

Beyond the Blurb: The Influence of User-Generated and Firm-Generated User Content on Purchase Intentions

An S-O-R Analysis of the Online Book Community

by

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May 2026

Master's Programme in International Marketing & Brand Management

Word Count: 21 889

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Abstract

Keywords: UGC, FGC, FGUC, UGC Perception, Perceived Authenticity, Social Media Usage Levels, Purchasing Intention, S-O-R Framework, Online Book Community

Purpose: This thesis investigates the influence of FGUC in comparison to UGC on Purchasing Intention through a direct pathway and an indirect pathway, with the mediating role of UGC Perception and Perceived Authenticity. Additionally, Social Media Usage Levels are studied as a moderating variable on both pathways.

Research Question: *To what extent does Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC) influence purchase intentions compared to User-Generated Content (UGC), and how do perceived authenticity and social media usage levels explain and condition this effect?*

Methodology: The study uses the S-O-R Framework as the foundation for the research design, utilizing a between-subjects experimental design through an online questionnaire. The survey included two versions of an image Stimulus, which were randomly assigned, that provided the participants with a subject on which to answer the questions targeting the Organism and Response dimensions of the study. UGC Perceptions, Perceived Authenticity, and Purchasing Intention were all measured multidimensionally with 3-5 items each using a 1-7 Likert Scale. A sample of 166 respondents was collected and subsequently prepared for analysis, including Correlation, Linear Regression, and PLS-SEM analyses.

Findings/Conclusion: The results of the study indicated that while participants marginally noticed the characteristics of the stimuli, firm influence did not substantially affect their perceptions of the post, with all hypotheses unsupported by the data. The stimulus condition was statistically insignificant in influencing the behavioral response, instead revealing the Organism dimension, consisting of UGC Perception and Perceived Authenticity, as the driving factor in purchasing intention. Further, social media usage levels were shown to have no significant moderating effect on both pathways, indicating that, regardless of daily online presence, both light and heavy users evaluate content using the same cognitive criteria. Surprisingly, age was considered to be a significant contributor to predicting purchase behavior, with older respondents reporting a higher likelihood of sharing recommendations and intending to purchase.

Theoretical and Managerial Contributions: Theoretically, this study deepens the conceptual scope of the S-O-R Framework by validating the consumer's internal cognitive assessment (O → R) over external stimuli, which demonstrates that contemporary consumer tribes exhibit a high level of digital literacy that eases the coproduction of authenticity over corporate templates. This challenges previous research assumptions regarding consumers' skepticism towards firm intervention. Managerially, the findings justify that B2C industries should adopt FGUC. By designing visually appealing and shareable templates that reduce user creative effort, firms can foster eWOM conversations without encountering authenticity and credibility repercussions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to our thesis advisor, Despoina Mavroudi, for her assistance and constructive criticism throughout the process of this project. We would also like to thank Javier Cenamor for his valuable comments and for serving as our examiner for this thesis.

To our dear families, we would like to thank you for rooting for us since the beginning. We couldn't have continued the pursuit of our dreams without their support.

Additionally, we would like to thank our friends for giving us unforgettable memories that kept us sane throughout the Master's Program and for helping us share the survey of this thesis.

We would also like to thank the online book community for inspiring this thesis. We both have found joy in the community and in our love of books and will continue to be grateful for the worlds created in the pages of a novel.

And finally, we would like to thank each other for the continuous drive and patience in the writing process. Thank you for the dedication and work ethic!

"I read a book one day and my whole life was changed." – Orhan Pamuk

"Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life." – Fernando Pessoa



Alessia Vitiello



Carmo Branco

"The scariest moment is always just before you start."

Stephen King

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	7
1.1	Background.....	7
1.1.1	Overview of Book Community.....	8
1.2	Problematization and Research Questions.....	9
1.3	Aim and Objectives.....	10
1.4	Outlines of the thesis.....	11
2	Literature Review	13
2.1	Social Media Marketing (SMM).....	13
2.2	Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)	14
2.3	User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), and Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC)	14
2.4	Perceived Authenticity.....	16
2.5	Purchasing Intentions.....	17
2.6	Chapter Summary	18
3	Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development.....	20
3.1	The Stimulus-Organism-Response Model.....	20
3.2	Mechanisms of the Model.....	21
3.2.1	Stimulus to Organism (S→O).....	21
3.2.2	Organism to Response (O→R)	21
3.2.3	The Organism Index	21
3.3	Hypothesis Development.....	22
3.3.1	FGUC vs. UGC as Stimuli (Independent Variable).....	22
3.3.2	Influence of social media user content on purchasing intention as a Response (Dependent Variable)	22
3.3.3	Organism Index (Mediator Variable).....	24
3.3.4	Social media usage levels as an influence on the Organism (Moderator Variable) .	25
3.4	Research Model	26
4	Methodology	27
4.1	Research Approach	27
4.1.1	Ontology	27

4.1.2	Epistemology	27
4.2	Research design	28
4.2.1	The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework.....	28
4.2.2	Experimental Design.....	29
4.3	Data Collection Method.....	29
4.3.1	Questionnaire Design.....	30
4.3.2	Sampling Technique	32
4.4	Data Analysis	32
4.4.1	Descriptive Analysis	32
4.4.2	Scale Reliability Analysis	33
4.4.3	Correlation Analysis	33
4.4.4	Linear Regression Analysis	33
4.4.5	Complementary PLS-SEM Analysis	34
4.5	Reliability and Validity.....	35
4.5.1	Reliability: Internal Consistency.....	35
4.5.2	Validity: Internal and Construct.....	35
4.6	Ethical Considerations	37
5	Analysis	39
5.1	Demographics and Descriptives	39
5.2	Manipulation Check.....	41
5.3	Evaluation of the Measurement (Outer) Model	42
5.4	Scale Reliability	44
5.5	Correlation Matrix Analysis	45
5.5.1	Evaluation of UGC Perception and Authenticity Indexes	46
5.5.2	Evaluation of the Organism Index Variables.....	46
5.5.3	Evaluation of the Stimulus Group Relationships.....	47
5.6	Primary Hypothesis Testing.....	47
5.6.1	Testing H1: Direct Effects and Stimulus Evaluation.....	47
5.6.2	Testing H2: Evaluation of the Organism Index Mediation.....	48
5.6.3	Testing H3a and H3b: Moderation of Social Media Usage.....	49
5.6.4	Supplementary Analysis regarding Age as Covariate Variable.....	52

5.7	Complementary Path Verification	53
5.8	Summary of Results	55
6	Discussion and Implications.....	56
6.1	The Organism over the Stimulus	56
6.2	The Subtlety of the Stimulus Conditions (H1 and H2).....	57
6.3	Social Media Usage Levels Today (H3a and H3b)	57
6.4	Revisiting and Contextualizing with Beck et al. (2026).....	58
6.5	Remodeling with the Age Covariate Variable	58
6.6	Theoretical Implications	59
6.6.1	The power of the Internal Organism mechanism ($O \rightarrow R$)	59
6.6.2	Assumption of the Source Skepticism	60
6.6.3	Digital Media Literacy and Coproduced Authenticity.....	60
6.7	Managerial Implications	61
6.7.1	“Green Light” for Standardized Content Templates.....	61
6.7.2	Scalable Reach without Authenticity Penalties	61
6.7.3	Prioritize Visual Appeal and User Satisfaction	62
7	Conclusion	63
7.1	Limitations and Further Research	64
	References	66
	Appendix A	72
	Appendix B	74
	Appendix C	78
	Appendix D	85
	Appendix E	87

List of Tables

Table 1	31
Table 2	36
Table 3	37
Table 4	40
Table 5	40
Table 6	41
Table 7	42
Table 8	43
Table 9	44
Table 10	46
Table 11	48
Table 12	48
Table 13	48
Table 14	50
Table 15	51
Table 16	51
Table 17	51
Table 18	52
Table 19	52
Table 20	53
Table 21	55
Table 22	55

List of Figures

Figure 1	26
Figure 2	54

1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will first introduce the background and the main concepts of this study, which will aid in the comprehension of the focus of our research. Subsequently, we will explain the purpose and motivation behind this study. Finally, we will give an outline of the structure and content of the thesis, laying the foundation for the rest of the chapters in this thesis.

1.1 Background

Social media has become the forefront of today's society, with a global penetration rate of 62.3% and 81.7% in Northern Europe (Statista, 2026). Additionally, the average global daily usage of social media last year was 2 hours and 21 minutes (Statista, 2026). This shows a considerable amount of activity worldwide on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and others. As such, it is an important area of social interaction that is becoming increasingly ingrained in consumers' daily lives and an important area of marketing for companies. This constant connectivity has fundamentally transformed how people socially behave, changing marketing from a traditional standpoint, with a one-way channel for broadcasting messages, to a two-way, multi-dimensional process where consumers interact actively with content of all kinds (Yoo et al., 2013; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

The growing levels of social media interactions occurring daily generate a massive continuous flow of data. These platforms are increasingly being used for more than just social purposes as companies have come to realize, and the potential of social networks and how activity online leaves behind a rich trail of data that can provide information about customer preferences, trends, and events within the market (Hinson et al., 2024). This data can then be analyzed in order to improve strategy and potentially predict consumer behavior (Rana et al., 2020). As such, a dedicated branch in the marketing field has been created to handle this growing social phenomenon.

As consumers increasingly engage with social media platforms (such as commenting, sharing, and posting photos, videos, and other content), enabling the two-way exchange, they generate a vast amount of user-generated content (UGC) that fundamentally changed traditional marketing paradigms (Rialti et al., 2017). UGC is defined as organic, non-commercial media content created by the general public and posted online (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Within the field of social media marketing, UGC has been a large part of the user experience as an organic form of word-of-mouth communications (Chung, 2025). In many cases, it can be more effective for promoting a company than firm-generated content due to the nature of the consumer producing such content without any prompting to do so (Beck et al., 2026). UGC is constantly viewed as highly credible, authentic, and objective communication, which is a powerful influence on purchasing intentions as well as fueling increases in online discourse (eWOM) (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Mainardes & Cardoso, 2019). Simply put, it provides the message that such

content was created purely from users' desire to express themselves (Ibrahim et al., 2025). As such, firms aim to generate such content as frequently as possible as part of their marketing strategy (Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). To facilitate this, they may provide templates and/or tools that make content creation easier. According to Beck et al. (2026), this is known as Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC) and is the focus of this study.

Marketing strategy, technological developments, and the evolution of trends have influenced the field and professionals to create dedicated subsections within the marketing sphere. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a branch of marketing that uses social media channels to promote a firm and its products or services (Rana et al., 2020; Hinson et al., 2024; Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Given the dynamic nature of communities on social media, there is a subculture for a broad range of interests online (Nolan & Dane, 2018). The online book community, referenced across platforms as BookTok, Bookstagram, and BookTube, is a space where the peer-to-peer influence is highly visible, and readers with a diverse range of followings act as tastemakers and authentic spokespeople with their UGC content (Reddan et al., 2024). As such, the book community has been selected as the field for this research study due to its relevance in studying consumer behavior, specifically purchasing intentions.

1.1.1 Overview of Book Community

The bookish community on social media, also known as BookTok, Bookstagram, or BookTube, depending on the platform, is a prevalent consumer tribe that focuses on literature and books within a range of genres (Reddan et al., 2024). It is known for the virality it can bring to a book and how people can connect with each other through literary discourse. The most well-known version of the community is BookTok, where short-form videos by book lovers promote books and express opinions and emotions about their favorite stories (Reddan et al., 2024). The hashtag #BookTok has reached around 370 billion views as of 2025, with the community thriving on participation through posts, comments, and shares (TikTok, 2025). It is a relevant context for studying the effects of social media on consumer behavior, specifically purchasing intentions, due to the high relevance of social media in book marketing, community-driven dynamics, and opportunities for co-creation and brand advocacy (da Silva et al., 2025).

Publishers have a strong presence within the community, along with readers and authors, and partner with many influencers as a part of their marketing strategy (Nolan and Dane, 2018). Additionally, with the initial rise of social media in the early 2010s, it was reported that social media had a powerful effect on boosting the popularity and sales of a given author or book regardless of initial online presence, as shown with the success of *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller as well as *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover (Nolan & Dane, 2018; Reddan et al., 2024). As the article by Nolan and Dane (2018) discusses, the book community is an influential tool within the publishing industry, not only as a direct marketing platform but also for the natural discourse that happens amongst consumers, which can have a profound effect on

the success of a book. As such, it is an industry that greatly relies on the power of social media to reach consumers worldwide.

The book community has reshaped modern reading culture. It has inspired more people to enjoy literature as more than just an academic obligation, taking part in the discussions about their experiences and turning it into a highly social and identity-forming exploration (da Silva et al., 2025). The power can also be seen through the sheer volume of activity on BookTok specifically (TikTok, 2025), but also through how a book's success can be changed overnight as the result of a trend within the community (Reddan et al., 2024). This can be attributed to the fundamental principles of UGC and how it is intrinsically linked to authenticity and elicits purchasing power among consumers as a result (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2025). According to an article in the Economist (Tok of the Town, 2023), an analysis of BookTok, the biggest example of the online book community, showed that it has changed the way readers experience books. Social media platforms essentially function as an online book club for readers, turning a normally solitary, analog activity into a social, digital experience for all to join (Reddan et al., 2024). Additionally, literary opinions shared by fellow users on social media are shown to have a large influence on what members of the community choose to read, with suggestions leading to bookstores having a dedicated table or section for the "As seen on BookTok" titles (Word of Mouth, 2021; Tok of the Town, 2023).

Since this close-knit digital community greatly relies on authenticity, shared emotional experiences, and peer support to discover new literature, it supplies a prime setting for an examination of the persuasive influence of UGC and similar counterparts (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Additionally, as publishing houses aim to grasp the power of the organic communication trends in order to boost sales and influence consumer behavior (Reddan et al., 2024), it provides a unique backdrop to study the emerging marketing concept of FGUC (Beck et al., 2026).

1.2 Problematization and Research Questions

The exponential growth of social media in today's society has transformed traditional marketing paradigms on a fundamental level, moving the power of communication from companies to consumers. As such, a considerable amount of academic research in recent years has concentrated on the influence of UGC and electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Hautz et al., 2014). The current state of research literature establishes a strong position on UGC as a major influence on consumer behavior in general (Yoo et al., 2013; Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2025). However, as companies are progressively coming to understand the persuasive effect of social digital networks, they have started to implement strategies to utilize this power, namely with the emergence of FGUC (Beck et al., 2026).

Despite this clear trend in marketing strategies, the existing academic literature seems to have fallen behind. Research focused on Firm-Generated User Content has just begun, with the term being coined recently, despite the fact that such content that fits into the concept has been seen on social media platforms for a few years at least (Annabell & Rasmussen, 2025). As such, we have targeted this gap within which to focus our research.

This gap is particularly important when it comes to the online book community. Given that this particular circle of social media users focuses on and depends on authentic content from fellow users and influencers, it is especially relevant to study the new concept of FGUC in comparison to UGC within this context (Reddan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the existing research on understanding how chronic daily usage of social media can affect perceptions of authenticity and purchasing behavior is inconclusive and underdeveloped (Singh & Kumar, 2022). The examination of current literature has produced weak results, and any conclusive results were secondary to the articles' main purposes. Therefore, we aim to add this variable to our study in order to gain a better understanding of how using social media platforms for extended quotidian periods can influence a consumer's perspective of online communications, specifically UGC and FGUC.

Adhering to the established gaps in current research, we propose the following research question:

RQ: *To what extent does Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC) influence purchase intentions compared to User-Generated Content (UGC), and how do perceived authenticity and social media usage levels explain and condition this effect?*

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of firm-generated user content on consumers when seen on social media platforms. Firm-generated user content (FGUC) is a new term coined by Beck et al. (2026) to describe the content posted by consumers, or users, that is originally produced by a firm. Given the new concept, but the sustained existence of such content in marketing media, it has been deduced that further research on the topic is needed. As such, we take a new approach by studying not the user posting as done in the study by Beck et al. (2026), but by studying the user receiving the content. Our overarching aim is to get a better understanding of our first look into FGUC and open the door further on a new avenue of research in the marketing field.

To achieve these aims, certain objectives have been specified. We will strive to quantify the direct and indirect influences of UGC and FGUC stimuli on purchasing intentions, with one pathway through perceived authenticity as a study of the internal processes of the consumer. Additionally, we intend to study the moderating effect of social media usage levels on the

pathway of influence between UGC/FGUC and purchasing intentions, both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity. Furthermore, we hope to provide a foundation for new managerial strategies when dealing specifically with social media marketing goals and the use and incentive of UGC and FGUC within publishing companies and on a more general level as well.

1.4 Outlines of the thesis

This thesis is organized into seven interconnected chapters. Each chapter builds on the previous one to address the overarching research question. The layout of the chapters is outlined below:

Chapter One: Introduction. This chapter introduces the landscape of this research by providing a comprehensive background on social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and the online book community. It also highlights the new emerging marketing strategy of Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC), defines the critical research gap regarding how users perceive this type of template content, details the formal research question, and asserts the core aims and objectives of this thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature review. This chapter consolidates the existing literature that converges with the topic of this thesis. It reviews the evolution of social media marketing as well as the collaborative space of social media platforms and the value of co-creation within online communities. In addition, it delves into the foundations of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and differentiates the concepts of User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), and the newly coined term of Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC). It finalizes by exploring perceived authenticity and the development of consumer purchasing intentions.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework. This chapter demonstrates the analytical mechanism of the research by defining the *Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework* and its application. It quantifies the different content versions (UGC vs FGUC) as the external Stimulus, combines perceived authenticity and UGC perception metric into a single Organism Index mediator, sets Purchasing Intention as the Response, and defines Social Media Usage as the Moderator. These paths are then used to develop the primary hypotheses of this research, culminating in the visual research model.

Chapter Four: Methodology. This chapter outlines the philosophical position of the thesis and the operational tactics used for the collection of data. Anchored in an *internal realist ontology* and a *positivist epistemology*, this study relies on a quantitative analysis by using a between-subjects experimental survey design to gather data. This chapter continues by detailing the sampling techniques used to target the online book community, outlining the creation of the stimuli, presenting the measurement conditions adapted from the established literature, and finally defining the process pipeline for the statistical analysis for this thesis.

