do we know what we know?" (Koch, 1999, p. 21). A subjectivist epistemology was used in this research, which believes that the "knower and respondent co-create understandings and meanings" upon encountering each other, as opposed to meaning already pre-existing and waiting to be discovered as it is (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). Knowledge is subjective rather than objective, is constructed socially and consists of competing interpretations, all of which are true and meaningful and can be said to be 'known'. The researcher brings one of these competing interpretations to light under a subjectivist epistemology, with the aim of understanding the meaning of the subject's experience. As such, the researcher cannot be separated from the research as it is through the researcher that knowledge comes to life (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

5.1.3 Research methodology

The research methodology, which is underpinned by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research, is the process by which data is generated and analyzed (Koch, 1999). Aligned with an interpretivist paradigm, this research adopted a hermeneutical methodology. Under hermeneutics, a phenomena and its meaning comes to be known through a post-hoc textual analysis of the stories and experiences relayed by the research participants (Thompson, 1997). As such, meaning from participants lived experiences is understood and interpreted by the researcher through the stories and narratives the participants tell, which often happens on reflection of their stories that have been transcribed into written text. The aim of the researcher is to be open to possibilities found in the text, rather than to prescribe and predict existing meaning onto the stories that subjects tell about their experiences (Thompson, 1997). The research design, described in the

next section, is tailored towards meeting the research aims of this study under a hermeneutical methodology.

5.2 Research design, strategies and data collection

5.2.2 Case study approach

The research design is a "flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical perspectives first, to strategies of enquiry and second, to methods for collecting empirical materials" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 25). This study employed a qualitative case study design consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a global brand (the focal brand) and SM users that have created UGC for that brand, and a qualitative content analysis of the focal brands social media pages.

As social identity theory has not been applied in the context of global social identification and global SM branding strategy, it was decided that qualitative research should be utilized to provide insight to the research questions. Qualitative research is usually exploratory and should be utilised when theory and extant literature surrounding a topic are nascent (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Qualitative research aims to generate insight and understanding into a phenomenon rather than to quantify it (Flick, 2014), and is commonly used under an interpretive paradigm. Within this qualitative approach, a case study design was selected. A case study is an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon using multiple methods of data collection within that case for the purpose of achieving deep and insightful information (Eisenhardt, 1989). An instrumental case study approach was used in this study, of which the purpose is to provide insight into a phenomenon and play a role in facilitating understanding of a wider theory, regardless of whether the case comes to be seen as representative of other cases or not (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A case study was useful to this research as the researcher wished to consider the research questions in light of their context, in this case a global branding context, to promote further thinking on the topic and to produce findings specifically relevant to global brands. As such, the case study helped to ground the research in a global branding context.

Gummesson (2000) purports that "an open discussion of the weaknesses surrounding a particular approach and its results" will help to improve the quality of the research (p. 94). Case studies have been criticised in literature for lacking statistical reliability and for having a limited ability for generalization and for having a bias towards verification (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gummesson, 2000). In terms of the first criticism, case studies limited ability to produce statistical verification is not a concern for this study, as the aim is to gain an initial understanding of the lived experiences of the research participants in terms of BGC and UGC rather than to produce a statistically testable hypothesis. In terms of the second criticism, the meaning of the research participants' lived experiences is not aimed to be generalized in this study, as the research aims to understand the social identity needs of UGC creators in the specific context of the case study. In terms of the third criticism, the researcher took steps to learn about and avoid researcher verification. This included bracketing, where pre-defined constructs that literature suggests may be relevant the case are kept bracketed and tentative so that the researcher is prepared to follow the direction of the research as it emerges, rather than directing it back to pre-defined constructs.

5.2.3 Case study methods of data collection and analysis

A key advantage of case studies is the ability to triangulate findings while keeping them as close to a single setting as possible (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ang, 2014). Triangulation is "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categorisation in a study" (Ang, 2014, p. 221). The multiple methods of data collection used in this case study (content analysis, global brand interviews and global SM user interviews) strengthened the research as they allowed the conversations of each of these sources to be compared and contrasted to generate insight into the research topic. To produce a rich case study, it was decided that only one global brand (referred to as Brand-X for anonymity) would be studied in this research.

The case study utilized interviews with both the global brand and the global brands SM users (UGC creators) to be able to corroborate and link the global brands perspective to the SM users' perspective, to understand holistically how global brands can evaluate their content strategy in light of global social identification. The researcher used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with

the focal brand and SM users to probe into the research questions. Interviews are a common method of data collection under interpretive enquiries as they allow for deep conversations to be held that can provide rich data for qualitative analysis (Ang, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research is guided by social identity theory; the semi-structured of interview questions was theory informed while also allowing for unexpected insights to emerge that may challenge or complement the guiding theory. These semi-structured interviews were designed to be responsive to the topics the participants speak about and sensitive to the words spoken by the interviewee (Britten, 1995). Open-ended questions were used to provoke thoughtful and in-depth answers while allowing for flexibility in the participants answers, which closed-ended questions do not provide.

Further, an observational content analysis was undertaken of the focal brands social media pages and communication (i.e. brand and user comments on the posts of these SM pages). The purpose of this was to supplement/extend the interview data and give further insight to the focal case by establishing the context of the research. The content analysis was qualitative and interpretive, thus codes emerged from the analysis rather than were pre-defined. The SM platforms Facebook and Instagram, as well as the brand's travel blog, were examined. These three platforms were chosen because they were the platforms that the brand uses most frequently (as reported by the brand). The researcher analyzed the brand's SM pages/communication through an iterative process that culminated in the development of themes related to semiotics, branding strategy/techniques and higher-order motifs (expressed in the findings section). The process by which the researcher derived themes from this content analysis is detailed in section 5.3.

Moreover, the question arose of whether global identity salience could be tested for within the case study. Existing studies that pinpoint the moment of social identity salience (i.e. Reed, 2004) tested this salience using manipulation and/or intervention, which is a considerable task that constituted a large part, or all, of the study. This was determined to lay outside of the scope of this thesis, as it was not central to the research aims. Therefore, this study will utilize findings and assumptions about salience from previous studies (i.e. that an identity can be made salient from stimulus cues that are meaningful to that identity) but will not directly test for/examine this.

5.2.4 Sample selection for case study

5.2.4.1 Global brand selection

Interpretive studies entail purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), thus it was decided that a case should be selected where the phenomenon of interest is observable and transparent. To engage in purposeful sampling in this study, it was necessary to develop criteria for focal brand selection to ensure the case had the best chance of giving insight into the global social identification process. Three criteria were used determine whether a brand could be considered global and whether that global brand could fulfil the theoretical expectations of the research questions. The criteria were developed based on global branding literature, and focused on a consumer positioning perspective of global branding to be consistent with the definition of global brands used in this study. As mentioned earlier, studies that define global branding based on international sales are uncommon in global branding literature (Özsomer & Altaras, 2008). For this reason, the sampling criteria below do not contain a minimum requirement for international sales, but are focused on brand positioning and the nature of global consumers:

1. The brand refers to multiple world regions or attempts to communicate with a diverse range of people, and/or refers to themselves as a global brand in their marketing communication.
2. The brand feels they meet the definition of 'global brand' used in this study (see page 9).
3. The brand is perceived as a global brand by its consumers.

Brand-X fulfilled the sampling criteria and thus was chosen as the focal brand for case study analysis. Brand-X is a global travel brand that organizes tours to every continent. The brand aims to provide their consumers with an authentic and unforgettable travel adventure that is facilitated by a tour leader and operates in small groups. The brand has a global website that can be tailored to various world regions, is active on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, and runs a travel blog that individuals can contribute to.

Criteria one was determined through analysis of the brands publically available online marketing communication. On their main website, Brand-X refers to themselves as a 'global company' and a 'global leader' in travel and reaches out to a diverse range of people by directly expressing the

desire to interact with customers from all over the world. Brand-X refers to many different continents and cities in their online marketing communication. Criteria two was obtained as a self-report measure by the brand, where the brand was asked if they feel they meet the definition of 'global brand' used in this study. When approached via email, a brand representative (the Head of Global Creative) from Brand-X responded that they definitely do meet this definition and added that they sell in three main global regions and many additional countries.

For criteria three, neither public nor internal company information, statistics or polls on consumer perceptions of the gobalness of Brand-X were available. Time constraints of this Master's study did not allow for contacting a large number of Brand-X's consumers to quantify their perceptions of globality. Thus, a content analysis of Brand-X's social media communication with its global consumers was undertaken to screen for SM users expressing known traits of global social identity (from literature) and evaluate whether these users were prevalent in the focal brands online communication. This is because extant literature purports that consumers with a global identity are strongly attracted to purchasing from, and communicating with, global brands (i.e. Jain & Griffith, 2011; Zhang & Kare, 2009, Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 2006). A further purpose of this was to evaluate whether the brand is appropriate for focal brand selection, as this study aimed to study global social identification which requires studying SM users with a global identity as part of their social self-schema. Although communicating with GCCP is a common feature of global brands as reported by extant literature, this was not used as part of the sampling criteria for the focal case. This is because while global brands usually use GCCP appeals in their branding communication, some global brands do successfully utilise FCCP or even LCCP appeals (e.g. Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017). Key traits of global social identity that were used for screening are listed below:

Attitudes:
- Positive attitudes towards globalization/global integration (i.e. Lin & Wang, 2016; Weinlich, 2016)
- Positive attitudes and respect towards differences across cultures (Low on ethnocentrism) (i.e. Jain & Griffith, 2011, Alden et al., 2006)
- Positive attitudes and understanding towards the similarities of global citizens (i.e. Zhang & Kare, 2009)

Interests:

- Interested in world diversity and foreign cultural experiences (i.e. Westjohn et al., 2012; Jain & Griffith, 2011)
- Interested in and/or desire to participate in global events and activities of global citizens (i.e. Lin & Wang, 2016; Weinlich, 2016)

Personality:

- Openness to experience trait: described as "curious", "imaginative", "insightful", "broad interests", "non-traditional", "preference for variety" (i.e. Westjohn et al., 2012, p. 62; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Zabkar, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, Diamantopoulos & Florack, 2017; Jain & Griffith, 2011)

Sentiments/emotions:

- Feel identification with humankind as a whole (i.e. Zhang & Kare, 2009; Bartsch et al., 2016; Jain & Griffith, 2011)
- Feel global connectedness (part of the global community) (i.e. Jain & Griffith, 2011; Lin & Wang, 2016; Weinlich, 2016)

These traits were identified and summarised from extant literature by the researcher. This was necessary because no existing study presents a comprehensive list of global identity traits. The content analysis was undertaken using the social media platform Facebook. Facebook was chosen because upon comparison of the brands social media sites, Facebook tended to display longer user comments, which were more useful to the researcher for the screening of exhibition of social identity traits. As the purpose was not to report a statistical analysis but to determine whether the brand could fulfil the theoretical expectations of the research questions, a short time period of 5 days was used for the content analysis (the brand posts 2-3 times per day on Facebook on average). The researcher stopped after finding a clear pattern regarding the expression of global social identity by SM users. Every post over the 5-day period was included in the content analysis, and every comment on each post was included apart from comments containing just a name-tag and

no other words or symbols; these comments had to be excluded as they gave no indication of the tone of the comments, nor the attitudes, interests or emotions expressed in them.

