

The role of social media brand communities

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

Master thesis

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Abstract

In recent years, more and more companies have become aware that a brand also has a social dimension, and with the advent of social media platforms, brand communities have experienced a shift from a traditional offline to more of an online presence. Brands of innovative consumer durables have also recognized social media brand communities as a very significant marketing strategy. It is therefore important to understand the influence of these communities on members' purchase intentions.

This master's thesis has the goal of demonstrating to enterprises what aspects of a social media brand community will influence the purchase intention of its members and what should be considered in order to enhance it. This will ultimately lead to the following research question: How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

To answer this, a quantitative study has been conducted that has targeted people who are participating in a social media brand community of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region. This involved testing various criteria of a social media brand community and their impact on the diffusion process (purchase intention).

The findings of the study revealed that increased positive electronic word-of-mouth leads to enhanced purchase intention of members. Furthermore, the research has shown that higher identification with a social media brand community, greater engagement, increased entertainment value, faster corporate responsiveness, and reduced occurrence of social spam, do not have a positive effect on the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables.

Keywords: Social media brand communities, innovative consumer durables, diffusion process

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List of Abbreviations

DACH	Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH)
SMBC	Social Media Brand Community
eWoM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
UAS	University of Applied Sciences
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
HSD	Honestly Significant Difference
R&D	Research & Development
PCI	Permanent Corporate Influencer

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1. Introduction

A brand community is defined as a specialized, non-geographical community that is based in a structured series of social relationships among admirers of a brand. This community is centered on a branded product or a service. As in other communities, brand communities are characterized by their rituals, traditions, shared consciousness, and sense of ethical responsibility. Original brand communities have thereby taken place offline.¹

Later, this concept was revolutionized with the help of the Internet. Brand communities have been established based on the Web 1.0 platforms, on business portals, and through customer initiatives. Currently, technology-savvy customers spend around 33% of their time online, approximately two hours a day, on social media sites.² Considering its high popularity, many businesses are also jumping into the social media space and utilizing online channels to promote the establishment of brand communities.³

In this regard, the Web 2.0 environment is distinguished by having two-way interactions between consumers and brands. With traditional media, the members of a brand community have been passive consumers of content, whereas in the more interactive environment of social media, they are able to reply to brand-related communications or even create them on their own.⁴ Simultaneously, it is a medium for members to become better aware of the brand, to receive information, and to interact with other members in the community.⁵

In addition to offering businesses an additional communication channel, social media brand communities also provide companies the opportunity to connect with their members, who can be a significant resource for information to help generate innovative ideas that are important for launching the proper products or product modifications.⁶

In Europe, about 47% of social media consumers are brand connected, following an average of about seven brands. In this pursuit, about 70% of the consumers joined a social media platform only to receive information of new products and brands.⁷

This demonstrates that a stronger connection between the consumers and the brand can be developed by social media brand communities; furthermore, it can minimize the advantages of having larger companies with high marketing budgets compared to smaller companies with lower budgets.⁸

¹ (Muniz; O'Guinn 2001, p. 412)

² (Kaur et al. 2020, p. 1)

³ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1757)

⁴ (Kaur et al. 2020, p. 1)

⁵ (Vohra; Bhardwaj 2019, p. 5)

⁶ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1757)

⁷ (Coelho; Rita; Santos 2018, p. 102)

⁸ (Casaló; Flavián; Guinalfú 2007, p. 785–788; Nguyen; Chaudhuri 2019, p. 54)

1.1 Motivation

In the past, when the Internet was non-existent, but people wanted to communicate with one another, the only way to do so was through writing letters and faxes or making phone calls. The invention of the web made it possible to explore the world and communicate with people in a different way for the first time. We now have a world where the Internet, computers, and mobile phones have become an integral part of everyday lives. The emergence of social media has once again revolutionized the way people communicate. Social media consumers are able to present themselves by posting and sharing pictures and videos with their friends and followers, as well as follow their favorite athletes and celebrities and be up to date with their posts. The opportunities of social media appear to be boundless, as both private consumers and influencers have already known for a while. Nevertheless, the utilization of social media is gaining relevance for enterprises as well.

From the perspective of a company, introducing innovative products to the market involves risks, but at the same time, it is a crucial corporate strategy. Only in this way, can they sustain their competitive advantages and generate long-term growth. New product diffusion continues to grow rapidly each year, which also demonstrates the importance of launching innovative products to the market. However, two-thirds of all recently launched new products fail.⁹

There have been plenty of innovative products in the past that have failed because the companies have mainly been occupied with the realization of the products themselves rather than a suitable marketing strategy. To distinguish themselves from the competition and to increase the chance of an innovative product to be successfully launched on the market, the building of a brand can be crucial. In order to support such brand building, enterprises have not only recognized the traditional marketing strategies, but also the huge potential of social media brand communities, abbreviated as SMBCs.¹⁰

An SMBC may be significant for a company also in the sense that, on the one hand, the members' brand awareness can be strongly intensified while, on the other hand, customer loyalty as well as purchase decisions can be enhanced.¹¹ Although the relevance of SMBCs has been known for a while, only a few studies have dealt with their impact on purchase intentions. The influence of SMBCs on the purchase intention of consumer durables in particular is being analyzed for the first time.

⁹ (Nguyen; Chaudhuri 2019, p. 39)

¹⁰ (Buchenau; Fürtbauer 2015, p. 33; Nguyen; Chaudhuri 2019, p. 55)

¹¹ (Časas; Palaima; Mironidze 2019, p. 9f)

1.2 Research question

This master's thesis aims to determine the impact of SMBCs on the diffusion process (purchase intention) of innovative consumer durables. In order to elaborate the influence of various aspects of an SMBC on the members' purchase intention, quantitative research has been conducted, in the form of a study in which no narrowing down is done regarding a specific brand, a specific product, or a specific social media platform.

The research question can therefore be formulated as follows:

- ***How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?***

As an additional goal, in this study it is shown how brand communities can be established through social media. There is also an analysis if and how the target audiences in the three specific countries Switzerland, Austria, and Germany (DACH region) differ. It will also consider the risks of SMBCs by highlighting what may trigger an online firestorm, also known as a shitstorm, within a brand community and ways in which enterprises can try to manage it.

This leads to the following sub-questions:

- ***How can brand communities be built by using social media?***
- ***How do the target groups differ in the analyzed countries?***
- ***What would cause a firestorm (shitstorm)?***

1.3 Outline of the work

In the first part, the brand community is theoretically discussed. Following a brief description of the social media and the corresponding platforms, it will also describe the differences between online forums and online communities. Next, SMBCs will be described, with a more detailed discussion of both consumer-initiated and company-initiated brand communities. The different types of SMBCs will also be explained in the sequence. Then, the reasons and consequences of a participation in SMBCs are described. After that, the risk of an SMBC will be addressed, a concept of consumer durables will be clarified, and the theory of diffusion of innovations will be illustrated.

Furthermore, a description of the interviews with the companies is presented, explaining the interviewees, the procedure, and the evaluation. Following, the hypotheses and the research model are presented. For this purpose, the variables to be measured "Identification", "Engagement", "eWoM", "Hedonic value", "Responsiveness", and "Social spam" are outlined in detail.

The methodology of the research is described afterwards. First, the data collection is more precisely explained, then the sampling is specified, and after which the procedure of the online survey and the data analysis is presented.

The next step is the presentation of the empirical evidence, which has been evaluated using the software SPSS. Thereby, the samples with their demographic data are initially analyzed. Then, the model quality will be demonstrated, and a reliability test will be performed. After that, the variables will be tested for multicollinearity. The hypothesis test subsequently will be performed, checking for any significant results between countries in the DACH region, and a summary of the non-member responses will be given.

The final section of this paper provides the discussion of the findings. The theoretical implications are first described. Recommendations for enterprises are then provided in the section on practical implications. In the end, the limitations of this thesis as well as the opportunities for further studies are indicated.

2. Brand communities

Powerful brands have a long-lasting relationship with their customers, which can increase a business's profitability to a large degree. Acquiring new customers has been found to be between five and seven times more expensive than retaining existing customers. Therefore, brand marketing should strive to enhance brand loyalty so companies can compete in a highly demanding business environment. However, it is possible to realize this by creating brand communities, which is evolving away from a traditional transactional perspective towards a relationship-oriented approach.¹² In this sense, a brand community may be seen as a series of connections between members and the brand, members and the product, members and the enterprises, and between the consumers themselves within a community.¹³ Companies can be supported by brand communities in understanding the consumer's relationship with the brand, regardless of whether that is positive or negative.¹⁴

Brand communities have the potential of creating a feeling that followers of a specific brand would like to be perceived as being different from those of competing brands. Firstly, in such brand communities, stories about the product usage or the brand are shared, and secondly, there is an exchange of information on the products provided by the brand. The members are encouraged to remain loyal both to the brand and to the community.¹⁵ Thereby, followers of a brand may have their individual motives that encourage them to participate in a brand community.¹⁶

Not only can brand communities contribute to spreading enthusiasm and curiosity about a certain brand, but they can also be a major source for new ideas and product innovations. In addition to the commercial interests of businesses, a desire to promote shared values, to exchange experiences, and to improve members' knowledge may also be perceived as being important.¹⁷

Thereby, brands may fulfill essential physiological and social needs. Becoming a member of a brand community can be used for identification with a brand in order to satisfy social needs. This can include seeking out symbols or characters that can be used to decode self-identity as well as the way they are perceived by others in the community.¹⁸ The vitality of a brand community is its ability to attract visitors and transform them into members of the community.¹⁹

The following section will provide an overview of social media, its platforms, online forums, and online communities.

¹² (Loewenfeld 2006, p. 3)

¹³ (Loureiro; Kaufmann 2018, p. 2)

¹⁴ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1217f)

¹⁵ (Thompson; Sinha 2008, p. 66)

¹⁶ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1756f)

¹⁷ (Marzocchi; Morandin; Bergami 2013, p. 108)

¹⁸ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1756f)

¹⁹ (Zhou et al. 2013, p. 2442)

2.1 Social media

Social media may be characterized as digital media, systems, and technologies that are accessed via application platforms. Different types of web-based services are available through either Web 2.0 or Web 3.0. An increased interest in social media started to appear in the late 1990s. However, the need for using social media in the area of private life as well as in the business sector has been rising.²⁰ In contrast with the conventional Internet, the social media consumer is not just a passive participant, but is able to research information about brands and find any kind of news about the company or the most recent deals. Consumers are also able produce this content by themselves, making them simultaneously a consumer and a content producer.²¹

2.1.1 Platforms

A rough differentiation is made between social media networks, media sharing platforms, and messenger services. The social networks, including Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Xing, enable the users to cultivate relationships with private individuals or business associates.²² Media sharing services are platforms where both private consumers as well as enterprises can upload pictures, videos, podcasts, texts, etc. to make them accessible to other interested parties. The well-known representatives of these platforms include YouTube and Instagram.²³ Messenger applications may also be of interest for businesses, in addition to being for personal use. Through instant messaging, it is possible to have more direct and close interaction with customers and potential business associates. For this purpose, there are platforms such as WhatsApp for Business, Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, or WeChat.²⁴

2.1.2 Online forums

The earliest type of social media is online forums. They represent a virtual space for exchanging and documenting opinions, experiences, and ideas. Forums are plentiful, as each one addresses different issues and target audiences. The members and enterprises do not communicate with one another in real-time, but rather with a time delay, as questions are posted into the forum and are answered by other members.²⁵

²⁰ (Gabriel; Röhrs 2017, p. 14)

²¹ (Corduan 2018, p. 1)

²² (Kreutzer 2021, p. 74)

²³ (Kreutzer 2021, p. 117)

²⁴ (Kreutzer 2021, p. 143)

²⁵ (Kreutzer 2021, p. 166)

2.1.3 Online communities

Compared to online forums, members of online communities are distinguished by a closer connection to one another. Rather than just an exchange of information, their aim is to collaborate closely in order to create new content and work on topics. Online communities have become significant because nowadays groups are becoming increasingly characterized by mutual interests rather than social background, salary, or age. It enables them to collaborate on the same subject even if they would have never met face-to-face because of geographical distance.²⁶

As already mentioned, this thesis will specifically focus on SMBCs. Their description in more detail will follow in the next chapter.

2.2 Social media brand communities

Social media has made it much easier to build a community in today's environment, retaining customers to the community and to the brand. By placing the community online, it empowers its members to become more active than they would be with offline communities. There can also be an enrichment in building relationships among subgroups in the community that otherwise might not have the chance to communicate with one another.²⁷

To enable consumers to establish a brand preference, it is crucial that a brand's image is perceived. When selecting a brand out of competing products, consumers are exposed to risk, as there may be an incomplete and unbalanced amount of information concerning rival products. Hence, brand image has an important role to play when helping consumers to make the right choice among various brands or products.²⁸ For building such a brand reputation successfully, SMBCs may be of major importance. Particularly in the field of innovative consumer durables, company-owned SMBCs might have a favorable impact on the brand identity.²⁹ The influence exerted by brand communities on social media can have an impact on effective thinking and behavior, adoption and usage, and trust and loyalty, as well as on the product preferences and purchasing decisions.³⁰ Thereby, the brand trust is a reflection of the feeling of confidence and the minimization of risk that can arise among the members in relation to a brand. In addition, the relationship and the interaction between the members and a brand may depend on the brand trust.³¹

Being a proactive enterprise may support the development of an SMBC. The insights gathered regarding the way in which customers perceive its products could support the development of new value-added products and a customer-centric corporate structure.³²

²⁶ (Kreutzer 2021, p. 166)

²⁷ (Wirtz et al. 2013, p. 227f)

²⁸ (Kumaravel; Kandasamy 2012, p. 34)

²⁹ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 37)

³⁰ (Chen; Chen; Xu 2016, p. 6f)

³¹ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1220)

³² (Wirtz et al. 2013, p. 238)

In comparison with the traditional media, where the content could only be consumed in a passive manner, social media offer the community members the possibility to generate content actively, which can shape the characteristics of the community and determine its influence on members. At the same time, cost-effective archiving of previous content can be facilitated in the digital environment, and an accumulation of collective expertise on particular subjects, creating a knowledge capital, has the potential to occur. SMBCs can thereby provide their members a sense of freedom, enabling them to share opinions on issues and certain subjects in multiple languages. This may lead to the generation of a free stream of information.³³ The dynamic created by this within an SMBC is capable of adding value for the member but also for the brand. This can generate trust and loyalty from members towards the SMBC as well as the brand itself.³⁴ In SMBCs, a virtual sense of community can arise. This may be expressed through a sense of belonging, a feeling of being important to each other by the members of a community, as well as an influence on other members and an experience of being embedded in the interaction process of an SMBC.³⁵

SMBCs can be categorized generally into two types: the consumer-initiated SMBCs, which are created by enthusiasts of the brand, and company-owned SMBCs that are officially managed and monitored by the enterprise. Both types will be described in more detail in the following.³⁶

2.2.1 Consumer-initiated SMBCs

Consumer-initiated SMBCs can be run by a social agglomeration of brand users. The prevailing social capital found there can provide members with both information and social benefits, which can in turn positively affect consumers' participation within a consumer-initiated SMBC. The emerging relationships through interactions may help members to have access to more information and social support. Additionally, due to the mutual interests within a consumer-initiated SMBC, ties to each other can be formed.³⁷ Hence, social capital can be considered a sort of resource that can occur in a consumer-initiated SMBC. In addition to providing information and social capital, other resources can include advice, business opportunities, ideas, empowerment, emotional and economic support, confidence, and collaboration.³⁸

For companies, consumer-initiated SMBCs may still be valuable because they increase the awareness of the corporate brand. However, to strengthen customers' trust in the brand, they may be rather ineffective.³⁹ Participation for the members of consumer-initiated SMBCs is different from those of company-owned SMBCs because it requires a cognitive process for evaluating the significance of the posted content.⁴⁰

³³ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1757)

³⁴ (Coelho; Rita; Santos 2018, p. 102)

³⁵ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1062)

³⁶ (Demiray; Burnaz 2019, p. 120f)

³⁷ (Li et al. 2019, p. 307f)

³⁸ (Li et al. 2019, p. 304)

³⁹ (Jung; Kim; Kim 2014, p. 587)

⁴⁰ (Demiray; Burnaz 2019, p. 120f)

2.2.2 Company-owned SMBCs

Today, there are more than 65 million enterprises use online brand communities in order to connect with their customers.⁴¹ Company-owned SMBCs in this regard may offer both economic and hedonic value to the consumers. This can more broadly result in trust and engagement throughout the SMBC. Instead of a direct commercial interest, brand followers see a company's actions as the desire and effort to build a wholesome and a good relationship with the SMBC's members.⁴²

The quality of the relationship can be regarded as good when the company and its members have the ability to interact on the same level and when the members of the SMBC have the opportunity to express their opinion.⁴³ However, contributing knowledge to the community can be diminished when companies excessively participate in member interaction. If there are additional financial incentives, this may even undermine the motivation of the members for knowledge contribution in the long-term.⁴⁴ Levels of brand trust may appear to be higher in company-owned SMBCs than consumer-initiated SMBCs, since consumers perceive an official SMBC to be a direct reflection in the engagement and effort that a company is trying to make. The consumer-initiated SMBCs, from the perspective of members, do not reflect brand reputation or credibility to the same extent. Therefore, a company-initiated SMBC can more effectively demonstrate to its members that they have an interest in an ongoing, high-quality relationship.⁴⁵

Besides trust, self-representation, community connection, peer-to-peer discussions, and support seeking can be stronger in company-owned SMBCs compared to consumer-initiated SMBCs.⁴⁶ In company-owned SMBCs, the experience that members have is rather passive. Unlike the consumer-initiated brand communities, the posts here are being read or videos are being watched without any evaluation of the content being necessary.⁴⁷

Company-owned SMBCs can be further categorized. The following section will explain each of these types in more detail.