Chapter Five: Analysis. This chapter presents the findings of the experimental survey. It is organized as established in the Methodology, starting with preliminary descriptive analysis, followed by manipulation checks and validity analysis, and correlation and regression analyses to complete the hypothesis testing. The results are presented using tables from Jamovi and are followed by a subsequent PLS-SEM analysis that further evaluates the dataset. Additionally, a complementary regression analysis was conducted, further investigating notable characteristics found in the sample. A summary table of the results can be found at the end.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications. This chapter delves into a thorough discussion of the results, following the hypothesis structure previously established. The sections theorize on various interpretations of the data based on Chapter Five's findings and reconnect them with the literature explored previously. Theoretical and Managerial Implications are included in this Chapter, exploring the contributions that this study produces in relation to the S-O-R Framework, interpretations of theoretical consumer perspectives, as well as potential strategies that managers can implement, suggested by the findings.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion. This chapter summarizes the main findings, reconnecting back to the research question and the main purposes of this thesis. Additionally, it discusses the limitations and potential directions for future research, acknowledging the novel concepts used in this study and the need for further exploration within the particular stream of FGUC.

2 Literature Review

This literature review chapter will organize the topics of this thesis and connect the dots between each concept. We explore the key theories and concepts of previous research that assist our theoretical framework.

2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a branch of marketing that focuses particularly on social media platforms as a stage for ads and marketing media (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Given the dynamic nature of communities on social media, there is a subculture for a broad range of interests online (Nolan & Dane, 2018). Due to the fact that over half the global population is actively online and engaged with social media platforms (Statista, 2026), it has created a need for a branch of marketing that is dedicated to the digital landscape of modern society (Rana et al., 2020). In this marketing sphere, value co-creation (the collaborative effort between company and customer to create value for a product or service) is facilitated as an ongoing process of consumer-firm interactions (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018; Santiago et al., 2022).

However, it is not a branch that passively promotes products and services on a different sort of platform; it is a branch dedicated to fostering the two-way interactions between organizations and consumers that is a hallmark of social media (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Coupled with the fact that it is a low-cost tool, organizations worldwide utilize social media to reach massive audiences, drive economic growth, and integrate commercial activity with social interactions (Hinson et al., 2024).

The merging of social interactions and commercial activities has given rise to the new concept of social commerce within the realm of e-commerce (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Social commerce is referred to as “an amalgamation of social media and the internet that aims to enrich people’s engagements in the sale and marketing of various products within online communities” (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). At its core, social commerce is built on ratings and reviews, communities, and recommendations (Rana et al., 2020). These constructs are vital in creating social trust amongst consumers and with organizations, employing co-creation values to fulfill consumer needs (Rana et al., 2020). Consumer co-creation within social media marketing is linked to Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) since it creates a discussion online of the products or services.

2.2 Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is defined as “the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet” (Ismagilova et al., 2020, p.1203). In simpler terms, it is positive and/or negative reviews given by consumers about a product, service, or company, posted online for public consideration (Yoo et al., 2013). The importance of Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) and, therefore, electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) is apparent in the dynamics of consumer interactions, which show that in-person and online conversations between consumers are more influential on purchasing decisions than any marketing strategies (Kozinets et al., 2010). These types of communications are primarily characterized by their independence from commercial influence, which aids in creating trust and reducing risk for the consumer (Ismagilova et al., 2017).

Further, it is a naturally occurring phenomenon amongst people to provide information about their experiences for the benefit of others (Kozinets et al., 2010). As such, WOM is also viewed as more trustworthy, given the lack of ulterior motives as compared to firm advertisements that want consumers to spend money on their products or services (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Kozinets et al., 2010). In fact, research indicates that up to 92% of consumers worldwide trust WOM type communications above all else, and 63% of consumers are more likely to purchase from a website that includes reviews from fellow customers (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018; Ismagilova et al., 2017). In this way, consumers tend to create content on their own to promote their opinions, which is known as User-Generated Content (UGC).

2.3 User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), and Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC)

Since the appearance of social media, users have used the platforms to express themselves through sharing opinions, discussing them in forums, and creating videos about them (Jansen et al., 2009). This content shared by consumers is, as mentioned above, referred to as User-Generated Content (UGC) (Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). According to Christodoulides et al. (2012), UGC is characterized by three factors: the content is available in a publicly accessible environment on the Internet; the content displays some kind of creative work; and the content is created outside professional routines and practices. Essentially, the advertising content made by nonprofessionals of the brand is the defining characteristic of UGC (Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023).

Generally, users generate content because of two motives: one is seen as a personal motivation of their interaction in social networks (gaining more followers/likes; self-promotion; personal enjoyment), and the other is based on monetary incentives where brands pay or exchange products for promotional content (e.g., reviews of the product) (Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023).

According to Karayaka and Ganim Barnes (2010), consumers perceive UGC as more trustworthy than content made by the brand, because the users who share their opinions online can be both positive and negative, which makes the content feel more authentic. As seen in the findings of Huang and Chen's (2006) study, consumers make their own decisions based on cues from the assessments of others. In other words, consumers who see others' recommendations and experiences are more likely to be influenced in their purchase decisions. Therefore, the purchasing intention of consumers can be affected by what they see online.

Companies are now adapting their SMM strategies to make sure they are also active online and are being seen by existing and potential customers. Firm-Generated Content (FGC) is the content created by a company and posted directly on its own social media platforms (Kumar et al., 2016). However, consumers still see this content as a marketing tool that lacks authenticity, which is crucial for generating interest in purchasing a brand (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). Research has shown that consumers' engagement, trust, and purchase intention are greatly influenced by their perceived authenticity, but the inauthentic content that firms share can result in skepticism and reduce effectiveness (Santiago et al., 2022; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022).

Here is where Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC) can come into play. According to Beck et al. (2026), FGUC is defined as “firm-developed content created for consumers to share as their own content through online channels” (p.153). An example of this is the Spotify Wrapped post that can be seen all over social media at the end of the year. Each user of the app gets a personalized yearly overview of the music that they consumed via audiovisual slides that can be shared online (Annabell & Rasmussen, 2025). This template has become a major phenomenon in the last few years (Jeczmiem, 2024). Additionally, Duolingo's in-app suggestions to share the latest achievements to social media can be categorized as FGUC, where it also gives the user a template to post on their personal account pages.

Ultimately, it is important to make the distinction between FGC, FGUC, and UGC, as it might be confusing to understand why FGUC is a distinct concept and why it is important to focus on academically. FGC, as mentioned above, is content created by a company and posted directly in the brand's own channel (Kumar et al., 2016). FGUC is started by the company, which is then given to the consumer to share online; in contrast, UGC consists of the customer's own unique idea (Beck et al., 2026). Essentially, in FGUC, the company provides a template of content so the consumer can publish online on their own pages, and it is designed particularly to look like

UGC to other consumers (Beck et al., 2026). This can be interpreted by other social media users as an authentic and trustworthy opinion. In conclusion, FGUC is different from FGC and UGC since it is a collaborative effort between the brand and the customer as opposed to content that is posted separately by either party.

2.4 Perceived Authenticity

As explained above, the need for companies to have authentic content comes from how consumers perceive this content and how it affects their purchasing intentions of products seen online. Within existing literature, authenticity is viewed as a multidimensional construct that is widely categorized by three theoretical lenses: objectivist, constructivist, and existentialist perspectives (Morhart et al., 2015).

In an objectivist perspective, authenticity is seen as a quality of an entity that can be assessed by experts (Morhart et al., 2015). Within this perspective, perceived authenticity comes an evidence-based reality, assessed empirically (Morhart et al., 2015). In the marketing context, the observable behaviors of a company, such as whether a brand has a corporate scandal or not, serve as demonstrative cues that can directly impact the organization's perceived credibility and integrity by the consumer (Morhart et al., 2015).

The constructivist perspective is argued to be a socially and personally constructed phenomenon (Morhart et al., 2015). In essence, the perceived authenticity is a subjective projection of a consumer's own beliefs; a consumer will judge a brand based on how well the brand "fits" within their internal beliefs and expectations (Morhart et al., 2015).

The last lens is the existentialist perspective, which links directly to human identity. In this perspective, consumers seek out authentic brands that help verify or construct their own self-identities (Morhart et al., 2015). In the psychological literature, it further defines this perspective as the ability to act as one's true self, which is driven by the understanding of personal identity and the processing of information about oneself without bias or defensiveness (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

In the digital sphere, perceived authenticity is entwined with the type of content consumers see. Existing literature indicates that UGC is perceived differently from FGC since, as explained previously, user content is seen as lacking the commercial intent to persuade, which makes it appear more trustworthy (Hautz et al., 2014). Notably, the constructivist perspective of authenticity explains how the technical flaws that can be seen in some user content, such as shaky camera work or writing errors, can actually heighten the perception of authenticity (Hautz et al., 2014). As discussed by Hautz et al. (2014), this happens because consumers have a lower expectation of video quality in UGC compared to FGC, which can lead to a significantly higher perceived trustworthiness. However, when the technical quality is high in both UGC and FGC,

the perceived trustworthiness tends to equilibrate, which proves that UGC is not unanimously superior to FGC (Hautz et al., 2014).

It is worth noting that, given the fluctuation in academic literature comparing the power of UGC and FGC, it indicates the importance of the consumer's perspective when it comes to online content (Hautz et al., 2014; Santiago et al., 2022). Studies have shown that, regardless of the source origin, if the consumer finds it satisfactory, it will positively influence purchasing intentions (Hautz et al., 2014). As such, it is highly relevant to include and measure UGC perceptions when conducting research in this field (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Ultimately, perceived authenticity functions as a mechanism that drives consumers' behaviors, relating the consumer to the brand, which significantly increases the likelihood of the consumer's purchasing intention (Morhart et al., 2015). In this thesis, due to the nature of the online book community and the vast range of publishers, we cannot focus on one brand; therefore, general perceived authenticity will be applied for the purposes of the study.

2.5 Purchasing Intentions

Purchasing intention is the willingness of a consumer to deliberately buy a product in the foreseeable future. According to Kotler and Bowen (2021), emotional motivation is what drives the consumer to willingly act on the purchase of a product, as well as their evaluation of said product. This is considered to be a reliable prediction of actual buying behavior. Additionally, Kotler and Bowen (2021) theorize that purchasing intention is the outcome of cumulative consumers' impressions on the product, connected to awareness, trust, and engagement. The delivery of these impressions via social media platforms is crucial in converting customers' interest into a purchase (Indrawati et al., 2023).

According to van der Heijden et al. (2003), there are a number of consumer behavior structures that result in the decision to make a purchase. These structures typically involve the following steps: identifying a need, conducting research before making a purchase, assessing other options, making the purchase, and conducting a post-purchase assessment. The authors affirm that these processes are somewhat abstract since they don't take into account why the buyer makes the purchase.

Chang and Wildt (1994) suggest that purchase intention has a positive impact on consumers' perceived value, while Bagozzi et al. (2016) confirm that the expectation that a purchase will make the consumer feel better is one of the key factors that contribute to decision making, demonstrating the effect of emotional expectations on the consumer's purchase intention. While internal processing and perceptions have always been a significant driver of purchasing intentions, the contemporary digital terrain has fundamentally altered how these perceptions are created (Mainardes & Cardoso, 2019). As noted by Brynjolfsson et al. (2013), technology is

gradually erasing the distinction between online and physical markets, which directly affects the channel of communication between consumers and brands and creates new ways to generate perceived value and affect consumer expectations.

So, in order to make decisions about what to buy, consumers are now using social media to learn more about brands and products (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The purchase intention built in both online and offline markets, as well as the impacts of other factors like social media use, trust, loyalty, brand value, communication generated in social media, and perceived value, have been examined in several recent studies (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Hajli, 2014; Rapp et al., 2013; Brynjolfsson et al., 2013). As such, we aim to extend the collective understanding of purchasing intentions within the field of UGC and FGUC.

2.6 Chapter Summary

In this section of the thesis, the literature review was conducted, covering the relevant literature streams that intersect for the subject of this study. The fundamental basis for this study is to understand consumer perceptions of various types of online content found on social media platforms and how the novel concept of FGUC can potentially influence marketing strategies (Beck et al., 2026). This literature review covers the major sections of marketing research that deal directly with the question of authenticity. Specifically, it discusses eWOM, defining it as well as explaining its importance with digital social interactions due to its inherent authenticity of users freely sharing their honest opinions about various products and services (Kozinets et al., 2010).

This is tied to a similar concept of UGC, where users also share their perspective online without incentive from firms (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023). This type of content is also seen as trustworthy for the same reasoning as eWOM and, as such, is the type of content that firms generally try to incentivize and produce indirectly (Karakaya & Ganim Barnes, 2010; Romero-Rodriguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023). This, of course, does not mean that companies do not post content directly themselves; in fact, FGC is shown to be a major segment of social media marketing activity, but it maintains its position as less trustworthy than naturally occurring interactions and opinions (Kumar et al., 2016; Santiago et al., 2022).

These concepts dealing with authenticity highlight the necessity to define and clarify the theory of perceived authenticity, which is a major section of the study itself. It is defined by Morhart et al. (2015) as a multidimensional construct with three philosophical perspectives. It is important to note that the perception of authenticity is specified, due to its abstract nature and the subjective belief of the consumer in the brand's authentic behavior being the only true measure of this concept (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). In marketing research, it is applied as perceived brand authenticity (PBA), defined in connection with a given brand and its operations, and as such stems from four core dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Morhart et

al., 2015). Given the importance of this concept, the full summary of related research was presented, but given the nature of the online book community and its refusal to focus on any one brand, general perceived authenticity from the subjective eye of the consumer will be analyzed.

Finally, the clarification of purchasing intentions concluded the chapter, with a clear definition and connection to the previous concepts. It is the inclination of a consumer to purchase a given product or service in a given period of time and is driven by emotional motivations as well as peer opinions and interactions (Kotler & Bowen, 2021; Indrawati et al., 2023). Chang and Wildt (1994) as well as Bagozzi et al. (2016) explain the rise of technology and its effect on purchasing intention, showing how consumers are generating new practices for creating value digitally and how online platforms like social media (and the content on such platforms, i.e. UGC, FGC and FGUC) are at the forefront of influencing consumers' intentions of purchasing (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

3 Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis. It begins by providing an overview of the S-O-R Theory and subsequently its model. Then, hypotheses are developed using the S-O-R model and incorporating the concepts reflected in the Literature Review by designating them as variables in the Stimulus, Organism, and Response categories. The research model is then shown for a visual representation of the text.

3.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model was originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) as a theory for environmental psychology and how environmental Stimuli can affect the internal processes, or Organism, of a person (or consumer) and therefore affect their behavior, or Responses. This model was further developed by Jacoby (2002), who found that the initial model was not dynamic enough to accurately understand consumer behavior and was entirely too rigid and linear. He proceeded to introduce a 7-section Venn Diagram-like model to effectively analyze the phases that a consumer goes through when encountering an environmental stimulus. Interestingly, it was noted that such a stimulus must be significant enough to make it “over the hill” and influence the organism and subsequently the response. As such, within the improved model, there are sectors for automatic processing and later, consciousness, which gives the impression that the organism responds without a conscious thought process (Jacoby, 2002). It is important to note that, in the words of Jacoby, “Psychological reality, not objective reality, determines our behavior” (Jacoby 2002, p.57). For the purpose of this study, the simplified version of this model will be used, and the timeline recommendation will not be followed due to deadline constraints.

The S-O-R model has been used extensively to study consumer behavior in many dimensions such as co-creation, brand loyalty, online engagement, and more (Zhu et al., 2020). The extensive use of this model has cemented its position as a fundamental tool in the world of consumer behavior research and how to analyze and explain it. Given its reliable and relevant standing, it will be a valuable foundation for this study of exploring the new concept of firm-generated user content. We will be using examples of user-generated content and firm-generated user content to act as stimuli for participants who will then answer questions about their inner processes, focusing on perceived authenticity and UGC perception, also known as the Organism, and then provide insight into their potential purchasing intentions within the book community. Understanding whether the participants can identify the original source of each stimulus and whether it affects their final behavior as consumers is vital to the purpose of this study.

3.2 Mechanisms of the Model

Developed from the original S-R model that has been used to study consumer behavior, the inclusion of the Organism step has led to an insight regarding the internal processes of the consumer when engaged in a potential purchasing decision, creating a section in the framework where research has acknowledged and is dedicated to increasing the understanding of a consumer's point of view (Jacoby, 2002). Within the model, the stimulus is defined as elements in the external environment, such as product features and pricing in the field of consumer behavior theory; the organism refers to a person's (or consumer) internal processes whether subconscious or conscious, such as attitudes, motives, emotions etc.; the response is also known as the consumer's reaction such as buying, communication about a product and other such actions (Hochreiter et al., 2023).

3.2.1 Stimulus to Organism (S→O)

In this step of the framework, the external environment (Stimulus) is received by the observer and incorporated into the Organism to be processed, where it is analyzed subconsciously and consciously (Jacoby, 2002). Once the process has begun, the psychological influences of the consumer begin to frame the stimulus, and analyze its message, or what the external environment might communicate in order to influence a potential behavior (Hochreiter et al., 2023). In the field of marketing and consumer behavior, an example of this step would be a product review being noticed by the customer, which would affect internal perceptions of the given product (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

3.2.2 Organism to Response (O→R)

Subsequently, once the Organism of the consumer has processed the stimulus, it proceeds to consciously influence their response behavior (Jacoby, 2002). The Organism plays a mediating role in the influence of stimuli on consumer responses, their cognitive constructs and opinions mixing with the stimulus to produce a reaction (Hochreiter et al., 2023). Such reactions can be internal, such as a shift in beliefs, opinions, and perspective, or external, such as a purchasing decision, active brand loyalty, and word of mouth communications (Jacoby, 2002; Ibrahim et al., 2025).

3.2.3 The Organism Index

For the purpose of this study, two concepts are measured and analyzed to target the organism dimension of the S-O-R framework: UGC Perceptions and Perceived Authenticity. In order to fully acknowledge the effects of the stimulus condition, the consumer's perception of said stimuli must be calculated for their perceptions of authenticity to correspond accordingly.

According to Beck et al. (2026), FGUC is intended to be perceived by consumers as UGC, and as such, it is vital to measure whether the consumers follow this view. Therefore, to capture the entire cognitive and emotional state of the internal processing phase, the two subdimensions of Perceived Authenticity and UGC Perceptions are structurally unified into a single construct operationally defined as the Organism Index.

3.3 Hypothesis Development

3.3.1 FGUC vs. UGC as Stimuli (Independent Variable)

Within the context of the S-O-R framework, the Stimulus (S) stands for the external environment that is made up of cues and communications for the observer, or in this case, the consumer, to perceive. For the purpose of this consumer behavior study, social media communications are operationalized as the external signal that captures the attention of a given customer. To analyze the impact of the original source of such online content, we operationalize the independent variables of FGUC and UGC to be used as the external stimuli within the S-OR model through dummy coding, where UGC is established as the baseline 0, and FGUC is operationalized as 1. Using this structural coding technique will allow for the subsequent analysis to clearly isolate the directional shift and effects. It will also ensure that any potential negative effects of trust and perceived authenticity will be traced back to the corresponding stimulus condition.