The results of the content analysis featured 83 user comments across 7 posts. Seven comments showed no identifiable traits of global identity, twenty-nine comments showed one trait, forty-three comments showed two traits and four comments showed three traits. In sum, 91% of screened user comments showed one or more traits of an accessible global identity as reported in extant literature. This was interpreted as meeting criteria 3 for focal brand selection, thus the researcher proceeded to study Brand-X. 'Openness to experience' and 'Interested in world diversity and foreign cultural experiences' were the most commonly identified global identity traits in the content analysis, which were often found in tandem with each other. 'Interested in world diversity and foreign cultural experiences' was shown if the user expressed interest in related topics (such as foreign culture) through their comments, and 'openness to experience' was shown in tandem with this trait if the user commented that they had visited the foreign culture or engaged in the foreign cultural experience in question or stated or alluded that they wish to. 'Openness to experience' was not found to be exhibited if the user's comment did not refer to visiting the place, as then only interest could be shown. An example of this follows:

*User-X: *name-tag omitted*, have you heard about Costa Rica?*

This comment was coded as 'Interested in world diversity and foreign cultural experiences' only, as there is no clear intention of visiting the foreign culture in the comment. However, User-Y commented:

User-Y: Currently halfway through your classic Costa Rica tour and absolutely loving it!! Thank you Brand-X, it is truly is such an amazing experience especially the home stay. It will be the first of many trips with your company.

This comment was coded as both 'Interested in world diversity and foreign cultural experiences' and 'Openness to experience', as the fact that the user is currently on the trip indicates openness to experience in addition to being interested in foreign cultural experiences.

5.2.4.2 Social media user selection

Before sampling criteria are outlined for SM user selection, the definition of UGC in the context of this research will be discussed. Although UGC research is in its infancy, most of the few papers on motivation for UGC creation use the definition of UGC presented in the literature review of this thesis (on page 15). However, because of the focus of the research questions on global social identification, the researcher found this definition to be limiting when selecting SM users to interview who have contributed UGC to the focal brand. This is attributed to the 'free' component of the definition. This issue emerged after the researcher interviewed a brand representative from Brand-X who discussed a process where individuals who are interested in creating content might contact the brand and ask for advice/guidance about content creation; if the brand feels that the individual's creative effort could be of value, the brand may offer to send them on a day-trip on one of their future planned travels or offer to pay for the potential content creator to take photos in a certain location. Further, Brand-X might still give individuals who are not professional content creators a reward for their content as a value-exchange, even if the content creator has not asked for one. In light of this, the researcher felt that the 'free' component of the original UGC definition may exclude SM users with potentially valuable insight into the research topic. With a view of broadening the scope of participants who could inform the study, the researcher reviewed UGC literature and noted core components of UGC that were inherent to UGC creation. The outcome of the process was the following definition generated by the researcher:

User-generated content is social media content related to a brand that:
a) is voluntarily created by social media users outside of the professional operations and practices of the brands employees and b) has been made public through social media channels (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012; Wang & Li, 2017; Halliday, 2016).

This is a broader definition that is still based on core components of UGC from extant literature, yet is tailored so as not to limit participant recruitment, and thus the findings, of this exploratory study. This definition focuses on content that is created voluntarily (i.e. of a person's free will) rather than content that does not receive any pre- or post-creation tangible or intangible rewards.

Following this definition, three sampling criteria were developed for SM user selection:

1. The SM user has contributed UGC to Brand-X's Facebook, Instagram or travel blog (most commonly used platforms by the brand).
2. The SM users' social media profiles show at least one identifiable trait of global identity.
3. The SM user is not an employee of Brand-X.

For criteria one, the researcher selected participants to approach to interview through Brand-X's UGC on their public social media pages. The UGC posts often tagged the creator's social media page, who usually had a public email address listed for contacts/queries that the researcher used to approach potential participants. If they replied and were interested, the content creator was asked to confirm they had indeed created content for Brand-X specifically. The researcher deliberately sought both frequent and occasional contributors and both free and rewarded contributors. The purpose of this was to seek a diverse sample of users that allowed for comparison and contrasting of insights.

For criteria two, the researcher screened the SM users' public Instagram profiles for identifiable traits of global identity. Instagram was chosen initially as all the profiles were publically viewable (as opposed to media like Facebook that are private) and used to keep the global identity screenings consistent across the same platform. SM users who did not have a public Instagram profile would have to be removed from the sample, but as it happened each SM user did have a profile. If the SM user's profile showed at least one clearly identifiable trait of global identity they were deemed to meet criteria two. Criteria three was met by asking the SM users if they are or have been employees of Brand-X and eliminating SM users that are/were. No rewards or vouchers were offered to participants as the researcher did not want a financial incentive to be a driver of interview participation, rather an interest in the topic and a willingness to talk about their experiences.

5.2.5 Interview process: global brand and social media users

In the interest of being concise, this section will discuss the overall interview process for both the global brand representatives and the SM users/UGC creators. Any differences in the interview process between the brand and user interviews will be noted.

A discussion with Brand-X revealed there were two brand representatives that could inform the research topic, and data saturation was achieved after eight SM user interviews (discussed shortly). Thus, the interview participants consisted of two brand representatives and eight SM users who have had UGC featured on the brands SM pages. The brand representatives hold senior positions (Head of Global Creative and Global Social Media Specialist) devising the brands social media content strategy and are situated within its global marketing team. The SM users had various relationships with the brand in terms of user-generated content; some were frequent contributors that received tangible or intangible rewards (i.e. money or consumption benefits) creating content for the brand and some were occasional contributors that did not receive a fee or any other benefits for their content (but did receive other forms of intangible value from user-generated contribution). Some user interviewees derived a large portion of their income from content creation activities (i.e. content creation for brands or other organizations, website and/or social media promotion/influencing, article or blog writing etcetera) while some user interviewees did not. The interviewed brand representatives and SM users had an age range of 22-46. Post-hoc analysis of interviewees' demographics revealed that all interviewees were born and raised in a Western cultural context (mostly from Australia and Canada).

Prior to the interview:

The researcher prepared for the interviews by reading literature about how to carry out qualitative interviews under a hermeneutical philosophy and consulting with outside sources to outline potential techniques and behavioural expectations for the interviews (e.g. the researcher's Master's supervisor). An interview guide was developed consisting of a range of open questions around the research topic so that the researcher could choose the most appropriate questions depending on how the interview progressed. The interview guide (shown in Appendix 1) began with warm-up questions and led into more thought-provoking questions, with questions that required deep answers scheduled to be asked near the end of the interview as is advised in qualitative research

interviews (Britten, 1995). Interviewees that were screened that met the selection criteria discussed above were contacted via email initially and provided with an information sheet and a consent to interview form, and asked if they had any questions about the project. As qualitative research interviews require the interviewee to divulge personal stories and meanings to the researcher, trust must be established before the interview and rapport built at every step from the initial interaction with the interviewee (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The researcher did this by contacting the interviewees politely and letting them know they were not obliged to respond, and if they chose to respond the researcher answered all questions about the project and informed the interviewee that they were prepared to conduct an interview at any time that suited the interviewee (to demonstrate respect for the participants time and facilitate trust-building).

During and after the interview:

Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, and occurred over skype. Skype was chosen so that a verbal conversation which allowed for follow-up questions could occur, as the global brand representatives and many global SM users/content creators were not located in the same country as the researcher. The brand interviews were conducted before the user interviews to allow for reflection and adjustment to the interview guide for users. The researcher commenced the interview by asking the interviewees about their day and if they had any questions about the project, to build rapport and start the interview in a friendly/comfortable manner. During the interview, the researcher asked questions from the interview guide as starting points but let the interviewee lead the direction of the interview, so long as the interview remained relevant to the topics the researcher is studying (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). During the brand interviews, the brand was asked to reiterate which SM platforms they engage with most regularly and with the most effort. The brand reported these to be Facebook, Instagram and their travel blog, so the discussion was kept on the topic of those platforms so that real life examples could be explored. During the SM user interviews, users were not initially asked about a specific platform so that the discussion could be flexible and to see which platforms the participants discussed naturally. If they did not naturally bring up any of the three platforms the brand engaged with the most, the researcher planned to ask about those platforms at a later point in interview. However, the participants naturally discussed Facebook, Instagram and the brands travel blog, and only very rarely

mentioned other platforms. During the interview, the researcher often summarized what the interviewee had said to check that their interpretation was correct (Britten, 1995). This was to give the interviewee a chance to correct the researcher's interpretation during the interview so that more insight could be gained by the researcher. Probing questions were used to explore any topics of interest. Interviews were recorded in order for the researcher to be able to transcribe the interviews at a later point. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings verbatim and sent them back to the interviewees to check for accuracy of content and interpretation (member checking). The researcher used NVIVO software to aid in the data analysis process. The interviewees were also asked if they would like to be sent the research when it is concluded.

5.3 Data saturation and analysis

Data saturation occurred when no valuable and/or significant additional information (codes, themes or data) was being obtained by data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For qualitative studies, data saturation can be achieved from as little as six interviews, under the condition that the interviews are rich and thick, as data saturation depends not on the amount of interviews conducted but on the depth of the data collected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation was not relevant for the global brand interviews because only one global brand was able to be selected with two brand representatives that were able to inform the research topic. However, as Brand-X has a large number of SM users who have contributed UGC to the brand, data saturation had to be considered. Data saturation was achieved at eight SM user interviews; in the final SM user interview, no new themes, codes or data emerged, thus the researcher proceeded to analyze the findings. A data saturation grid was used to determine this.

