# Co-Creation: What Users Want

*A Qualitative Study on how Social Media Users balance Motivators and Barriers to Co-Create within Marketing Activities on Social Media Platforms*

*Authors:*

Anna Mellin

Ioannis Diakoulakis

*Supervisor:* Javier Cenamor
*Examiner:* Magnus Nilsson
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# Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore motivators and barriers that customers balance when it comes to co-creation in marketing activities undertaken by brands on social media. A qualitative research strategy was decided, with semi-structured interviews as the research method. The coding was thematic, and eight different themes of motivators and barriers to co-creation were found. Furthermore, themes were then divided into three categories, namely, socially oriented themes, personally oriented themes and enjoyment oriented themes. Within the socially oriented themes, the motivators and barriers found were *Unhelpful/Helpful User Behavior*, *Value of Content for Others* and *Being Recognised/Ignored*. Within the personally oriented themes, the motivators and barriers found were *Value Congruence/Incongruence* and *Trustworthiness/Untrustworthiness*. Within the enjoyment oriented themes, the motivators and barriers found were *the Prize* and *Expectancy of Winning* when it comes to brand related contests, as well as *Relatable/Not Relatable Tone* when it comes to the overall communication from a brand.

# Keywords

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Anna Mellin                                              Ioannis Diakoulakis

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Value co-creation is a topic that revolves around the idea that the customer plays an important role within the process of value creation (Merz & Vargo, 2009). Moreover, from a technological process perspective, this provides companies with new perspectives and ideas, while strengthening the bond to the customers, who take the role of being value co-creators (Merz & Vargo, 2009). However, co-creation is not limited to technological processes. In fact, when it comes to social media marketing activities, creating value together with consumers in social media has dominated the current marketing landscape for years, where customer participation, involvement and user-generated content has become central elements (Murray, Dennie & Combs, 2022). Moreover, co-creation activities from the user's side can include liking, sharing, producing user generated content, or participation within brand communities, to name a few. The point is that there is an active participation on some level by the consumer, where value is simultaneously created for the company. This value can be, for example, increased brand awareness through more interaction on social media posts, as well as deepening relationships between users and brands.

Co-creation activities in social media can help spark interaction, and within 2021, 40 percent of companies around the world were adding new ways for users to interact with them (Statista, 2023). However, in general, to get consumers to interact with content is, at times, rather difficult, and between 2019 and 2022, there was an overall drop in engagement within most social media platforms (Feehan, 2023). Moreover, in the fast paced world of social media, where most consumers scroll and read already produced content, to encourage such consumers to participate is a difficult task (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). This speaks to the relevance of focusing more on co-creation activities within social media, and especially toward the user, about what motivates them, or hinders them, to interact and co-create with brands.

Starting briefly by introducing user motivation, it becomes clear that from the user's side, there needs to be some sort of motivation, or incentive, to participate in any type of co-creation activities. Motivation is about what makes someone motivated to aim for a certain goal or outcome (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2016). For example, by conducting contests, companies often appeal to the extrinsic, external

reward focused motivation simply by offering incentives in terms of a prize. What is more, gamified activities can appeal both to the intrinsic, inner reward focused motivation of playing, but also to the extrinsic motivation of winning a prize (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2016). However, from the user's side, there can also be barriers, or hindrances, that deter users from participating in any type of co-creation activities. For example, users may be deterred from co-creating in a brand community if self centered members behave negatively towards other users (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Further, if gamified activities are too challenging, users' might consider chances of winning to be too low and thus refrain from participation (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

In the same vein, the relevance of reaching active participation is that it has been argued to both maintain customer-brand relationships, allow for co-creation of value with current users, as well as to reach new ones (Song, Qu & Li, 2022). Furthermore, speaking of the relevance for involving customers within marketing activities, it is the consumers who have the power to make a campaign "viral" and thereby strengthen the position of the brand (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Moreover, as social media has exacerbated the role of the consumer as a "value creator" (Ind & Coates, 2013, p.88), understanding consumer motivations and barriers are more important than ever.

## 1.2 Problem discussion

This part will further discuss the relevance for why this study is conducted, and present two different reasons for that. Firstly, a research gap will be illustrated within the current literature on how users balance motivators and barriers within co-creation activities. Secondly, it will be argued that recent changes in platform affordances can affect user behavior when it comes to co-creation activities on social media. Moreover, the latter implies that while contributing with many useful insights, the current literature might be limited in its applicability.

Starting with the current literature on co-creation in marketing activities, motivations for how and why social media users share (Haikel-Elsabeh, Zhao, Ivens & Brem, 2019) like and comment (Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López & Bernal-Bravo, 2021), engage in brand communities (Wasko & Faraj, 2000), create user generated content (Dhaka, 2017) and so forth, has been discussed plenty throughout the literature. In fact, we argue that there is a solid research base regarding the motivations for users to engage in such co-creation behavior when it comes to marketing activities. When it comes to barriers for why users refrain from participating in co-creation activities, there is indeed less literature to be found. Yet, one still finds both how users refrain due to privacy concerns (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020; Stöckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007), low expected rewards (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014) and information overload (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020), to name a few of the barriers. In conclusion, motivators have been studied more than barriers, but there are still some studies that do include barriers.

However, despite studies on both motivators and barriers within different co-creation activities, there is currently a lack of a holistic view within the literature that provides an overview of how users balance motivators and barriers. This is the research gap that we want to fill. Hence, while there are many interesting and useful studies, the holistic perspective is not really provided. Instead, different studies focus on different platforms and different activities. For example, while Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019) focus solely on Facebook sharing, Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López and Bernal-Bravo (2021) focuses on Instagram likes and comments. Furthermore, other studies are providing a view of why users participate in brand contests (Zhang, Sung & Lee, 2010), while some take a focus on identity, and argue that a barrier to co-creation is incongruence between the users' identity and the brand (Hollenbeck &

Kaikati, 2012). As can be seen in these examples, and especially within the latter one, is that such studies differ greatly. Inarguably, both provide interesting insights within their respective part of co-creation. Still, as illustrated by these examples, from such differences between the studies, it is difficult to gain an overview of user motivations and barriers in co-creation activities.

Thus, while the perspectives from different studies provide interesting insights into various parts of co-creation activities, we argue that a holistic overarching view of how users balance motivators and barriers within co-creation activities has been neglected. Within this study, the aim is thus to provide such an overview. A holistic view would contribute to the dialogue and give more insights into co-creation. Moreover, motivators and barriers to partake in co-creation from the user's side are quite complex. By having an overview, it might be easier to navigate the complex phenomenon that co-creation is. This would not only extend the understanding of co-creation as a phenomenon, but also make it easier for marketers to know how, or even when, to conduct co-creation activities within their social media marketing efforts.

The second reason for why this study is of relevance, and why current literature might be limited in its applicability, is the rapid change of technology. Moreover, as technology is changing, so are social media platforms and their platform affordances. Consequently, as new platforms are emerging, the remaining social media platforms are changing features. These features are sometimes visible for the user, but there are also other changes, such as algorithmic changes, that are not visible, yet change the experience for the user. Hence, both of these types of changes affect how users experience the platform and thereby also their behavior, even sometimes without them noticing. For example, there is a vast difference in Instagram before 2022, i.e. before the drastic change where Instagram moved away from being mainly a photo based sharing platform to prioritize content in the video format (Milmo, 2022). This can make studies conducted on Instagram usage before this change to be somewhat limited in their applicability, and the same goes for many other platforms.

Still, studies that were conducted a few years ago are of course both interesting and useful in many ways, and will work as the foundation for this paper. However, the point is that as technology is changing, new social media platforms emerge, which also sparks changes in platform affordances in the existing ones. In

this vein, this further motivates the relevance to conduct this study, as current literature might be limited in its applicability. Moreover, the different features by platforms today are oftentimes more advanced than for some years ago, which creates more opportunities and challenges for co-creation activities. For example, a co-creation activity today on Instagram might be about asking users to share a story, or a reel, while some years ago, it might have been more about photo based posts in the feed. Even though it is content creation, user behavior might differ when it comes to creating a story post that disappears after 24 hours, compared to the more effort needed into creating a short video within one's feed.

Summing up, as the current research within the field of user motivators and barriers to participation in co-creation activities is somewhat fragmented, the aim with this research is to contribute with an integrated holistic view. Furthermore, the relevance for this study is also supported by the swiftly changing social media landscape, making user behavior in co-creation activities changing as well. Thus, this study takes the perspective of the user and sets out to explore how users take part in co-creation activities and how motivators and barriers are balanced when doing so.

## 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore motivators and barriers that customers balance when it comes to co-creation in marketing activities undertaken by brands on social media.

## 1.4 Research Question

How do customers balance motivators and barriers to co-create value in social media marketing activities?

# 2. Theoretical Framework

## 2.1 Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation in Marketing Activities Online

When it comes to co-creation activities and motivations and barriers for users to take part in them, such activities can be divided into different areas. This is because some co-creation activities might be related to, for example, social motivations and barriers, and others to personal ones. Moreover, both motivations and barriers can be divided as such. To clarify, social activities can be about actively participating in a brand community with the motivation of connecting with other users (Wasko & Faraj, 2000), while personal barriers can be to refrain from posting something from a brand that is not in line with one's self image (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). For this reason, the theoretical framework is also divided into different parts. More specifically, the theoretical framework is divided into; *Social Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation*, *Personal Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation* and *Enjoyable Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation*.

We gain support from the literature for the division of these three parts by both Kennedy and Guzmán (2016) and Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, (2011). Moreover, Kennedy and Guzmán (2016) studied motivation for co-creation and found consumers to be motivated when social interaction was involved, when the consumers were experiencing compatibility with the brand, and when consumers would have fun in the process. Furthermore, Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, (2011) argued that users who are contributing to branded content do so for three reasons; "personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment" (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011, p.35). Additionally, supporting the two categories social and personal is De Vries, Peluso, Romani, Leeflang and Marcati (2017), arguing that socializing and expressing oneself are two of the most important motivators for users to either contribute or create on social media with brands' activities (De Vries et al. 2017).

## 2.1.1 Social Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation

Social motivators and barriers that will be discussed within this section essentially revolve around co-creation activities that in some way involve other users. This will be discussed in terms of how some users are motivated to contribute by experiencing a community feeling and sharing information with one another (Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Dhaka, 2017). Moreover, other social motivators that will be discussed are where some users also are motivated to protect other users (Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, Gremler, 2004; Atwal, Bryson & Tavilla, 2019; Halliday, 2016). Furthermore, social barriers will also be incorporated within this part. Such barriers can take shape in being criticized online by other users (Teichmann, Stokburger-Sauer, Plank, & Strobl, 2015), scared to express one's own opinion in front of other users (Chepurna & Criado, 2018), or how community members can become a barrier to co-creation within a community by acting out of self interest (Wasko & Faraj, 2000).

Starting the section from a brand community perspective, social motivators for taking part in co-creation activities have been discussed by Wasko and Faraj (2000), who found that people are motivated to participate in online communities and dialogue, because of the feeling of 'community' and knowledge exchange. The feeling of belonging within a community, is furthermore also highlighted by Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut, (2008) as an important motivator for participation in a community. In the same vein, when the exchanged knowledge is not of quality and when community members are acting out of self-interest, then users are deterred from co-creating, creating a social barrier (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Furthermore, Ind, Croates and Lerman (2020), found that people are motivated to participate in a community when they think that it will be valuable for them, when they can express themselves and develop their knowledge.

From a broader perspective of motivators and barriers for co-creation, Chepurna and Criado (2018), also found a social barrier that can impact co-creation, called inertia, which refers to how a large group that holds similar opinions can influence the rest of the group toward the same opinions. In addition, Constantinides, Brünink and Lorenzo-Romero (2015), takes a similar broader perspective, and argues that the social integrative benefits for expanding social cycles and a sense of community participation, are factors that motivate consumers to participate in

co-creation activities online. This is agreed upon by Madupu and Cooley (2010), who list social integration; to socially interact with others, build friendship and intimacy, as an important motive to engage in a community. Furthermore, another social driver for community engagement identified by Madupu and Cooley (2010) is social enhancement, which is the motive to gain acceptance and approval by the rest of the community.

This social bonding between users is further supported by Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh (2021), who discuss liking, sharing, and commenting behavior. Hence, Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh, (2021), argue that if the social media user has a positive experience with the branded content, it is more likely that the branded content is shared and/or liked and/or commented on. One positive experience, according to Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh, (2021), is social bonding, which is where users can bond with other users over the branded content, which makes users experience belonging and attachment. Hence, the connection with other users becomes like a community, where users can talk, share and discuss thoughts and opinions around both the branded content, but also other things that emerge during discussion (Waqas, Hamzah & Mohd Salleh, 2021).

The social motives are also argued by Dhaka (2017) who instead looked into user motivations in producing user generated content. Moreover, Dhaka (2017) found that users produce more content when users are acquainted with other users on the same social network site. Hence, according to Dhaka (2017), it is firstly a way of staying in touch with people who are important to the users personally, yet it could also be a way of remaining connected with a community which might be beneficial in terms of, for example, providing information or resources to the user (Dhaka, 2017). This was also somehow agreed upon by Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008), who continues along these lines and argues that consumers are producing user generated content as a form of participating in a community, as well as giving consumers a way of associating with their friends online. Moreover, this helps consumers feel important, as they are producing something that can be of value for others (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008).

On the other hand, social connection can also prevent users from creating brand-related content because of the peer pressure that users may feel about sharing their content with other users (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2020). Even so, because of the time constraints that content creation requires, users' primary use of

social media, namely to connect with other people is hindered, and thus makes users demotivated to participate in content creation (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2020). Another somewhat socially related discussion was argued by Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who stated that being concerned about other customers was the primary motivation for consumers to raise their voice online. Similarly, Atwal, Bryson and Tavilla, (2019) states that consumers are motivated to share food reviews to both help and inform other consumers. Najar and Rather (2021) further argues for the importance of user generated content as a source of information. Halliday (2016) agrees that as user generated content is indeed a source of information, trust emerges, and a sense of goodwill between users, which again shows the underlying social motive. In this sense, there is also a distrust toward professionally generated content (Halliday, 2016).