Our aim is to compare and contrast responses to FGUC with responses to UGC to get a better understanding of how FGUC can influence purchasing intentions. It is necessary to measure responses to both types of stimuli in order to analyze and comprehend the true effects of FGUC in the context of natural word-of-mouth communications between consumers and on social media platforms.

3.3.2 Influence of social media user content on purchasing intention as a Response (Dependent Variable)

The potential effect of viewing content in the form of user recommendations for consumption online on social media platforms has been studied extensively within all manner of fields and with all manner of variables (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Singh & Kumar, 2022; Chung, 2025). It has been confirmed that there is a significant relationship between viewing specifically UGC and purchasing intentions, whether directly or indirectly (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Singh & Kumar, 2022; Santiago et al., 2022). As such, with this study, we aim to understand how it compares with the phenomenon of FGUC and whether there is any significant difference in their influence on consumers. According to the studies mentioned above, it is clear that a positive effect can be expected.

However, according to Singh and Kumar (2022), their results showed that the FGC did not directly affect purchasing intention. To further understand this inconsistency, it is crucial to examine the fundamental mechanisms that differentiate UGC from FGUC. UGC is created by the general consumer rather than by the marketing professionals of the brand, and it is mainly shared online without explicit commercial intent (Mainardes & Cardoso, 2019; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Since UGC consists of genuine personal experiences, reviews, and opinions from other consumers who have no financial gain in the brand's success, as mentioned previously, consumers perceive it as a highly credible, objective, and authentic source of information about the brand (Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). This highly perceived trust is a crucial factor in the consumer decision-making process because it influences the reduction of perceived risk associated with the purchase of the product (Ismagilova et al., 2017; Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). Accordingly, consumers entrust more in the recommendations of other consumers than in the marketers of the brand itself (Huang & Chen, 2006). Existing research continuously upholds the view that UGC has a strong positive impact on brand equity, brand attitude, and consumers' purchase intention by acting as a powerful form of eWOM (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2017).

In contrast, FGUC introduces a different fundamental dynamic to the social media marketing ecosystem. FGUC is defined as a firm-generated content that is created for consumers of the brand to share as their own in their personal channels, basically putting the brand's words in the consumers' "digital mouths" (Beck et al., 2026). Whilst FGUC provides a convenient template that is easier to share, it is still firm-generated content (Beck et al., 2026). Irelli and Chaerudin (2020) point out that consumers have the knowledge and can generally recognize the ulterior commercial motives of firm-generated communications. Research has indicated that while FGC is often successful for the general brand attitude, it fails to impact purchasing intentions to the same strong degree as UGC (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). In some other contexts, FGC has shown an insignificant or even negative influence on purchase intention, save for when the consumers already have a preexisting relationship with the brand (Santiago et al., 2022).

So, because FGUC affects the perceived autonomy and authenticity of the output content, it can trigger skepticism on the consumer's side, particularly if the message that is proposed to be shared is not a match to the consumer's experience and expectation of their experience with the brand (Beck et al., 2026). Hence, while FGUC provides a positive shareable prompt that can shape the online image of a brand, its influence on the final purchase intention is watered down compared to the organic nature of UGC.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: User-Generated Content (UGC) has a stronger positive effect on purchase intention than Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC).

3.3.3 Organism Index (Mediator Variable)

UGC and FGUC represent distinct approaches to social media marketing and brand communication that shape social media users' perceptions in different ways. UGC is created by consumers outside the company, making it entirely independent from the brand's control, lacking commercial intent (Hautz et al., 2014; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). In contrast, FGUC represents a different strategy where the firm specifically develops content and asks consumers to share it on their own social media (Beck et al., 2026). While providing FGUC allows for a simpler sharing process and reduces cognitive effort for consumers, it inherently changes the traditional scheme of eWOM (Beck et al., 2026). Rather than consumers having a "blank canvas" for their genuine expression of their experiences, FGUC puts firm-created words into consumers' digital mouths (Beck et al., 2026).

This difference in the origin of the content significantly influences consumers' perception of the content and its authenticity. Consumers understand and are aware that brand communications conceal ulterior motives to persuade and sell their products (Hautz et al., 2014). Therefore, when consumers recognize that posts are made by the firm, such as when consumers encounter identical messages across social media, it can affect their perception and skepticism towards the brand's authenticity (Beck et al., 2026). On the other hand, due to UGC being genuine personal experiences and opinions from fellow consumers with no financial interest in the brand's success, consumers perceive this content as unbiased, honest, and authentic (Hautz et al., 2014; Irelli and Chaerudin, 2020). Hence, UGC shows a higher perceived authenticity than firm-generated content (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Subsequently, internal processing acts as a critical factor in consumer decision-making and purchasing behavior (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Consumers, when they evaluate brands as authentic, assign the brand with greater credibility, integrity, and trustworthiness (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Morhart et al., 2015). Within the cognitive process of the Organism, this elevated state of trust and positive perception from the consumer reduces the perceived risk and uncertainty when it comes to purchasing the brand (Indrawati et al., 2023; Hajli, 2014). Studies show that exposure to highly authentic brands and recommendations from peers significantly increases consumers' emotional attachment to the brand, the choice to consume it, and the overall purchase intention (Hajli, 2014; Morhart et al., 2015).

Merging this, the perceived authenticity and perception of UGC perform as a crucial psychological bridge that links social media content (*S*) to the consumer's intention to purchase (*R*). The organic, non-commercial, and peer-driven nature of UGC fosters a strong perception of authenticity compared to FGUC (Beck et al., 2026; Hautz et al., 2014). Subsequently, this internal assessment validates the product in the consumer's mind and drives their intention to purchase it (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Morhart et al., 2015). Therefore, the influence of UGC and

FGUC on purchasing intention is not entirely direct, but it functions through the consumer's assessments of the content's authenticity.

Reflecting on the psychological reality and maintaining the measurement model aligned, the cognitive evaluations are structurally unified, with UGC Perception and Perceived Authenticity combined into a single reflective construct as Organism Index. This consolidation acts as the primary psychological engine and mediator to the S-O-R framework, outlining the total internal evaluation process and how it directly explains the final purchasing intention. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The Organism Index mediates the relationship between UGC and FGUC and purchasing intention, such that high perceived authenticity and UGC perception increase purchasing intention.

3.3.4 Social media usage levels as an influence on the Organism (Moderator Variable)

While there seems to be a lack of studies explicitly researching the effect of social media usage levels on consumer perceptions of online content, there have been studies that imply the potential effect of being more susceptible to an online recommendation given a consumer's chronic online presence (Singh & Kumar, 2022). This can also be referred to as "social network proneness", where the mere presence of a brand and its supporters online can positively affect a consumer's potential behaviors (Kumar et al., 2016). In an article researching the effects of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant effect was documented concerning high engagement with UGC and its influence on purchasing decisions (Singh & Kumar, 2022). Given the context of increased usage due to the limitations of this world event, a preliminary conclusion was drawn that consumers are more likely to purchase if they spend a considerable amount of time on the social network platforms. In the specific context of the online book community, users on BookTok, Bookstagram, and BookTube are part of a lively and dynamic community where literature is a large part of their social standing and influences their online interactions (Reddan et al., 2024). Research indicates that consumers who are frequent users of social networks and online platforms show a higher tendency to value online sources of information, such as other users' opinions and UGC (Karakaya & Ganim rBarnes, 2010). Given that the book community has such a strong online presence, it follows that the impact of UGC can be stronger and more positive. In the case of FGUC, it is important to note that while the main difference from UGC is that it is originally firm-generated, the final version of such content is in the hands of the consumer and is posted on their accounts (Beck et al., 2026). Therefore, the intended effect is for it to be perceived as UGC, albeit potentially more polished due to the firm's influence. As such, we hypothesize the following:

H3a: High social media usage moderates the relationship between UGC/FGUC and purchasing intentions, such that intention is high when usage levels are high.

H3b: High social media usage moderates the relationship between the Organism Index and influence of UGC/FGUC on purchase intentions, such that perceived authenticity and positive perceptions are high when usage levels are high.

3.4 Research Model

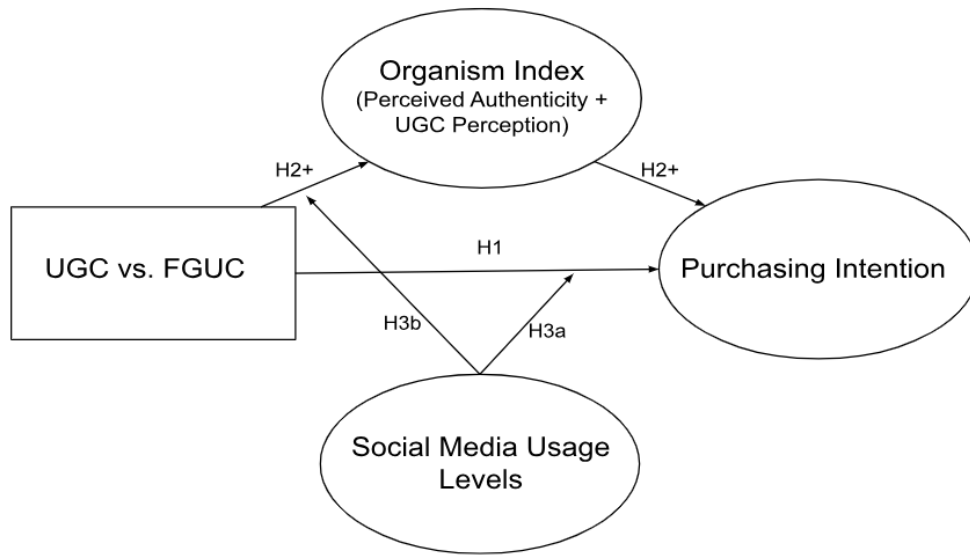


Figure 1: Research Model

4 Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used to study the differing effects of UGC and FGUC on consumers' purchasing intentions, specifically examining the mediating role of the Organism Index and the moderating role of social media usage. Firstly, we detail the psychological foundations of the study, then the research design will be explained, including the data collection process, questionnaire design, sampling, and finally, the data analysis method will be discussed.

4.1 Research Approach

This section will establish our philosophical foundation for this study. The philosophical foundation of a study is how researchers guide their perceived view on reality and how that knowledge of reality can be gathered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). By identifying these underlying assumptions, researchers can then develop the methodology, research design, and the specific data collection and analysis methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). To meticulously research the effect of how UGC and FGUC influence perceived authenticity and UGC perceptions and subsequently purchasing intention, this thesis adopts an *internal realism ontology* and a *positivist epistemology*.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the basic philosophical assumption that a researcher can have towards the nature of reality and what types of beings exist (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This study adopts an internal realist ontological position. This position implies that if a single, concrete reality exists and it is fundamentally independent of the human mind, it is then impossible for researchers to observe it or obtain it directly (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

This assumption is highly appropriate for this thesis since this study explores abstract psychological and behavior paradigms, such as consumers' perceived authenticity, UGC perceptions, and purchasing intention. Since these behaviors are internal cognitive conditions, they cannot be observed directly in the physical world; alternatively, indirect evidence can be gathered to measure their consequences on consumers' decision-making (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Thus, internal realism justifies that although these human behaviors are measured indirectly by structured surveys, they represent a reality that has a measurable impact on business outcomes.

4.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology depicts the set of assumptions that regard the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world and how knowledge is acquired (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Aligning with the

internal realism ontological position of this thesis, this research is centered on a positivist epistemology. The positivist perspective is that the social world exists externally, and its peculiarities should be measured through objective methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

A positivist epistemology is characterized by a deductive method of assuming fundamental laws or causal relationships and then deducing what types of observations can demonstrate the truth of these hypotheses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This epistemology aligns with the objective of this thesis, which starts with predetermined hypotheses regarding the mediating role of the Organism Index and the moderating role of social media usage. By using concepts that are quantified and measured objectively, a positivist approach enables the rigorous, statistical testing of the causal factors driving consumer behavior (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

4.2 Research design

To test this thesis's hypotheses, a quantitative design is adopted via an online survey. The research design is centered on the S-O-R theoretical framework and relies on a Linear Regression analysis using Jamovi and a complementary Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for analyzing the relationships between variables.

4.2.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework

The conceptual framework of this thesis is embedded in the S-O-R approach, which places specific characteristics of an environment (Stimulus) as an effect on the internal, psychological state of individuals (Organism), which subsequently prompts the behavioral outcomes (Response) (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Jacoby, 2002). As explained previously, this model is widely applied in the marketing context to explain how external stimuli translate into consumer behaviors in digital environments (Saif & Nofal, 2026).

By structuring the variable of this thesis in the S-O-R framework, the following can be distinguished:

- Stimulus (S): As the external environmental cues that are encountered by the consumer serve as a source of reaction (Saif & Nofal, 2026), in this thesis, the Stimuli are different online communication sources that are specifically engineered to expose the participant to either the UGC post or the FGUC post.
- Organism (O): As the internal affective and cognitive assessment provoked by the stimulus (Saif & Nofal, 2026), in this thesis, the Organism is represented by the Organism Index. This is the vital mediating process of connecting the external stimulus to the behavioral response of the consumer since it captures how the content source alters

the consumer's perception of trust, satisfaction, and their assessment of the integrity of the brand (Saif & Nofal, 2026).

- Response (R): As the behavioral response that results from the consumer's internal processing, purchasing intention represents the driving component of behavioral intent. (Saif & Nofal, 2026).

Additionally, the moderating variable of social media usage is integrated in the S-O-R framework because it influences how consumers process the Stimuli, which then affect the Organism and Response dimensions of our research model.

4.2.2 Experimental Design

In order to isolate the relationship proposed by the S-O-R framework, this thesis adopts a between-subjects experimental design. As mentioned by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), in positivist research, experimental designs are structured to leverage the internal validity by removing plausible alternatives that might justify any disparities between groups.

In this experimental design, the participants of the survey were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions: one group of participants was exposed to the FGUC stimulus, and the other was exposed to the organic UGC stimulus (see Appendix A). The random assignment of the stimuli is an essential aspect of the experimental method used, as it ensures that the groups are divided into each stimulus without any bias (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, the respondent's UGC perception, perceived authenticity, and purchasing intention observed can be attributed to the content source rather than unrelated factors or pre-existing personal inclinations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In addition, integrating this experience with a structured online survey simplifies the collection of quantitative data from a large sample, which fulfills the positivist requirement for hypothesis testing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

4.3 Data Collection Method

With the positivist epistemology in mind and the experimental S-O-R design established in the previous section, the primary data for this thesis were collected using a structured online survey (see Appendix B). Online surveys, compared to traditional paper-based methods, optimize data collection since they offer a broader geographical reach, minimize research expenses, and enable a faster response time (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Additionally, having the survey on an online platform is a suitable approach to obtain large volumes of primary data whilst limiting human error in data entry (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022).

4.3.1 Questionnaire Design

The primary data was collected in an online questionnaire facilitated on Google Forms. The survey was designed to guide participants through the S-O-R framework and was divided into distinct stages: demographics and screening, the experimental manipulation (the Stimuli), and the measurement of the Organism and Response constructs.

The survey began by collecting standard demographic information, such as age and gender. Subsequently, the survey assesses the moderating variable of social media use by asking the participants to indicate their most used social media platform and their average daily use of social media, adapted from Singh and Kumar (2022). To make sure that the sample of participants fits the target population of the Online Book Community, screening questions regarding the participants' reading preferences are adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016). Importantly, the respondents who indicated that they “Never” view book-related content on their social media were disqualified from being included in the survey, which ensures the validity of the target sample.

To establish the experimental conditions, the participants were randomly assigned to Condition A (UGC) or Condition B (FGUC) using a randomization question that asked whether the last digit of their phone number is odd or even. The experimental stimulus that is used was inspired by the “Spotify Wrapped” phenomenon, which uses data to create a shareable personalized template summarizing a year's consumption of music (Annabell & Rasmussen, 2025). Leveraging this format, the stimulus of our research displays a list of the “Top Beach Reads of 2026”. The book titles were not specified because they could lead to the participants' bias in books.

Before viewing the post, participants are given a brief contextual description to set the scene. For the UGC condition, participants are told that a friend of theirs organically posted their top reads on their social media feed (see Appendix B). In comparison, in the FGUC condition, participants are told that a friend sent them a direct message asking the participant to check on a post that they just shared, where they received a template from a literary company highlighting their top beach reads of the year based on their past summers (see Appendix B). To simulate the nature of each content type, some minor but realistic differences are integrated into the visual stimuli. For example, the FGUC post in Condition B includes brand-specific hashtags, which are typical of firm-generated content that is prompted to be shared but often are absent on organic UGC (Beck et al., 2026).

Following the exposure to the Stimulus, respondents evaluated the content to measure the internal and behavioral outcomes defined by the S-O-R framework. To capture the respondent's internal cognitive evaluation, the survey measured the general UGC perception and perceived authenticity. Lastly, to assess the respondent's conative behavior outcome, the survey measured

the participant's purchasing intention based on the stimuli. All of the specific items, questions, and measurement scales used throughout the questionnaire are detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Measurement Table for Survey Structure

Measurement	Questions/ Item	Scale	Source
Demographics	Age and Gender	Categorical	Self-developed by the authors
Social Media Usage (Moderator)	What is your most used social media platform?	Categorical (Facebook; TikTok; Instagram, YouTube; X; Other)	Adapted from Singh and Kumar (2022)
	On average, how many hours a day do you spend on social media?	Categorical (<1hr; 1-3hrs; 3-6hrs; >6hrs)	
Screening	How often do you view content on social media about books?	5-point scale (Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Often; Always)	Adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016)
	Do you watch content from book influencers?	Yes/No	
	Do you check what other people post about books?	Yes/No	
UGC Perception (Organism)	I am satisfied with the post about books.	7-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016)
	The level of the post about books meets my expectations.		
	The post about books is very attractive.		
Perceived Authenticity (Organism)	I think the social media post is convincing.	7-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Bui et al. (2025)
	I think the social media post is credible.		
	I think the social media post is believable.		
	I think the social media post is trustworthy.		
	I think the social media post is authentic.		
Purchasing Intention (Response)	It is very likely that I will purchase one of the books.	7-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Bui et al. (2025)
	I will buy one of the books next time I get a chance.		
	I will recommend one or more of the books to my friends.		

4.3.2 Sampling Technique

This study takes on a non-probability convenience and intentional sampling technique to collect data. The convenience technique is practical for the limitations of a student's research, such as time and budget constraints (Kabir et al., 2024), while intentional sampling ensures that the respondents of the survey are aligned with the specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (da Silva et al., 2025).

