Department of Marketing

When engagement is for self-presentation:

the role and impact of the ideal-self in social media engagement

by

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Abstract

This thesis expands the concept of engagement beyond its representation of genuine behaviour. In the social media context, the thesis posits that individuals may hold a broader range of motivations and drivers including using engagement activity as part of a representation of their ideal self– rather than being driven by genuine behaviour as the extant literature generally expects. Via a two-phase, qualitative research design, this thesis explores how engagement can be affected by an individual's ideal self and the effect on others.

The first phase of the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 social media users to explore the role and impact of the ideal self in engagement. The results identified three types of engagement for self-presentation based on different relational and dispositional levels: staged engagement, contradictory engagement and faked engagement. These forms of engagement for self-presentation also had different drivers: self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. This revealed how engagement for self-presentation may affect other actors (i.e., individuals and focal firms). Hence, it was necessary to pose questions to organisations. The second phase of the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 7 organisations to understand the results of the first phase from organisational perspectives. The findings suggested that brand awareness, trust and control are key themes when attempting to understand how organisations view engagement for self-presentation.

Overall, this thesis contributes to the literature on engagement by reinforcing the aspect of the self and enhancing the current understanding of how engagement may occur on social media and its impact on others. This research considers engagement as a form of self-presentation, reflecting the different relationships and dispositions of individuals to focal objects. This suggests self-presentation as an antecedent of engagement. The thesis also acknowledges the temporality of such engagement. Finally, the research contributes by showing how engagement for self-presentation may affect organisations.

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Chapter 1:   Introduction

1.1 Research background

The roles of consumers have evolved over time, with consumers becoming more active contributors in firms' activities (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2018; Dolan et al., 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek, Jaakkola, and Alexander, 2018; Kozinets et al., 2010; Maslowska et al., 2019; NG, Sweeney and Plewa, 2020). This has resulted in an evolution of firms' marketing strategies, as many firms now desire deeper engagement from consumers (Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Consequently, engagement has gained considerable prominence in recent years, as seen in its featuring as a key research priority of the Marketing Science Institute (MSI, 2016). This ongoing recognition is also evidenced by the number of international academic journals that feature engagement as a subject of special issues (i.e., *Journal of Service Research*, 2010, 2011, 2019; *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2016; *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, 2017; *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 2017; *Journal of Service Management*, 2018; *Journal of Service Marketing*, 2018; *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2019).

Engagement concerns activities beyond normal transactions and is broadly understood as a consumer's disposition to voluntarily contribute resources to a focal object (i.e., brand/firm) (Brodie et al., 2019; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Researchers have, therefore, posited that engagement antecedents represent genuine consumer acts based on pre-existing relationships, such as involvement, participation, trust, loyalty, satisfaction and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011). Accordingly, it seems that most of the current literature assumes, as conditions for engagement, a strong relationship between the consumer and the brand/firm (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) and a strong consumer disposition to engage (Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016).

Consequently, much of the literature identifies engagement as being beneficial to firms' performance in various areas, both directly and indirectly

(Pansari and Kumar, 2017) – e.g., sales growth, cost reductions, competitive advantage, brand referral, product development and superior profitability (Brodie et al., 2013; Clark, Lages and Hollebeek, 2020; Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Islam, Rahman and Hollebeek, 2018). Such enhanced benefits can be achieved from consumers contributing resources (i.e., network assets, persuasion capital, knowledge stores and creativity) (Harmeling et al., 2017). These valuable resources would be inaccessible to firms if consumers were unwilling to provide them through engagement activities.

While consumers have been investigated in the context of a focal interactive relationship for engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a), recent research suggests that other actors involved in the ecosystem must also be considered, including both human and non-human (i.e., technology) actors (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Blasco-Arcas et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2019, Storbacka et al., 2016). This heightens the current understanding of the role of engagement, which has subsequently shifted from an exclusive focus on consumers to considering a wider range of actors – known as actor engagement (AE). This form of engagement provides a broader domain and considers various actors' roles in an ecosystem that accommodates increasing resource contribution (i.e., time, energy and effort) and examines how much these actors affect one another (Brodie et al., 2019).

Such engagement has been found more often in the social media context, where any individuals beyond consumers can engage with focal objects online via 'likes', 'shares', comments, posts and other means platforms enable and encourage (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019; Rietveld et al., 2020; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014). Thus, engagement is often amplified through the ubiquity and functionality of social media platforms (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Simon and Tossan, 2018). Social media has become a significant feature for many individuals: a means for communication, connecting and updating their lives and the environment surrounding them (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015), and it is projected that there will be more than 3.1 billion social media users worldwide by the year 2021 (Statista, 2019a).

Accordingly, social media engagement supports a huge shift in individuals' interactions as online engagement platforms facilitate connections with multiple actors (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2019). Thus, the engagement activities that appear on social media could just as likely result from someone's behaviour, which might manifest as engagement. In this way, the engagement would not have the same relationship and disposition to the focal object as expected in other studies. Engagement with different properties, therefore, could be driven by various reasons other than genuine behaviour. This seems to only apply in the social media context since social media presents fewer restrictions, compared to the offline environment, such as the lack of physical interactions and the fact that social media connections are weak ties (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Ellison, Charles and Lampe, 2007; Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008). This renders more opportunities for individuals to engage with a focal object in any way they wish. This realisation could provide an alternative perspective to the current understanding of engagement, which assumes that actors have a strong relationship with and disposition toward the focal object, driven by genuine behaviour.

Therefore, this thesis problematises the intention of individuals driving engagement on social media. It is possible that engagement is undertaken as part of self-presentation, which is a process used to portray the individual's ideal self to an audience (Goffman, 1973; Marder et al., 2016a). This is accomplished through individuals associating themselves with focal objects to present their ideal selves to others (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). As individuals act online in an attempt to boost their self-presentations, social media engagement may not accurately reflect their genuine behaviour since self-presentation often involves content that is already edited and adjusted at the point of posting to fit a certain storyline and attract people (Crate, 2017). This opposes the characteristics of being authentic (i.e., authentic living, self-alienation and the absence of accepting external influence) as identified in authenticity literature (Wood et al., 2008). Hence, it is questioned whether we should consider the authenticity of this behaviour, since engagement is undertaken as part of the self-presentation process.

In addition, the practice of presenting the ideal self via social media engagement is highly visible to others within the poster's own network (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit, 2016a). The networks surrounding these individuals are, therefore, affected by their engagement behaviours (Clark, Lages and Hollebeek, 2020). As the influence of online engagement is strong and persuasive (Gomez, Lopez and Molina, 2019; Zhang, Kuo and Mccall, 2019), others may perceive it as a form of influencing behaviour, which will affect others' perceptions of the focal object (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). This impact can occur without the viewer realising that the engagement they see is intended for self-presentation and that it does not necessarily represent authentic behaviour, people do tend to check for source reliability and trustworthiness, e.g., from where the content originated and who authored it (Burkhardt, 2017; Crate, 2017; PwC, 2018). However, the key problem with this argument is the extent to which engagement activities on social media are known to be as genuine and sincere as they may seem.

Following this direction, the impact of engagement affects other individuals within the poster's network, but, since people make decisions based on others' engagement activities, this impact may extend to the focal firm (Clark, Lages and Hollebeek, 2020). Firms are increasing their dependence on social media; it has been reported that businesses spent more than US$89,905 million on social media advertisements in 2019 (Statista, 2019b). As this dependence grows, firms begin relying on engagement as a resource reflecting consumers' genuine behaviours (Harmeling et al., 2017). However, companies must be aware that the engagement on which they rely for decision-making could result from the poster's self-presentation.

This thesis, therefore, has both academic and practical benefits as it provides an alternative understanding of relationships and dispositions that differs from conceptualisations in other engagement studies. The properties, drivers and impacts of self-presentation engagement may also, arguably, differ from those of what might be seen as more authentic behaviour. Understanding this is particularly important to the treatment of engagement. Firms' engagement marketing divisions may encounter unexpected consequences if they create strategies based on inauthentic information derived from self-presentation engagement instead of more authentic behaviours.

The following sections (Sections 1.2 and 1.3) present the aim and objectives of this thesis and the approach through which the research has been conducted. Section 1.4 then overviews all chapters in the thesis.

1.2 Research aim

In light of the research background and gap presented above, this research has one primary aim:

To explore how engagement can be affected by an individual's ideal self and the effect on others.

This thesis argues that little emphasis has been given to the integration of engagement and the 'self'. Therefore, this research is influenced by the necessity of connecting the two distinct research streams of engagement and the self by considering the conditions under which engagement activities may be engendered by a person's need to present his or her ideal self. This argument has not been broached in scholarly literature to date, and previous studies have been restricted to the notion of engagement as a genuine and voluntary concept (Brodie et al., 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), not considering the possibility of engagement activity that aims to present an ideal self. Social media, however, seems to facilitate such a relationship between engagement and the self. Therefore, this thesis problematises the intentions of individuals driving engagement on social media. Any actors beyond consumers (i.e., any individuals) can engage with focal objects on social media platforms since such connectedness is promoted (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019). The visibility of social media content enables this engagement to affect other actors, including other individuals and focal firms. However, as engagement can be used to facilitate self-presentation of the ideal self, its conditions and consequences could also differ from the impacts of engagement based on genuine behaviour (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Consequently, this thesis will adopt an alternative view, considering the concept of engagement in relation to the ideal self, highlighting unexplored areas and

contributing theoretically and practically to the understanding of this key issue by developing and refining new understandings of engagement activity. In this way, the research will clarify the conditions under which engagement activities could be employed to present an individual's ideal self. The study's overarching aim is examined through three research objectives, defined in the following section.

1.2.1 Research objectives

This thesis examines the following objectives in accordance with the overarching aim outlined above.

Objective 1: To explore the role and impact of the ideal self on actor engagement in online social media.

It is generally assumed that engagement reflects consumer's genuine behaviour (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). This can be seen by the key antecedents that are well understood in the literature, such as trust, satisfaction and loyalty – all of which are centred around a pre-existing relationship (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). However, the drivers of engagement may not be limited to those mentioned. It is possible, therefore, to consider that social media engagement occurs because individuals want to engage with a focal object as a way of presenting their ideal selves. This would provide an alternative antecedent to the engagement literature and present different properties of the relationship and disposition between individuals and focal objects in engagement activities − not limited to examining the assumption that a strong relationship and disposition toward the focal object is a condition for an individual's engagement (Brodie et al., 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Pursuing this research objective is a prerequisite to achieving the second and third research objectives.

Objective 2: To understand how the self-presentation (via engagement activities) of others can influence individuals and other actors.

Building on the first research objective regarding the existence of engagement aimed at presenting the ideal self, such displays of self-presentation could impact others – influencing and mobilising their attitudes and behaviours toward the focal object (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). While some individuals are

aware that engagement activities can be subjected to self-presentation, others tend to perceive them as persuasive and genuine, without recognising that they may be manipulated for self-presentation (Harmeling et al., 2017). Consequently, there is a chance that people could make decisions based on inauthentic engagements. This would further impact other focal actors (i.e., firms) involved in these engagements. Therefore, this research attempts to understand how these impacts occur.

Objective 3: To investigate whether and to what extent firms are aware of engagement for self-presentation.

After completing the first two objectives, this thesis pursues its final research objective, as it is necessary to explore how firms respond to engagement for self-presentation. This objective serves as a follow-up to the impacts of the inauthenticity inherent in engagements for self-presentation, which can be far-reaching – not limited to the individuals who observe the engagements, but stretching to the focal firms involved (Clark, Lages and Hollebeek, 2020; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). As firms increasingly develop marketing strategies relying on engagement as a source of knowledge for marketing decisions (Harmeling et al., 2017), it has become essential that they understand the extent to which the engagement they count on could be self-presentation involving inauthentic content, the possible effects of which may either be beneficial or detrimental to their business. They must develop methods for handling such engagement. Therefore, this research objective investigates the issue from an organisational perspective.

1.3 Research approach

To satisfy the aim and objectives of this study, it is grounded in an interpretive philosophy. This has allowed the researcher to best investigate the unexplored issues outlined above by acquiring insights into the role that self-presentation plays in the engagement activities of different individuals. Thus, the thesis is exploratory in nature and uses qualitative methods to develop an understanding of the complex research areas of engagement and the self. The

empirical portion of this thesis involves one main qualitative study, with two phases of data collection. All data were collected via semi-structured interviews.