⁴¹ (Herhausen et al. 2019, p. 1f)

⁴² (Akrouf; Nagy 2018, p. 948)

⁴³ (Jibril et al. 2019, p. 13f)

⁴⁴ (Liao; Dong; Guo 2020, p. 9)

⁴⁵ (Jung; Kim; Kim 2014, p. 587)

⁴⁶ (Časas; Palaima; Mironidze 2019, p. 20)

⁴⁷ (Demiray; Burnaz 2019, p. 120f)

2.2.3 Types of company-owned SMBCs

Company-owned SMBCs can be further subdivided in three main categories. In doing so, a differentiation is being made between open, sophisticated, and restricted SMBCs.⁴⁸

2.2.3.1 Open SMBCs

In open SMBCs, consumers may join and leave the community without being required to fulfill specific membership requirements (high community access). The communication between members can thereby occur in a spontaneous, unrestricted manner and mostly takes place in real-time. The company generally does not constrain the content of the communication and only monitors it on an irregular basis (low activity control). This means that the members can express themselves about products or can exchange information without restriction. Moreover, the company only participates in the communications if it is in a position to answer members' questions or concerns (moderate host involvement). The members generally do not form any ties and use the community mainly to receive responses to product-related issues (low member engagement).⁴⁹

2.2.3.2 Sophisticated SMBCs

Participation in a sophisticated SMBC requires a sign-up and administrator approval for access that is usually, but not always, granted (moderate community access). There is occasional monitoring and controlling of members' communications from the company by asking them questions, which may not be in real-time. Furthermore, communication content may be partially restricted (moderate activity controlling). However, the enterprise demonstrates responsiveness to members' questions and issues, and participates in community activities and conversations with members on a frequent basis (high host integration). Its members typically develop powerful bonds, while being involved in complicated, thoughtful interactions, as well as in community activities.⁵⁰

2.2.3.3 Restricted SMBCs

In the case of restricted SMBCs, membership has to be acquired. Among other things, access to the community can be granted only to users who have already purchased a product. In order to obtain an access code, new members may also have to pay fees (low community access).⁵¹ Members' communications are carefully monitored, and content is constrained by the enterprise in many cases, allowing only a limited amount of space for words to be entered (high activity controlling). The enterprise does not respond to members' questions or requests, nor do they involve themselves in communication with the community (low host integration).⁵²

⁴⁸ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 37)

⁴⁹ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 33)

⁵⁰ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 33f)

⁵¹ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 34)

⁵² (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 34)

The members typically only form loosely tied relationships and the interactions among them are straightforward. At the same time, its members rather infrequently involve themselves in community activities (moderate consumer engagement).⁵³

2.2.4 Factors for participation in SMBCs

For the participation in SMBCs, it is possible to define about five key factors. Although all of them are interconnected, the self-related, the social-related, and the information-related factors may have the most importance when it comes to participation. Despite these factors, the entertainment-related and technology-related factors influencing people to participate in SMBCs may also be significant.⁵⁴

2.2.4.1 Self-related factors

The self-related factors may be considered the most frequent reason for joining an SMBC. This is about an individual user wanting to be involved with the community and how the user perceives their relationship to the SMBC or their personal benefits. Self-related factors for participating may be considered social identity, self-driven motivations, and incentives and rewards.⁵⁵

2.2.4.2 Social-related factors

Social-related factors can be mentioned as the second most common drivers for participating in an SMBC. They are based on the relationships among individuals within a brand community that can be characterized as either social benefits or social needs. The probability of participating in an SMBC may be positively affected if trustworthy people, such as the family and friends of the user, endorse the members of an SMBC. Thereby, social-related determinants also have the potential of increasing engagement in an SMBC.⁵⁶

2.2.4.3 Information-related factors

The information-related factors can be regarded as the third most common reason for joining SMBCs. For their participation, members of an SMBC expect to be provided with information about the brand's products. Thereby, a higher perceived quality of the information may lead to a higher engagement within the SMBC.⁵⁷

⁵³ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 34)

⁵⁴ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 282)

⁵⁵ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 282f)

⁵⁶ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 284; Časas; Palaima; Mironidze 2019, p. 20f)

⁵⁷ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 284)

2.2.4.4 Entertainment-related factors

Besides the factors for joining an SMBC mentioned above, the entertainment-related drivers also play an important role for the participation in SMBCs. In this regard, the members are expecting a certain hedonic value, also known as entertainment value. Fun and the level of enjoyment the members of an SMBC may have been crucial here.⁵⁸

2.2.4.5 Technology-related factors

Finally, the technology-related reasons have to be addressed, which also represent a motivation for users joining an SMBC. These may include the design, the features, and the quality of the platform on which the SMBC operates.⁵⁹

2.2.5 Consequences of participation in SMBCs

In terms of the impacts of SMBC participation, it is possible to differentiate between brand-related, brand-community-related, and social-related, whereas with the factors mentioned above, they are all interconnected.⁶⁰ In the next subsections, only the positive consequences of participation will be examined.

2.2.5.1 Brand-related consequences

The brand-related consequences may be considered as the most significant impacts of an SMBC. Contributing to an SMBC may have positive effects on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. The brand loyalty can even degenerate into oppositional brand loyalty. In this process, the SMBC fights against a competing brand, which may subsequently result in brand love.⁶¹

2.2.5.1.1 Brand satisfaction

Brand satisfaction is a member's overall experience with the product or service of a brand. More specifically, it may be a measurement of the extent to which members' expectations have been fulfilled or even outperformed by the brand. A cognitive process compares the perceived level of performance with the level of performance and standards that the member would expect.⁶² This involves the evaluation of the entire brand experience, considering a variety of brand-specific information and observing everything from a comprehensive point of view. Satisfaction can only be evaluated after using the brand, which requires ownership of the brand and, consequently, either one or multiple transactions.⁶³ With the help of an SMBC, brand satisfaction may result in a long-term and sustainable relationship between the members and a brand.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 284)

⁵⁹ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 285)

⁶⁰ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 285)

⁶¹ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 285)

⁶² (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1219f)

⁶³ (Fröhling 2017, p. 30)

⁶⁴ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1219f)

2.2.5.1.2 Brand loyalty

In the currently more globalized world in particular, where competition has become increasingly intense, one of the key corporate objectives has been to build a loyal customer base. This can enhance the longevity of an enterprise. To engender brand loyalty, businesses should empower members to have the chance to develop, represent, and build trust in their personal brand using SMBCs.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, without developing any emotions or bonds, the members' engagement in an SMBC will not automatically result in their loyalty towards the brand.⁶⁶ The emotional experiences and active engagement of members in SMBCs may therefore generate brand differentiation, which can have a positive impact on members' brand loyalty.⁶⁷

2.2.5.1.3 Brand love

The brand love is the most intensive expression of relationship between the members of an SMBC and a brand. This is characterized by a long-lasting bond, with strong positive emotions and a significant fear of losing the brand.⁶⁸ Unlike brand satisfaction, it is not essential for the development of brand love to be in possession of or to have used or consumed a product or service. Brand satisfaction does not always result in brand love. For some members, brand satisfaction turns into brand love, while for others it does not evolve into a strong anxiety of losing the brand or a desire for a long-lasting commitment. The reverse scenario also occurs, where members do not necessarily experience satisfaction with a brand, but have established a sense of brand love.⁶⁹

2.2.5.2 Brand community-related consequences

The second to last impact can be called the brand community-related consequences. This is concerned with the impact that the SMBC membership of the participants may have on the SMBC. This includes the commitment to the community, integration into the community, and loyalty to the SMBC.⁷⁰

2.2.5.3 Social-related consequences

The final consequences that can be explained are the social-related consequences. Here, the electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) effect can be observed. This involves the spreading of information about the SMBC and about the brand itself. The spreading of information can be about positive word of mouth or negative word of mouth. An explanation of the latter will be provided in more detail in the next chapter.⁷¹

⁶⁵ (Confente; Kucharska 2021, p. 24; Casaló; Flavián; Guinalíu 2007, p. 785–788)

⁶⁶ (Zhou et al. 2012, p. 894f)

⁶⁷ (Simon; Brexendorf; Fassnacht 2016, p. 419)

⁶⁸ (Fröhling 2017, p. 27)

⁶⁹ (Fröhling 2017, p. 30)

⁷⁰ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 285)

⁷¹ (Hook; Baxter; Kulczynski 2018, p. 286)

2.3 Risks of SMBCs

Besides the positive impacts such as positive eWoM, enterprises may also be exposed to negative consequences, in particular in social media.⁷² Negative emotions (e.g., contempt, guilt, or sadness), like positive emotions (e.g., happiness and enjoyment), may have influence on the distribution of posts in SMBCs.⁷³ However, the difference between the two lies in the fact that negative posts or statements in social media have an impact five times higher than positive messages.⁷⁴ In cases where large amounts of negative messages and posts involving waves of outrage and indignation without referring to any specific complaint are addressed towards an enterprise, these are known as online firestorms or online shitstorms.⁷⁵ Such online firestorms receive meaningful support for a brief period by members sharing the negative eWoM. For companies, such negative eWoM can be reputational damage that subsequently causes them to suffer customer loss on a massive scale.⁷⁶

Both virality and contagion may be increased by high arousal words. Virality can also be enhanced when there is a strong structural tie and a closer linguistic style match between the writer of a negative eWoM and the SMBC.⁷⁷ Thereby, the dynamics of an opinion forming process in SMBCs can be affected by such factors as the speed and volume of communication, an unimpeded flow of information, a lack of diversity, and network-based decision-making processes.⁷⁸

⁷² (Pfeffer; Zorbach; Carley 2014, p. 117)

⁷³ (Chawla; Mehrotra 2021, p. 25)

⁷⁴ (Habibi; Laroche; Richard 2014, p. 159)

⁷⁵ (Pfeffer; Zorbach; Carley 2014, p. 118)

⁷⁶ (Herhausen et al. 2019, p. 1f)

⁷⁷ (Herhausen et al. 2019, p. 16f)

⁷⁸ (Pfeffer; Zorbach; Carley 2014, p. 125f)

3. Innovative consumer durables

This chapter contains the explanation of innovative consumer durables. For this purpose, what an innovation means and to what extent it can be further categorized will first be explained. Next, the nature of consumer durables will be explained. At the end of this section, diffusion theory and related elements will be presented.

3.1 Innovation

In general, an innovation may be divided into four different types. These are process innovation, which is concerned with introducing new or substantially improved production methods, marketing innovation in which new marketing methods are implemented, organizational innovation, which involves the deployment of organizational methods that were not previously utilized, and product innovation in which a new or improved product is launched.⁷⁹ In this regard, the product can also be an older type, but when it provides an unequaled benefit for the consumer or is considered to be new in terms of its usage, then it is also referred to as a product innovation.⁸⁰ In this study, the primary attention is on product innovations.

3.2 Consumer durables

Consumer goods are part of tangible assets and can roughly be divided into two distinct types. The first is short-term consumer goods, which may also be described as consumables, while the second is long-term consumer good, known as consumer durables (Figure 1).⁸¹

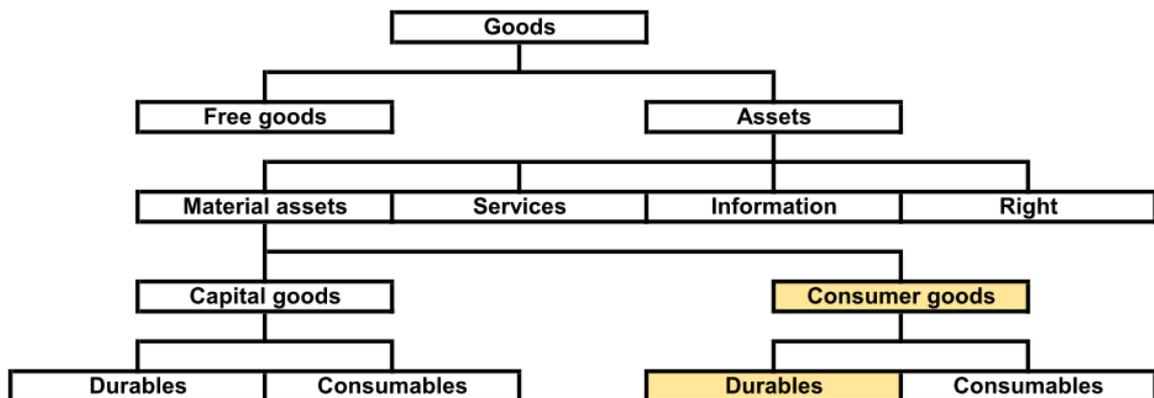


Figure 1: Consumer durables

Source: Own figure based on (DAA n. y.)

⁷⁹ (Elia; Messeni Petruzzelli; Urbinati 2020, p. 8–10)

⁸⁰ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 104)

⁸¹ (Neubäumer; Hewel; Lenk 2017, p. 7)

Consumables are goods that are intended to be used only for one purpose and cannot be reused. Medicines, fuel, cosmetics, or groceries belong to this category.⁸² Consumer durables, in contrast, represent products that do not wear out rapidly, but that can be used over a longer period.⁸³ Consumer durables include, for example, automobiles, electronics, jewelry, or household equipment.⁸⁴ The present study specifically focuses on the area of consumer durables.

3.3 Theory of innovation diffusion

The diffusion of innovation theory has its origins in the year 1903 and has been interpreted and further developed by various researchers over the years. It describes the process that occurs by which consumers adopt an innovation, such as a new product or an idea. As can be seen in Figure 2, the diffusion curve systematically illustrates the different stages of an innovation. Most commonly, in the beginning, only a few consumers, who are called "Innovators" or "Lead users", may be open to the new product or idea and will adopt it. Over time, more and more consumers have the ability of becoming more open to the innovation. This may occur until a point of saturation is reached.⁸⁵

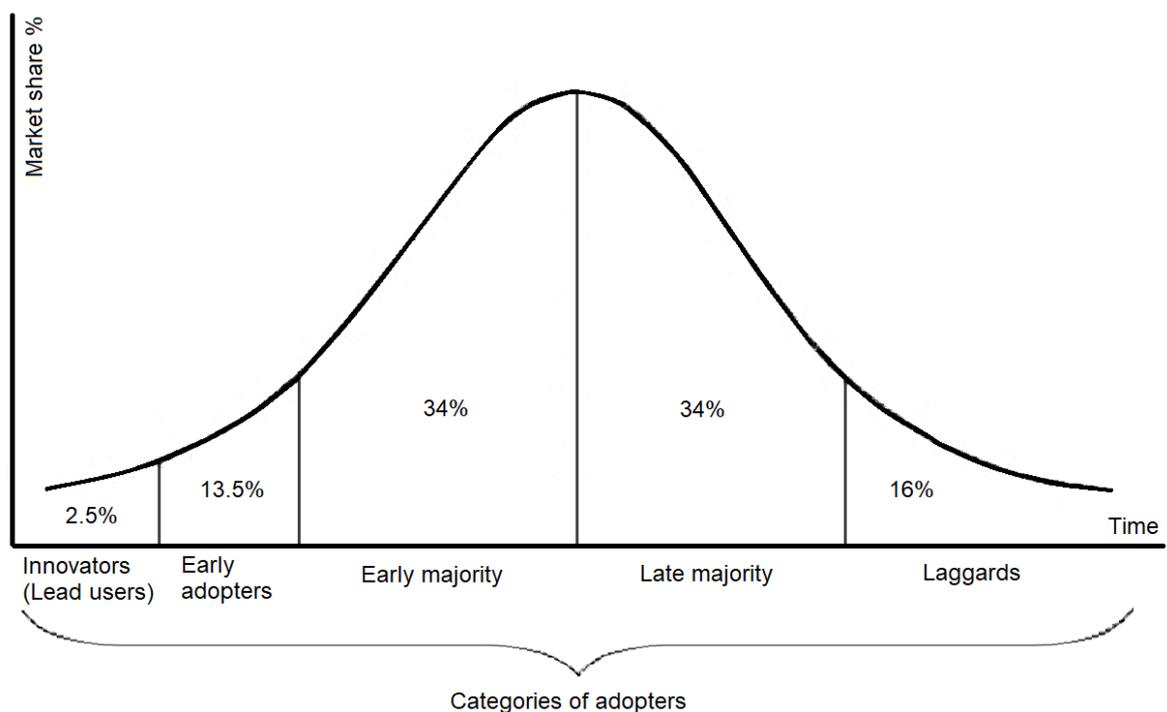


Figure 2: Diffusion of innovation

Source: Own figure based on (Dearing; Cox 2018, p. 185)

⁸² (Bpb 2022)

⁸³ (Chakraborty 2016, p. 9–11)

⁸⁴ (Bpb 2022)

⁸⁵ (Canadian Journal 2011)

For the diffusion of innovations, the interaction of several elements is critical. These are composed of the communication systems, the time factor, and the social system, which can be subdivided into the different groups.⁸⁶ These elements are outlined in more detail below.

3.3.1 Communication systems

The communication systems, also called communication channels, are concerned with the degree and speed with which consumers talk about and diffuse an innovation. These can further be categorized as interpersonal channels, which are between individuals and may influence the decision in favor of or against an innovation, as well as mass communication channels, where knowledge about an innovation is generated.⁸⁷

3.3.2 Time

The time of innovation diffusion incorporates both the categorization of adopters and the rate of the adoption. The timeframe from which an innovation first arises to the point where it ceases to be an innovation will be of interest. It measures the speed with which an innovation is diffused and adopted in a community.⁸⁸

3.3.3 Social system

A social system is an interconnected group of individuals that may or may not adopt an innovation. The diffusion of an innovation can only happen if the social system accepts it and exchanges information about it, both inside the system and with other systems.⁸⁹ Depending on the way consumers in a social system adopt an innovation, they may be grouped into innovators (lead users), early adopters, early majority, late majority, or laggards.⁹⁰ These are reviewed more closely in the following.