Yesiloglu, Memery and Chapleo (2021) however contrasts this statement saying that social media users instead have a tendency to seek information directly from brands, in contrast to from user generated content. As a reason for why this might be the case, it is argued that consumers have been used to interacting with brands in real time on social media (Yesiloglu, Memery & Chapleo, 2021). Continuously, trust in the relationship between user and brand is important, and consumers are motivated to protect other consumers when sharing brand related content (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019). From a social community perspective, Teichmann et al. (2015) also found that users do indeed often look after other users, especially inexperienced, members of a community. This is to protect such users from potential danger, such as receiving negative comments and criticism. In this sense, this avoids harming the atmosphere of the community which would result in fewer contributions to the community (Teichmann et al., 2015).

## 2.1.2 Personal Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation

Personal motivators and barriers that will be discussed within this section are co-creation activities between the brand and the user. This puts an emphasis on the inner relationship between the user, the user's personality and self concept. Moreover, it is about how the user considers themselves to be represented in social media, with what sort of co-creation activities and what kind of brands. Hence, it is about how such activities resonate with the user's identity and self-image. Moreover, this part will be about how users tend to have motivations to engage with brands online that they experience congruent with themselves and their values (Rabbanee, Roy & Spence, 2020; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Waqas, Hamzah & Mohd Salleh, 2021; Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). Within this regard, this part will also go through personal barriers, such as experiencing no shared values (Chepurna & Criado, 2018), or considering oneself not having anything of value to post (Haikel-Elsabeh et al., 2019; Stöckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007). Moreover, personal barriers also include anxiety over contributions not being good enough, or not understanding certain community contributions (Cheng & Zachry, 2020), as well as worrying about being considered bragging (Sekhon, Bickart, Trudel & Fournier, 2016).

A starting point to this section is provided by Rabbanee, Roy and Spence, (2020), who found personal motivators when it comes to co-creation activities such as liking, commenting and sharing behavior. Moreover, Rabbanee, Roy and Spence, (2020) states that brand attachment has a mediating role between self-congruity, i.e. how individuals relate their identity with a brand, and behavior such as commenting, sharing and liking. Furthermore, Rabbanee, Roy and Spence, (2020) also found that individuals who consider their belongings more as an extension of themselves than consumers on average do, are more likely to have a higher brand attachment, and are therefore more likely to engage in liking, sharing and commenting behavior. From the community participation perspective, Teichmann et al. (2015) argues that self-presentation, among other factors, has a positive influence over the users' participation in online communities. Madupu and Cooley (2010) also fills in by stating that self discovery is a driver of online community participation, and is the motive of members to reinforce their personal values and identify with other valued members of the community. Interestingly, source closeness, which is about users

familiarity and similarity with the brand that is posting, was also found to be directly linked with clicking like (Cheung & To, 2022).

Following the personal factors within co-creation, a study by Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) states that consumers use brands on Facebook to show a certain image to other users, which leads to that consumers tend to use brands as a representation of their ideal self and their actual self. Moreover, users choose to avoid certain brands and to engage with other brands, as means to express their identity (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). Similarly, a study by Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh (2021) argues that self-identity congruence, i.e. the congruence between the branded content and the norms, social roles and beliefs held by the user, is important as content that resonates with the consumer's identity is more likely to be shared by the user. Following this reasoning, Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, (2013) states that users who identify themselves more strongly with a brand tend to have a stronger commitment, generate more positive word of mouth, and consider the brand being "part of their self concept" (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013, p.57).

Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019) and Nikolinakou and Phua (2019) continue to discuss the motivations for why people share branded content. Nikolinakou and Phua (2019) argues that self enhancement motivates consumers to share informational branded content, as it gives users a way to feel a sense of achievement and even power (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019). However, Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019) instead take a narrower view focusing solely on the platform Facebook, and argue instead that it differs between two groups of people. Moreover, the groups Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019) refer to are called posters, meaning people who post actively, i.e. on a regular basis, and lurkers, who do not feel comfortable posting as they consider themselves not having anything of value to post online. The latter is also supported from a study by Stöckl, Rohrmeier and Hess (2007), who found this barrier when studying user generated content for video contests. Moreover, what Stöckl, Rohrmeier and Hess, (2007) found was that users refrained from participating with the argument of not having anything interesting to contribute with. However, for contests using text instead, this was not as prevalent (Stöckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007).

Going back to the discussion by Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019), the more active the posters are, the more this group also shares branded content. Still, this does not apply for lurkers. Yet, what is the same for both groups is the fact that the more users identify with a brand on Facebook, the more these users want to share posts about the

brand (Haikel-Elsabeh et al. 2019). Moreover, Nobre and Ferreira (2017) argues for the importance that users feel that they are recognized, differentiated, considered, and listened to by the brands. Similarly, two other studies taking the community perspective yet following the discussion around shared values, are Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut, (2008) and Wasko and Faraj (2000). Moreover, Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut, (2008) speak about that how well the user is identifying with community values is important for community participation, and Wasko and Faraj (2000) argue that participation is helped when users feel that everyone in the community shares the same values and ideas.

Taking a broader view on co-creation, Kennedy, Guzmán and Ind, (2022) found that people were motivated to engage in co-creation activities if the brand and its communication was aligned with their personal values (Kennedy, Guzmán & Ind, 2022). In the same vein, Chepurna and Criado (2018) found that no shared values with the brand is considered a barrier to co-creation online. Following this discussion, Sekhon et al. (2016) offers another explanation as to why users refrain from sharing and how users try to overcome this. What Sekhon et al. (2016) states is that consumers want to avoid being considered to be "bragging" when sharing, tagging, and/or mentioning certain brands, and therefore employ strategies to avoid this. The first strategy by users is to speak about the brand in another context, such as instead talk about what one is doing, how one is feeling, or what one is thinking about. Furthermore, the second strategy is to try to take away the focus on oneself, while the third strategy is to downplay positive characteristics of oneself and/or the brand (Sekhon et al. 2016).

Cheng and Zachry (2020) tackles barriers from a perspective of building community knowledge when it comes to online competitions. Moreover, Cheng and Zachry (2020) argues that while the group called experts contribute heavily, new users struggle with anxiety over contributions not being good enough, which would risk hurting their social image within the group. Another barrier identified is that it can also be difficult for new members to understand the contributions from more senior, expert members, exacerbating the uncertainty for new members (Cheng & Zachry, 2020).

## 2.1.3 Enjoyable Motivators and Barriers for Co-Creation

When it comes to this section, it is all about motivators and barriers regarding how users are enjoying the co-creation activities. Moreover, this part is about motivating factors, such as when users consider content as fun and entertaining and thus choose to co-create (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014; Yesiloglu, Memery & Chapleo, 2021). Furthermore, there are also enjoyment related barriers that are hindering the enjoyment for the user, and such barriers will also be discussed within this part. Moreover, it can be user generated content creation that makes the user concerned over their privacy (Stöckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007; Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020), or content that requires too much participation from the user's side yet does not offer a strong reward, such as a prize or discounts (Park & Jiang, 2021; Buzeta, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2020; Zhang, Sung & Lee, 2010).

This section begins with Kennedy and Guzmán (2016), who identified both fun and communication appeals as factors for why millennials want to co-create with brands. The factor of fun included how entertaining and exciting consumers thought of the interaction with the brand to be, while communication appeal was about how appealing consumers thought that the advertising campaigns and communication efforts of the brand were (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016). Complimenting the factor of fun, Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014) mention the entertainment motive as the consumers' affection and interaction with the brand and its content that they find amusing and fun. According to them, this motive is associated with viral marketing campaigns and creating buzz. Yesiloglu, Memery and Chapleo (2021) found that users who are motivated to create brand-related posts out of enjoyment, will do so more frequently since it is an enjoyable act for them. Moreover, Nikolinakou and Phua (2019) speak for the enjoyment and stimulation that comes from creating content involving brands, which is according to the authors stronger than merely sharing already made branded content. According to Park and Jiang (2021) motivations for entertainment, that is, the user's need for fun and amusement, are the strongest drivers for users to participate in contributing activities with the brand, and thus increase its value.

Cheung and To (2022) argue about the communication appeal, mentioning how attractive the branded content is, i.e. how attractive the different content types (photos, videos and texts) are, directly and indirectly motivates people to click the like

button. The indirect influence is through perceived value, which then becomes a mediator between the attractiveness of the branded content and the behavioral response (i.e. clicking like) (Cheung & To, 2022). Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López and Bernal-Bravo (2021) argues that on Instagram, posts with hashtags, videos with some type of sound, as well as carousel posts (i.e. multiple photos in one post), get more likes than other types of content. However, since these posts did not motivate consumers to comment under them, Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López and Bernal-Bravo (2021) explain that is may be due to the longer viewing time, stressing the impact that added time and effort puts on the consumers, as commenting requires consumers to put more effort into the consumption of the content. Interestingly, by investigating internet memes on Twitter, Yang (2022) found that using humor in brand-related posts can increase positive attitudes toward the brand and higher intention to share the post with other users. They also found that posts were perceived as more humorous when they received more interactions (replies, likes, retweets) from other users, and that humor works only when the content is perceived as funny by the users (Yang, 2022). This seems to be in line with Howe et al. (2023) who found that humor is effective only when it is used cleverly, increasing brand attitudes and brand engagement.

Park and Jiang (2021) also argue for the importance of extrinsic rewards such as economic incentives for consumers to contribute to the brand. When it comes to branded content that requires more interactions, most comments were gained when the branded content were contests, followed by voting and then by answering questions (Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López & Bernal-Bravo 2021). According to Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López and Bernal-Bravo (2021), this gives support to the idea that consumers are motivated to share branded content the most when there is an external reward. Yesiloglu, Memery and Chapleo (2021) also found that external motivation in the form of rewards as a result of users' engagement with branded content on social media, was a key factor for increasing brand-related posts on these platforms. Buzeta, De Pelsmacker and Dens (2020) mention remuneration as the act of receiving economic incentives like discounts, promotions, taking part in competitions, etc., to have a strong influence on brand-related content that is posted and shared by users' social media accounts.

Furthermore, Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014) also bring up the opportunity seeking motive, by which consumers are expecting to receive discounts, promotions,

and overall financial benefits, as a motivator for interaction with brands on social media. This was also discussed by Ashley and Tuten (2015) as a reason for why consumers follow brands. Lastly, Zhang, Sung and Lee (2010) highlights how brands can promote and accelerate word of mouth through rewards. Namely by giving rewards to the winner of a contest as well as their friends they may choose, companies can stimulate communication and word of mouth among people who will share the contest with their friends and persuade them to participate in order to increase their chances of winning (Zhang, Sung & Lee, 2010). They also compliment the argument of rewards by saying that adults are driven by monetary rewards, and thus by introducing such rewards, uncreative content can become fun for the consumers (Zhang, Sung & Lee, 2010).

When engaging in co-creation communities, intrinsic motivations are also complimented with financial rewards which in this case work more as a sign of gratitude for participating rather than a financial exchange (Ind, Croates & Lerman, 2020). Discussing participation from a perspective of gamification, Berger, et al. (2018) argue that if consumers are under time pressure, it will be frustrating for them to participate in gamified activities. Moreover, Berger, et al. (2018) also state that gamified interactions must be both strongly focused on interaction, as well as being optimally challenging. This was also agreed upon by Ashley and Tuten (2015) who state that contests hosted by brands only become effective when the goals are attainable and challenging.

When it comes to barriers for producing user generated content and social media participation, Stöckl, Rohrmeier and Hess (2007) argue that the reason people refrain from producing user generated content can be both due to lack of time and fear of not enough protection of their privacy. Additionally, Tsimonis, Dimitriadis and Omar (2020), found three relational costs in social media pages. Namely, privacy concerns, information overload and ad irritation. Privacy concerns refers to the user's concerns about their private data being used in social media and that it negatively affects how consumers use social media (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020). Information overload refers to the feeling that the users will have when exposed to excessive amounts of information which will cause annoyance and negative attitude towards the brands and their communications on social media (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020). Lastly, they mention ad irritation as the feeling of annoyance that

users will feel after being exposed to a lot of advertising online, which again acts as a relational cost of social media (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis & Omar, 2020).

## 2.2 Conceptual Model

Below is the conceptual model, where motivators and barriers are placed on different sides to provide an overview. The model shows that social motivators are mirrored by social barriers, personal motivators by personal barriers, and enjoyment related motivators by enjoyment related barriers. Motivators and barriers are separate within the model which represents how motivators and barriers are mainly discussed separately within the literature. However, they are mirrored because both can be present at the same time and both can be there simultaneously.

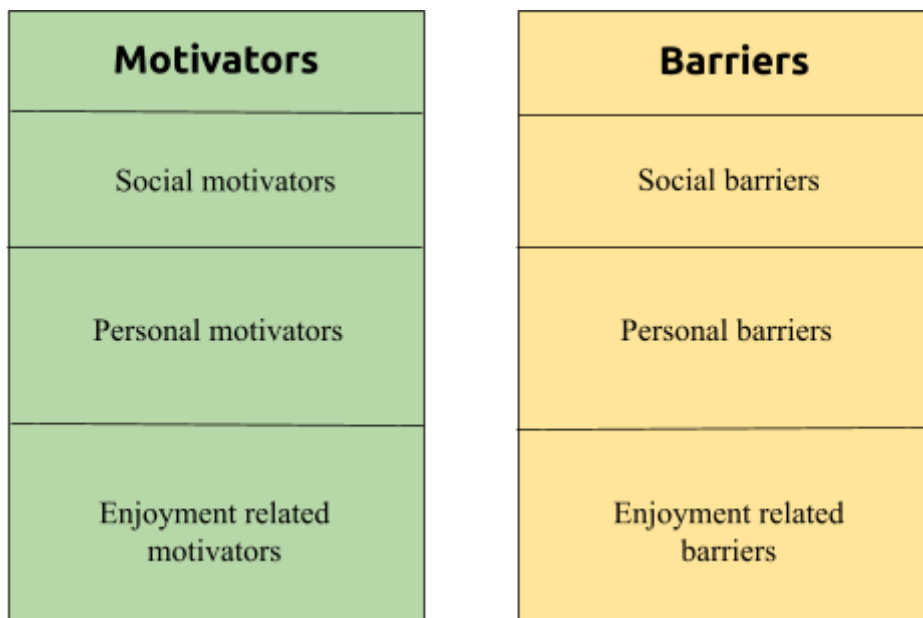| Motivators | Barriers |
| --- | --- |
| Social motivators | Social barriers |
| Personal motivators | Personal barriers |
| Enjoyment related motivators | Enjoyment related barriers |

Figure 1. Diakoulakis and Mellin. Motivators and Barriers, an Overview.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Qualitative Research Strategy

For this research, a qualitative research strategy was chosen. Qualitative research aims to gather data that are not numeric or in a quantitative form (Pathak, Jena, Kalra, 2013; Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, & Valizade, 2021). Qualitative research aims to answer questions concerned with human experiences and develop an understanding of social lives and experiences (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Given that, the topics that this research aims to explore, i.e. co-creation, motivators, and barriers, take place within the organizations and the minds of people, and thus can not be studied by measuring and quantifying them (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001), a qualitative research was better suited for uncovering these phenomena and discovering the underlying aspects of social behavior (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2001). This is because many of the topics that this research aims to cover (such as co-creation, motivators, and barriers), are a result of human and social behavior and are thus not measurable in a quantitative sense. Qualitative research methods are ideal for identifying and investigating social phenomena from different participant perspectives and painting a holistic picture of the phenomenon (Williams, 2007), and consequently an ideal choice for this research and our aim.