The first research phase focused on social media users with recent records of engagement activities. To capture rich data, participants were asked to open their Facebook accounts and talk through their own engagement activities within their profiles. The participants were recruited from social media groups, and 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals representing 11 nationalities. These interviews addressed Objectives 1 and 2. In the second phase of the study, data were collected from organisations in six industries. The organisations were selected from industries specifically mentioned by participants in the first phase. Organisations were contacted through LinkedIn, and seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. These organisations were asked to comment on data examples acquired from the first phase to explain those results from the organisational perspective. These interviews addressed Objective 3.

1.4 Summary of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters (Figure 1.1). After this introductory chapter, the thesis moves to literature review chapters, each covering a specific topic: engagement (Chapter 2), the self (Chapter 3) and conceptual development, combining both engagement and the self (Chapter 4). These are followed by a chapter introducing and justifying the philosophical and methodological choices underpinning the thesis (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study's first phase – the qualitative findings, which explore the role and impact of the ideal self on social media engagement and assess how self-presentation (via engagement) can influence other individuals and actors. Chapter 7 presents the results of the study's second phase, which offer the organisational perspective on the results of the first phase. The concluding chapter summarises the key contributions of this thesis (Chapter 8). An overview for each chapter appears below.
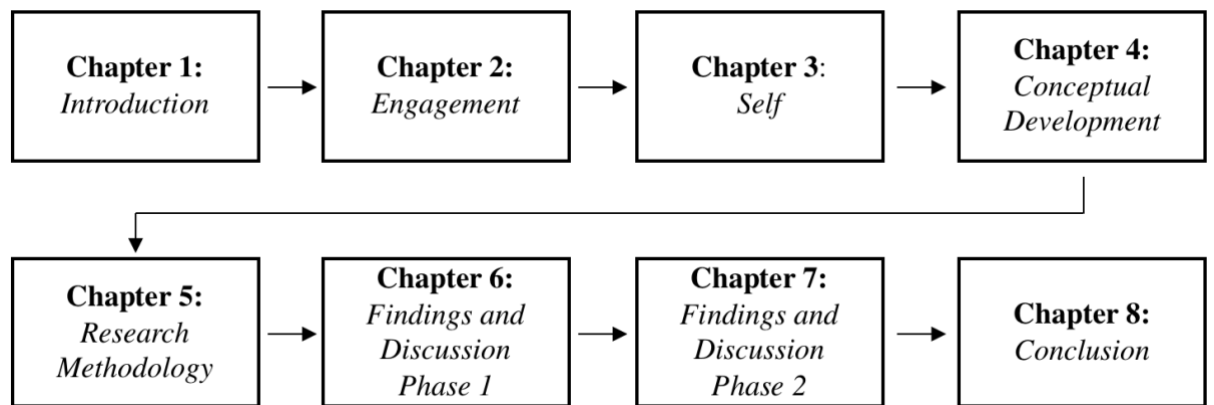
Figure 1.1: Thesis overview

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to engagement. Initially presenting an overview of existing research and its significance, the chapter moves on to discuss engagement from different foci, including consumer engagement, which is widely examined in the literature, and actor engagement, which has recently arisen. Thus, it critically examines their conceptualisations through disposition and resource contribution, nomological networks and iterative relationships, multiple engagement dimensions, engagement intensity and valence and platforms and practices. The chapter continues by introducing social media as a key context for engagement, which gives users increasing opportunities through its interactive function. High visibility also results in greater exposure and a higher impact of engagement activity. This set of circumstances makes it possible for engagement to be viewed in an alternative way based on individuals' ideal selves rather than on their genuine behaviours toward the focal object.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature associated with the 'self'. It considers particular notions around the ideal self and the process of presenting the ideal self to other people, which is known as 'self-presentation'. This chapter assesses the roles of the ideal self in the social media context and the concept of authenticity − suggesting that the presentation of the ideal self on social media could be inauthentic. It continues by introducing the notion of brand as a tool for helping the self-presentation process; this may include brand consumption and brand associations (i.e., engagement).

Chapter 4 integrates the concepts of the preceding chapters: engagement and the 'self'. Engagement is proposed to be driven by genuine motivation for individual actors, reflecting their authentic dispositions towards focal objects; however, self-presentation could be said to be an inauthentic motivation. By combining these concepts, attention is given to an alternative understanding of engagement.

Chapter 5 presents the researcher's decisions concerning research design and methodology. Research worldviews are outlined, and interpretivism is adopted as the philosophy underpinning the thesis. The research objectives suggest that a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews is most appropriate. This has been pursued in two phases: the first conducted with social media users and the second with organisations. Other justifications are made regarding data collection: participant sampling, site selection, ethical considerations, interview procedures and approaches to data analysis.

Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study's first phase, addressing Objectives 1 and 2. The chapter begins with the results for Objective 1 – exploring the role and impact of the ideal self on actor engagement in social media. The findings suggest that contrary to the extant engagement literature, which has hitherto only considered strong relationships and dispositions as engagement, there are three other types of engagement subjected to different levels of relationships with and dispositions toward focal objects, which are all involved in self-presentation. The research found three different forms of such engagement: 1) strong relationship and weak disposition, 2) weak relationship and strong disposition and 3) weak relationship and weak disposition. These manifestations of engagement also involve various drivers, including self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. This chapter then moves on to discuss the results for Objective 2 – assessing how self-presentation (via engagement activities) influences other individuals and actors. This highlights the impact engagement for self-presentation has on many stakeholders (i.e., other individuals and focal firms).

Chapter 7 introduces the second phase of the study, which addresses Objective 3 − investigating whether and to what extent firms are aware of engagement for self-presentation. This phase developed from the need to understand

how firms think about the issues revealed in the study's first phase (Chapter 6). Thus, the research sought to explore companies' perspectives on engagement for self-presentation (three categories from the first phase). Firms commented through the lenses of brand awareness, trust, and control. The results added additional insight to the findings of the first phase and provided explanations of how firms view, and might respond to, the impacts of engagement for self-presentation.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with four main contributions. Firstly, this research suggests that engagement could occur for the purpose of self-presentation, being subject to different levels of relationships and dispositions. Secondly, the thesis highlights alternative antecedents to engagement literature, which centre around self-presentation. Thirdly, such engagement is seen as a temporal concept, meaning that it could be a temporary rather than a long-term phenomenon. Finally, the study expresses how inauthentic engagement might affect organisations and lead to organisational change. This provides both theoretical and managerial implications. The author also discusses the limitations of the study and presents recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 : Engagement

The chapter reviews the literature concerning engagement to discuss the existing research and its significance from various perspectives. It acknowledges that the subject of engagement also extends beyond consumers to include other actors (i.e., any individuals) in an interactive relationship. This is often amplified through the functionality of social media, and engagement via social media is the main focus of this thesis. As engagement with focal objects via social media appears genuine and is visible to many others, this impacts other actors, who are involved differently. Therefore, this thesis recognises that individuals may have several underlying motivations for engaging with a focal object online, and the resulting engagements may not be as genuine as they seem.

Chapter 2 is structured as follows. Section 2.1 provides an overview of how literature on engagement has developed across various fields and emerged in marketing research. Section 2.2 reviews the foundation of engagement research; it begins by reviewing the engagement of customer and actor (2.2.1) and then progresses through five main fundamental propositions: disposition and resource contributions (2.2.2), nomological networks and iterative relationships (2.2.3), engagement dimensions (2.2.4), engagement intensity and valence (2.2.5) and platforms and practices (2.2.6). Following this, Section 2.3 assesses the engagement literature in the online social media context. This involves a discussion of the social media characteristics that support engagement (2.3.1), engagement functions in social media (2.3.2) and performance of social media engagement (2.3.3). This leads to an examination of engagement's impact on other actors, who are involved in 'engagement' online in different ways (Section 2.4). This impact is discussed in terms of source and outcome (2.4.1) and its impacts on firms (2.4.2). Section 2.5 concludes with a summary of Chapter 2.

2.1 Overview of engagement

Literature on engagement has grown across various academic disciplines, including computer systems (O'Brien and Toms, 2008), education (Skinner and Belmont, 1993), political science (Galston, 2001), psychology (Achterberg et al., 2003), sociology (Jennings and Stoker, 2004) and organisational behaviour (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although these fields demonstrate a long tradition of engagement research, engagement is used across disciplines to mean different things. This diversity is exemplified in the extant research. For instance, 'student engagement' focuses on education; 'civic engagement' is explored in sociology; 'employee engagement' is studied in organisational behaviour; and 'social engagement' is explored in psychology (Skinner and Belmont, 1993; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Jennings and Stoker, 2004).

Within marketing and services, however, the term 'engagement' only began to appear in the literature recently, and the theoretical roots of engagement studies tend to embed themselves in either relationship marketing (Kumar et al., 2010) or service-dominant logic (Brodie et al., 2011). Attempts have been made to define the term using various approaches including psychological states (Brodie et al., 2011), psychological processes driving loyalty (Bowden, 2009), behavioural manifestations (Van Doorn et al., 2010) and engagement marketing from organisations' perspectives (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Most early research in marketing and services, therefore, has focused mainly on 'customer engagement' (CE) (Brodie et al., 2011). A probable explanation for this is that the role of customers has evolved over time, with customers becoming active contributors to brands, providing greater influence at lower costs (Harmeling et al., 2017; Kozinets et al., 2010). Given the growing body of literature on CE and the differing views of marketing scholars, there are opposing conceptualisations regarding how CE should be addressed, including its definition, forms, dimensions and operations. Since the concept of engagement is still evolving, the attention of a number of scholars has been directed towards the term 'engagement' with the hope of it becoming a major research area. For example, researchers have recently

expanded the focus of engagement beyond customers to include any actors in the focal relationship within the network (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016). To provide further understanding, the following sections of this chapter describe engagement in more depth.

2.2 Engagement: Foundation

This section reviews the foundation of engagement in relation to different lenses embedded in the body of literature, showing the term's progress and development over the time.

2.2.1 From customer to actor

Despite the notion that various actors exist in an interactive focal relationship, the existing marketing literature pays much attention to and mainly investigates the 'customer' (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010) and the 'consumer' (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014) as key engagement subjects in the focal interactive relationship. A possible explanation behind their being the most discussed subject in the engagement context could be the relationship these customers and consumers have with the focal object. These relationships are not limited to consumer purchases or consumption, but involve voicing opinions and contributing to the focal firm (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Thus scholars are aware that, when customers and/or consumers are engaged with a focal object, they also contribute to firm performance, both directly and indirectly (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Kumar et al., 2019).

The terms 'customer' and/or 'consumer' engagement are often used interchangeably in the marketing literature (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012). Some scholars interpret these terms as being closely related, reflecting a highly similar concept scope. This inconsistency in usage may be due to disagreement about the terminology. Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012), however, oppose claims that offer no explanation for the distinction between customer and consumer. They argue that the latter term incorporates the broader sense, which not

only includes current, but also potential (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012) and non-paying consumers (Groeger, Moroko and Hollebeek, 2016). Thus, it incorporates a more complete set of actors. Moreover, there is disagreement as to the definition of engagement concepts. For example, some prefer the terms customer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011a), consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014) and social media engagement (Dessart, 2017). Table 2.1 provides a number of definitions related to engagement concepts, which differ on some aspects but generally suggest similarities regarding engagement interactions that go beyond normal transactions regardless of the engagement object (i.e., brand or service) or context (i.e., offline or online). Consumers generally engage with objects both offline and online (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018).

