Brand Engagement on social media and its Impact on brand equity in Higher Education: Integrating the social identity perspective

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Brand Engagement on social media and its Impact on brand equity in Higher Education:
Integrating the social identity perspective
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Abstract

Purpose

The rapid adoption of social media has resulted in a fundamental shift in the way communication and collaboration take place. While social media is recognized as an important marketing communication tool, it has become overlooked how social media marketing activities (user-generated and firm-generated content) influence brand equity creation in the higher education sector. Drawing from social identity theory, this study identifies how higher education institutions develop customer-based brand equity using social media marketing, and social brand engagement, taking cross-comparison between high and low subjective norms.

Design/methodology/approach

A survey was used to collect data from a sample of 936 undergraduates of private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka and Vietnam. These data were gathered using purposive sampling and in testing the hypothesis and structure among the variables, structural equation modeling was used to determine the relationship between the study variables.

Findings

For the conceptual framework, the author found that the structural equation model complies with the empirical data. The structural equation model shows that social brand engagement mediates the relationship between user-generated content, firm-generated content, and brand equity. Further, the subjective norms were found to moderate the relationship between user-generated content, firm-generated content, and social brand engagement, highlighting that the lower the subjective norms the higher the influence on social brand engagement as students receive low pressure and influence from external parties.

Research limitations/implications

The study was conducted at private higher education institutes in Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Future research could benefit from the perceptions of undergraduates in public higher education institutes. Future researchers could widen the diversity of service settings in the sample and replicate this investigation to discover if the results are consistent across the whole services sector.

Originality/value
The current research contributes to the services marketing and branding literature in the higher education context. The paper presents the crucial elements in building brand equity for higher education institutes to fill the existing gaps in higher education branding literature. The findings of the current study provide strategies to improve the higher education sector.

Keywords: user-generated content, firm-generated content, social brand engagement, customer-based brand equity, subjective norms, higher education

Paper type Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are being driven towards commercial competition imposed by economic forces resulting from the development of global education markets (Gibbs, 2018). While the competition in the global marketplace is increasing, HEIs were trying hard to differentiate their offering to stay above the competitor (Elsharnouby, 2015). Accordingly, Mourad et al. (2019) argued that the key strategy for HEIs to survive in a difficult competitive environment is to create unique brand equity for themselves. Furthermore, the choice of a HEIs is a long-term personal investment in one’s life, which incurred a higher level of risk. Positive brand equity provides a signal to the targeted stakeholders that the promised service will be delivered, thus mitigating risk associated with experience and credence qualities (Foroudi et al., 2017). As such, relevant brand equity enables HEIs to foster their competitive advantage relationships by identifying the set of perceptions, preferences, and associations that current and prospective have about the brands (Jackson, 2019). It has been recognized as an integral element in developing students’ positive perceptions of HEIs (Dennis et al., 2017).

Recently, branding activities of HEIs have been developed beyond traditional channels of communication to technology-enhanced digital marketing using social media platforms as communication channels (Fujita et al. 2017; Perera et al. 2022). The Digital generation of Gen Z and Millennials has a large online presence and frequently thinks of social media sites as places to both gather and disseminate information (Chugh and Ruhi, 2018). The increasing interactive usage of SM enhances students’ engagement with HEI brands in the social media sphere (Roopchund et al., 2019). It opens new opportunities for the students to seek, share, and gather relevant HEIs’ brand information from different stakeholders via conversation, activities, and discussions (Schivinski et al., 2016).
During the global pandemic of Covid - 19, like any other industry, HEIs have canceled many of their marketing offline activities such as open days, and exhibitions to cope with the prevailing situation (Turnbull et al., 2021). Although the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on economies and societies has yet to be determined, most predictions indicate a post-Covid recession stage in addition to several changes in human behavior (Farnell et al., 2021). In response to future uncertainties, HEIs have altered their branding activities on social media and looking for innovative strategies to survive in this situation. Branding on social media for HEI is still an important research priority, especially after the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic, as successful branding can lead to various outcomes that influence the sustainability of the institutions, such as students’ engagement and loyalty (Ross, 2020). Scholars have been interested in social media since its blizzard explosion in many contexts. The use of social media as a marketing communication tool in higher education was one of these concerns, which has received some investigation but is still in its early stages.

The rising popularity of social media has offered a platform for students to gather, seek, and share their knowledge, experiences, and preferences while selecting HEIs (Peruta & Shields, 2018). Social media has dramatically influenced students to engage with HEIs over different social networking sites (Clark et al., 2017). In light of the exponential growth of social network sites and their integral role in branding, social media platforms play a prominent and vital role in encouraging students to engage with HEIs-related branding activities (Pringle & Fritz, 2019). Similarly, HEIs also create a variety of posts on their official social networking sites to enhance the students’ interaction with the institute while facilitating students’ social engagement with HEI brands (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Therefore, Social Brand Engagement (SBE) opens up new opportunities for prospective students to gather HEIs’ brand information from existing and potential students (Perera et al., 2022). Despite the importance of SBE and its potential benefit to students and the HEIs, the effect of SBE has received little attention in higher education literature. The general concept of applying social media to engage with potential students through a branding strategy is convincing (Waqas, 2022). However, limited studies have investigated this topic in-depth, specifically on how content on social media should be managed to enhance students’ brand engagement and HEIs’ brand equity. Meanwhile, students’ brand engagement is often recognized as an important sign of digital customer relationship management (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022), which becomes a trigger for enrolment intention (Kumar
Therefore, what remains unclear is how HEIs use social media marketing to facilitate SBE in creating a unique value about HEI in the minds of the students (Waqas, 2022).