Thematic analysis was the method of data analysis used in this study, for both the interview results and the content analysis. Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" that focuses on providing rich thematic descriptions of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is often constructed within the interpretivist paradigm, and is well suited to studies that seek to understand the meaning behind phenomena (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). A 'theme' is defined as something that "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and

represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Codes are ideas of meaning that are not yet organized into higher, broader categories (themes, which can consist of one or multiple codes). Thematic analysis allowed for both manifest meanings and latent meanings to be thematised, which refer to directly observed (i.e. stated, discussed) and indirectly observed (i.e. implied, below the surface) meanings respectively (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) discuss six stages of thematic analysis in their widely cited article. The researcher closely followed these steps in the analysis of data for this study:

Phase one: Becoming familiar with the data	In this phase the researcher transcribed the interviews, re-read the interview transcripts multiple times, reviewed the content analysis and considered the content analysis and the interviews in light of the emerging context of the case study and of background literature. Initial ideas were recorded as they entered researchers mind.
Phase two: Generating initial codes	The researcher produced initial, tentative codes from the data (both semantic and latent), as data was organized into categories of meaning that shared commonalities. The researcher analyzed data under each code and considered the data in light of the meaning of the code.
Phase three: Searching for themes	The researcher considered the initial codes holistically to search for potential themes. A thematic map was used to visualise relationships between codes and themes. The researcher also considered relationships between different themes, or themes and sub-themes. This phase, along with the next phase, was an iterative process where the researcher went back and forward between data and theory using a part-to-whole approach, which allowed the researcher to consider the part (i.e. a code) in relation to the whole (i.e. a theme) and vice versa to achieve reflective clarity and consistency between data and theory (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Phase four: Reviewing themes	Themes were combined, separated, eliminated or added according to the researcher's interpretive understanding of the data. Themes not supported by data were eliminated. The researcher re-read the dataset many times to ensure their thematic thinking about global identity and global SM branding reflected the data.
Phase five: Defining and mapping themes	The researcher refined and defined the themes, and pieced together a holistic story in relation to the research questions and the research context that would be understandable to those who have not experienced the phenomenon. The researcher utilised a 15-point checklist of thematic analysis criteria surrounding topics such as detail provision, comprehensiveness of iterations and language used (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 96).
Phase six: Producing the report	The thematic analysis was turned into a story with rich detailed description that could be presented in a thesis. Thematic data was used as evidence for this story.

5.4 Checks of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that it is an "artistic endeavour and requires a soulful and imaginative approach to assessing its quality" (Houghton, Casey & Shaw, 2013, p. 12), thus traditional quantitative measures should not be used to evaluate its quality (i.e. Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013). Extant literature cites four common criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research: credibility, dependability (sometimes referred to as trustworthiness), confirmability and transferability (i.e. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 2013).

Credibility focuses on "establishing a match between the constructed realities of respondents and those realities presented by the researcher" (Sinkovics et al., 2008, p. 6). This study adopted

multiple methods by which to support and achieve credibility, namely triangulation, member checking and thick descriptions (Ang, 2014). Triangulation (i.e. interviewing users, the brand and conducting a content analysis) enhanced credibility due to the multiple and diverse sources of information that triangulation provides a study (Ang, 2014). To engage in member checking, the researcher prepared an interview summary for each interviewee and sent this summary along with the interview transcripts to the participants, who were asked to check for accuracy of data and accuracy of researcher interpretation. Thick descriptions were also used to enhance credibility as rich detail provides readers of the study with the chance to question the findings and raise any issues of concern with the researcher (Ang, 2014). Potential biases (such as social desirability bias) were studied by the researcher and actions were taken to address them.

Dependability is concerned with how stable and congruous the research results are, or should be, over time (Sinkovics et al., 2008). This study used a formal coding process to present and preserve formal codes so that the research can be built on, replicated, compared or critiqued in the future (Sinkovics et al., 2008). Audit trails and reflexivity were also used to enhance dependability. To build an audit trail, the researcher took comprehensive notes about the rationale for all decisions made so that the decisions, and thus the findings, would be completely transparent (Houghton et al., 2013). Reflexivity is concerned with self-awareness of the researcher's role in the study (i.e. what this role should and should not be like), which the researcher ensured they were consciously aware of at every stage of the research process so as not to influence the findings with personal bias (Houghton et al., 2013).

Transferability refers to "whether or not particular findings can be transferred to another similar context or situation, while still preserving the meanings and inferences from the completed study" (Sinkovics et al., 2008, p. 6). To ensure that transferability was able to be considered once the research was complete, the researcher followed the advice of Houghton et al. (2013) in providing thick and rich descriptions of the research findings/context so that transferability could be critically considered near the end of the study. Further, Sinkovics et al. (2008) reports that comparing and conflicting a study's findings with similar literature lends to the transferability process because reviewing literature conducted in both similar and disparate contexts can prompt critical thinking

about which contexts the research may be transferable to. This was undertaken by the researcher during the analysis of findings.

Confirmability asks the researcher to maintain neutrality, as researchers "need to demonstrate that their data and the interpretations drawn from it are rooted in circumstances and conditions outside of the researchers own imagination" (Sinkovics et al., 2008, p. 6). Confirmability was enhanced with the audit trail and reflexivity methods described above by Houghton et al. (2013). The audit trail helped the researcher (and readers of the research) determine whether the researcher's interpretations stemmed from experiences of the participants and were not swayed by biases in the researcher's thinking. The researcher remained aware of their background assumptions and alert to any new assumptions developed over the course of the research, and engaged in member checking to ensure their interpretation of the participants lived experiences was as close to these experiences as possible (Sinkovics et al., 2008).

5.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics in social research is "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others", such as rights to dignity and privacy (Bulmer, 2001, p. 46). Ethical guidance and approval for this research was sought from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with a formal information sheet and consent to interview form outlining their rights regarding withdrawal from the study, data destroying dates, the protection of the participants' confidentiality, and the participants' rights around refusal to answer questions and the like. Participants were only contacted via publically available contact details that they had freely published online. They were informed they had no obligation to reply or to participate in the study, and were given a consent form to sign before the interview if they wished to participate, which informed them of their rights and the nature of the interview (such as it being recorded and transcribed). Interview data was not shared with anyone other than the researcher and the researcher's supervisor, as was detailed in the consent to interview form. The interview recordings and other information were stored on the researcher's computer only and encrypted with a password to prevent access. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms (i.e. Interviewee 1) to ensure the participants' identities remain confidential.

6. Findings

This section presents key findings as a result of the content analysis and the global brand/global social media user interviews. The findings are organized below in terms of the framework of global social identification developed from this study, and then discussed in terms of the research questions in the discussion section. The following framework emerged from an empirical analysis of the findings, which will be explained in full in sections 6.1-6.4. The framework features two stages of global identification on social media, global identity priming and global identity expression:

A Theoretical Framework of Global Social Identification in Social Media Branding
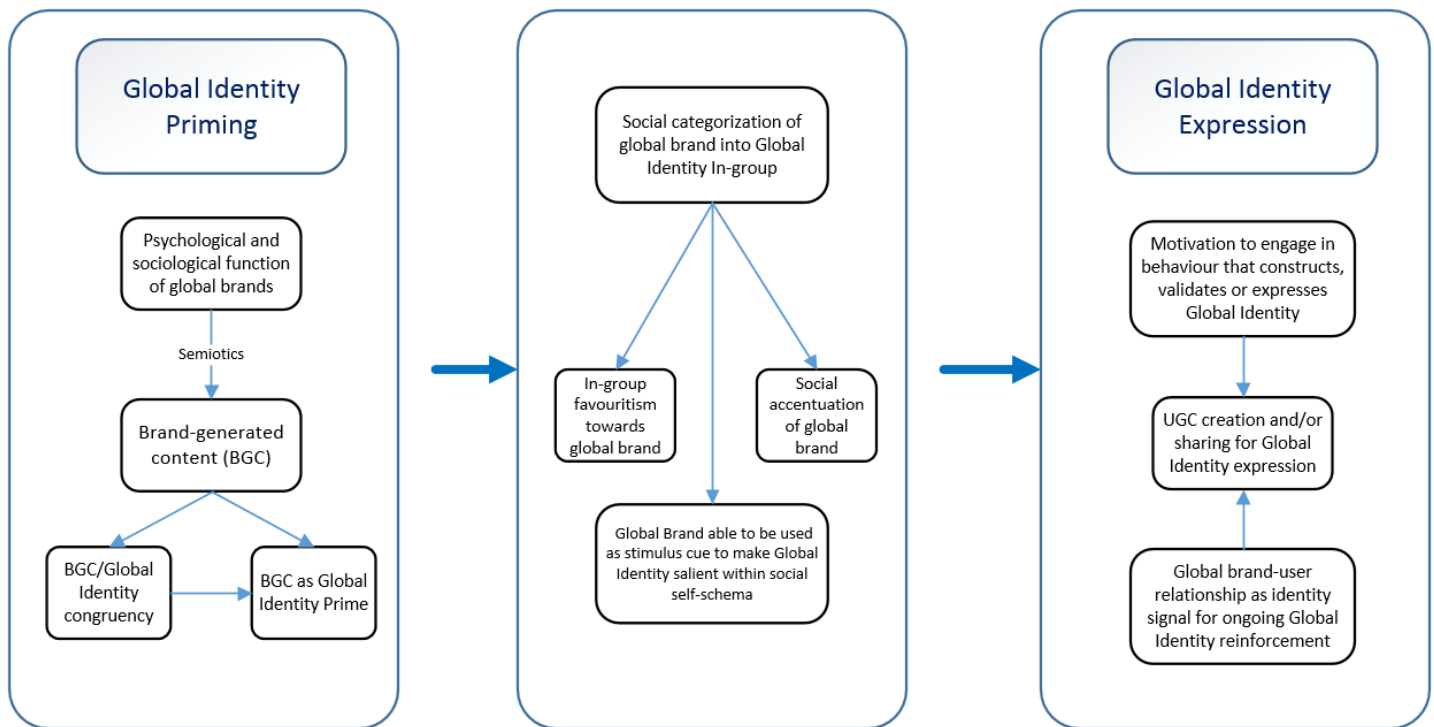
6.1 Global identity priming

The findings show that the values purposefully embedded by Brand-X in their BGC can act as primes for global identity, due to a congruency between the brands values and the values that are meaningful to individuals with a global identity as part of their social self-schema. These values act as primes on

social media when they are transformed, via semiotics, into story themes expressed through BGC that are meaningful to these users.