Scholars	Terms	Definitions
Bowden (2009)	Consumer engagement	Psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which consumer loyalty forms for new consumers of a service brand, as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase consumers of a service brand. (p. 65)
Van Doorn et al. (2010)	Customer engagement behavior	Customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. (p. 254)
Brodie et al. (2011)	Customer engagement	A psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships. (p. 260)
Hollebeek (2011a)	Customer brand engagement	The level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions. (p.790)
Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012)	Consumer engagement	The intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate. (p. 133)
Brodie et al. (2013)	Consumer engagement	A multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/ or behavioral dimensions, which plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community. (p. 107)

Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014)	Consumer brand engagement	A consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions. (p. 154)
Jaakkola and Alexander (2014)	Customer engagement behavior	Customers make voluntary resource contributions that have a brand or firm focus but go beyond what is fundamental to transactions, occur in interactions between the focal object and/or other actors, and result from motivational drivers. (p. 248)
Storbacka et al. (2016)	Actor engagement	The disposition of actors to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context provided by a service ecosystem. (p. 3009)
Dessart (2017)	Social media engagement	The state that reflects consumers' positive individual dispositions towards the community and the focal brand as expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive and behavioural manifestations that go beyond exchange situations. (p. 377)
Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek (2018)	Actor engagement	An actor's voluntary resource contributions that focus on the engagement object, go beyond what is elementary to the exchange, and occur in interactions with a focal object and/or other actors. (p. 336)
Brodie et al. (2019)	Actor engagement	A dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system. (p. 174)
Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen (2019)	Customer engagement	A customer's motivationally driven, volitional investment of focal operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge and skills), and operand resources (e.g., equipment) into brand interactions in service systems. (p. 166)

Table 2.1: Engagement terms and definitions

Accordingly, Brodie et al. (2011) suggest five fundamental propositions (FPs) for generalising the definition of engagement to fit into any context and distinguish itself from other concepts (Table 2.2). This well-established conceptual domain has been able, and can continue, to capture the essence of other definitions and is well accepted as influential. However, researchers (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019) now argue that the work of Brodie et al. (2011) requires revision, since the study does not account for some recently introduced concepts. Scholars suggest a more current argument, which states that customer/consumer engagement may no longer be able to capture the richness of the concept because the

present evolutions in this research field state that any actors in the focal interactive relationship must also be considered. Thus, actor engagement is believed to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016). Customer/consumer engagement may be perceived as one type of actor engagement (Brodie et al., 2019). This theoretical revision is normal, as development is generally needed to address increasingly ambiguous evidence and gaps in the focal concept (Yadav, 2010). This also illustrates the engagement of increasingly connected actors in the network relationship (Brodie et al., 2019). For example, Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos (2019) highlight the role of engagement in the business-to-business context.

However, a focus on human participants would ignore the power of technology, particularly in the evolving technological environments that facilitate engagement (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019; Letheren et al., 2019). Hence, discussing 'actors' should not be limited to human actors, such as consumers and other individuals (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2016). Technological development allows non-human actors, such as machines and organisations, to be included in these networks (Storbacka et al., 2016; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Morgan-Thomas, Dessart and Veloutsou (2020) also suggest looking at technology actors in terms of their physical materiality (i.e., devices) and non-physical materiality (i.e., digital haptics and platforms). Thus, actor engagement acknowledges the notion of various combinations (Brodie et al., 2019; Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018); this thesis also shares this view. For example, collections of humans and technologies facilitate resources across engagement platforms (Storbacka, 2019).

The number of actors is also shown in various engagement concepts (Table 2.1), including any individuals beyond customers or consumers, other social media users, brands, and brand communities. (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2019; Dessart, 2017; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). These individuals may play different roles and engage in different practices. For example, customers who are satisfied with a product may engage by commenting about their experience and recommending products to other users in the brand community. However, those

individuals who do not use the product may still engage by liking the product posts that appear on the brand page. This also affects the degree of influencing behaviour directed at others (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Considering the engagement of various actors, Storbacka (2019) identifies two categories of actors: primary stakeholders (i.e., customers, suppliers and employees), who are involved in transactions and exchange; and secondary stakeholders (e.g., interest groups, technology and media), who are non-exchange based. There exists, of course, the chance that roles might switch – that an actor, who is a current customer, may no longer have need of the product he or she purchases yet may still engage in the secondary stakeholder role, and vice versa (Storbacka, 2019). Such considerations of various actors demonstrate how the actors' resource contributions increase available resources (i.e., time, energy and effort) (Brodie et al., 2019; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), which Storbacka (2019) defines as the 'economies of actor engagement' (p.4).

Accordingly, a set of revised fundamental propositions for engagement, which involve amendments to fully incorporate engagement into the connected network context and make it more generalisable, has been provided (Brodie et al., 2019). Table 2.2 compares the FPs suggested by Brodie et al. (2011, 2019) for engagement, which will be used to outline engagement in more detail. This following sections, therefore, review the extant literature on engagement – progressing through disposition and resource contribution, nomological networks and iterative relationships, multiple engagement dimensions, engagement intensity and valence and platforms and practices.

Original FPs for CE (Brodie et al., 2011)	FPs for AE (Brodie et al., 2019)
FP1: CE reflects a psychological state, which occurs by interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships	FP1: AE dispositions occur through connections with other actors that lead to resource contributions beyond what is elementary to the transactional exchange
FP2: CE states occur within a dynamic, iterative process of service relationships that cocreate value	FP2: AE emerges through a dynamic, iterative process, where its antecedents and consequences affect actors' dispositions and network connections
FP3: CE plays a central role within a nomological network of service relationships *FP4: CE is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions*	FP3: AE is a multi-dimensional concept, subject to the interplay of dispositions, and/or behaviors and the level of connectedness among actors
FP5: CE occurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing CE levels	FP4: AE occurs within a specific set of institutional contexts, generating differing AE intensities and valence over time
	FP5: AE is coordinated through shared practices that occur on engagement platforms

Table 2.2: Comparison of Fundamental Propositions between CE and AE (Brodie et al., 2019; p.12)

2.2.2 Dispositions and resource contributions

The progress of engagement research has involved various perspectives, which consider the nature of engagement and how it manifests. While most scholars tend to be more concerned with the psychological state (Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012), others arguably focus on its behavioural manifestations (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010). Recently, the focus has shifted toward a disposition to

engage (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018, Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016). Brodie et al. (2019) state: 'Dispositions occur through connections with other actors that lead to resource contributions beyond what is elementary to the transactional exchange' (p.12). Thus, it is important to clarify each view.

The extant literature on engagement may have a singular focus on the behavioural manifestations of engagement. Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft (2010) specifically consider the narrow definition of engagement as 'a behavioural manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transaction' (p.247). This is a similar view to that of Van Doorn et al. (2010), who define it as 'behaviours that go beyond transaction, and may be classed as customers' behavioural manifestations that have a brand focus beyond purchasing resulting from motivational drivers' (p.254). Van Doorn et al. (2010) also suggest that the focus of consumer engagement behaviour (CEB) is more organisation-centric, as opposed to the consumer-centric view found in many other studies. Furthermore, they address engagement as a non-transactional behaviour, which focuses on the act of engagement, such as recommendation, suggestion, review and word-of-mouth (WOM) (Van Doorn et al., 2010). This contrasts somewhat with the suggestion that both transactional (i.e., purchase) and non-transactional behaviour (i.e., recommendation) are involved in maintaining engagement (Gummerus et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Based on this, the behavioural aspect tends to feature in a considerable number of studies because it is more observable, rendering it the dominant dimension (Groeger, Moroko and Hollebeek, 2016; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Solem and Pedersen, 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010).

Van Doorn et al. (2010) also address five variables under the behavioural aspect: valence, form or modality, scope, nature of impact and customer goals. In stating these variables, the authors attempt to declare the dominant stance for the behavioural focus. However, this unidimensional perspective only partially explains some specific aspects of engagement and fails to generate other components, such as consumers' cognitive and emotional characteristics, which reflect multidimensional phenomena and create a broader totality of the engagement concept.

On the other hand, Brodie et al. (2011) define engagement as 'a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand) in a focal service relationship' (p.260). This definition focuses on the state of being engaged, which reflects a multidimensional concept – offering a more comprehensive view of the term (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). More contemporary research, however, recognises engagement as a disposition; that is, a 'readiness of individuals to invest resources in connections with other actors' (Brodie et al., 2019, p.12) and to engage with a focal object at a particular point in time (Storbacka et al., 2016). Brodie et al. (2019) update this view and suggest using the term 'disposition' instead of 'psychological states', as previously advised by Brodie et al. (2011), since 'disposition' can be applied to any actor (Storbacka et al., 2016).

Brodie et al. (2019), therefore, define actor engagement as 'a dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actor's dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system' (p.11). This highlights the importance of the individual's state of willingness and tendency to 'do' something (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019), which reflects a voluntary resource contribution (such as time, energy and effort) through engagement behaviour (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Accordingly, this leads to observable engagement activities (Storbacka et al., 2016). This, therefore, offers a reconceptualised notion of engagement based on disposition to engage by integrating resources with focal actors (Storbacka et al., 2016; Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019).

To sum up, Table 2.3 represents different engagement perspectives in the selection of key papers over time. This suggests that mixed perspectives are found in early engagement studies between behavioural aspects and psychological states. However, after 2016, research tends to collaborate more in the same way toward a focus of disposition – a view which this thesis also shares.

	Behavioural aspect	Psychological state	Disposition
Van Doorn et al. (2010)	*		
Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft (2010)	*		
Brodie et al. (2011)		*	
Hollebeek (2011a)		*	
Gummerus et al. (2012)	*		
Brodie et al. (2013)		*	
Jaakkola and Alexander, (2014)	*		
Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014)		*	
Wallace, Buil and Chernatony (2014)	*		
Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015)		*	
Storbacka et al. (2016)			*
Li, Juric, and Brodie (2017)			*
Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek (2018)			*
Brodie et al. (2019)			*
Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen (2019)			*

Table 2.3: Review of engagement perspectives

2.2.3 Nomological network and iterative relationships

Most scholars agree upon some key characteristics of engagement; a core theoretical notion is the role of interactivity and the value of the co-creative experience between consumers and the focal object (Brodie et al., 2011). Bowden (2009) postulates that the existence of a focal two-way interaction between the specific subject and object is a necessary condition for engagement to take place. Thus, Brodie et al. (2019) suggest that 'engagement emerges through a dynamic, iterative process, where its antecedents and consequences affect actors' dispositions and network connection' (p.12). This focal interactive experience depicts engagement as a motivational construct (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a),

which reflects a voluntary act of the consumer toward a brand (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Consumers are, thus, considered to be engaging in genuine behaviour, expressed in relation to their connections with a brand (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019).

This can also be seen in the nomological network, which describes relational concepts central to the discussion of engagement. Researchers have perceived these constructs as follows: involvement, participation, flow, rapport, trust, loyalty, commitment, satisfaction and self–brand connection (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). These are key examples of marketing concepts, which have previously been studied in engagement literature. All these general constructs are well understood, from the conceptual basis, as either *antecedents* or *consequences* of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011), and they underpin most existing studies (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a).

Table 2.4 demonstrates relational constructs as proposed by Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek (2011a), which suggests that each construct is positively related, yet theoretically distinct, when compared to other constructs and the engagement concept. For example, although involvement is found in much literature relative to engagement, it does not comprise interactive ability and includes no behavioural aspects (Vivek, 2009). Participation, on the other hand, could explain the behavioural aspect of engagement, but it primarily focuses on exchange situations. Hence, no attempt has been made to explain the multidimensional aspects of engagement, which go beyond the exchange-centric approach, reflecting a broader view of experience (Vivek, 2009). Furthermore, flow can best be treated as a potential antecedent of engagement in only specific contexts, such as the online environment (Brodie et al., 2011). Although flow is related to the cognitive and emotional dimensions of engagement, it is subject to short-term, transformative, peak experiences (i.e. immersive activity) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Hollebeek 2011a). In contrast, engagement reflects a process that is carried out over time in varying levels from low to high (Hollebeek, 2011a). Thus, flow fails to fully explain the properties of engagement.

Concept	Definition	Expected relationship to engagement
Involvement	An individual's level of interest and the personal relevance of a focal object based on values, goals and self-concepts (Mittal, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985)	Antecedent required prior to relevant engagement
Participation	The degree to which customers produce and deliver services (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer, 2009)	Antecedent required prior to relevant engagement
Flow	A state of optimal experience characterised by focused attention, effortless concentration, intrinsic enjoyment, etc. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)	Antecedent in specific context (i.e., online environment)
Rapport	A sense of genuine interpersonal sensitivity and concern (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993)	Antecedent for existing consumers in a specific context; consequence for new consumer
Trust	Consumer-perceived security/reliability in brand interactions and the belief that the brand acts in their best interest (Rotter, 1967)	Antecedent for new consumer; consequence for existing consumers
Loyalty	Consistent purchases prompted by a favourable attitude over time (Day, 1969; Guest, 1944)	Potential consequence; antecedent in subsequent episodes
Commitment	Valuing an ongoing relationship with a specific other party, warranting maximum efforts to maintain it (Morgan and Hunt, 1994)	Antecedent for existing consumer; consequence for positive relationship
Satisfaction	An overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to date (Johnson and Fornell, 1991)	Antecedent for existing consumer; consequence for new consumer
Self–brand connection	The extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concepts (Escalas, 2004)	Potential consequence

Table 2.4: Constructs related to engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; p.261, Hollebeek, 2011a; p. 794)

Consequently, the potential contributions of engagement to these constructs are the roles of interaction and the value of co-creation embedded in consumers' brand related service processes (Brodie et al., 2011). Thus, a number of scholars have emphasised that the concept of engagement is distinct from these relational terms. Having discussed and compared relationships between selected constructs and engagement within its nomological network, these relational constructs are,

therefore, identified either as antecedents and/or consequences of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011).