Many factors play a role in prospective higher education students’ decisions about which university they want to attend such as institution recognition, learning environment, country image (Hailat et al., 2022), educational establishments (James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017), employability, and community outreach unquestionably take a part in their complex decision-making process. Generation Z members (i.e., prospective students) do consider others’ opinions and perspectives in making their decision, but they still want to be listened to, valued, and involved (Miotto et al., 2020). In particular, students’ perceptions of the HEI brands are depending on the perceived social pressure and the opinions of other people whom they believe as important, which resulted in so-called subjective norms (Utami, 2017). Subjective norms are influencing the students’ relationship with the HEIs while inducing them to behave in a certain manner and to comply with other people’s views (Perera et al., 2020). Since the students rely heavily on social media and online communities, they search for relevant information about HEIs on social networking platforms and gather opinions before making their enrolment decision (Hamadi et al., 2022). However, Yau (2015) noted that subjective norms in cyberspace are influencing student–HEI relationships. Even though the students are the most influential contributors to online reviews for HEIs, students’ perception of subjective norms in developing brand engagement in the higher education context has been largely disregarded (Tavakoly Sany et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study extends the existing literature and provides empirical evidence about how the content on social media influences brand equity via students’ social brand engagement. This examines the extent to which social media marketing, and social brand engagement influence undergraduates’ perception of brand equity in higher education sectors. Using social identity theory (SIT) as the theoretical foundation, the current research argues that marketing activities on social media networking sites create a significant impact on enhancing brand equity via social brand engagement as the mediator. This study also takes into consideration the moderating effect of the undergraduates’ perception of subjective norms in identifying the most influential content in social media to develop students’ HEI engagement. In
terms of managerial contributions, the findings provide a valuable resource in the preparation of
the HEI branding and marketing strategies, through social media campaigns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing with User-Generated Content and Firm-Generated Content

Social Media Marketing utilizes the creations and exchanges of User-generated content
(UGC), and Firm-generated content (FGC) (Müller and Christandl, 2019). Since UGC is
developed by users for non-commercial purposes, brand-related UGC from trusted information
sources may be more influential than other resources within the consumer’s own network of
social connections (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Wang (2017) noted that many social media users
are engaging in UGC, approximately 61% of Gen Z people report that they frequently check
their social media accounts to see whether their posts are getting likes by friends, and if their
friends say negative things about them. In the context of higher education, UGC facilitates the
stakeholders to create social media groups to connect with the right audience as part of the HEIs’
marketing activities by sharing their experiences with the institutes (Swart et al., 2019). Students
are susceptible to using UGC to gather information while actively participating in sharing the
information on their personal social media pages (Yu & Ko, 2021).

On the other hand, FGC is the content created by the firms on their official social media
pages about their brands (Colicev et al., 2019). It should be noted that customers' decision to
engage with brands on social media is a choice, however, firms must actively interact with
consumers regarding their product and brand development (Dwived et al, 2021).

The HEIs are also highly engaged in sharing FGC as they are trying to reach prospects
globally. Since the younger generation is more oriented toward social media, the HEIs are
sharing information on the official brand pages to enhance awareness (Poulis et al., 2018; Song
et al., 2023). For example, HEIs have separate Facebook pages such as club pages, different
pages for different academic departments, and sports pages to cater to the target audience (Peruta
and Shields, 2018, Haikel-Elsabeh et al., 2019).

Previous research has highlighted the importance of students’ social media use for their
self-esteem (Steinfield et al., 2008), social capital formation (Ellison et al., 2007), educational
engagement (Junco, 2012), and acculturation (DeAndrea et al., 2012). However, research has not
yet empirically investigated the relevancy of UGC, and FGC for higher education sectors. This
research offers additional insight into how students interact with their HEI brands based on the content generated on social media.

**Social Brand Engagement in social media**

Social Brand Engagement (SBE) is a full social act without boundaries that allows participants to engage in social interactions with brands and other customers (Kozinets, 2014). Customer engagement is, however, context-specific, giving rise to potential variations in the interpretation in different contexts including customer brand engagement, brand community engagement, social media engagement, and social brand engagement (Brodie et al. 2011; Dolan et al., 2016). The recent development of engagement research in marketing acknowledges that engagement encompasses a network of interactions with other people, all of which can influence engagement with the brand and goes beyond a dyadic contact between a person and a brand (Bal et al. 2015). Adopting this network approach of engagement acknowledges that while interactions between students typically involve references to the institution’s brand, they frequently occur outside of its direct control (Farhat et al., 2021). Although this social exchange is not directly under the host brand's control, it can offer chances for individuals to participate (for example, in the online brand communities) and hence facilitate social brand engagement (Perera et al., 2020; Hayran & Ceylan, 2022). This viewpoint acknowledges that the overall social brand engagement - the brand here being "the university" - is a complex aggregation of engaging interactions with various others (such as other students or university representatives) and represents institutional engagement between the student and the university (Conduit et al., 2016).

Accordingly, this social brand engagement happens when a student engages in conversation with other students concerning the university, which in turn strengthens the student's relationship with the institution. Hence, applying these perspectives to the university context, Altschwager et al. (2018, page 85) defined social brand engagement as “the student’s level of interactions and connections with the brand (i.e. the university brand) based on interactions with other students concerning that brand”. It becomes imperative to understand that
the majority of engagement studies adopt an intra-individual, customer psychology-based perspective.

