Examining user-generated content, service failure recovery and customer–brand relationships: an exploration through commitment-trust theory

Abstract

Purpose

User-generated content (UGC) and service failure have attracted considerable marketing inquiry over the last two decades. Previous studies primarily focused on the outcome of service failure and the impact of UGC on perceived failure severity. We depart from previous studies by examining the moderating role of UGC on the relationship between service failure recovery (SFR) and customer–brand relationship.

Design/methodology/approach

Building on commitment-trust theory and from a phenomenological hermeneutical perspective, we explore this phenomenon through the interpretation of 60 in-depth interviews with millennials from three European countries: Italy, France and the UK. An analysis of the data was conducted using a qualitative approach to understand the main constructs and relationships derived from the data.

Findings

This study conceptualises four distinct moderating characteristics of UGC in the SFR process: satisfied with experience and brand, dissatisfied with experience and brand, satisfied with brand and dissatisfied with brand. The insights from our responsiveness, empathetic response, counterfactual thinking and brand salience (RECB) framework contribute to research on UGC and shed light on the relationship between SFR and consumer–brand relationships in the fashion industry.

Originality/value

Overall, this study demonstrates that customer interactions with UGC significantly affect their responses to, and relationships with, a brand. The proposed framework opens up interesting avenues for future research on the moderating role of UGC on the relationship between SFR and customer–brand relationships.

Keywords: *user-generated content, millennials, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), qualitative research, failure recovery strategy, customer–brand relationships*

1. Introduction

Prior research suggests that social media encourages Internet users to produce user-generated content (UGC), which is material created and uploaded to the Internet by marketing practitioners and non-professional Internet users (Presi *et al.*, 2014; Müller and Christandl, 2019). UGC contains information, opinions and consumption experiences that can be created, shared and explored anywhere and at any time. Internet users no longer passively consume marketer-provided information but generate their own marketing information (Berthon *et al.*, 2008). Through UGC, consumers drive electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which is based on "informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (Litvin *et al.*, 2008, p. 461). To develop an understanding of a consumer's experience of service failure recovery (SFR) through UGC, we leverage eWOM, which is any statement made by consumers about a product or service shared through various digital channels (Marchand *et al.*, 2017).

Reviews, a type of UGC, are a key source of information about products and services. Reviews are characterised by an extensive social reach and by a high speed of interaction (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004) and can influence consumers' information searches and purchase decisions (Yang *et al.*, 2022). McKinsey & Company reported that customers spend between 20 and 40% more with companies that respond to customers' enquiries reported through social media (Das *et al.*, 2022). Companies that fail to respond to customers on social media have a 15% higher customer churn rate than companies that do respond (Das *et al.*, 2022). Customers who experience poor service and complain on social media will take further action if the complaint is ignored or if the brand responds ineffectively. According to a report by Statista, if a brand's response to a customer's social media complaint was poor, then 41% of customers would share the company's poor response with friends online and 31% would repost the complaint following an ineffective brand response (Dixon, 2022a). If a brand does not respond to a customer's social media complaint, then 31% of customers would mention to friends online that the brand ignored their complaint and 18% would repost the complaint if it was still ignored (Dixon, 2022a).

Most previous empirical work on eWOM focused on its relative impact on consumer intentions to purchase (Hsu *et al.*, 2017; Yusuf *et al.*, 2018) and how some online reviews are perceived as useful in orienting decisions that concern whether or not to buy or use products or services

(Luan *et al.*, 2022). Online reviews serve as a means to verify whether expectations stemming from a company's promises are confirmed by consumers. As with product ranking, online reviews act as a peripheral cue in evaluating products or services (Gupta and Harris, 2010) by virtue of the fact that the more that conversations take place about products or services, the more they are perceived as popular. Within a brand community, the virality of negative eWOM is higher when the intensity of negative emotional words is greater than normal, and when there is a strong perceived similarity between the sender and the receiver (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019).

Drawing on the motivation-opportunity-ability framework, Rosario *et al.* (2020) observed that the continuous evolution and technological affordances of eWOM, such as low barriers to entry and capability to form ties with others, could be leveraged by consumers to evaluate and moderate service recovery efforts through online and offline interfaces. Most importantly, they argued that by shaping the technological affordances of the interfaces, brands could provide consumers with opportunities to evaluate their relationships with the brand. The technological affordances of eWOM also include facilitating co-creation and interactive engagement; thus, eWOM affords the enhancement of failure reporting or easing of dissatisfied customers' informational and emotional needs. However, although the technological affordances of eWOM for building failure recovery strategy are interesting, given eWOM's alignment with UGC, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the effect of a recovery process on customer–brand relationships, particularly customers' responses other than evaluation and purchase intentions. The lack of research on consumers' perceived identification and personal relationships with brands during a failure recovery process carries the risk of failing to develop an effective tool for influencing consumer–brand relationships. Marketing managers using this tool would be able to understand how best to target and enhance consumers' attitudes to favourable engagement, which would act as a competitive advantage for the firm.

Building on the central paradigm of SFR, we add to the current marketing literature by explicitly recognising the affordances of UGC on SFR and customers' responses to, and identification with, brands. Drawing on prior literature and commitment-trust theory, the current study adopts a phenomenological, constructivist and hermeneutical approach. Commitment-trust theory grounds the research on the broad shared values, communication, trust and commitment that characterise a successful customer–brand relationship. We explore the moderating role of UGC created by customers on the relationship between SFR and customer–brand relationships through the interpretation of 60 in-depth interviews with millennials from three European countries: Italy, France and the UK. Millennials have

historically exhibited the most interest in online fashion purchasing, they are the most innovative group of online users and they engage actively in UGC (Smith, 2011; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). We selected the fashion industry due to consumers' significant consumption of UGC. For example, a report by Statista showed that 45% of fashion and lifestyle consumers spend between one and three hours per day on TikTok, which is one of the leading UGC platforms (Dixon, 2022b). Also, Mintel reported that 57% of female fashion shoppers rely on UGC to make informed decisions (Mintel, 2022).

We present a framework that captures the interlinks between existing studies and our empirical data. Our main intention is to contribute to and enhance the UGC literature by presenting a well-grounded description of the relationship between UGC, service recovery process and customer–brand relationships.

2. Theoretical context

This section is divided into two subsections that discuss: first, negative eWOM, service failure and motivations for eWOM; and, second, commitment-trust theory.

2.1 Negative eWOM, service failure and motivations for eWOM

UGC includes brand-related subject matter (Chari *et al.*, 2016), such as facts, opinions and experiences shared among consumers about brands or products. Brand-related UGC that takes the form of online reviews on social network sites functions as eWOM messages; online reviews drive product awareness and influence consumers' purchase decisions (Marchand *et al.*, 2017). Positive online reviews encourage purchase intentions (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017); negative online reviews can discourage them.

A considerable amount of research has suggested that different factors influence the perceived usefulness of eWOM messages. The valence of reviews is one of the factors that consumers use more than others in heuristic information processing as the basis of their purchase decisions (Luan *et al.*, 2022). Negative valence has more of an impact than positive valence on consumer intentions (Chatterjee, 2001). Moreover, as some studies demonstrated, consumers are more attracted by negative reviews compared to positive ones, and these are also more easily generated. This shows that customers are much more interested in sharing negative experiences than satisfied consumers are motivated to write and talk about their positive experiences (Rozin and Royzman, 2001). Negative online reviews produce negative eWOM; the main sources of negative online reviews are experiences of service failure.