3.3.3.1 Innovators (lead users)

The innovators, also called lead users, are willing to take risks and able to handle uncertainty and complicated knowledge. They appreciate innovations are motivated by the notion of creating a change. Their adoption period is the shortest possible and they serve as gatekeepers for the next group during the adoption phase.⁹¹

⁸⁶ (Schmidt 2009, p. 18)

⁸⁷ (Canadian Journal 2011)

⁸⁸ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 104)

⁸⁹ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 104)

⁹⁰ (Canadian Journal 2011)

⁹¹ (Canadian Journal 2011)

3.3.3.2 Early adopters

In comparison with innovators, early adopters are more constrained by the limitations of the social system. Nevertheless, they are opinion leaders and the first in their group who are ready and willing to adopt and to evaluate innovations for the benefit of others. Hence, the degree of success and the speed of further diffusion are reliant on the early adopters. While the number of early adopters in a diffusion process may be rather small, they are still essential in decreasing the uncertainty of an innovation. Furthermore, early adopters are the individuals who test an innovation and report the results back to the enterprise.⁹²

3.3.3.3 Early majority

The early majority are the users who generally trust the information presented by the early adopters in order to adopt an innovation. They take their time since they need evidence of the benefits of a product adoption; however, they do not like to be the last to adopt an innovation. The divergence between the early adopters and the early majority can be disruptive to the adoption of an innovation.⁹³

3.3.3.4 Late majority

The late majority typically only adopts an innovation when the average segment of the population has already adopted it. These individuals are conservative and have fundamental concerns regarding the adoption of an innovation, but ultimately surrender because of group pressure by adopting the innovation.⁹⁴

3.3.3.5 Laggards

The final group of consumers in a social system are the laggards. Essentially, they refuse changes because they may not have knowledge of the innovation or may have financial issues. Before adopting an innovation in its final stage, everything has to work. Therefore, despite their negative attitude towards innovations, their part in the social system is to stimulate the improvement and development of the innovation itself.⁹⁵

⁹² (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 105)

⁹³ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 106)

⁹⁴ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 107)

⁹⁵ (Wani; Ali 2015, p. 107)

4. Interviews

To compare the insights gained from the literature with practical application, the perspective of enterprises in the field has been obtained through interviews. An interview guideline has been generated for this process. The interview period has taken place between 29.03.2022 and 29.04.2022. The following subsections discuss the interviewees, the interview procedure, and the results in some detail.

4.1 Interview partners

To find appropriate interview partners, several social media platforms have been used to identify companies that have already established brand communities for innovative consumer durables as part of their marketing strategy. Enterprises matching these criteria have been contacted by their marketing department. Simultaneously, potential contacts were also sought in the circle of friends and acquaintances. Consequently, 17 appropriate businesses in the DACH region were contacted, from which five agreed to be interviewed.

The interview partners have experience between one and seven years. Their professional titles include "Junior Digital Marketing Manager", "Social Media Manager", "Social Media & Online Manager", "Digital Marketing Project Manager", and "Global Marketing Communications Director".

4.2 Interview procedure

In order to be able to prepare for the interview, the interview guidelines in German and in English was sent to the interview partners in advance upon their request. Afterwards, appointments were scheduled for the interviews. These interviews were all performed by using the Microsoft Teams application.

After the greeting and a short introduction, the interview partners were assured that the information collected would be used only in anonymized form for this master's thesis. The three initial questions were followed by another 13 questions with sub-questions. To satisfy compliance restrictions, the interviewees had the choice not to answer any of the questions. After all questions were asked, the responses were reviewed one more time with the interview partners. In conclusion, the next stages of the master's thesis were discussed and the interviewees dismissed.

4.3 Analysis of the interviews

Despite the fact not all interviewees had been directly in charge of the maintenance of the SMBC, they were still able provide useful insights about the company-owned SMBC, as described below in a summarized form.

The answers of the interviewees indicate that the marketing departments are already focusing largely on online content or are showing an increasing tendency in this direction. A large proportion of the content published from the brands has an entertaining and interactive design with the product as the focus. The social media manager and their team are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the SMBC. Enterprises rely on an open SMBC to promote their innovative consumer durables. Thereby, communication between members is not disturbed, except if untruthful posts regarding products are being shared. If this happens, the social media manager becomes active, gets the facts straight, and then invites the members to try out the products, so they can make their own impressions.

The majority the enterprises ensure that they always respond to questions from the community members. Depending on the situation, the social media manager responds directly or forwards the issue to the responsible person. While simpler issues can be handled within a short period, more complicated topics or problems may take longer. Members are informed if a response cannot be made within one working day. In the event of social spam, the spammers will be advised that they should immediately communicate with the customer service department. In case of repeated spam posts, the corresponding member's account is blocked. The enterprises also think that the satisfaction of the members, which can lead to positive word of mouth, reduces the perception of risk, and increases trust, thus having a positive impact on purchase intention.

As already mentioned, due to the literature research and the practical references, which were obtained through the interviews with the companies, hypothesis formulation and development of the research model are carried out in the next chapter.

5. Hypotheses and research model

In the next subsections, the hypotheses for the empirical part of the thesis are formulated. In addition, the research model is developed, which graphically shows the relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variable.

5.1 Identification

The identification of members with an SMBC is a key element through which engagement can also be strengthened by a feeling of belonging to the group.⁹⁶ Members can identify with SMBCs by feeling that their social identity is linked with the brand community and the brand itself. Such identification can be stronger in a homogeneous group.⁹⁷ Members with a self-branding approach perceive the brand as representing them. Therefore, members with self-branding are more able to remain loyal and more likely to have an oppositional brand loyalty.⁹⁸ In order to identify with an SMBC, an identification with the brand itself is required. This can roughly be differentiated between brand identification and consumer identification with a brand.

Brand identity is all about consumers being able to distinguish a specific brand from its competitors. Having a powerful identity that adds both prestige and uniqueness can increase consumers' tendency to identify themselves with a brand, as the brand is perceived to be more trustworthy, and consumers may believe their expectations can be fulfilled more likely based on the high recognition factor.⁹⁹ As a result, brand identification is a channel for expressing self-image and brings social value or symbolic benefit to the consumer.¹⁰⁰

The identification of consumers with a brand may occur on a more personal level, where the brand emphasizes the personality of the consumers expressing their beliefs and their values, and, from a more social perspective, whereby the brand acts as an aspirational self-status and communication tool. Consumers are more likely to choose brands that they presume to have the same values. By identifying themselves with the brand in a stronger manner, they may show increased brand loyalty as well as more cooperative behavior where not only their own interests are being pursued.¹⁰¹

Previous studies have demonstrated that identification with a brand and with an SMBC have a positive impact on enhancing brand trust. Through identification with an SMBC, eWoM and engagement, as expressed in the form of knowledge contribution, were positively affected.¹⁰² It has also been empirically proven that identification between members within an SMBC may have a more significant impact on brand loyalty compared to direct identification between members and the brand or enterprise.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ (Martínez-López et al. 2021, p. 13)

⁹⁷ (Liao; Dong; Guo 2020, p. 9f)

⁹⁸ (Kuo; Hou 2017, p. 265)

⁹⁹ (Coelho; Rita; Santos 2018, p. 102f)

¹⁰⁰ (Zhou et al. 2012, p. 894f)

¹⁰¹ (Coelho; Rita; Santos 2018, p. 103)

¹⁰² (Martínez-López et al. 2021, p. 13; Liao; Dong; Guo 2020, p. 9)

¹⁰³ (Confente; Kucharska 2021, p. 22)

However, there has not been any previous attempt to measure the influence of identification with an SMBC on the diffusion process (purchase intention) of innovative consumer durables. As a result, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: The higher the identification with an SMBC is, the higher the intention to buy an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

5.2 Engagement

Engagement in a brand community may be explained as the members' commitment to invest their personal resources, including time, energy, and money.¹⁰⁴ Through member engagement, the brand's reach within the member's network is extended because member-company interactions are published in the member's network.¹⁰⁵ Engagement in an SMBC is considered being active in searching for information on the brand, being involved in marketing campaigns, and being interactive with other members.¹⁰⁶

The members act out of commitment to the community as well as their own interests in exchanging information with similar-minded members in a social media environment, which can result in affiliations, create bonds, generate empowerment, and be meaningful in connection with consumer reviews via eWoM. Due to the free of charge principle, recommendations and other information diffuse rather quickly in- and outside the community and thus support the companies.¹⁰⁷ From a corporate perspective, the amount and type of information it obtains from engaged members in an SMBC can be meaningful. Issues, requests, and emotions can be all shared, and enterprises may choose only to listen or to engage actively in discussions with the members to figure out their expectations of the brand and strive for improvements, where needed. This procedure is called the "build-measure-learn" approach and allows companies to adjust product development phases to be more customer-oriented, faster, and more adaptable to new market conditions.¹⁰⁸

The level of member engagement in an SMBC may also be affected by the complexity of the product. As the complexity of products increases, members have to become more involved with the product and have to acquire more knowledge in order for the products to be used. In doing so, it can enhance the user experiences and engagement in the SMBC.¹⁰⁹

Both consumer satisfaction with products and product symbolism may have positive impacts on members' engagement in an SMBC. There can be a strong propensity to symbolic consumption regardless of the online environment in which the consumers are situated.¹¹⁰

Engagement of the members of an SMBC may be dependent partly on perceived interest and benefit outweighing the potential risks, and partly on the value of the interactive experiences being higher than the effort required to engage in specific interactions.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1220)

¹⁰⁵ (Simon; Brexendorf; Fassnacht 2016, p. 419)

¹⁰⁶ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1220)

¹⁰⁷ (Brodie et al. 2013, p. 107f)

¹⁰⁸ (Simon; Brexendorf; Fassnacht 2016, p. 419)

¹⁰⁹ (ShiYong et al. 2022, p. 8)

¹¹⁰ (ShiYong et al. 2022, p. 8)

¹¹¹ (Brodie et al. 2013, p. 107f)

Based on the degree to which members are engaged within an SMBC, it is possible to distinguish between passive and active members.¹¹²

Thereby, the passive members will benefit from an SMBC by merely browsing, but not posting.¹¹³ The limited engagement of passive members in the SMBC may be explained in a lack of extraversion, which necessitates actions involving little exposure to social interaction.¹¹⁴ The active users, in contrast, are enthusiastically involved in SMBC activities, and generating posts.¹¹⁵ Having active members in an SMBC also means that they expect an appealing and customized brand experience in which they can be involved and share.¹¹⁶

Regarding engagement, existing studies have already explored whether accountability and the collective psychological responsibility are more pronounced among active members than passive ones.¹¹⁷ It has also been shown that where active engagement enhances trust within an SMBC and mutual sharing of information builds a sense of confidence, as well as being a key variable in brand loyalty.¹¹⁸ In addition, it has been proven that active members can become fans with emotional ties through intrinsic motivation, which are in a permanent relational exchange with the companies.¹¹⁹ Finally, it has been found that these fans may interact with non-members and transform them into transactional members. The degree to which members are satisfied determines whether transactional members can be retained or even be converted into loyal or delighted customers (Figure 3).¹²⁰

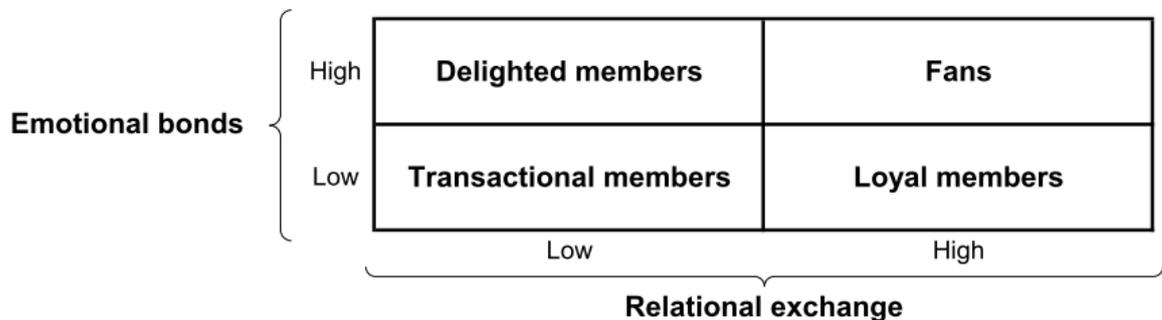


Figure 3: Member engagement matrix

Source: Own figure based on (Sashi 2012, p. 265)

¹¹² (Vohra; Bhardwaj 2019, p. 9)

¹¹³ (Vohra; Bhardwaj 2019, p. 9)

¹¹⁴ (Kumar 2019, p. 253)

¹¹⁵ (Vohra; Bhardwaj 2019, p. 9)

¹¹⁶ (Simon; Brexendorf; Fassnacht 2016, p. 419)

¹¹⁷ (Kumar 2019, p. 252)

¹¹⁸ (Vohra; Bhardwaj 2019, p. 17; Martínez-López et al. 2021, p. 13)

¹¹⁹ (Kaur et al. 2020, p. 1)

¹²⁰ (Sashi 2012, p. 268)

In order to obtain new findings, it is measured the influence of active engagement in SMBCs on the diffusion process (purchase intention) of innovative consumer durables. Second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2: The higher the engagement within an SMBC is, the higher the intention to purchase an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

5.3 Electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM)

In word-of-mouth, short WoM, product information and experiences are transmitted. Recommendations are made from a subjective consumer point of view, whereby an informal exchange with potential consumers on products or services occurs.¹²¹ Existing research has revealed that consumers trust WoM more than they trust traditional media, including radio and television advertisements, print media, and in-person sales.¹²² The emergence of Web 2.0 has also created eWoM. Unlike classic WoM, eWoM can be found online.¹²³ In this case, the communication participants do not need to be located in the same place, the information is spread more quickly, and the anonymity is higher. EWoM mainly consists of written communication, whereby the messages are electronically saved so that they can be retrieved by a large number of individuals. With traditional WoM, people were still reliant on a specific environment with a more narrowly defined group of friends and acquaintances. Like the original WoM, eWoM can also involve both positive and negative diffusion of information.¹²⁴ The communication channels used by eWoM can range from e-mails, blogs, discussion forums, corporate websites, chat rooms, and e-commerce websites to SMBCs.¹²⁵

Members with a strong relationship with the brand, also known as fans, can be more interested in spreading positive experiences that have been made in relation to the brand through eWoM. Their aim could be to improve the brand's success by using positive eWoM.¹²⁶

It has been revealed by previous studies that the volume of eWoM is positively related to purchase intention, and that nearly everyone (91% of those sampled) consults user-generated content before purchasing a new product or service, of which almost half (46% of those sampled) influence the purchase decision.¹²⁷

Based on the presented data, this paper will explore the influence of positive eWoM on the diffusion process (purchase intention) of innovative consumer durables. The third hypothesis is thus as follows:

H3: The higher the volume of positive eWoM in an SMBC is, the higher the intention to purchase an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

¹²¹ (Lis; Korchmar 2013, p. 5)

¹²² (Cheung; Thadani 2012, p. 462)

¹²³ (Lis; Korchmar 2013, p. 11)

¹²⁴ (Lis; Korchmar 2013, p. 12)

¹²⁵ (Lis; Korchmar 2013, p. 11)

¹²⁶ (Akrouit; Nagy 2018, p. 948)

¹²⁷ (Cheung; Thadani 2012, p. 461–465)

5.4 Hedonic value

Hedonic value, also known as entertainment value, is the description of the feeling of pleasure, enjoyment, fun, and entertainment that the members may experience within an SMBC.¹²⁸ This can be realized when attractive and colorful content is provided to the members as pictures or videos rather than in text form. At the same time, the content needs to be easily understandable and not convey an impression that the company is only trying to encourage its members to purchase a product.¹²⁹ So the hedonic value may be perceived as a gift, creating a guilty feeling among participants and in a broader way fostering brand loyalty.¹³⁰

Existing published research has found that hedonic value enhances the formation of an identity within an SMBC, and that the members are more satisfied with the SMBC.¹³¹ Also has been proven that hedonic value is a key element of members' decision to join or remain in an SMBC.¹³²

Given the literature and in order to generate new knowledge, it is assumed that hedonic value also influences the diffusion of innovative consumer durables. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis posed is as follows:

H4: The higher the entertainment value in an SMBC is, the higher the intention to purchase an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

5.5 Responsiveness

Responsiveness constitutes a key element of online interactions. Due to this criterion, an enterprise may guarantee an effective cooperation with members of an SMBC, attentively, quickly dealing with questions, complaints, and customers' requests.¹³³

Responding to customer opinions from the company's perspective demonstrates that the members of an SMBC are being heard and an interaction may occur. The more exchanges between the two parties, the more members perceive that their questions, needs, and requests are being acknowledged, which can increase their trust in the brand as well as in the company. An essential aspect of responsiveness is the speed of reaction. This is measured by the time between members' contributions and the corresponding company response.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1757)

¹²⁹ (Limpasirisuwan; Donkwa 2017, p. 107)

¹³⁰ (Laroche et al. 2012, p. 1757)

¹³¹ (Huangfu et al. 2022, p. 4; Limpasirisuwan; Donkwa 2017, p. 105)

¹³² (Huangfu et al. 2022, p. 4–10)

¹³³ (Ameur; Rached 2021, p. 18)

¹³⁴ (Sheng 2019, p. 43)

It has been empirically revealed that responsiveness can have a significant influence on customers' satisfaction. As a result, about 58% of the members of an SMBC expect a response to their posted content. Of them, 42% expect a reaction within a day, while 39% expect an answer within a week, followed by 7% within an hour, and 2% expecting a response within a minute.¹³⁵ Thereby, about 64% of the members complain about unsolved issues. After that, they are 38% more negatively affected by the brand. At the same time, 60% of them are more likely to take a negative action involving negative eWoM.¹³⁶

No study has demonstrated the influence of responsiveness on the diffusion of innovative consumer durables. Therefore, the next hypothesis is as follows:

H5: The faster a company's response to company-specific questions in an SMBC is, the higher the intention to purchase an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

5.6 Social spam

Spam is not a natural phenomenon, but is a product created by hackers, programmers, marketers, or social media consumers, among others. Spam usually refers to misuse, bad behavior, or exploitation of various kinds.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, SMBC can also be affected by spam. So-called social spam is, for example, unrequested and unwanted reviews. Such reviews can be categorized into hyper-reviews, defamatory reviews, and non-reviews. The hyper-reviews can be reviews in which an alternative competitive brand receives undeserving positive commentary in the brand community of the hosted brand. This form of review attempts to promote competing products.¹³⁸

The second kind of spam in SMBCs is defamatory reviews. With this type of review, negative and malicious comments about the hosted brand are posted. The objective of defamatory reviews is to harm the reputation of the hosted brand. In the third category of social spam, the non-reviews are considered. This can involve posting information that is not relevant to the hosted brand in the SMBC or to any competing brands. It may make it more difficult for members to comprehend this information. An increasing amount of non-meaningful information can distract the members from the relevant information, increasing the difficulty of identifying the accurate information, causing members to be confused.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ (Agnihotri et al. 2016, p. 178)

¹³⁶ (Melancon; Dalakas 2018, p. 158)

¹³⁷ (Brunton 2013, p. XIVf)

¹³⁸ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1062)

¹³⁹ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1062)

It was empirically verified that hyper-reviews are considered hostile by the members of the SMBCs. They may become more perceptive of the members' own membership and have an influence on the SMBC.¹⁴⁰ Defamatory reviews, on the other hand, make it hard for the members to forget the negative information and thereby identify with the SMBC. Because members may perceive their self-esteem under threat as well, their trust in the SMBC will decrease, affecting interactions between members. The non-reviews will also negatively impact membership, as members may cease to engage with the SMBC or cut off communication with other members.¹⁴¹

Due to excessive amount of non-relevant content in SMBCs, members might become annoyed, which may in turn cause negative eWoM for the brand. Thereby, the volume of negative eWoM may be less of a factor than the degree of annoyance that is caused among consumers. Hence, social spam can be considered as a type of antecedent for online firestorms.¹⁴²

The gathered insights, will serve as the base for analyzing the influence of social spam on the diffusion of innovative consumer durables in an SMBC, which leads to the final hypothesis formulation and is as follows:

H6: The less social spam in an SMBC is, the higher the intention to purchase an innovative consumer durable of the brand.