While quantitative methods can still research human experiences and social phenomena, these types of research are based on pre-coded questions and surveys that inevitably provide static answers and data. The closest we could get to our subject through quantitative methods is to provide our participants with a survey, asking them to rate their experiences on the topic, using a numerical scale. Such an approach would likely limit the vast and variable data that is the human experience to static and non-descriptive number figures, and thus limit our understanding of the social phenomena underlining our topic. Thus a qualitative research approach was a better fit for this research. Given that our topic is bound to human experiences and thus different interpretations among participants, we believe that qualitative research will be better suited for exploring and discovering a wider area of different perspectives and provide us with various angles and interpretations of the issue at hand. In addition, qualitative research is more about exploring and discovering, in contrast to quantitative research which is more about measuring. Moreover, qualitative research involves an open-ended structure and allows for the researcher's participation and

input when need be (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). This is again a more suitable approach for our research.

## 3.2 Qualitative Research Method

To answer our question of how customers balance motivators and barriers to co-create on social media, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research method. Qualitative interview research is being done in order to get a better understanding of the respondents' views, beliefs, and experiences on the topic (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). The benefit of qualitative interviews is that they provide an in-depth understanding of the respondent's input on the topic in a confidential and personal setting (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021) which allows respondents to give detailed answers and thus deeper understanding.

For this research, the topic of motivators and barriers for co-creation can be very personal and experiences can differ greatly from person to person. That is why semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method, over a focus group research approach. Focus groups are best suited for when the aim of the research is to find how certain groups of people think, interact, and influence each other as part of a group (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2001). For this research question we considered it would be detrimental to the research to have the respondents influencing the rest of the group and the data, and thus further strengthens the choice of semi-structured interviews over focus groups.

We also think that focus groups run the risk of participants being unwilling to share what makes them participate or deter from co-creation activities because they may feel ashamed of sharing their motives and deterrents with other people. This would certainly hinder our study, and we believe that it is beneficial for our aim to focus on individual and private answers rather than group-minded answers. As the respondents were also anonymised, it gives the respondents more security in expressing themselves more freely. This again speaks for the relevance of conducting anonymised semi-structured interviews.

We also choose to conduct semi-structured interviews instead of fully structured or unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to delve deeper into the social and personal matters of the participants, and get inside the mind and feelings of the participants (Carson et al. 2001) and have a certain degree of influence over the topics of conversation (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021;

Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2001). We consider it important to be able to intervene in the conversation and provide participants with new input, follow-up questions, and prompt them to expand upon their answers when we think that there is more information to be gained (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2001). Given that the topic is somewhat personal and very diverse among participants, it is crucial that we are able to steer the conversation based on the answers provided, in order to get the most out of them. For example, we expect that motivators and barriers are often in conflict with each other, meaning that a certain phenomenon can be a motivator for one participant, but at the same time, it could be a barrier for another one. Thus, the same questions can have different outcomes depending on the person on the receiving end. For this reason, semi-structured interviews will allow us to look behind the participants' answers, identify their motives and differentiate between motivators and barriers.

## 3.2.2 Types of interview questions

Starting off with the qualitative semi-structured interviews, it was considered essential to build rapport with our participants, to build trust with them and create a safe and comfortable environment for our participants to fully express themselves and contribute to the research the best way possible (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This is a crucial step of the research, as failure to develop trust can result in participants giving stale answers and answering only what they think is expected from them (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). We aimed to ease our participants into the conversation by using icebreaker questions (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021) and thereby introducing the topic by presenting them with the structure of the interview and how it would take place (Flick, Von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004), as well as how it can benefit them for participating in the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, we considered it crucial to be able to jump into the conversation when we see fit and help our participants develop their answers further. That is why we were asking follow-up questions to the participants based on their answers, as well as different probing techniques to get them to explain their position more clearly. By using silent probes and suggesting that a question has not been answered thoroughly, the participants were probed to explain their answers further without asking them explicitly to explain (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). On the same note, another integral part of the interviews was to use laddering up and laddering

down techniques. A laddering up technique is when the researcher is helping the participant to explain their position on an answer that they provided, and usually the best way to achieve this is to ask 'Why' questions as follow-ups to their answers (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Laddering down is when the researcher is asking the participants to paint a picture of the topic at hand, often by asking them to give examples to explain and visualize their answers (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). We considered both of these methods crucial to our study as they were helpful in the conversation as they were making respondents dive deeper into their answers. This is because it might be difficult for respondents to answer directly, and speaking about examples can often be helpful as it connects more to their daily lives, and in this case, daily use of social media. Moreover, it can be difficult to answer right away about what, for example, would hinder one from posting something, but it might be much easier to give an example of a situation where one was hesitating about posting something, and dig deeper into that. For this reason, both laddering up and laddering down techniques were used, as they complement each other by both discussing examples and then diving deeper into the reasons behind the behavior in that situation.

## 3.4 Pre Test

A pre-test was conducted with two people from our network, just to get an overview of how well the questions are working, that the questions are appropriate and understandable (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Overall, the questions were deemed appropriate, but some minor adjustments were made. It was found that the question about interaction, namely; "How do users participate/communicate with your brand online? What type of interaction do you usually see?" can also be interpreted to be about communication with the brand through the selling site. This is most likely as it says online, and not specifically social media. Still, this might not be negative, as customer service is very important for a company, but we decided to change it to social media to fit even better with our research question, as it is more about social media marketing activities.

Furthermore, the question about "How do you work with getting users to interact (like/share/comment) on your content?" some changes were made. Here we considered that the examples of like/share/comment was limiting the answers, as interaction can be to order something, write a review, etcetera. Thus, any examples were taken away and only provided if needed. That is because we discovered that by

mentioning these specific interactions we might frame our respondents' minds into giving answers only for these interactions and ignoring every other interaction that may take place. Hence, we believe that a more general question is suitable as it includes all interactions and will not prevent respondents from speaking about only certain actions, while at the same time it will motivate participants to think of the unique ways that they interact with their customers and answer accordingly.

Regarding the questions to users, it was considered that the word community was considered to sometimes be a bit narrow, as in Facebook terminology it is often called a page, yet it has a similar, if not exactly the same, role as a community i.e. providing a space for users to interact with each other around a shared interest. However, as some users might still prefer the word community, and might have been in communities on different platforms, it was decided that both community, groups and pages all might be examples that help users to understand the question. Regarding the question "What are your thoughts when you see others share branded content?" it became clear that the term branded content might not be a term that most people use. Hence, the terminology branded content was switched, and instead changed to content, such as posts, from brands. Similarly, for the question "Have you been taking part in contests by brands online? What types of contests? Why/Why not?" the word types was considered confusing, if it was about the platform, the product that is given away, or in general for what kind of contest for certain brands, etcetera. For this reason, this question was rephrased to "Can you describe contests you have chosen to take part in, or chosen not to take part in?" as we are interested in getting to know more about these contests, details, and how/why the user participated. Hence, this question will help participants clearly picture all the details needed.

## 3.5 Sampling Selection

For this paper, the sampling method chosen was generic purposive sampling, which focuses on selecting respondents with the purpose of them being able to answer the research question (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, to choose which respondents that have the insights that could help answer the purpose and research question of the study, a set of criteria was developed. Thus, the criteria is there to determine the characteristics that the respondents must fulfill in order to participate within this study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, when developing the different criteria, it became apparent that it needed to be developed into two different groups. This is because the co-creation activities include two actors, namely consumers and companies, it is important to include both actors involved within the co-creation activities (Chepurna & Criado, 2018).

Furthermore, on the one hand, it became apparent that interviewing users was argued to be relevant as the research question is about how customers balance motivators and barriers. Still, it also became apparent that consumers, or users, might lack certain initial knowledge and experience within the area of co-creation within marketing activities. Such knowledge and experience would be beneficial to help answer the purpose and research question. Furthermore, it was also argued that users might not have full insight into their own behavior; insight that a marketer might have gained through for example, conducting campaigns and thereby observing user behavior in social media. Therefore, it was decided that it was also relevant to discuss the topic from a company perspective. Thus, for the two groups, the users and company respondents, the criteria for being a respondent was the following.

Starting with users, the criteria was to actively use social media platforms on a regular basis by creating some sort of content, at least something every month (could be posting pictures, videos, tweets and so on) or sharing branded content on a somewhat regular, monthly basis. Furthermore, it could also be users who had previously been, or currently are, either engaged in brand communities or brand competitions. Moreover, the relevance for interviewing the users who are posting content regularly, is that such users arguably are the target for companies seeking to co-create, as these users are actively posting and contributing. Hence, companies engaging in co-creation in marketing activities would benefit from being present in active users' posts. The relevance of interviewing users who have been, or currently

are, taking part in brand communities or brand contests, is that these users are also, or have been, the target of companies wishing to co-create. Furthermore, as these people either have been, or currently are engaging in social media platforms in some way, they see a lot of the co-creation activity that is going on, as they are part of it.

Still, to add a whole different perspective, which could help gain even more insights, it was decided to include one user who actively refrains from doing all such activities. This was decided for two reasons. First, as the study is about how motivations and barriers are balanced, it was deemed relevant to include one user who might consider the barriers so high that participation is out of the question. Second, as it is argued that most users are in fact lurkers, i.e. does not participate at all online (Haikel-Elsabeh et al. 2019), it became clear that it would be beneficial to gain insight from such a user as well.

The second criteria set for the company respondents was to either be a marketing assistant, content creator/producer, marketing coordinator, social media marketing manager, digital marketing specialist or in some other way working professionally in a role including marketing and/or customer interaction. Furthermore, the criterion set for the companies that the respondents were working for had to be companies that engage in some sort of co-creation activities. Yet, it was not necessary to work with co-creation activities in all aspects, and it was not necessary either that such activities had been, or currently are, successful. Moreover, the point was that these companies had engaged in, had tried out, or currently were trying out co-creation of some sort in their marketing activities.

To add another perspective, two of the companies are marketing agencies, which greatly differs from the other companies in that a marketing agency conducts campaigns for different companies. Thus, a marketing agency might not engage in co-creation for their own purposes, but have been conducting several campaigns aimed towards it. In this sense, it was argued that such an agency might have different insights gained from working with different social media campaigns, and was therefore deemed relevant to include in the study. The reason for including two respondents from two different marketing agencies is that these respondents' roles are quite different. Moreover, one respondent is a social media manager on a smaller agency, working very closely with content creation. Furthermore, the second respondent is also at a quite small agency, yet has a very different role, as head of customer success.

To further add onto the varying perspectives, one customer service employee was also included, as the respondent is at the frontline meeting customers at a large retail chain. Hence, this person meets as well as handles a lot of negativity and issues that subsequently also ends up in the company social media channels. Furthermore, customer service employees at this retail chain must also be aware of current marketing campaigns, such as deals and discounts, as their customers ask about that. Moreover, while it would have been ideal to interview someone at the marketing department as well, it was difficult to access individuals from that department. Still, we consider it being relevant to add the perspective of a customer service employee, as there already are several marketers within this study.

Regarding the difficulty of access, one written response was also included. It was because while it was not possible to arrange a meeting with the social media manager of this company, it was considered valuable to still include the written response received. Another respondent that should be mentioned is somewhere in between the users and the companies, as this person produces video game content online that features popular brands, products, and services from the gaming and tech industry. It is not to the immediate interest of this person to promote these brands per se, but instead the content that happens to feature these brands. In this sense, the relevance for including this person is that he offers a more user-centric approach to co-creation and content creation, which is done professionally.

To sum up, all these different perspectives were argued to yield many different insights and nuances, and therefore were considered of value to this study. Moreover, variation in answers is important as it can help gain a broader and fuller understanding of a topic (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). While, for example, a digital marketing specialist might have a more result oriented view when it comes to link clicks, view time or a similar metric, a content producer might have a very different view on the same question. It should be noted that for the marketing agencies, the customer service employee, the gaming content producer on Youtube and the user who were refraining from engaging, the questions were changed slightly. Needless to say, this is because it would not make sense to ask a marketing agency if they have been conducting contests for their own purpose, or if the user who refrained from participating is engaged within a brand community. Furthermore, regarding the gaming video content producer, it was considered that as the content is produced for profit and that it is to his immediate interest to invite other users to engage with his

content, we considered the company questions to be better suited for this participant as they would arguably provide us with more insights. Hence, by including multiple perspectives a richer understanding can emerge, and eventually allow us to come closer to a theoretical saturation, which is when no new perspectives emerge during the interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, due to time constraints, it was considered to be difficult to reach complete theoretical saturation, as there might simply not be enough time to conduct as many interviews as it would take to reach a saturation point. This will be discussed more in detail below.