Service failure occurs when the service delivered does not meet the expectations of consumers (Oliver, 1980). This is often related to slow service, bad packaging or failure to respond to the customer (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). Specifically, a technical service failure involves the tangible aspects of what the consumer receives, whereas a functional service failure is a process failure that emerges from the customer's perception of the various interactions during the service encounter (Grönroos, 1994).

Understanding what triggers negative eWOM after a service failure is an important issue for providers. Put simply, individuals rate products negatively in anticipation of a reward they may receive from a company. The company engages with them to manipulate online information concerning their products and services (Dellarocas, 2006). Consumers may use negative eWOM on their own behalf to make their dissatisfaction known and to obtain a possible solution (Lin *et al.*, 2018). However, consumers may also give voice to negative experiences to prevent others from enduring similar bad experiences (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). In this sense, they are driven by altruistic motivations that enrich the wealth of knowledge that the Internet makes available to its users. If consumers experience an extremely severe service failure, then they may react by posting negative reviews to harm the firm or to reduce their tension, frustration and anger (Presi *et al.*, 2014). Thus, some eWOM stems from an emotional release and some is motivated by vengeance. Individuals who create negative eWOM who have a positive and flattering view of themselves, may have, as Presi *et al.* (2014) highlighted, self-enhancement motivations, such as active participation in social networks to increase their capacity to attract attention. Shin *et al.* (2014) classified those who communicate a negative experience online into two types: prevention-focused consumers and promotion-focused consumers. Prevention-focused consumers are focused on obligations and develop behaviours based on vigilance to stay away from a negative state. In contrast, promotion-focused consumers are focused on their aspirations and they adopt behaviours aimed at moving towards a positive end state. Shin *et al.* (2014) also demonstrated that consumers who have experienced poor service and find that all online reviews of the provider are positive, react by giving voice to negative eWOM. Table I highlights papers that have examined the relationship between UGC and SFR. These papers focus on failure severity and purchase intentions, whereas the focus of the current paper is on customers' responses to, and identification with, brands.

Table I: Studies on the relationship between user-generated content and service failure and recovery

Construct	Description	Relevant studies	Emphasises…			
			A motivation to create negative eWOM-based UGC	Negative venting via UGC	UGC reporting intensifies severity of failure	UGC prompts online response from providers
Service failure experiences	Service failure occurs when the service delivered does not meet the expectations of consumers. Consumers' experience of service failures can lead them to report the failure, either through private reporting to the company or online channels open to the public.	Anderson and Simester (2014) Golmohammadi et al. (2020) Grégoire et al. (2018) Harris et al. (2006) Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) Herhausen et al. (2019) Lin et al. (2018) Presi et al. (2014) Rosario et al. (2020) Shin et al. (2014)	Yes No Yes No No Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes No Yes No Yes Yes Yes Yes No Yes	No Yes Yes No No Yes No No No No	No No Yes No No Yes No No No No
Distributive, procedural and interactional justice	Customers' evaluations of service failure and recovery efforts are influenced by the type of failure they experience, the manner of the recovery process, how they were treated and the outcome of the failure and recovery efforts. The three justices are: distributive (fairness of the outcomes), procedural (fairness of procedures) and interactional (treatment people experienced). These can	Azemi et al. (2019) Choi and Choi (2014) Grégoire and Fisher (2008) Homburg and Fürst (2005) Wei et al. (2019)	No Yes Yes No No	No No Yes No No	No No No No No	No Yes Yes No No

	influence eWOM-based UGC behaviours within failure recovery situations.					
Service recovery response	Response recovery strategies are mostly examined under a service recovery context rather than an eWOM-based UGC context. The provider's choice of recovery response can increase the likelihood that customers will engage in eWOM-based UGC and impact customers' evaluation of failure severity and recovery actions.	Harris *et al.* (2006) Maxham III (2001) Ozuem *et al.* (2021b)	No Yes Yes	No No Yes	No No No	No No No

eWOM, electronic word of mouth; UGC, user-generated content

Scholars have pointed out that brands are becoming part of the exchange of eWOM information (Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Azemi *et al.*, 2019). Brand-related eWOM can easily and quickly reach a global audience that shares similar interests in the brand (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012). In addition, brand-related eWOM can have the power to influence this audience if it is generated by sources embedded in personal networks. This occurs if the information is considered to be trustworthy. A crucial goal for companies is to develop appropriate SFR strategies with the aim of reducing the possible consequences of negative eWOM. Negative eWOM impacts negatively on *brand attitude*, reducing, as Beneke *et al.* (2015) demonstrated, brand trust, brand affect and purchase intentions. A lower purchase intention for a brand following negative eWOM may be due to *brand equity dilution*. In fact, Bambauer-Sachse and Mongold (2011) highlighted that a constructive processing of information can result in a revision of brand evaluation through the weakening of consumers' perceptions of a brand's additional value on the basis of a consumer-based brand equity.

2.2 Commitment-trust theory

Trust depends on the knowledge x has of y in terms of behaviour in specific situations. In addition, hypotheses are made regarding future behaviour in relation to those specific situations. Trust can be understood from a rational choice perspective or from a more historical, cultural and normative perspective. Rational choice actors have a fixed set of preferences and behave to maximise these preferences in a calculating and strategic manner. Actor behaviour is not driven by impersonal historical processes but by strategic calculations, which will be affected by expectations of how others are likely to behave in the same situation. Indeed, "institutions structure such interactions, by affecting the range and sequence of alternatives on the choice-agenda or by providing information and enforcement mechanisms that reduce uncertainty about the corresponding behaviour of others and allow gains from exchange thereby leading actors towards particular calculations and potentially better social outcomes" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 945). The cultural approach argues that behaviour is not totally strategic, but is bounded by an individual's worldview. This does not mean that people are not purposive or rational, but that in times of decision making they turn to "established routines of behaviour to attain their purposes" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 939). Indeed, the emphasis is placed on the interpretation of a situation in relation to a course of action rather than simple calculation. In response to the second approach, one could argue that institutions provide moral or cognitive templates for the interpretation of actions. Individuals are deeply embedded in the

working of institutions, which are composed of symbols, scripts, routines and so on, which provide filters for the interpretation of situations, others and self. However, they do not only provide strategic information but also affect the identities, self-images and preferences of those coming to a decision. Overall, institutions incorporate the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in an organisation structure of polity (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Trust emerges not simply through calculations or how one should behave and strategise in relation to others, but draws on historical norms and culture relating to past activity when assessing the level of cooperation based on the said emergent trust.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) in their commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing stated that the two fundamental factors of trust and commitment must exist for a relationship to be successful. They identified a "mediating variable approach"; they found that in relationships, factors such as termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values, communication and opportunistic behaviour could lead to acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation, functional conflict and uncertainty if they were not mediated by relationship commitment and trust. Shared values, communication and lack of opportunistic behaviour in relationships involve the "same theoretical foundations as cognitive learning theories which assume individuals are rational and learn from the past" (MacMillan *et al.*, 2006, p. 808). Commitment trust theory is normally perceived in terms of cause-and-effect procedures, which adhere to shared values through predictive behaviour in an institutional context. However, as noted above, commitment-trust theory also relates to social contract theory and institutional theory which could take the form of a rational choice perspective or a historical institutionalist perspective. This paper perceives trust through a historical institutionalist lens, which is broader than the cause-and-effect relationship normally identified. Based on this notion of commitment-trust theory, this paper attempts to assess the levels of negative or positive valence (avoidance or acceptance) one may have regarding certain online experiences. Expectations or estimations of situations differ and are normally based on subjective assessments in relation to the extent trust has been developed through previous experiences. So, individual trust in online commercial activity can affect levels of negative or positive valence (Hajli, 2020). Indeed, trust is developed through actors networking in institutions, and we argue that a comprehension of valence can be developed to provide a qualitative understanding of service failure and brand relationships through a phenomenological hermeneutical perspective.