6.1.1 The role of semiotics in transferring the psychological and sociological function of global brands to BGC on social media

From the interviews and content analysis, it emerged that Brand-X has rich and deeply meaningful psychological and sociological function to SM users that have a global identity. Brand-X can be symbolic to these users of globally-orientated beliefs, ideas and practices that represent certain meanings/mental concepts in their social worlds. These meanings are transferred from the global brand to their social media content and then to global social media users through a semiotics process; visual cues, verbal cues and story themes were used in BGC with the purpose of embedding in this content a deeper symbolic meaning relevant to global identity. The role of Brand-X in this meaning transfer was purposeful, as the brand deliberately and consistently used globally significant story themes in their content to engage in semiotic meaning transfer. The brand aimed to do this with a framework centred on thematic meanings that guides their content strategy:

Brand representative 1: we came up with um five proof points under this be Brand-X idea, one is be fearless, be challenged, be open, be curious and be responsible, so they're kind of how we are articulating our proof points as part of the campaign…and this is the same like the proof points don't change we just articulated them differently, prior to that are the three content pillars that we work within are real life experiences, and real life experiences is kind of the brand essence of what we say we do, so ah, content based around those, taking the idea of authentic insights into local life and bringing it to life editorially, so we've got real life experiences, then we have our products, so content that is inspired by the diverse products we offer, and then finally we have purpose beyond profit, so anything that's about responsible business, the Brand-X foundation and sustainability, so within those three pillars we also had different themes that kind of go across those, so destinations, freedom and flexibility of our travel style, convenience, a sense of belonging and community, um, Brand-X's expertise in trust building, responsible travel, authentic local experiences, small groups and local leaders, local leaders is a big focus for us as well, so that's our pillars and themes

Brand-X is strategic in using this framework as a guiding structure to embed meanings in BGC that are congruous with the social identity the brand wants to connect with and the personality it wants to demonstrate to its social media audience. The brand also uses the framework to attract a certain kind of person to their brand. When asked who their content strategy is aimed at, Brand-X discussed how they are trying to reach out to, and connect with, a certain type of person: social media users with a global identity:

Brand representative 1: so kind of going back to what it means to be Brand-X and like I said before about our values and the type of people who travel with us, or even not just travel with us but the type of people that are attracted to us have that similar value set um, they're the open type of people, so we kind of came up with this proposition that there's two types of people in the world, there's the narrow minded people who live in fear of, fear of other cultures and other ethnicities, other communities, um and they want to, they're the people that are building walls to keep out the other, whereas Brand-X people are the ones who are open, and the ones that wanna go out there and connect and learn about different, and learn about other, because they know that that's what makes the world a better place, so we kind of had this idea that there's these two types of people and we called the kind of open type Brand-X people

Brand-X's content strategy is heavily centred on the psychological and sociological meaning of the brand to the above SM users. As such, the brand aims to embody certain psychological and sociological meanings in the minds of these users and transfer these meanings to them through the use of semiotics. The content analysis revealed three higher-order motifs (reoccurring ideas and values) found in the brands own BGC and the UGC posted by the brand on its SM platforms, all of which had a strong psychological and/or sociological underpinning. As Brand-X embedded these motifs in its content, it became a symbol of them:

- Cultural wonderment
- Transformation and personal development
- Emotional connectivity to, and care for, the world and its inhabitants (global citizenship)

Literature referred to earlier in this thesis describes three types of meaning transfer vehicles: verbal, visual and thematic signs. These meaning transfer vehicles are discussed independently in literature regarding global semiotics, with no connections between them articulated upon. However, it emerged from the content analysis (and was given further insight into by the interviews) that in relation to global identity there is a connection between the three vehicles; visual and verbal signs can be used to *express* thematic meanings associated with global identity through priming on social media. The content analysis revealed that the combination of visual and verbal semiotics (i.e. imagery and language) and thematic semiotics (i.e. the thematic meanings signalled by these verbal and visual semiotics), rather than any of these meaning transfer vehicles alone, signified the above higher-order motifs. For example, verbal semiotics such as culturally-inclusive language and visual semiotics such as imagery featuring people from many different cultures were used by the brand as signifiers of thematic meanings like diversity, respect for tradition and foreign cultural experience. When these verbal cues, visual cues and thematic meanings were combined together in BGC, the combination of culturally-inclusive language, multicultural imagery, diversity themes, respect for tradition themes and foreign cultural experience themes all banded together to produce a higher-order motif or idea (which in the case of this example was cultural wonderment). The difference between the higher-order motifs and lower-order themes is that a motif is made up of a combination of many themes plus verbal and visual cues (such as language that evokes emotion) to signal emotional sentiments that link/band the themes together, whereas a lower-order theme such as foreign cultural experience does not necessarily feature strong sentiment or emotion; as such, the synergy of many themes and visual/verbal cues can build sentiment that translates into the deeper meaning of a higher-order motif.

The most common thematic meanings (lower-order), visual cues and verbal cues found in the content analysis are presented below, followed by an example of how the synergy produced by these themes/visual cues/verbal cues can translate into a higher-order motif. Thematic meanings that can be used in combination with other thematic meanings and a range of verbal/visual semiotics to signal higher-order motifs are:

- Diversity
- Travel
- Foreign cultural experiences
- Responsible business

- Authenticity
- Respect for tradition
- Happiness
- Natural beauty
- Inclusivity
- Aspiration/life enrichment

Visual and verbal cues that signify (and add value to) the thematic meanings:

- Using the brand name as global identity prime ('Brand-X' strongly linked to global identity)
- Using a brand anthropomorphism strategy- human-like tone of voice used to add emotion to the themes
- Using an anthropomorphic hashtag '*Be*Brand-X'
- Images of facial expressions i.e. people's faces filled with awe, laughter etcetera (emotional evocation by visual imagery). Images symbolising diversity i.e. imagery of people from many cultures
- Using no semiotics that are grounded in any strong cultural tradition, to symbolise diversity (as when using GCCP, the aim is for the brand to not be associated with any particular foreign culture)
- Using only certain GCCP symbols (i.e. travel, diversity) and avoiding other GCCP symbols (i.e. global fashion, global technology)
- Low editing- natural facial expressions and authentic imagery
- Using freeze-in-action shots (showing real-life experiential value)
- Using language associated with openness and learning, and respect for cultural traditions (etcetera). Language used is informative, adventurous, excitable and inclusive.

To exemplify the semiotics process, the higher-order motif of transformation and personal development can be used. This motif was expressed in content via symbolism only, and was never referred to directly. The following example is taken from a post about a person who prepared for, and then embarked on, a mountain hike. This content that contained the following verbal and visual semiotics, as well as the thematic meanings signalled by these visual and verbal semiotics, gave the reader the impression that transformation and personal development had occurred on this physical journey:

Visual and verbal semiotics used: • Authentic (unedited) photos of the person's trip and their facial expressions/emotions clearly shown in visual imagery • Emotional language and descriptions of emotions experienced on the trip e.g. pride and reward • Images of the person with others they met on the trip, and descriptions of their ongoing friendships • In-depth and emotional descriptions of grueling physical fitness activities performed before the trip • Personal details about the tour guide and their background/life • Inspiring and passionate language used • Description of climbing a mountain and the feelings experienced at the top, imagery of the person at the top of the mountain • In-depth descriptions of local traditions and cultural products, language that signals appreciation of these traditions and products • Down-to-earth tone of voice, humor used	
Embedded thematic meanings: • Fitness and physical development • Authenticity • Socializing • Happiness • Travel • Foreign cultural experience • Aspiration/life enrichment	Higher-order motif signalled by these visual, verbal and thematic meanings: Transformation and personal development

Story themes such as the above were the most powerful method through which the brand transferred psychological and sociological meaning to SM users. The role of semiotics was critical in this process, as the nature of the semiotics used turned the story themes into global identity primes. A further

example of a story theme embedded in the brands social media content is as follows:

Brand representative 1: yeah, I think that the main themes and stories are about how travel has the capability, like how travel can transform you, how travel can transform a community, how travel can transform, um, like a local leader, so, I think like the themes that really do well or the stories that really do well are for instance we have an interview with one of our local leaders called Leader-X in Cambodia, um, and it was done by Person-X who's our managing editor who works in the Toronto office, she did this interview and Leader-X's story is about how she's a female leader which is really, a lot of the countries that we visit female leaders are, like, its frowned upon, so sort of breaking those barriers if you like, the gender equality, but um Leader-X's life changed when she became a tour leader and she was able to earn this income through Brand-X and she's been able to build a house for her mother, so her mum is safe and has security, and like how her life has been transformed… yeah the stories around how travel has the power to transform you or a place or the world like banning elephant rides, and it's like these stories all seem to be about transformation I think

Further, it emerged from the content analysis and interviews that verbal and visual semiotics in BGC can play different roles in symbolising and evoking thematic meaning for SM users with a global identity. Visual cues (i.e. visual symbols and imagery) were used more often to draw initial attention to the global identity prime, while verbal cues (i.e. stories and language choice) were used more often to transfer deep meaning around values and emotions to the SM user. Together, strong, eye-catching visuals were used in the global brands content strategy with the purpose of attracting SM users to then engage with verbal elements of the content that highlighted the brands global values. Both the global brand and global SM users were aware that image choice is important for creating initial attraction to the brand, which then leads to further engagement with the brand message:

Brand representative 2: image choice is super important because as you know like that's the first thing that people notice, a lot of the time it might be the only thing they see like they'll see in their feed an image and a headline and that's your only opportunity to really cut through with whatever message you're trying to get across

Interviewee 8: yeah I mean there's so many photos on Instagram these days that an image has to be really like outstanding for me to want to read the caption that goes with it, you know like you need something to really make you say wow and then you're interested in reading whatever story goes with the image, or engaging more with whoever's posted the image

Verbal cues were found to be more important for a deep understanding of the brands values, yet were not as effective as visual cues for drawing initial attraction to the brand, or 'breaking through the clutter'. These verbal messages/stories are how the brand showcases its values, sentiments and personality, which is how it is able to build deep emotional connections with SM users. As such, users with a global identity come to understand the brands values, and subsequently engage in strong relationships with the brand, more as a result of verbal rather than visual cues:

Interviewee 2: there's a lot of content on there and something has to stand out quite a lot to get the full extent of your attention because in the end content is asking for your time and time is the most valuable resource and you're not going to spend 30 seconds of your time to stop and read what someone saying unless it's grabs your attention. I guess that's the difference between a blog and between imagery, like through blogging you can evoke more through words like you can include character you can include tone of voice you can make a proper personality shine through and you can connect with a human being through words whereas if you just see a picture on Instagram you connect with the picture and you connect with the environment of the picture and it's kind of a connection that might linger for more of a shorter time, that's it, if you read something and read someone's voice and listen to someone through words it makes a longer lasting connection than just looking at a picture of them so it's like a deeper connection because you imagine, you feel, and you are just more stimulated to a deeper level

These findings highlight the important role of verbal semiotics for deep meaning transfer from the brand to SM users, as well as the key role of visual semiotics for catching global SM users' attention and drawing them in to engage with brands messages in an emotional manner. As such, it could be implied that visual semiotics may be more relevant to the cognitive component of global identity (i.e. for attention capturing and initial social categorization), while verbal semiotics may be more relevant

to the emotional component (i.e. for facilitating and furthering bonds with SM users and connecting through the deep shared meanings between brand and user).

The process described in this section, the transferring of psychological and sociological meaning of the brand to SM users via semiotics embedded in BGC, can be thought of as part of the global identity priming process on social media. Brand-X purposefully embeds psychological and sociological meanings congruent with concepts that are meaningful to those with a global identity in their BGC to draw those users to the brand. This will be discussed further below.