¹⁴⁰ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1067)

¹⁴¹ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1062)

¹⁴² (Hutter et al. 2013, p. 348)

5.7 Research model

Based on the formulated hypotheses, it was possible to create a research model that demonstrates the empirical part of the work. Figure 4 illustrates the independent variables of identification, engagement, eWoM, hedonic value, responsiveness, and social spam; furthermore, their respective hypotheses are connected with the dependent variable, which is the diffusion of innovative consumer durables. Using existing studies, these six hypotheses were formulated for this master's thesis, which is designed to provide new findings on the diffusion process (purchase intention), particularly of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region.

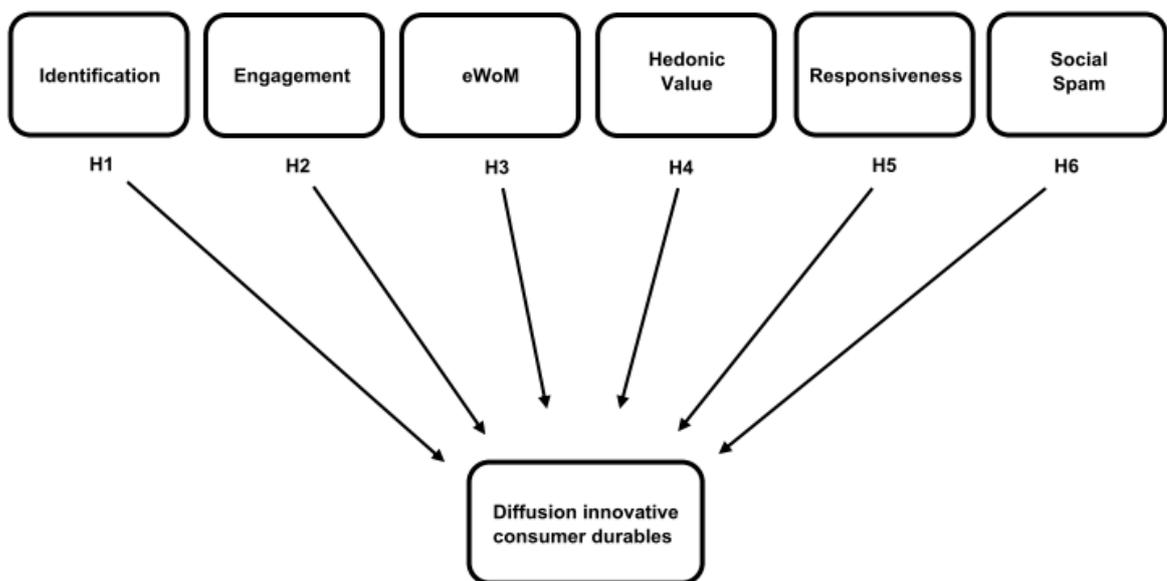


Figure 4: Research model

Source: Own figure

6. Research methodology

These six hypotheses have been tested empirically. For this purpose, first a questionnaire was developed, which then was provided to the test participants as an online survey. For the creation of the questionnaire, the online survey tool from Tivian called Unipark was used. Access to this tool was provided by the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences (UAS). The online survey was active between 04.05.2022 and 23.05.2022, during which time it was possible for the test participants to answer the survey. The following subchapters will discuss the data collection, the drawing of samples, the survey process, and the data analysis in more detail.

6.1 Data collection

For data collection, demographic information was requested at the beginning of the field phase. An initial question then was followed by 24 single-choice questions for which the test participants had to select their corresponding answer based on a five-point Likert scale.

The Likert scale was established for valid and reliable measurement and quantification of subjective preferences for feelings, thoughts, and activities. In this process, test participants have to indicate their level of agreement with a specific statement (item) using an ordinal scale. The combination of all statements reveals the particular attitude towards a certain hypothesis.¹⁴³

Both the hypotheses and the online survey are based on the literature of various research studies, although previous academic research has not focused primarily on the impact of SMBC on members' purchase intentions. Therefore, for new findings, the variables and the associated items have been adapted to allow exploration of the effects on the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables. For final data analysis, only the completely answered questionnaires have been considered.

6.2 Drawing of samples

The population in this study includes all social media users who are located in the DACH region, regardless of a particular platform, and who follow any brand promoting innovative consumer durables. In order to be able to draw a conclusion for the population, a random sampling was conducted. For this purpose, the link for participation in the survey was shared in various social media groups and on several platforms, with a large e-mail distribution list of the Vorarlberg UAS, and with family, friends, and acquaintances.

¹⁴³ (Harpe 2015, p. 838; Joshi et al. 2015, p. 397)

6.3 Survey process

Before the survey was placed online, a pre-test was conducted with 13 participants. This allowed potential comprehension problems or any other issues to be reported by the test participants. Their suggestions were then integrated in the survey. After no further comments were received from the test participants, it was possible for the survey, which was made available in German and English, to be launched online. It started with an information about the questionnaire, where it was mentioned that participation is completely anonymous and the collected data will be exclusively processed for the master's thesis. To be able to participate in the survey, a checkbox had to be selected that ensured consent for the usage of the collected data. On the following page, the terms "social media brand communities" and "innovative consumer durables" were briefly explained followed by a short introduction of the purpose of the survey.

The first question was a filter question, which was designed to determine who of the test participants actually follows any brand promoting innovative consumer durables. When this question was answered in the affirmative, the next question was asked, where demographic information was collected. If it was answered in the negative, they were directed to a final page where they were asked about their reason for not following a brand of innovative consumer durables. The semi-open question was structured as a multiple-choice question. In order to explore further what would need to be changed in order to stimulate the interest in joining an SMBC of innovative consumer durables, participants had the opportunity of answering a second question, which was intended to be open-ended.

Following the demographic information, variable-specific questions were asked. This involved 24 single-choice questions. To provide a better overview for test participants, the corresponding questions for each variable were listed on a separate page.

6.4 Data analysis

For the data analysis, the program IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) was used. In the Unipark software, the data had already been coded appropriately, requiring no adjustments during the export into SPSS. In accordance to the Likert scale, the value "totally disagree" was assigned as 1 on the scale, "rather disagree" was given the value 2, "neither nor" was 3, "rather agree" was 4, and "totally agree" was 5. First, the participants' demographic data was evaluated and revealed. In a further step, the quality and significance of the model were shown by using the model summary, the corrected R-square and the ANOVA table. In the next step, the reliability analysis was carried out.

After the reliability analysis, the mean of each scale was combined by using the scale average, because the evaluation of a variable involves combining the individual items of a variable.¹⁴⁴ To exclude correlation between the variables, multicollinearity was tested by using the tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF). Then, the effects of the independent variables, also called predictors, on the dependent variable, also known as the criterion variable, were analyzed. Since multiple independent variables and a dependent variable are given, multiple linear regression was used to conduct the analysis.¹⁴⁵ Thereby, the scaling of the dependent variable is also a requirement for multiple linear regression since this has to be continuous and metric (Table 1).¹⁴⁶

	Number of independent variable	Scale level dependent variable	Scale level independent variable
Simple linear regression	One	Metric	Metric, ordinal, nominal
Multiple linear regression	Various	Metric	Metric, ordinal, nominal
Logistic regression	Various	Ordinal, nominal	Metric, ordinal, nominal

Table 1: Forms of regression

Source: Own table based on (DATAtab 2022)

Following the hypothesis testing, the existence of behavioral differences in the DACH region related to the variables was checked and if present, where they occurred was indicated. Lastly, the results of the participants who did not join an SMBC promoting innovative consumer durables were evaluated.

¹⁴⁴ (Grünwald 2019)

¹⁴⁵ (UZH 2022a)

¹⁴⁶ (Regorz 2022)

7. Findings

In this chapter, the analysis of the online survey is discussed. As mentioned earlier, the sampling data will be evaluated, the models used will be explained on a detailed level, and the testing of the hypotheses will be performed and described.

7.1 Samples

During the period in which the online survey has been active, 473 respondents participated. Out of all those who took part, 217 did not complete the survey and, therefore, could not be considered for further evaluation. With the filter question at the beginning of the survey, it was possible to extract from the remaining 256 respondents which of them follow an innovative consumer durables brand. Thereby, 147 indicated that they do not follow such a brand on social media. Consequently, 109 respondents represent the valid sample size for the quantitative analysis.

The demographic data revealed that 62 respondents are male and 46 are female; one belongs to the gender category "Divers" (Table 2).

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	46	42.2
Male	62	56.9
Divers	1	0.9
Total	109	100

Table 2: Gender distribution

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Analyzing the age of the test participants, it becomes recognizable that most test participants with 54 respondents are in the age between 26 and 40 years. Of the participants, 44 are 18-25 years old. Of the participants, 10 are between the ages of 41 and 65, and only one person is under the age of 18 (Table 3).

Age	Frequency	Percent
Under 18 years	1	0.9
18 - 25 years	44	40.4
26 - 40 years	54	49.5
41 - 65 years	10	9.2
Total	109	100

Table 3: Age distribution

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The educational distribution demonstrates (Table 4) that a majority of the test participants has a bachelor's degree, with 50 participants. Of all the respondents, 21 have a Matura (maturity diploma). Of the participants, 14 state that their education is different from the choices they were presented in the questionnaire. There are 13 respondents with a master's degree in the group. Of the rest of the test participants, 10 participants had completed an apprenticeship, and one person has no scholastic degree.

Education	Frequency	Percent
Master's degree	13	11.9
Bachelor's degree	50	45.9
Matura	21	19.3
Apprenticeship diploma	10	9.2
No school degree	1	0.9
Other education or training	14	12.8
Total	109	100

Table 4: Education distribution

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

In the evaluation of the location (Table 5) revealed that with 37 test participants, most of the sample participated from Switzerland. Of the participants, 33 people took part in the survey from Austria and 21 from Germany. Of the participants, 18 answered the questionnaire and indicated that they are not from the DACH region.

Location	Frequency	Percent
Austria	33	30.3
Germany	21	19.3
Switzerland	37	33.9
Other	18	16.5
Total	109	100

Table 5: Location distribution

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

7.2 Model quality

The model summary in SPSS describes the model quality and indicates how well the estimated model matches the collected data. Thereby, the coefficient R is the linear correlation between the observed values of the dependent variable and the values predicted by the model.¹⁴⁷ The coefficient R^2 describes which variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. The value can range from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates that the model has no explanatory power and 1 implies that the model can perfectly predict the observed values. However, the number of independent variables influence the value of R^2 , meaning that the higher the number of independent variables is, the higher R^2 will be, although the additional variables do not have explanatory power. That is why the corrected R^2 is calculated and used.¹⁴⁸

The result of the conducted model summary reveals that the corrected R^2 value lies at 0.347. In other words, the independent variables describe 34.7% of the variance of the dependent variable.

However, such a low R^2 value is not problematic considering that in situations in which human behavior should be predicted, the R^2 value could be expected to be less than 50%, unlike, for instance, physical processes.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ (Singh 2015, p. 13)

¹⁴⁸ (UZH 2022a)

¹⁴⁹ (Minitab 2022)

Additionally, when the model summary has been generated, the Durbin-Watson statistics were retrieved, which serve for checking the autocorrelation. The value of the Durbin-Watson statistic normally ranges between values of 0 and 4, whereby only values between 1 and 3 are acceptable. In this context, a value around 2 is the ideal. Since this work deals with cross-section data and does not have natural ascending or descending order (chronological sequence), a graphical diagnosis using the scatter plot should also be made in addition to the Durbin-Watson test.¹⁵⁰

The obtained Durbin-Watson value is 2.088 and thus far means that there is no autocorrelation (Table 6).

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.621	0.385	0.347	0.69831	2.088

Table 6: Model summary

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The scatterplot illustrates that the values here are also within a range between a value of -3 and +3, with the exception of two outliers, which are negligible. This means that the graphical interpretation also reveals that no autocorrelation exists (Figure 5).

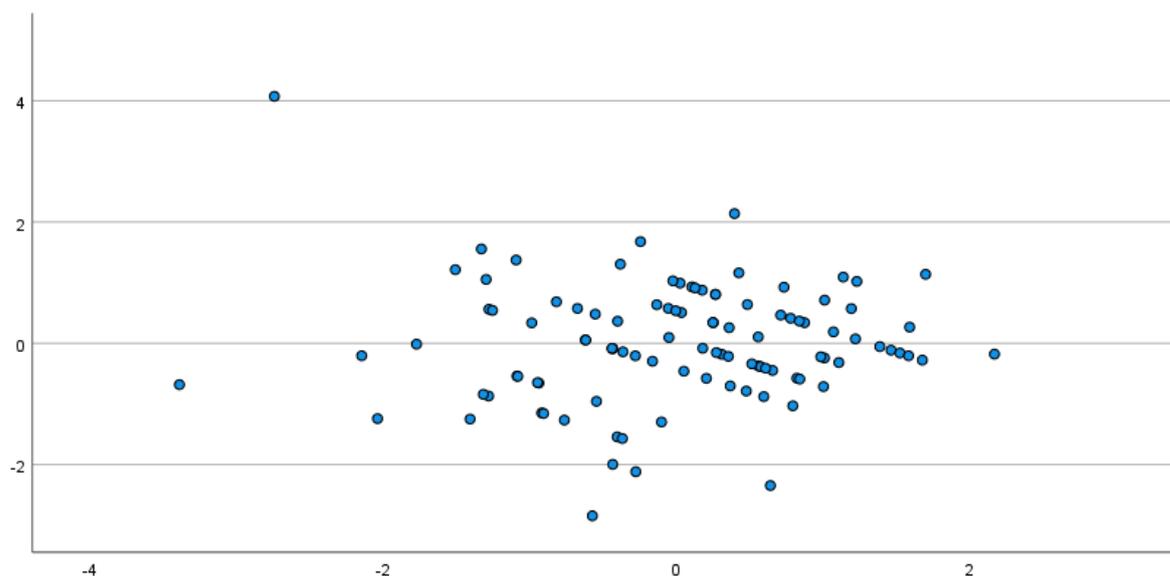


Figure 5: Scatterplot

Source: (IBM SPSS Statistics)

¹⁵⁰ (Walther 2019)

The ANOVA table is also presented in addition to the model summary table for the multiple linear regression analysis. In order that the regression model provides an explanatory contribution, the ANOVA should have a significant value of $p < 0.05$. When the significance value p is above 0.05, the calculation of the multiple linear regression can no longer proceed.¹⁵¹

An indicated value in the ANOVA table (Table 7) corresponds to a significance of < 0.001 , which is statistically considered highly significant; therefore, it implies that the regression model makes an explanatory contribution, allowing the analysis to be continued.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	29.338	6	4.890	10.027	<0.001
Residual	46.813	96	0.488		
Total	76.151	102			

Table 7: ANOVA of the regression model

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

¹⁵¹ (Walther 2022a)

7.3 Reliability test

To measure the degree of consistency (internal consistency) between multiple questions (items) in a questionnaire, a reliability test has to be performed. Since all variables' scales have more than two items, Cronbach's alpha was applied for this purpose.¹⁵² In this context, internal consistency refers to the degree of consistency between multiple questions in a questionnaire. Their Cronbach's alpha value reveals whether the questions actually measure a specific construct. Cronbach's alpha is a number between 0 and 1.¹⁵³ The table below summarizes the related values and how their internal consistency should be interpreted (Table 8).