## 3.5.1 Sample size

There is not a specific recommended sample size in qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and instead the focus is to aim to reach theoretical saturation. In the same vein, as qualitative research is not focusing on generalizing, but instead on gaining a deeper understanding, there is not a specific sample size that can be applied, and therefore, the sample size will differ depending on the topic (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover, there is a difference between sequential and non-sequential sampling approaches (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and for this study, a sequential sampling approach was used. This was because it was difficult to estimate what insights each respondent would give, and thereby the research started out with some interviews, and more were added as the research progressed. However, to initiate the interviews, and to address the practical issues of booking respondents, five users and five company respondents were selected. Still, as the interviews were initiated, it was considered that more perspectives would strengthen the study, and more respondents were hence added. Thus, the focus was to get as close as possible to saturation within the given time frame. The sample size eventually landed on 16 respondents.

## 3.6 Interview guide

The interview guide is a helpful tool to ensure that all topics are covered (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Within table one, the respondents are presented and within table two, introducing questions are placed. Lastly, within table three, the interview questions are shown. However, it is important to state that the questions are more as a guide to ensure that the topics are covered, and hence not something that was to be followed strictly, as it is a semi structured interview guide.

Table 1. Table of Respondents.

| Interviewees | Gender | User or Firm | Role | Time | Place | Interview length |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | Male | Retail Chain Firm | Customer Service Employee | 26 th April | In Person | 15 minutes |
| Respondent 2 | Female | FMCG Firm | Content Creator and Social media Strategist | 3rd May | Video Call | 31 minutes |
| Respondent 3 | Female | Financial Software Firm | Digital Marketing Specialist | 27 th April | Phone Call | 15 minutes |
| Respondent 4 | Male | Content Producer | Content Producer | 27 th April | Video Call | 20 minutes |
| Respondent 5 | Male | Medical Equipment Firm | Marketing Coordinator | 29 th April | In Person | 33 minutes |
| Respondent 6 | Female | Marketing Agency | Social Media Manager | 4th May | Video Call | 32 minutes |
| Respondent 7 | Male | Marketing Agency | Head of Customer Success | 10th May | Video Call | 24 minutes |
| Respondent 8 | Female | Telecommunication Company | Social Media Manager | 12th May | Written Response | N/A |
| Respondent 9 | Male | Telecommunication Company | Marketing and Sales | 16th May | Video Call | 17 minutes |
| Respondent 10 | Female | User | Tried contests, interacts with brands, Overall user 1 | 26 th April | Video Call | 21 minutes |
| Respondent 11 | Female | User | Community Participant | 2nd May | In Person | 31 minutes |
| Respondent 12 | Female | User | Never shares nor posts | 2nd May | Video Call | 25 minutes |
| Respondent 13 | Female | User | Sharing branded content, UGC | 2nd May | Video Call | 27 minutes |
| Respondent 14 | Female | User | Lurking, contests, community participation, Overall user 2 | 3rd May | Video Call | 33 minutes |
| Respondent 15 | Female | User | Contest Participant | 4th May | In Person | 21 minutes |
| Respondent 16 | Female | User | Creates content, not follow brands | 6th May | Video Call | 37 minutes |

Table 2. Introducing questions.

| Introductory Questions Questions for User | Introductory Questions for Companies |
|---|---|
| Are you on social media on a daily basis? | What social media channels do you have/work with? |
| What are you typically doing most on social media? | What kind of content do you work with most to get customers to interact? |

Table 3. Interview questions for users and companies.

| Concept | Question Users | Questions Companies | Sources |
|---------|----------------|---------------------|---------|
| Social | Have you ever been in a brand community, or in another online community? Can you tell us more about your experience there? If so, did you talk with other users? How so? Why/Why not? | How do users participate/communicate with your brand on social media? What type of interaction do you usually see? | (Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Daugherty et al., 2008; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Dhaka, 2017; Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Atwal et al., 2019; Halliday, 2016; Teichmann et al., 2015; Chepurna & Criado, 2018; Woisetschläger et al., 2008; Ind et al., 2020; Constantinides et al., 2015; Waqas et al., 2021; Buzeta et al., 2020; Najar & Rather, 2021; Yesiloglu et al., 2021; Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019) |
| | What do you expect from other members of the community? What sort of experience stood out to you when participating in a community? | Have you experienced users commenting negatively on your posts, and/or toward other users? What do you think other users think about that? | |
| Personal | What kind of content do you post about products/from brands? Why/why not? What kind of content would you like to post? What stops you from posting such content? What are your thoughts when you see others share content, such as posts, from brands? | How do you work with content so that it's fast and easy to take in? What do you think makes users share branded content and create content with brands on their own channels? | (Rabbanee et al., 2020; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Waqas et al., 2021; Tuškej et al., 2013; Chepurna & Criado, 2018; Haikel-Elsabeh et al., 2019; Stöckl et al., 2007; Cheng & Zachry, 2020; Sekhon et al., 2016; Teichmann et al., 2015; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Cheung & To, 2022; Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019; Nobre & Ferreira 2017; Woisetschläger et al., 2008; Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Kennedy et al., 2022; Cheng & Zachry, 2020) |
| | Do you follow brands online that you like and/or shop from? Why/why not? Have you ever shared information about products that you enjoy on your social media? Why/Why not? Have you regretted sharing (or not sharing) anything? Do you put much thought/effort into content that you share? Why/Why not? | Have you noticed that some content is getting much more interaction than others? What content? How do you work with getting users to interact on your content? Is there anything you prefer not to do contentwise? | |
| Enjoyable | What do you think is fun when companies do within social media? What kind of posts/initiatives? What would you like to see more of? | Do you work with humoristic content? How so? How do you work with tone of voice? | (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014; Yesiloglu et al., 2021; Stöckl et al., 2007; Tsimonis et al., 2020; Park & Jiang, 2021; Buzeta et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2010; Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019; Cheung & To, 2022; Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021; Yang, 2022; Howe et al., 2023; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Ind et al., 2020; Berger, et al., 2018) |
| | Have you been taking part in contests by brands online? What contests were these? Why/Why not? Can you describe contests you had taken part in, or chosen not to take part in? If yes, what kind and why? If no, elaborate. | Have you pursued contests/giveaways? Why/why not? Why do you think some users choose to not participate in contests/giveaways? Have you done any contests with unexpected success/failure? Why do you think this happened? | |

## 3.6.1 The interview process

The interviews either took place online with video calls, physical, or on the phone, together with one received written response. The different variations in ways to conduct the interviews were important as it enabled us to get answers from individuals who we might not have been able to interview otherwise due to distance. Furthermore, the reason for that one interview took place on the phone is because one company said yes to an interview, but requested a phone interview. A drawback of doing a phone interview is that as one cannot see the person, it becomes more difficult to interpret *how* they are answering the questions, for example, if the respondent are doing hand gestures or similar. Still, one can hear if the respondent is hesitating, or somehow being unsure of how to answer, making the phone interview still having nuances to the answer.

The language of the interviews differed as some interviews took place in Swedish and some in English, depending on the language that the respondents were more comfortable with. However, it should be noted that most interviews did take place in English. Still, that the respondents were comfortable was considered important, and this also played a role in the different variations in where the interviews took place. To clarify, we wanted to get the respondents to be able to relax, and consider it more of a friendly conversation, where they could talk more freely and openly express themselves. It was also because we did not want respondents to consider the interview a burden, something that they have to fit into their cramped schedule, as stressed respondents might instead want to get the interview over, and not elaborate their answers fully. Hence, if the respondent asked to do the interview with a phone call, a video call, or on a physical location, then the interview was conducted there. Furthermore, as some of the respondents were from our own network, interviews could then also easily take place at a booked room at the university, in the interviewers' home, or at the interviewees' home.

One challenge that arose was that two of the respondents from companies indeed asked to get interview questions sent beforehand, and as sending questions beforehand might have an impact on the answers and cause some bias that answers are phrased in a socially desirable way, i.e. telling us what we want to hear (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), it became somewhat of a challenge. However, we decided to send some questions beforehand, to give the respondents a little bit of everything

that we would ask about. In that sense, we asked the expected questions, but followed up with more questions around the same topic. By doing so, we gave the respondents a way of preparing for the interview somewhat, but still left some room for us to follow up on the answers, ask for examples, and so on. Still, it should be noted that this was only for two of the interviews, as the others did not have any preparation.

For all the interviews, as it is semi structured interviews, the questions were again not asked in an exact manner, but more seen as a guide to covering the different areas of the topic. Furthermore, the length varied somewhat between the interviews, and especially the first few interviews were shorter. This was because in the beginning, it was more difficult to know the direction, and after a few interviews, it was easier to probe into different aspects of the topic. Moreover, we developed some questions slightly by reformulating them to make them clearer, and even added a question. In this sense, we worked very much back and forth between the theory and conducting interviews, and this gave us a better understanding of the topic.

## 3.7 Data Analysis Method

The coding process was, as typical for qualitative research, an iterative process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, we worked back and forth between conducting the interview material and analyzing it. In this way, we were able to develop an understanding and different ideas, and this shaped the subsequent steps within the collection of interview material. Moreover, this is common in qualitative research, as the analysis of the data does not only steer the analysis, but also the data collection (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

For the coding, the first step was to conduct open coding, by creating many different small codes. The transcriptions were put in a document where we could gather the information from the different interviews. After this, the focus was to analyze the material by looking for common themes. What we did here was to divide the codes into a whole category, which we call the theme. Thus, in this sense, the category is a more abstract way of what the codes are all about (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover, what we then did was to look at the different relationships between the codes and categories, and here, it was helpful to create a memo. The memo is a helping tool, not only for writing down different codes and categorizing them but also to remember them. This is because while in the coding process, it can be useful to create many different codes, and hence it can be equally difficult to remember them (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover, for each main theme, there are several sub themes, becoming one main theme. The memo is displayed below to show more insight and transparency into the coding process.

Table 4. Memo.

| Themes | Subthemes | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Socially Oriented Themes | Helpful / Unhelpful User Behavior | <u>Helpful vs Unhelpful User Behavior refers to:</u> how users perceive that other community members are helping others or not, can act as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |
| | Value of Content for Others | <u>Value of Content for Others refers to:</u> how users perceive content as valuable for other users, as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |
| | Being Recognised / Ignored | <u>Being Recognised / Ignored refers to:</u> how recognition or ignorance from the brand and other users can act as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |
| Personally Oriented Themes | Value Congruence / Incongruence | <u>Value Congruence / Incongruence refers to:</u> how congruence or incongruence between personal values and brand values can act as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |
| | Trustworthiness / Untrustworthiness | <u>Trustworthiness / Untrustworthiness refers to:</u> how brand trustworthiness can act as a motivator or a barrier for co-creation. |
| Enjoyment Oriented Themes | The Prize | <u>The Prize refers to:</u> how economic rewards can act as a motivator or barrier to co-creation. |
| | Expectancy of Winning | <u>Expectancy of Winning refers to:</u> how the chances of winning in a contest can act as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |
| | Relatable / Not Relatable Tone | <u>Relatable / Not Relatable Tone refers to:</u> how communication efforts from brands can act as a motivator or barrier for co-creation. |

## 3.8 Evaluation Criteria

This research used the criteria for evaluation called trustworthiness and authenticity (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Within the trustworthiness criterion, there are four sub criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The first criterion credibility is about that the research has been conducted according to well established practice and that the findings have been validated by respondents (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The latter is about how respondents take part of the findings and considers if this is in alignment with the respondents' view of the matter. Hence, this strengthens the credibility of the research. However, it can also be problematic if respondents might want to strike certain things that they had said, as a way of censoring the material (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). For this research, the credibility criterion was used in the way that the research was conducted in good practice, however, the findings were not validated by participants afterwards. This was mainly due to the fact that it was difficult to reach out to the companies again to require more time of theirs to read through transcripts. However, it was also somewhat problematic as some respondents might have wanted to edit or censor some parts. For these reasons, it was decided to not conduct participant validation.

The second criterion transferability is about how well the research findings can be transferred into other contexts, and this can be done by producing thick descriptions with context rich details (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, these thick descriptions become like a database, and thereby allows others to judge the transferability of the findings, into other different contexts (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Within this research, we have strived towards filling the transferability criterion by providing as thick descriptions as possible, including much context specific and detailed information. By doing this, we aim for others to utilize the findings in their specific context.

The third criterion is called dependability and is the parallel criterion to reliability, a common criterion seen within quantitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover, it is about the research being trustworthy, and this can be done through an auditing approach with complete records of every step taken within the research. Then, these steps are audited by peers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, such an approach was deemed problematic and demanding, due to the vast amount of text that an auditor would have to go through. This is also described as a

reason for why this approach to dependability has not proven popular (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Yet, to work with this criterion, we instead aimed for transparency within all steps taken, and hence, letting the reader do the audit for themselves. In this sense, we argue that the transparency in showing the steps increases the trustworthiness of this paper.

The fourth criterion is called confirmability, and is about objectivity. Moreover, it is about showing that while business research cannot be conducted objectively, it can still be assured that the research has been carried out in good faith (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019. In this sense, this has been shown by following a typical qualitative research strategy, and by working separately and together with the empirical material as to detect eventual bias. In this sense, the codes have been checked and rechecked, and are shown with a clear coding scheme that will give the reader an in-depth view over the coding process. Hence, by showing this, it is possible for the reader to assess if these are findings that others might have come up with, which strengthens the confirmability criterion within this research.

The criterion authenticity is about whether different viewpoints have been represented fairly (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This has been done by showing the respondents clearly within the interview guide, and then also showing clearly within the empirical material who said what. In this way, we consider that each of the respondents' viewpoints have been fairly represented.