**Brand Equity for HEIs**

The term brand equity has emerged as one of the most crucial topics in marketing management since the 1990s (Lee et al., 2017), which has been recognized as an important factor in creating a competitive market advantage and differentiation (Iglesias et al., 2019). Farquhar (1989, p. 24) defined brand equity as the “added value with which a given brand endows a product”. Brand equity can be discussed from three main perspectives: financial-based brand equity, employee-based brand equity, and customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Keller (1993) noted that, from a marketing perspective, brand equity is referred to as CBBE, which is the focus of this research. Aaker (1991, p. 15) defined CBBE as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers”.

The HE sector has shifted its focus towards marketing-oriented approaches, such as advertising, and branding whereby students became customers of the HEIs (Guilbault, 2018). Gupta and Kaushik (2018) argue that higher education, as a service sector, has many customers, and stakeholders (e.g. future employers, government, society), but the students are the core customers. Therefore, this study is also focusing on CBBE for HEIs from the perspectives of undergraduates, considering them as the customers of the HEIs.

The intangible nature of HEIs’ services creates some difficulties in the evaluation of the delivered education quality and relevant features in advance (Pinar et al., 2014; Eldegwy et al., 2018). In this context, developing strong, positive, and distinctive associations with the brand won’t happen until they’ve completed the experience, which typically entails finishing a degree (Ostojić et al., 2021). This experience is a mid-to-long-term commitment that will have an impact on a person’s identity after consumption (Vukasovi, 2015). HEIs may thus raise this expenditure to develop a distinctive brand identity to set themselves apart from the competition while making a profit from it (Carvalho et al., 2021). The fact that a university degree is a one-time purchase is another unique characteristic of HEIs that cannot be disregarded when evaluating brand equity (Farhat et al., 2021). Therefore, loyalty cannot be measured in terms of repeat purchases but may be shown in the student's choice to continue postgraduate studies at the same HEI (Vukasovi, 2015) or the alumni's dedication (Pedro et al., 2018). Students' connections
with tangible and intangible aspects are therefore tied to the brand equity of HEIs (Mourad et al., 2019).

HEIs, strive to build positive brand equity to (a) increase their brand awareness among stakeholders (Dennis et al., 2017), (b) increase their student enrollment (Lim et al., 2020), (c) make it easier for them to hire top-notch faculty and administrators (Mourad et al., 2019), (d) set themselves apart from competing for new and existing HEIs, and (e) increase their market share (Perera et al., 2022). According to Endo et al. (2019), limited research in the branding literature attempted to identify the issues and factors that are crucial for creating strong HEI brand equity. The ability of HEIs to communicate the caliber of the provided services is facilitated by developing and managing brand equity in the HE marketplaces (Mourad et al., 2019). Thus, this research adopts an empirical model developed by Lassar et al. (1995) by synthesizing the qualities of higher education services that influence brand equity with the conceptualized dimensions of brand equity: social image, performance, attachment, trustworthiness, and value.

The inclusion of the service system viewpoint of engagement adds to the body of literature on education by giving a comprehensive depiction of the complex and various interactions that contribute to overall social brand engagement. However, what remains unclear is how to foster students’ social brand engagement in developing brand equity on social media. Social brand engagement will identify in this study as an effective mediator to link UGC, FGC, and CBBE in the higher education context.

**Theoretical foundation – Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) highlighted that people are inclined to assign themselves exemplary features of a social category in social settings (Tajfel et al., 1979). Individuals go beyond their identity or their sense of self and develop a social identity with the group. As a result, individuals often behave consistently with these group expectations to maintain their associations with the group and other members (Tajfel et al., 1979). Marketing research demonstrates that consumers identify with brands that echo and strengthen their self-identities through their engagement with the brand communities (Fong et al., 2021). Members of brand communities engage in collective behaviors, such as sharing norms, to extol the virtues of their beloved brands, and help other brand identifiers (An et al., 2019).
SIT has been considered appropriate for investigating customer-brand relationships, and the effects of identification can complement other important research streams, such as brand equity research (Lam et al., 2010). Young individuals tend to identify themselves as digital natives and social media savviness. Social identity creation and expression motivate members to engage with relevant online communities on social media. As group members, individuals perceive a similarity between self and other group members (identity similarity) (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), it triggers their active participation in social media group activities to seek, share, and discuss some similar interesting topics including higher education. Their level of effort in engaging in the social group increases their sense of commitment and belonging with the social brand groups (Hughes et al., 2019). This provides a theoretical basis on which individual customers connect with a social category (the brand) or a social group (other users of the same brand) and enhance, maintain, or protect their connections through the content generated on social media (Fujita et al., 2017).

SIT also assumes that people identify themselves with certain social groups to enhance their self-esteem and self-concept (Cooper et al., 2017). SIT has been used to explain conformity and socialization and group-based bias in peer groups and also serves as a theoretical paradigm to explain the relationship between customers and brands (Kuo & Hou, 2017). A brand can serve as a symbol for a social group, allowing customers to feel a sense of shared identity and belonging with that brand. When brands portray a good brand image and effectively position this image in the minds of consumers, these consumers will tend to show some degree of bias toward such brands (An et al., 2019). Social media has matured into the prime channel for regular interactions and the development of brand-customer relationships that enrich social identity (Burnasheva & Villalobos-Moron, 2019). Social media is a prime example of a public setting that may exert such social influence. Individuals adopt social media as a platform to enforce social inclusion by expressing identical behaviour among the desired social group (Chen & Lin, 2019). The desire to establish social consensus among a particular social group drives individuals to exploit brand engagement across a public platform, like social media (Chu & Chen, 2019). Online brand communities retain a vital presence for consumer assertion of engagement (Delbaere et al., 2021). Interestingly, brand-customer connections are strengthened as consumers publicly identify with brands in pursuit of building a self-identity based on what that brand represents (Prentice et al., 2019). The consolidated global network of users, under a common
platform of user-generated content, encourages individuals to express any personal opinion or preference (Mayrhofer et al., 2020). Users create a variety of content forming distinct relations with brands through their pursuit of gaining the desired social identity (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). As a form of digital content marketing, UGC appears to be more successful in boosting brand familiarity with brands connotation due to its connected insight into credibility and trustworthiness, thus, it may reduce customer doubtfulness about the company’s general intent (Rasool, & Pathania, 2021). As a result, the content that has been created for non-advertising purposes (e.g. UGC) has a greater impact on customer responses than the content that has been created for advertising purposes (e.g. FGC) (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Several studies use social identity to explain active participation in virtual communities through user and firms created content (Tsai and Bagozzi, 2014; Zhang & Li, 2022; Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022), which develops through in-group ties prompting people to interact with other members and firms (Wolter and Cronin, 2017). Social identification with social media means that the user has a sense of belonging to that social media community and will willingly continue to engage with the brands on social media platforms to develop brand equity (Chen, 2021). Members who have identified as group members are more likely to dedicate more time and energy to engaging in branding activities (Zhang & Li, 2022).