The target population for this study is whoever is active on social media and has knowledge about the online book community, which is appropriate for the research context of this thesis. Active users in the digital literary spaces, such as BookTok, Bookstagram, and BookTube, regularly lean on eWOM and peer recommendations to discover new books and decide whether the book is deserving of their attention (Reddan et al., 2024). For our research purpose, having an ideal representative sample for demonstrating the decision-making process in online consumption is beneficial since these users are already familiarized with engaging with bookish content (Reddan et al., 2024). Using this criterion on the sample allows for minimizing unwanted socio-demographic variation, which helps in a more precise analysis of the different stimulus sources.

4.4 Data Analysis

In order to effectively test the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3, the quantitative data collected through the survey method following an S-O-R layout and utilizing the Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree) for each question will be analyzed thoroughly following different statistical techniques. The data will be examined to ensure the reliability of the measurements, assessed using descriptive statistics with the Jamovi program, as well as for preliminary relationships, and finally analyzed for hypothesis testing.

4.4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Before the main statistical analysis can be started, an initial process of descriptive statistical analysis must be completed. This step is essential for the purpose of ensuring that the data is transformed from its raw form to a feasible format for further testing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This includes scanning for outliers, missing or duplicate values, and elimination of responses that do not fit the criteria for the study.

Once this process has been completed, a description of the data set is generated to summarize its notable features for ease of interpretation. The Mean and Standard Deviation will be measured based on the values for each question concerning the Organism dimension (perceptions of UGC and authenticity) as well as the Response dimension (purchasing intention) in the S-O-R

paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This necessary phase creates a baseline for the initial impression of the participants' reactions to the stimuli.

4.4.2 Scale Reliability Analysis

Due to the survey being conducted, measuring latent variables with multiple questions on the Likert Scale, it is fundamental to ensure the internal consistency reliability of the measure used (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). Internal consistency evaluates how well the multiple items, or questions, work together to effectively measure the same psychological construct, or in this case, the latent variables defined (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

In order to execute this, the study will calculate the Cronbach's alpha (α) for each scale within the survey. This is the most popular statistic within the psychological and behavioral field for measuring reliability (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). The recommended value for α is 0.7 or higher to ensure that the error variance is minimized properly. Additionally, Macdonald's omega (ω) will be applied to balance the analysis as it does not rely on the rigid mathematical assumptions like α does. Instead, it allows for variability in the factor loadings and is generally a more robust metric (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). As such, both statistical benchmarks will be included in this phase of the analysis to ensure the most accurate reading of scale reliability.

4.4.3 Correlation Analysis

Following the documentation of reliable scales, a correlation analysis will be the next step in order to understand the strength and direction of relationships between the variables (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). It establishes how variables are related without implying causation.

Specifically, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) will be used to measure the extent of the relationship between continuous variables (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Pearson's r ranges from -1 to +1, measuring both the statistical significance and strength of the correlational relationship; a value closer to 0 indicates a weak relationship, whereas a value closer to either -1 or 1 indicates a strong relationship (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). This step will provide preliminary insights into the variables framed within the S-O-R paradigm and lay the foundation for the following stage of hypothesis testing.

4.4.4 Linear Regression Analysis

Given that the correlation analysis could not examine the causal pathways, a linear regression analysis is employed to serve this purpose and complete the analysis of the data set. This statistical method is a powerful tool for understanding the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables while controlling for potential confounding variables (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Given the S-O-R framework utilized to organize the survey, multiple analyses will be conducted to track the various pathways in the theory:

- Testing $S \rightarrow O$: analyzing the perceived UGC and authenticity scores in relation to the Stimuli of UGC and FGUC to understand whether there is a difference in internal perceptions of content originality.
- Testing $O \rightarrow R$: regressing the purchasing intention (Response) onto the UGC and authenticity values (Organism) to evaluate the effect of internal perceptions on potential behaviors.
- Testing for moderating and mediating effects: analyzing the effects of social media usage levels as a moderating influence and perceived authenticity as a mediating variable in influencing the final response stage (purchase intention).

Finally, these various versions of the linear regression model will overall be evaluated using the coefficients of determination R^2 and adjusted R^2 to determine the level of variance in the dependent variables that can be explained by the independent variables (Stimuli) (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). Additionally, the correlation coefficient (β) alongside t -tests and p -values will clarify whether the hypotheses in question are supported or rejected by the data with statistical significance (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

4.4.5 Complementary PLS-SEM Analysis

To be able to test the complexity of the relationships outlined in the research model, PLS-SEM will be used. This analysis technique works by withdrawing consecutive linear combinations of variables and is extremely efficient in explaining the responses and the model variance (Yoo et al., 2013).

The motive for choosing PLS-SEM in addition to traditional regression analysis is due to several key advantages that align with this research design. PLS-SEM is remarkably able to handle complex predictive models that involve multiple latent constructs, mediators, and moderators simultaneously (Santiago et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2014).

PLS-SEM is also a non-configurable deviation-based technique that does not demand a normal distribution of the data (Yoo et al., 2013; Santiago et al., 2022). This makes it reliable when addressing real-world survey responses, which often deviate from the assumptions made by researchers. Additionally, PLS-SEM focuses on predicting the responses and interpreting the latent variance between the variables (Yoo et al., 2013). As the goal of this thesis is to predict how the different content sources lead to purchasing intention, the PLS-SEM nature of prediction is extremely appropriate (Santiago et al., 2022). Lastly, PLS-SEM analyzes the efficiency of the

latent variables with multiple items, such as the scales for the Organism Index that were used, while clearly recognizing and taking into account errors of measurement (Zhang et al., 2014).

4.5 Reliability and Validity

To guarantee academic rigor and integrity in this study, assessments of validity and reliability were implemented in a pretest survey. This aligns with the positivist approach that this study has, where it seeks the objective measure of the social reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

4.5.1 Reliability: Internal Consistency

Reliability indicates the consistency of a measurement, which represents the degree to which we can verify consistent and repeatable results over time or across different measurements (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). Therefore, following the methodology that has been proposed in chapter 4.4.2, internal consistency was measured by using Cronbach's alpha (α) and MacDonald's omega (ω).

To confirm the measurement scales, we conducted a pilot pretest. The analysis of the Initial Pretest ($N = 20$) produced an $\alpha = 0.399$ and $\omega = 0.558$ for the multi-item continuous scale of whether the participants correctly perceived the stimuli as UGC or FGUC. The low value of Cronbach's alpha demonstrates that the items were not being perceived consistently by the participants, failing the acceptable standard of 0.70, as mentioned previously (Navarro and Foxcroft, 2025). To solve this, a second pretest was conducted to address these consistency issues. In the Pretest 2.0 ($N = 11$), the negatively framed items measuring perceptions of corporate design and stimuli were reworded and clarified. After these modifications, the reliability improved to $\alpha = 0.856$ and $\omega = 0.879$, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

4.5.2 Validity: Internal and Construct

According to Navarro and Foxcroft (2025), validity guarantees that the research instrument is accurate and that it measures the theoretical constructs that it is intended to measure. In this thesis, two forms of validity were established: Construct Validity and Internal Validity.

The Construct Validity was obtained by adapting measurement scales from academic literature for the UGC perception and perceived authenticity variable (Organism), and the purchasing intention variable (Response). In an experimental between-subjects design, Internal Validity is essential to guarantee that the effects that are observed are genuinely caused by the manipulation of the stimuli and not by unrelated factors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

Therefore, the pretest was also conducted to ensure internal validity. This first pretest ($N = 20$) revealed that the participants could not distinguish between the UGC post and the FGU template. A sample t-test was conducted and demonstrated that mean scores for perceived template-based were not statistically distinguished between the UGC group ($n = 9$) and the FGUC group ($n = 11$), yielding no significant difference, $t(18) = -0.17, p = 0.869, d = -0.07$. Similarly, a non-significant outcome was reported for the perceived company-written item ($t(18) = 0.35, p = 0.731, d = 0.16$) and own creation item ($t(18) = 0.08, p = 0.941, d = 0.03$). This t-test provided us with the notion that the participants were not distinguishing the authorship source as intended, which revealed a threat to internal validity.

Upon the rewrite of the secondary pretest, as mentioned above, it was confirmed that the manipulation was marginally successful. In the same lines as the previous pretest, a t-test was conducted to redetermine validity. In the Pretest 2.0 ($N = 11$), the group of respondents that were exposed to the FGUC ($n = 6$) stimulus reported stronger statistical results in the template-based item ($t(9) = -2.07, p = 0.069, d = -1.25$). The strongest divergence was within the company-written item ($t(9) = -1.86, p = 0.095, d = -1.12$). In contrast, the perception of own-creation item declined as expected when shifting from UGC layout and the FGUC item ($t(9) = 1.07, p = 0.313, d = 0.65$). Looking at the analysis of all of the items together, it demonstrates that the target audience better perceived the differences in the structure of the stimulus, which establishes a marginal justification to deploy the manipulation in the primary survey design. Despite the clear indication to complete a third pretest in order to achieve a statistically significant p-value, we were not able to do so due to time constraints. Additionally, given the sample size, it can be inferred that if the Pretest 2.0 were the same size as the first round, the p-value would have been smaller. In conclusion, the improved results of the second pretest mean that the participants actively perceived this distinction, which made possible the validation of the manipulation before the launch of the primary survey.

Table 2: Independent Sample T-Test for Pretest 1.0

Independent Samples T-Test						
		Statistic	df	p		Effect Size
Template_Based	Student's t	-0.1667	18.0	.869	Cohen's d	-0.0749
Company_Written	Student's t	0.3493	18.0	.731	Cohen's d	0.1570
Own_Creation_Rev	Student's t	0.0753	18.0	.941	Cohen's d	0.0339

Note. $H_a: \mu_0 \neq \mu_1$

Group Descriptives						
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Template_Based	0	9	4.22	5.00	2.11	0.703
	1	11	4.36	4.00	1.69	0.509
Company_Written	0	9	4.56	5.00	1.81	0.603
	1	11	4.27	4.00	1.79	0.541
Own_Creation_Rev	0	9	3.89	4.00	1.90	0.633
	1	11	3.82	3.00	2.23	0.672

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test for Pretest 2.0

Independent Samples T-Test						
		Statistic	df	p	Effect Size	
Company_Written	Student's t	-1.86	9.00	.095	Cohen's d	-1.129
Template_Based	Student's t	-2.07	9.00	.069	Cohen's d	-1.251
Own_Creation_Rev	Student's t	1.07	9.00	.313	Cohen's d	0.647

Note. $H_a: \mu_0 \neq \mu_1$

Group Descriptives						
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Company_Written	0	5	3.20	3.00	2.28	1.020
	1	6	5.33	6.00	1.51	0.615
Template_Based	0	5	3.40	4.00	2.30	1.030
	1	6	5.83	6.50	1.60	0.654
Own_Creation_Rev	0	5	3.80	4.00	2.17	0.970
	1	6	2.50	2.00	1.87	0.764

4.6 Ethical Considerations

During the research process, ethical guidelines were adhered to ensure the integrity of the academic community and the integrity of the participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Following the core principle of ethical practice that Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) mention, this thesis implements several measures to prevent harm, ensure informed consent, safeguard privacy, and maintain transparency.

Before accepting to respond to the survey, the participants receive an introduction to the survey with an explicit purpose of the research, the estimated completion time, and the data usage. Informed consent is mandatory for their participation in the survey, which was given upon proceeding to the next section. It is also clearly stated that participation is entirely voluntary and that respondents may skip questions or withdraw at any stage without any consequence.

While digital literary spaces are highly popular among teenagers, obtaining their parents' consent online poses both ethical and practical challenges. To comply with ethical standards regarding vulnerable populations, this study was restricted to adults. A screening question will ensure that respondents aged 18 or older are the only ones to participate.

The survey was also completely anonymous, requiring no personally identifiable information, such as names and email addresses. Basic demographic data was collected for control purposes, but during the analysis, it will be aggregated so no individual participant can be identified from the results. Because this study employs a quantitative between-subjects experimental design, the exact nature of the stimuli could not be fully disclosed upfront to prevent response bias. While this concealment requires ethical justification, the fictitious book posts pose no harm to the

participants. Moreover, to ensure transparency, at the end of the survey, a debriefing statement was given to provide an explanation of the experiment's true nature. It has also been disclosed to the participants that this thesis will be published on Lund University Publications (LUP), making it publicly available.

This cautious handling of the collected data helps build trust between researchers and participants, which then encourages full disclosure during the survey process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). When participants feel reassured that their data will be used in a safe way, they are more likely to engage in detailed and truthful responses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Adhering to these considerations also reinforces the quality of the study, as ethical rigor is essential in quantitative management research in the academic community (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

5 Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the survey and the analysis of the collected data from the established survey. The data analysis will start with a descriptive overview of the results, clarifying the scope and extent of cleaning as well as the preliminary information gleaned. Then the manipulation check and the reliability analysis will follow, covering four dimensions outlined in the survey design section. Afterward, the results of the correlation analysis will be discussed and compared, understanding the connections between Group condition, Organism Index, and Purchase Intention. Finally, the hypothesis testing will be conducted and discussed using Linear Regression and additional PLS-SEM analysis within the Smart-PLS computer program.

5.1 Demographics and Descriptives

In accordance with quantitative method analysis thresholds, our objective with the survey results was to garner at least 15 respondents for each variable (Benson et al., 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this case, a minimum of 60 respondents were needed for the survey analysis. Once enough data was collected, our time allowed for additional responses to be collected, and the results were compiled and cleaned to be run through the Jamovi computer program, with the sample size being recorded as 166 participants. This fundamental first step assisted in ensuring that the dataset was free of incomplete entries, duplicate submissions, and verifying data criteria. As established in the methodology, respondents who reported that they have “never” seen book content on social media ($n = 11$) were eliminated from the study to ensure the reliability of their answers. Once completed, the sample size for the study stands at 155 participants ($N = 155$).

Using a between-subjects experimental design, the distribution of the sample was fairly balanced across the two stimulus conditions: 79 participants (51%) for the organic User-Generated Content (UGC) baseline condition and 76 participants (49%) for the Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC) condition. The randomization question successfully completed its purpose to ensure a fairly symmetrical distribution for comparison and analysis.

The demographic profile of the participants was computed, accounting for age, gender, and social media habits (preferred platform and daily usage levels). As seen in Table 4, the age distribution was quite wide, from the minimum being 20 years to the maximum being 74 years. The mean age of the sample was 41.5 years ($SD = 14.8$ years), showing a considerably mature group overall. Given the convenience sampling method used, the wide range of ages was to be expected. This particular sample will be able to indicate the perspective of a generally more mature population than is usually collected for social media studies, due to the most common generation on social media being Generation Z, and additionally, Millennials.

Table 4: Age Descriptive Statistics

Descriptives		
	Group	Age
N	155	155
Missing	0	0
Mean		41.5
Median		43
Standard deviation		14.8
Minimum		20
Maximum		74

In line with the common perception that most users active in the book community are female, our dataset showed a heavy gender skew, with 72.3% ($n = 112$) of the respondents choosing she/her pronouns (see Table 5). Accordingly, 27.7% ($n = 43$) identified with he/him pronouns. The nonbinary pronouns were also provided as an option, but were not chosen by any of the participants ($n = 0$).

Table 5: Gender Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies of Gender			
Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
He/him	43	27.7%	27.7%
She/her	112	72.3%	100.0%

Regarding the social media habits recorded as the moderating variable in our research model, the majority of the sample reported having moderate usage levels, with 52.3% ($n = 81$) spending 1 to 3 hours per day on social media, 22.6% ($n = 35$) spending 3 to 6 hours per day, and 25.2% ($n = 39$) spending less than an hour per day. The most commonly preferred platform was shown to be Instagram with 58.1% ($n = 90$) of the votes, followed by TikTok with 14.8% ($n = 23$) of the votes. Facebook and YouTube were the next highest options (see Table 6).

Table 6: Social Media Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies of Social_Media_Hours			
Social_Media_Hours	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1 - 3 hours	81	52.3%	52.3%
3 - 6 hours	33	21.3%	73.5%
less than 1 hour	35	22.6%	96.1%
more than 6 hours	6	3.9%	100.0%

Frequencies of Most_Used_Platform			
Most_Used_Platform	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Facebook	18	11.6%	11.6%
Instagram	90	58.1%	69.7%
LinkedIn	2	1.3%	71.0%
LinkedIn	3	1.9%	72.9%
Reddit	2	1.3%	74.2%
TikTok	23	14.8%	89.0%
X (formerly Twitter)	2	1.3%	90.3%
YouTube	15	9.7%	100.0%

5.2 Manipulation Check

Following the descriptive analysis of the data, an independent samples t-test was conducted to ensure the internal construct validity of the manipulation items used within the survey before moving forward with correlation and causation analyses. Firstly, a reliability analysis was run to compute the Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω) values due to there being three separate question items. The results revealed a Cronbach's α of 0.617 and McDonald's ω of 0.668. Given that the optimal academic threshold requires a value above 0.70, our values are not considered excellent but are still satisfactory for further analysis.

Additionally, an independent sample t-test was conducted on the computed manipulation check index, which is the calculated mean of the three manipulation question items across the two conditions (0 = UGC; 1 = FGUC). The results revealed that the participants in the FGUC group recorded a slightly higher perception of the corporate origin of the post ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.21$) as compared to the participants in the purely UGC group ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.24$). This trend in the findings showed a marginally significant statistical trend ($t(153) = -1.93$, $p = 0.056$) as well as a considerably small effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.310$). These results suggest that the presentation of the stimuli, and the choice of a "friend" posting about books in both conditions with considerably nuanced variations, resulted in the subtle but sizable differences in perceptions. Therefore, the

manipulation check provided satisfactory results in establishing the independent variable of content origin and allowed for further analysis and testing within the S-O-R framework.

Table 7: Manipulation Check T-Test

Independent Samples T-Test							
		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	Effect Size
Manipulation_Index	Student's t	-1.93	153	.056	-0.379	0.197	Cohen's d -0.310

Note. $H_a: \mu_0 \neq \mu_1$

Group Descriptives						
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Manipulation_Index	0	79	3.59	3.67	1.24	0.139
	1	76	3.97	4.00	1.21	0.139

5.3 Evaluation of the Measurement (Outer) Model

Before examining the S-O-R path hypothesis up close, to ensure high measurement model alignment, the reflective inner constructs were confirmed using SmartPLS 4. To illustrate the whole cognitive process of the internal organism phase, an Organism Index was established, which reflects both UGC Perception and Perceived Authenticity as mentioned in the Methodology section.

Regarding the Construct Reliability, the latent scales exceed the academic standards of the thresholds. The unified Organism Index achieved a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.932$ and a Composite Reliability of 0.944. Along the same lines, the Purchasing Intention variable (Response) revealed a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.921$ and a Composite Reliability of 0.950, which confirms a strong scale of internal consistency.