6.1.2 BGC-global identity congruency and BGC as a global identity prime on social media

The psychological and sociological meanings that Brand-X transfers to their key SM users act as global identity primes because of the congruency of these meanings with values that are important to this social group. This congruency stems predominantly from the values (i.e. beliefs about what is important in life) shared between the global brand and the global SM users (as opposed to attitudes, sentiments, interests and so on). In fact, Brand-X discussed how SM users with a global identity showed a very diverse range of attitudes, sentiments and interests:

Brand representative 1: I think the personalities are really different and varied, um but I think it just comes back to this values match, when I think of all of the different people that we've had these kind of working relationships with, they're so different but they are the same like, they're open people, they wanna connect with other people around the world, they wanna learn about culture they wanna learn about other communities, it not just about their work it's not just someone that's gone oh I'm a photographer and I wanna be like a digital nomad and I wanna travel the world, that's a really different thing and that's like a self-serving sort of goal, whereas I think Brand-X people are all different types of people and personalities and different ages but they're looking for something more in the world and deeper connections with people and they wanna open up things

Brand representative 2: people from all walks of life that are just connected by that common love of travel and adventure and see travel as a way of really connecting people, um, and opening people's minds really, people who are yeah open minded and celebrate differences you know

The values of the global brand were consistently very strongly aligned with the values of social media users with a global identity. As will be discussed, these values were of the utmost importance in terms of global social identity categorization through social media, UGC contribution and brand-user relationships. While all global SM user interviewees briefly mentioned traits, interests and attitudes associated with global identity during their interviews (i.e. attitudes displaying love of travel, interest in foreign culture etcetera), the importance of three distinguishable values, discussed below, was the most significant and pervasive topic discussed by the interviewees. Both the global SM user and global brand interviewees discussed these values openly, emotionally, passionately and naturally. These values have not been discussed in extant literature (while traits, interests etcetera have been), but were strikingly similar across interviewees. The interviewees used the values to define who they are and describe how they live, work and relate to others; the values were at the core of their identity. While other aspects of these SM users (e.g. demographics, personality type, attitudes, opinions) were considerably diverse and thus difficult for Brand-X to develop content strategy around, global identity values were the tool that bonded the global brand and its social media users together as a social collective. As such, Brand-X's content strategy is based around semiotics related to the following values that all interviewees (including brand representatives) possessed:

1. Altruistic (selfless) care for global environmental, human and/or animal welfare. For example:

Interviewee 5: in the world climate we're in now where there's a lot of conflict going on in a lot of places there's a lot of unwanted refugees, not as in the refugees are unwanted, but I mean as in they have to leave their homes unwanted, and then the reception of that to the rest of the world you know I think if people have seen some of these places or how people have come from It's a whole different perspective on it, rather than people are coming to this country and droves, too like these people need a place to stay, like they're resilient they can add value to our country

Interviewee 2: So I think in terms of globalization, globalization does push us forward as a race and as a society and I think it's a really positive thing that it is happening. But I am concerned about climate change, it could be a collateral damage of the world becoming more globalized in the sense

that our productions gone up a lot, like environmental degradation, And more people more population that's another thing, but the fact that we pumping more resources out means our productivity's gone up which means more resources are getting used which is putting pressure on the environment which is an awful effect, and in terms of cultural convergence, like as long as cultures aren't being appropriated it's good to have access to other cultures and it's good.

Brand representative 1: we are a values-led business and everyone in the team across the business is extremely passionate about what we do, like we see a bigger picture for what Brand-X is doing in the world particularly around that purpose beyond profit space…like the work comes first, what we're doing comes first

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2. Self-development through foreign cultural exposure. For example:

Interviewee 3: if you do get the chance to live in a foreign land I reckon it's one of the best things I ever did it just puts life in perspective it's just such a good thing to do for personal growth and that sort of thing and it makes you understand a lot more about the world and yourself I guess

Interviewee 2: you can tell travellers like you know when somebody has travelled because there is something about travellers mind that you can kind of engage with like something just a little bit more open and a little bit more understanding and there's a bit more clarity with conversation when you're talking to someone that has travelled before just because they've seen more humanity and they understand more about life…they are able to understand humanity and they are more appreciative of humanity

Brand representative 1: I think that um, yeah self-development, just like how someone grows and one of the insights, one of the thoughts when we were working on the brand campaign was the idea that looking at the word Brand-X, a place can be captivating, a place can be beautiful, a place can be enticing, a place can be whatever, but only a person can be Brand-X, like a place can't be Brand-X so it's a descriptive for a human being

3. Educating others about global conditions, global practices and global life. For example:

Interviewee 4: I do try to show snippets of what it might be like to be there like I have a photo on my Instagram I was just looking at of a guy in a tea market in Bangkok and he's pouring like a Thai iced tea and doing this very cool way so I have a picture of that and it's just a snippet of daily life in Bangkok that people might not necessarily know about but people would be interested

Interviewee 7: for me it was a really fine line between talking about the plight of these animals and sharing content that would get people's attention but also educating them on you know what's happening with this species and how they can help so obviously some of the pictures that I put up were really cute because you know a cute does get the views and you need the views to get people reading

Brand representative 1: tour leaders usually have dual degrees or multiple degrees plus a masters, they're very highly educated like you can't become a tour leader for instance in Morocco or Egypt or Turkey you have to have a masters in your particular specialty of tourism, so it's a very very highly sought after professional role so we wanna help elevate that position, kinda wanna help educate our consumers that this isn't like a, I think people can before they've experienced a local leader can just think it's like a tour guide

The aesthetics, images choices and story themes expressed through Brand-X's BGC were flexible and diverse, as long as they were congruent with, and representative of, the three values described above. Further, the interviews revealed that content creators with a global identity are preferred and sought after by the global brand for content creation (i.e. to receive UGC from). Brand-X discussed how they wish to induce brand-user interactions with users that are value-aligned with the brand, rather than interact with a large number of SM users that are not value-aligned. When asked who they wish to obtain UGC from and build content creation relationships with, both global brand representatives articulated the importance that they interact and build relationships with SM users with a global identity, particularly values-focused SM users who have concern for environmental, human and animal welfare, who want to travel for self-development and who want to educate/express to others how travel can change the lives of both the traveller and the local communities that host travellers. For example:

Brand representative 2: we definitely want people who are aligned with our brand, so if its someone for example who you know if there's photos of them riding elephants or doing things like that then we won't um be sharing their content because we don't want to be ah, you know, linked to that cause that's not what we're about, um but if its yeah people who yeah have that same kind of love of travel and adventure and they're conscious of the environment and you know conscious of people, that's something that will definitely kind of get our attention in someone else's content

A further interesting finding that emerged from the interviews is that global identity value exhibition through social media content functions as an implicit UGC acquisition strategy for the global brand. Purposefully embedding global identity values through content was a way for Brand-X to attract SM users with a value-alignment to work with the brand in terms of UGC creation and sharing. Because of this value-congruency, the UGC that was contributed by these users aligned with the brand image and personality that Brand-X wished to articulate to their social media audience:

Brand representative 1: I think that we have been very lucky in that the type of content, the legacy and values of the content that we've put out like on our Facebook and on our Instagram etcetera is that aspirational, inspirational kind of explore the world stuff and it tends to draw people to it so I don't think that we've had to do a lot to actively go out and recruit for people that want to contribute to our brand because naturally it happens

The value-alignment between Brand-X and it's key SM users was of great importance to the willingness of participation (both in terms of paid and free contribution) of these users in the global brand's SM content strategy via UGC. The interviewed SM users said they prefer not to engage in content creation for a brand that they are not value-aligned with (which can be thought of as out-group avoidance). For example:

Interviewee 6: oh absolutely, in the past I've learned my lesson with people who don't share the same values and it's hard to be on the same page not just financially but also when you're creating something you want to be giving your best work and if the values aren't aligned sometimes that doesn't necessarily happen or occur

Interviewee 8: if I don't connect with a brand I won't work with them, like there has to be some kind of connection in my own mind that would fit into my personality in my actual real life for it to make any sense for me to create content for them otherwise I don't see the point of just taking something for money, it has to mean something to me and it has to have a story in it for me that is relevant to me in my personal life

6.2 Social categorization of the global brand into global identity in-group

From the interviews, it became clear that the SM users recognized and identified Brand-X as a symbol of in-group membership of global identity, and thus categorized Brand-X into the 'global identity' in-group. The presence of values that are aligned with global identity (i.e. the three values discussed above) in the global brand's content strategy assisted social categorization of the brand on social media sphere, as this highlighted similarities between the global brand and the SM users. Four features of the SM user interviews (as is congruent with social identity literature) indicated that the users had socially categorized Brand-X into the global identity in-group:

a) Descriptions that made the brand sound like a person with global identity (i.e. describing the brand like a person from the in-group rather than a person from the outgroup). For example:

Interviewee 2: I reckon they would be conscious of culture like definitely conscious of culture, and people are really important to them, like as a brand they have a huge focus on people and so as a brand that could be represented as a person I would say that this brand has great humanity, um I'd say that, which yeah that leads onto just being a good open-minded understanding human being in the sense of understanding and respecting cultures like respecting the way people are and the way they act the food they eat and everything, like they raise culture up as something to be respected and I think that would be really defining in terms of who they would be as a person. Like I went to Samoa recently and when you go there you're not supposed to walk and eat and it's not being racist if you do that but a lot of people wouldn't know that, but Brand-X would be the kind of person who would know that and it would respect that and know about cultural traditions, like

having their understanding of humanity and respecting what people are used to. I think we sort of have that in common or at least I like to think that (laughs)

b) Positive (as opposed to negative or neutral) in-group evaluations of Brand-X. When interviewees were asked to evaluate the brand, they only gave positive evaluations (except Interviewee 3, whose case will be discussed soon). For example:

Interviewee 7: Brand-X for me is definitely a person of very high ethics and integrity, somebody that tries to do the right thing and definitely somebody I would want in my inner circle, because in any business there is always people that aren't good hearted you know ,that aren't after the right things for the world they're in it for themselves I guess, but Brand-X aren't like that they really do have a great soul and it's a great organization to be associated with and to work with

c) Social accentuation of the brand. Interviewees were asked to describe both the similarities and differences between themselves and the brand. Interviewees were easily able to discuss similarities but found it difficult to name any differences between themselves and Brand-X. For example:

Interviewee 7: um, so which would we share I'd definitely say ethics and integrity um and what wouldn't we share...Well I guess they're on a much grander scale that I am, but I am definitely ambitious in my own way, no I can't really think of any that we that we deviate from

d) Finally, a consequence of in-group categorization was out-group avoidance (in terms of content creation and social media activity) of brands that are not congruous with global identity. For example:

Interviewee 2: I would never work with a fast food company because I just don't believe that fast food represents anything to do with inspiring people to do good things, it's so far away from enjoying the fruits of culture and cultural food presented to you in different countries and I'd never work with any other kind of brand that kind of would be in any area like that that I just don't think it would be right

for me to be involved in, I guess just what's represented through my content like if I don't want to support something I'm not going to do that through content

From the interviews it also emerged that the most prominent facilitator of global identity in-group categorization of Brand-X was the anthropomorphism strategy used by the brand. As mentioned in the literature review, brand anthropomorphism is a branding strategy used to humanize the brand in a way that consumers ascribe humanlike features onto it, such as personality traits, opinions and interests. For in-group categorization to occur, the brand must be categorized (i.e. thought of as belonging) into the global identity in-group: a group of people who share a global identity. For Brand-X to be evaluated and categorized into SM users' in-group, the users must be able to realise similarities and differences between themselves and the brand. The SM user interviews revealed that this strategy of brand humanization facilitated the users' imagination of the brand as if it were a person, which allowed them to know whether the brand should be categorized into the in-group or not. For example:

Interviewee 5: I think they've worked out a good way to be really personal friendly and an open person

Interviewee 6: excitable, very ready for anything at any time, compassionate um and concerned for others with a deep sense of empathy um and fun-loving, likes to live life to the fullest

Anthropomorphism was a clear and deliberate strategy used by the global brand to encourage connections with their desired SM users:

Brand representative 1: only a person can be Brand-X, like a place can't be Brand-X, so it's a descriptive for a human being and um, yeah that thing about it, you have to do something to be Brand-X you have to choose to be Brand-X, so we came up with live Brand-X and then as part of this brand campaign we're transitioning to using be Brand-X purely because its more active and it fits with that branding that we're working on at the moment

Brand representative 2: I think our tone of voice as well is always, we try to always make, we always avoid any kind of marketing jargon we don't kind of want to sound generic its always as conversational as possible, again we wanna sound like people not like a corporate company, you know, cause we are people

Once Brand-X was categorized into the global identity in-group, it become a symbol of global identity that could be utilised by the user on social media; hash-tagging of the brand name was used by SM users as a symbol of the in-group (those with a global identity) and to reach out to brands in this in-group for content-creation based relationships/engagement. As such, it can be deemed that hash-tags can be used to symbolise social group membership. For example:

Interviewee 5: I'll be finding certain locations that were really beautiful photogenic and so forth and I started using hashtags that were related to their kind of social media, so Brand-X and things like that, and that's how I kind of connected them to myself that was when I was starting to explore photography and things like that and trying to build up my own following, it kind of seemed like a tool to help spread the word of my own photography through their medium, I kind of researched a bunch of different travel blog brands or blogs or different types of Instagram's that would share similar types of locations photos things like that to me and they seem to have a lot of tours involved in the sort of places that I was sharing so I guess it was kind of relatable in a lot of ways

While this study does not test for global identity salience or pinpoint its exact moment of occurrence, previous findings in literature regarding salience have been strong and consistent in showing that stimulus cues relevant to a certain social identity have the power to make that identity salient, as long as the cues are meaningful to the identity and represent the identity positively. Based on this, the findings of this study are considered typical of those with a global identity that is or has at some point been made salient e.g. the interviewees responding positively to global brands and displaying in-group favouritism towards global brands. As such, the effects of the global brand acting as a stimulus for global identity salience are shown in this study, although we do not directly capture the moment of salience.

6.3 In-group favouritism toward the global brand

As discussed in the literature review, individuals tend to evaluate members of their in-group positively, as this promotes a positive evaluation of themselves based upon shared in-group categorization. During the interviews, all but one SM user did not evaluate any aspect of Brand-X negatively. When discussing the content they have created for Brand-X, the SM users were asked to evaluate the brand as if it were a person and were also asked what they think the content they've created for Brand-X says about them to others in the public sphere. The responses showed clearly that in the context of this research, in-group favouritism had extended to Brand-X and SM users realized a positive self-concept by positively evaluating themselves based on the content they have created for the brand, as well as their relationship with the brand. For example:

Interviewee 4: I would hope that they (the public) *think I'm a good writer and I have a knack to be able to kind of draw the reader in to my story, I hope that they would think I was a good storyteller, um I hope like brave maybe and kind of like fearless independent, um I think I make a few jokes so maybe funny, a good travel partner good on her feet you know like I feel like I probably come across as an experienced traveller which I am and maybe easy going (laughs)*

Interviewee 7: well I think really the brands that you work for do say a lot about you as a person and Brand-X, the fact that they do have such a stellar reputation in the travel industry I think it's really good for my reputation to be seen to be working with them and having my content shared by them and being associated with them so I think predominantly the feeling people would get from seeing them sharing my work is that I also must be someone that is good and someone that has integrity and hopefully they're drawing those comparisons

However, one interviewee (Interviewee 3) did not evaluate themselves positively based on the content they have created for Brand-X. In fact, Interviewee 3 evaluated themselves negatively based upon the content. This interviewee showed signs of possessing the cognitive component of global identity (awareness of group membership) but not the evaluative component (no positive self-esteem based on group membership) or the affective component (no positive emotional attachment to the brand) of social identity. In terms of the cognitive component, Interviewee 3 displayed the same three global

identity values as the other interviewees and displayed interests and attitudes associated with global identity (such as being interested in travel and viewing globalization positively). However, in terms of the evaluative component, Interviewee 3's evaluation of themselves based on the UGC created for the brand was less positive than other interviewees:

Interviewee 3: like I said like 70% of the content I've created for Brand-X is not 'Interviewee 3' flavoured…that's the thing Brand-X gives you a platform that you can reach a much wider audience but is it necessarily the content that I want to have my name associated with reaching a wider audience.. yes and no like it gives me more opportunities to pitch for writing work in the future because now I've got a name on a website and a pile of articles that are attached to it, some that I'm more proud of than others..

In terms of the affective component, Interviewee 3 did not demonstrate emotional attachment towards the brand, whereas all other interviewees did. The lack of positive sentiment towards the brand in comparison to other interviewees (who all showed signs of possessing the cognitive, evaluative and affective dimensions of social identity) was noted by the researcher. This interviewee's reason for interacting with the brand online was considerably less meaningful than the other interviewees:

Interviewee 3: I only follow them online to see if they're promoting my stuff I actually don't read any of their travel articles

Interestingly, Interviewee 3 (who only showed signs of the cognitive component) did not display any in-group favouritism towards the brand. This finding is consistent with literature discussed earlier that purports that the evaluative and (especially the) affective components are the real drivers of social identification, rather than the cognitive component. As such, this finding is interesting as it supports literature that suggests that cognitive awareness of a social category alone may not be enough to induce social identification, as if the individual does not evaluate this social group positively they may in fact try to distance themselves from the group by failing to evaluate in-group members/symbols positively, as was shown by Interviewee 3.

6.4 Global identity expression

The findings showed that UGC creation/sharing with the global brand functioned as an identity expression vehicle for social media users with a global identity. This affected content quality; UGC from these SM users was of considerable value to the global brand, who considered the content to have high authenticity, uniqueness and meaningfulness. The bonds and emotional connections developed for the brand from this meaningful content creation were found to be beneficial to long-term global brand-user relationships on social media.

6.4.1 Motivation to engage in social media behaviour that validates, constructs or expresses global identity (UGC creation and/or sharing for global identity expression)

The most prominent behavioural mechanism through which SM users who possessed the cognitive, evaluative and affective dimensions of global identity (i.e. all interviewees except Interviewee 3) expressed, constructed and validated their this identity on social media was through UGC creation and/or sharing for Brand-X. Through this, the SM user was able to display and express the values associated with their global identity. From the interviews, it was clear that the interviewees saw content creation for Brand-X as a vehicle through which their own global identity messages and values could be strengthened and shared, and their thoughts and feelings relevant to global identity expressed. Some examples of this are as follows:

Interviewee 2: I want to show the scale of the world and how vast the world is… I guess I'm kind of using space in my pictures to symbolise the vastness of the earth, and the size and scale of the reward of exploring this earth, and I use scale to symbolise how much people have earned through this exploration like how much they've developed as a person from the exploration and I just feel like that space in the pictures symbolise that kind of journey and it shows a sense of accomplishment and reward, and I feel at this kind of thing evokes emotion you know

Interviewee 1: I want to share my experiences and I want to inspire people to travel I think the travel is the greatest intellectual experience that you can have like it will teach you so much more than sitting in a classroom in my opinion

Interviewee 7: I write long captions because I think that travel is about more than just a picture there's so much more to the whole experience so for me I definitely want people to read the caption as well as see the image, and hopefully wanting to be a part of my journey

Content creation for global brands can thus be an important and meaningful way through which social media users can express their global identity. As content creation can be an identity expression act, UGC creation/sharing is an emotional process that has a meaningful outcome to SM users, which can result in a build-up of emotional attachment for the global brand (as the brand is the vehicle that helps the user to express their identity). For example:

Interviewee 5: the emotion that I feel when I'm in a place, trying to put that into a photo, I think the ones that I post to social media are the ones that are very aesthetically pleasing so ones that I might look at and they evoke emotion in me straight away and I'm like oh my god I'm sure someone else would look at that and would feel the same thing

Interviewee 1: it's nice to be able to talk about more meaningful topics around travel and ethics and working with Brand-X for example does give me the opportunity to do that

The interviews and content analysis showed that the in-group connection with the brand (which is present when content creation for Brand-X is occurring) encourages the SM user to express the global identity values that they share with the brand in their UGC. However, neither the global brand's whole global identity nor the SM user's whole global identity seemed to be expressed in the content- rather the crossover between the brands and the user's global identity values (i.e. the most prominent shared global identity features and/or values between user and brand) were expressed. This is because each SM user did not place exactly the same importance on each of the values associated with global identity and/or choose to engage in identity expression via content creation/sharing around exactly the same topics and themes.

The expression of shared global identity values injected a deep and engaging meaning into the UGC, which was greatly valued by the brand. When creating content for Brand-X, users with a global

identity preferred to produce meaningful, value-expressive content designed to evoke emotions, inspire other SM users and educate them about global welfare. They did not aim to produce content that is bland or aesthetically pleasing but lacking in inspiration and emotional evocation. The expression of shared values that these users are incredibly passionate about drove them to produce exceptional, meaningful and awe-inspiring content because the content creation process meant more to them than just content creation- it was an expression of values they hold close to their hearts. As such, the creative work (i.e. UGC featured on the brands social media page) that the user expresses global identity values through is meaningful, reflects the brands values, and is authentic. This authenticity of content proved to be of great importance to both the brand and users. For example:

Interviewee 2: I really like what they do on social media and how its meaningful and interesting, like I can engage with it it's not just a short term thing to look at its actual messages that kind of stick around, and I like how they don't have an editing style cause it makes it all more genuine and more real like these pictures are real and show real emotions and the stories they tell are more real because of that.