Students’ interaction the social media content increases their engagement with brands and enhances brand knowledge among customers (Kisiołek et al., 2021). This brand knowledge alternatively evokes students’ feelings and association with the SBE and denotes a higher level of interaction with the firms’ brand which in turn creates brand equity. Social media provides additional touchpoints to encourage social engagement between the brand and the customer throughout SBE, which deepens the customer-brand relationship. Customers’ SBE with brand information can satisfy and delight customers which ultimately leads to brand equity. A higher level of interaction with social media content reflects higher engagement with brands and thus enhances brand equity. Thus, customers’ SBE strengthens the customers’ interaction with content generated on social media, resulting in creating more value vis-a-vis brand equity (Gummerus et al., 2012). Effective social engagement with UGC and FGC shortens the brand
decision-making process (Flanagin et al., 2018) which in return could enhance the brand equity by assuring the credibility that a brand incorporates into the users’ mindset. We assumed that social identity played a similar role in members’ participation behavior in the user-created interest community. All things considered and taking into consideration that customers are more frequently exposed to UGC than to FGC (Colicev et al., 2019), it is logical to hypothesize that the two types of digital content marketing differ in their relative influence on customer responses such as online brand advocacy.

Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: Social brand engagement mediates the effect of (a) user-generated content, (b) firm-generated content on CBBE

Subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour which is formed by aggregating the beliefs of groups or individuals that matter to an individual (Northrup and Smaldone, 2017). This is related to the perceived social influences/pressures to indulge or not to indulge in a given behavior viewed by their reference groups if they perform a certain behavior (Wan et al., 2017). An individual’s behaviour can often be dependent on the social networks and organization one belongs to a social group (Spartz et al., 2017). Therefore, subjective norms incorporate perceptions of whether a particular action is expected by friends, family, and society (Wan et al., 2017).

Social identification of the self is comprised of two identities, personal and social. Personal identity refers to an identification of personal characteristics; whereas social identity considers a collective identification of the group that the individual belongs to (Stets & Burke, 2000). Consumers are also said to own objects (i.e. brands) related to social identity as a form of ‘identity reassurance’ (Bartsch et al., 2016, p. 3631). A social identity has the most influence on an individual’s behaviour and shared norms when that identity is salient (Charness & Chen, 2020). The more salient a certain social identity is, the higher likelihood the individual will engage in “behavioural choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity”, such as identity-congruent brand choices and brand engagement (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Identity salience posits that individuals have multiple social identities that are meaningful to them and that these identities are arranged hierarchically, with identities that are more salient in this hierarchy being more meaningful to the consumer, thus more likely to affect or determine
...consumer attitudes and behaviour towards branded products (An et al., 2019). Individuals largely own and purchase products that are representative of their most salient social identities, avoid brands and other stimuli that contrast with these identities, and hold more favorable attitudes toward brands that represent these identities (Burnasheva et al., 2019). This is because engaging in identity-congruent behaviour enhances individuals to follow the norms and opinions of others (Hernandez & Sarge, 2020). Individuals seek to enhance both identities by embracing brand-related behaviour that accentuates their individuality; however, this is an individualism that is socially commended (Gilal et al., 2020). Customers pursue brands that convey personal attributes and social identification while maintaining societal compliance on a public scale (Rather et al., 2021). Individuals altered their behaviours according to societal standards, especially within circumstances involving high salience purchasing the brands (Nguyen et al., 2022). Individuals chase social identification within brand communities to develop favorable attitudes toward the brands (Mittal et al., 2022).

Some previous studies have identified that subjective norms are significant drivers of highly interactive services due to the intangible nature of the services (Raymond et al., 2018). Subjective norms further have the potential to develop brand communities that engage in conversation about the brands (Danylchuk et al., 2018). Subjective norms have the ability to influence individuals’ brand-related behaviour in the social media sphere (Wong et al., 2020; Chandran & Alammari, 2021). This denotes that the social pressure the individuals receive is important for the members of the social networks about passing along brand messages (Potgieter and Naidoo, 2017). Having a high level of subjective norms indicates that the customers view the behaviour of others in the brand community and act accordingly to the group’s expectations (Chandran & Alammari, 2021). Therefore, higher subjective norms on the content generated on social media could increase the prospective customers’ perception of the social media brand and thus enhances social brand engagement. Thus, prospective customers’ perception towards brand-related UGC and FGC in increasing social brand engagement expect to vary based on the high and lower subjective norms. Accordingly, the researchers formulate the following hypotheses:

**H2: Subjective norms moderate the effect of (a) UGC on SBE, and (b) FGC on SBE**

Subjective norms impact behavioral intention such as people close to the individual like family members and other important people like friends’ perception influence consumer decisions about the brand (Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022). Consumers’ identification withing the
groups induces them to follow the norms shared which influence the relationship between
consumers’ brand engagement and purchase intention (Perera et al., 2020). While subjective
norms from an attitudinal perspective are defined as the perceived social pressure from others for
an individual to behave in a certain manner toward the focal brand, it demonstrates a favorable
attitude toward the brand and its equity (Rizwan et al., 2021). The definition of perceived social
pressure is very similar to attitude as its consumer’s subjective evaluation or judgment about a
brand's overall superiority (Shah et al., 2016). Attitude can better predict intentions when the
subjective norm is favorable (Zhuang et al., 2021). Individuals who are influenced by the
opinions of significant others are more likely to alter their attitude towards a particular behavior
as per their subjective norms (Lee & Chow, 2020). Subjective norms were found to impact
attitude and brand engagement favorably among Gen Z consumers (Kashif et al., 2018). Young
consumers under the stronger influence of their peers may modify their behaviors. Various
studies have revealed the interaction effect of norms on the relationship between brand equity
and purchase intention (Abdullah et al., 2018; Febrian & Fadly, 2021). Social norms could
support increasing the strength of brand engagement to increase brand equity (Zhang et al.,
2021). Subjective norm as a moderator has been studied by earlier researchers in the context of
tourist satisfaction and visitors’ revisit intention (Liang & Shiau, 2018). In addition, recent
studies provide evidence that subjective norms had a strong moderating effect on the purchase
intention of air tickets through e-commerce websites (Wan et al., 2018) and luxury purchase
behavior by Gen Y consumers (Jain, 2020). Hence, we hypothesize in collectivistic cultures such
as Sri Lanka and Vietnam where a person’s decisions are directed by significant others (Jain,
2019), subjective norms may play a crucial role in explaining the relationship between social
brand engagement and brand equity. Based on the above, we offer the following moderation
hypothesis:

**H3: Subjective norms moderate the effect of SBE on brand equity**
Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

**METHODOLOGY**

To evaluate our hypotheses model, we employed a quantitative survey design using a questionnaire with inclusion/exclusion criteria to only involve respondents with some prior experience with social media brand engagement. Since this study is focusing on HEIs’ brand equity, the undergraduates who are currently studying in Sri Lankan and Vietnam HEIs have been considered as the target population.

Two criteria were applied to identify the eligibility of each individual for this study: the first was that they must be a current undergraduate of the selected HEI, and the second was they must have at least one social media profile because some questions were based on undergraduates’ experience with social media. The researcher selected four institutions; one from each category based on (a) research-intensive, (b) teaching-intensive, (c) regional-focused, and (d) special interest from Vietnamese, and Sri Lankan HE sectors (Kandiko and Mawer 2013). All students in this study were enrolled in a degree program at accredited Sri Lankan, and Vietnamese HEIs (Table 1). A total of 1024 questionnaires were distributed among the undergraduates based on purposive sampling (Yamane, 1973). Out of 1024, 978 were returned and 936 were considered valid for subsequent quantitative analysis as 42 were unusable due to the missing responses. The questionnaire was designed using and adapting existing scale items in the literature. All responses were recorded using an ordinal 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from “completely disagree” to “completely agree”. At the early stage of the questionnaire design process, the researcher developed a preliminary pool of measurement items for all constructs in the theoretical framework based on the information derived from the literature review. In the next stage, an initial screening was made and the aim of it was twofold; firstly, to
ensure that the chosen questions were appropriate for the Sri Lankan, and Vietnamese culture, and secondly, to confirm the questions can be clearly understood by the undergraduates. In the final stage of the questionnaire development process, appropriate items for each research construct were incorporated in an initial questionnaire copy, which was then reviewed by ten undergraduates, ten academics, and two marketing managers comprising both Sri Lankans and Vietnamese in order to ensure the clarity of the questionnaire statements and the comprehension of measurement scale. The questionnaire was designed using existing scales from Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995), Dessart (2017), Osei-Frimpong and Mclean (2018), Schivinski et al. (2016), and Srinivasan (2015) (see Table 2).

Lassar et al. (1995) are considered the forerunners in measuring customer-based brand equity in the service sector. In developing the model, they have focused on the perception of the customers rather than objective indicators and the global value of a service brand (Alexiadou et al., 2017). The model proposed by Lassar et al (1995) has been used by several researchers, and empirically tested in various service settings (Horng et al., 2012; Christodoulides et al., 2015; Abdul, 2017; Hasni et al., 2018), and suggested, this scale is more appropriate in measuring customer-based service brand equity than other existing scales.

Descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis have been used to create profile data and to identify the observed variables for these constructs using SPSS 23. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to assess the goodness-of-fit for the framework and structural equation modeling was used to analyze the structural relationships of the framework through AMOS 23.

**FINDINGS**

The demographic data relating to gender, year, hours on social media, and widely used social networking sites, are summarized in Table 1.

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<td>Hours on Social Media</td>
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It is seen that the gender breakdown was 30.99% male and 69.01% female. The sample consists of more female customers than males. This is justified when compared with the general gender distribution of Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The average time on social media has been identified based on the active participation hours with social media. It shows a higher percentage in the last category which represents social media usage for more than 4 hours (38.7%). The lowest number of respondents use social media for less than one hour (2.7%). Average social media usage per day indicates through 2-3 hours. As the researcher expected, the most widely used social networking site among the selected sample was Facebook. 48.2% of Facebook users indicate nearly half of the respondents in the sample use Facebook more than other social networking sites. According to Vietnam digital landscape (2018), and Digital Sri Lanka (2018), the widely used SNS in both countries was Facebook, and the second position was owned by Youtube (15.0%), which is to some extent consistent with the results of the study.