3. Methodology

3.1 Paradigm of inquiry

This phenomenological, constructivist and hermeneutical study uses an abductive approach and theoretical sampling techniques to provide an experiential, problem-solving-oriented theoretical framework. Phenomenology emphasises the pursuit and explication of truth through the description of a phenomenon as it displays itself to consciousness. There is a return to lived experience through capturing existence as it is lived. Indeed, the basis of knowledge involves "the lived experience in the lifeworld" (Howell, 2013, p. 62).

In relation to the phenomenological approach, the constructivist paradigm of inquiry considers that individuals develop and give meaning to the world through social amelioration and agreement. Ontological and epistemological positions identify that reality is not external to human existence, but determined and defined through social and symbolic interaction. As with phenomenology, constructivists consider that, "humanity alone is responsible for knowledge development and understanding is a matter of interpretive construction on the part of the active subject" (Howell, 2013, p. 90).

In a similar way, hermeneutics considers that understanding involves interpretation; in a phenomenological context, understanding or truth is based on the life experience of communities. Historical understanding and cultural being should be incorporated into analysis to engage with the very process of interpretation and understanding. "Consequently, understanding requires engagement with self which involves including preconceptions, subjectivity and bias. Preconceptions permit an understanding of everyday thought and discourse" (Howell, 2013, p. 158). Indeed, notions regarding trust and valence involve subjective perspectives and pre-understanding, which are explored through interviews, theoretical sampling and open-ended questions. Through a phenomenological philosophical position, and as researchers, we should not attempt "to free ourselves of all prejudice, but to examine our historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others and ourselves" (Garrison, 1996, p. 434).

3.2 Theoretical and purposive sampling strategies

To partially examine unreflected historically inherited prejudices, this study entails an ongoing process through theoretical and purposive sampling and data collection procedures that continue to evolve in relation to an evolving body of research. Purposive selection and

preliminary analysis were conducted to reveal trends in the data, which informed selection in the second phase and involved preparatory questionnaires and interviews. A semi-structured interview format was chosen because the study is phenomenological in terms of its scope, themes and topics, and these are predefined. In this incremental, iterative research design (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), step one provides the epistemological foundation for step two, by verifying the data, thus improving the axiology of the overall research.

Theoretical sampling involves a "process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses data and decides what data to collect next ... to develop theory as it emerges" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Strauss and Corbin (1998) described theoretical sampling as an opportunity to "maximise" the discovery of "variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions" (p. 201). This paper utilises primary data collected through a series of in-depth interviews, which aided and underpinned the development of a substantive theory and framework regarding UGC and customer–brand relationships.

3.3 Data collection methods

Empirical data were generated through open-ended questions allowing participants to provide answers in their own words on their online service failure experiences with the fashion industry (Geer, 1988) without having their length of response limited (Kelley, 1983). To address the aim of our study, we selected millennials of different ages in the range of 18 to 39 years. This is because millennials are virtually interactive, shop online for fashion, and they communicate through digital social media (Loeb, 2020). A total of 108 individuals were invited to participate from three countries (France, Italy and the UK), and 60 volunteered to be interviewed. The participants' demographic information is shown in Table II. Three of the researchers are affiliated to various universities in the UK, France and Italy. Each of the researchers leveraged their professional networks to recruit participants who were mainly current or former students. The interviews were conducted through virtual platforms (Zoom, Adobe, Meet, Teams, Skype). Each interview ranged between 35 and 55 minutes. Predetermined questions were created to guide the researchers, but the questions were modified during the interview to obtain a precise understanding of the participants' individual experiences (Appendix 1). Data were transcribed into a written format consisting of 220 pages of verbatim discussion. We read and analysed the transcripts to identify incidents and patterns.

Table II: Participants' demographic information

Country	Gender	Occupation	Age range
United Kingdom	Female	University marketing student	24–26
	Male	Retail sales assistant	21–23
	Male	Administration assistant	27–29
	Female	MBA university student	30–32
	Male	Personal trainer	27–29
	Female	University marketing student	21–23
	Female	Accommodation officer	24–26
	Female	University business studies student	18–20
	Female	University international business with language student	18–20
	Male	Accountant	30–32
	Male	University finance student	21–23
	Male	English teacher	30–32
	Female	Lecturer in psychology	27–29
	Male	University international business student	24–26
	Male	Mechanical engineer	27–29
	Male	University economics student	21–23
	Male	Mortgage adviser	33–35
	Male	University economics student	18–20
	Female	University MSc economics student	24–26
	Female	Receptionist	27–29
Italy	Female	University MSc economics student	27–29
	Male	Administrator	24–26
	Female	University economics student	24–26
	Female	Content developer	27–29
	Female	Waitstaff	18–20
	Male	University economics student	21–23
	Female	University international management student	21–23
	Male	Recruitment specialist	33–35
	Female	University business administration student	18–20
	Female	Teaching assistant	21–23
	Male	Spanish and English translator	33–35
	Male	Human resource team assistant	27–29
	Female	Sales executive	33–35
	Female	Administrator	33–35
	Female	Procurement officer	24–26
	Male	University graphic communication student	18–20
	Male	University business administration student	21–23
	Male	Compliance risk management officer	33–35
	Male	University international management student	18–20
	Female	University marketing student	18–20
	Female	University economics student	18–20

	Male	Administrator	33–35
France	Female	MSc global luxury and fashion	24–26
	Female	MSc global luxury and fashion	24–26
	Male	Cashier	18–20
	Male	MSc global luxury and fashion	27–29
	Male	University sports business management	18–20
	Female	MSc global luxury and fashion	33–35
	Female	MSc global luxury and fashion	33–35
	Female	Procurement officer	27–29
	Female	Project manager	30–32
	Female	Executive assistant	33-35
	Male	University finance student	18–20
	Male	IT test consultant	33–35
	Female	University economics student	18–20
	Female	University fashion marketing and business management student	18–20
	Male	Assistant librarian	24–26
	Female	University human resource management	24–26
	Male	Social media coordinator	27–29
	Male	University finance student	21–23

4. Data analysis

4.1 Systematic qualitative approach

An analysis of the data was conducted using the qualitative approach proposed by Gioia *et al.* (2013) to understand the main constructs and relationships derived from the data. The data were summarised and interpreted using three stages of analysis (first, second and third orders). The first stage involved examination of the transcribed qualitative data following the interviews with the participants. This stage was used to identify the primary codes that represented the participants' responses to the current topic. A large number of primary codes, which identified potentially relevant factors, were developed during the first-order analysis of the rich narrative data provided by the interviewees. As the analysis progressed, similarities and differences between primary codes could be identified, similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) notion of axial coding. This is a process in which relevant codes are identified, which reduces the number of codes to a manageable number (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

After the counting of repetitive words and phrases found in the first-order stage of analysis, the second stage of analysis involved the development of second-order themes that expressed implicit meanings in the data identified by the researchers' interpretations (van Maanen, 1979). Drawing on the literature and qualitative interviews, we identified ten second-order themes.