Cronbach's Alpha criteria	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$	Good
$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$	Acceptable
$0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$	Questionable
$0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.5$	Unacceptable

Table 8: Cronbach's alpha criteria

Source: Own table based on (Siswaningsih et al. 2017, p. 3)

The independent variable "Identification" has been measured through four items. The Cronbach's alpha value has issued 0.799, which means that a good internal consistency is obtained (Table 9).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.799	4

Table 9: Reliability statistics for identification

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

¹⁵² (Walther 2022b)

¹⁵³ (Tavakol; Dennick 2011, p. 53)

In the item scale statistics, the value of Cronbach's alpha can be seen if a specific question (item) were to be deleted. If the second question for the variable "Identification" were to be left out, then the value of the Cronbach's alpha would increase to 0.806, which would not have a big impact compared to the current value (Table 10)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I feel connected to the other members of an SMBC	8.78	7.195	0.591	0.758
I can identify with a company-generated SMBC	8.41	8.362	0.480	0.806
I can identify with a consumer-initiated SMBC	8.72	6.459	0.716	0.692
I identify with a brand through an SMBC	8.79	6.640	0.666	0.720

Table 10: Item-total statistics for identification

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

For the independent variable "Engagement", four questions (items) were asked. The reliability statistics reveal a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.899, which is almost an excellent value (Table 11).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.899	4

Table 11: Reliability statistics for engagement

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

From Table 12, it is evident that the Cronbach's alpha value would decrease slightly if one question (item) were to be removed and therefore all questions are relevant for reaching the value of 0.899.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I communicate with a company through an SMBC	6.07	10.986	0.729	0.890
I post product related content within an SMBC	6.51	11.507	0.819	0.857
I share information with other members of the SMBC	6.21	10.856	0.824	0.852
I am an active member in an SMBC	6.28	11.557	0.742	0.882

Table 12: Item-total statistics for engagement

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Four questions have been used for the independent variable "eWoM" as well. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.856 was issued. Additionally, this value can be considered as good (Table 13).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.856	4

Table 13: Reliability statistics for eWoM

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

To achieve the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.856, the last question could have been neglected, although this is not a disturbing element (Table 14).

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Positive reviews in an SMBC influence me	10.18	7.387	0.744	0.798
Positive experiences of the other members in an SMBC influence me	10.08	7.582	0.722	0.808
Product recommendations from other members in an SMBC are meaningful to me	10.37	7.490	0.728	0.805
I let myself be influenced by electronic word-of mouth	10.58	7.638	0.611	0.856

Table 14: Item-total statistics for eWoM

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Three questions (items) were used for the independent variable "Hedonic value". This has shown a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.847, which is a good value (Table 15).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.847	3

Table 15: Reliability statistics for hedonic value

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Eliminating the last item would also result in a minimal improvement in the Cronbach's alpha value. Excluding the last question, the value would be 0.863. However, the increase in the value is so marginal that this can be ignored (Table 16).

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I find participating in an SMBC entertaining	5.62	3.747	0.736	0.771
I have fun within an SMBC	5.78	3.469	0.778	0.727
I enjoy the interaction with other members within an SMBC	6.23	3.553	0.643	0.863

Table 16: Item-total statistics for hedonic value

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Three questions (items) were also used for the independent variable "Responsiveness". The evaluation shows that Cronbach's alpha value 0.870 was obtained. This is also a good value (Table 17).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.870	3

Table 17: Reliability statistics for responsiveness

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The item-total statistic here shows that ignoring the first item would produce a minimal enhancement in the Cronbach's alpha value. The new value would then be 0.902. Since the change in the value is very small, it would not need to be taken into consideration (Table 18).

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I expect a fast response from a company to my posts within an SMBC	7.30	4.467	0.657	0.902
It is important to me that my product-related questions are answered at a rapid pace	6.69	4.079	0.827	0.751
I expect a short-term response to questions addressed to the company	6.81	3.962	0.780	0.791

Table 18: Item-total statistics for responsiveness

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Likewise, for the independent variable "Social spam", three items were used. The Cronbach's alpha value output is 0.795 (Table 19). As for the variables previously mentioned, this is considered a good value.

Cronbach's	Number of Items
0.795	3

Table 19: Reliability statistics for social spam

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Table 20 shows that the Cronbach's alpha value would worsen if one item were removed instead of improving, and it therefore makes sense to leave all questions as they are.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I find spam within an SMBC to be annoying	8.05	4.105	0.597	0.774
Spam within an SMBC irritates me	8.54	2.937	0.653	0.715
Spam within an SMBC distracts from important product information	8.34	3.128	0.695	0.656

Table 20: Item-total statistics for social spam

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

For the dependent variable "Diffusion", as for the previous few variables, three items were used. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.758 is between acceptable and good (Table 21).

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.758	3

Table 21: Reliability statistics for diffusion

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The item-total statistics show that excluding the third item would result in a value of 0.835, which is in the good range. However, since the value of 0.758 is acceptable in any case, it is not essential to modify the items in this case (Table 22). If the Cronbach's alpha value would no longer be in an acceptable range, then a reaction would be required.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I will buy innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	6.45	3.112	0.719	0.527
I have bought innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	6.23	3.180	0.622	0.636
I decide to purchase consumer durables through an SMBC	7.07	3.750	0.443	0.835

Table 22: Item-total statistics for diffusion

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

7.4 Multicollinearity

In multiple linear regression, it is possible that multicollinearity will occur. With the help of the VIF, a too high correlation can be described among two or more independent variables. In case of multicollinearity, two independent variables that are highly correlated with each other might be measuring the same thing, which requires further investigation.¹⁵⁴ An indication that multicollinearity may be possible is given when the VIF value is higher than 4 or if the tolerance value is below 0.25. A VIF value higher than 10 or a tolerance value lower than 0.1 means that there is significant multicollinearity, which has to be corrected.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ (Walther 2021a)

¹⁵⁵ (CFI 2022)

In Table 23, the tolerance values are clearly above the critical value of 0.25 and the VIF value is well below the crucial value of 4. Therefore, no multicollinearity is found.

Model	Tolerance	VIF
Identification	0.578	1.731
Engagement	0.595	1.682
eWoM	0.608	1.644
Hedonic value	0.595	1.680
Responsiveness	0.663	1.508
Social spam	0.685	1.461

Table 23: Collinearity statistics

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

7.5 Hypothesis test

As mentioned already, multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses that were formulated. In this analysis, whether the regression coefficients are significant ($p < 0.05$) will be tested. If this is the case, the null hypothesis (standard hypothesis) can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis (formulated hypothesis) can be accepted.¹⁵⁶ Table 24 shows all the independent variables and their significance level, which is explained in more detail in the next subsections.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	0.678	0.403		1.681	0.096	-0.123	1.479
Identification	0.207	0.105	0.207	1.962	0.053	-0.002	0.416
Engagement	0.047	0.082	0.060	0.581	0.563	-0.115	0.209
eWoM	0.358	0.099	0.370	3.608	<0.001	0.161	0.555
Hedonic value	0.025	0.098	0.026	0.255	0.799	-0.170	0.220
Responsiveness	0.073	0.086	0.084	0.855	0.395	-0.097	0.244
Social spam	0.086	0.095	0.088	0.906	0.367	-0.103	0.276

Table 24: Coefficients table

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

¹⁵⁶ (Hartmann; Lois 2015, p. 27)

7.5.1 Hypothesis H1 (Identification)

We have to falsify the first hypothesis, which states that a higher identification with an SMBC results in a higher intention to buy an innovative consumer durable of a brand (H1). The significance level p is 0.053 and hence just misses the significance level ($p < 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis must be accepted, which states that identification with an SMBC has no influence on the purchase intention of innovative consumer durables.

7.5.2 Hypothesis H2 (Engagement)

The second hypothesis, expressing that higher engagement within an SMBC creates an increase in the purchase intention of an innovative consumer durable of a brand must also be falsified, as the significance level of 0.563 is clearly above the 0.05 significance level. This means the null hypothesis will be accepted, which does not see any correlation between a higher level of engagement in an SMBC and a higher purchase intention of innovative consumer durables.

7.5.3 Hypothesis H3 (Electronic word-of-mouth)

For the third hypothesis, whether a higher positive eWoM in an SMBC results in a higher purchase intention on an innovative consumer durable of a brand was tested. At < 0.001 , this value is highly significant, meaning the alternative hypothesis H3 may be accepted, and the null hypothesis must be falsified. This provides empirical evidence and allows the conclusion to be drawn that increased positive eWoM in an SMBC increases the purchase intention for innovative consumer durables of a brand.

7.5.4 Hypothesis H4 (Hedonic value)

In the fourth hypothesis, the intention to buy an innovative consumer durable of a brand should increase with higher hedonic value in an SMBC. The significance level with 0.799 ($p < 0.05$) is very high. The alternative hypothesis H4 must therefore be rejected with the null hypothesis, which finds no correlation between higher hedonic value and purchase intention, being accepted.

7.5.5 Hypothesis H5 (Responsiveness)

According to the fifth hypothesis, which implies that faster response to company-specific questions will increase purchase intention of a brand's innovative consumer durable, results in a p -value of 0.395, which is higher than the significance level, and consequently implies that the alternative hypothesis H5 must be falsified. In turn, the null hypothesis is accepted, which does not find a relationship between the response time of an enterprise to members' questions and the purchase intention.

7.5.6 Hypothesis H6 (Social spam)

The last hypothesis postulates that the less social spam exists within an SMBC, the higher the purchase intention of an innovative consumer durable of a brand. The coefficient table indicates a significance value of 0.367. Thus, the last alternative hypothesis H6 also has to be falsified and the null hypothesis, stating that no relationship between social spam within an SMBC and the purchase intention of innovative consumer durables exists, can be accepted.

7.6 Differences in the DACH region

To be able to analyze the existence of differences between the regions in the survey, a one-way ANOVA is used. In the process, a variance homogeneity test is also conducted to determine whether the variances are homogeneous, in other words, if there is an equality of variances.¹⁵⁷

The test for variance homogeneity can be performed by using the Levene test (in the form of an F-test). The null hypothesis states that the same variances exist; however, a significant value ($p < 0.05$) falsifies the null hypothesis, and the alternative hypothesis must be accepted, which means that the variances differ. Table 25 reveals that no significant value is identifiable for any of the items. This means that the variance in the groups is homogeneous.

	Levene Statistic		df1	df2	Sig.
Identification	Based on Mean	0.978	3	105	0.406
	Based on Median	0.627	3	105	0.599
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.627	3	96.836	0.599
	Based on trimmed Mean	0.946	3	105	0.421
Engagement	Based on Mean	0.647	3	105	0.587
	Based on Median	0.274	3	105	0.844
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.274	3	100.507	0.844
	Based on trimmed Mean	0.597	3	105	0.618
eWoM	Based on Mean	1.146	3	105	0.334
	Based on Median	0.830	3	105	0.480
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.830	3	98.633	0.480
	Based on trimmed Mean	1.141	3	105	0.336
Hedonic value	Based on Mean	0.315	3	105	0.814
	Based on Median	0.250	3	105	0.861
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.250	3	99.157	0.861
	Based on trimmed Mean	0.338	3	105	0.798

¹⁵⁷ (Walther 2021b)

Responsiveness	Based on Mean	0.507	3	105	0.678
	Based on Median	0.664	3	105	0.576
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.664	3	100.116	0.576
	Based on trimmed Mean	0.588	3	105	0.624
Social spam	Based on Mean	1.975	3	105	0.122
	Based on Median	1.706	3	105	0.170
	Based Median and with adjusted df	1.706	3	78.143	0.173
	Based on trimmed Mean	1.934	3	105	0.129
Diffusion	Based on Mean	0.479	3	105	0.698
	Based on Median	0.513	3	105	0.674
	Based Median and with adjusted df	0.513	3	102.392	0.674
	Based on trimmed Mean	0.483	3	105	0.695

Table 25: Levene statistic

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The significance level in the ANOVA table is observed by testing if there is a difference between the means of several independent groups defined by a categorical (nominally and ordinaly scaled) independent variable (factor).¹⁵⁸

Based on Table 26, the identification and engagement variables have significance levels of 0.040 and 0.016, which are below the significance level of 0.05, indicating differences between the groups for these variables.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Identification	Between Groups	6.005	3	2.002	2.869	0.040
	Within Groups	73.271	105	0.698		
	Total	79.276	108			
Engagement	Between Groups	12.116	3	4.039	3.594	0.016
	Within Groups	117.994	105	1.124		
	Total	130.110	108			
eWoM	Between Groups	0.830	3	0.277	0.350	0.789
	Within Groups	83.090	105	0.791		
	Total	83.920	108			
Hedonic value	Between Groups	2.963	3	0.988	1.147	0.334
	Within Groups	90.407	105	0.861		
	Total	93.370	108			

¹⁵⁸ (UZH 2022b)

Responsiveness	Between Groups	0.799	3	0.266	0.268	0.848
	Within Groups	104.430	105	0.995		
	Total	105.229	108			
Social spam	Between Groups	1.125	3	0.375	0.503	0.681
	Within Groups	78.340	105	0.746		
	Total	79.466	108			
Diffusion	Between Groups	0.963	3	0.321	0.421	0.738
	Within Groups	79.949	105	0.761		
	Total	80.911	108			

Table 26: One-way ANOVA

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

Although the ANOVA table finds significance, a post-hoc test has to be performed to determine whether truly significant results occur and, if so, between which factors that is the case. This involves a comparison of all the possible group combinations.¹⁵⁹ In this case, the post-hoc Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) is performed.

The Tukey HSD test showed (test results in the Appendix) that there is a p-value of 0.054 between the groups "Austria" and "Germany" for the variable "Identification", which means that the significance level ($p < 0.05$) was just missed and, consequently, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no difference between the groups in the DACH region, must be accepted. The only significant value from the Tukey HSD table, which is $p = 0.008$, exists between the groups "Austria" and "Other". Nevertheless, this result is irrelevant for this study, as only the differences in the DACH region are to be measured.

7.7 Non-members

In the online survey, as already mentioned, 147 people indicated that they do not follow any brand of innovative consumer durables on social media. In the questionnaire, there was an option for them to choose from four predefined answers and one open answer to state what their reason is for not following such a brand. The predefined answers were "I do not use social media", "I prefer offline brand communities", "I don't follow any brand because I can't identify with any of them" and "I don't like the fact that in most brand communities the economic aspect predominates". The analysis of the frequency of the answers in the data was made with the help of descriptive statistics. Unlike the other parts of the questionnaire, these questions were not compulsory and could either be answered or skipped.

¹⁵⁹ (UZH 2022b)

As shown in Table 27, 23 respondents indicated that they do not use social media. A preference for offline brand communities is another reason for 19 test participants not to follow any brand of innovative consumer durables online. Of the 147 participants, a total of 64 cannot identify with any brand of innovative consumer durables. Furthermore, 47 persons have indicated that they do not like the fact that most SMBCs focus on the economic aspects.

	Frequency	Percent
I do not use social media.		
not quoted	124	84.4
quoted	23	15.6
I prefer offline brand communities.		
not quoted	128	87.1
quoted	19	12.9
I don't follow any brand because I can't identify with any		
not quoted	83	56.5
quoted	64	43.5
I don't like the fact that in most SMBCs the economic		
not quoted	100	68.0
quoted	47	32.0

Table 27: Frequency table

Source: Own table based on (IBM SPSS Statistics)

The responses that emerged from the open answer option of the semi-open question can be summarized. Some indicated a lack of interest in consumer durables as their reason for not following, while only joining brands that promote consumables or are concerned with service and support. Others find the relationship between SMBC members too superficial. Receiving too much spam in SMBC is another reason for not being a member. Respect for the prevailing group dynamic in such an SMBC was also a barrier for respondents to follow a brand. Others, however, stated that it was a previously subconscious behavior that only came to their attention through this online survey.

Besides the reasons for not participating in SMBCs of innovative consumer durables, the respondents were additionally asked an open question in which they had the possibility to indicate their opinion on what would have to change for them to consider participating in such an SMBC. The evaluation of this question produced different findings, which are also summarized.

Respondents felt that brands should make more of an effort to make customers feel valued and appreciated. A strong identification with an innovative consumer durables brand, which has not been the case according to the respondents, would encourage some to join an SMBC. A further need of other test participants is to receive detailed and interesting product information about the innovations from the brands. Product testing and associated truthful information by other members of the SMBC, which can be described as eWoM, was also mentioned. On the other hand, some participants miss the entertainment value in the content shared by the brands. The occurrence of advertisement and spam in the SMBCs should be reduced and more educational content about the brand or enterprise should be shared instead, according to the answers of the respondents.

8. Discussion

This paper's major objective is to analyze empirically how SMBCs influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables. In previous research, only limited consideration was given to SMBCs in terms of the impact they may have on purchase intentions. This master's thesis is the first of its kind, since no study has previously analyzed the influence of SMBCs on purchase intention specifically for the product category of innovative consumer durables. As a sub-objective of this master's thesis, companies will be shown how SMBCs can be established. As this study focuses on the DACH region, it will be determined whether the results of the respondents vary between the regions of Austria, Germany, or Switzerland. Besides the positive characteristics, it also highlights the risks of an SMBC, in the form of online firestorms.

For answering the research question, a literature review was conducted at the very beginning. To compare these findings to the perspective of enterprises, several interviews were conducted with companies from various industries engaged in the promotion of innovative consumer durables. Afterwards, hypotheses were formulated. In order to test them and reach a larger number of participants, a quantitative online survey was conducted. It was challenging to obtain a sufficient number of participants to complete the survey. As also can be extracted from the responses of the non-members, the motivation to follow a brand for innovative consumer durables in social media is limited. When the survey was made inactive, meaning that no further participants were able to complete the questionnaire, the analysis of the data began with the help of IBM's SPSS software.

8.1 Theoretical implications

The first hypothesis, which predicted a connection between identification with an SMBC and the diffusion process, could not be proven true. According to this result, members do not have to identify with an SMBC, or only to a minor degree, in order to have a purchase intention for innovative consumer durables. In addition to the connection between identification with an SMBC and an increase in brand trust, positive eWoM, and increased member engagement within the SMBC, other studies were also able to prove empirically that identification with an SMBC has a greater influence on participants' brand loyalty than identification with a brand itself. Contrary to expectations, the findings in this study could be explained by the fact that it is a specific product segment, where identification does not appear to be a primary factor for a purchase intention but based on some statements from the non-members' questionnaire. Consumers may consider interesting and detailed product information, possibly specifically about the new features, to be more relevant.