It seems that treatments of engagement antecedents and/or consequences are inconsistent in every piece of research, despite several conceptual (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010) and empirical (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014) studies in this field. However, Brodie et al. (2011) explain one implication of this, suggesting that, at some point in time, the antecedents of engagement may potentially extend to become consequences, and vice versa. For instance, Li, Juric and Brodie (2017) posit that engagement outcomes from a previous phase may become engagement conditions in a succeeding phase. Fehrer et al. (2018) and Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) have also found that the positive engagement outcomes for one consumer (consequences) may influence the engagement behaviours of other actors (antecedents) as they are connected in the network. Moreover, a construct, such as trust, may represent a consequence for the new consumer when engaging with a brand for the first time, but it could be an antecedent for existing consumers (Bowden, 2009). This is subject to previous brand experience (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Those who develop a different brand experience may be inclined to engage differently (Van Doorn et al., 2010). A moderating effect may exist among these constructs towards engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Thus, whether they are antecedents or consequences, they are important for measuring the effectiveness of a firm's activities (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

It seems, therefore, that most research considers firm related antecedents, yet motivation to engage can stem from a consumer-based precondition (Prentice et al., 2019; Vivek, Beatty and Hazod, 2018; Van Doorn et al., 2010). For example, personality traits (Marbach, Lages and Nunan, 2016; Islam, Rahman and Hollebeek, 2017; Itani, Haddad, and Kalra, 2020). This shows that motivations to engage are not limited to the list of constructs related to genuinely held beliefs. Change in the level of consumers' genuine behaviours toward a brand could also bring different constructs to a different nomological network. It may be possible that new theoretical constructs will emerge and be brought into consideration in specific contexts, which

may, in turn, create new opportunities for consumers to realise different reasons for engagement on various occasions. This demonstrates that the motivation to engage may not yet be well understood, as new and alternative reasoning may arise over time.

The multidimensional nature of engagement appears to support increased opportunities for other constructs to emerge. This section has examined the key relational constructs of engagement as understood in the literature, some of which have characteristics that can be explained under particular dimensions only. Thus, these engagement dimensions will be further discussed in Section 2.2.4.

2.2.4 Engagement dimensions

From a multidimensional perspective, there is a debate regarding the various engagement dimensions. Brodie et al. (2019) suggest that 'engagement is a multi-dimensional concept, subject to the interplay of dispositions, and/or behaviours and the level of connectedness among actors' (p.12). Accordingly, having considered Brodie et al. (2019), this section considers engagement dimensions as cognitive, emotional, behaviour and connectedness. These dimensions are likely to vary across contexts (Brodie et al., 2011). This is evident in the case of Patterson, Yu and de Ruyter (2006) – who propose absorption, vigour, interaction and dedication as dimensions of offline consumer engagement – while Mollen and Wilson (2010) propose sustained processing, instrumental value and experiential value as dimensions of online consumer engagement. These examples demonstrate how some authors include unique and context-specific dimensions, as early research tends to have no system for classifying the engagement dimensions. Others argue that a single set of dimensions applicable to all contexts would be unable to capture the specific elements that underlie engagement (Calder, Malthouse and Maslowka, 2016; Vivek et al., 2014).

In relation to the development, Brodie et al. (2011) assert that 'customer engagement is a multi-dimensional concept subject to a context and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions' (p.260). Hollebeek's definition (2011b) definition promotes 'the levels of a

customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions' (p.555). Brodie et al. (2011) argue that other dimensions proposed by previous research tend to correspond to the elements found in this tripartite engagement dimensionality. An example of this has been put forward by Patterson, Yu and de Ruyter (2006), who suggest that absorption and dedication reflect the cognitive and emotional dimensions, respectively, and that vigour and interaction can be explained through the behavioural dimension. Although engagement dimensions have been employed under different names, they share similar scope. Therefore, most engagement studies tend to correspond to this set of dimensions incorporating cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects.

First, the cognitive engagement dimension refers to the level of concentration and brand-related thought-processing consumers experience through their interactions with a focal brand of their engagement. This leads to the extensive interest and attention consumers may give to the focal brand (Hollebeek, 2011b). For example, Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) explain this through the aspects of attention and absorption.

Second, the emotional aspect of engagement captures the collective levels of emotions (i.e., inspiration and feeling) a consumer experiences from positive brand related affects stemming from their interactions with the focal brand of their engagement. This generates a sense of 'belonging' to a focal brand in the consumer (Hollebeek, 2011b), which Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) describe this through the aspects of enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Third, the behavioural dimension of engagement, which features in a number of studies (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010), reflects a consumer's brand-related energy level; that is, the energy, effort and time the consumer spends interacting with the brand. It captures consumers' participation in particular brand activities (Hollebeek, 2011b) This can be seen through consumers sharing, learning and endorsing (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015). This set of dimensions has found widespread acceptance in the literature because it reflects broad applicability and is adaptable across contexts and foci (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011b; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012;

Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015). In addition, Brodie et al. (2019) have recently suggested another dimension, to provide a more complete view of the current movement in engagement research.

This fourth dimension is 'connectedness' (Brodie et al., 2019), which reflects interactions between various actors in a network in which their relationships are somehow further affected by other actors (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). This dimension explains how all actors are interconnected in the service ecosystem (Brodie et al., 2019). This is in accordance with the findings of Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen (2019), who attempt to revise some concepts of engagement by adding a 'social' dimension to reflect the increased recognition of a network of connected stakeholders. Though they give different names to this dimension, Brodie et al. (2019) and Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen (2019) describe similar issues.

This section has reviewed the four key dimensions of actor engagement as found in the extant literature, which are generally accepted as being at the core of engagement. Consequently, particularly for this thesis and its focus on engagement in the social media context, it is important to be aware of the complex issues associated with how individuals devote their relevant resources to the social media setting. To capture all aspects of engagement and to avoid limiting its focus, this thesis considers the various dimensions for measurement and addresses the multifaceted context of the cognitive, emotional, behavioural and connectedness dimensions. By accounting for the multidimensional nature of engagement, the current research can examine engagement facilitated through a platform that connects actors and brings opportunities to focal actors.

2.2.5 Engagement intensity and valance

Brodie et al. (2019) suggest that 'engagement occurs within a specific set of institutional contexts, generating differing intensities and valence over time' (p.12). In this way, engagement is subject to the situations in which it occurs. Although engagement can have a negative valence and a dark side (Azer and Alexander, 2018), it is more often perceived as beneficial to firms, reflecting positive valence in most cases. Accordingly, it has been reported that activities by engaged consumers create

competitive advantage, sales and, ultimately, profit for a business (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2013; Kumar, 2018; Islam, Rahman and Hollebeek, 2018). Firms also recognise the value consumers can provide beyond financial transactions (Kumar, 2013). This value can be drawn from consumers' resource contributions (i.e., time, energy and effort), which can have positive implications for a brand's marketing and development (Chandler and Lusch, 2015; Haumann et al., 2015), for example, through consumer-to-consumer interactions (Brodie et al., 2013) and suggestions for improvement (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Therefore, organisations focus on stimulating positive valence and engagement intensity from individuals via various methods, such as firm initiated engagement (Beckers, Van Doorn, and Verhoef, 2018), firm engagement (Barger, Peltier, and Schultz, 2016), marketer-generated content (Meire et al., 2019) and digital content marketing (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Harmeling et al. (2017) suggest that firms should develop 'customer engagement marketing' to motivate consumer contributions to firms' marketing functions from consumer-owned resources. These contributions are beneficial to a firm's performance in many areas, both directly and indirectly (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Harmeling et al. (2017) sought to illuminate how firms' performances can benefit from consumer-owned resources through network assets, persuasion capital, knowledge stores and creativity.

By way of illustration, when consumers begin engaging, they bring their network assets with them, which allows firms to connect to more diverse audiences, such as potential consumers (Harmeling et al., 2017). For other consumers, information brought about through the engagement of those with whom they are familiar will generate greater trust and, therefore, be more persuasive than information acquired from marketing communications (Harmeling et al., 2017). Consequently, firms benefit from consumer persuasion capital, although some consumers may be low on this resource as they may have little influence or be mistrusted in their networks. The information carried in engagement activities may also reflect consumers' knowledge stores about the focal products from their own experiences or familiarity, which would improve communication through the quality

of their content and make them able to support other consumers (Harmeling et al., 2017). This may come with consumer creativity, which aids product development and innovation (Harmeling et al., 2017). However, the key problem with consumer knowledge stores and consumer creativity is that they involve only those consumers with high experience and exclude consumers with low experience, new consumers and non-consumers – thereby failing to explain how such values may be captured from other groups of people who engage.

These valuable resources, however, would be inaccessible to firms if consumers were not willing to provide them through their engagement activities, and leveraging these benefits can lead to financial returns over time (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Therefore, most engagement literature tends to focus on positively valenced engagement as a predominant concept, as it is generally believed to reflect the positive signals consumers send toward a focal object (i.e., consumers' loyalty or positive word-of-mouth) (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). This reflects the belief that studies have treated engagement as a genuine act of the consumer. Such an approach, however, fails to consider consumers acting outside firms' expectations.

As such, the valence factor of engagement behaviour is composed, not only of positive, but also of negative facets, which could be detrimental to a firm (i.e., consumer's posting comments against a firm or dissociating with a brand) (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Bowden et al., 2017; Li, Juric, and Brodie, 2018). Consequently, consumer co-creation may not always be of positive valence; it can also be negative. While some studies view this as co-destructed value (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018), others argue that it is just engagement with negative valence, which still emphasises value co-creation for the focal brand (Juric, Smith and Wilks, 2016).

Negative engagement is a largely overlooked area in engagement literature (Juric, Smith and Wilks, 2016). Hollebeek and Chen (2014) are among the few researchers who explicitly discuss negative engagement valence. Azer and Alexander (2018) also consider negative engagement through negatively valenced, influential behaviour and the ability to conceptualise its forms and triggers. Blut, Heirati and

Schoefer (2020) identify the role stress plays in engagement during the participation process. Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2020) also investigate brand negativity within anti-brand community. Consequently, some scholars have proposed a method of addressing such negative behaviour to lessen the effects of negative engagement – e.g., by detecting the intensity of negative engagement to handle it effectively (Azer and Alexander, 2020) or by restoring consumer-based brand equity using partnership quality, an element within brand relationship, for unliked brands (Veloutsou, Chatzipanagiotou and Christodoulides, 2020).

Nevertheless, when engagement behaviour is not positive, this does not necessarily mean it is negative. Consumers may simply withdraw their engagement from a focal object for reasons that cause no harm or damage to the brand, such as changed needs or the necessity of balancing activities due to having multiple roles (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018). This disengagement behaviour does not reflect the intention to inflict negativity on other actors (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018). Dolan et al. (2016) also suggest dormancy as a type of engagement behaviour in which customers may temporarily become inactive after a period of interactivity with the brand. Although, this kind of engagement behaviour seems neutral, Li, Juric and Brodie (2018) argue that the valence of engagement behaviour could be considered based on either the directions (approaching or withdrawing) or the outcomes (beneficial or harmful). Thus, while some consider withdrawing to be negative engagement (Bowden, Gabbott and Naumann, 2015; Dolan et al., 2016), others see negative engagement in term of its outcomes, whether beneficial or harmful to firms (Juric, Smith and Wilks, 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Interestingly, engagement behaviour that seems positive could result in opposite outcomes, and vice versa, if it does not reflect the authentic intentions of the actors. This thesis acknowledges that the valence of engagement draws upon a range of engagement activities, including the possibility of a person engaging without genuine behaviour toward the focal object. Negative effects on a firm may happen, not necessarily through negative activities, but through actions that cause suspicious thoughts and/or wrong expectations toward the focal firm. Such effects also depend

on the degree to which other people are influenced by an actor's engagement activities. Thus, the interdependence of engagement intensity and valence also exists when individuals bring their norms and values to bear, which affect others (i.e., shared social trends) (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019) and are further amplified through the engagement platform.

2.2.6 Platforms and practices

Recently, more and more engagement activities are occurring through engagement platforms, which enable resource integration among actors (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2019). Engagement platforms, regardless of their physical or virtual touchpoints, are vital for facilitating engagement and connecting various actors (Breidbach and Brodie, 2017). Brodie et al. (2019) suggest that many shared engagement practices are developed through such platforms.