Building on these conceptualisations, in the third stage, participants' subjective experiences, literature and the researchers' interpretations were discussed, thereby enhancing the validity of the theme categorisations (Ozuem *et al.*, 2022). The second-order themes explained eWOM and its impact on customer–brand relationships following SFR. The analysis of the third-order stage generated four aggregate dimensions that described the generalised qualities of eWOM and SFR. This was made possible by examining concepts in the extant literature that supported the creation and validation of the final constructs or aggregate dimensions (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). This enabled the researchers to develop four emergent aggregate dimensions/themes that served as the basis for the current framework: responsiveness, empathetic response, counterfactual thinking and brand salience (RECB). Consistent with Ozuem *et al.*'s (2021b) recommendations, the three stages were developed and illustrated (see Figure 1); each of these aggregate dimensions/themes is discussed in Subsections 4.2 to 4.5. Further examination of the themes and primary data led to the identification of four UGC and SFR encounter pathways and customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction outcomes: satisfied with experience and brand, dissatisfied with experience and brand, satisfied with brand, and dissatisfied with brand. These pathways and the four aggregate dimensions/themes supported the development and illustration of the RECB framework (Figure 2). The goal was to understand how the themes connected to eWOM-based UGC and consumers' perceptions and responses to the UGC during SFR situations (see Figure 2).
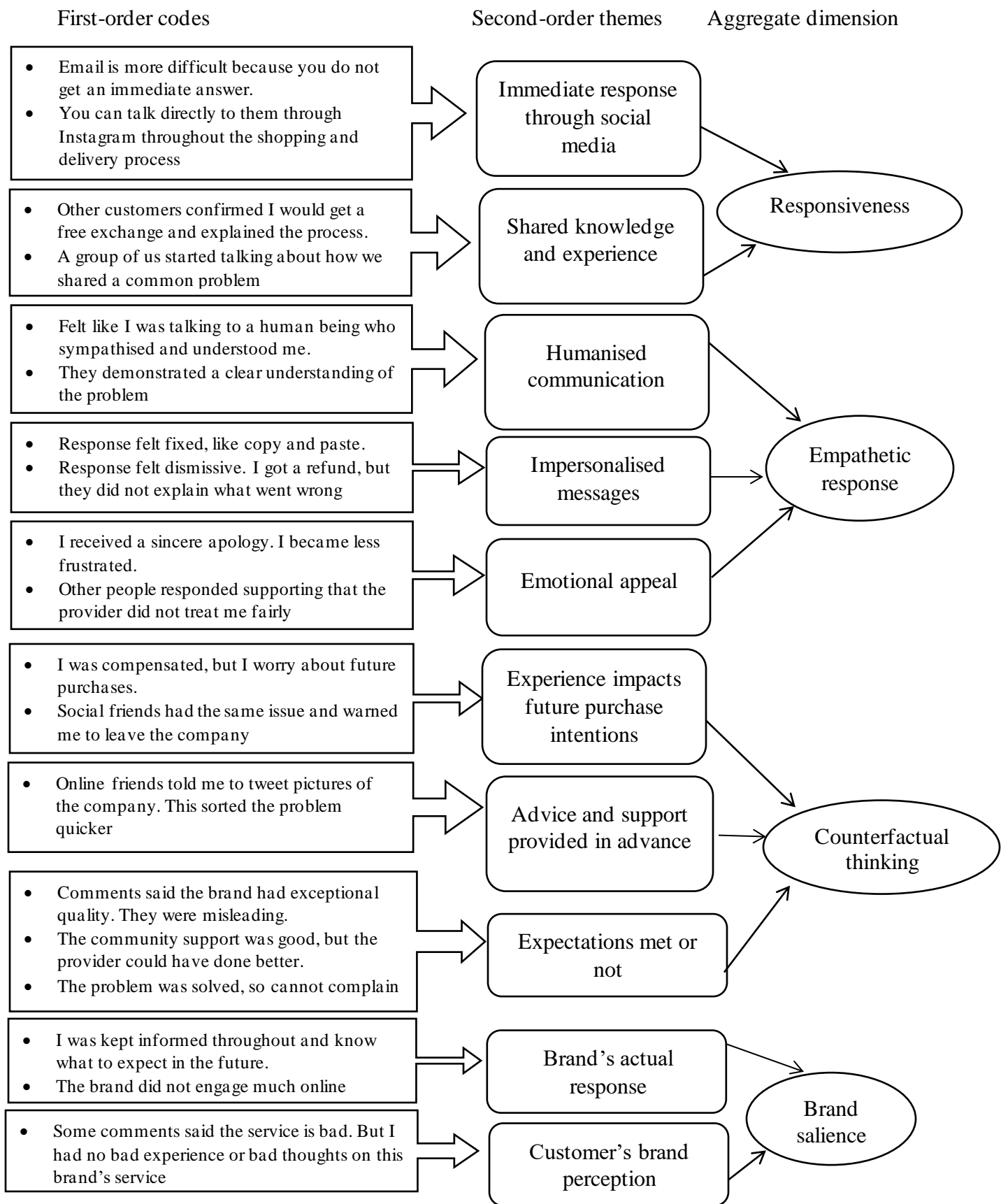
First-order codes

- Email is more difficult because you do not get an immediate answer.
- You can talk directly to them through Instagram throughout the shopping and delivery process

- Other customers confirmed I would get a free exchange and explained the process.
- A group of us started talking about how we shared a common problem

- Felt like I was talking to a human being who sympathised and understood me.
- They demonstrated a clear understanding of the problem

- Response felt fixed, like copy and paste.
- Response felt dismissive. I got a refund, but they did not explain what went wrong

- I received a sincere apology. I became less frustrated.
- Other people responded supporting that the provider did not treat me fairly

- I was compensated, but I worry about future purchases.
- Social friends had the same issue and warned me to leave the company

- Online friends told me to tweet pictures of the company. This sorted the problem quicker

- Comments said the brand had exceptional quality. They were misleading.
- The community support was good, but the provider could have done better.
- The problem was solved, so cannot complain

- I was kept informed throughout and know what to expect in the future.
- The brand did not engage much online

- Some comments said the service is bad. But I had no bad experience or bad thoughts on this brand's service

Second-order themes

- Immediate response through social media
- Shared knowledge and experience
- Humanised communication
- Impersonalised messages
- Emotional appeal
- Experience impacts future purchase intentions
- Advice and support provided in advance
- Expectations met or not
- Brand's actual response
- Customer's brand perception

Aggregate dimension

- Responsiveness
- Empathetic response
- Counterfactual thinking
- Brand salience

Figure 1: Data structure

4.2 Responsiveness

When service failure occurs, accessibility and the speed of recovery are important factors that influence customer satisfaction with recovery efforts (Andreassen, 2000). When customers perceive a service problem to have high severity, and have negative perceptions of the provider's responsiveness to service failure, customer dissatisfaction increases and the likelihood of the spread of negative eWOM also increases. This is evidenced by the following excerpt from a 24-year-old female student:

> You can only have contact with the seller through email. But the procedure's more difficult because you do not get an immediate answer or solution.