Across all of the instruments, convergent validity was fully supported. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.680 for the Organism Index and 0.863 for Purchasing Intention. Since these values go beyond the standard baseline of 0.50, it is proven that both constructs account for the majority of their indicator item variance.

Table 8: Latent Construct Reliability and Convergence Validity Matrix

Latent Construct Architecture Layer	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability A (ρ_A)	Composite reliability C (ρ_C)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Organism Index	0.932	0.934	0.944	0.680
Authenticity Sub-Dimension	0.930	0.930	0.947	0.784
UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	0.896	0.900	0.935	0.829
Purchasing Intention	0.921	0.925	0.950	0.863

Concerning the discriminant validity, this was assessed by using the conservative Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The structural correlation ratio between the Organism Index and Purchasing Intention was validated as 0.813. Since this value rests firmly below the academic threshold of < 0.85 , it supports that internal processing index and purchase intention are embodied differently in the consumer mindsets and represent a distinct behavioral trigger between each other.

Table 9: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Discriminant Validity Matrix

	Authenticity Sub- Dimension	Organism Index	Purchasing Intention	Social Media Usage	UGC Perception Sub- Dimension	UGC vs FGUC	Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC
Authenticity Sub- Dimension							
Organism Index	1.024						
Purchasing Intention	0.725	0.813					
Social Media Usage	0.136	0.097	0.026				
UGC Perception Sub- Dimension	0.748	0.954	0.808	0.016			
UGC vs FGUC	0.098	0.089	0.082	0.018	0.058		
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC	0.077	0.074	0.033	0.641	0.055	0.015	

5.4 Scale Reliability

After the manipulation check was completed, a thorough internal consistency reliability analysis was performed to validate the measurement scales utilized in the survey prior to proceeding with more in-depth analyses of the dataset. Each scale was evaluated using both Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω) to ensure a robust examination. Following the questionnaire design, the UGC Perception scale, Perceived Authenticity scale, and Purchasing Intention scale were all included in the analysis (see Appendix C).

To begin, the UGC Perception scale (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) was used within the Organism dimension of the S-O-R framework to get a reading on the participants' perspectives of the post stimuli and subsequently measure their satisfaction. The three question items together yielded a high Cronbach's α of 0.894 and McDonald's ω of 0.901. Given that both metrics surpass the established threshold, it is confirmed that the items have strong cohesion and can be securely condensed into the computed variable of UGC Perception Index for further analysis.

Furthermore, the Perceived Authenticity scale (Bui et al., 2025) was also used alongside the UGC Perception scale to measure the internal Organism of the participants. The five items that make up this scale were also computed to yield high results, with a Cronbach's α of 0.929 and McDonald's ω of 0.933. This scale, therefore, also passes the threshold and is accepted as a functional scale to be used for further interpretation, compressed as the Authenticity Index in Table 10. For a more detailed analysis, separate testing of this combined variable will be discussed in the next section.

Finally, the Purchase Intention Scale (Bui et al., 2025) was employed to measure the participants' likelihood of buying the fictional books. The three items questioning overall likeliness to purchase, the likelihood of purchasing the next available chance, and the intention of recommending the titles to friends were together analyzed to have a Cronbach's α of 0.917 and McDonald's ω of 0.923. These strong results, yet again, confirm the reliability of the scale in measuring intention and can be utilized as the foundation for subsequent interpretation.

5.5 Correlation Matrix Analysis

Following the acceptable results of the reliability analysis, a Pearson correlation analysis was completed to understand the directional strength and statistical significance of the relationships between the independent, mediating, and dependent consolidated variables. For the purpose of this particular assessment, the measurement items were averaged together into their respective scales, following Table 1. In order to fully understand the relationships between the scales, the Organism Index was separated in this correlation matrix analysis. As such, the computed variables of UGC Perception, Authenticity Index, and Purchase Intent were utilized in this analysis and can be seen in the table below:

Table 10: Correlation Matrix Table

Correlation Matrix		UGC_Perception_Index	Authenticity_Index	Purchase_Intent	Group_Dummy
UGC_Perception_Index	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Authenticity_Index	Pearson's r	0.684 ***	—		
	df	153	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
Purchase_Intent	Pearson's r	0.733 ***	0.671 ***	—	
	df	153	153	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	
Group_Dummy	Pearson's r	−0.055	−0.095	−0.079	—
	df	153	153	153	—
	p-value	.494	.238	.331	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5.5.1 Evaluation of UGC Perception and Authenticity Indexes

The relationship between UGC Perception and Purchase Intent is the strongest, as shown in Table 10. They share a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.733, p < .001$). This indicates that post satisfaction, attractiveness, and meeting expectations are heavily tied to purchasing intentions, more so than the perception of authenticity. Consumers who have a positive perception of content will be more likely to potentially purchase the subject of that content.

Additionally, the relationship between Authenticity and Purchase Intention is also shown to be strong and statistically significant ($r = .671, p < .001$). This confirms that authenticity also plays an important role in motivating purchase intention within the online book community. Although it is not as strong as UGC Perception, it is a core mediating factor and shows that credibility and trustworthiness are fundamental values to take into account on social media platforms.

5.5.2 Evaluation of the Organism Index Variables

Within the Organism dimension of the SOR framework, two scales were utilized within the survey in order to create a more in-depth understanding of the internal mechanisms at work for the participants. As such, the correlation coefficient indicating the relationship between UGC Perception and Authenticity is shown to be strongly positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.684, p < .001$). This finding signifies the intertwined nature of these concepts, where they work together within the consumer's mental processes to influence purchasing intention. Clearly, the results show that if the participants found the posts to be attractive, satisfying, and meeting

expectations, they are more likely to also perceive it as authentic and therefore be more likely to potentially purchase the books.

5.5.3 Evaluation of the Stimulus Group Relationships

Alternatively, the results of the correlation analysis regarding the Group variable's relationship with the other variables are shown to be negative and statistically insignificant ($r = -.055$, $p = 0.494$ with UGC Perception; $r = -0.095$, $p = 0.238$ with Authenticity; $r = -0.079$, $p = 0.331$ with Purchase Intent). This is to be expected when conducting a study with realistic and subtle stimulus conditions. Given that the general layout of both examples was identical, with minor differences such as including hashtags and links, it is indicative of the correlation coefficient results and the inability to illustrate this indirect relationship. As such, it is an additional indication of the necessity for multiple regression modeling, which will be presented subsequently.

5.6 Primary Hypothesis Testing

By using hierarchical linear regression and bivariate correlation mapping with Jamovi, a primary hypothesis testing was conducted. As mentioned in Section 3.3.1, a dummy coding was configured with UGC as 0 and FGUC as 1, and the Purchasing Intention variable was used as the primary dependent variable.

5.6.1 Testing H1: Direct Effects and Stimulus Evaluation

Hypothesis 1 proposes that User-Generated Content (UGC) has a stronger positive effect on purchase intention than Firm-Generated User Content (FGUC). Within the baseline regression model testing (Model 1), the direct path mapping of Group Dummy to Purchasing Intention produced an unstandardized coefficient estimate of -0.2771 with a standard error (SE) of 0.686 , a t -statistic of -0.404 , and a p -value of $p = 0.687$.

Although the mathematical direction of the coefficient is negative and aligns with the expectation that FGUC faces minor resistance, the relationship is statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$). Consequently, within this online book community context, the change in the author of the content source does not generate a statistically reliable direct implication in the consumer purchase intention; therefore, Hypothesis 1 is not supported.

Table 11: Dual Model Linear Regression Matrix H1 and H2

Model Fit Measures			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.0807	0.00652	-0.0132
2	0.7550	0.57008	0.5586

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=155

Model Comparisons						
Comparison		ΔR^2	F	df1	df2	p
Model	Model					
1	- 2	0.564	197	1	150	<.001

Table 12: Model 1 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent						
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate	
Intercept	3.0580	0.442	6.9227	<.001		
Group_Dummy	-0.2771	0.686	-0.4038	.687	-0.07897	
SM_Usage_Transf	0.0231	0.200	0.1158	.908	0.01824	
Group_Dummy * SM_Usage_Transf	0.0231	0.312	0.0742	.941	0.00614	

Table 13: Model 2 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent						
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate	
Intercept	-0.2480	0.3750	-0.6613	.509		
Group_Dummy	0.0128	0.4534	0.0282	.978	-0.01193	
SM_Usage_Transf	-0.0940	0.1322	-0.7114	.478	-0.05569	
Group_Dummy * SM_Usage_Transf	-0.0230	0.2058	-0.1116	.911	-0.00609	
Organism_Index	0.9055	0.0646	14.0225	<.001	0.75710	

5.6.2 Testing H2: Evaluation of the Organism Index Mediation

Hypothesis 2 states that the Organism Index (composed of Perceived Authenticity and UGC Perceptions) positively mediates the relationship between UGC and FGUC and purchasing intention. To assess this hypothesis, in the psychological association of the S-O-R framework, the correlation matrix was initially consulted as part of a two-step analysis followed by linear regression (See Table 10). The correlation parameters mapping the dummy group into the internal cognitive process were negative and statistically insignificant ($r = -0.055$, $p = 0.494$ for UGC perception; $r = -0.095$, $p = 0.238$ for perceived authenticity). Since the upstream path from

the stimulus to the consumer's internal organism was non-significant, a mediation channel is not supported; therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

However, it is revealed that a positive statistically significant relationship exists between UGC Perception and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.733$; $p < 0.001$), which indicates that superficial looks of the post, such as post attractiveness and satisfaction meeting the respondent's expectations, are heavily tied to purchasing intentions. At the same time, the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Intention is highly significant ($r = 0.671$, $p < 0.001$). Within the Organism Index itself, UGC perception and Perceived Authenticity are strongly correlated ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$).

Although these correlation results provide promising evidence that internal trust and content satisfaction are considerably tied to purchase intentions, they cannot indicate any causal relationship or account for the true workings of the S-O-R framework. Thus, a dual model linear regression analysis was conducted to directly evaluate H2's predictions. The findings revealed that, similar to the correlation matrix, the direct pathway of the Stimuli was statistically insignificant in influencing purchase intentions, accounting for less than 1% of the variance in potential buying behavior ($R^2 = 0.0065$). Alternatively, the structural inclusion of the Organism dimension in Model 2 substantially altered the results, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the Organism Index and reader purchasing intentions. The model comparison was additionally statistically important ($\Delta R^2 = 0.564$, $F(1,150) = 197$, $p < .001$) with Model 2 accounting for 57% ($R^2 = 0.57$) of the total variance in purchase intentions (see Tables 11, 12, and 13).

Furthermore, controlling for alternative factors in Model 2, the Organism Index was found to be considerably influential, indicating a strong relationship as a significant driver of behavioral outcomes ($\beta = 0.9055$, $SE = 0.0646$, $t = 14.02$, $p < .001$). While holding for the baseline stimulus, Perceived Authenticity and UGC Perceptions together excelled in driving purchase intention within the study.

In conclusion, even though the origin of the FGUC design does not alter the consumer perception, the internal state of the Organism is what drives the final response. When the content that is shown satisfies the consumer's expectation and instigates a higher perceived authenticity, the purchasing intention and recommendation intention increase, independent of the layout of the content seen. This provides a validation for the theorized S-O-R model. However, given the weak pathway results from the Stimulus condition to the Organism dimension, the mediation relationship is incomplete. Therefore, H2 is not supported by the data.

5.6.3 Testing H3a and H3b: Moderation of Social Media Usage

To finalize the primary hypothesis testing, an analysis of the interaction was made within Jamovi to evaluate whether the consumer's social media usage affects their behavioral process. To test

this, product-term interaction nodes (Social Media Usage X Group Dummy) were used. The results are compiled in the following table:

Table 14: Linear Regression Matrix H3a - Measurements and Model Coefficients

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.0807	0.00652	-0.0132

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=155

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Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	3.0580	0.442	6.9227	<.001	
Group_Dummy	-0.2771	0.686	-0.4038	.687	-0.07897
SM_Usage_Transf	0.0231	0.200	0.1158	.908	0.01824
SM_Usage_Transf * Group_Dummy	0.0231	0.312	0.0742	.941	0.00614

Hypothesis 3a proposes that high social media usage moderates the relationship between UGC/FGUC and purchasing intentions, such that intention is high when usage levels are high. This relationship testing reported a coefficient estimate of $\beta = 0.00614$ ($SE = 0.312$, $t = 0.0742$) and a p-value of 0.941. Meaning that this interaction is not significant since $p > 0.05$, therefore, Hypothesis 3a is not supported by the data. Daily social media usage implements no direct moderation in the influence of a reader's purchasing intention within the online book community.

Subsequently, for testing hypothesis 3b, a dedicated two-block hierarchical regression was executed within Jamovi to test a conditional process mechanism. Hypothesis 3b states that social media usage moderates the relationship between the Organism Index and influence of UGC/FGUC on purchase intentions, such that perceived authenticity and positive perceptions are high when social media usage levels are high.

The baseline Model 1 establishes that the S-O-R framework functions with statistical sensitivity since $R^2 = 0.570$ for purchasing intentions. Model 1 is governed by the direct link of the internal processing loop (Organism Index → Purchasing Intention), which reveals a highly significant positive effect (Estimate = 0.9054, $t = 14.069$, $p < 0.001$).

In Model 2, the interaction node of Organism Index X Social Media Usage was introduced so that the conditional moderation path could be mapped. This interaction generated an Estimate of

0.0501 ($SD = 0.0874$, $t = 0.573$, $\beta = 0.0323$). Most importantly, the interaction between organism index and social media usage demonstrated a non-significant interaction p-value of $p = 0.567$.

The introduction of this conditional block resulted in a statistically insignificant value ($\Delta R^2 = 0.00094$), with Jamovi's step-comparison metrics validating the lack of relevance ($F(1,150) = 0.329$, $p = 0.567$). Therefore, hypothesis 3b is not supported by the data.

Table 15: Dual Linear Regression Matrix H3b - Measurements and Model Comparisons

Model Fit Measures			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.755	0.570	0.562
2	0.756	0.571	0.560

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=155

Model Comparisons						
Comparison		ΔR^2	F	df1	df2	p
Model	Model					
1	- 2	9.40e-4	0.329	1	150	.567

Table 16: Model 1 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent					
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	-0.2282	0.3294	-0.693	.490	
SM_Usage_Transf	-0.1034	0.1014	-1.021	.309	-0.0547
Group_Dummy	-0.0347	0.1556	-0.223	.824	-0.0120
Organism_Index	0.9054	0.0644	14.069	<.001	0.7570

Table 17: Model 2 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent					
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	0.1605	0.7540	0.213	.832	
SM_Usage_Transf	-0.2986	0.3552	-0.841	.402	-0.0569
Group_Dummy	-0.0341	0.1559	-0.219	.827	-0.0118
Organism_Index	0.8045	0.1875	4.291	<.001	0.7591
Organism_Index * SM_Usage_Transf	0.0501	0.0874	0.573	.567	0.0323

The findings demonstrate that an individual's social media usage has no impact on how internal trust and satisfaction turn into a purchase intention. If a consumer assesses a recommendation as

authentic, they develop an identical desire to purchase it independently of their social media usage habits.

5.6.4 Supplementary Analysis regarding Age as Covariate Variable

To ensure that the data is thoroughly analyzed from all potential avenues, a complementary hierarchical regression was executed. Age was used as a control variable to address the potential generational differences in consumer perceptions within the online book community. By insulating the background of demographic variations in this analysis, it allows for a clearer calculation of the S-O-R framework's variance, without altering the primary path configurations.

Table 18: Linear Regression Matrix using Age as Covariate Control

Model Fit Measures			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.0807	0.00652	−0.0132
2	0.2178	0.04742	0.0220

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=155

Model Comparisons						
Comparison						
Model	Model	ΔR ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	- 2	0.0409	6.44	1	150	.012

Table 19: Model 1 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent						
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate	
Intercept	3.0580	0.442	6.9227	<.001		
Group_Dummy	−0.2771	0.686	−0.4038	.687	−0.07897	
SM_Usage_Transf	0.0231	0.200	0.1158	.908	0.01824	
Group_Dummy * SM_Usage_Transf	0.0231	0.312	0.0742	.941	0.00614	

Table 20: Model 2 Specific Results

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent					
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	1.5873	0.72398	2.193	.030	
Group_Dummy	-0.3846	0.67548	-0.569	.570	-0.0717
SM_Usage_Transf	0.2489	0.21555	1.155	.250	0.1538
Group_Dummy * SM_Usage_Transf	0.0854	0.30726	0.278	.781	0.0227
Age	0.0239	0.00943	2.538	.012	0.2428

The findings did not change the original pathways of the research model in any way, since both the direct content stimulus impact (H1: $p = 0.570$) and the daily social media usage as a moderator (H3a: $p = 0.781$) remained entirely unsupported.

However, Age itself was shown to be a significant predictor of consumer purchasing intentions ($p = 0.012$). This value proves that for every year a respondent's age increases, their baseline in the purchasing intention or recommendation rises by 2.4% ($\beta = 0.0239$). Additionally, by controlling age, it successfully improves the direct S-O-R framework's overall explanatory power for H1, since the R^2 score increased from 0.0065 to 0.0474. This incremental shift confirms that the complementary model was successful in isolating and controlling the demographic noise, providing a more precise statistical foundation before proceeding with the simultaneous latent path verifications.

5.7 Complementary Path Verification

To complement the regression analysis that was just done and to take into account errors in the measurement variance across the variables, a PLS-SEM analysis was conducted. By following a bootstrapping execution using 5,000 resamples, the coincident path systems provide a validation for the regression guidelines.