Second, the variable "Engagement" was tested. The hypothesis that a higher engagement within an SMBC increases the purchase intention could not be proven. Although previous work explored engagement as a key variable for brand loyalty, the result of the present work means that members of an SMBC of innovative consumer durables do not necessarily have to be actively engaged to develop higher purchase intention. It may be that passive members can develop the same or even higher purchase intention for innovative consumer durables. This finding may have a connection to other studies that have already found that passive members have higher self-efficacy, self-identity, and sense of belonging than active members, and their limited involvement occurs due to a lack of extraversion, meaning that they prefer actions that require less social contact.¹⁶⁰ The more pronounced character traits such as self-efficacy and self-identity could also be motivators for passive members to adopt innovative consumer durables as so-called innovators or early adopters very early in their market phase. In this context, engagement during passive membership could only take place in the form of eWoM, enabling them to share their product experiences with the next consumer group and foster diffusion.

The third hypothesis is about eWoM. It states that higher positive eWoM within the SMBC increases the purchase intention of innovative consumer durables. Evaluation of the data revealed as expected that this hypothesis can be accepted, thus proving a connection between positive eWoM and the purchase intention of innovative consumer durables. With the present result, it is possible to draw parallels to a previous study that found that the volume of eWoM has a positive effect on purchase intention.¹⁶¹ Although this study did not deal specifically with SMBCs, it shows that 91% of the study respondents visit user-generated content on various channels to obtain information before making a purchase, and 46% make their final purchase decision based on this information.¹⁶² The eWoM received can be especially important for the diffusion phases of the early and late majority groups. They can build on the shared experiences of innovators and early adopters in their purchase intention and consequently minimize the risk of adopting an innovative consumer durable.

With the fourth hypothesis, it was expected that a higher hedonic value within an SMBC increases the diffusion of innovative consumer durables. This expectation could not be confirmed after data analysis. In a previous study, it was shown that hedonic value in an SMBC could have a positive effect on identity formation as well as active and passive engagement of members in an SMBC.¹⁶³ The evaluated answers of the questionnaire of some non-members show partial parallels to these findings. They indicated that the lack of entertainment value is a reason not to follow a brand of innovative consumer durables. For purchase intention, hedonic value is not relevant, as this study reveals. Compared to other product groups where the product may be known among SMBC members and hedonic value may serve to keep members happy, for the initial stage of innovative consumer durables where less is known about the product, the bare data together with information about the product's new features may be more crucial than the hedonic value.

¹⁶⁰ (Martínez-López et al. 2021, p. 13; Kumar 2019, p. 252)

¹⁶¹ (Cheung; Thadani 2012, p. 465)

¹⁶² (Cheung; Thadani 2012, p. 461)

¹⁶³ (Huangfu et al. 2022, p. 4–10)

The fifth hypothesis is about responsiveness in SMBCs and predicts a relationship between fast response and purchase intention of innovative consumer durables. However, the result of the evaluation states that fast reaction has no influence on purchase intention. Consequently, no response or a slower response could have a positive impact on purchase intention. This finding is unexpected because earlier studies have explored that trust in a brand enhances as interaction between members and the company increases, with the speed of response being the critical factor.¹⁶⁴ Conversely, if members' problems are not taken seriously by enterprises, they may generate negative attitudes towards a brand and express this in the form of negative eWoM.¹⁶⁵ Explanations as to why the responsiveness of the subjects in this study have no effect on purchase intention could be that especially in the area of innovative consumer durables, either the companies already provide a substantial amount of information and thus fewer or no questions arise at all, or the active and informed community members help out and answer other members' questions, requiring less or no response from an enterprise. It could possibly also be related to the fact that, for this product group specifically, members value product experiences from other members more than a quick response from companies. This would fit with the significantly tested variable "eWoM" in this study and further draw parallels to the expressions of some test participants who prefer to have honest product reviews from other members.

The last hypothesis in this thesis claims that a lower volume of social spam within an SMBC has a positive effect on the purchase intention of innovative consumer durables. This assumption could not be confirmed after analyzing the data, which means that there is no correlation between the volume of social spam in an SMBC and the diffusion process, or the opposite is the case, and social spam actually favors the purchase intention. The findings are in contrast to partial results of a past research work that divided social spam into different types and found out that the members of an SMBC perceive social spam as annoying, increasing the willingness for negative eWoM, and that the identification as well as the trust in the SMBC decreases with an increased volume of social spam.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, some non-members stated in the questionnaire that they do not follow a brand because they would receive too much advertising and spam and, as a consequence, that a reduction of advertising and spam in the SMBC could make them follow a brand. However, further results from the same previous study showed that hyper-reviews, one of the forms of social spam, has a positive impact on brand loyalty, as excessive undeserved promotion of a competing brand encourages the formation of oppositional brand loyalty.¹⁶⁷ This could be a possible way to explain the result of this study. In this regard, SMBCs of innovative consumer durables could be mainly about the occurrence of hyper-reviews, which possibly increases brand loyalty and, therefore, members' purchase intention of innovative consumer durables.

¹⁶⁴ (Sheng 2019, p. 43)

¹⁶⁵ (Melancon; Dalakas 2018, p. 158)

¹⁶⁶ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1062–1067)

¹⁶⁷ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1063)

In summary, the findings of this paper indicate that the role played by eWoM within an SMBC is highly significant for members when it comes to purchase intention of innovative consumer durables. The higher the volume of positive electronic word-of-mouth is, the higher the members' purchase intention. The hypotheses tested for the variables shows that "Identification", "Engagement", "Hedonic value", "Responsiveness", and "Social spam" do not influence members' purchase intention of innovative consumer durables.

8.2 Practical implications

The findings of this thesis may be helpful for companies that are involved in promoting innovative consumer durables and already use social media platforms as a marketing channel or are considering to do so in the future.

A go-to-market strategy for innovative consumer durables can pose challenges for enterprises.¹⁶⁸ In this regard, the members of an SMBC may already have an important part to play in the development of new products. The first is in the diffusion phase; the innovators, also known as lead users, and the early adopters can be crucial for companies here, as they can provide suggestions for improvement when involved in the research and development phase and increase product adoption through their expertise and characteristics, as well as reduce receptivity for new competitive developments and be ready for investments in innovations.¹⁶⁹ To reduce the risk perception of other user groups and increase positive eWoM, announcements ahead of the actual product launch as well as extensive product information may be significant.¹⁷⁰

In addition to the go-to-market strategy, the right targeting strategy also matters because it directly effects the diffusion of new products.¹⁷¹ For this purpose, enterprises could use a paid content creator, also known as a permanent corporate influencer (PCI), to assist the social media manager instead of a traditional content creator, commonly called influencer, who only offers occasional support. Through this approach, it could be possible to establish a community in social media that would further increase brand awareness.¹⁷² While doing so, members may easily perceive the companies' shared content as too commercially oriented, which can jeopardize an organization's credibility. That could potentially be countered through spontaneous posts. Posts from brands where products are shared in a more natural environment from daily life may have a spontaneous effect, which can stimulate the members' interest in finding out about the product involved.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ (Dass et al. 2021, p. 1227)

¹⁶⁹ (Popp 2016, p. 11)

¹⁷⁰ (Nguyen; Chaudhuri 2019, p. 55)

¹⁷¹ (Hu et al. 2018, p. 117)

¹⁷² (Klein 2021, p. 5)

¹⁷³ (Maden 2019, p. 137)

In principle, a trustworthy environment should exist in an SMBC, in which users feel free to participate and provide their resources.¹⁷⁴ Deciding on the type of SMBC the enterprise should use when diffusing innovative consumer durables may be strongly dependent on the degree of innovativeness of the products. Concerning the diffusion model, open communities might provide appropriate advice in the case of fundamentally innovative consumer durables. If the innovations are incremental, then both open and sophisticated types of communities might be considered. Restricted SMBCs typically result in less success among innovators and early adopters of innovative consumer durables.¹⁷⁵

Since this study shows that social spam does not have negative impacts on purchase intention, it might be that hyper-reviews are the primary form of spam appearing in these SMBCs. It has been found that hyper-reviews can even have the opposite effect in an SMBC, which is to create a positive effect. Companies could thus intentionally retain or even encourage a certain volume of hyper-reviews. In doing so, they could encourage members to discuss this type of spam actively, which lets them gather more information about the technological advances of competing brands and thus be involved in developing more innovative ideas that could be helpful to the focal brand's enterprise and the evolution of its products.¹⁷⁶

To detect negative eWoM that can be damaging to corporate reputation, tools such as Diction can be applied. A computerized content analysis software, which can monitor the content of a company's own SMBC and compare it with other SMBCs, including SMBCs that are hostile to the brand. The occurrence of negative eWoM could be detected at an early stage by this means.¹⁷⁷ When negative eWoM is identified by the software, then the appropriate reaction strategy should be applied to prevent a potential online firestorm. Trying to minimize the potential for negative eWoM to spread in advance, enterprises could decrease the virality of negative posts by apologizing or attempting to discuss the issue with the unsatisfied member through a different channel.¹⁷⁸ If the emergence of an online firestorm can no longer be prevented, companies should respond multiple times, with the first reaction to negative eWoM messages being highly animated and showing more empathy in subsequent communications, which might reduce the virality of an online firestorm.¹⁷⁹

Since the variable "eWoM" was found to be a significant factor for the purchase intention of the members of an SMBC of innovative consumer durables, enterprises should focus on the diffusion of eWoM and encourage the members of the SMBC to share their positive experiences with other members. Innovators and early adopters have the potential to be targeted specifically for this purpose, since their positively shared experiences with a new product may lower the barriers and risk perceptions of the next groups in the diffusion phase, thus enhancing the diffusion of innovative consumer durables.

¹⁷⁴ (Wang; Yang; Li 2021, p. 637)

¹⁷⁵ (Gruner; Homburg; Lukas 2014, p. 40)

¹⁷⁶ (Feng et al. 2018, p. 1068)

¹⁷⁷ (Paschen et al. 2017, p. 1071f)

¹⁷⁸ (Herhausen et al. 2019, p. 17)

¹⁷⁹ (Herhausen et al. 2019, p. 18)

8.3 Limitations and future studies

This work has provided useful findings, but these are also accompanied by some limitations that must be considered.

First, it is important to mention that the present study is not representative, since the sample size achieved is insufficient. It is therefore not feasible to draw conclusions about the population as a whole. In addition, the impact of SMBCs on the diffusion process has been evaluated by a limited number of variables, which constitute only a segment, as the inclusion of additional criteria would have exceeded the scope of this study. In this thesis, the focus has been on SMBCs of companies promoting the product group "innovative consumer durables". The knowledge obtained in this thesis can therefore not be generalized for SMBCs of other product groups. Furthermore, the study focuses exclusively on the DACH region, meaning that generalizations to other regions will not be possible.

Future research could extend the present study by re-validating this research model using a larger sample. It might also be informative to conduct a behavioral analysis of other regions. Furthermore, to expand the insights of this paper, it would also be of interest to examine if there are other effects of SMBCs that are associated with the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables. Further product group studies could be conducted in order to demonstrate the impact of SMBCs on diffusion and to compare the different product groups. Future research may also focus on specific social media platforms, exploring the influence of each on the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables.

9. Summary

This master thesis dealt with the question, "How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?". After a literature review and interviews with companies, a quantitative study was conducted to answer this question.

To compare the insights from the literature with the practice, an interview guideline has been created and consequently interviews have been conducted with enterprises, which promote innovative consumer durables. Afterwards, the hypotheses have been formulated. Following that, a questionnaire has been developed with the purpose of evaluating the hypotheses expressed. In order to achieve a wider reach, an online survey has been used. Finally, the questionnaires of the respondents have been analyzed by using the IBM SPSS software.

From the results, it can be concluded that the variable "eWoM" is highly significant and thus has a positive influence on the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables. On the other hand, it has been found that there is no significant relationship between the variable's "Identification", "Engagement", "Hedonic value", "Responsiveness" and "Social spam" in an SMBC and the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables. Furthermore, there were no significant differences found between the target groups within the DACH region.

Hence, this quantitative research has been able to reveal that a higher volume of positive eWoM in an SMBC increases members' purchase intentions of innovative consumer durables. For this reason, companies should attempt to enhance positive eWoM by encouraging members to post and share their positive experiences in the community, which would subsequently boost the diffusion of innovative consumer durables.

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Appendix 1: Interviews with companies

Appendix 1.1: Interview guideline in German

Herzlich Willkommen und vielen Dank für Teilnahme an diesem Interview, welches meine Masterarbeit unterstützt. Diese befasst sich mit folgender Forschungsfrage:

Wie beeinflussen Social Media Brand Communities den Diffusionsprozess von innovativen Gebrauchsgütern in der DACH-Region?

Das Interview wird zwischen 20-25 Minuten Ihrer Zeit in Anspruch nehmen.

Die gewonnen Daten aus den Interviews werden ausschliesslich für meine Masterarbeit und in anonymisierter Form verwendet.

- Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon für Unternehmen XY?
- Wie lautet Ihre genaue Berufsbezeichnung?
- Was gehört zu Ihren täglichen Aufgaben?

Frage 1: Wie sieht die Marketing-Strategie bei Unternehmen XY aus?

- In welchem Bereich liegt dabei der Fokus?
- Wieviel Prozent macht Online-Marketing im Gegensatz zu konventionellen Kanälen aus?

Frage 2: Wie ist die Unternehmenseinstellung gegenüber Social Media Brand Communities?

- Wie werden die Inhalte gestaltet?
- Wie wird die firmeneigene Social Media Brand Community betrieben?
- Welche Sozialisierungsmassnahmen werden dabei vom Unternehmen ergriffen?
- Werden die verbraucherinitiierten Social Media Brand Communities überwacht oder wird eventuell auch aktiv mitgewirkt?

Frage 3: Wie wird die Zielgruppe angesprochen?

- Wer ist für die firmeneigene Social Media Brand Community zuständig?
- Gibt es Influencer oder Permanent Corporate Influencer die im Unternehmen tätig sind?

Frage 4: Welche Art von firmeneigener Social Media Brand Community führt das Unternehmen (offen, anspruchsvoll oder eingeschränkt)?

- Wie wird auf Fragen, Beschwerden oder Verbesserungsvorschläge von Mitgliedern an das Unternehmen reagiert?
- Wie ist dabei die Reaktionszeit?

Frage 5: Was wird unternommen, um die bestehenden Mitglieder in der Markengemeinschaft zu halten?

- Wie werden engagierte Mitglieder belohnt?
- Wie werden weniger engagierte Mitglieder motiviert?

Frage 6: Welche Strategie wird verfolgt, um potenzielle Mitglieder für einen Beitritt in die Markengemeinschaft zu überzeugen?

Frage 7: Was sind negative Aspekte, welche sich in einer Social Media Markengemeinschaft ereignen können?

- Ist es in der Social Media Markengemeinschaft schon einmal zu SPAM-Nachrichten (Reviews) durch Mitglieder gekommen? Wenn ja, wie hat das Unternehmen reagiert?
- War die Social Media Markengemeinschaft schon einmal von einem Online-Firestorm, auch bekannt als Online-Shitstorm, betroffen? Wenn ja, wie wurde darauf reagiert?

Frage 8: Wie wird die Zufriedenheit der Mitglieder gemessen?

Frage 9: Was für Arten von Markenveranstaltungen (online oder offline) wurden für die Mitglieder organisiert?

Frage 10: Wie wird das Vertrauen und das Engagement in der Social Media Markengemeinschaft gefördert?

Frage 11: Werden bestimmte Tools verwendet?

Frage 12: Wie würden Sie den Einfluss der Social Media Markengemeinschaft auf den Diffusionsprozess (Verkaufsprozess) von innovativen langfristigen Gebrauchsgütern beurteilen?

Frage 13: Wie kann eine Social Media Markengemeinschaft die Kaufentscheidung beeinflussen?

Aus den gesammelten Informationen aus diesem Interview und in Kombination mit den Ergebnissen aus der Theorie, werden Hypothesen aufgestellt und anhand einer quantitativen Umfrage mit Mitgliedern von Social Media Markengemeinschaften getestet.

Als Dankeschön für die Teilnahmen an den Interviews, sende ich Ihnen am Ende gerne meine fertige Masterarbeit zu.

Appendix 1.2: Interview guideline in English

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company XY?
- What is your exact job title?
- What are your daily tasks?

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company XY?

- In which area is the focus?
- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

- How is the content designed?
- How is the company's own social media brand community run?
- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?
- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

- Who is responsible for the company's social media brand community?
- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?
 - What is the reaction time?

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

- How are dedicated members rewarded?
- How are less engaged members motivated?

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?
- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 1.3: Interview transcript company 1

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company 1?

One year

- What is your exact job title?

Junior Digital Marketing Manager

- What are your daily tasks?

Support Digital Marketing Manager, SMBC, Google SEM maintenance, Organize events, etc.

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company 1?

Both offline and online marketing is conducted.

- In which area is the focus?

Offline, the presence is more in the print media and magazines, but events are also organized for the clients and potential clients. Online, among other things, Google SEM is operated and the company's own SMBC is maintained on various platforms.

- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

Currently, 60% of all the company's marketing activities take place online. However, the trend towards online marketing is continuously increasing.

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

It finds more and more acceptance.

- How is the content designed?

The content is product-related, whereas the benefits are shown and information about the product is provided.

- How is the company's own social media brand community run?

Through the Digital Marketing Manager. Posts information about new products in an entertaining way.

- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?

Constantly new and exciting content is posted. The social media manager only responds to questions or suggestions that are directly directed to the company.

- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

Yes, the consumer-initiated communities are monitored and if there are any questions or problems, the company also steps in and gets in touch with the members.

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

It depends on the platform and whether it's online or offline.

- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

No, and it is not planned yet

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

It runs open SMBC.

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?

The opinions of the members are taken seriously.

- What is the reaction time?

Depending on the relevance of the topic, the response is between one and three days.

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

Efforts are made to maintain their identification with the SMBC by regularly posting informative and entertaining content to encourage interaction between members. In addition, efforts are made to ensure that their concerns are taken seriously.

- How are dedicated members rewarded?

These members are invited to events, etc.

- How are less engaged members motivated?