This issue has prompted many firms to improve their relationship with customers by collaborating with them to increase the efficiency of the information they spread. Engagement is an important entity in the purchasing process for customers when measuring overall service quality (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, another 24-year-old female fashion student said:

> I purchased from a boutique called Recc-Paris … it's not just a door-to-door delivery, you can directly talk to them through Instagram throughout the shopping and delivery process. If the order is being delayed, you would know, or if you want to exchange for a larger size, they know what it is.

The interactivity and the speed of responses delivered through two-way communication channels identify the firm's willingness to support customers through online communities (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2017), which is vital in maintaining a trusting and positive customer relationship following service failure. A 28-year-old female student averred:

> A dress I ordered was too small for me, I wasn't sure if I would get an exchange without extra charge. I asked others through Facebook about it, they quickly confirmed I would get a free exchange and explained the process.

Correspondingly, another 27-year-old male student stated:

> I read some online comments regarding a pair of shoes I wanted. The customers indicated that the size they ordered was smaller for their feet than expected. I decided to get a larger size above mine, just in case.

In online communities, the most common type of activity is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing underpins notions of trust and reinforces positive valence. The motivation of customers

to communicate with other individuals in online communities may include their need to assess levels of trust through contacting other individuals who are in a similar situation to validate their prospective decisions and gain a better understanding of factors before acting (Liou *et al.*, 2016). A 25-year-old female student noted:

> The biggest response I got was from other customers through Socials. I posted about an item I didn't receive, and soon a group of us started talking about how we shared a common problem. The company never responded to us, so we tagged the company in our comments so others would know about this.

Individuals are often motivated to disclose information online if the online channel has a supportive climate (Shao, 2009).

4.3 Empathetic response

Empathy is developed through trust and is one of the characteristics of emotional support provided by others (Menon and Dubé, 2007), which comprises feelings of sorrow and compassion for the misfortune experienced by others. In digital environments, emotional support can exercise positive effects on customers' satisfaction. A 28-year-old male participant noted:

> When I messaged the support team through Instagram, it felt like I was talking to a human being who sympathised and wanted to understand me.

This ensured a human connection and emphasised a relationship and the development of trust and enhancement of positive valence. Providers face challenges in offering the affective support and assistance customers desire due to the lack of interpersonal interactions within digital settings (Gelbrich *et al.*, 2021). This has impacted the adoption of personalisation within online settings. Technological systems are often perceived as cold and impersonal, which customers can notice. A 26-year-old male participant asserted:

> I received a response on Facebook, "We are happy to help, please click on this link for more information". This response feels fixed, like copy and paste.

In contrast, a 23-year-old female university marketing student had a different experience:

> They demonstrated a clear understanding of the problem and they were really oriented on providing the solution.

These responses identify a contrasting difference between how customers respond to a service failure when the response is an automatic and generic response and when it is personalised and addressed to specific individuals. Intriguingly, a 28-year-old fashion student noted:

> The store provided a somewhat dismissive response; I got a refund, but it felt like they were just trying to get my complaint over and done with without explaining what went wrong.

For psychological recovery strategies, an apology is offered by the firm with an explanation regarding the service failure, whereas monetary-related compensation revolves around encouraging customers to use the service again. A 23-year-old male participant noted:

> The message to me was a sincere apology. It indicated a polite and friendly messenger which reduced my frustration regarding the situation.

An empathetic apology alone may not satisfy all customers under all service failure situations. A customer may forgive the failure if it is beyond the firm's control, but if customers believe the brand has the capability to avoid or deal with a failure, then they are less likely to forgive it. Indeed, the customer builds an understanding of the firm and determines levels of trust that impact or influence future behaviour. A 29-year-old female participant asserted:

> I posted the company's response on Twitter. Other people responded to my post supporting that the provider did not treat me fairly.

Customers will hold expectations regarding the messages brands deliver through digital environments (Gelbrich *et al.*, 2021). If customers do not receive the empathetic response they expect from the provider, they are more likely to share their experience through negative eWOM to obtain empathetic support.

4.4 Counterfactual thinking

Despite brands' best efforts to deliver an effective recovery strategy, the strategy may not generate customer satisfaction. When customers have an unsatisfactory experience, they are likely to engage in counterfactual thinking which could be upward or downward. Upward thinking involves thinking that the outcomes could have been better. Conversely, downward thinking focuses on how things could have been worse (Wang *et al.*, 2017). When negative emotions are evoked by upward counterfactual thinking, customers might feel discouraged

from repurchasing from brands leading to decreased loyalty. A 19-year-old female participant said:

> I faced so many issues, to me, I could have had a much better experience. I didn't believe that next time would be better, it was better to leave.

Customers develop attitudes relating to trust and valence not only through experience, but also through the favourable or unfavourable information they encounter (Wang *et al.*, 2017). If customers are engaging in upward counterfactual thinking following service failure, and if they encounter negative information shared through other customers' negative eWOM, they are less likely to exhibit positive attitudes towards brands, including satisfaction and loyalty. Conversely, customers may develop positive attitudes when they encounter positive information. A 23-year-old male participant noted:

> Comments said the brand had exceptional quality. But when I tried to get an exchange the company tried to pass off responsibility. My experience was worse than what the comments stated. The comments were really misleading, I wished I had never followed them.

Customers are influenced by review sites that contain a balance of positive and negative information as they perceive them to be more trustworthy, personal and useful (Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012). This can be beneficial to customers when they seek an effective recovery procedure. A 29-year-old female receptionist considered she trusted companies that had reviews from friends when she stated:

> I feel information from online friends sorted the problem much quicker. Recovery may have been harder without my friends' advice.

eWOM creates empathy as it facilitates the sharing of issues individuals encounter through personal experience (Deighton *et al.*, 1989). Customers may seek outcomes they perceive to be positive, including effective recovery strategies. This 21-year-old male participant noted:

> The support I got from online friends was good, but I feel the provider could have made the experience better by explaining to me why there was nothing they could do.

Interestingly, this participant revealed that providers' actions and expressed attitudes can have an impact on how customers perceive the service recovery procedure. This results in different outcomes regarding their satisfaction with brands. A 27-year-old male participant noted:

> There wasn't much online engagement, but the company solved the issue I enquired about so I cannot complain. The experience could have been worse.

Customers may feel that their basic needs and expectations were met and therefore they may feel content with the service recovery outcome (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003). They may even develop downward counterfactual thinking, whereby the outcome could have been worse than the existing outcome. Thus, counterfactual thinking is affected by expectations, the eWOM customers observe and by the actions delivered by the provider.

4.5 Brand salience

The effective management of SFR strategies can have a positive impact on customers' satisfaction and on their overall perception of brands (Bougoure *et al.*, 2016). Positive satisfactory outcomes can have a significant impact on brand salience. Salience refers to the level of a customer's active recollection of a brand (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986). Brand salience evokes a sense of whether the customer automatically trusts that the brand will deliver at the required time. A 30-year-old male participant identified trust and reinforcement when he stated:

> Nike responded quickly to my return request through Twitter. I was kept informed throughout the whole process; I now know what to expect if something happens again.