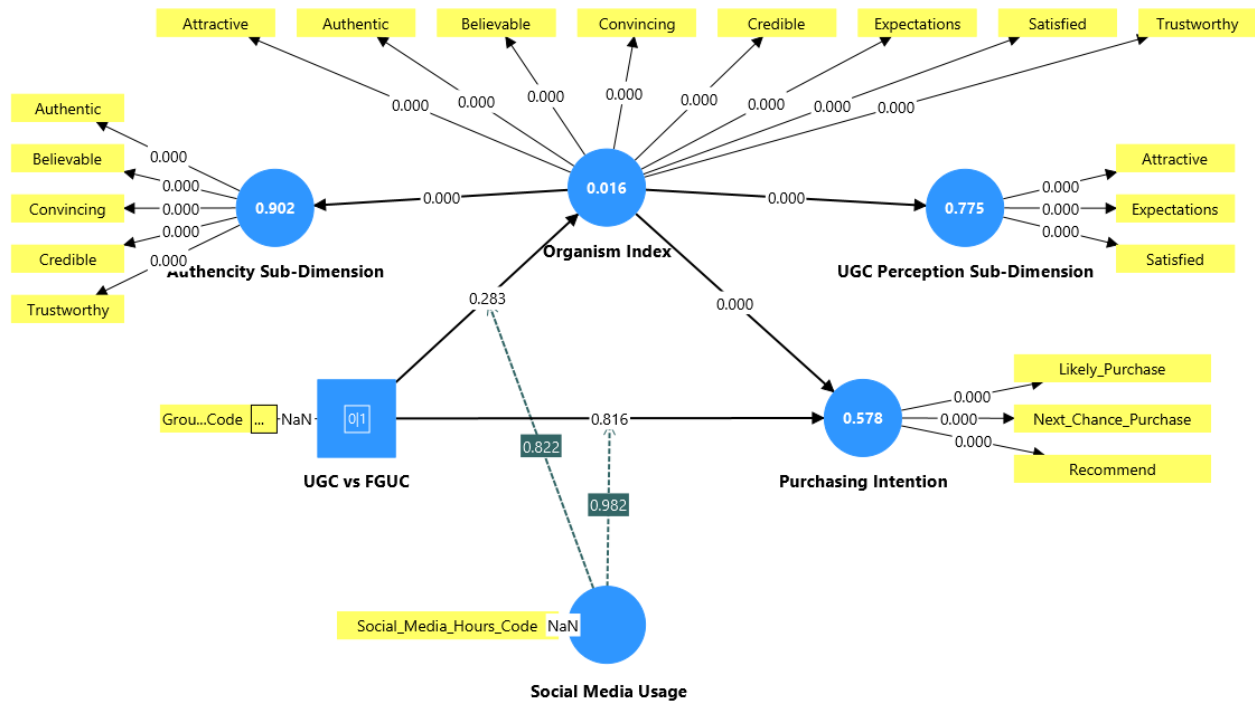


Figure 2: PLS-SEM Bootstrapping Diagram Results

The path generated within the model matched the primary findings. The Direct Path Link (UGC versus FGUC to Purchasing Intention) reported a coefficient of $\beta = -0.024$ ($t = 0.233$, $p = 0.816$), which confirms that H1 is not supported by the findings. The Mediation Path Link (UGC versus FGUC to Organism Index to Purchasing Intention) shows a coefficient of $\beta = -0.133$ ($t = 1.078$, $p = 0.281$), confirming, once again, that H2 is not supported. For the Moderating Path Links, the interaction tracks measuring purchasing intention ($\beta = -0.002$, $p = 0.982$) and the internal Organism ($\beta = 0.034$, $p = 0.822$) proved non-significant, confirming that both H3a and H3b are not supported.

Fundamentally, the supplementary model indicates that the dominant role of the internal process loop (Organism index to Purchasing Intention) is powerful ($\beta = 0.762$, $t = 19.486$, $p < 0.001$), producing a large, isolated effect size ($f^2 = 1.352$).

Accordingly, the overall relevance of the S-O-R model is powerful, since the integrated structural system accounts for 57.8% of the total variance explained ($R^2 = 0.578$) for the final Purchasing intention. In addition, the model explains 90.2% of the variance within Perceived Authenticity Subdimension ($R^2 = 0.902$) and 77.5% within the UGC perception variable ($R^2 = 0.775$), which validates its performance as an internal cognitive process for consumers. However, the model accounts for only 1.6% of variance in the Organism Index ($R^2 = 0.016$) (see Appendix D). This target variance reinforces that while the internal organism loop (O $\rightarrow$ R) is what dictates the final purchasing intention, the upstream path from external stimulus to the organism (S $\rightarrow$ O) remains statistically weak.

Table 21: Bootstrapping Analysis - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Organism Index -> Authenticity Sub-Dimension	0.950	0.950	0.011	88.050	0.000
Organism Index -> Purchasing Intention	0.762	0.765	0.039	19.486	0.000
Organism Index -> UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	0.880	0.881	0.018	48.932	0.000
Social Media Usage -> Organism Index	0.080	0.078	0.098	0.810	0.418
Social Media Usage -> Purchasing Intention	-0.055	-0.054	0.071	0.775	0.438
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	0.034	0.032	0.152	0.225	0.822
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.002	-0.003	0.105	0.023	0.982
UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	-0.175	-0.177	0.163	1.073	0.283
UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.024	-0.026	0.105	0.233	0.816

5.8 Summary of Results

Table 22: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Description	Primary Analysis Value (P-value)	Supplementary PLS Value (P-value)	Results
H1	UG display a stronger direct positive effect on purchase intentions than FGUC	$p = 0.687$	$p = 0.816$	Not Supported
H2	Perceived Authenticity and UGC perception (Organism Index) positively mediate the relationship between content stimulus and purchasing intention	$p = 0.978$ (S → O) and $p < 0.001$ (O → R)	$p = 0.281$	Not Supported
H3a	Daily Social Media usage moderates the relationship between UGC and FGUC and purchasing intention, showing higher impact among heavy users of social media	$p = 0.941$	$p = 0.982$	Not Supported
H3b	Daily Social Media usage moderates the relationship between UGC and FGUC and perceived authenticity within the consumer mindset	$p = 0.567$	$p = 0.822$	Not Supported

6 Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the newly coined concept of Firm-Generated User Content within the context of the online book community on social media using the Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework as a method to analyze consumer perceptions. While the results of the experimental survey in the section above revealed that all of our hypotheses were unsupported by the data, it is important to note that considerable insights have nonetheless been gathered.

This chapter will focus on five main points that have been discovered throughout the duration of this research thesis. To begin with, the power of the Organism dimension will be discussed, delving into a comparison with the influence of the stimulus conditions and potential explanations for this being the case. Then, the statistical insignificance of the Stimulus will be dissected along with interpretations of why H1 and H2 failed, followed by the justifications of the neutrality of screen time in contemporary society and why H3a and H3b were unsupported in the data. Next, a comparison between our data and Beck et al. 's (2026) study will be conducted, from which the initial spark for the focus of our study originated. The final section of the Discussion will assert the supplementary findings related to the Age variable and its unexpected relevance to our original research model. Next, the Theoretical and Managerial Implications will be stated, providing novel ideas for the implementation of FGUC in academic research and marketing strategies.

6.1 The Organism over the Stimulus

Despite the stimulus kick-starting the S-O-R framework and being the baseline from which consumers proceeded to evaluate, the results of this study clearly show that the internal processing (Organism) of the consumer is the primary dimension influencing their potential response behavior. As previously indicated, the two scales utilized to measure the Organism dimension were the only statistically significant results we had garnered (both united and separately). This is in line with previous research that establishes perceived authenticity and internal perceptions of products and content as substantial influences on purchasing behavior (Saif & Nofal, 2026; Bagozzi et al., 2016; Morhart et al., 2015). In simpler terms, the more a consumer is reported to be satisfied with content and perceives it as trustworthy, the more likely they are to follow through with purchasing intention (See Appendix C for the separated Linear Regression Results).

Following this theoretical stream, the results of our study revealed another interesting insight: UGC perception (the experience of the content) is more strongly correlated with purchasing behavior than authenticity (mere trustworthiness). While historically, the majority of studies have shown that authenticity is a considerable influence on purchasing intentions (Kozinets et

al., 2010; Morhart et al., 2015; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022), there are several that have collected data to support the theory that the perceptions of online content, regardless of origin, is the more powerful driving factor of actual purchasing intentions (Bagozzi, 2016; Chung, 2025; Saif & Nofal, 2026). Additionally, the notion that “psychological reality, not objective reality, determines our behavior” strengthens this view (Jacoby 2002, p.57). Therefore, the content being attractive and satisfactory is more important than being seen as credible. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between these two concepts as a unified Organism Index. Cognitive trust and content satisfaction work together in establishing a consumer’s perception and opinion of social media content.

6.2 The Subtlety of the Stimulus Conditions (H1 and H2)

As previously mentioned in the section above, the stimulus conditions within the context of this study were found to be statistically insignificant, despite our earlier pretesting to measure the internal validity of our investigation. Following the definition and examples that were established in Beck et al. ‘s (2026) study, the FGUC condition was meant to potentially pass as UGC given that ultimately, the content was posted by the consumer and not the company itself. Methodological limitations and the similarities between UGC and FGUC could have directly caused this failure, along with the unspecified book titles (originally intended to avoid bias). Additionally, 70-80% of the participants reported using Instagram and TikTok as their primary platforms, which are characterized by visual content as compared to X (previously Twitter), the inspiration for our stimuli and heavily text-based examples. Ultimately, consumers today are highly digitally literate and are aware of the nuances of content co-creation between users and literary firms. Given that our manipulation checks passed, the participants were aware of the differences but seemingly chose to overlook them when making their decision.

Within the context of this study and the model that was developed, it is abundantly clear that the primary reason for the hypotheses being unsupported in the data is the issue regarding the Stimulus dimension of the framework. As shown in the previous chapter, the correlation and regression analyses indicated a strong relationship between the Organism and Response dimensions, with a lack of connection between the Stimulus and Organism dimensions. Additionally, it is important to note that Jacoby (2002) specifically mentions the importance of a strong Stimulus in order to make it “over the hill” and start the process of influencing the Organism. As such, it is possible to theorize that with a stronger stimulus condition, the results could have potentially indicated a significant result.

6.3 Social Media Usage Levels Today (H3a and H3b)

Regarding the last hypotheses developed in this study, the idea that heavy versus light social media daily usage would provide a significant influence on consumer perceptions and

authenticity was unfounded. The data instead reported that the majority of our sample indicated usage levels above one hour daily. This potentially implies that 1 or more hours of daily social media is a normalized baseline for users today, particularly within the book community. As such, the differentiation in usage levels and its effect on content perceptions cannot be established. Therefore, a potential interpretation of this result is that usage levels truly do not have a significant effect on how a consumer perceives the content present on online platforms, and that a lighter user and a heavier user evaluate content authenticity using the same cognitive criteria.

When connecting back to academic literature, the concepts of ad blindness and consumer skepticism can potentially explain the results of this study. According to Hautz et al. (2014), consumers are becoming increasingly aware of commercial content, especially when paired with high daily social media consumption. As such, in the context of contemporary digital literacy, social platforms are flooded with such content in various forms, which have desensitized consumers from its potential influence (Kozinets et al., 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The daily usage reported by the participants, paired with the considerable number of adult years active online given the mean age of our sample, suggests that they have all developed the knowledge to identify potential commercial factors within online content and evaluate it similarly. Therefore, it can safely be theorized that the majority of online social media users have reached a certain level of adeptness and wariness in navigating such platforms.

6.4 Revisiting and Contextualizing with Beck et al. (2026)

Despite not being statistically significant, the results did show a slight downward trend when moving from the UGC condition to the FGUC condition, with reports of authenticity and purchasing intention dropping .2 points. When put in comparison with Beck et al. 's (2026) findings, which state that providing a template for customers lowers the creative effort, it establishes a downside in the receiver's point of view, lowering the authenticity value for consumers. Additionally, their article establishes that the detriment to authenticity perceptions is minimal regarding negative experiences within their study; as such, they discuss that this proves the value of FGUC and its capabilities of exponentially increasing positive communications about a given company (Beck et al., 2026). Our findings reflect this conclusion, demonstrating that a considerable number of consumers will still be willing to communicate and potentially purchase the book despite knowing that the recommendation originated with a template from a firm.

6.5 Remodeling with the Age Covariate Variable

Additionally, results indicated that older consumers are more likely to share recommendations they see online, implying that they are more trusting of the content they encounter, regardless of origin. This compares significantly with younger consumers, specifically Generation Z and

Millennials, who are typically more wary and skeptical of social media content. This may be due to members of these generations growing up with the technology and being aware of the sources and techniques used in making promotional content, as well as UGC, and therefore are more selective of the content they choose to share and trust.

In this additional avenue of analysis, it is important to note that the results do not indicate a detrimental effect on the Organism Index's influence on purchasing intention. Rather, the Age factor is an additional dimension that coexists with UGC Perceptions and Perceived Authenticity. As such, an additional interpretation could be due to the financial stability that comes with maturity and older generations. Having spent significantly more time in the workforce, they naturally possess a greater capacity for long-term saving and investment than their younger counterparts. The plausibility of more disposable income as well as more leisure time could also explain the higher reported intentions amongst older generations.

6.6 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this thesis provide theoretical contributions to the field of social media marketing and consumer behavior, whilst expanding the conceptual scope of the S-O-R framework. This study revised the foundational assumptions regarding content source credibility, digital persuasion, and the internal cognitive process in consumers by studying the convergence of UGC and the evolving concept of FGUC among online consumer tribes.

6.6.1 The power of the Internal Organism mechanism ($O \rightarrow R$)

The primary contribution of this thesis is its empirical validation of the internal consumer process in the Organism phase over the Stimuli. This study shows that the internal cognitive process of the consumer acts as a gatekeeper to their final conative behavior.

This internal mechanism is confirmed by the linear correlations and the simultaneous latent path equations. The linear regression analysis discovered a positive statistical significance between internal consumer perception and their behavioral response: the connection between UGC Content Perception (visual attractiveness, satisfaction, and expectation) and final Purchasing Intention is remarkably solid ($r = 0.733$, $p < 0.001$), while the Perceived Authenticity is connected to purchase intention ($r = 0.671$, $p < 0.001$). The PLS-SEM analysis reports that the path from the Organism Index to Purchasing Intention shows a relative emphasis of $\beta = 0.762$ ($t = 19.486$, $p < 0.001$). Under the guidelines introduced by Hair et al. (2022), this isolated effect size on the path represents a highly rare magnitude ($f^2 = 1.352$).

Since the combination of these components accounts for 57.8% ($R^2 = 0.578$) of the total variance explained for Purchasing Intention, it also explains the 90.2% ($R^2 = 0.902$) of the latent variance within Perceived Authenticity, which proves that the external stimuli are not what determines the

consumer behavior. Instead, it is the internal cognitive state that the consumer has that dictates what the consumer's intents will be. Therefore, in this case, if a book recommendation effectively satisfies the consumer expectation, presents a visual attractiveness, and triggers perceived authenticity, it will determine the final consumer behavior towards purchasing intention, overruling the format of the content that it appears in.

6.6.2 Assumption of the Source Skepticism

Additionally, the failure to find significant outcomes in both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 offers a theoretical contribution by challenging the assumptions of the literature consumer. In past marketing research, it has been argued that the visible firm interference in the content, such as templates, would trigger the consumer's internal defense mechanisms against the brand (Morhart et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016). These frameworks dictate that consumers would automatically associate the corporate hand in content as an ulterior commercial intent, which leads to consumer skepticism and the destruction of eWOM value in consumers' eyes.

However, the evidence from this study has demonstrated that this polarization between UGC and FGUC content is becoming outdated. Since the manipulation check of the final survey has marginally confirmed that the respondents are proactively noticing the difference between the content, such as hashtags and template configurations of the FGUC post, the following non-significance of the path proves that identifying a post as firm-generated does not break the trust or ruin purchasing drive. This disputes the previous definitions of content authenticity and signals the need for marketing theory to model new consumer assessments through a more contemporary mindset.

6.6.3 Digital Media Literacy and Coproduced Authenticity

To explain this shift, we introduce a new perspective on how modern social media consumer tribes have developed a degree of digital media literacy. Users that interact daily in close-knit digital subcultures (such as BookTok, BookTube or Bookstagram) now understand the nuances of content co-creation, content filtering and the relationship between platforms, users and brands. Therefore, these users do not see these firm templates as a corporate intrusion. Instead, the consumer accepts it as a helpful co-creation tool that reduces their cognitive load, improves their visual aesthetics, and makes their personal expression easier across platforms.

The theoretical boundary of authenticity must then shift from an objectivist view towards a more fluid, constructivist, and co-creative lens. In the modern digital era of marketing, authenticity is not shattered by the existence of corporate layouts. Instead, authenticity is coproduced by the brand providing a layout, and the user instilling their genuine and honest evaluation. If the text within the template satisfies expectations and aligns with the community norms, the consumer

tribe will fully accept the FGUC content as real and believable without imposing any penalty towards the brand.

6.7 Managerial Implications

The findings of this research provide critical strategic insights for professionals within the publishing industry and for B2C industries. Social media marketing literature has warned brands against the direct interventions within the user spaces, indicating that a corporate presence would trigger consumer skepticism towards the brand and would damage the brand's trust (Kumar et al., 2016). However, this study, by comparing the FGUC and UGC content, uncovered operational advantages for marketing managers in adapting this approach.

6.7.1 “Green Light” for Standardized Content Templates

The most vital takeaway from this study for marketers is that the shift from organic UGC and FGUC was proven to be statistically insignificant. Accordingly, this lack of significance can be seen as a “green light” for firms to start using this type of firm-generated content in their marketing strategies. This proves that marketing departments can discard the passive strategy of waiting for WOM conversations to happen organically and start having a hand in the kickoff of these conversations with the implementation of FGUC.

We encourage firms to design and hand out visually appealing, highly structured templates to consumers. In the literary space, this could be a yearly reading summary, interactive lists such as “top genres that you identify with” or “your aesthetic based on the genres that you read”, which would incentivize consumers to post them on their social media platforms. In other industries, this could also be used. For example, the brand Spotify could partner with Letterboxd (a movie rating app) and launch in each app an interactive list for “Movies that you should see based on what you listen to” (in Spotify) and “Songs that you must listen to based on the movies that you see” (in Letterboxd). As confirmed in this study, consumers do not instinctively reject eWOM simply because it uses a template provided by a brand, which gives firms a secure foundation to deploy FGUC content directly to their consumer spaces.

6.7.2 Scalable Reach without Authenticity Penalties

By deploying creative FGUC templates, brands can achieve dual marketing aims: achieving a viral scale across social media platforms while avoiding public scrutiny regarding brand authenticity. In the online reading communities, such as BookTok and Bookstagram, a book can become an instant bestseller overnight over a viral trend (Reddan et al., 2024). However, predicting or forcing these organic trends has been historically a challenge for companies (Reddan et al., 2024).

FGUC resolves this problem by lowering the need for the creative effort required to produce content from users (Beck et al., 2026), making the involvement easier for the consumer tribe. Since this study validates that modern users process FGUC with high digital literacy and do not face a decline in trust when facing firm layouts, brands can safely assemble campaigns. This collaborative marketing strategy allows firms to maintain their brands' consistency and aesthetic, allows consumer conversations on specific posts to happen naturally, and at the same time amplifies the eWOM reach without encountering a penalty towards the brand's reputation.

6.7.3 Prioritize Visual Appeal and User Satisfaction

Furthermore, the data provides a plan for template design since the user's visual experience was shown to be the strongest driver for purchasing intention. The general content perception, which was measured on how attractive and satisfying the post was, presents the highest link to the buying decision.