**Construct Validity**

To assess the adequacy of the measures, the authors estimated the convergent validity through item reliability (Table 2). Firstly, item reliability was evaluated based on the factor loadings of the items (i.e., observed variables) on their respective constructs. As all the factor loadings were higher than the threshold value of 0.5, convergent validity was supported (Hair et al., 2014). Secondly, construct reliability was assessed through Cronbach alpha coefficients. As Cronbach alpha coefficients were higher than the threshold value of 0.7, construct reliability was supported (Hair et al., 2014).

*Table 2: Factor loading and reliability*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Brand Engagement (SBE) – Dessart (2017)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel enamoured with this social network</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very concerned about everything related to this social network</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel this social network is very interesting</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When interacting with this social network, I feel very happy</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel very comfortable when interacting with this social network</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with this social network is my pleasure</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of time thinking about this social network</td>
<td>0.678</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of time caring about this social network</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When interacting with this social network, I forgot the things around me</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time passes very quickly when I use this social network</td>
<td>0.712</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was fascinated when interacting with this social network</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When interacting with this social network, it is difficult to separate me</td>
<td>0.767</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share my opinions on social networks</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share interesting content on this social network.</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often ask questions on this social network</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often search for information on this social network</td>
<td>0.738</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often seek help on this social network</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to convince others to be interested in this social network</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried to protect this social network from criticism</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always talk well about this social network with others</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) - Lassar et al. (1995)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can expect outstanding teaching quality from this university</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td>0.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the study period, I found that the quality of this university was</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less prone to errors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This university seems to be a learning place without quality problems</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel proud of the decision to enrol at this university</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This university will be well appreciated by my friends</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on information on social networks, this university is suitable for my personality</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This university degree is valuable

Considering the level of tuition that I pay for this university; I believe I will receive more than the tuition that I spend

I chose this university degree because of the benefits I received

If I look at the faculty and facilities of the university, I find this university very reliable.

For students' interests, the university seems very attentive.

I believe this university does not take advantage of its students

After experiencing this university, I was very pleased with my growth and knowledge

I have a positive feeling about this university

My time at the university helped me feel friendlier towards this university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm-Generated Content (FGC) - Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I follow the information posted by this university on its official social networking sites to get updated information about the university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow up by communicating with the university's official social networking sites to get more information about the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will follow the information on the university's official social networking sites if the university-related information is interesting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User-Generated Content (UGC) - Schivinski et al. (2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within these social networking sites, I feel satisfied with the content shared by other users about my university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within these social networking sites, the content shared by other users about my university meets my expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within these social networking sites, the content shared by other users about my university is very attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within these social networking sites, the content shared by other users about my university is better than other universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective Norms (SN) - Srinivasan (2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firm-Generated Content (FGC) - Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-Generated Content (UGC) - Schivinski et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The authors also estimated discriminant validity to further ensure the adequacy of the measures. As all the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were higher than the threshold value of 0.5, convergent validity was supported (Hair et al., 2014). Discriminant validity was further evaluated by comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with the bivariate correlations among constructs (Table 3). Composite Reliability (CR) values were higher than 0.7, therefore, construct reliability was further supported.

Table 3: construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminate Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>FGC</th>
<th>UGC</th>
<th>CBSE</th>
<th>SBE</th>
<th>SN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGC</td>
<td>4.4808</td>
<td>1.16513</td>
<td>0.852</td>
<td>0.658</td>
<td>0.811a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>4.3478</td>
<td>1.22711</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>0.212b</td>
<td>0.760a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBBE</td>
<td>4.7371</td>
<td>0.97254</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.464b</td>
<td>0.393b</td>
<td>0.935a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>4.3782</td>
<td>1.11835</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>0.177b</td>
<td>0.317b</td>
<td>0.298b</td>
<td>0.823a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN</td>
<td>4.5815</td>
<td>1.30951</td>
<td>0.648</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>0.178b</td>
<td>0.212b</td>
<td>0.005b</td>
<td>0.320b</td>
<td>0.760a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Square root of AVE in the diagonal
b Pearson correlations among constructs

A preliminary analysis revealed that the correlation between the variables ranged from 0.17 and 0.46. Since correlations were less than 0.75, multicollinearity is not a problem with the data (Wheeler & Tiefelsdorf, 2005). Further, CR values and reliability coefficients were within the acceptable and threshold levels, thus vouching or the reliability of the constructs. As an additional check, we assessed the VIF values and found that these values were less than five for all the constructs, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem with the data.

Due to our data which is self-reported, a common method bias test was executed (Podsakoff 2003). We used Harman’s single-factor analysis (Harman, 1976), and the results show that 38.4% (less than 50% threshold) of variance was accounted for by the first factor.
Therefore, we can conclude that this study data has no common method bias problems (Podsakoff, 2003).

Hypothesis Testing

The model yielded acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.805$, GFI = 0.933, AGFI=0.911, RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.951, and SRMR =0.0387.

In addition to this, the mediating effect of social brand engagement between subjective norms, UGC, FGC, and the dimensions of brand equity was also analyzed (see Table 4) using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes, and Scharkow (2013).