Intriguingly, this participant revealed the importance of maintaining a strong connection through social media. Customers' experiences with brands can positively influence the quality of their relationship with brands, which can play a significant role in building brand loyalty and brand endorsement. Another participant, a 30-year-old man stated:

> I visited Foot Locker's Instagram to find out how to return a pair of shoes; they took so long to reply and compensate me. Nike takes much less time, I'm willing to pay more for them than pay Foot Locker to make me wait longer.

When customers experience service failure with one brand, the satisfaction of their experience with another brand is likely to become more noticeable, causing them to see that brand as a better alternative. A lack of willingness can cause customers to feel ignored by a brand as indicated by this 21-year-old male participant:

> It is a great disservice for fashion brands not to use social media channels to stay connected with their dissatisfied customers, especially considering how many use it.

Similarly, another 27-year-old male participant noted:

> The brand does not seem to engage online consumers, so it is of little surprise that very few customers post feedback and complaints through social media.

The above participants reveal that engaging with customers through UGC during service failure ensures perceived service quality is maintained to promote satisfaction. However, a 20-year-old female student stated:

> I tweeted the company and they replied with a link for me to send my complaint. But the page link said the site was no longer available, useless, right?

When customers encounter inconsistencies between the advertised values of brands and the response they receive during service failures, acceptance of negative eWOM can be increased. However, if online comments are inconsistent, in terms of the customer's commitment to and experience with the brand, then negative information is likely to be perceived as biased information (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2001). Negative eWOM may not have the same effect on all forms of brand salience and trust as consumers have different experiences of brands and encounter service failures with varying levels of failure severity.

5. Discussion

The aim of our study is to assess levels of valence based on commitment-trust theory and enrich the literature on UGC in relation to SFR and customers' responses by introducing four novel moderators (aggregate dimensions/themes): satisfied with experience and brand, dissatisfied with experience and brand, satisfied with brand, and dissatisfied with brand. Our study demonstrates that UGC plays a pivotal role in signifying the efforts of providers to assist customers following a service failure. This can influence existing and potential customers' adoption of, or defection from, brands. Landsman and Nitzan (2020) suggested that the impact of UGC on customers' perspectives of service dissatisfaction is key. This suggestion is supported by our results that demonstrate that eWOM provides a higher order of expressional dissatisfaction (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). Extrapolating from these results and analysis, the current study presents a RECB framework, which is derived from the names of aggregate dimensions/themes (responsiveness, empathetic response, counterfactual thinking and brand salience) (see Figure 2). Within the RECB framework, we affirmed several themes and concepts that are either explicit (responsiveness and empathetic response) or implicit concepts

that portray consumers' affective reaction (counterfactual thinking and brand salience). These key processes either generate positive or negative customer–brand relationships during or following a SFR process. As Figure 2 shows, individual customers might encounter UGC that exhibits certain characteristics that could have a positive impact on brand image when service failure occurs. They might also encounter a low volume of content or content that does not provoke a positive valence from customers.
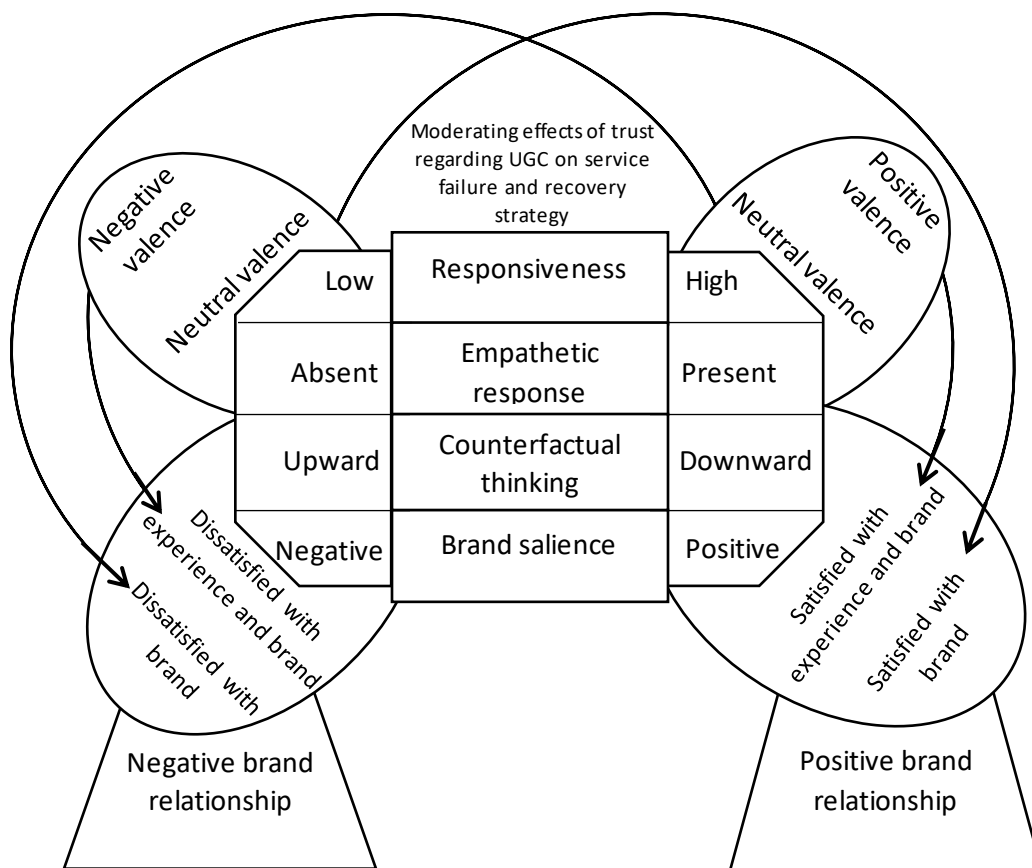
Low	Responsiveness	High
Absent	Empathetic response	Present
Upward	Counterfactual thinking	Downward
Negative	Brand salience	Positive

Moderating effects of trust regarding UGC on service failure and recovery strategy

Negative valence — Neutral valence — Positive valence — Neutral valence

Dissatisfied with experience and brand — Dissatisfied with brand

Satisfied with experience and brand — Satisfied with brand

Negative brand relationship

Positive brand relationship

Figure 2: RECB framework

UGC, user-generated content

However, as the framework illustrates, customers' responses to UGC differ based on the emotional valence the content provokes. Customers' satisfaction with UGC activity varies depending on the level of contribution they believe the UGC has added to improve SFR and on their pre-existing perspectives of the brand. These can ultimately impact the outcome in terms of whether customers develop a positive or negative relationship with the brand. This

can be linked back to the valence they develop from observing UGC. The four pathways that impact a customer's positive or negative brand relationship with a brand are described in the following subsections.