These fundamental changes in the mechanisms of engagement have broadened the concept toward recognising more diverse actors in focal relationships, which is possible through platforms facilitating such practices. For example, most early studies have concentrated on a single engagement object, without considering the fact that consumers are disposed to different foci concurrently. Only a few studies consider multiple objects underlying engagement (Vivek et al., 2014; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016; Fehrer et al., 2018). For instance, within the online brand community, a platform allows consumers to interact, both with the brand and with other marketplace actors, such as other consumers (Dessart, Valoutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016; Marbach et al., 2019; Prentice, Wang and Lin, 2020). Bowden et al. (2017) suggest that an engagement 'spillover effect' could occur between two distinct objects in which engagement with one object (i.e., the brand community) could influence engagement with another object (i.e., the focal brand).

A broader perspective is also, therefore, suggested for considering the nature of engagement as being the network of surrounding actors, who also affect, and are affected by, engagement (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Verleye, Gemmel and Rangarajan (2014) explain how

individuals' immediate networks of actors affect engagement behaviour, while Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) show that community characteristics also affect individuals' engagement intentions. Fehrer et al. (2018) suggest that engagement does not just emerge by itself but that ties to other actors in networks are essential for creating it. Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek (2018) add a more comprehensive review, which does not limit itself to multiple actors and objects impacting each other but, instead, considers the impact from different engagement contexts in which actors are embedded in service ecosystems.

Reference groups and conflicting multiple roles are also emphasised to understand why actors change their tendencies to engage in particular situations (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018). Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek (2018) consider multiple levels of engagement in which actors perform (micro, meso and macro). Within these levels, they are exposed to multiple, interconnected engagement contexts, and, importantly, their engagement activities impact one another as they may also be subjected to multiple roles. It is, therefore, probable that engagement of any kind can have a ripple effect across the entire ecosystem by broadening the focus beyond the current micro-level (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018). This shows that actor interconnectedness affects the actors' tendency to engage and to integrate resources – behaviours that are often facilitated through engagement platforms (Brodie et al., 2019).

By way of illustration, Li, Juric and Brodie (2017) explore multi-actor engagement in actor networks using case studies to develop a theoretical framework. This is evident in the case of United Breaks Guitars – a viral story in which an airline mishandled a passenger's guitar. The virality of this story was made possible through interactions among multiple actors in the technology-facilitated environment over time. YouTube was one such engagement platform, but the story also extended to other contexts, such as Amazon book reviews and newspapers (Li, Juric and Brodie, 2017). Another useful case is United Airline's overbooking incident that went viral, receiving huge attention in the press, social media and academic journals. The incident also had major financial implications, with company share prices experiencing a more than one billion dollar decline overnight (Nazifi et al., 2020).

This expands the view of engagement to account for technological advancements in substituting human interactions. This sort of mediated engagement via technology is especially significant to the current thesis, which focuses on the social media context's facilitating engagement between actors (i.e., consumers, salient others and brand). Technology development not only breaks interaction barriers but also increases actors' abilities to engage with others through online platforms (Li, Juric and Brodie, 2017). This progression opens room for new capabilities, which have been previously overlooked. Therefore, Section 2.3 considers engagement in the setting of online social media.

2.3 Social media engagement

This section highlights the advent of digital transformation, which has shifted engagement contexts from offline to online. Studies of online engagement are not new. Early research has given attention to online reviews. For example, Godes and Mayzlin (2004) consider the relationship between online reviews and TV programme ratings. And Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) examine the relationship between online reviews and book sales on Amazon. Previously, online platforms that facilitated engagement might have been, for example, discussion forums, blogs and websites (Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel, 2009). The choice of virtual platform has a huge influence on engagement intensity (Brodie et al., 2011). Technological advances, however, have enabled the online environment to support more interactive features; thus, increasingly popular online interactive platforms, such as social media, have recently received considerable attention from scholars (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Santini et al., 2020; Sashi, 2012). This can be seen through the call for more research regarding how 'social media and other marketing activities create engagement' (MSI, 2014; p.4).

2.3.1 Social media and its characteristics for engagement

Social media can be defined as 'a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the

creation and exchange of user generated content' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). It appears that most of the existing research to date focuses on engagement in the context of Facebook due to its popularity over a long period of time (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016; Yang et al., 2016). Recently, however, an increasing number of studies has shifted to considering other social media platforms for a diverse viewpoint, such as Twitter (Read et al., 2019), Instagram (Phua, Lin and Lim, 2018) and YouTube (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019).

Social media overcomes various constraints, such as geography and time; hence social media engagement can happen anywhere and at any time. In the same way that interactions between people often lead to a greater level of interdependence, social media provides 'more frequent, faster, and richer interactions among large groups of people' (Sashi, 2012, p.269). Hence, social media platforms facilitate a continuity of interactions among individuals. Interactivity allows for two-way communication between an individual and a brand, beyond a mere exchange (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). Social media has transformed individuals from being passive to being active contributors (Dolan et al., 2016; Ritz, Wolf, and McQuitty, 2019). This provides opportunities for individuals to become co-creators of a brand (Jahn and Kunz, 2012), which simultaneously co-creates value (Breidbach, Brodie and Hollebeek, 2014). This has been seen in the case of brand communities. Although individuals play various roles and differ in the intensity of their activities and contribution of resources (whether they provide or receive the resources) within brand communities (Ozboluk and Dursun, 2017; Ponsakornrungsilp, 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011), they tend to be among those likeminded individuals, who share the common goal of engaging at a deeper level and co-creating value with the brand and other individuals (Pongsakornrungsilp, 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Ozboluk and Dursun, 2017; Veloutsou and Black, 2020).

These capabilities make social media highly relevant to engagement research, and recent studies have also acknowledged how individuals are able to interact with other individuals in this online environment (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-

Thomas, 2016). Social media posts can be visible to many people. Even when a person may not be directly related to the poster, he or she can come across posts because they might know others who have interacted with the posts (Hughes, Swaminatha, and Brooks, 2019). Thus, social media engagement is public to a varying degree. This presents engagement characteristics that can be well explained by the recent revised fundamental propositions of Brodie et al. (2019). Social media is an architecture that facilitates and enables connectedness among multiple actors, who then influence one another, and the openness of social media platforms leads to more engagement opportunities.

While most extant studies consider consumers' social media engagement (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014), all social media platforms allow for more actors, and this shifting focus to include more stakeholders, as reviewed in a previous section (2.2.1), means that any individuals can engage with a focal object in online social media, with the platform facilitating that engagement (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019). Therefore, the current thesis acknowledges this broader view of possible actors who engage in online social media, considering that social media users can be any individuals, without having to possess any particular level of relationship and disposition toward the focal object of their engagement.

2.3.2 Engagement functions in social media

Engagement activities, when displayed on social media, include liking, commenting, sharing and posting (Creevey, Kidney and Mehta, 2019; Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014). With the development of the social media platforms, specifically Facebook, various reaction buttons have been added to allow individuals to express emotion and to increase the methods of engagement. Facebook reaction buttons are no longer limited to 'like', but now also include 'love', 'haha', 'wow', 'sad' and 'angry' (Lima, Irigaray and Lourenco, 2019).

Elaborating on this, Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) classify individuals' online brand related activities into three continuums: consuming,

contributing and creating. Liking (clicking a button to add a simple reaction to a posts), commenting (inserting a response to express one's opinion under the post) and sharing (clicking to repost the posts on one's own profile or send it to another person) are contributive activities. In comparison, posting (producing and publishing an original post, either a message or content, on one's own profile) is a creating activity (Lima, Irigaray and Lourenco, 2019; Malthouse et al., 2013; Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, 2011; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski, 2016). This reflects the multiplicity of interactions, which also vary in intensity on social media.

However, Calder and Malthouse (2008) argue that engagement is a stronger concept than merely 'liking' something on social media, as individuals can 'like' a brand's page simply to keep up-to-date with information without being 'a brand admirer'. Moreover, a 'like' may be perceived as having less value than a 'comment', a 'share' or a 'post', as liking something only requires a single click- the minimum effort necessary to engage- while commenting, sharing, and posting require more steps (Labrecque, Swani and Stephen, 2020; Peters et al., 2013). Despite this criticism, extensive research has been carried out measuring engagement on social media through 'likes', 'comments' and 'shares' (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Chauhan and Pillai, 2013; Malhotra, Malhotra and See, 2013; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014; Tafesse, 2016). These studies have uncovered some evidence suggesting that these online activities manifest engagement.

The inconsistencies in these arguments suggest that what academics and firms consider to be engagement could be defined from different angles. While academics often discuss engagement in terms of reflections on understandings, such as drivers, consequences and types (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015), firms tend to focus more on the number of likes/comments, strategies to encourage engagement and the value that may be gained from engaging individuals (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012; Kumar et al., 2010; Sashi, 2012; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012).

2.3.3 Social media engagement and its performance

According to scholars, social media engagement is a beneficial company input. Malhotra, Malhotra and See (2013) suggest that 'brands have embraced Facebook as a key marketing channel to drive engagement' (p.18). This could result in increased engagement activities with brands (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Hanson, Jiang and Dahl, 2019; Sheng, 2019), as interaction opportunities are magnified in the online context due to the publicity of actions related to social media engagement (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016).

Research has, therefore, also considered the critical roles of social media engagement, which contribute to company performance. Yang et al. (2016) explore how social media engagement influences individuals' search engine use, indicating whether people become more interested in the brand. Other studies have found that social media engagement also enhances brand experience (Pongpaew, Speece and Tiangsoongnern, 2017) and brand awareness (Hutter et al, 2013) and is positively associated with brand use and buying intentions (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Brodie et al., 2013). Consequently, social media engagement increases a firm's financial performance (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). However, most social media engagement points individuals toward brand appreciation instead of persuading them to purchase (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). This suggests that engagement will have uncertain consequences (Beckers, Van Doorn, and Verhoef, 2018).

Engagement on different social media platforms, however, may not have a similar effect on company performance as engagement is context-specific (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019) and subject to different sets of experiences on each platform (Voorveld, et al. 2018). For example, Oh et al. (2017) have found that engagement with newly released films on Facebook and YouTube positively correlates with box office revenue, yet the same effect was not observed on Twitter. Arora et al. (2019) have determined that Instagram engagement is more impactful, in terms of social influence, than engagement on Twitter and Facebook. However, these platforms are subject to different metrics, such as number of 'likes' on Facebook and Instagram, number of tweets and retweets on Twitter and number of views on YouTube (Malthouse et al., 2013). For example, individuals can 'like' something

with a single click, yet they need to spend time watching a video on YouTube for the number of views to increase. Thus, it is challenging to compare performance across platforms.

Despite the benefits social media engagement offers to firms, as illustrated through most of the extant research, engagement's interactive and co-creative abilities among users in the network also prevent the brand from retaining full control of its social media engagement (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Malthouse et al., 2016). For example, it may lose control through consumers' negative engagement, negative contributions (Dolan et al., 2016) and negative influencing behaviour in both direct forms (such as dissuading, warning and endorsing competitors) and indirect forms (such as discrediting, expressing regret and deriding) (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Moreover, other forms of online engagement produced in relation to the self rather than to the focal company – such as personal values (Marbach et al., 2019), personal aspirations (Razmus and Laguna, 2019), self-linkages (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012) and self-expressions (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014) – can also make others misunderstand brands. This indicates that social media engagement may lead to unexpected outcome for firms, as engagement can be performed by various individuals with different backgrounds and different experiences with the firms.

Engagement may not have the same effects in the offline environment, which requires much effort in comparison to the effortlessness of social media engagement (Giakoumaki and Krepapa, 2019). Digital materiality enables new types of engagement practices (i.e., uncovering, appropriating and cultivating) (Morgan-Thomas, Dessart and Veloutsou, 2020). Thus, motivations for engaging with a brand on social media may differ, leading engagement to occur more often in alternative, easier contexts. This reveals further opportunities associated with using social media platforms, which give individuals the ability to engage online in ways not available in the offline environment. To illustrate, brand consumption becomes virtual, and engagement with a certain brand can substitute for the role of actually using the product; that is, brand engagement can occur without brand ownership (Kumar and Nayak, 2019). Research has found that social media actions occur prior to purchase

(Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). Individuals may also no longer need to actually own products to engage with a brand, since social media places no restrictions on such criteria. Based on this, engagements with brands on online platforms may not only come from the brands' users with genuine interests in the firm but also from individuals who intend to develop associations with the brands to communicate particular aspect of themselves (i.e., their ideal selves).