As such, an important finding of this study is that global social identification can be important for enhancing the quality of the UGC created and shared with Brand-X by their key SM users. The importance and value to the global brand of meaningful, value-expressive content from users with a global identity stems from the nature of the social media content environment. During interviews with the brand representatives, it emerged that the social media environment is saturated with content and that breaking through the clutter is an extremely difficult task. In this saturated environment, the global brand constantly searches for unique, original and meaningful content. With continuous content being fed into the social media environment since the rise of UGC, content that stands out is valued by the brand:

Brand representative 2: obviously people are inundated with content all the time so kind of being able to cut through, it takes a lot, but you know social is such an insatiable beast so you know there's always going to be an appetite for more content more content all the time… we want stuff that's, and I mean just different in general, cause people are seeing so much all the time, so much content all the

time, um, so anything that's just different in general or shows a different side of somewhere that they thought they knew

6.4.2 Global brand-user relationship as an identity signal for ongoing identity reinforcement:

The three global identity values discussed earlier were found to be of great importance to ongoing brand-user interactions/relationships between Brand-X and their SM users/content creators. The global brand utilized these values to connect and develop affect-based relationships with users with a global identity. The emotional connection built between brand and user when the user socially identifies with the brand, creates content for and/or shares content with the brand, and displays in-group favouritism towards the brand leads the SM user to view their interactions with the brand as an affect-based relationship (as opposed to a mere commercial entity that they interact with). During the interviews, SM users (except Interviewee 3) discussed the emotion they felt during content creation for Brand-X, which lead the user to perceive their interactions with the brand as a long-term relationship. For example:

Interviewee 7: if they're trawling through that hashtag and they're picking content to reshare they can choose one of my pictures but with the relationship that I have with Brand-X they know that they're always more than welcome to share my work

Through this global social identification process, the global brand gains utility to social media users as an ongoing global identity reinforcement resource, which underpins the brand-user relationship and helps the user to reinforce and feel connected to their own global identity. This is because Brand-X has established itself as a global identity in-group symbol through the global identity priming process, thus public user interactions with the global brand can be used to display this global identity membership to other SM users (in other words, ongoing identity expression). Brand-X demonstrated awareness of, and enthusiastic desire to participate in, this ongoing relationship, discussing the following:

Brand representative 2: we engage with our customers on Facebook and on our Instagram as well quite well, we you know go through all the comments and kind of liking commenting and replying, to

encourage them to share it with us when we post we'll ask questions in some of it as well, like what kind of travel, for posting an image of the Vatican in Rome you sort of ask if what kind of experience they prefer whether it's the kind of must do's or off the beaten track kind of stuff, and I find that's a really nice way to engage with people because its again putting a bit of person behind the brand, I think we're all so bonded, we kind of wanna extend that to our followers and make them part of our Brand-X community

7. Discussion

This research aimed to gain a rich understanding of how the global social identification process could be relevant and/or important to global social media branding. This will be discussed below in terms of this study's research questions in order to elaborate on key findings in light of the literature which guided the research.

7.1 RQ1: How can a global brand use BGC to socially identify with SM users who have a global identity as part of their social self-schema?

A global brand can use BGC to engage in global social identification by embedding three particular value-based themes in their content: altruistic (selfless) concern for global environmental, human and animal welfare, self-development through foreign cultural exposure and the importance of education about global conditions, global practices and global life. When embedded in BGC, these three values attract SM users with a global identity (and bond them together as a social collective) more powerfully than BGC appeals towards demographics, interests, personality traits or any other aspects seem to. These values act as global identity primes through BGC, encouraging those with a global identity to socially categorize the global brand into the in-group, display in-group favouritism towards the brand, and engage in identity expression in a manner that involves the brand.

The findings based around values were unexpected; global identity values have not been explored explicitly in extant literature, which is more focused on attitudes, interests and personality traits (e.g. Bartsch et al., 2016; Zhang & Kare, 2009; Zabkar et al., 2017). Many of these features described in literature, such as the attitude of viewing globalization positively, are congruous with the values discovered in this study. However, most features do not capture the depth nor the extent of these values. For example, the feature 'positive attitudes towards globalization' that is reported as an attitude possessed by those with a global identity in extant literature (e.g. Lin & Wang, 2016; Weinlich, 2016) may not be fully reflective of how those with a global identity actually perceive globalization; in this study, under the 'altruistic concern for global environmental, human and animal welfare' value, all interviewees discussed concern for the negative consequences of globalization in addition to viewing it positively. As such, the attitude in literature of viewing globalization positively

may only be part of the story, thus the values explored here may be able to provide a deeper understanding of global identity. This is important as the brands understanding of global identity can influence the semiotics it uses for priming through BGC. Moreover, the findings of this study can be examined in relation to literature that states that those with a global identity respond positively to GCCP symbols (i.e. Bartsch et al., 2016; Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017; Strizhakova et al., 2011). This literature, however, does not examine specifically *which* GCCP symbols (i.e. which semiotics) those with a global identity respond well to. This is important because extant literature, albeit still in early stages, lists symbols such as blue jeans, Apple iPods and hamburgers as common symbolic representations of GCCP (Akaka & Alden, 2010). However to those with a global identity in this study, symbols such as hamburgers seemed to contrast with the values they are passionate about, thus such symbolism may not encourage social identification with the global brand. Symbols such as hamburgers, blue jeans and Apple iPods were not used by the global brand in this study. As such, some common GCCP symbols reported in literature may not be representative of, or may even contrast with, global identity in particular; this study suggests that global identity symbols are value-based and contextual. As such, those with a global identity may not respond equally, or even positively, to all GCCP symbols.

Further, in discussing how global brands can reach out to global identity, global identity can be contrasted with other social groups that are relevant to global branding, such as global youth. Literature (i.e. Stevenson, 2002; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006) states that global youth are thought to be concerned with image or 'coolness', hedonic consumption, rebellion, and are connected to "highly stylized clothing, grooming, music, communication technology (notably the mobile phone)" (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006, p. 233). As these priorities are considerably different from the priorities/values found in this study and discussed in literature in relation to global identity, it can be posited that while global identity is a values-led social group, other global social groups such as global youth may not be values-led; they may be more status-led (focused on image and reputation). In a branding context, social identity symbols have often been used to assert a certain public image or produce a new look (Jenkins, 2014). Global brands that aim to target social categories such as global youth use imagery centred around youthfulness that is designed to induce consumers to feel young and virile, assisting them to display images of youthfulness to others to raise their self-esteem (MacInnis et al., 2014). This does not appear to be congruous with this study's interview findings,

which found that users with a global identity interact with brands representative of this identity for reasons that are not concerned with the individual's superficial image/reputation in the global community, or with being 'cool'; the users in this study interacted with the brand to feel closer to, and express creatively, their own global identity and to help drive social change (i.e. educate others about the global community). In this comparison, it can be highlighted that for a global brand to reach out to a certain social identity on social media, the brand should consider what drives social identification i.e. whether the social group may be values-led or status-led.

Finally, the findings of this study show that brand anthropomorphism on social media is a key strategy that can help to engage users with a global identity. This is because anthropomorphism helps to communicate the brands values, which were the drivers behind close and meaningful brand-user relationships and social categorization of the brand into the global identity in-group. Brand anthropomorphism has not been linked to social categorization or global identity in literature thus far, yet seems to be an important tool used by global brands for global social identification. Further, brand anthropomorphism is a key strategy for global identity which is values-led, yet it has not been explored (in literature) whether brand anthropomorphism is a common or successful strategy that can be used for social identities (such as global youth) that appear to be more status-led.

7.2 RQ2: How can this social identification affect or influence UGC creation and/or sharing by SM users with a global identity?

The global social identification process in a social media branding setting can influence the quality (in terms of outcomes) of UGC creation and the motivation to share UGC with the global brand. Once the user has socially categorized the global brand into the global identity in-group, UGC creation for the global brand acts as a vehicle for global identity expression; this in-group status can motivate UGC to be shared with the brand for global identity expression purposes. As such, global social identification can influence the quality of UGC by encouraging users with a global identity to passionately inject their global values into the content, and can inspire creativity around topics associated with global identity to be embedded in the UGC. This is useful for the global brands content strategy, as this content (UGC that is value-reflective, meaningful and unique) is sought after by brands that wish engage users with a global identity.

This study made clear that global SM users are very aware that their actions on social media send messages about their social groups/identities to others. The idea that identity expression as part of the social identification process could influence the outcome and improve the utility of UGC created for/shared with brands has not been discussed in extant literature. This is a novel finding that reflects literature that purports that UGC creation is intrinsically motivated (i.e. Wang & Li, 2017; Sun et al., 2017; Halliday, 2016). Further, this study extends the idea in extant literature that UGC sharing could transpire for identity expression purposes (i.e. Christodoulides et al., 2012; Shan et al., 2017) by showing that this can occur as part of a *social identification process* (in particular, the global social identification process). Currently, there are no links in literature between social identification and UGC creation/sharing for brands. Further, this study extends literature that speaks briefly of the relationship between BGC and UGC (i.e. Ding et al., 2014; Christodoulides et al., 2012). Such literature touches on the idea that the quality of BGC can inspire or deter SM users to provide UGC to brands, and states that BGC can and should be used to incentivize SM users to create and share brand-related UGC. This study extends this literature by providing a viable reason *why* BGC can inspire or deter UGC from a social identity perspective; SM users consciously or subconsciously evaluate identity primes in BGC (such as global identity values) which can either prime the user to socially identify with the brand (which is motivating for the user to provide UGC to the brand) or deter the user from interacting with the brand if they perceive that the BGC contains identity signals that are incongruous with their preferred and/or active social identities. As such, this study highlights the transparency of social media in publically displaying social identification symbolism through BGC and UGC. This can prompt global brands to consider how their BGC can relate to the identity expression needs of their key SM users.