5.1 Satisfied with experience and brand – strengthened positive perspective of the brand following interactive recovery

Customers who seek guidance and help from other customers following a service failure tend to rely on trusted online channels that have a supportive climate (Lin *et al*., 2018; Hajli, 2020; Ozuem *et al*., 2021b). These trusted environments can positively impact customer satisfaction with the recovery process and improve the perceived equity of the brand (Wei *et al*., 2019). They can also enhance satisfaction with the brand. Customers who share UGC can spread information regarding levels of trust about areas in which brands are underperforming, and the negative valence of the UGC can potentially harm brand equity. To reach customers more effectively and develop trust, brands encourage customers through social networking sites to deliver positive brand-related information (Harmeling *et al*., 2017; Maxham III, 2001), including the willingness and ability of brands to resolve service failures. Knowledge sharing is a fundamental activity for building trust within online communities whereby members can share experiences and endorse decisions that would be beneficial to other individuals (Liou *et al*., 2016). This is important for customers who have encountered service failures and require assurance regarding the brand's ability to provide recovery solutions.

Valence is based on levels of trust and indicates the emotional value associated with an event that prompts an individual response. This applies when customers encounter service failure and UGC associated with or linked to the failure. The manner in which the content is presented can impact customer perceptions: if the UGC message is framed positively or negatively, the corresponding valence will be positive or negative (Levin, 1987). Customers who trust the brand and UGC normally coalesce under the satisfied with experience and brand pathway; they develop positive valence when the UGC continues to provide solutions to overcome a service failure, which increases their satisfaction with the recovery experience. Thus, the satisfied with experience and brand pathway is mostly constructed by the customer's impression of the information they initially encounter, as it impacts their perception of the rest of the service recovery procedure delivered by the brand.

5.2 Dissatisfied with experience and brand – weakened perspective of the brand following non-interactive recovery

Customers on the dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway do not encounter any of the characteristics of UGC that customers obtain via the satisfied with experience and brand pathway. When they do not encounter the desired level of responsiveness and empathetic response from the UGC, the UGC is less likely to create commitment and trust and have a moderating impact on the service recovery process. A perceived social presence within online environments can cause customers to feel socially present (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019; Jin *et al.*, 2017) and feel emotions that are typically evoked during face-to-face interactions. Similar to customers on the satisfied with experience and brand pathway, customers who have experienced the dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway want to experience interactive UGC delivered via informational support during service recovery. If they do not encounter the desired level of informational support and empathetic responses, then trust will not be realised and customers will develop negative emotions or a negative valence of the experience, which would lead to customers judging that the recovery procedures were unfair (Choi and Choi, 2014; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008).

Engagement is an important measure of service quality for customers as is the perceived level of informational and emotional support delivered through online interactions (Shao, 2009). This can have an impact on a customer's experience with a brand, which can influence the quality of the relationship between the customer and the brand (Hess Jr *et al.*, 2003; Yang *et al.*, 2022). However, if customers have an unsatisfactory experience of SFR and UGC activity, this will likely elicit negative salience towards the brand causing other brands to be perceived as better alternatives. The outcome of the dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway leads to negative relationships with the brand based on the limited number and personalisation of UGC activities. This causes customers to develop negative valence leading to upward counterfactual thinking and negative brand salience.

5.3 Satisfied with brand – emotional attachment to the brand

The satisfied with brand pathway involves commitment and trust and customer valence that aligns positively with the brand itself, and less so with the UGC activity related to the recovery process. Compared to customers who experience the satisfied with experience and brand pathway and dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway, customers who are satisfied with

the brand may encounter UGC that has low responsiveness and a lack of empathy or personalisation within the messages. However, their valence is neither positively nor negatively affected by this. Customer perceptions of UGC and its moderating effect on SFR processes are not limited to the service failure event and recovery experience. A long-term customer relationship with the brand can have a pivotal effect on their evaluation of the UGC and recovery process. Customers satisfied with brands are typically less concerned about the UGC made available to them (Golmohammadi *et al.*, 2020); so, it has less of a moderating effect on their perceptions of SFR. Even if the perceived responsiveness of UGC is low, and the empathy expressed through the content is limited, customers on the satisfied with brand pathway have a neutral valence regarding UGC and present positive behaviours in downward counterfactual thinking and brand salience due to their emotional attachment to the brand.

When there is limited UGC for customers to evaluate, customers following the satisfied with brand pathway will align their cognitive thinking with their past experience with the brand (Rosario *et al.*, 2020), which they will apply to their counterfactual thinking. Satisfied with experience and brand and dissatisfied with experience and brand counterfactual thinking will be developed based on the level of interactivity customers experienced during the SFR process. If the UGC indicates positive valence in regard to the brand's recovery strategy, the observing customer will develop a positive valence leading to downward counterfactual thinking and positive brand salience. For the satisfied with brand pathway, customers reflect on their existing relationship with, commitment to, and trust in the brand, which positively impacts their own downward counterfactual thinking and brand salience, which maintains their satisfaction with the brand and positive relationship with the brand.

5.4 Dissatisfied with brand – emotional detachment from the brand

The satisfied with brand pathway is associated with customers who have a positive attachment to the brand, which causes them to have neutral reactions to UGC. UGC arouses no emotions or neutral valence in customers who progress through the dissatisfied with brand pathway and it has little impact on their perceptions of SFR strategies. However, unlike customers aligned with the satisfied with brand pathway, customers aligned with the dissatisfied with brand pathway are not emotionally attached to the brand, which causes a negative relationship with the brand to be sustained even if service recovery is achieved (Azemi *et al.*, 2019). The more that knowledge sharing occurs within online channels, the higher the level of perceived interactivity. While high online interactivity will allow positive valence to develop in

customers under the satisfied with experience and brand, dissatisfied with experience and brand and even satisfied with brand pathways, the dissatisfied with brand category describes customers who develop neutral valence from observing the UGC, even if this is highly responsive and empathetic, or reflects others' positive experiences (Shin *et al.*, 2014).

Similar to customers who follow the satisfied with brand pathway, the dissatisfied with brand pathway leads customers to evaluate the overall SFR process directly through counterfactual thinking (Grégoire *et al.*, 2018). This category develops upward counterfactual thinking, which causes them to imagine that they may have had a better experience if the brand had prevented the failure at the beginning. This further increases negative brand salience (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Ultimately, the dissatisfied with brand pathway results in a negative relationship with the brand as the customer does not have an attachment to the brand, which would have caused them to attribute less blame to the brand for the service failure. Thus, despite UGC meeting the informative and supportive standards required to support customers, customers at the beginning of the dissatisfied with brand process are less impacted by UGC in regard to SFR strategies.

6. Conclusion

Our paper contributes to the UGC, SFR and customer–brand relationships discussion in several ways. Specifically, the study develops the conceptualisation of the moderating effect of UGC on SFR responses and their impact on customer motivations to develop a positive or negative relationship with the brand following the failure and recovery process. Overall, this study demonstrates that customer interactions with UGC significantly affect their responses to, and relationships with, the brand. We identified four salient configurations of influences that distinguished customers' receptiveness to recovery strategies. Brand managers should understand these different configurations and implement flexible decision making that would result in effective recovery processes. Based on the historical institutional perspective of trust underpinning commitment-trust theory, we argue that customers observing UGC will encounter other customers' emotions expressed through the UGC that may shape their own valence regarding an entity (Levin, 1987; Lin *et al.*, 2018). However, customers' valence is not solely based on UGC itself or on the valence of the shared content. Based on trust and circumstance, the type of relationship a customer has with the brand is essential to understanding the strength of the effect that UGC will have on their individual valence in terms of SFR, satisfaction and customer–brand relationship. Some customers have a strong emotional attachment to, and unquestioned trust in, brands that prevents them from defecting (Hess Jr *et*

al., 2003), whereas customers with a weak attachment are less forgiving of service failures (Klein and Dawar, 2004; Monga and John, 2008).