## 3.9 Ethical and Societal Considerations

It is important to take into consideration both ethical and social issues. Ethical concerns are often divided into four different criteria; informed consent, avoidance of harm, invasion of privacy and deception (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The first criterion, namely informed consent, is about giving so much information to the respondent so the respondent can make an informed decision whether they wish to participate or not (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This was done for all respondents, and through that, informed consent was obtained by all respondents. In addition, we also asked if we were allowed to record the interviews, and assured the respondents that the interview will only be recorded and used for research purposes, and deleted afterwards. This was allowed by all respondents. Besides explaining what the interview was about, anonymity was also ensured for the respondents. In this way, we ensured that the respondents were out of harm's way when it comes to privacy

concerns. This goes into the second and third criteria of ethical considerations. Out of harm's way can be interpreted differently (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and within this study, as there was no risk of physical harm, it was considered to be about stress, emotional anxiety, or worry about saying things in a way that might risk current and future employment. Still, as the questions were not personal in the sense that they would reveal any sensitive information, we consider that there was no risk for respondents to feel uncomfortable. Yet, the respondents could choose if they for some reason would not want to answer any question. Also, as all respondents were, as stated, anonymous and so were their companies, there was no risk for worry about current or future employment related issues. Last but not least, the criterion regarding deception where researchers sometimes avoid revealing what their research is about, was not an issue within this study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). While the explicit research question was not mentioned, it was still discussed with the respondent beforehand what the research was about. This avoided the possibility of any deception taking place.

It is furthermore important to discuss societal considerations, as research is conducted in a wider context (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, it is important to highlight the ways in which this research can be used and misused. We want to highlight that as this research is about users, there could be a risk that this research could be used in a manipulative sense by other parties. Hence, a company might use the motivations and barriers customers experience as a way to manipulate consumers into engaging with content that is, perhaps, detrimental to the consumer's health, mentally or physically. In the same vein, it can also be a positive contribution in the sense that users become more aware of their barriers and motivators, and hence gain awareness of possible manipulation attempts.

# 4. Findings

Within this section, the findings will be presented in the form of eight themes that were identified through the interviews. Each theme will be presented and described, followed by quotes from the respondents. By doing so, different viewpoints are discussed in relation to the themes. Moreover, all themes were identified as having both motivators and barriers to co-creation, relating to the same theme. Both the motivators and barriers within the same theme are described and illustrated in the form of quotes. Thus, within all themes, motivators and barriers are discussed. Moreover, this is why each of the themes has both motivators and barriers within the headlines, because both motivators and barriers were found within all themes.

## 4.1 Helpful / Unhelpful User Behavior as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

One theme within the material was that receiving help from other users was identified as a motivator. Users who participated in the study, and especially those who were part of a community, mentioned how their motivation for co-creating with a community or a brand was increased when they felt that other members of the community were helpful and they were able to get value out of their participation with them.

> *"I really want to comment since I'm taking part of others' comments when others are happy or unhappy with the products then I want to give back to the other users if I have bought the products." (Respondent 13, Sharing branded content and UGC).*

> *"Sometimes it could just be informational. That they like the information and they want to share this along to others or that they just find it a bit interesting." (Respondent 5, Marketing Coordinator).*

On the other hand, users reported that their motivation for participating and contributing to a community was severely damaged when certain members were unhelpful and acted out of self-interest instead of helping the community. In that case, the unhelpful behavior of certain members of a community acts as a barrier for co-creation, preventing the rest of the members within the community to contribute with their value.

> *"I actually lost motivation creating and doing stuff because, you know I was like, okay, I'm done with that. I'm done with people judging everything I do and everything I say." (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).*

> *"There were always people who were hating on things and writing mean comments, then one got sad to read those, but it was nice when I got to be the moderator and could remove them." (Respondent 11, Community Participant).*

> *"People like talk out of experience and they're not really trying to actually help or like post informations about this (...) they are talking out of this experience and leadership mode and not so much for like the community mode in that they're here to help new members, but more like for status, yeah. I know better." (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).*

However, unhelpful and negative comments could also be viewed as an opportunity to spark interaction, and thereby facilitating co-creation.

> *"I think I see more negative comments in the quote retweets because usually when they do quote retweets, those people have many followers as well (...) They know that their followers are gonna react to what they say." (Respondent 6, Social Media Manager).*

> *"Negative comments aren't always bad. (...) because sometimes if you have a large community and people liking the brand, they will come in and defend the company and then it could be a positive thing." (Respondent 7, Head of Customer Success).*

Describing a specific campaign, it was also stated;

*"(...) But there was a lot of negative comments. But then other people came in and commented on that and it started a discussion. (...) it created a PR boom for us. Even if it was like half positive, half negative comments, but it was a discussion and I think it was a good thing. Even if there were negative comments."* (Respondent 7, Head of Customer Success).

## 4.2 Value of Content for Others as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

Another theme identified was that of users wanting to provide value to other users through their participation and activities on social media. Namely, when users thought of a piece of content as valuable, they had the desire to share it with their friends, serving as a motivator for co-creating value and publicity for the brands that produced the content.

*"I believe that they would be interested in going to a really nice place and eat. So that's why I post that and for the paintings, I really like them. So I want other people to see something really nice. So that's why."* (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).

*"It has to be a win, win situation for both. Because if they don't find any value for themselves, they won't share the content."* (Respondent 9, Marketing and Sales).

*"I think I would do it more if it's a product that 's from another country. Like this would be more likely for me to post and share, like if I find the product that I know you can only find it, in lets say Sweden, (I would share it)."* (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).

On the contrary, if the content in question was not very exciting, or the users felt that it would not be interesting for their friends, they would not share it. A feeling of annoyance and/or disinterest by one's friends was brought up, especially in relation to tagging friends in content, and sharing content. Furthermore, it was even seen as inappropriate from the company's side to ask for these actions. Hence, this was acting as a barrier for users in co-creating within marketing activities for brands.

*"Maybe that's why I'm also not doing it because I don't think it's so important or tempting for the other people." (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).*

*"So on my Instagram account I only have friends of mine… So I think that they won't be that interested (...) if I really like something, I'm gonna send them, like via a private message or something." (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).*

*"It feels a bit ugly from the company's side, they just want publicity, I don't know, it's a bit ugly." (Respondent 12, never shares nor posts).*

*"I feel like it's annoying if I have to tag like, five people. I'm like, I only want to tag one or two, which I know are very interested in the same thing. So I don't want to tag all of my friends, basically because I know some of them won't be interested in it (...) And then another thing that I personally would never do is post it in like an Instagram story, because that's just, I don't know… for me personally that just feels a bit more awkward." (Respondent 11, Community Participant).*

## 4.3 Being Recognised / Ignored as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

One more theme which was identified was that of receiving recognition from the brand, and/or other members of a community and/or social media platform. It is common for certain brands to create and manage their own communities in order to increase the level of involvement that users put into their marketing activities. Moreover, respondents mentioned that they are motivated to co-create value with brands and brand communities when they receive recognition from the brand and/or from other users of the community. Companies also acknowledge that recognising users is important.

*"For me, I always competed, not even for the prices. I was just always like I want to participate because if you won, you would get the physical prize, but you would always be in the (brand) magazine as well. So for me it was also very important to me. I think it was a recognition kind of thing where I wanted to show people that, hey, I can do this, I really want to be in a magazine and have people see what I draw." (Respondent 11, Community Participant).*

*"We see many people actually commenting on our posts when we have different campaigns. (...) and we take the time to respond to them and help them with it. We also have people on Instagram that are tagging us in their posts (...) And we always like them back, to show them that we appreciate them interacting with us."* (Respondent 1, Customer Service Employee).

*"Yes, as I mentioned I think letting them feel like they have to get involved in the conversation is the most important thing, (...) make a connection or make a community like a better connection between brand and their followers (...), they're really willing to share because they really love to show their loyalty to the brand."* (Respondent 6, Social Media Manager).

Recognition from other users was also mentioned as a motivator to add branded hashtags, share content and comment.

*"(...) it was just fun to get a lot of likes to boost your self esteem a bit."* (Respondent 16, Creates content, not follows brands).

*"I just want to make sure that it goes out to as many people. And since people really liked it, I felt really good about myself and I was like, OK, I'm going to keep doing this, you know."* (Respondent 11, Community Participant).

More specifically, one campaign was described where users were commenting within the comment field about the stories of other entrepreneurs. However, it was also stated that the company had experienced difficulty in repeating such a campaign.

*"There was a few years ago when we were looking for entrepreneurs to our entrepreneurs portraits and that gave a good response rate, and then we also had a post where entrepreneurs could tell us about their business in the comment section where we got a lot of comments. We have tried similar things later, but it has not given the same results."* (Respondent 3, Digital Marketing Specialist).

On the other hand, when users were not feeling that they were recognised, co-creation activities, such as giving a like, was hindered. Moreover, it was about feeling that the recipient did not care about the co-creation action. Thus, not being recognised was considered a barrier to co-creation activities.

*"I think that overall, I'm quite bad at liking posts from friends and acquaintances. But I do it more than with famous people. Because for celebrities I'm thinking that they will not care about my like, but my friends and family I feel that they will care that I have liked it." (Respondent 12, never shares nor posts).*

## 4.4 Value Congruence / Incongruence as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

Another theme regarded the congruency of the content with the personal values and interests of the users. Both users and companies mentioned that having branded content that is congruent with the values and beliefs of the users is an important factor for motivating co-creation. It was mentioned how users followed, liked, and shared content, and overall how they contributed to the brand and/or its community because they felt a personal connection with them. Thus, being congruent with the users' values and interests was seen as a motivator for users to co-create marketing value with companies.

*"So it was the prize and the brand as well because if I see a brand that I really really like having a contest, I'm like, okay, I'm going to take part in that. (...) I'm a person that if I see something and I want to post and want other people to see it, then I'll do it. I'm not gonna think about what others think of me." (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).*

*"(...) because it has to do with anime clothes and there is a correlation between me liking anime and also my audience that likes anime. And also I like the products. I kind of want to promote something good for my audience as well." (Respondent 4, Content Producer).*

*"I think it's about the brand love also, what the brand actually means to them (...) (the users would be thinking) Why are they having this contest? Is it just plainly giving out stuff, or is it actually for something that matters and they try to communicate to media?" (Respondent 5, Marketing Coordinator).*

In contrast, having content that is incongruent with a user's beliefs, values, or interests, will prevent users from engaging in co-creative actions. It was expressed that it was difficult to engage users without this personal connection or identification

with the brand. Furthermore, users were often expressing reluctance in sharing on their personal profiles. Resonance with the brand and the content was discussed as a possible reason for why users were not sharing content. Thus, incongruence with the brand and the content was identified as a barrier for co-creation of value between users and brands.

> *"Usually, it's quite difficult to trigger user generated content (UGC) but it's definitely something that brands are seeking for. It is important for the brand's awareness because it's mostly related to positive experiences with the brand. We closely monitor such cases and we observe a link or identification between the content published and the user's personal preferences." (Respondent 8, Social Media Manager).*

> *"Something that ticks me off and I will not participate is sharing and posting in your personal account (...) I'm not interested in this contest so much. Like, it's something that I would like to win but then, not something that I would like to be in my personal profile." (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).*

> *"We tried for them to share first but they didn't want to seem to share the content too much. I don't know if it was the prize, that they didn't win a TV, or that it actually didn't resonate enough with them to share." (Respondent 5, Marketing Coordinator).*

## 4.5 Trustworthiness / Untrustworthiness as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

One more theme identified was touching upon the area of trustworthiness, where users expressed that they are motivated to participate by clicking like if they like the product, or actively going to the official website to read information about the product. Thus, the official channels were considered trustworthy;

> *"I would say like, useful communication with information like from a site that you know it's official site and you can actually go and read specifically more information and not just their opinions." (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).*

*"There are these different types of clothing brands, interior design, and food. (...) if there is a dress I like I click like, but otherwise I scroll by." (Respondent 13, Sharing branded content and UGC).*

However, others valued user generated content in terms of product reviews and comments more, and considered such channels more trustworthy;

*"So I follow brands that I really like because I want to know what they have new and see like reviews and videos of people using that product and how it actually looks." (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).*

*"If it is a brand, I usually read others' comments, what they think, if it is a good product or not,(...) sometimes I might change my mind and realize that, ooh this was not good, and I was lucky someone else had written that they were dissatisfied with the product. Have I read that several people are dissatisfied, then I'm glad I could take part of that information." (Respondent 13, Sharing branded content and UGC).*

*"It's much more likely that people like the brand if someone else talks about it than if the brand talks about themselves." Respondent 7 (Head of Customer Success).*

Some users raised concerns about trustworthiness when it comes to privacy concerns. Namely, when it came to participating in brand contests, it was mentioned that sharing some personal information, such as a phone number, was not appreciated. This was thus identified as a barrier for taking part in brand co-creational activities, such as contests.

*"Sometimes you have to become a member, and one might start subscriptions, it can be a bit tricky (...) or you have to give your phone number, then I'm thinking I will get a lot of calls, and I don't want that (...) email is alright" (Respondent 15, Contest Participant).*

## 4.6 The Prize as a Motivator / Barrier for Co-Creation

Another dominant theme during the interviews was that of financial compensations, usually in the form of discounts and prizes in contests. It is very common for brands to host contests through their social media pages, where they will often ask users to co-create in the form of liking, commenting, sharing their content or tag their friends. In exchange, users receive a potential prize, and as a result the company increases their presence and value on social media. Most of the user respondents mentioned that they are motivated to participate in co-creation with brands on social media when there is a financial compensation or the potential to win a prize.

> *"They have like this, you are collecting points and then they have this web shop where one can choose things (...) it is this QR code and then you scan and you get the points, I like that, I think it is why I buy from this brand." (Respondent 15, Contest Participant).*

> *"I know one campaign we had was like for every electronic device you return like we purchased it back, you got some points for a game (...) And that got a lot of attention and people wrote and asked more about it." (Respondent 1, Customer Service Employee).*

> "We regularly host contests and it's a main way to reward customers or bring more engagement and boost the followers base. On the participant's side, we see that users choose to participate to win the prizes." (Respondent 8, Social Media Manager).

However, it was not always the case that users were interested in participating. Moreover, it was mentioned that the prize has to have certain characteristics, or it will hinder participants. It was mentioned how the prize has to be valuable or of interest to the participants, otherwise, co-creation would not occur. Thus, the prize characteristics can thus also be considered a barrier, if they are not relevant for the participants.