Table 4: Summary of path coefficients and associated bootstrap confidence intervals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>CBBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without SBE as the mediators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of UGC</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of FGC</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With SBE as the mediators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of UGC</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect of UGC via SBE</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With SBE as the mediators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of FGC</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect of FGC via SBE</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 1 depicts that social brand engagement mediates the effect of (a) UGC, (b) FGC on CBBE. The indirect effect between UGC and CBBE was significant (indirect effect = 0.10; 95% bootstrap CI from 0.18 to 0.27). In addition, the direct effect of UGC on CBBE was also significant (direct effect = 0.17; 95% bootstrap CI from 0.14 to 0.32). This suggests social brand engagement partially mediates the relationship between UGC, and CBBE. Further, the indirect effect between FGC and CBBE was found to be significant (indirect effect = 0.22; 95% bootstrap CI from 0.16 to 0.29). The direct effect of FGC on CBBE remained statistically significant over and above the indirect effect, indicating a partial mediation (direct effect = 0.29; 95% bootstrap CI from 0.24 to 0.34).
Further, this study identified the moderating effect of subjective norms (see Table 5) through multigroup analysis using AMOS.

**Table 5: The moderating effect of subjective norms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Less Norm</th>
<th>More Norm</th>
<th>Differences between parameters</th>
<th>t-value differences between parameters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>t-value</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>t-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC SBE</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>4.578***</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>4.059***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.519**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGC SBE</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>6.647***</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>4.237***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>2.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBE BE</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>4.197***</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>6.288***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>2.09**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*B = Estimate effect, *** p<0.01, ** p < .05; * < .1, N/S: Not significance*

In Hypothesis 2, we argued that subjective norms moderate the effects of (a) UGC on SBE, and (b) FGC on SBE. The findings demonstrated that lower the subjective norms higher the influence on social brand engagement through UGC, and FGC, supporting H2(a), and H2(b). In this sense, the students seem to explore more information via UGC, and FGC, when they receive low pressure and influence from external parties. The higher the norms led them to follow the behaviours of others with limited access to the content generated on social media. In Hypothesis 3, we argue that subjective norms moderate the effect of social brand engagement on brand equity. The higher the norms the higher the influence in creating brand equity.

**DISCUSSION**

This study proposes an integrated framework of social media and brand engagement to provide empirical evidence of the effects on CBBE from the student’s perspective drawing on social identity theory.

**Theoretical Contribution**

This study contributes to the literature by advancing knowledge on the importance of content generated on SM for the formation of social brand engagement and brand equity in the
higher education sectors. We drew upon social identity theory to show how UGC and FGC can impact students’ perception of HEI brands which have received limited attention in social media research so far, especially in the context of higher education, and this study provides several theoretical contributions.

Firstly, we employed a social identity lens to better comprehend the phenomena of social media. The significance of social identity in relationship marketing has been extensively proven (Fujita et al., 2018), and we empirically showed its use in the context of social media. By studying the influence of identity cues offered in the social media context on the enactment of salient social identity and the role of students’ brand engagement in the higher education context. Given the emergent nature of this research area, this work is one of the few studies to empirically examine students’ engagement with HEI brands from the social identity perspective. By taking the social identity, and applying it to the higher education context, an important contribution has been made in understanding the students’ engagement with the content generated on social media and their perception of creating brand equity. Accordingly, this study extended our understanding of how digital natives engage with brands on social media, by providing a vivid illustration of students’ engagement with HEIs through UGC, and FGC. The use of social identity theories to understand how this cohort of students builds and makes sense of relationships with their brand and its constituents has added a fresh perspective to the literature.

Secondly, our findings suggested that UGC, and FGC both increase students’ social brand engagement which in turn enhances brand equity. The results indicate that social brand engagement creates a positive impact on HEI brands and their equity. The findings support the work of Mourad et al. (2020) and also imply that the determinants of brand equity in higher education sectors portray a constructed structure that is robust across service contexts. This study identified that social brand engagement plays an important mediating role in driving brand equity of the HEIs, answering the call for empirical research into the drivers and outcomes of brand equity (Šerić et al., 2018). The previous study only confirms the direct impact of UGC, FGC, and brand equity (Hermaren, and Achyar, 2018), and we confirmed that it should go through social brand engagement in creating brand equity. The findings provide compelling evidence that social brand engagement mediates the relationship between UGC, FGC, and brand equity, which had not received much attention in the literature. The findings further support the work of De Villiers (2015) and also imply that brand engagement is a function of individual traits and
predispositions, a postulate that so far has been only conceptual (Wirtz et al., 2013). This is an important phenomenon for HEIs to understand, as the complex and varied interactions from student to student, as well as student to HEI across various touchpoints, all manifest in overall student engagement toward the HEI brands (Conduit et al., 2016). This realization echoes that students’ interaction with other students in social media settings fosters stronger and more frequent brand-related behaviours on SNSs (Algesheimer et al., 2005). While previous research has disregarded the effect of social brand engagement in creating brand equity via UGC, and FGC, we show that it is beneficial to consider consumer identification with the brand, and consumer identification with members of the social network to develop the consumer engagement with the brand and the brand equity. This implies that consumers’ social identification should more effectively translate into persuasion on social media in creating strong brand equity (Chen & Lin, 2019). We confirm that social brand engagement has a stronger persuasive effect in developing brand equity. One of the reasons behind these contrasting findings is that most previous research has considered solely the volume of UGC, and FGC, without decomposing it into consumers’ social identification (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022), as is the case in our study. This should add more firepower to brand engagement when arguing for a positive return on investment on social media.