For marketers, this means that the aesthetic and design of the post should receive the most attention when producing an FGUC marketing campaign, as well as the largest share of the budget. When developing the template, there should be a focus on the visuals, the ease of interaction, and formatting the post elements that can be used in the already existing styles of various social media platforms. Essentially, if a FGUC template looks appealing and satisfies the user's aesthetic standards, it will be successful in creating eWOM and consequently, may lead to a rise in purchasing intention and therefore, increase the brand's revenue.

7 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this thesis was to study the new concept of Firm-Generated Use Content (FGUC) with an empirical investigation within the online book community, by using a Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework as the theoretical foundation. The previous research on this new term has focused on the consumer reaction to being asked to participate in the sharing of these templates. Conversely, in this thesis, we have focused on the reaction of other consumers who see these templates online and their perception of them.

Through a between-subjects experimental survey ($N = 155$), the causal paths, direct, mediated, and moderator, of the S-O-R framework were evaluated using linear regression in Jamovi, and a simultaneous latent path verification was done in SmartPLS. The results of this analysis revealed that the primary hypotheses of this thesis were statistically unsupported. Each content type dummy group failed to wield a statistically significant direct effect on the purchasing intention (H1: $p = 0.687$). Moreover, the mediation path of the internal cognitive evaluation could not be proven mathematically (H2: $p = 0.978$) due to the link from the content format to the participants' internal perception being non-significant. Lastly, the social media daily usage imposed zero moderating effect on the behavioral outcomes (H3a: $p = 0.941$) or the internal perception of authenticity (H3b: $p = 0.567$).

Nevertheless, this lack of statistical significance across the proposed hypotheses has generated a forecasting ability attributed to the 57.8% of the total variance explained ($R^2 = 0.578$) for the final Purchasing Intention. This paradox shows that the origin of the content template and the layout design (the Stimulus) does not affect the consumer's decision on purchasing intention. Instead, the behavior of the consumer is solely driven by the internal cognitive evaluations formed during the Organism phase. The combination of the mechanisms of content satisfaction, visual attractiveness, expectations, and perceived authenticity acts as a decision-maker for the behavioral response ($O \rightarrow R: \beta = 0.762, p < 0.001, f^2 = 1.352$). This confirms the claims made by Hautz et al. (2014) that when technical quality and content satisfaction are high, consumer bias against the source's ownership disappears.

Essentially, this thesis presents a theoretical contribution by challenging the assumptions made by previous research about consumer skepticism. In the past research, it has been argued that the visible interference of firms in content would trigger the consumer's mental reluctance towards the brand (Morhart et al., 2015). However, this study illustrates a shift in the digital consumer's behavior, since contemporary online tribes do not penalize the firm-generated template.

Fundamentally, this thesis proves that the online consumer tribes of contemporary society do not chastise or reject the firm-generated template. Rather, the recommendation content provided fulfills the reader's expectations and provokes high perceived authenticity. Ultimately, this thesis proves that FGUC can be integrated seamlessly into the digital landscape, serving as a powerful

tool for marketers to provoke engagement and eWOM without a detrimental effect on the brand's authenticity.

7.1 Limitations and Further Research

Despite the strengths of this study, there are several limitations, both methodological and theoretical, that must be addressed along with directions for future research. Firstly, regarding the methodological limitations, the study was limited to measuring perceptions for one moment in time. This choice in research design could have potentially influenced the results found, capturing only an initial impression and not a fully processed opinion. Further research could conduct a similar longitudinal study focusing on the long-term effects of FGUC on consumers and their trust in influencers or brands, as well as their consumer fatigue.

Along these lines, as stated in the Theoretical Framework, the simplified version of the S-O-R Model was used for convenience and time management purposes. This could be considered a limitation due to the thorough theoretical background that Jacoby sets in his article (2002). As such, future researchers could replicate this study using the seven-step model along with the timeline recommendation to garner more comprehensive results. Furthermore, the shortcoming of only receiving a marginally significant reliability result in our Pretests could be a considerable limitation of this study. Accordingly, it is important for future researchers to establish a thoroughly reliable Manipulation Check scale in order for the main experiment to have a robust baseline.

Additionally, a considerable limitation of this study is the stimulus choice made for the survey. While the generic use of “Book 1” was chosen to stand in for a real book title in order to avoid the participants’ bias in genre preferences, it could have negatively affected the study in that it reduced the ecological validity. Future researchers could limit the study to participants with a certain preference and use real titles to avoid the negative effect on their immersion experience into the stimulus. Another choice made was focusing on a stimulus with text-heavy recommendations, which is not the most common form of book content. For purposes of convenience and time management, the study was limited to imitating a post that could be found on X (formerly Twitter). This could limit the analysis for book-type content. Future research could focus on visual FGUC, using video content to replicate this study to garner different results, which is the most popular type of content for the book community.

Finally, within methodological limitations, a single example of each condition was used within the survey, which could have limited the participants’ perceptions and imagination when faced with social media examples. These versions of the stimulus were used due to having a list format inspired by the Spotify Wrapped yearly posts, as well as allowing the participant to imagine a potential list of books that would fit their preferences. However, having more than one version of

the stimuli in the conditions used could provide additional insights and novel results for authenticity perception.

Focusing on theoretical limitations, several were found to have significant potential effects. To begin with, the narrow context of the online book community could have negative implications, as the particular results of this study are not easily generalizable to other industries. Despite the singular consumer behavior of purchasing intention used as the dependent variable, the internal processes that drive a consumer to make such book-related purchases are different and at times more complex than purchases within other fields. As such, future research could replicate this study using a more generic subject matter for the stimuli, which could potentially garner more universal insights into the perceptions of FGUC on social media.

Additionally, only one moderating variable was included for the purpose of this thesis, potentially leaving other factors undiscovered that could provide more insight. Future research could introduce other concepts within the Organism's processes, such as brand loyalty and others, which could provide further understanding of user perceptions regarding FGUC. Another interesting avenue to explore would be investigating the influence of hyper-personalized templates or content on social media and how it compares. Also, using the AI label could lead to understanding how it moderates the influence of UGC/FGUC on perceptions and purchasing intentions. These potential paths could answer the question of whether it mitigates the risks of being seen as inauthentic.

Finally, another considerable limitation of this study is not recording how users feel when seeing several people post identical FGUC template posts. The singular instance of the experimental stimuli did not fully impress upon the participants the characteristic reality of FGUC posts, which is of seeing several posts from unrelated accounts with similar wording, hashtags, and other features. Future research could take this potential approach as its focus, measuring and analyzing users seeing non-influencer users post similar or identical content.

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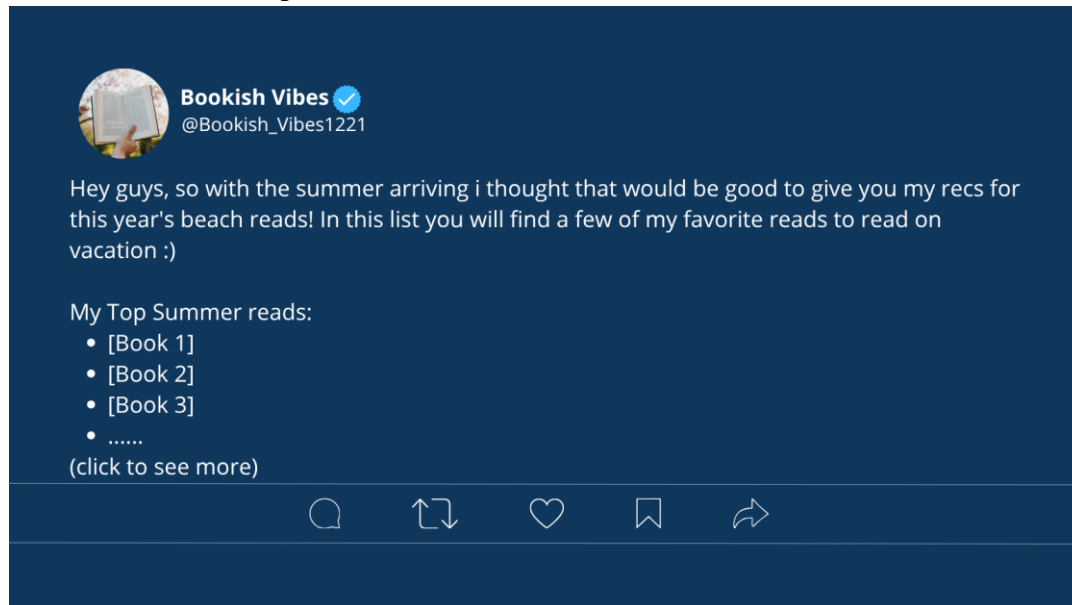
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Appendix A

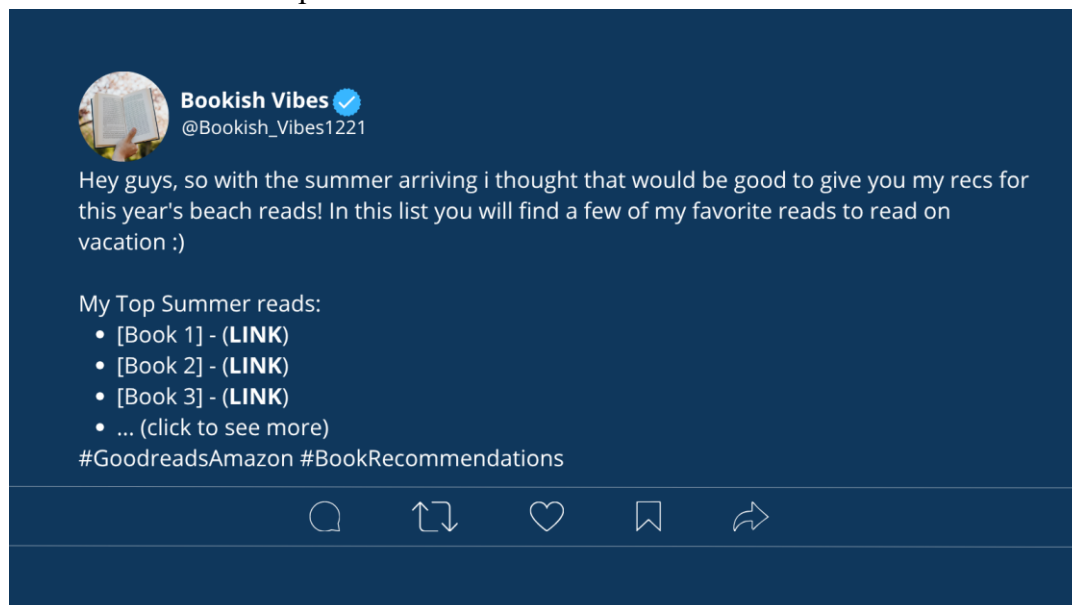
Pretest Version

UGC Stimulus Example



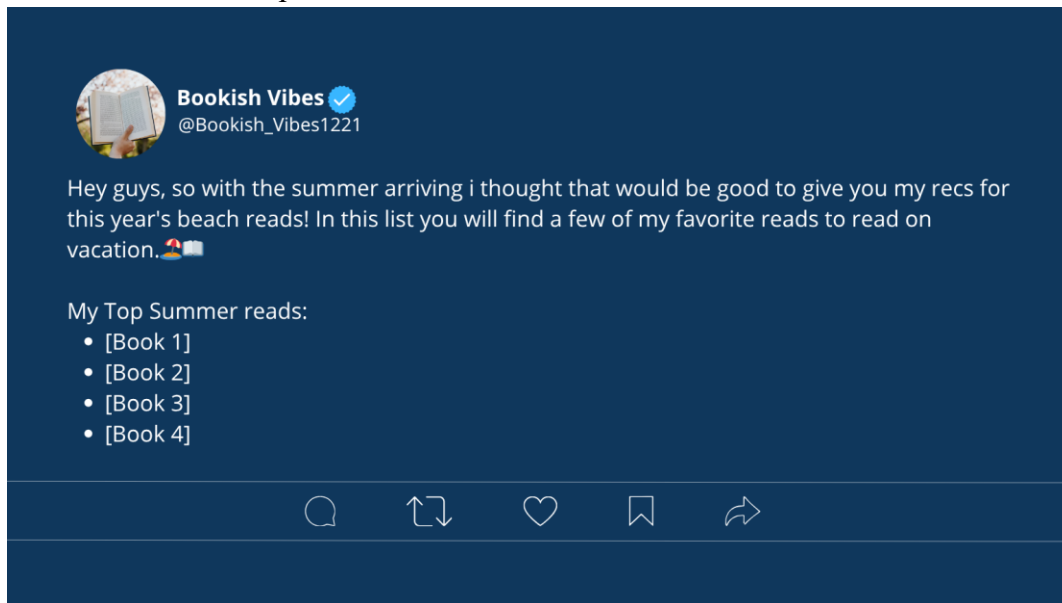
Pretest Version

FGUC Stimulus Example



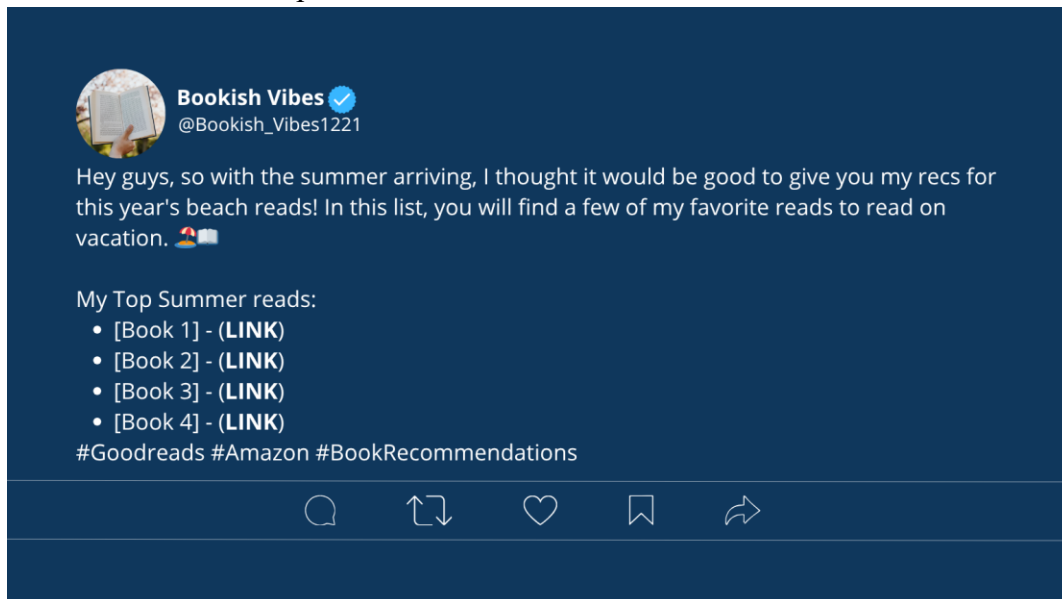
Main Survey (Updated) Version

UGC Stimulus Example



Main Survey (Updated) Version

FGUC Stimulus Example



Appendix B

Final Survey Questionnaire

Section 1: Introduction and Informed Consent

Research Students:

- Alessia Vitiello
- Carmo Branco

LUSEM - MSc International Marketing and Brand Management

Purpose of the Study: We are conducting this survey to research on how different types of content on social media can influence purchasing intention, specifically within the bookish community (BookTok, Bookstagram, BookTube, etc.)

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be shown a scenario regarding a social media post on books. You will then be asked to rate on scale of 1 to 7 various statements related to your perception of the post, your reactions and purchasing intention regarding the books. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality & Data Protection: Your responses are completely anonymous. No personal identifiable information (such as name and email) will be collected. The data will only be used for academic research purposes as part of a Master's Study.

Voluntary Participation: The participation on this survey is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the survey at any time by closing the browser window without any penalty.

Publication of the findings: The thesis will be published in the Lund University Publications portal where it will be publicly accessible.

Contact information: If you have any questions about this research, please contact us by email at: ca7010br-s@student.lu.se and al3576vi-s@student.lu.se

Section 2: Demographics and Screening Checks

1. What is your age?
2. What gender do you identify with?

She/her

He/him

Nonbinary / Other pronouns

4. On average, how many hours a day do you spend on social media?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1 to 3 hours
- 3 to 6 hours
- More than 6 hours

5. What is your most preferred/used social media platform?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Other

6. How often do you view content on social media about books? (Target Filter)

- Never (*Automatic Disqualification*)
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

7. Do you watch content from book influencers?

- Yes
- No

8. Do you check what other people post about books?

- Yes
- No

Section 3: Experimental Stimulus Assignment

Note: Respondents are automatically randomly routed to either Condition A or Condition B based on their response to the following randomization question:

9. Is the last digit of your mobile phone number odd or even?

- Odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) → Go to Condition A
- Even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8) → Go to Condition B

GROUP A: REVIEWS ROUTED TO UGC CONDITION

Contextual Background Scenario: Imagine a close friend of yours organically posts a text summary list detailing their personal favorite beach reads of the summer onto their primary social media newsfeed page.

See Appendix A: Updated Version of UGC Example for Stimulus Image

GROUP B: REVIEWS ROUTED TO FGUC CONDITION

Contextual Background Scenario: Imagine a close friend of yours sends you a direct message telling you to check out a new post they just shared. They used an automated visual layout template generated directly by a publishing firm to instantly compile their top reading choices based on their summer history.

See Appendix A: Updated Version of FGUC Example for Stimulus Image

Section 4: Post-Exposure S-O-R Framework Evaluation

Note: The following latent scale evaluation items apply identically to all survey participants regardless of their assigned stimulus. All items are measured using a standard 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

Construct Block A: Environmental Manipulations Check

MC1: The content of the post I just saw was originally written by a company or publisher.

MC2: This post appears to be based on a template provided by a brand.

MC3: The person who posted this content created it entirely on their own.

MC4: I think that this social media post is realistic.

Construct Block B: User-Generated Content Perception (Organism Dimension)

UGCP1: I am satisfied with the post about books.

UGCP2: The level of the post about books meets my expectations.

UGCP3: The post about books is very attractive.

Construct Block C: Perceived Source Authenticity (Organism Dimension)

AUTH1: I think the social media post is convincing.

AUTH2: I think the social media post is credible.

AUTH3: I think the social media post is believable.

AUTH4: I think the social media post is trustworthy.

AUTH5: I think the social media post is authentic.

Construct Block D: Purchasing and Recommendation Intentions (Response Dimension)

PI1: It is very likely that I will purchase one of the books.

PI2: I will buy one of the books the next time I get a chance.

PI3: I will recommend one or more of the books to my friends.

Section 5: Survey Closer and Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation!

About the study:

This research's goal is to compare how different types of content seen on social media (User-Generated Content and Firm-Generated User Content) can potentially influence how we perceive its authenticity and purchasing intention.