> *"It depends on the prize, like if you give them a really good price they will come like crazy but if it's something they don't, typically they won't participate." (Respondent 2, Content Creator and Social media Strategist).*

*"It has to be worth it, I can't be like 100 SEK, then it doesn't feel worth it (...) Before it was more like, electronic devices." (Respondent 15, Contest Participant).*

*"Yeah, I wouldn't do it if it was too little money. I said okay, how many minutes is it? How much effort does it take? What is the price of the gift card? Okay, it's worth it. So I wouldn't do it otherwise. Not for fun." (Respondent 16, Creates content, not follows brands).*

## 4.7 Expectancy of Winning as a Motivator / Barrier for Co-Creation

Following the conversation of contests and prizes, one topic that was brought up extensively by the respondents during the interviews, was the chances of winning the prize in a contest. Moreover, how it can affect participants to engage in co-creating with brands. Almost all of the participants mentioned that they are often offset by their low chances of winning in a contest, and that they will choose to not participate in the contest altogether, consequently acting as a barrier for them to co-create value with brands.

*"You feel like it's a waste of time. You're not going to win. The chances are low." (Respondent 4, Content Producer).*

*"There's also always the idea that probably I'm not gonna win this, so I'm not gonna post it and share it and do all this process that takes a lot of time. So because I don't have much chances to win, I'm not bothered to participate." (Respondent 10, Overall User 1).*

*"Some of the community contests I didn't do because I really focused on the official ones where I always felt that is something that looks at talent, while the community (hosted) are very much based on popularity, so that people that won most of the time were the people that were already famous, so I felt like, okay, I don't really have a very big chance there. So I'm not going to spend too much time on it." (Respondent 11, Community Participant).*

Even when winning once or twice, one user considered it unlikely to win again,

*"I'm probably not going to win again." (Respondent 13, Sharing branded content and UGC).*

In contrast, users reported that when they felt that their chances of winning were higher, or when they felt having a certain degree of influence over the outcome, as opposed to simply relying on their luck, their motivation for participating in the contests increased.

*"I only take part in contests if I see that not many people have commented and have taken part in this contest because that's why I feel that I have more chances to win." (Respondent 14, Overall User 2).*

*"It should be like it was before, when there was less competition and more challenges within the competitions. With that combination, one wants to join (...) I also like contests where there are multiple winners, and can last a few months, and someone, or a few, winning every week. Then one really wants to put in the effort, it's easy to join kind of." (Respondent 15, Contest participant).*

*"I don't want to put in any effort if it's not sure that I'm going to get something in return." (Respondent 16, Creates content, not follows brands).*

Contest with challenges were also mentioned, where users could influence the result;

*"(...) they had to guess how many hearts were in the basket. And the closest one or the one guessing the right number had a chance to win airpods, but in order to do that, they had to like, comment and follow us." (Respondent 9, Marketing and Sales).*

*"What we noticed is that in the competition where people had bad results, they didn't feel the need to sign up or follow, but we wanted them to to follow us anyway, just to participate in tournaments. So that's like they should follow before they throw the ball, because afterwards if they had a bad result, they would just leave and ignore to follow us." (Respondent 9, Marketing and Sales).*

## 4.8 Relatable / Not Relatable Tone as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

Another theme mentioned as a motivator for engaging with brands online is tone of voice and the style of communication that brand pages use in order to become more relatable to the users and motivate them to participate in an active dialogue with them. Both users and companies mentioned how more relatable content would motivate people into participating with the branded content that they see online, usually by liking, commenting and sharing.

> *"What drives the most engagement is funny content and you know humorous things (...) So if there's room for humor on that on the light hate comments, we will answer like because it's our trait to be self ironic as a brand trait. (...) (We avoid) really polished and fake-like videos." (Respondent 2, Content Creator and Social media Strategist).*

> *"Yeah, in that case, we wanted to make something that was more emotional and we try to make content that they stopped and continue to look at. Just to surprise them and try to make them stop in their feed and read what we had to say about it. Yeah, like we ask a question and have them reply to a comment or make them share something. Something more active than just seeing the content."*
> *(Respondent 7, Head of Customer Success).*

> *"So at the first like 30 seconds you gotta be super interactive and also you gotta ask questions (...) because most of the time people will just leave after the 30 second mark (...) I guess trending titles or create a good thumbnail so they can catch the eye easier. I have some other videos that I make that are super, like I guess "with good edits" that take more time to create. So if I spend a lot of time on a video, it usually will get kind of viral." (Respondent 4, Content Producer).*

Especially, the video format was highlighted to spark more engagement among users, as to avoid them only scrolling by and remaining passive;

> *"If it's a video or pictures that talk about the same thing, yeah maybe videos might be better (...) The engagement time is a bit longer on videos." (Respondent 5, Marketing Coordinator).*

*"We use both pictures and videos, short videos, one thing we quickly changed already several years ago, was that when we began doing the films they were longer (...) for us, viewing time has been high against the benchmark, but in general the viewing time is low, since people are scrolling, so we shortened them." (Respondent 3, Digital Marketing Specialist).*

Likewise was trending AI created images with stronger color mentioned briefly as an element that sparks interaction and thereby facilitates co-creation, motivating people to click;

*"We started to use the image from AI creation, (i.e. Midjourney) or more like creative and also neon color, futuristic images (…) and just by having the cooler images, they will definitely open it (…) And they're like, yeah, we want to see more like these images" (Respondent 6, Social Media Manager).*

Similarly, one barrier for users was also mentioned, how users experienced skepticism towards content that had a more traditional ad-like style. It was also stated that content that was too well edited could at times cause skepticism, especially for the product that was shown in the content. Often, such content was described as giving away a clear intention of making a sale, but also by being somewhat manipulative, or untrustworthy, where users expressed that they wanted to see reviews of products to see how it really looked when others were using the product.

*"Yeah, yeah, I got very skeptical just because of all that, it feels a bit like spam, right? Like they just collected like all these items from like really cheap (...) and they make this like videos when it looks super awesome and picture looks super awesome." (Respondent 16, Creates content, not follows brands).*

*"I don't want it in my feed all the time, I just want to visit their website when I want to (...) it becomes extra commercial in my feed (...) I just see it as sales tricks." (Respondent 12, never shares nor posts).*

# 5. Discussion

The analysis follows the division seen within the theory chapter into social, personal and enjoyable by dividing it into three theme types; *Socially Oriented Themes, Personally Oriented Themes* and *Enjoyment Oriented Themes*. By doing so, the aim is to provide a holistic view of how the different eight elements from the previous section are becoming three categories.

Socially oriented themes are predominantly concerned with motivators and barriers for co-creation that takes place within the interaction amongst other users. This can be sharing branded content with other users, creating user generated content to inform other users, or similar actions involving other users.

In contrast, personally oriented themes are more about the individual, and how motivators and barriers are balanced personally. Thus, it is characterized by inner motivations, where the users must experience congruence with the brand that is in line with the respondent's dreams, goals and deeper values.

Lastly, the enjoyment oriented themes are about how users are motivated to participate in co-creation activities through extrinsic motivators such as financial compensation for their time and effort. In addition, the content is discussed more in terms of being attractive content, often with fun content that focuses on entertaining the users.

It was considered difficult to decide what aspects were inherently social, and which ones belonged in the personal domain. Moreover, it can be argued that it is difficult to, at times, to separate the two, as even within the social context, we are still individuals. However, it was therefore decided that themes that relate to image, such as self image, or social image, are still personal, as that regards the individual's view of the self, even if that is within a social setting. In a similar manner, it was also decided that themes that are about recognition are more social than personal, as such regards the recognition from other users. Yet, it should be noted that socially related themes and personally related themes were difficult to understand in silos. Thus, it is more about bridging the understanding between the socially oriented themes and the personally oriented ones, (and also the enjoyment oriented themes), and hence create a fuller picture of how users balance motivators and barriers in co-creation activities.

## 5.1 Socially Oriented Themes

The first theme within the socially oriented themes that was found is *Helpful/Unhelpful User Behavior,* and that is related to how people are motivated to help users who have helped them back. This is typically about providing user generated content or commenting on brand's posts to help other users with the same product. Moreover, many users turn to social media to find information and knowledge about products and services from brands. Unhelpful users regard users who are careless and negative and even hateful. To sum up, this theme is placed within the socially oriented theme as it deals with the user's relation to other users about branded content.

The second theme within the socially oriented themes that was found is *Value of Content for Others*, which was also placed in the socially oriented themes as it regards another social aspect, i.e whether users consider what they post as having value to other users. Moreover, the barrier here is about how users can refrain from engaging in co-creation activities if they are not considered to be of value for other users. One example of this can be that a user refrains from sharing branded content since the user considers the content to be of no value to the user's friends and acquaintances on social media.

The third theme within the socially oriented themes is *Being Recognised/Ignored,* and this was placed within the socially oriented themes as it also involves a social aspect. Moreover, the motivation to engage in co-creation activities here stems from being recognised, seen, and/or appreciated by the brand and/or other users. Similarly, the barrier here refers to how not being recognised, and even being ignored, by both the brand and other users, makes the user unmotivated to participate in co-creation activities.

## 5.1.1 Helpful / Unhelpful User Behavior as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

The first theme that was placed within the socially oriented themes was how helpful user behavior could be argued to be considered a motivator for co-creation, and unhelpful user behavior as a barrier. This was seen because users tend to value information from other users, and was thus motivated to give back to those other users. This is very much in line with Wasko and Faraj (2000) and Ind, Croates Lerman (2020), arguing that knowledge exchange is an important motivator for users to engage in communities. Moreover, it is also similar to the findings by Najar and Rather (2021) and Halliday (2016), who highlighted user generated content as a trusted source of information, creating goodwill between users. Similarly, it was also somewhat supported by Constantinides, Brünink and Lorenzo-Romero (2015) and Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut (2008), who argues that consumers are motivated to participate in co-creation activities online by social integrative benefits for expanding social cycles and a sense of community participation.

Moreover, this theme is furthermore about how users can express concern for other users in such a way that it motivates them to share information (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019), as a way of being helpful. This is somewhat discussed by Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Atwal, Bryson, and Tavilla, (2019), who both argue that users often are motivated to speak up if they feel that other users could benefit from the information. Moreover, within this study, it was found that users may do so by writing a review or a comment about a product. In this sense, helping other users is a motivator to engage in co-creation activities.

In the same vein, unhelpful user behavior was considered a barrier, as users became deterred from co-creation in instances of negative behavior, such as negativity or hateful comments. Once again, this was mentioned by Wasko and Faraj (2000) as a barrier to co-creation activities. Perhaps more interesting however was the fact that it was found that some negativity could even spark co-creation activities. In this sense, it was argued that a certain degree of negativity might make other users inclined to defend the brand. It is however unclear how well spread this tendency is among users, and it was not so prevalent within this study. In contrast, for most respondents within this study, it was instead mentioned that they refrained from adding their own opinions in the case of negative comments, and instead chose to stay passive. While

this could be due to many reasons, Chepurna and Criado (2018) and Teichmann et al. (2015) offer an explanation and argue that users can be deterred from participation due to fear of being criticized for their opinions. Another explanation can be offered by Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019), who speaks about different groups of people; the posters, who post actively, i.e. on a regular basis, and lurkers, who refrain from posting as they consider themselves not having anything of value to post. Moreover, following the argument from Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019), it may be argued that even though users might disagree with the negative comments, the same users might refrain from participating simply because they consider themselves not having anything of value to contribute with.

## 5.1.2 Value of Content for Others as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

The second theme placed within the socially oriented themes was how content that is valuable to other users tend to act as a motivator for co-creation. Similarly, content that is not considered of value to other users, tends to act as a barrier to co-creation activities. Starting with how content that is considered of value to others acts as a motivator, it can be somewhat related to the findings by Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008), who argue that consumers are producing user generated content as a form of participating in a community and to feel important, In this sense, the users are producing something that can be of value for others (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008). Similarly, it also gives some support to the claim by Dhaka (2017), who found that users produce more content when users are acquainted with other users on the same social network site. Hence, it can be stated that users produce content with other users in mind. For this reason, if the content is of value for other users, users are more motivated to share the content with other users.

In the same vein, it was evident in how users often felt an annoyance and disinterest when brands asked them to share content. Moreover, the user considered their friends to be uninterested in the content, and this created a barrier toward the co-creation activity, and left users not only passive, but somewhat annoyed by being asked to share in the first place. Interestingly, what was also mentioned was a tendency to share content not in the public feed but in private direct messages. Moreover, there seemed to be a barrier not about sharing per se, but that sharing now is taking place in a different, more private and somewhat targeted to specific friends,

way. Moreover, if users do not consider certain posts to be of value for other people than a specific receiver, sharing in private messages is much more relevant. In this sense, it can also be that branded content is in fact shared more than companies are aware of. Moreover, this form of somewhat silent co-creation activities was prevalent within this study. This finding goes hand in hand with the findings by Buzeta, De Pelsmacker and Dens (2020) and Cheng and Zachry (2020) who speak about the peer pressure that users feel about sharing their content with other users, and anxiety over contributions not being good enough. In this sense, this private sharing might relieve users of such pressure, while still being able to share content of value with their friends. This is further somewhat supported by Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) who states that consumers care about what they share as they use brands on social media to show a certain image to other users, and even avoid certain brands, to express their identity (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012).

## 5.1.3 Being Recognised / Ignored as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

The third theme placed in the socially oriented themes are about how being recognised by the brand and/or others users can work as a motivator for co-creation activities. Similarly, not being recognised in this sense can be a barrier for the user to engage in co-creation activities. Starting with the motivator from being recognised by the brand and/or other users, it was clear that such recognition were making users more inclined to co-create. It was seen that such a tendency was connected to a feeling of self-esteem, self expression, and in general feeling good about oneself. Moreover, it was expressed that being rewarded by the brand and/or other users left users with an inner feeling of satisfaction with oneself. In this sense, it can be argued that the brand and other users make the user feel valued. This is supported by Nobre and Ferreira (2017), who argue for the importance that users feel that they are recognized, differentiated, considered, and listened to by brands. In this sense, it can also be argued that recognition is perhaps more psychological and about the individual, than social and about other users. Still, it is sometimes difficult to separate social and personal factors, as they are at times difficult to understand in silos.