So far, there has been no major focus on this.

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

For this purpose, paid ads are applied, or historical products are presented.

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?

No spam has been distributed in our community so far.

- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Once we had the case that there was an online shitstorm regarding an advertising slogan. The advertising image was deleted, and a written apology was addressed to the members.

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

Based on interactions such as comments, likes and shares

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

Events are organized every month.

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

No specific funding masses have been considered so far

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

No

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

In my opinion, it increases the members' intention to buy if they can identify with the SMBC and feel comfortable. For sure, positive reviews and word of mouth will also have a positive effect on the purchase intention.

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

If the product is sustainable and of good quality and the members speak positively about it.

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 1.4: Interview transcript company 2

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company 2?

Since August 2021

- What is your exact job title?

Social Media Manager

- What are your daily tasks?

I prepare posts for the different social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, launch campaigns, and manage the SMBC

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company 2?

The focus is on online marketing, including promoting the product via the company's own website and the SMBC on the various platforms. There are a few exceptions where a product is published in a magazine, but this is not the rule.

- In which area is the focus?

The focus is on online marketing.

- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

Online marketing accounts for about 90% and the remaining 10% represents offline marketing.

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

The company has a positive attitude towards SMBC.

- How is the content designed?

The posts are designed to be interactive. Members are asked to actively participate, with posts saying that they should, for example, share the product experience with other members. Reposts are also made on posts from customers. To entertain the community, puzzles are created.

- How is the company's own social media brand community run?

Everything goes through the social media manager and her team.

- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?

Interaction between members is only observed but not disturbed. Interventions are only made if statements are not truthful. The company responds to the false statement with the actual facts and invites the members to test the product themselves on site.

- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

They are observed rather cautiously, and it is not actively searched for them.

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

With appealing content, whereas in SMBC the information about a product is presented in an aesthetic and funny way.

- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

No, currently everything still goes through the social media manager. In the future, a collaboration with influencers is planned.

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

Open communities

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?

The questions of all members are answered at least once a day. If the social media manager cannot answer them because they are too detailed in technical terms or if they are complaints about the products, they are forwarded to the appropriate department.

- What is the reaction time?

The company tries to answer simple requests within a short time. If it is about more complex issues, which cannot be solved within a day, they are forwarded to the appropriate person who is responsible. The members then get a response that the actual question can be answered soon.

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

Interaction and entertainment within the SMBC.

- How are dedicated members rewarded?

With contests and lotteries, but these take place relatively infrequently.

- How are less engaged members motivated?

To motivate the members, direct calls in posts are tried.

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

Targeting via campaigns

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Not yet occurred

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

The engagement rate is measured.

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

No brand events are organized in the traditional way. Members are made aware that the products can be tried in the stores.

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

With very qualitative products and with the brand that has existed and proven itself for years at a very high level, the trust of the members is there

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

Not yet

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

There is a very large influence possible. Word-of-mouth decreases risk perception of members and purchase intention may also increase for products in higher price segment.

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

Reviews (product ratings) can also have a big impact.

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 1.5: Interview transcript company 3

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company 3?

Seven years

- What is your exact job title?

Social Media & Online Manager

- What are your daily tasks?

Support of the webshop as well as the social media channels and creation of the content.

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company 3?

The main marketing strategies are, on the one hand, the retention of regular customers and, on the other hand, the development of the younger target group between the age of 25 and 35.

- In which area is the focus?

Ad placement, Own website, SMBC

- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

100% online

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

The company has an open mentality towards SMBC.

- How is the content designed?

The ambition is to keep the content natural and in a way that gives the impression that the posts are created spontaneously.

- How is the company's own social media brand community run?

By the social media team, which consists of two people.

- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?

The company encourages members to discuss and share product-related content.

- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

Yes, these are being monitored.

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

Five times a week with an Instagram post, about 2-3 times via Facebook and YouTube videos.

- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

Yes, we have permanent influencers and one-time collaborations. In the future, this will be expanded.

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

Open

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?

Suggestions and questions are checked for their usefulness and implementation potential, discussed internally and partially implemented.

- What is the reaction time?

Within a few days the members get a response.

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

Constant interaction with the members.

- How are dedicated members rewarded?

Customers recruit customers, ad placement, coupons in newsletter.

- How are less engaged members motivated?

Advertisement placement, coupons in newsletter.

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

New customer acquisition through ad placement & social media

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Not yet occurred

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

Follower and likes

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

No brand events are organized.

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

Models "like you and me" and insights through videos into our daily work and our company.

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

No

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

The influence that SMBC has on the purchase intention is becoming greater and greater, also because it is easier to reach the younger target group.

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

This could happen by pushing popular articles, which have a higher number of likes.

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 1.6: Interview transcript company 4

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company 4?

Five years

- What is your exact job title?

Global Marketing Communications Director

- What are your daily tasks?

Taking care of marketing and communication for a portfolio, focusing on the messaging and go to market strategy.

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company 4?

The marketing strategy is product marketing, branding as well as communication and digital marketing.

- In which area is the focus?

It really depends on the project, but more and more my focus is on digital communication and marketing.

- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

Currently, the distribution between online and offline marketing is that about 70% takes place online and the remaining 30% offline in journals, at fairs, etc.

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

In some cases, it still takes a lot of convincing, but a growing acceptance can be seen.

- How is the content designed?

The focus is to promote the products by posting the potential of the innovations.

- How is the company's own social media brand community run?

We have a Social Media Expert that sets the guidelines for the entire organization.

- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?

No special socialization measures are taken.

- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

Basically, the consumer-initiated SMBCs are not searched out and monitored. However, if there is evidence of a consumer-initiated community that can be harmful to the company, then action needs to be taken.

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

There are several target groups. Each team speaks to its own target audience in its own way.

- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

No influencers are used.

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

It is an open type of SMBC.

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?

Managed by each team individually and the Social Media Manager answers on the brand's behalf.

- What is the reaction time?

An effort will be made to respond within one week.

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

- How are dedicated members rewarded?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

- How are less engaged members motivated?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?

Not yet occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Not yet occurred

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

We focus on the engagement numbers.

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

No brand events have been organized so far.

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

Cannot be answered due to compliance.

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

We track social media interactions to get information about ROI on social media investments, but it's more about awareness rather than purchase intent.

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

It can bring awareness about a new product to the market.

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 1.7: Interview transcript company 5

Welcome and thank you for participating in this general interview, which supports my master's thesis. This addresses the following research question:

How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables in the DACH region?

The interview will take between 20-25 minutes of your time.

The data obtained from the interviews will be used exclusively for my master's thesis and in anonymized form.

- How long have you been working for company 5?

4.5 years

- What is your exact job title?

Digital Marketing Project Manager

- What are your daily tasks?

Digital Marketing Project management, Advertising consulting, Agency management, Analytical research and reporting, Paid advertising monitoring

Question 1: What is the marketing strategy in company 5?

Attempts are made to meet the needs of the customer base. A satisfied client base is more likely to speak positively about the products.

- In which area is the focus?

Newsletter marketing and Google Search Ads focusing on the style and quality of products.

- What percentage is accounted for by online marketing as opposed to conventional channels?

The vast majority is online marketing. Some print advertising is on the HQ and bus stops near the HQ. Other than that, the main focus of the marketing is online.

Question 2: What is the corporate attitude toward social media brand communities?

It is unfortunately very neglected. The large focus is on followers, likes, engagement etc. Little focus on satisfaction or participating in the community directly.

- How is the content designed?

The content that is shared focuses on the products. Among other things, they show the sustainability and high quality of the products. Sometimes professional photo shoots or influencers are used for posts.

- How is the company's own social media brand community run?

The Global Marketing Director leads the Social Media Manager, who plans and coordinates content. The online department used to monitor comments related to customer service requests.

- What socialization measures are taken by the company in the process?

No socialization measures are undertaken.

- Are consumer-initiated social media brand communities monitored or possibly actively participated in?

No, they won't.

Question 3: How is the target group addressed?

The focus of the content is the product. Posts are generated, but they are in English only and not region specific. No boosting or targeting takes place.

- Are there influencers or permanent corporate influencers working in the company?

No permanent corporate influencers, but there are some recurring influencers. They sometimes participate in content creation but are not involved in community communication.

Question 4: What type of proprietary social media brand community does the company run (open, sophisticated, or restricted)?

Open

- How are questions, complaints, or suggestions for improvement from members to the company responded to?

If they have a complaint, they are referred to customer service, and rarely is the complaint handled in the SMBC.

- What is the reaction time?

It can take days but also up to weeks.

Question 5: What is being done to retain existing members in the brand community?

There is constant posting of content. In addition, live broadcasts are made.

- How are dedicated members rewarded?

They are not.

- How are less engaged members motivated?

They are not.

Question 6: What is the strategy to convince potential members to join the brand community?

The strategy is to make entertaining and aesthetic looking posts.

Question 7: What are negative aspects that can happen in a social media brand community?

Racism has occurred

- Has the social media brand community ever experienced SPAM messages (reviews) from members? If so, how did the company react?

Yes. We reached out to the poster and asked them to contact the customer service department and if the posts kept coming, we would block the account.

- Has the social media brand community ever been affected by an online firestorm, also known as an online shitstorm? If so, how was it responded to?

Nothing ever that was at a large scale.

Question 8: How is member satisfaction measured?

Follower growth and post likes.

Question 9: What types of brand events (online or offline) were organized for members?

Brand events are organized from time to time.

Question 10: How is trust and engagement fostered in the social media brand community?

It is not. Some efforts in the past were just responding to messages.

Question 11: Are specific tools used?

Facebook Business manager

Question 12: How would you assess the impact of the social media brand community on the diffusion process (sales process) of innovative long-term consumer goods?

Unfortunately, the potential is not being exploited in our company. In general, the brand community on social media can have a huge impact on the diffusion process. It is common for us to ask our friends for recommendations and social media lets us ask the world. Social proof helps with innovative products by showing that other people have tried it and it works as stated. It can build trust.

Question 13: From your perspective, how can a social media brand community influence purchasing decision?

Consumers are human and we all have certain psychological needs that must be met before making a purchase. The social community provides a lot of those needs and the brand itself only needs to foster the members to do the work themselves. Consumers want to know that a company has ethics and standards, that they are trustworthy and care about the consumer, they want to engage with the brand and feel an emotional connection, and they want to know (mostly) that they are not the first (apart from early adopters). They want to participate in live/virtual events and feel like they belong to the community. All of this can be done via social media. When marketing does its job sales becomes more about helping them find the right purchase rather than convincing them to do so.

From the information gathered from this interview and in combination with the results from the theory, hypotheses will be created and tested using a quantitative survey with members of social media brand communities.

As a thank you for participating in the interviews, I would be happy to send you my completed master's thesis at the end.

Appendix 2: Online survey

Appendix 2.1: Conceptualization of the questionnaire in German

Folgen Sie Marken innovativer langlebiger Konsumgüter auf Social Media-Kanälen?		
Ja		Nein*
Unabhängige Variablen	Testitems	Skala
Demographische Daten	Was ist Ihr Geschlecht?	Nominal
	Wie alt sind Sie?	Metrisch
	In welchem Land leben Sie derzeit?	Nominal
	Was ist Ihr höchster Bildungsabschluss?	Ordinal
Identifikation	Ich fühle mich mit den anderen Mitgliedern einer SMBC verbunden	Ordinal
	Ich kann mich mit einer unternehmensgenerierten SMBC identifizieren (Offizielle Markenseite, welche vom Unternehmen betrieben wird)	Ordinal
	Ich kann mich mit einer verbraucherinitiierten SMBC identifizieren (Markenseiten, welche von Markenfans gegründet und betrieben werden)	Ordinal
	Ich identifiziere mich mit einer Marke durch die SMBC	Ordinal
Engagement	Ich kommuniziere mit einem Unternehmen über eine SMBC	Ordinal
	Ich veröffentliche produktbezogene Inhalte in einer SMBC	Ordinal
	Ich teile Informationen mit anderen Mitgliedern in einer SMBC	Ordinal
	Ich bin ein aktives Mitglied in einer SMBC	Ordinal
Elektronische Mundpropaganda (eWoM)	Positive Bewertungen in einer SMBC beeinflussen mich	Ordinal
	Positive Erfahrungen anderer Mitglieder in einer SMBC beeinflussen mich	Ordinal
	Produktempfehlungen von anderen Mitgliedern einer SMBC sind für mich bedeutsam	Ordinal
	Ich lasse mich von elektronischer Mundpropaganda beeinflussen	Ordinal
Unterhaltungswert	Ich finde die Teilnahme an einer SMBC unterhaltsam	Ordinal
	Ich habe Spaß in einer SMBC	Ordinal
	Ich geniesse die Interaktion mit anderen Mitgliedern innerhalb einer SMBC	Ordinal
Reaktionsfähigkeit	Ich erwarte eine schnelle Reaktion eines Unternehmens auf meine Beiträge in einer SMBC	Ordinal
	Es ist mir wichtig, dass meine produktbezogenen Fragen schnell beantwortet werden	Ordinal
	Ich erwarte eine kurzfristige Antwort auf Fragen, welche an das Unternehmen gerichtet sind	Ordinal
Sozialer Spam	Ich empfinde Spam innerhalb einer SMBC als störend	Ordinal
	Spam innerhalb einer SMBC irritiert mich	Ordinal
	Spam innerhalb einer SMBC lenkt von interessanten Produktinformationen ab	Ordinal
Abhängige Variable	Testitems	Skala
Kaufabsicht	Ich werde innovative langlebige Konsumgüter von Marken kaufen, denen ich in den sozialen Medien folge	Ordinal
	Ich habe innovative langlebige Konsumgüter von Marken gekauft, denen ich in den sozialen Medien folge	Ordinal
	Ich entscheide mich für den Kauf von innovativen langlebigen Konsumgütern über eine SMBC	Ordinal
No*		
Halboffene Frage	Warum folgen Sie keiner Marke von innovativen langlebigen Konsumgütern auf einem Social Media-Kanal?	
Offene Frage	Was müsste sich ändern, damit Sie einer SMBC beitreten?	

Appendix 2.2: Conceptualization of the questionnaire in English

Do you follow brands of innovative consumer durables on social media channels?		
Yes		
No*		
Independent variables	Items	Scale
Demographics	What is your gender?	Nominal
	How old are you?	Metric
	In which country are you currently living?	Nominal
	What is your highest education degree	Ordinal
Identification	I feel connected to the other members of an SMBC	Ordinal
	I can identify with a company-generated SMBC (Official brand page, which is operated by the company)	Ordinal
	I can identify with a consumer-initiated SMBC (Brand sites which are founded and operated by brand fans)	Ordinal
	I identify with a brand through an SMBC	Ordinal
Engagement	I communicate with a company through an SMBC	Ordinal
	I post product related content within an SMBC	Ordinal
	I share information with other members of the SMBC	Ordinal
	I am an active member in an SMBC	Ordinal
Electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM)	Positive reviews in an SMBC influence me	Ordinal
	Positive experiences of the other members in an SMBC influence me	Ordinal
	Product recommendations from other members in an SMBC are meaningful to me	Ordinal
	I let myself be influenced by electronic Word-of-Mouth	Ordinal
Hedonic value (entertainment value)	I find participation in an SMBC entertaining	Ordinal
	I have fun within an SMBC	Ordinal
	I enjoy the interaction with other members within an SMBC	Ordinal
Responsiveness (the ability to react)	I expect a fast response from a company to my posts within an SMBC	Ordinal
	It is important to me that my product-related questions are answered at a rapid pace	Ordinal
	I expect a short-term response to questions addressed to the company	Ordinal
Social spam	I find spam within an SMBC to be annoying	Ordinal
	Spam within an SMBC irritates me	Ordinal
	Spam within an SMBC distracts from important product information	Ordinal
Dependent variable	Items	Scale
Purchase intention	I will buy innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	Ordinal
	I have bought innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	Ordinal
	I decide to purchase consumer durables through an SMBC	Ordinal
No*		
Semi-open question	Why you don't follow a brand of innovative consumer durables on a social media channel?	
Open question	What would have to change for you to join a social media brand community?	

Appendix 2.3: Questionnaire with Unipark software in German

Informationen zur Umfrage

Die Sprache kann in der oberen rechten Ecke ausgewählt werden.

Die Teilnahme ist anonym und die Antworten können nicht zu Ihnen zurückverfolgt werden.

Die erhobenen Daten werden ausschließlich zu wissenschaftlichen Zwecken verwendet und verfolgen keine kommerziellen Interessen.

Wenn Sie Fragen oder Anmerkungen haben, können Sie mich gerne per Mail kontaktieren: mma4644@students.fhv.at

Wenn Sie mehr Information über die Verarbeitung Ihrer personenbezogenen Daten wünschen, bitte auf [folgenden Link](#) klicken.

Ich stimme zu, dass meine personenbezogenen Daten gemäss den hier aufgeführten Angaben verarbeitet werden.

[Ich möchte nicht teilnehmen](#)

WEITER ZUR UMFRAGE

Begriffserläuterungen:

Social Media Marken-Community

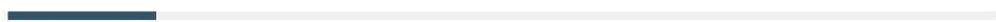
Unter einer Social Media Marken-Community versteht man eine Fangemeinde einer Unternehmensmarke in den sozialen Medien. Die Mitglieder der Brand Community haben in der Regel ein starkes Interesse und ein hohes Wissen über die Marke.

Beispiele: Harley-Davidson, Ferrari, Apple, KitchenAid, Dyson, usw.

Innovative langlebige Konsumgüter

Innovative langlebige Konsumgüter sind für den wiederholten oder längerfristigen Gebrauch bestimmt. Es handelt sich um relativ hochpreisige Produkte mit einem hohen Grad an Verbraucherbeteiligung.

Beispiele: Neuartige Autos, impulsgebende Haushaltsgeräte, innovative Mobiltelefone, usw.

 15%

WEITER

Willkommen, meine Damen und Herren!