We are aiming to prove that FGUC is influential but will never surpass the influence of UGC particularly when it comes to the book community online. This community is characterized by influential peer opinions and authentic content is seen as "required" by BookTok/Bookstagram viewers.

Additional information and further questions:

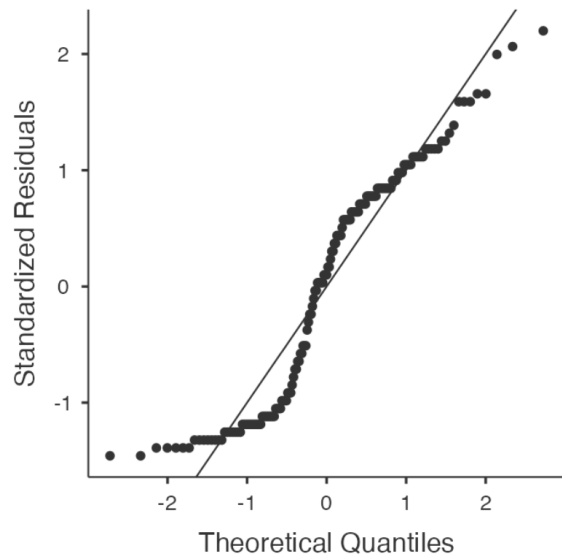
If you have any questions or concerns relating to this survey, please feel free to reach out to us by email: ca7010br-s@student.lu.se and al3576vi-s@student.lu.se

Appendix C

Supplementary Jamovi Results

Demographics

Age Q-Q Plot



Continuous Variable Descriptives

Descriptives

Descriptives										
	Group	Satisfied	Expectations	Attractive	Convincing	Credible	Believable	Trustworthy	Authentic	Likely_Purchase
N	FGUC	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
	UGC	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79
Missing	FGUC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UGC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	FGUC	3.83	3.63	3.14	3.28	3.92	4.09	3.91	3.84	3.04
	UGC	4.01	3.70	3.34	3.58	4.13	4.37	4.04	4.16	3.23
Median	FGUC	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
	UGC	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	4	3
Standard deviation	FGUC	1.48	1.39	1.49	1.47	1.55	1.51	1.46	1.50	1.60
	UGC	1.48	1.47	1.58	1.52	1.37	1.44	1.38	1.57	1.40
Minimum	FGUC	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	UGC	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	FGUC	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
	UGC	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

Descriptives

Descriptives								
	Next_Chance_Purchase	Recommend	Realistic	Company_Written	Own_Creation	Template_Based	Own_Creation_Rev	
N	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	2.82	2.78	3.96	3.55	3.78	4.14	4.22	4.22
	3.08	3.01	4.11	3.29	4.22	3.71	3.78	3.78
Median	3.00	2.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Standard deviation	1.59	1.77	1.58	1.70	1.60	1.59	1.60	1.60
	1.43	1.63	1.70	1.63	1.70	1.59	1.70	1.70
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

Reliability Analysis

Manipulation Check

Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.617	0.668

UGC Perception

Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.894	0.901

Purchase Intention

Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.917	0.923

Perceived Authenticity

Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.929	0.933

Correlation Analysis

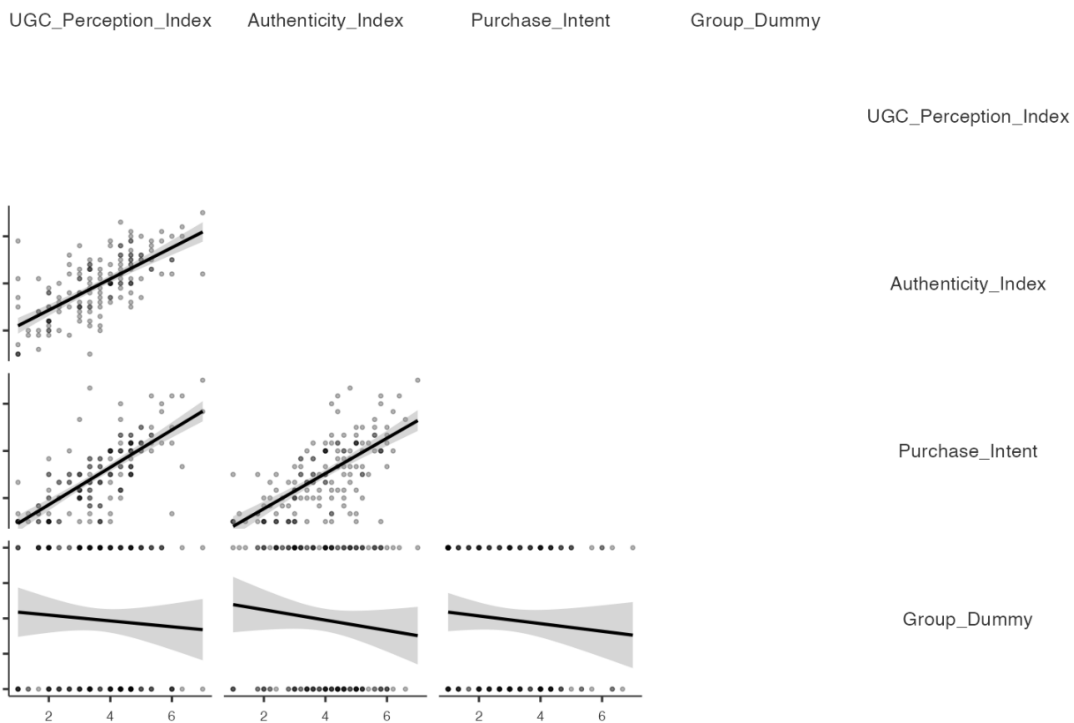
Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix

		UGC_Perception_Index	Authenticity_Index	Purchase_Intent	Group_Dummy
UGC_Perception_Index	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Authenticity_Index	Pearson's r	0.684 ***	—		
	df	153	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
Purchase_Intent	Pearson's r	0.733 ***	0.671 ***	—	
	df	153	153	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	
Group_Dummy	Pearson's r	−0.055	−0.095	−0.079	—
	df	153	153	153	—
	p-value	.494	.238	.331	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Plot



Social Media Usage Moderation Analysis

Descriptives

Descriptives

	Group	Social_Media_Hours	Authenticity_Index	Purchase_Intent
N	FGUC	less than 1 hour	15	15
	UGC		20	20
Missing	FGUC		0	0
	UGC		0	0
Mean	FGUC		3.47	2.84
	UGC		3.75	2.83
Median	FGUC		3.60	3.00
	UGC		4.00	3.00

Descriptives

Descriptives

	Group	Social_Media_Hours	Authenticity_Index	Purchase_Intent
N	FGUC	3 - 6 hours	19	19
	UGC		14	14
Missing	FGUC		0	0
	UGC		0	0
Mean	FGUC		3.71	2.79
	UGC		3.90	2.93
Median	FGUC		3.60	2.33
	UGC		3.90	2.83

Linear Regression Analysis

(With Perceived Authenticity and UGC Perception as Separate Factors)

Linear Regression

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.769	0.591	0.583

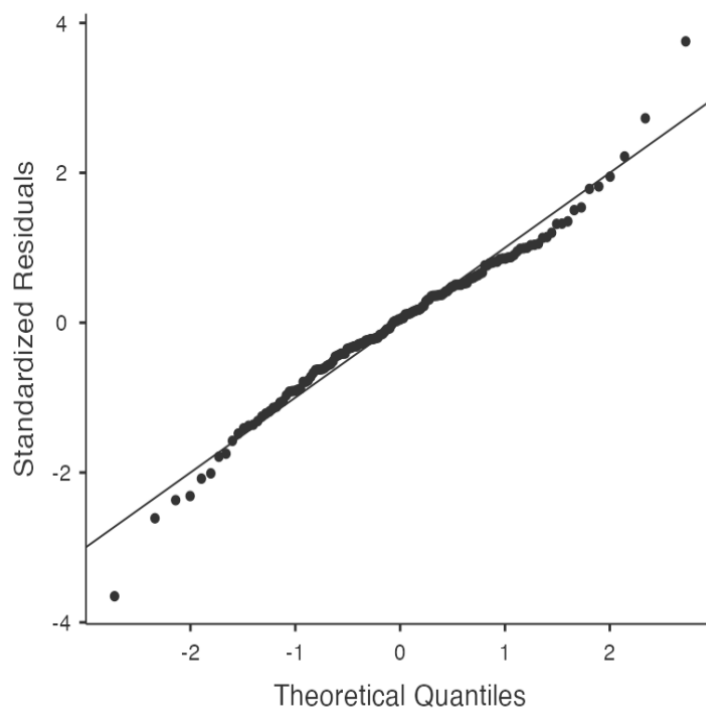
Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=155

Model Coefficients - Purchase_Intent

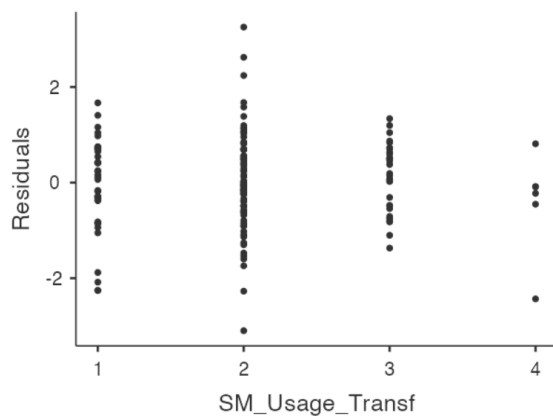
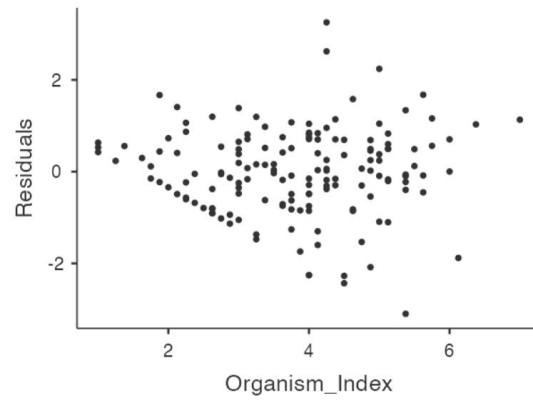
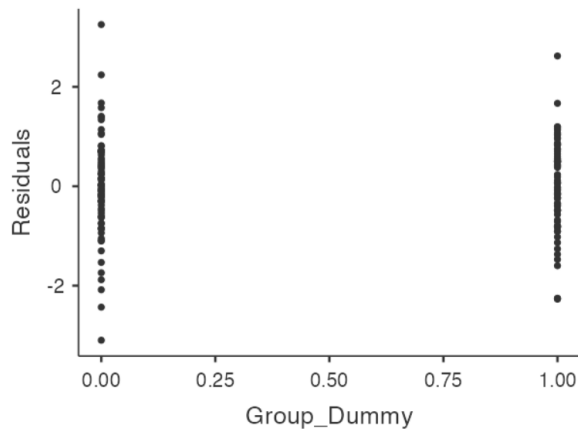
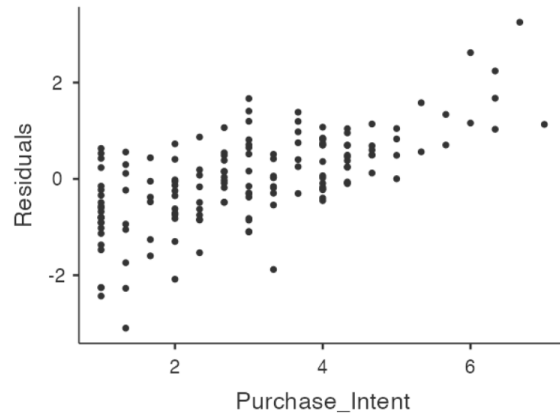
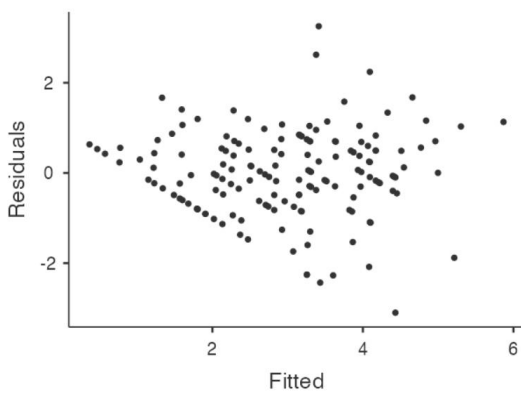
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	-0.3816	0.2667	-1.431	.154	
Group_Dummy	-0.0580	0.1517	-0.382	.703	-0.0200
Authenticity_Index	0.3530	0.0798	4.424	<.001	0.3163
UGC_Perception_Index	0.5580	0.0772	7.231	<.001	0.5154

Assumption Checks

Q-Q Plot



Residual Plots



Appendix D

Supplementary PLS-SEM analysis Results

Bootstrapping Analysis - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Organism Index -> Authenticity Sub-Dimension	0.950	0.950	0.011	88.050	0.000
Organism Index -> Purchasing Intention	0.762	0.765	0.039	19.486	0.000
Organism Index -> UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	0.880	0.881	0.018	48.932	0.000
Social Media Usage -> Organism Index	0.080	0.078	0.098	0.810	0.418
Social Media Usage -> Purchasing Intention	-0.055	-0.054	0.071	0.775	0.438
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	0.034	0.032	0.152	0.225	0.822
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.002	-0.003	0.105	0.023	0.982
UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	-0.175	-0.177	0.163	1.073	0.283
UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.024	-0.026	0.105	0.233	0.816

Coefficient intervals bias corrected

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Bias	2.5%	97.5%
Organism Index -> Authenticity Sub-Dimension	0.950	0.950	0.000	0.921	0.965
Organism Index -> Purchasing Intention	0.762	0.765	0.003	0.672	0.829
Organism Index -> UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	0.880	0.881	0.001	0.839	0.911
Social Media Usage -> Organism Index	0.080	0.078	-0.002	-0.118	0.266
Social Media Usage -> Purchasing Intention	-0.055	-0.054	0.001	-0.199	0.077
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	0.034	0.032	-0.002	-0.273	0.329
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.002	-0.003	0.000	-0.201	0.211
UGC vs FGUC -> Organism Index	-0.175	-0.177	-0.002	-0.492	0.143
UGC vs FGUC -> Purchasing Intention	-0.024	-0.026	-0.002	-0.233	0.175

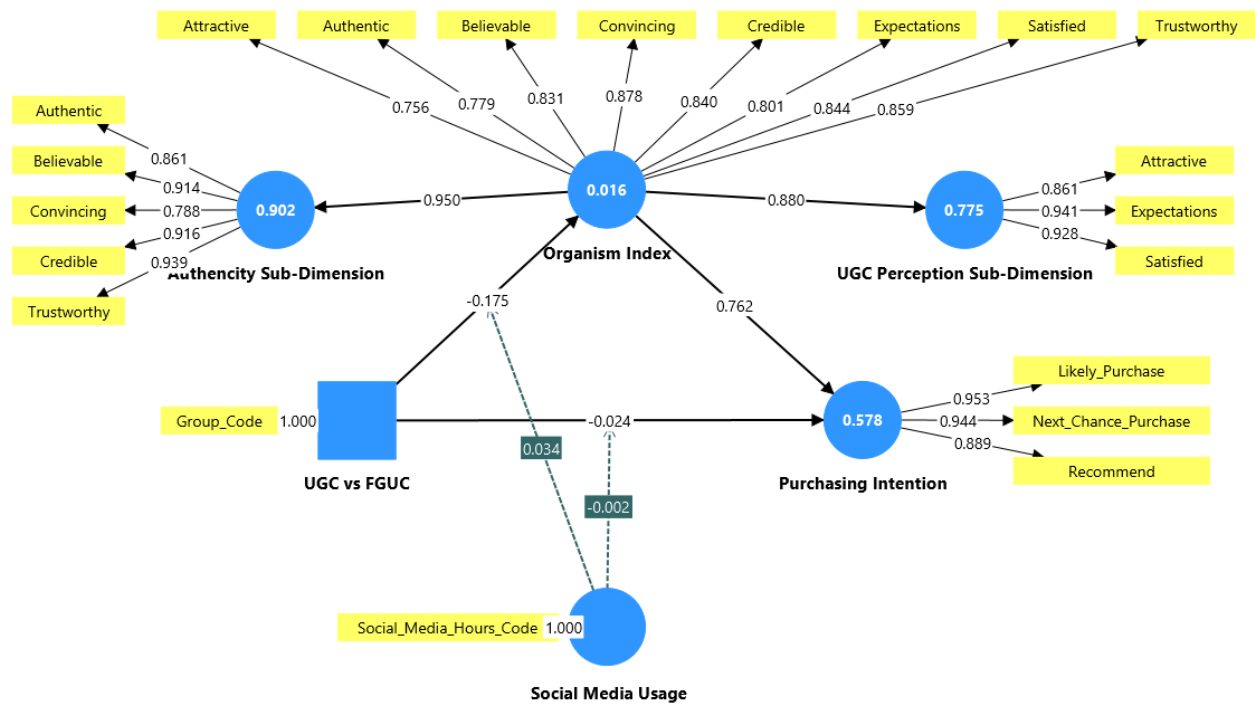
R-square Matrix

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Authenticity Sub-Dimension	0.902	0.902
Organism Index	0.016	-0.003
Purchasing Intention	0.578	0.566
UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	0.775	0.773

f-square Matrix

	Authenticity Sub-Dimension	Organism Index	Purchasing Intention	Social Media Usage	UGC Perception Sub-Dimension	UGC vs FGUC	Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC
Authenticity Sub-Dimension							
Organism Index	9.232		1.352		3.440		
Purchasing Intention							
Social Media Usage		0.004	0.004				
UGC Perception Sub-Dimension							
UGC vs FGUC		0.008	0.000				
Social Media Usage x UGC vs FGUC		0.000	0.000				

PLS-SEM Algorithmic Diagram



Appendix E

Declaration of AI Usage

In this thesis, Generative AI, such as Gemini, has been used mainly in the beginning stages of our research for the purpose of brainstorming and organizing the structure of our timeline. AI tools, specifically ScopusAI, were used to navigate the vast existing literature in Marketing research, as well as provide us with an overview of important topics within the scope of this thesis. Additionally, ScopusAI assisted us in better understanding the targeted research gap and the various literature streams, acting as a virtual librarian.

We want to emphasize that we understand the process of how Generative AI functions and that it does not base its responses purely on facts. As such, all generated responses were critically analyzed to ensure the validity of their contents. We appreciate its potential and would like to expressly state that no text or data was generated with the use of AI. All text, data, analysis, and decisions concerning this thesis were produced solely by the authors, and AI, such as Grammarly, was used strictly to provide suggestions concerning spelling, grammar, and sentence structure.