On the other hand, being unrecognized or even ignored by brands was found to be a barrier. This was seen slightly in how users considered celebrities to be different from them and not care about whether one as a user interacted with their posts. In this

sense, although this was stated only in terms of celebrities, which is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, it is likely that this tendency is the same for brands. It can be argued that users experience a distance, and that the brand does not offer any meaningful connection as the user's efforts to connect are not recognised by the brand or celebrity. This hinders co-creation, as it conflicts with the user's primary motive to be on social media, namely to connect with other users (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2020), and contradicts user motivators such as developing friendship and intimacy (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Moreover, naturally, while there is a difference between a personal profile and a brand online, by failing to be considered as one of the user's social connections, it can be argued that brands are being seen more as a TV channel, that merely broadcasts outwards.

This is somewhat supported by Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh, (2021), who discusses liking, sharing, and commenting behavior and argue that if the social media user has a positive experience with the branded content, it is more likely that it will be shared. One positive experience, according to Waqas, Hamzah and Mohd Salleh, (2021), is social bonding, which is where users can bond with other users over the branded content, which makes users experience belonging and attachment. In contrast, if the user instead has a negative experience, it might be argued that instead of a social feeling of belonging, the user might develop a feeling of detachment toward the brand, and remain a passive follower.

## 5.2 Personally Oriented Themes

The first theme within the personally oriented themes is *Value Congruence/Incongruence.* Moreover, this is characterized by inner motivations, where identity congruence is pivotal to motivate the user to interact with the brand. Hence, there must be a deeper connection between the branded content and the user's identity and self image in order to motivate participation in co-creation activities. Thus, it is placed within the personally oriented themes. On the other hand, being incongruent with the users values and beliefs serves as a barrier for co-creation, since users will avoid participating with these brands.

The second theme within the personally oriented themes is *Trustworthiness/Untrustworthiness.* For this theme, it was more about how some users trust branded content more, while others consider user generated content more trustworthy. In this sense, there are also barriers, such as privacy concerns that hinder users from engaging in co-creation activities. Barriers also regards an overall skepticism towards branded content, which makes users in general deterred from participating in co-creation activities with brands.

## 5.2.1 Value Congruence / Incongruence as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

The first theme that was identified within the personally oriented themes is that of brands and content being congruent with the personal values of the users, thus acting as a motivator for co-creation. Reversely, when users felt that the brand and its content were not congruent with their values, they were not motivated to participate in co-creational activities. As a result, incongruence with user values served as a barrier for co-creation.

Furthermore, it was discovered that one potential reason for co-creating with brands on social media was because users, often unconsciously, felt a sense of connection and attachment with the brand. Similar insight was given by Rabbanee, Roy and Spence (2020), who argues that brand attachment is a driver for interaction with brand related content, and Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, (2013) who states that users who identify themselves more strongly with a brand tend to have a stronger commitment with it. Moreover, this also aligns with Kennedy, Guzmán and Ind, (2022) who state that people are motivated to co-create with brands that are aligned

with their values. Furthermore, it follows the argument by Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2019) who state that users' motivation to share content on Facebook will increase when their values align with the brand.

On the contrary, it was found that when user values do not align with the brand and its content, users will be discouraged to participate in co-creation activities. In this sense, the unalignment between the brand and the user's values becomes a barrier for co-creation. This was agreed by Chepurna and Criado (2018) who argue that no shared values between brand and user hinders co-creation. This also compliments the findings by Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012), who state that users will often choose the brands that they engage with, and ignore the rest.

It is however unclear as to whether congruence is sufficient on its own to be a motivator for users to take part in co-creation activities. Moreover, while it was clear that users did have identity congruence related motivators, they were mostly seen as motivators in addition to another motivator, such as the quest to search for recognition. Hence, congruence alone was not considered a motivator but in combination with the motivator of gaining recognition, it was arguably pivotal, as it was not satisfying for users to gain recognition from brands that are incongruent with their personal selves.

In addition, while the literature stresses how users choose brands to show a certain identity and image to others (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012) as well as how users want to avoid to come across as bragging (Sekhon et al. 2016), this was not as emphasized within this study. Moreover, as discussed before, it was seen within this study that users might refrain from sharing within the public feed, which may be related to that users do not want to associate too many brands with their personal image. However, within this study, it was not seen that users deliberately were sharing certain content as a way of expressing their identity and image. This might have to do with the fact that sharing behavior seems to have changed, or perhaps that it is more common for certain segments, perhaps very young social media users, or for users with very specific interests, such as a desire to show expensive clothing items. However, this behavior was not seen within this study, which questions how common it is today.

### 5.2.2 Trustworthiness / Untrustworthiness as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

While being trustworthy can be considered somewhat basic and a hygiene factor for brands, it should still be noted that trustworthiness can be considered a motivator for co-creation activities, and comes in two different directions. These two directions are either considering user generated content more trustworthy than branded content, or vice versa. Furthermore, the tendency that some users considered user generated content much more trustworthy than branded content was in line with research by Najar and Rather (2021) and Halliday (2016). However, the other tendency toward users trusting branded content more than user generated content, stands in agreement with the research by Yesiloglu, Memery and Chapleo (2021).

One possible explanation for why there is this conflict, or two-sided view on the matter, could be that previous experiences from other users can influence their attitude on the matter. For example, some users who previously had negative experiences with communities and user generated content, became more skeptical towards it, while users who were part of a helping community were valuing user contribution much more than branded content. The reason for why this matters in terms of co-creation, is that the tendency to trust user generated content might spark interaction among other users, and create goodwill among users (Halliday, 2016). Still, when it comes to the tendency for users to trust branded content more, then there is less incentive to engage with other users. In this sense, it might be more likely that users either click the link to the website, and/or do the simplest form of co-creation activity, i.e. liking the post.

The barriers found that were related to trustworthiness is also twofold within this study. Moreover, the first barrier in relation to trustworthiness regards privacy concerns on social media. This is in line with the research by Tsimonis, Dimitriadis and Omar (2020) and Stöckl, Rohrmeier and Hess (2007) who argue for privacy concerns to be considered a barrier to social media activities. Moreover, within this study, it was expressed that giving away phone numbers might lead to unwanted calls, while an email address was more okay, as it was considered easier to delete unwanted emails. Thus, it was clear that some users felt violated of their privacy and considered contests or other activities where such information was to be included a barrier to take part in the co-creation activity.

The second barrier was not so much related to trustworthiness of specific brands and/or content, but more of a general skepticism towards branded content. This can be somewhat related to ad irritation, which was identified by Tsimonis, Dimitriadis and Omar (2020) as the feeling of annoyance that users will feel after being exposed to a lot of advertising online. Moreover, trust in the relationship between user and brand is important (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019), however, it appears that this distrust that was found among some users is a barrier that hinders co-creation within marketing activities on a general level. Hence, there was a tendency for users to consider the brand to have a hidden angle, simply just trying to sell the user something the user did not want or need.

## 5.3 Enjoyment Oriented Themes

Three themes were identified within the enjoyment oriented themes. To begin with, *The Prize* as a motivator and/or a barrier was a common topic of discussion and refers to how motivated or not the users will be for participating in co-creating activities based on the reward or financial compensation offered to them. It was found that user engagement in co-creating with brands on social media was more prevalent when users thought of the prize or reward offered to them to be of high value or interesting to them. Consequently, when the prize was not very valuable or did not align with their interests, users reported that they would not care about participating in the contests and would scroll past it.

The second enjoyment oriented theme that was identified is *Expectancy of Winning* as a motivator and/or barrier. On a closer inspection, the prize of the contest was not the only determinant of users participating in a marketing activity and co-creating value. Following the conversation of contests, rewards, and prizes, the respondents put the topic of winning chances on the table. It was discussed how having a low expectancy of winning was a barrier for many users and a reason to ignore the contest. On the other hand, when users felt that their chances of winning were higher, or that they have a certain degree of influence over the outcome of the contest so as to improve their chances, then it was more tempting for them to participate in the contest.

Lastly, the theme of *Relatable/Not Relatable Tone* as a motivator and/or a

barrier was placed within the enjoyment oriented themes. The style and tone of communication was found to have a pivotal role in the world of social media where users want a more active and communicative role from the brands. Adopting a more relatable and humane tone of voice, using humor, aesthetically pleasing content and format was brought up as a motivator for engaging in co-creative actions. On the contrary, having stale communications on social media, which reminded users of traditional advertisements with the sole purpose of making sales, was mentioned as something that would put off users and make them ignore the content and the brand, thus acting as a barrier for co-creating value on social media.

## 5.3.1 The Prize as a Motivator / Barrier for Co-Creation

The first theme that was identified in the enjoyment oriented themes is the prize as a motivator and/or barrier. It became clear that a major motivator for users to co-create value with brands on social media is the prize offered. The prize can refer to external financial rewards for the winners of contests, or it can be in the form of discounts and gift cards. The respondents agreed that they are motivated to participate in contests with the sole purpose of winning the prize promised to them. However, when users were considering the prize not to be worth participating for, it was considered a barrier in terms of co-creation activities. This is in line with Cuevas-Molano, Matosas-López and Bernal-Bravo (2021) who support that external rewards will motivate co-creation activities in the form of the sharing of branded content, as well as Yesiloglu, Memery and Chapleo (2021) who state that rewards will increase users' brand-related posts on social media.

Following the discussion around economic incentives, discounts and gift cards were also identified to motivate user participation with brands. This finding is in agreement with Buzeta, De Pelsmacker and Dens (2020), who bring up remuneration through discounts and promotions as a motivator for increased sharing of brand-related posts. Furthermore, this finding also aligns with Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014) who suggest opportunity seeking, as receiving discounts, promotions and other financial benefits to motivate interaction with brands through social media. Moreover, it also follows along the lines of Park and Jiang (2021) who argue that extrinsic rewards can incentivize consumers to contribute to brands. In this way, the prize is facilitating co-creation activities with the brand on social media. Still, it is however

unclear how much value is created for the brand, as the users in this case are predominately motivated by other, often external financial, incentives. Moreover, a tendency for users to follow a company just for the chance of winning a desirable prize, only to forget and unfollow them when the contest is over, was mentioned. Hence in the long run, it is questionable how much of a motivator for co-creation the prize actually is.

In addition, users also commented that they often follow brands in order to stay informed about said discounts, promotions, and offers, which aligns with Ashley and Tuten (2015) who state financial benefits as a motivator for following brands online. Furthermore, since many contests usually ask users to share and tag their friends in order to participate and receive a reward, users often tagged their closest friends or family members. This is somewhat in line with Zhang, Sung and Lee (2010) who showed that brands giving rewards that can be shared among friends is an effective way to motivate online word of mouth.

## 5.3.2 Expectancy of Winning as a Motivator / Barrier for Co-Creation

The second theme that was brought up in the enjoyment oriented themes is that of the expectancy of winning in a contest that acts as a motivator or a barrier. It was previously discussed how the prize can motivate users in taking action with brands to co-create value, but it was apparent that prize was not the only factor influencing users' actions. It was found that the chances of winning can influence the motivation of users in participating in a contest, even if the prize was desirable nevertheless. Namely, if users felt that their chances of winning were very low, then they would not bother participating and deny the company their involvement, serving as a barrier for value co-creation. A potential reason explaining this reluctance is the factor of time. Given that users considered that it is unlikely for them to win a prize, committing any amount of time and effort towards something that is perceived as unattainable, was considered a waste of time and thus created discomfort. This is in agreement with Berger, et al. (2018) who states that users will be frustrated in participating in gamified activities if they are under the pressure of time and Stöckl, Rohrmeier and Hess, (2007) who provide a somewhat similar insight in that users will not engage because of lack of time.

However, users were more eager to participate in contests when they expected that they were having a higher chance of winning. Moreover, if the promise of a reward for their time and effort was considered more likely, then users would have a higher motivation in participating in the contest. Thus, a higher winning expectancy was considered a motivator for co-creating value with brands. This is similar to Ashley and Tuten (2015) who state that brand-hosted contests are only effective when the goals are attainable.

In addition, users were more motivated to participate in a contest when it was likely that their actions and input could influence the outcome of the contest in their favor. Moreover, users explained how they would enter contests allowing them to influence the outcome somehow, such as conducting a challenge within a competition. The element of challenge gave users the confidence that they could influence the outcome in their favor. In this sense, if users felt that they could master the challenge, then they considered the likelihood of them winning higher and thus being rewarded for their time, effort, and skill. This finding complements Berger, et al. (2018), and Ashley and Tuten (2015), who both speak of the effectiveness of contests as a result of a proper challenge. It should be noted that, when it comes to the element of challenge it was however not found to be motivating in itself for participating in co-creation, but it was motivating for users in the context of influencing their chances of winning for a better result.

## 5.3.3 Relatable / Not Relatable Tone as a Motivator / Barrier to Co-Creation

Lastly, about the enjoyment oriented themes, *The Relatable/Not Relatable Tone* was identified as a motivator and/or barrier for co-creation. As communication is the primary function of social media, it is clear that the communication style of brands on social media plays a crucial role in motivating user participation with their content and actions. It was stated that users follow and engage with brands that have a relatable communication style. Namely, when the use of language and tone of voice were done in a more relatable and humane way, then users tended to relate more with the brand and were therefore more motivated to participate in a conversation with them. It was mentioned that a motivation for following and engaging with brands is because of the enjoyment of the content and the way it is being communicated

through visuals and sounds. This is in line with Kennedy and Guzmán (2016), and Enginkaya and Yilmaz (2014), who mention fun, communication appeal, and entertainment as factors for engaging and co-creating with brands.

Another entertainment factor that was brought up was the use of humor as a motivator for users to participate in co-creation activities as respondents mentioned that humorous content will motivate communication and participation with the brand, leading to the co-creation of value. This is in agreement with Yang (2022) who states that humor will increase positive attitudes towards the brand and the sharing of content. However, a negative side of humor was also brought up, where the situational factor was highlighted. Hence, the skepticism toward humor regards how humor differs and may not be shared by all users. Thus, the same humorous content might be a motivator for some users, while a barrier to others. This may be somewhat in agreement with Howe et al. (2023) who state that humor can be effective situationally.