In dieser Umfrage geht es um die Rolle von Social Media Brand Communities und die Frage: "Wie beeinflussen Social Media Marken-Communities den Diffusionsprozess von innovativen Gebrauchsgütern?"

Mein Name ist Marcel Marrazzo und ich studiere Betriebswirtschaftslehre mit Schwerpunkt auf internationalem Marketing und Vertrieb an der Fachhochschule Vorarlberg.

Mit Ihrer Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage, welche nicht länger als 5 Minuten dauern wird, unterstützen Sie mich sehr bei meiner Master thesis.

P.S.: Diese Umfrage enthält einen Abschlusscode für SurveySwap.io und SurveyCircle.com



Folgen Sie Marken innovativer langlebiger Konsumgüter auf Social Media-Kanälen?

Bitte eine der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen

Ja

Nein



Warum folgen Sie keiner Marke von innovativen langlebigen Konsumgütern auf einem Social Media-Kanal?

Bitte eine oder mehrere der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen
Zu unterst kann auch eine frei wählbare Antwort hinzugefügt werden

Ich nutze kein Social Media

Ich bevorzuge offline Marken-Communities

Ich folge keiner Marke, da ich mich mit keiner identifizieren kann.

Mir gefällt nicht, dass in den meisten Social Media Marken-Communities der wirtschaftliche Aspekt überwiegt

Was müsste sich ändern, damit Sie einer Social Media Marken-Community beitreten?

Unten haben Sie die Möglichkeit etwas zu schreiben



31%

WEITER

Was ist Ihr Geschlecht?

Bitte eine der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen

- Weiblich
- Männlich
- Divers

Wie alt sind Sie?

Bitte eine der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen

- unter 18 Jahren
- 18 - 25 Jahre
- 26 - 40 Jahre
- 41 - 65 Jahre
- über 65 Jahre

In welchem Land leben Sie derzeit?

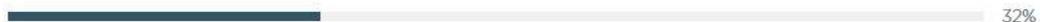
Bitte eine der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen

- Österreich
- Deutschland
- Schweiz
- Sonstiges

Was ist Ihr höchster Bildungsabschluss?

Bitte eine der Antwortmöglichkeiten unten auswählen

- Master-Abschluss
- Bachelor-Abschluss
- Matura/Abitur
- Lehrabschluss
- Kein Schulabschluss
- Sonstige Aus- oder Weiterbildung

 32%

WEITER

Identifikation mit einer Social Media Marken-Community

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich fühle mich mit den anderen Mitgliedern einer Social Media Marken-Community verbunden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich kann mich mit einer unternehmensgenerierten Social Media Marken-Community identifizieren (Offizielle Markenseite, welche vom Unternehmen betrieben wird)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich kann mich mit einer verbraucherinitiierten Social Media Marken-Community identifizieren (Markenseiten, welche von Markenfans gegründet und betrieben werden)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich identifiziere mich mit einer Marke durch die Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 40%

WEITER

Engagement innerhalb einer Social Media Marken-Community

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich kommuniziere mit einem Unternehmen über eine Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich veröffentliche produktbezogene Inhalte in einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich teile Informationen mit anderen Mitgliedern in einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin ein aktives Mitglied in einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 49%

WEITER

Elektronische Mundpropaganda (eWoM) in einer Social Media Marken-Community

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Positive Bewertungen in einer Social Media Marken-Community beeinflussen mich	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positive Erfahrungen anderer Mitglieder in einer Social Media Marken-Community beeinflussen mich	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Produktempfehlungen von anderen Mitgliedern einer Social Media Marken-Community sind für mich bedeutsam	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich lasse mich von elektronischer Mundpropaganda beeinflussen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 57%

WEITER

Unterhaltungswert in einer Social Media Marken-Community

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich finde die Teilnahme an einer Social Media Marken-Community unterhaltsam	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich habe Spaß in einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich genieße die Interaktion mit anderen Mitgliedern innerhalb einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 66%

WEITER

Reaktionsfähigkeit in einer Social Media Marken-Community

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

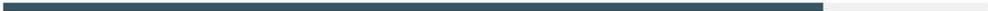
	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich erwarte eine schnelle Reaktion eines Unternehmens auf meine Beiträge in einer Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Es ist mir wichtig, dass meine produktbezogenen Fragen schnell beantwortet werden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich erwarte eine kurzfristige Antwort auf Fragen, welche an das Unternehmen gerichtet sind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 74% WEITER

Sozialer Spam in einer Social Media Marken-Community

Social Spam ist unerwünschter Spam-Inhalt, der auf Social-Media-Kanalen und anderen Kanälen erscheint. Beispiele: Beleidigungen, Hassreden, betrügerische Bewertungen usw.

	nicht zu	zu	weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich empfinde Spam innerhalb einer Social Media Marken-Community als störend	<input type="radio"/>				
Spam innerhalb einer Social Media Marken-Community irritiert mich	<input type="radio"/>				
Spam innerhalb einer Social Media Marken-Community lenkt von interessanten Produktinformationen ab	<input type="radio"/>				

 83% WEITER

Kauf von innovativen langlebigen Konsumgütern

Bitte wählen Sie für jede Aussage die auf Sie zutreffende Option aus

	Stimme absolut nicht zu	Stimme eher nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme eher zu	Stimme absolut zu
Ich werde innovative langlebige Konsumgüter von Marken kaufen, denen ich in den sozialen Medien folge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich habe innovative langlebige Konsumgüter von Marken gekauft, denen ich in den sozialen Medien folge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich entscheide mich für den Kauf von innovativen langlebigen Konsumgütern über eine Social Media Marken-Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 91% WEITER

Danke für Ihre Teilnahme!

Für SurveyCircle-Benutzer (www.surveycircle.com): Der Umfragecode lautet: 1Y4R-6SYD-WT4Z-X46S

Mit dem folgenden Code erhalten Sie Gutschein, die Sie verwenden können, um kostenlose Forschungsteilnehmer bei SurveySwap.io zu erhalten. Gehen Sie zu: <https://surveyswap.io/sr/1MZ4-JLQE-605F> Alternativ können Sie den Code auch manuell eingeben: 1MZ4-JLQE-605F

 100%

Appendix 2.4: Questionnaire with Unipark software in English

Survey information

The language can be selected in the upper right corner.

Participation is anonymous and the answers cannot be traced back to you.

The data collected is used exclusively for scientific purposes and does not follow any commercial interest.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me by mail: mma4644@students.fhv.at

If you would like more information about how we process your personal data, please click [the following link](#).

I agree that my personal data will be processed in accordance with the information provided here.

[I do not want to participate](#)

GO TO THE SURVEY

Explanation of terms:

Social media brand communities

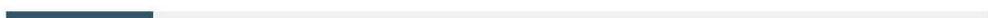
A social media brand community refers to a fan base of a corporate brand on social media. Brand community members typically have a strong interest in and knowledge of the brand.

Examples: Harley-Davidson, Ferrari, Apple, KitchenAid, Dyson, etc.

Innovative consumer durables

Innovative consumer durables are designed for repeated or longer-term use. They are relatively high-priced products with a high degree of consumer involvement.

Examples: Novel cars, impulse household appliances, innovative cell phones, etc.

 15%

CONTINUE

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen!

This survey is about the role of social media brand communities and the question: "How do social media brand communities influence the diffusion process of innovative consumer durables?"

My name is Marcel Marrazzo and I study Business Administration with focus on International Marketing and Sales at the University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg.

With your participation in this survey, which will take no longer than 5 minutes, you will support me a lot in my master thesis.

P.S.: This survey contains a completion code for SurveySwap.io and SurveyCircle.com

 8% CONTINUE

Do you follow brands of innovative consumer durables on social media channels?

Please select one of the answer options below

Yes

No

 23% CONTINUE

Why you don't follow a brand of innovative consumer durables on a social media channel?

Please select one or more of the answer options below
You can also add a freely selectable answer to the bottom

- I do not use social media
- I prefer offline brand communities
- I don't follow any brand because I can't identify with any of them.
- I don't like the fact that in most brand communities the economic aspect predominates
-

What would have to change for you to join a brand community?

Below you have the possibility to write something

 31% CONTINUE

What is your gender?

Please select one of the options below

- Female
- Male
- Divers

How old are you?

Please select one of the options below

- under 18 years
- 18 - 25 years
- 26 - 40 years
- 41 - 65 years
- over 65 years

In which country are you currently living?

Please select one of the answer options below

- Austria
- Germany
- Switzerland
- Other

What is your highest educational degree?

Please select one of the options below

- Master's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Matura/Abitur
- Apprenticeship diploma
- No school degree
- Other education or training



32%

CONTINUE

Identification with a social media brand community

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
I feel connected to the other members of a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
I can identify with a company-generated social media brand community (Official brand page, which is operated by the company)	<input type="radio"/>				
I can identify with a consumer-initiated social media brand community (Brand sites which are founded and operated by brand fans)	<input type="radio"/>				
I identify with a brand through a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				

 40% [CONTINUE](#)

Engagement within a social media brand community

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
I communicate with a company through a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
I post product related content within a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
I share information with other members of the social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
I am an active member in a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				

 49% [CONTINUE](#)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) in a social media brand community

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

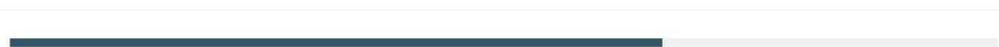
	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
Positive reviews in a social media brand community influence me	<input type="radio"/>				
Positive experiences of the other members in a social media brand community influence me	<input type="radio"/>				
Product recommendations from other members in a social media brand community are meaningful to me	<input type="radio"/>				
I let myself be influenced by electronic Word-of-Mouth	<input type="radio"/>				

 57% CONTINUE

Hedonic value (entertainment value) in a social media brand community

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
I find participation in a social media brand community entertaining	<input type="radio"/>				
I have fun within a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
I enjoy the interaction with other members within a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				

 66% CONTINUE

Responsiveness (the ability to react) in a social media brand community

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
I expect a fast response from a company to my posts within a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				
It is important to me that my product-related questions are answered at a rapid pace	<input type="radio"/>				
I expect a short-term response to questions addressed to the company	<input type="radio"/>				

 74% CONTINUE

Social spam in a social media brand community

Social spam is unwanted spam content that appears on social media channels, and others. Examples: Insults, hate speech, fraudulent reviews, etc.

I find spam within a social media brand community to be annoying	<input type="radio"/>				
Spam within a social media brand community irritates me	<input type="radio"/>				
Spam within a social media brand community distracts from important product information	<input type="radio"/>				

 83% CONTINUE

Purchase of innovative consumer durables

Please select the option that applies to you for each statement

	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither nor	Rather agree	Totally agree
I will buy innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	<input type="radio"/>				
I have bought innovative consumer durables from brands I follow	<input type="radio"/>				
I decide to purchase innovative consumer durables through a social media brand community	<input type="radio"/>				

 91% CONTINUE

Thank you for your participation!

For SurveyCircle users (www.surveycircle.com): The Survey Code is: 1Y4R-6SYD-WT4Z-X46S

The following code gives you credits that can be used to get free research participants at SurveySwap.io. Go to: <https://surveyswap.io/sr/1MZ4-JLQE-605F> Or, alternatively, enter the code manually: 1MZ4-JLQE-605F

 100%

Appendix 3: Tukey-HSD-Test (Post-hoc analysis)

						95% Confidence Interval	
Dependent Variable	(I) Location	(J) Location	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Identification	Austria	Germany	-0,60173	0,23319	0,054	-1,2105	0,0070
		Switzerland	-0,42670	0,20001	0,149	-0,9489	0,0955
		Other	-0,50253	0,24477	0,176	-1,1415	0,1365
	Germany	Austria	0,60173	0,23319	0,054	-0,0070	1,2105
		Switzerland	0,17503	0,22823	0,869	-0,4208	0,7709
		Other	0,09921	0,26832	0,983	-0,6013	0,7997
	Switzerland	Austria	0,42670	0,20001	0,149	-0,0955	0,9489
		Germany	-0,17503	0,22823	0,869	-0,7709	0,4208
		Other	-0,07583	0,24006	0,989	-0,7025	0,5509
	Other	Austria	0,50253	0,24477	0,176	-0,1365	1,1415
		Germany	-0,09921	0,26832	0,983	-0,7997	0,6013
	Switzerland	0,07583	0,24006	0,989	-0,5509	0,7025	
Engagement	Austria	Germany	-0,27056	0,29591	0,797	-1,0431	0,5020
		Switzerland	-0,28215	0,25382	0,683	-0,9448	0,3805
		Other	-1,01263	0,31062	0,008	-1,8235	-0,2017
	Germany	Austria	0,27056	0,29591	0,797	-0,5020	1,0431
		Switzerland	-0,01158	0,28963	1,000	-0,7677	0,7445
		Other	-0,74206	0,34050	0,136	-1,6310	0,1469
	Switzerland	Austria	0,28215	0,25382	0,683	-0,3805	0,9448
		Germany	0,01158	0,28963	1,000	-0,7445	0,7677
		Other	-0,73048	0,30463	0,084	-1,5258	0,0648
	Other	Austria	1,01263	0,31062	0,008	0,2017	1,8235
		Germany	0,74206	0,34050	0,136	-0,1469	1,6310
	Switzerland	0,73048	0,30463	0,084	-0,0648	1,5258	
eWoM	Austria	Germany	0,19156	0,24832	0,867	-0,4567	0,8398
		Switzerland	0,19574	0,21300	0,795	-0,3603	0,7518
		Other	0,07449	0,26066	0,992	-0,6060	0,7550
	Germany	Austria	-0,19156	0,24832	0,867	-0,8398	0,4567
		Switzerland	0,00418	0,24304	1,000	-0,6303	0,6387
		Other	-0,11706	0,28574	0,977	-0,8630	0,6289
	Switzerland	Austria	-0,19574	0,21300	0,795	-0,7518	0,3603
		Germany	-0,00418	0,24304	1,000	-0,6387	0,6303
		Other	-0,12125	0,25564	0,965	-0,7886	0,5461
	Other	Austria	-0,07449	0,26066	0,992	-0,7550	0,6060
		Germany	0,11706	0,28574	0,977	-0,6289	0,8630
	Switzerland	0,12125	0,25564	0,965	-0,5461	0,7886	

Hedonic Value	Austria	Germany	-0,46320	0,25902	0,285	-1,1394	0,2130
		Switzerland	-0,27273	0,22218	0,611	-0,8528	0,3073
		Other	-0,18013	0,27189	0,911	-0,8900	0,5297
	Germany	Austria	0,46320	0,25902	0,285	-0,2130	1,1394
		Switzerland	0,19048	0,25352	0,876	-0,4714	0,8523
		Other	0,28307	0,29805	0,778	-0,4950	1,0612
	Switzerland	Austria	0,27273	0,22218	0,611	-0,3073	0,8528
		Germany	-0,19048	0,25352	0,876	-0,8523	0,4714
		Other	0,09259	0,26666	0,986	-0,6036	0,7887
	Other	Austria	0,18013	0,27189	0,911	-0,5297	0,8900
		Germany	-0,28307	0,29805	0,778	-1,0612	0,4950
		Switzerland	-0,09259	0,26666	0,986	-0,7887	0,6036
Responsive-ness	Austria	Germany	-0,11977	0,27839	0,973	-0,8465	0,6070
		Switzerland	0,10975	0,23879	0,968	-0,5136	0,7331
		Other	0,08923	0,29222	0,990	-0,6737	0,8521
	Germany	Austria	0,11977	0,27839	0,973	-0,6070	0,8465
		Switzerland	0,22952	0,27247	0,834	-0,4818	0,9408
		Other	0,20899	0,32034	0,914	-0,6273	1,0453
	Switzerland	Austria	-0,10975	0,23879	0,968	-0,7331	0,5136
		Germany	-0,22952	0,27247	0,834	-0,9408	0,4818
		Other	-0,02052	0,28659	1,000	-0,7687	0,7277
	Other	Austria	-0,08923	0,29222	0,990	-0,8521	0,6737
		Germany	-0,20899	0,32034	0,914	-1,0453	0,6273
		Switzerland	0,02052	0,28659	1,000	-0,7277	0,7687
Social Spam	Austria	Germany	0,20491	0,24112	0,830	-0,4246	0,8344
		Switzerland	0,03631	0,20682	0,998	-0,5036	0,5762
		Other	0,25253	0,25310	0,751	-0,4082	0,9133
	Germany	Austria	-0,20491	0,24112	0,830	-0,8344	0,4246
		Switzerland	-0,16860	0,23599	0,891	-0,7847	0,4475
		Other	0,04762	0,27745	0,998	-0,6767	0,7719
	Switzerland	Austria	-0,03631	0,20682	0,998	-0,5762	0,5036
		Germany	0,16860	0,23599	0,891	-0,4475	0,7847
		Other	0,21622	0,24822	0,820	-0,4318	0,8642
	Other	Austria	-0,25253	0,25310	0,751	-0,9133	0,4082
		Germany	-0,04762	0,27745	0,998	-0,7719	0,6767
		Switzerland	-0,21622	0,24822	0,820	-0,8642	0,4318

Diffusion	Austria	Germany	0,07648	0,24358	0,989	-0,5594	0,7124
		Switzerland	0,12367	0,20893	0,934	-0,4218	0,6691
		Other	0,28283	0,25568	0,687	-0,3847	0,9503
	Germany	Austria	-0,07648	0,24358	0,989	-0,7124	0,5594
		Switzerland	0,04719	0,23840	0,997	-0,5752	0,6696
		Other	0,20635	0,28028	0,882	-0,5254	0,9381
	Switzerland	Austria	-0,12367	0,20893	0,934	-0,6691	0,4218
		Germany	-0,04719	0,23840	0,997	-0,6696	0,5752
		Other	0,15916	0,25076	0,921	-0,4955	0,8138
	Other	Austria	-0,28283	0,25568	0,687	-0,9503	0,3847
		Germany	-0,20635	0,28028	0,882	-0,9381	0,5254
		Switzerland	-0,15916	0,25076	0,921	-0,8138	0,4955