Moreover, an important benefit to the global brand in this study was the authenticity of UGC created as an act of global identity expression. The UGC created/shared for identity expression purposes in this study featured genuine, sincere emotions and experiences that added to the authenticity (and thus the quality) of the content. As touched on in the findings, global SM users cared about content authenticity and preferred to engage with content they perceived as being reflective of real life circumstances, emotions and phenomena. The users felt that content authenticity was a feature that encouraged them to bond with the brand, and engage with the brand's content, as authentic content

was considered more meaningful to them. As such, the idea that UGC as an identity expression act can be helpful to the perceived authenticity of global brands could be important to explore further. Finally, an important inference that can be drawn from the findings of this study is that global brand-user relationships (on social media) can be underpinned by the bonds and connections that stem from shared social identification between brand and user. In this study, aspects of global identification such as in-group categorization, in-group favoritism and social accentuation helped the user to feel close to the brand, which assisted in developing, fostering and cementing the brand-user relationship. The notion that brand-user relationships can be underpinned by global identity bonds highlights the opportunity for global brands to strengthen relationships by reaching out to, and nurturing the identity needs of, users with a global identity. These findings illustrate how brand-user relationships on social media that are underpinned by social identity connections (i.e. global identity connections) are strong, enduing and meaningful to the user. This could be an important asset to global brands that seek this type of close relationship with users in the global marketplace. This also relates to findings of this study that suggest the evaluative (self-esteem) and affective (emotional) components of global identity are the drivers of these strong, enduring and meaningful brand-user relationships, rather than the cognitive component. In terms of relationship-building, these findings could mean that global brands must evoke emotion and assist the user in realizing positive self-esteem to build an effective long-term relationship, as opposed to merely signaling membership of global identity (i.e. just engaging with the cognitive component).

8. Limitations

The chosen methodology and data collection strategies denoted some limitations of this study. Firstly, this research only included global brand representatives and SM users from Western cultures, as all of the individuals that responded to the researcher's invitation to participate in the study happened to be from Australia and Canada. A more culturally diverse sample would strengthen the transferability of the study findings, as deeper insights may have been able to be gained from a cross-cultural comparison between the responses of Western and non-Western participants.

Moreover, this research was qualitative, interpretive and context-specific. This can be limiting as the research is not readily generalizable to other settings. However, the aim of the study was to gain context-specific insight to the research questions rather than to achieve wide generalization.

Further limitations include the researcher not testing for, and therefore not being able to draw conclusions about, global identity salience (for reasons discussed in the methodology section) and that the study did not possess inter-coder reliability due to only one researcher coding the study results. This was necessary because of the study timeframe and the nature of the study as a Master's thesis. Using more than one coder may have strengthened the credibility and dependability of the study findings.

9. Assumptions

As the research questions stemmed from an analysis of extant global branding, semiotics and social identity theory literature, the researcher had to make certain assumptions as the study was being conducted. The study's assumptions included the theoretical assumptions of social identity theory, for example that individuals do socially categorize and segregate the social world into meaningful social groups, that individuals wish to realise positive self-esteem and that social actors are relatively predictable in their actions. The assumptions of semiotics theory were also transferred to this study i.e. the study assumed that individuals will receive meaning from signs and symbols such as the global brands BGC.

Further, this study made assumptions concerning the research paradigm, ontology and epistemology that guided the interpretation of the results. The researcher assumed no outside influences were present during the interviews, and as such assumed the information the participants were giving was reflective of social identity theory rather than any other similar theories. The researcher also assumed that participants were being honest and accurate in their interviews, and had no ulterior motives for what they were discussing.

10. Implications for theory

This research extends extant literature by making certain contributions to theory. Firstly, this study has extended theory around global identity to an online setting, giving theoretical insight into the way the global social identification process transpires in a social media branding context. This is a novel theoretical extension, and is timely and relevant due to the rise and prevalence of social media branding in the modern global branding environment. Moreover, this study has extended global identity literature and theory with findings around the importance of global identity values, what these values are, and what semiotics can be representative of these values. In that, this research has raised questions about the nature of global identity, for example questions around which GCCP symbols individuals with a global identity are and are not receptive to. This presents opportunities for further refinement of the concept of global identity. This research has also extended social identity theory by linking social identity (global identity in particular) to UGC (in terms of identity expression), which has not been done in extant social identity literature. As such, this study shows how social identity symbolism/semiotics can be reflected in online identity expression activities. This has implications for theory development, as it is hoped that this study can assist in guiding further research about the global identification process in an online branding context. The theoretical implications generated from the findings of this study are context-specific, therefore are not readily generalizable. However, these theoretical insights may be transferrable to a research context with similar features and a similar theoretical underpinning; this must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

11. Implications for practice

In addition to the study's theoretical contributions, this research can have implications for global brand managers in the social media sphere. The framework presented in this study can guide global brand managers in considering how their social media strategy (in terms of BGC development and UGC acquisition) could affect, or be affected by, the global social identification process. Firstly, an implication that can be drawn from this study is that global brands should be aware that there are two elements to global identity priming through BGC on social media: the visual element that captures the attention of the user (i.e. the imagery) and the verbal messages that nurture and strengthen relationships (e.g. global identity values and motifs). While this study has largely focused on the latter, global brands should be aware that BGC must capture initial attention for the brands deeper messages to reach the SM user. As such, BGC that is value-orientated but is not eye-catching and does not stand out to the SM user may not be effective for global identity priming. The second implication that can be drawn from this study is concerned with out-group avoidance on social media. Out-group avoidance in this study was a powerful mechanism that denoted that SM users who perceived a brand as incongruous with their global identity steered clear of that brand on social media. These users used semiotics (i.e. global brand symbolism) to evaluate whether the brand belongs in the in-group or the out-group. As semiotics that are incongruous with global identity can encourage out-group avoidance, global brands should be aware that connecting with these users may not be as simple as incorporating GCCP symbols into their BGC. As this study found, some GCCP symbolism seems to be incongruent with global identity values. As global identity congruency is what allows BGC to be a global identity prime, global brands must be careful about which GCCP symbols they use as the brand may be placed into the out-group, and thus avoided, if the wrong GCCP symbols are chosen. Global brands must consider what is important to the specific social identity they are trying to connect with, and remain aware that their brand may be avoided by any users who perceive brand symbolism as being representative of one of their out-groups. In-depth knowledge of what drives certain social identities (e.g. values-led vs. status-led) can help global brands to foster brand-user relationships underpinned by social identification. A final implication that can be drawn from this study is that global brands looking for unique, authentic and meaningful UGC can consider which social identities may be important to their brand and use BGC identity primes to encourage these users to create/share identity-

expressive UGC. As such, global brands should understand that UGC acquisition may benefit more by attracting the right content creators to the brand, through the social identification process, than creating a specific brief/demanding certain content to be created from SM users.

12. Conclusions and further research

By exploring the global social identification process in a social media setting, this research has shed light on the role of BGC as a global identity prime and UGC as an identity expression vehicle. This has enabled a deeper and more meaningful understanding of global social identification on social media from a global branding strategy perspective. By demonstrating how social media users can socially categorize a global brand into their in-group, this research has highlighted social identification as a potentially powerful tool that can underpin brand-user relationships. While this is a timely and valuable contribution to global branding in the modern branding 3.0 environment, the avenues explored in this study highlight the need for further research in certain areas. Further studies could explore and refine the three global identity values discovered here in more depth, and examine their prevalence and meaning in the wider global branding environment. Further studies could also explore whether there are any other values that may be important to those with a global identity. Moreover, future research could explore in more depth which social identities relevant to global branding (e.g. global identity, global youth, global business elite etcetera) are values-led versus status-led. This could be important for global brands to strategize identity primes around the various social identities they may wish to reach out to in their social media content strategy. Future research could also explore GCCP symbols in a global branding setting, as there is lack of research on this. This could help to shed light on which GCCP symbols are the most powerful and/or meaningful to certain social groups. Finally, this study focused on UGC as a global identity expression vehicle, but further studies could expand this scope to explore whether there are other ways in which global identity expression may transpire in relation to global brands on social media. Further research should also explore and test for global identity salience on social media, as this was not within the scope of this research. In exploring these avenues for further research, it is hoped that the field of global branding can gain valuable insight into global social identification that can assist global brands in strengthening brand-user relationships in the social media sphere.

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide used to initiate discussion around research topics:

1. Explanatory statement/introduction and answering questions

Part A: Warm-up questions

Brand representatives:

1. Can you tell me about your role and day-to-day activities within this company?

2. How does your company view social media for global branding?

SM users:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your social media page/s and what your usual social media activities are?

2. How do you feel about globalization?

Part B: Global brand-user relationships

Brand representatives:

1. How does your brand view and engage in relationship building with social media users? What challenges and enablers/opportunities do you see in terms of building relationships with global social media users?

2. Which social media users does your brand attempt to engage with on social media and why?

3. What strategies/actions in terms of social media content/strategic goals does your brand have in place to engage with these users? How do you think these strategies/actions build or strengthen relationships?

SM users:

1. Why do you interact with Brand-X on social media and what do these interactions mean to you?

2. If you had to describe Brand-X as a person, what would they be like and how do you feel about them?

3. Do any themes, features, posts, images (etc.) of Brand-X's social media pages/activity make you feel either close/connected to the brand, or distant from the brand? If yes, why do you think this is?

Part C: BGC and global symbolism

Brand representatives:

1. How does your brand attempt to communicate with global social media users from potentially different cultures/backgrounds on social media?

2. Which images/symbols/themes do you use and why? What do you aim to make your global social media followers do on social media (in terms of specific social media actions) by using these (images/symbols/themes/etc.)?

3. How do you aim to make the users feel (and towards who, themselves or the brand?) by using these (images/symbols/themes/etc.)?

SM users:

1. When you see or interact with Brand-X on social media, how do you feel about the brands social media posts (themes, symbols etc.)? Why? What do Brand-X's themes on social media mean to you?

2. If Brand-X was a person, which personality traits do you think you would share and which personality traits do you think you would not share with them? Can you think of any features or aspects of Brand-X's social media posts/activities that have contributed to the way you feel about sharing or not sharing these traits?

3. Is there anything you do on social media to express who you are and manage how others perceive you? If so, what and why?

Part D: UGC

Brand representatives:

1. How do you motivate (or attempt to motivate) your brands social media followers to create and send in UGC to you? What kind of social media users do you desire UGC from?

2. Do any particular kinds of social media content/posts that your brand engages with prompt an increase in either the amount or the quality of user-generated content you receive? If yes, can you describe this content/posts?

3. Can you describe what kind of UGC (in terms of themes, designs, symbols, content, creative expression etc.) your brand values the most from your social media followers? Which features are important for UGC to possess for your brand to post (or consider posting) it to your social media page/s?

SM users:

1. Can you tell me a bit about how you decided to create or share social media content for Brand-X? Feel free to use a specific example of a rewarding, memorable or recent piece of UGC you created or shared. Did you send this directly to the brand or did you tag them in it on your own social media pages? What made you decide to do this, and why?

2. What does it mean to you to create or share UGC for/with Brand-X?

3. What do you think this UGC says about you, to yourself and to others?

Part E: Ending questions/comments/thanking participants

1. Is there anything else that you feel is relevant to our discussion, or that you would like to discuss?

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