As pointed out by Golmohammadi *et al.* (2020), consumers' susceptibility to negative eWOM was greater if they had conducted less behavioural efforts, such as information searching, prior to making purchasing decisions. Rosario *et al.* (2020) showed that consumers with greater uncertainty about events, such as SFR, and weaker customer–brand relationships are more likely to be influenced by UGC that appears ineffective in a SFR process. Consistent with this study, we argue that experienced consumers evaluate UGC based on their past experiences or relationship with a brand, while others with less experience may become more psychologically influenced by negative eWOM or feel increased dissatisfaction with UGC if they perceive it to be ineffective.

Furthermore, again in relation to commitment-trust theory, we suggest that customer valence and their perspective of the brand prior to the SFR are important mediators in understanding the impact of UGC on positive or negative brand relationship outcomes. The effect of UGC on customer satisfaction will align according to the customer's valence regarding the content and their existing perspective of the brand, which will vary depending on the customer's past purchasing experience or attitudinal judgement. By considering these varying effects, this paper conceptualises the effect and outcomes of UGC on four pathways: satisfied with experience and brand, dissatisfied with experience and brand, satisfied with brand, and dissatisfied with brand. All these pathways begin with customers encountering UGC during a service recovery process that will result in customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with two individual entities: the brand and the service experience. This paper concludes that customer groups following two different pathways judge UGC differently, even when encountering the same UGC.

Our study demonstrates that customers' trust and subsequent strong emotional attachment to a brand (satisfied with brand pathway) positively impacts their downward counterfactual thinking and brand salience. The UGC they encounter, even if it contains limited interactivity and connectiveness, prompts a neutral valence from the customer individually. This causes the UGC to have little impact on the positive brand relationship of customers on the satisfied with brand pathway. In contrast, customers following the dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway who encounter UGC with low responsiveness and empathy develop a negative perspective resulting in a negative relationship with the brand. This may stem from the

customer's need to connect with others for informational and emotional support (Liu *et al.*, 2022) during a failure event that arouses concern, worry and insecurity. This increases the individual's need to rely on others.

Customers following the dissatisfied with brand pathway do not react with an emotional valence towards UGC regardless of meeting a high level of responsiveness and empathetic response. While these customers may be content with the recovery outcomes, the UGC does not reduce their negative perception of the service failure prior to recovery or contribute to building their attachment to the brand, resulting in a negative relationship with the brand. In contrast, customers following the satisfied with experience and brand pathway may find the information and support from UGC exceeds their recovery expectations, which causes them to develop a positive salience towards the brand and to judge the service experience to be positive. Customers following the satisfied with experience and brand pathway and dissatisfied with experience and brand pathway are more likely to analyse the effectiveness of the recovery in relation to how they were treated throughout the process (Septianto *et al.*, 2020). This links to how supportive and helpful UGC can be in contributing to the recovery process. Customers associated with the satisfied with brand pathway and dissatisfied with brand pathway are self-focused in their behaviour, meaning their valence is influenced by either the brand's equity or the actual service experience. This causes them to be less affected by other customers' persuasion. On the dissatisfied with brand pathway, customers' perceptions of the brand after service failure are mainly influenced by the efficiency of the recovery service because they have low attachment to the brand; poor service will reinforce their negative perception of the brand and make them disregard any positive messages in the UGC.

The diverse customer behaviour in response to UGC during SFR procedures indicates that different groups of customers will have varying perspectives regarding trust in relation to the contribution of UGC to recovery solutions. While UGC activity may enable brands to showcase their commitment to supporting customers (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2017), not all customers will perceive that this adds value to service recovery and it may cause some to defect from the brand. Providers must consider how individual customers develop notions of trust and integrate UGC into service failure experiences as well as how they perceive the messages and the expressed valence.

7. Limitations and further research directions

Like most empirical studies, our investigation is not without its limitations. A potential limitation of the RECB framework is that it does not focus on specific UGC content or on messages related to SFR activity. It does not distinguish between UGC that is shared between customers or between the provider and the customer. Levels of online interactivity between customers may be higher due to fewer controls and restrictions on conversations in contrast to interactions with the brand, which may be more focused or fixed around a specific recovery process. Limitations also arise from the selection of interview partners (millennials, the majority of whom were former students of economics-related fields from the three countries) and interview topic (fashion). Furthermore, the current study examined the effect of UGC based on customer–brand relationships in the fashion industry. It is envisaged that a longitudinal study is needed to test the RECB framework. The final concern relates to the terms of reference and the three European countries (France, Italy and the UK). Perhaps future studies should consider a wider heterogenous target population that would provide broader perspectives.

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Appendix 1: Guided questions

1. What type of online service failure did you experience? (technical, communication, delivery, other)
2. When (on what occasion) did you experience it? (normal shopping, after a specific client request, after a specific event, etc…)
3. Why did you decide to use that provider's online service? Was it the first time that you had decided to use that provider's online service? (if no) – What other online services did you use and why?
4. Did you have a relationship with that provider? (for how long, for what, collect details on the relationship)
5. What were your thoughts about the provider during the service failure you encountered? (try to understand the interviewee's perception of the provider)
6. Do you know other competitive providers? In what ways do they differ in service failure and response? Which of their online services did you experience?
7. Where did you communicate the online service failure? (social networks, which social networks were used, i.e., name and characteristics, other online media used; offline media used and relative description)
8. Why did you decide to communicate through these means of communication? (fast, effective, accessible, causality; try to understand the reasons for their use with respect to other means of communication)
9. When and for how long did you use these means of communication? (on what other occasions were they used, why and for how long)
10. Where do you usually share information with your friends? (social networks and which ones, how often are they used in respect to other communication means)
11. Did you write on social networks before contacting the company or did you contact the company before writing on social networks? Did you implement other kinds of behaviour?
12. What did you write to the company about your online service failure?
13. What did you write in your social network about your online service failure? (take note of potential linguistic expressions used)
14. Who answered your communication? (company personnel, other social network user; more than one person, how many, how long after the failure, etc.)
15. What responses did they communicate to you? (try to remember specific expressions used)

16. What is your impression of the person(s) who answered (they knew the provider, they were an expert on the issue as they had had a similar experience, they answered by accident, etc.)
17. Did you know them? (if yes, what was the relationship; did the interviewee speak to them on many occasions, etc.)
18. What view prevailed at the end of the sharing? And why? (interviewee's ideas prevailed and why, the ideas of others prevailed – who and why, why did the interviewee accepted them).
19. Did you get an answer from the provider? How did the provider answer? (in the case of a dominant collective-based view, try to understand the approach that the provider used, was the answer personalised or was it a collective or generic answer)
20. Did the provider engage other users or parties to answer you? (were these other consumers, personnel, influencers? how they were involved, what impact did they have)
21. Were you satisfied with the answers you received and why (consider the overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the brand and the experience)