Thirdly, more significantly, this study has explored the moderating effects of norms and their impact on SBE activities. The previous studies have highlighted the importance of subjective norms (Tavakoly et al., 2021; Perera et al., 2022), but limited studies were on the higher education sector. Our findings reveal that subjective norms are an even more potent predictor of students’ brand engagement with HEIs in the higher education context. Findings highlighted that the students are engaging more with the HEI brands when they receive lower pressure from the people whom they are relying on. When the students receive lower influence from the people the students are following, the students are tented to search for information on social media. The lower the influence from the groups they are in, the higher the reference to the content generated by the users and the HEIs on social media. When there is a lower level of perceived control over the behavior of the students, students are intended to follow the UGC, and FGC on social networking sites. Our explanation for the finding is that the low level of social pressure on the students led them to search for the information they need and engage with engaging brands. According to the social identity theory, brands with higher (vs. lower)
subjective norms have a higher influence on social brand engagement through UGC, and FGC and thus a stronger relationship with HEI brand and brand equity. We find that for low (high) subjective norms, the relationship between, UGC, FGC, and social brand engagement is strong (weak). We believe this is due to the initial high levels of subjective norms of HEIs, making additional marketing efforts less effective. Thus, such brands should first try to control their norms before engaging in social media content strategies (Helal & Ozuem, 2018). One positive finding for such brands is that the effects of brand engagement are mostly positive, suggesting that they can still benefit from subjective norms on social media by encouraging the creation of brand-related UGC (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2020). This confirms our conjecture that brands with better reputations enjoy fewer norms among the people who categorize themselves into different social categories to build their own social identity, even if they use more positive language in their UGC and FGC. In terms of consumption categories, we find that FGC has a stronger positive effect in creating brand engagement when the lower level of norms is shared by the community members. Given that service brands typically have more customer-oriented social media pages, social identification can effectively persuade consumers and offer efficient customer post-purchase service (Singh & Chakrabarti, 2020).

In addition, this study used a moderated analysis to investigate the effects of subjected norms on the relationship between social brand engagement and brand equity. The results clearly show that brand engagement has a significant and positive impact on brand equity, and the subjective norms also positively and significantly moderate the relationship between brand engagement and equity. This study demonstrates how social norms are related to social identity expressiveness and thus links more closely to two concepts that have previously been treated as two independent antecedents of branding (Neville et al., 2021). These analyses show that the effect of social brand engagement on brand equity is moderated by social identity expressiveness. This particular finding also suggests that the role of social norms in previous adoption studies may have been slightly simplified and perhaps even inflated (Lede et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2021). As social identity expressiveness and related concepts are seldom included as determinants of technology adoption, subjective norms often come to play the leading role on behalf of all social and identity-related antecedents (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). The present study shows that subjective norms are related to social identity expressiveness and that social brand engagement and brand equity explain larger portions of the variance in intentions to use norms...
than do in isolation. This finding extended the previous findings of Jahanbakhsh (2023) in the context of the online sphere.

Finally, Sobaih et al. (2016) purport that HEIs in emerging countries suffer from a lack of communication technology to connect with the students. But this study confirmed that social media is widely spread among emerging countries and 85.8% are actively engaging in social media branding activities. This study further highlighted the use of social media by the digital native in emerging countries which requires more attention from both researchers and policymakers. Besides, this study is focusing on the higher education sectors of an emerging country, which is different from the studies conducted in developed countries that were claimed as biased and lack overarching or generalizable implications in emerging countries (Jamali & Karam, 2018).

**Managerial Implications**

This research offers a practical framework for service organizations wishing to design long-term social media strategies. For social media practitioners in the service industry, this study supports the assertion that it is critical to implement strategies to maximize the visibility of the firm through their official social media pages and motivate the users to create content about the firms’ brands on their personal social media pages. Recognizing FGC’s role is critical in influencing social interactions and identifications, and therefore our findings are directly applicable to service organizations.

Further, our research has important implications for higher education marketers. Based on the findings of our study, it is recommended that HEIs need to dedicate resources to creating more content on social media, to enhance their relationship with prospective students. In particular, HEI may want to work with many SM platforms that are available to most students. But, if an HEI creates multiple social media pages, but is very slow to post information or is providing information that is irrelevant, uninteresting, or inaccurate, this could have a detrimental impact on the HEI’s brand value and ultimately on the quality of their relationship with the HEI. Therefore, it always would be helpful for HEIs to motivate students to engage with HEI brands and generate content on social media to receive solicit feedback and interact with their prospective students. Since offering social media pages in and of itself does not guarantee that students will access and/or engage with these pages, it is also important for higher education marketers to develop strategies for encouraging social media usage.
Mostly students are fascinated to engage in using brands on social media to fulfill their hedonic needs. Our results provide some useful insights for retailers, since nowadays, they face the challenge of improving their brand management in order to increase brand equity and sale to offer a differential value to the marketplace. As suggested in previous literature, in order to increase sales and market share of brand equity, retailers should put more emphasis on the social norm and their reputation, instead of positioning on a low-price proposition.

Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding its theoretical contributions and managerial implications, this research also has some limitations. First, this research used private HEIs. So, the findings could have differed with public HEIs so that future researchers can focus on public HEIs as well. Second, this study is limited to the HE sectors, and therefore the external validity of the findings is an issue. Future researchers could widen the diversity of service settings in the sample and replicate this investigation to discover if the results are consistent across the whole services sector. Third, as data were only collected through questionnaires, mono-method bias is a concern. Future research could triangulate surveys with qualitative data sources, such as direct observations or in-depth interviews. Finally, in line with recent suggestions, future researchers in the area may advance understanding by including cross-country and cross-cultural comparisons of the determinants of brand equity, in the HE industry.

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Data Availability Statement:
Data available on request from the authors
References