Earlier studies may not have comprehensively covered the alternative motivations of social media engagement. Firms must constantly adapt to maintain the relevance of engagement as evolving technology continuously reshapes engagement methods (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Therefore, this thesis examines online social media engagement, which can occur in relation to individuals' ideal selves. It is worth questioning whether engagement, played out on social media, actually reflects 'engagement', which is a manifestation of genuine behaviour or 'engagement', which is objectified for the self-presentation of the ideal self. However, to effectively benefit from engaging with a focal object on social media, engagement activities must be in reference to, and therefore visible to, others so the desired inference can be made (Berger and Ward, 2010). Kabadayi and Price (2014) also discuss how individuals assert their interactions by engaging publicly and visibly on social media to promote their social media presences. Section 2.4 will review this point further to better understand its possible effects.

2.4 Impact of engagement on other actors

As online activities are usually visible to others, one individual's engagement activities with a focal object (i.e., a brand) are differently perceived by other people, which could contribute to others' experiences and behaviours (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). It has been suggested that engagement with focal objects on social media could be objectified for the purpose of self-presentation. Consequently, another area, which must be considered, is whether and how this engagement might impact other actors. It is possible that a spillover effect may occur, with further

responses again reflecting inauthentic behaviour. Therefore, this section analyses the impacts of engagement activities on other actors.

When engagement activities are visible to the public or to an individual's network, other people may observe this without considering whether it is genuine. Engagement activities with focal objects act as a persuasive source of information to others in an individual's network (Zhang, Kuo and Mccall, 2019; Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007). This is because people perceive activities (i.e., brand related activities) produced by individuals in their network as being more reliable than external activities, and they are, therefore, unlikely or less likely to position themselves in opposition to those activities (Willemsen et al., 2011). These findings seem consistent with other research conducted from the firm's perspective; for instance, Harmeling et al. (2017), in seeking to support this line of evidence, considers how firms can benefit from their consumers' persuasion capital. For other people belonging to individuals' networks, information presented by someone in their network is often perceived as more authentic, and, therefore, more persuasive, than information presented by a brand (Goh, Heng and Lin, 2013; Hernandez-Ortega, 2019; Itani, Haddad and Kalra, 2020).

Therefore, others may see content regarding brands and products carried through engagement activity online as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019), which Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet' (p.39). Some scholars report that engagement leads to eWOM (Islam and Rahman, 2016), while others consider eWOM to be a form of engagement behaviour (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Consequently, eWOM has become an option for individuals to offer their own thoughts and a major source for other people to gather information related to their interests so that they will feel comfortable before making their choices (Creevey, Kidney and Mehta, 2019). People tend to value information carried via this method, as they perceive it to be unbiased and delivered by experienced users. Thus, it has a large impact on the behaviour of those who are exposed to it (Berger, 2014).

Therefore, the behaviour of one individual (i.e., engagement activity) could greatly influence and adjust others' perceptions of a focal object (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). According to Jaakkola and Alexander (2014), this behavioural manifestation of engagement is 'influencing behaviour', which is defined as 'customer contributions of resources such as knowledge, experience, and time to affect other actors' perceptions, preferences, or knowledge regarding the focal firm' (p.255). This effect is not limited to people's attitudes regarding the focal brand, but it could possibly extend to people's actions and behaviours. Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) further identify this as 'mobilizing behaviour', which is 'customer contributions of resources such as relationships and time to mobilize other stakeholders' actions toward the focal firm' (p.255). These behaviours can accrue value outcomes, not only with prospective consumers, but also for the focal firm (Alexander and Jaakkola, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017). With this in mind, it is evident that an individual's ability to influence others with his or her opinions satisfies his or her desires as a social creature (Itani, Haddad and Kalra, 2020). However, it must be borne in mind that some individuals may be subject to low influencing power (Harmeling et al., 2017).

2.4.1 Source and outcome of impact

Perceptions of engagement with focal objects impact people differently; the effect tends to be positive if an individual is a 'significant other' – that is, highly influential to the observer (Andersen and Chen, 2002). Significant others (i.e., online influencers, friends and family) greatly influence the activation of people's shifts in perception and behaviour (Horberg and Chen, 2010). Shah (2003) explains that what significant others hold to be important may automatically affect the selection of activities observers intend, or go on, to perform. This is a form of social proof through which a person defines appropriate behaviour by observing the behaviour of others, who may be significant to or similar to himself/herself (Cialdini et al., 1999). Therefore, seeing other individuals engage with a focal brand may pressure people to develop the same practices to conform with others (Nolan et al., 2008).

The engaging individuals may also be opinion leaders, who are perceived as having wide knowledge or many connections in their own networks. Such people

tend to act as a source for suggestion and have influence over their peers (Casalo, Flavian and Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018; Iyengar, Van den Bulte and Valente, 2011). These people can also be called by other terms, such as 'micro-influencer' (Zhang, Kuo and McCall, 2019). People's relationships with others influence how they define their own 'selves' (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). They may choose to identify themselves and engage with a particular focal object (i.e., brand) to highlight their connectedness, seeking access to and acceptance within a group (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Bernritter et al., 2017). Bernritter et al. (2017) have found that this effect is even stronger among people with interdependence characteristics.

Such impact depends on the experiencing actors, which reflects findings in the reference group literature (Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Coker, Altobello and Balasubramanian, 2013). Reference groups offer insights into the determinants of people's behaviours, supporting the idea that, when people have a favourable attitude toward a particular group of individuals, they are likely to do something consistent with the activities of that group (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). However, this emphasises the possibility that people's responses and actions may not be entirely truthful, as they might be using their engagement simply as a vehicle to ally themselves with a group, regardless of their genuine interest in or attention toward the topics of the engagement activities they observe.

Whether or not the engagement activities people observe reflect individuals' genuine behaviour, as well as how such activities impact them, also depend on the role of tie-strength, which reflects the level of relationship between people and their social media connections (Zadeh, Zolfagharian and Hofacker, 2016). People may be fully impacted by the engagement activities of those with whom they have weak ties – i.e., as they may not know each other very well, making any stories conveyed through engagement activities seem convincing without knowing the actualities behind them. However, they may be more suspicious of the engagement activities of those to whom they are more closely tied if those activities seem inauthentic, since they know each other well (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006).

The strength of the relationship between the parties could also negate doubts and suspicions regarding the inauthenticity of engagement activities (Orsingher and

Wirtz, 2018). Thus, the stronger the relationship, the greater the possibility that people will respond positively to the engagement activities of those in their networks, which later brings further benefit to the brand. The effects are contrary when there is a considerable amount of engagement activity from individuals with whom people are not prone to be associated (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014; White and Dahl, 2007). This illustrates a double-edged sword effect.

However, the relationship between individuals who engage with focal objects and other people (i.e., observers) is not the only consideration. From their observations, people also draw inferences about individuals based on the relationships they assume individuals have to the brands with which they engage. When those individuals share a positive and/or congruent image with that of the brand, this further supports the observers' confidence in the brand and increases people's intentions to identify themselves with that brand (Sirgy, 1982). This may be similar to how influencers' characteristics affect brand and engagement (Cornwell, 2019; Hughes, Swaminatha and Brooks, 2019). The match between the image of the brand and the image of the person positively affects the brand attitudes and purchase intentions of observers (Til and Busler, 2000). Therefore, when individuals engage with a brand, their images may be transferred to the brand as the identities of brands and individuals can be cocreated (Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

Additionally, when observers perceive that the focal brand has qualities relevant to their own goals, they are more likely to mimic the behaviours they observe to reach their goals (Berger and Heath, 2007). Similarities between brands and people facilitate engagement (France, Merrilees and Miller, 2016). By way of illustration, Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit (2016b) emphasise the role of brand warmth in increasing people's intention to engage with it, as warmth is a friendly characteristic, which most people intend to show but which is actually only applicable to some people. However, one of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not account for whether those goals are genuine. This often results in more desirable behaviour, which could contradict the actual nature of the 'self' and, thus, the level of genuine intention toward the activity is questionable.

Literature in this field focuses more on the impacts of direct brand intervention, such as online reviewing (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Hernandez-Ortega, 2019), but little attention has been paid to what effects incidental brand contact (i.e., engagement activity with a brand) can have on other people. Research recognises that only partial exposure to brands may also impact individuals (Ferraro, Bettman and Chartrand, 2009), but knowledge in this area is still very scarce (Bernritter et al., 2017). This thesis, therefore, aims to further explore the impact of this phenomenon regarding the extent to which engagement activity with a focal object – which seems unintentional or not directed toward any particular actors – could impact other actors, with or without their acknowledgement.

2.4.2 Impact on firms

While most literature tends to assume that engagement activities with a focal object always positively impact firms, the effects of these activities on others is not necessarily positive (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit, 2016a). From an observer's viewpoint, an individual's engagement with a focal object can lead to a negative impression if the observers have already developed strong connections with other competing brands or have incongruent images with this brand (Ferraro, Kirmani and Matherly, 2013; Harmeling et al., 2017). A likely explanation lies in the fact that the needs of these observers have already been met, so anything that adds to this might seem less attractive. This weakens the observers' subsequent brand preferences (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek (2018) also mention the role conflict in multiple engagement contexts, which is associated with negative outcomes. This suggests that people may need to balance their roles, which could result in disengagement.

Moreover, Vogel et al. (2014) suggest that perceiving others' positive life events, displayed in the form of endorsement activity, could negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of observers, who could perceive it as unfair that other people are doing better than they are. Hence, the effect on the brand could be less than positive. Research has also studied the visibility of engagement activity among others, and the findings illustrate that, when individuals are exposed to a substantial amount of observable engagement activity with focal objects, this tends to decrease

the likelihood of them adding their own support (Ferraro, Kirmani and Matherly, 2013; Kristofferson, White and Peloza, 2014). Additionally, if people are able to detect that the engagement activity with the focal objects they perceive reflects inauthentic behaviour, or if they believe the inauthentic behaviour to be real and develop expectations which later turn out to be untrue, they tend to negatively perceive what they observe (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019).

Individuals' engagement activities with firms may make others perceive firms negatively. Thus, engagements could have knock-on effects for firms. However, firms might also increase their own reliance on information from individuals' engagement activities. From the firms' perspective, engagement activities are a valuable resource, which assist decision-making processes, such as product development and communication strategies (Harmeling et al., 2017). Therefore, as engagement activities on social media occur outside the firms' control, they could be detrimental to business, given that they could reflect inauthentic behaviour; thus, as resources, they would be subject to adjusted and biased aspects of the situation.

To conclude this section, it has commonly been assumed that people tend to perceive the online engagements individuals in their networks have with focal objects to be real, without considering the likelihood of those activities being inauthentic. What they see also impacts them and their behaviours in various ways through connectedness. For example, interactions between people and brands can be affected by the relationships people have with other individuals, and some people's engagement behaviours with the focal brand can affect others' engagement behaviour to the brand (Fehrer et al., 2018). While some recognise that impact in themselves, others may not. However, their perceptions and behaviours, which cause further reactions to the focal brand, can result from the engagement activities of other individuals to whom they have previously been exposed via online social media. Therefore, one individual's engagements impact, not only other people in that individual's network, but also the focal firm involved in those engagement activities (Clark, Lages and Hollebeek, 2020). This can extend to other firms, as well, since some people adopt the behaviour of endorsing a focal firm's competitors (Azer and Alexander, 2018) or developing oppositional loyalty for a competing brand (Dessart,

Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2020). However, since what people observe on social media could be inauthentic, their reactions, therefore, may be similarly inauthentic, or they could be reacting in a genuine manner to a disingenuous stimulus.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

In reviewing the literature surrounding engagement, this chapter has examined the foundation of theories and extant understanding of engagement. Current research implies that the disposition to engage reflects individuals' genuine behaviours toward a focal object. However, more actors may be concerned in the interactive relationship, particularly on social media platforms, which facilitate interactions among individuals and focal objects, creating more opportunities for online engagement. In this way, social media increases engagement activities, which are largely visible to others and impact focal actors. Engagement, therefore, may benefit these focal actors, including individuals and firms. However, the benefits previously seen by focal actors may only occur under the condition that engagement is based on individuals' genuine behaviour, as understood in the literature. Still, this overlooks the explanation regarding the genuineness of engagement activities, which may result in unexpected impacts to focal actors – particularly when individuals realise the opportunities online engagement offers to assist them in satisfying their self-related interests. This is also believed to be subject individuals' perceptions of their 'selves'. Accordingly, Chapter 3 reviews the literature concerning the concept of the self, as this plays an important role in adding new perspectives in engagement literature.