Regarding communication style, the type of content and its format was also discussed. It was found that specific content formatting, such as shorter videos or attractive images to name a few, was considered to have a positive influence on users interacting with the content and thereby adding value to it. In this sense, attractive content was found to be a motivator to co-creation. Similarly, Cheung and To (2022) argued for the same topic on communication appeal and how it will influence users clicking the like button.

On the other hand, it was reported that when brands' communication style is not relatable and gives the impression of being very much ad-like and impersonal, users tend to experience some sort of discomfort towards these brands, eventually prohibiting their involvement in co-creation activities with them. Thus, not relatable communication style from the brand can be a barrier for co-creation. An explanation for this could be given by Tsimonis, Dimitriadis and Omar (2020) who argued for information overload and ad irritation as relational costs in social media, as it was found that users nowadays are more aware of brands and their presence online. This arguably makes it easy for users to get defensive towards branded content, thinking that brands only aim to sell something, and as a result get disheartened to co-create.

# 6. Conclusion

With the purpose of exploring motivators and barriers that customers balance when it comes to co-creation in marketing activities, eight different themes were found, and categorized within Socially, Personally, and Enjoyment oriented themes.

Three themes were placed within the socially oriented themes. First, it was found that helpful and unhelpful user behavior acted as a motivator and barrier. More specifically, users who have been helped by other users were motivated by wanting to return the favor. In contrast, negative experiences with other users acted as a barrier. Second, content that was considered valuable for other users acted as a motivator for co-creation, while content considered irrelevant for other users was seen as a barrier. Third, being recognized from either the brand or other users were also considered a motivator, in terms of receiving validation from others. By not being recognised, a distance was seen, where users considered the brand indifferent to the user's co-creation activities, thereby acting as a barrier.

Two themes were placed within the personally oriented themes. First, it was found that being congruent with user values was considered a motivator, whereas being incongruent was considered a barrier. Second, trustworthiness was considered a necessary motivator co-creation. Moreover, untrustworthiness was found to be a barrier for co-creation, as general skepticism towards branded content together with privacy concerns was prevalent among users.

Three themes were placed within the enjoyment oriented themes. First, users were motivated to co-create with brands if a valuable reward was given, and demotivated if the prize was of no value to them, acting as a barrier for co-creation. Second, it was found that users were not motivated to participate in a contest if their expectancy of winning was low. However, when users considered that they could affect the outcome, for example through a challenge, the expectancy of winning was often perceived as higher, acting as a motivator. Third, a relatable tone and communication style was identified as a motivator for co-creation. However, an unrelatable tone was found to alienate users and deter them from co-creating with the brand. Last but not least, an overview of the eight different themes within the three categories of socially, personally and enjoyment oriented themes is illustrated below in figure 2.
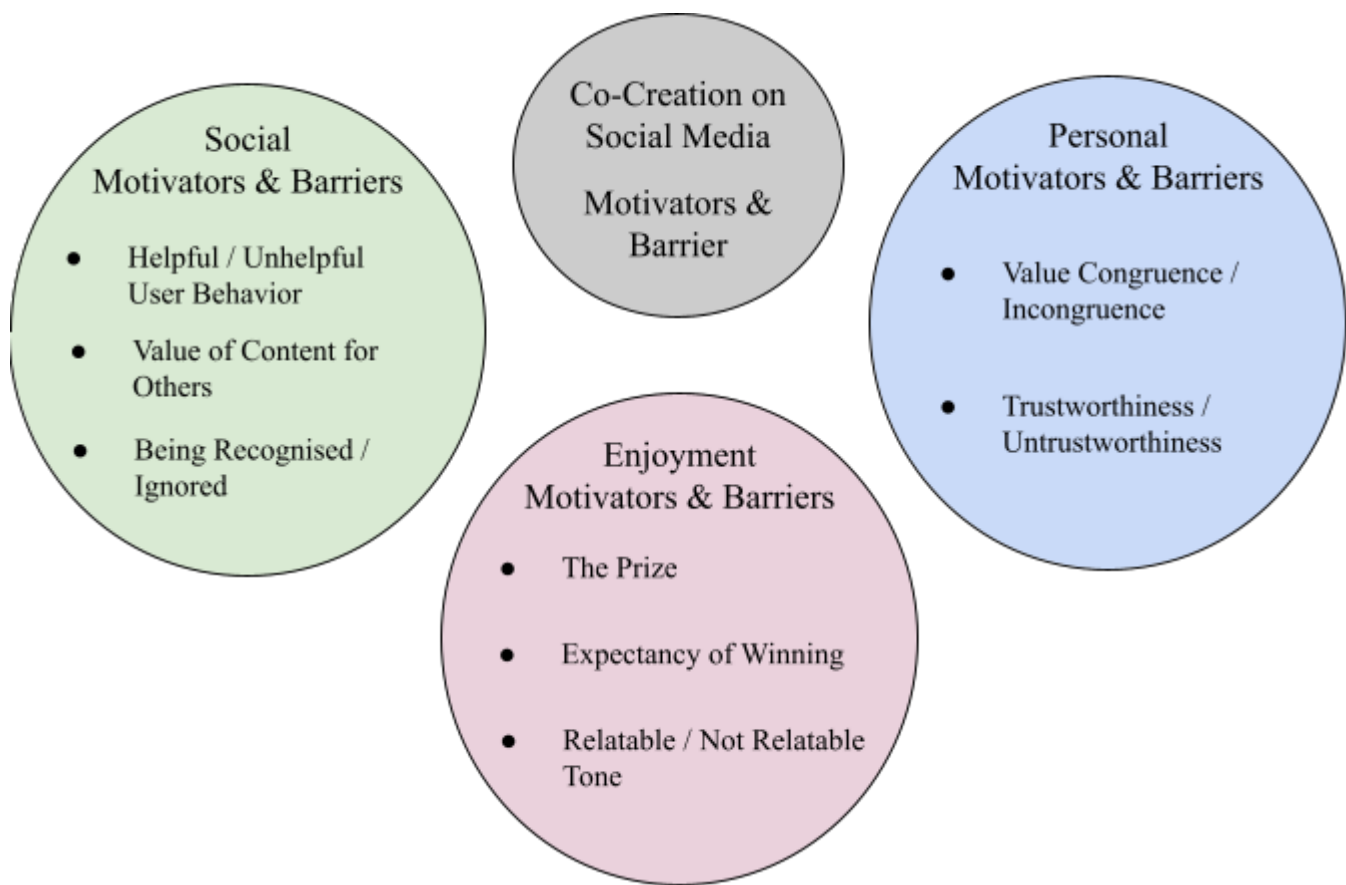
Figure 2. Diakoulakis and Mellin. Motivations and Barriers for Co-Creation on Social Media.

# 7. Research Implications

## 7.1 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications for this study are twofold. First, it was deemed that there was a lack of a holistic approach to combining how users balance motivators and barriers when it comes to co-creation. As discussed, previous research has highlighted many different viewpoints of the phenomenon, often divided in isolation both between motivators and barriers, and even focused somewhat in isolation of different social media platforms. Hence, in the scattered but solid research field, it was difficult to find a holistic approach to co-creation in marketing activities. Thus, as it was difficult to find an integrated combination of such insights, this is what this research contributes with. Therefore, the first theoretical implication revolves around providing this holistic understanding of the topic. Second, as discussed that technology is changing and thereby also social media platforms and their platform affordances, such changes are affecting user behavior. Hence, as stated, how current research indeed provides many useful insights, such insights are based on platforms over the past few years and might thus be limited in their applicability. Therefore, as social media is changing at a rapid pace, such novelty was deemed to justify the need to build on the research field. Moreover, by extending and building on previous research, this paper contributes with new insights into the field.

Furthermore, these insights take over from where current literature left off. For example, a tendency toward a new and more private sharing behavior was discussed, together with a more general skepticism toward branded content. Such tendencies were not as prevalent within current literature on co-creation, and is thereby considered to be contributing to the field by extending the discussion. However, while many of the findings were confirmed by previous research, there were also findings that contradicted previous studies. For example, the tendency of choosing brands to show a certain image and identity to others was not seen within this study. On the contrary, it was instead shown that users were increasingly concerned about only sharing what could be of value for other users in the public sphere/feed. Such findings show that user behavior is changing, and suggest a tendency for people to use social media perhaps more privately. This is important as it contributes with a fuller

understanding of how users are balancing motivators and barriers, and are thereby adding new insights into the field.

## 7.2 Managerial Implications

Marketers who are hoping to engage with customers in co-creation activities can benefit from this study. Firstly by differentiating between the different themes it will be easier for brands to identify the motivators and barriers for each theme that applies to their users. Given that the same actions can have different outcomes depending on the person, managers should first identify in which category their action and co-creational activities falls into, and after that they can take into consideration what motivates but also prohibits users from participating in their actions.

In the case of brands wanting to motivate users to participate in co-creation based on the social themes of the study, it is advised that they take the following steps. Brands should promote helpful behaviors and dismiss unhelpful ones inside their communities and channels. They should also create content that is helpful for their users, but most importantly content that the users will consider helpful for their friends and acquaintances. By doing so, users will be incentivized to share it with them. Lastly, they should recognize the efforts of their users and their community contributions. It is advised that the above recommendations are more effective when used simultaneously and together. For example, by creating content users will think is helpful for other users, brands will be able to motivate helpful user behaviors such as sharing of branded content. It is these behaviors that brands then must recognize and promote in order to incentivize more users to act in a similarly helpful manner. This could create a cycle of promoting the social themed motivators while minimizing the social themed barriers.

Brands that want to appeal to the personally oriented themes of motivators should find the content that is congruent with their user values and beliefs, and adjust their content based on that. Regarding trustworthiness, it can come in many different forms, i.e. some users considered user generated content to increase the brand's trustworthiness, while for others, official branded content seemed more trustworthy. Thus companies should find which applies for them and adjust their content accordingly, either to make it in a way that promotes sharing with other users, or focus only on communication through official channels. Additionally, companies should avoid asking for very personal information as it is bound to dissuade users

from participating in their co-creation actions. Given that the personally oriented theme has common ground with the socially oriented theme, the task of achieving content congruence with the users' personal values will become easier if companies keep track of the social channels and communications of their users. It is advised that both socially and personally oriented motivators should be used in conjunction. In addition, companies should strive to make their content trustworthy and avoid traditional advertisement-like content.

For brands that want to motivate users based on the enjoyment oriented themes of the study, it is advised that companies should take into account the type of prize offered, as it is most often the main motivator for users participating in contests. Hence, given that the prize is a strong motivator for many users in participating with brands and co-creating with them, brands should focus on keeping their rewards and prizes relevant with their users' interests. However, it should also be stated that users might only be interested in the prize, and fail to establish any meaningful connections with the brand in the long run, thus brands should also find other ways to keep the interest of their customers and invest in a long lasting communication with them.

The expectancy of winning the said prize should also be monitored and be kept at a level where users feel intrigued for participating given that users will not be motivated to put their time and effort in a contest that is unlikely to give them something in return. One method that was mentioned to make users consider their chances of winning were higher, was to make them have some sort of input over the outcome of the contents, i.e. by introducing some sort of challenge or competition where user skills, knowledge, and talents could help them increase their likelihood of winning. Furthermore, brands could also ease the barriers of participation by asking for less steps of participation, less personal and sensitive information, and generally avoid asking for public sharing or tagging a lot of people on their content.

Lastly, managers are also advised to adjust their communication to a more relatable and humane way. They should also avoid sales-driven communication and promotion strategies, as it was shown that users will feel unease in actively involving themselves with this content. Humor can be effective when used in the right situations, but it can also be somewhat problematic in other instances. Hence, the use of humor should be used cautiously according to the situation and brand.

## 7.3 Limitations

While we are happy with the number of company respondents, and indeed consider their various positions in their respective companies to provide valuable information to this study, there are still some limitations to consider. Moreover, there were both the time limitation of the study, as well as the difficulty of access that proved somewhat of a challenge. When it comes to the users, it was also difficult to find variations, as many users were behaving somewhat similarly. It would have been of interest to interview even more highly engaged followers/fans of a brand, or perhaps a community manager within a brand community. Still, due to the time constraints and difficulty of access, it was difficult to find such respondents. It should also be mentioned that given the time constraints, it was difficult to interview as many respondents as we would have wished. While we were satisfied with the sample size, it could nevertheless have been larger in order to achieve better saturation of data. Another limitation could also be that there were predominantly female respondents, and a more balanced sample selection might have provided other perspectives. Another aspect that would have been of interest to take into account is different ages, as social media behavior differs among various age groups (Internetstiftelsen, 2023).

There is also a limitation within the chosen method. Hence, the limitations of this study can be that users might not remember their own behavior, or choose to speak about things they think we want to hear. For this reason, it would have been interesting to conduct a similar study but instead using netnography, or another form of observation, where users could be studied more in action. This might give more of an insight into actual behavior, and it would be of interest to see if certain motivators and barriers are equally prevalent.

## 7.4 Future Research

One interesting barrier to co-creation called inertia, by which a large group can influence the behavior of others, identified by Chepurna and Criado (2018), was not seen as much within this study. The reason for that, could be that instances like these are probably more apparent inside communities which was not the main focus of our study. Hence, would still be of interest for future research to look into more. In addition, future research could look into private sharing more among users, as it was mentioned that there was a tendency to share content not in the public feed but in

private direct messages. Moreover, it would be of interest to study different sharing behavior changes, public and private, and dive deeper into what might be behind such a behavioral change among users. Another interesting aspect that was brought up in this research but was not covered extensively, is the effect that platforms have in shaping co-creational behaviors.

Moreover, it was found that it is quite difficult to get customer participation in marketing activities. Therefore, it could be interesting for future research to look into how platforms and their affordances can shape user participation in co-creation and how this progress has happened during the previous years, providing us with a better outlook for what to expect in the future. Furthermore, it was found that different motivators and barriers are prevalent at the same time, for example, social motivators and social barriers often seemed to be complementing and/or conflicting with each other. However, it would be of interest for future research to look more into how different motivators and barriers from different themes, such as personal and enjoyment can complement or conflict with each other and thereby influence user action.

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