Chapter 3 : Self

This chapter reviews literature related to the 'self' to provide a fundamental understanding of individuals' selves and how each individual may differ in the methods through which they present themselves. This portion of the literature review supports Chapter 2 (the review of engagement) regarding how engagement may occur in alternative ways, based on people's presentations of their ideal selves. Chapter 3 proceeds in the following order.

It begins by discussing the development of the self-concept (Section 3.1) and how individuals develop different types of selves (3.1.1). It then moves on to investigating the ideal self – 'who I want to be' – which is a focus of this thesis. This continues with a discussion of how the advent of social media has established new opportunities that were previously difficult to accomplish in face-to-face contexts, providing an environment supporting the portrayal of the ideal self. The ideal self is also reviewed via authenticity literature (3.1.2). This leads to a review of the various ways in which the ideal self is further reflected, such as through the role of brand, which is commonly considered a useful tool for self-expression (Section 3.2). Section 3.3 explores the process of expressing the ideal self through 'self-presentation' to other people within a network, a topic that has been receiving considerable attention for some time. The recent movement of self-presentation onto social media, which presents increasing opportunities and challenges, is also considered (3.3.1). This is followed by a discussion of how individuals use tools, such as brand associations, to help present themselves on social media, introducing the assumption that self-presentation can occur through interaction and association with particular focal objects on social media via engagement activities (3.3.2). These elements will be pulled together and summarised at the end of Chapter 3 (Section 3.4).

3.1 Self-concept

Despite there being many previous studies on the subject of 'self', there is no universal agreement on a concise definition for the self-concept, or the 'self'. It has been widely defined, but it is understood by most scholars as the 'totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object' (Rosenberg, 1979, p.7). This summation is used to explain the complex system of beliefs and attributes individuals hold toward their own personas (Baumeister, 1999). The views individuals have of their own 'selves' change and grow as a result of exposure to experiences and other selves, which influence the evolution of a single 'self' (Lewis, 1990). This view, however, contrasts with prior research, which views the self as an isolated part of an individual. For example, James (1925) holds that the self grows primarily through the individual's own perceptions, yet this argument is almost 100 years old; thus, extensive research, over time, has uncovered changes and development in the subject.

The developmental process of a self-concept can be represented through two components of the self: the existential self and the categorical self (Lewis, 1990). The existential self is the most basic part of the self-concept. Its development begins in early childhood and involves the awareness of self-constancy – the regulation of thoughts and ideas (Bee, 1992). This arises, in part, by a person reflecting on his or her relationship with the world (Lewis, 1990). In the early years of life, the existential self is very basic and is influenced by surroundings. At this stage, to define their 'selves', children apply concrete categories. Examples include characteristics, such as height and hair colour. However, the existential self disappears at some point during the process of growth and transformation (Lewis, 1990).

Within this transformation process, the self is developed through a personal process (i.e., the existential self), and the categorical form of the self then evolves through a process of social experiences and interactions with external factors (Khan et al., 2016). The categorical self represents the later stage of the self, when individuals realises their existence as separate beings with unique experiences and

comes to the awareness that they are independent objects in the world (Lewis, 1990). At this later stage, the self expands to include references to internal traits, comparative evaluations and the perceptions of others (Lewis, 1990). By way of illustration, Kuhn (1960) has found that, when an individual is asked 'Who am I?' 20 times, their various answers tend to fit into categories, such as social groups and classifications, ideological beliefs, interests, ambitions and self-evaluations.

For individuals to fully function in this way, this progression can be traced back to the early construction of the self, which supports this theoretical perspective. Cooley (1902) expounds the concept of the 'Looking Glass Self', which postulates that the self is continually developed through interactions with other people, and, thus, it is socially referenced to the extent that individuals interpret their 'selves' based on reflections of the responses they receive from others. However, this is a very subjective view, as it is based on the individual's inferences of how they think others judge them, and these inferences could be exactly right or badly wrong. While Cooley (1902) focuses on reactions from particular people, Mead (1934) argues that this overlooks a broader social perspective. Therefore, Mead (1934) accounts for perceptions from 'generalised others' rather than 'particular others' to render an examination of true socialisation. In a similar manner, Kenny and DePaulo (1993) also hold a supporting view that 'people are not very good at knowing what any particular individual thinks of them, but better at knowing what people in general think of them' (p.158).

Mead (1934) further explains this context as 'symbolic interactionism', which is a reflexive process consisting of 'I' (the self-directed mind) and 'Me' (a reflection of others' attitudes that an individual assumes). The intersection of 'I' and 'Me' creates a sense of 'self', as individuals engage in the process of role-taking, during which they learn to see their 'selves' through the eyes of others (Mead, 1934). By putting themselves in the place of the other, individuals see their 'selves' from others' viewpoints, and, thus, others become their 'looking glass'. Both Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) suggest a mutual understanding that the integration of the self is formed through individuals' ability to take on the perspectives of others within their interactions. However, the actual judgements of others appear unimportant as

the focus is on how individuals perceive and feel about those judgements. This view could still be biased, as it is seen from the individuals' perspective. Because of this, it is questionable the self is individually or socially identified. A possible explanation might be that the self is formed through individuals' perceptions, which are constructed via others in society.

As people mature, their life experiences direct the categorical self to become increasingly differentiated from others. This differentiation reflects changes occurring over time – not solely influenced by the present but, rather, by a collection of past experiences (i.e., childhood experiences) and a growing vision of the future (Rogers, 1959). All these are considered highly significant in the development of the self-concept (Khan et al., 2016).

3.1.1 Multiple selves (Actual, Ought, Ideal self)

Environmental and individual factors also shape individuals, aiding their differentiation and helping them develop various aspects of their categorical selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Traditionally, the study of the self-concept has focused on the unitary self as a static entity (Allport, 1955). However, this argument is inconsistent. Other literature regarding the self-concept acknowledges the self to be a dynamic and changing entity, which can be influenced by the various situations life presents, resulting in the possibility of multiple selves (Markus, Smith and Moreland, 1985). For example, the transition from the existential self to the categorical self can result in more than one concept of the categorical self, depending on the context of the external factors to which an individual is subjected. The context tends to direct a certain aspect of the 'self', which individuals choose to express and direct their behaviour; different contexts could render a particular aspect of the 'self' to be more salient than others (Reed II et al., 2012). Accordingly, Higgins (1987) suggests three types of self-concepts consisting of the actual self ('Who I am'), the ought self ('Who I should be'), and the ideal self ('Who I want to be').

All these selves are affected by a number of factors – such as parental influence, friends and the media – and these factors affect how people feel, think and act in the world (Higgins, 1987). For instance, a woman who is a mother (actual self)

may consider herself to be a housewife (ought self) or a successful working woman (ideal self). The actual self is the reflection of how a person perceives himself or herself, which represents characteristics that the individual believes he or she possesses. The ought self, on the other hand, represents what an individual believes he or she should or ought to be, based on a sense of duty and obligation. However, most individuals are aware, not only of their versions of self that are based on reality, but also of the version of the self they would like to be. This is how the 'ideal self' develops. It represents the idealised version of the self, which is motivated by dynamic goals, personal wishes and ambitions (Higgins, 1987; Sirgy, 1982). Festinger (1954) suggests that these goals and ambitions are also formed based on interaction and comparison with others.

As the ideal self may not be consistent with the actuality of real life, individuals still strive to achieve the 'ideal self-state' (Dolich, 1969; Belch and Landon, 1977; Higgins, 1987). Many individuals prefer the ideal self because it represents the embodiment of their aspirations and motivates them to enhance the performance, experiences and ambitions of their 'selves' and feel good about themselves (Harris and Bardey, 2019; Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012; Sirgy, 1982). However, this is difficult to measure, and not everyone has a particularly high motivation for personal growth. Moreover, the ideal self, by definition, rarely exists; if it did, it would no longer be considered 'ideal' (Higgins, 1987).

Keeping in mind the concept of the ideal self, which is also highly subject to context, this thesis emphasises the ideal self within the emerging context of online platforms (social media), which provide more opportunities than the offline environment for individuals to represent themselves. The development of social media not only allows individuals to express their identities, but it further contributes to the construction of their personas (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). A more detailed account of how social media is compatible with the expression of ideal self is discussed in the following section.

3.1.2 Ideal self, social media and authenticity

Studies regarding the representation of 'self' online have been undertaken since the dawning days of the internet. Early research concerning the online creation of the 'self' mostly focused on anonymous online environments, such as chat rooms (Bargh, Mckenna and Fitzsimons, 2002). A more recent study has shifted attention to less anonymous online settings, such as dating sites, and reports divergent findings (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006). The 'self' has been investigated further, specifically regarding the emergence of the digital world, in which it is constructed as a new phenomenon that takes place through a digital platform (Belk, 2014). Social media, an increasingly popular online space, has been generating considerable interest.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, allow individuals to represent their 'selves' online through various means. The lack of physical interaction on social media provides more possibilities, including new ways and tools (i.e., online profiles and associations) for individuals to express their 'selves' (Davenport et al., 2014; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Orehek and Human, 2016; Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008). It has been questioned whether the emergence of social media enables people to create expressions of self that differ from the qualities they possess in their real lives. Because of this, the actual self and the ideal self seem to receive more attention from scholars examining them in relation to online social media. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) have found that both these types of 'self' can be presented by individuals via online social media. This demonstrates a balanced perspective, since the growing phenomenon of social media allows individuals to freely express their 'selves', which is subject to the purpose of usage. The generalisability of much published research on this issue is problematic (Back et al., 2010; Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Michikyan, Dennis and Subrahmanyam, 2015; Walther, 2007), which could be due to the many motives that may lie behind an individual's construction of his or her online self (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran and Shahar, 2016).

Some scholars suggest that people are inclined to exhibit their selves in ways that accord with their lives. For example, Bargh, Mckenna and Fitzsimons (2002)

have suggested that online interactions allow individuals to better express aspects of their actual selves, the aspects they are less able to express offline due to difficulties, such as unexpressed qualities and interpersonal abilities (Rogers, 1951). Back et al. (2010) also support the view that people present their actual selves via social media platforms. The explanation for this finding suggests that an idealised version of the self is difficult to accomplish online since users are linked to people with whom they are familiar in their offline social networks. Social media friends and other connections might question the validity of presented information if they do not consider it to accurately reflect the person posting it. Thus, when online, people tend to replicate their actual behaviours from the offline setting rather than behaving differently from their usual characters (Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat, 2013). This hinders their capacity to truly erase the actual, even in online relationships. Research also highlights the pressure individuals feel to present their actual selves to others, especially in significant relationships (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008). Bargh, Mckenna and Fitzsimons (2002) further explain that people are looking for close relationships, and that true self-disclosure is a requirement for developing such relationships. However, people with strong relationships tend not to determine individuals by just a single action (Menon and Ranaweera, 2018).

On the other hand, many relationships in which users are engaged on social media can be held together by 'weak ties' (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006), while people may have only a few genuine close relationships. As such, people who are connected via social media may not know each other particularly well, making it more possible to present an idealised version of 'self', with a low risk of social sanction. Moreover, given the amount of time people may spend in online environments prior to making any expressions, individuals have more time to think about how to highlight the good aspects of their 'selves' and hide personal, undesirable information (Walther, 1992; 2007). This offers an opportunity for an individual to engage in idealised image development (Cornwell and Lundgren, 2001; Tiggemann and Anderberg, 2020). For example, Alfasi (2019), Harris and Bardey (2019) and Manago et al. (2008) argue that the ideal self is presented online, especially by young adults on Facebook (Chua and Chang, 2016; Michikyan, Dennis

and Subrahmanyam, 2015). Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) state that people tend to display their ideal selves on social media by 'crafting' online images. In addition, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) suggest that 'Facebook selves' reflect the socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline but have not yet been able to achieve. This opinion is also supported by Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan and McCabe (2005), who argue that people make an effort to project themselves online in a more socially desirable way, which is perceived to be better than their real life.

Another line of research suggests further evidence that individuals tend to reflect their ideal selves on social media. Apparently, when individuals repeatedly express their ideal selves online, it is possible that others will conflate those ideal selves with the people's actual selves. Consequently, scholars argue that social media narrows discrepancy gap between the actual and the ideal self, as it enables users to create the 'ideal self' by letting them fulfil their wishes, rendering them more satisfied with themselves (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Hu, Zhao and Huang, 2015). Consequently, Ellison, Hancock and Toma (2011) suggest that using the ideal self is one strategy for resolving pressures – involving some truths while remaining attractive.

Although the ideal selves presented on social media are still partly based on truth, they are adapted to be more desirable than reality, which may be considered less authentic. Authenticity literature has examined various aspects of this, such as brand (Beverland, 2006; Charilton and Cornwell, 2019; Ilicic, Baxter and Kulczynski, 2019), advertising (Becker, Wiegand and Reinartz, 2019), tourism (Bryce, Murdy and Alexander, 2017; Park, Choi and Lee, 2019), celebrity (Moulard, Garrity and Rice, 2015; Poyry et al., 2019) and self (Wood et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2019). While in different contexts, authenticity has been used to refer to various meanings due to the nature of the entity; commonly, authenticity can be described in many ways: i.e., genuine, real, original, authentic, sincere and honest (Becker, Wiegand and Reinartz, 2019; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Illicic and Webster, 2016; Moulard, Garrity and Rice, 2015). In previous research, scholars have measured authenticity via several methods, from a less direct measure asking people whether their behaviour varies across various roles (Shaldon et al., 1997) to a more

obvious measure asking people to rate themselves on a continuum (Kernis and Goldman, 2006). What distinguishes individuals who are 'authentic' is that they are true to themselves; thus, they behave in accordance with their values and are honest in their behaviour and interactions with others. According to this conceptualisation, Kernis and Goldman (2006) argue that authentic individuals do not misrepresent information relevant to themselves, and they act in a way that is consistent with their values rather than intended to please others. Wood et al. (2008) define three characteristics of authentic individuals: authentic living, self-alienation and absence of accepting external influence. They suggest that the search for self-authenticity is a key human motivation; it can be explained by the self-determination theory, which states that individuals are intrinsically motivated to be authentic (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

However, individuals are not only intrinsically motivated; they are also externally motivated from their exposure to elements of reward and pressure. Therefore, in some situations, individuals inherently need to conform and adapt to the norm. The increasing orientation of people performing according to social expectation is regarded as the opposite of authenticity – that is, humans becoming increasingly inauthentic (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). Franzese (2007) further suggests that apparently acting authentically in all circumstances could bring considerable problems, not only to the actors themselves, but also to society – if authenticity is viewed as being true to oneself. Most individuals are found to submerge their authenticity on various occasions for self-protection or self-gain, as being positively regarded by others is often a prerequisite for many favourable outcomes in life (Leary, 2001; Vannini and Franzese, 2008). This raises the question as to whether individuals exhibiting inauthentic behaviour should be considered authentic or inauthentic, if they happen to live their lives duplicitously.

Authenticity is determined by others (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Therefore, other people may perceive individuals as being authentic even when individuals act inauthentically. The expression of the ideal self on social media may also appear authentic to others. The present thesis acknowledges this, and, therefore, it focuses further on the phenomenon of the ideal self in the online environment. This section

has concluded that there is a high possibility that the ideal self, which is inauthentic, is displayed in online social media as that environment supports it very well. How individuals convey their stories and experiences regarding their ideal selves via online social media is discussed in later sections.

3.2 Construction of the ideal self

People attempt to control elements that facilitate their ideal selves by positively directing behaviour to enhance their 'selves' (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Goffman, 1973). When individuals decide which image to communicate in a social situation, they can express their decision through the focal object such as the brand, product, service or community. To illustrate this point, this section demonstrates how ideal self can be constructed through examples of various focal objects.

Previous research has illustrated the role of object in expressing a person's ideal self through various means – e.g., through purchasing and consuming items from a brand or multiple brands (Aaker, 1997; Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Therefore, a brand, which indicates an individual's concerns and preferences, can be chosen to express the 'self' and its characteristics (Aaker, 1997). As such, brands become relevant to individuals during the process of identity construction, and they allow people a route for expressing their 'selves' (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). However, no brand provides exactly the same meaning to different individuals (Hammerl et al., 2016; Ritson, Elliott and Eccles, 1996). This inconsistency has led to the assumption that consumption is not driven by the product function alone, but that it is also a source of symbolic capital, which individuals use to signal their identities and classify themselves (An et al., 2019; Berger and Heath, 2007; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2012; Su, Hu and Min, 2019; Levy, 1959; Fournier, 1998).

However, brand and product consumption alone does not confirm that the desired recognitions are made about the individuals who consume (Berger and Ward, 2010). This complexity has led to the notion that consumption of these objects might be related to the individual's self-expressive goal (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal,

2011), in which the private and public consumption of brands and products results in different relationships to the self (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit, 2016b; Ross, 1971). Prior research suggests that publicly consumed brands and products are better than privately consumed brands and products for conveying particular meanings about individuals (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). As such, the ideal self is found to be related to the public consumption of brands and products, as they are more visible and make the desired image easier to create (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). Conspicuous consumption is often examined in relation to this concept, considering which conspicuous objects are likely to be used in situations where the individual's main purpose is to express his or her ideal self (Ross, 1971; Swaminathan, Stilley and Ahluwalia, 2009; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2018). Individuals can explicitly signal their preferences and choices in observable behaviour via brand and product choices (e.g., 'Relating to the Jeep brand satisfies my goal of appearing tough'; 'SUV represents family-oriented car') (Berger and Heath, 2007; Deighton, Avert and Fear, 2011).

Self-concept studies have investigated whether individuals are motivated to approach certain objects that match their specific ideal selves (Japutra, Skinci and Simkin, 2019; Malar et al., 2011). This introduces the concept of self-congruity, whereby objects such as brands, products and services are assumed to have an attached image and virtue (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Sirgy, 1982). These images are also formed via association with their users in a two-way relationship (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). Sirgy (1982) developed the congruity theory to examine how congruity 'between the self and the object' influences a person's motivation to purchase. The more congruence the object image has with individuals' selves, the more personal connections individuals make with the object (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel, 2004; Kim, Sung and Um, 2019; Park et al., 2010). In this sense, people compare their images of themselves with objects. They develop their behaviours and attitudes to prefer objects that seem to have similar images to their selves (i.e., their ideal selves) to satisfy their needs for self-inflation (Cowart, Fox and Wilson, 2008; Gonzalez-Jimenez, Fastoso and Fukukawa, 2019; Sirgy, 1982).

Self-congruity theory explains individuals' basic motivations for congruence between their selves and the object, and perhaps between the ingroup and the object in that individuals tend to prefer objects that are congruent with other people in their group. As people in the same group tend to have similarities, (Peng et al., 2018; Hammerl et al., 2016), this explains why individuals use these objects to feel that they are part of a group. However, self-congruity theory cannot explain individuals' needs for differentiation and new aspirations. It also cannot fully explain individuals' selves as the totality of who they are being shaped into becoming by the multiple objects surrounding them, thus expressing different aspects of their 'selves' (Belk, 1988). In a similar vein, there are also some constraints regarding these objects, such as product category, product conspicuousness and budget restrictions, which prevent certain objects and the self from having similar images (Malhotra, 1988; Graeff, 1996).

Another framework that could also be particularly useful for explaining this is the perspective of the extended self. Belk (1988) argues, through the concept of the 'extended self', that individuals are what they own, and, thus, such possessions are viewed as part of the self (Belk, 1988). This practice allows individuals to convince their 'selves' of their own abilities, which they would not have without the related possessions (Belk, 1988). Therefore, more recent attention has focused on the provision of brands and products, with researchers extending the possessions literature to include brands and products and suggesting that people consume them to support their identities (Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Stuppy, Mead and Van Osselaer, 2019). These brands and products provide the individual with more desirable aspects of the self – meaning, the ideal self. Subsequently, it becomes more intuitively and generally accepted that people create and represent an ideal self-image through using brands and products, as these help construct identity (Escalas, 2004); people use them to convince themselves of the reality of the enhanced people they hope to become (Brown, 2007).

However, this explanation does not fully consider the online consumption of objects. Belk (2013) later argues that, by incorporating the technological environment, there is a dramatic increase in the variety of ways available for

expressing the self through online ownership without actual ownership of physical possessions. Watkins, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2016), for example, examine digital virtual goods, in which social media accounts and/or user generated content not only present a new configuration of ownership, but also extend possibilities for the construction of the self. Mardon and Belk (2018) also investigate digital material configuration through the various characteristics digital objects exhibit, some of which demonstrate qualities in the holder. In addition, any kind of physical ownership may no longer be necessary, as Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2001) suggest the concept of psychological ownership, which reflects the mental state individuals can feel about the target of ownership, regardless of whether it is material or immaterial (Carrozzi et al., 2019; Sinclair and Tinson, 2017). This can be developed by just touching the object (Peck and Shu, 2009) or looking at the products (Kamleitner and Feuchtl, 2015). Accordingly, this leads to engagement with the brand online (Kumar and Nayak, 2019). To this extent, it seems possible that, within social media, the focus is not limited to ownership or consumption as a prerequisite condition for individuals to develop an ideal self, as they can do so based on brand associations online (Belk, 2013; Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019).

Recently, however, an opposing phenomenon has been recognised. Wolter et al. (2016), for example, suggest the term 'brand disidentification', while Odoom et al. (2019) suggest 'brand avoidance', and Sarkar et al. (2019) suggest 'brand embarrassment'. Although the labels differ, they are useful concepts for understanding how some individuals- not all, as brand embarrassment might be applied to existing customers only, while brand disidentification and brand avoidance might also include potential consumers- might hold the alternative view that an undesirable image may be caused by interacting with a focal object. Therefore, they avoid linking themselves with those objects, excluding the brands from their projected images to successfully maintain their ideal selves.

This can also be seen in the case of politics. Few people choose to be involved with posts related to their preferred political entities even if they are motivated to do so (Marder et al., 2016b). Voicing political opinions on Facebook may be desirable to some people but unappealing to others (Marder, 2018). Individuals tend to shy away from conspicuous connections to political parties out of

concern for theirself-image (i.e., their ideal self) (Marder et al., 2016b). Therefore, choosing not to get involved is a strategy to manage one's self-image against undesirable impressions (Marder et al., 2016b; Marder, 2018). This is in direct contrast with people's choice to identify themselves with objects to form their ideal selves, as has been investigated by most studies in the field (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012).

In this section, various notions of how individuals use objects for identity creation have been explained. To better understand how objects can be applied to the projection of the ideal self as an outward form of communication, and to reveal the process through which individuals satisfy their own needs and make good impressions on their audiences, the following section describes the process of self-presentation in greater detail.

3.3 Self-presentation

Rather than focusing only on creation of the individual's ideal self, this research also explores the process by which that ideal self is communicated to other people. While the ideal self is perceived by an individual ('Who I want to be'), it is seen by others as self-presentation (Goffman, 1973; Kim, Chan and Kankanhalli, 2012; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Table 3.1 presents a number of definitions of self-presentation from various scholars, which share similar characteristics. Many describe self-presentation as a process used to portray desirable information about oneself (i.e., an ideal image), to avoid an undesirable portrayal, or to present a positive impression for an audience. While some scholars use the terms 'self-presentation' and 'impression management' interchangeably (Goffman, 1973; Marder et al., 2016a), others distinguish between these terms. In this vein, impression management is viewed as an outcome of self-presentation (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Leary and Allen, 2011).

Scholars	Definitions

Baumeister, 1982	Self-presentation is the use of behavior to communicate some information about oneself to others. (p.3)
Baumeister and Hutton, 1987	Self-presentation is behavior that attempts to convey some information about oneself or some image of oneself to other people. (p.71)
Ellison, Hancock and Toma, 2011	Self-presentation is behavior aimed at conveying an image of self to others and has as a primary goal influencing other people to respond in desired ways. (p.47)
Leary and Kowalski, 1990	Self-presentation refers to the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them. (p.34)
Lee et al., 1999	Self-presentation is behaviors used to manage impressions to achieve foreseeable short-term interpersonal objectives or goals. (p.702)
Lyu, 2016	Self-presentation is a purposeful process for packaging and editing the self to distribute positive impressions to others. (p.185)
Marder et al., 2016a	Self-presentation (or similarly impression management) is a process that involves controlling impressions revealed to audiences. (p.57)
Marder, 2018	Self-presentation refers to the act of managing one's public image in front of an audience with the aim of instilling a desired impression. (p.170)
Schau and Gilly, 2003	Self-presentation is the intentional and tangible component of identity. Social actors engage in complex intraself negotiations to project a desired impression. (p.387)
Sievers et al., 2015	Self-presentation is the process by which individuals are concerned with the impression they make on others in social situations. (p.25)
Swani and Labrecque, 2020	Self-presentation entails the selection and use of content that will elevate one's self-image. (p.281)
Vogel and Rose, 2016	Self-presentation is a subset of impression management whereby individuals develop their identities and roles and gain social rewards through their interactions with others. (p.294)

Table 3.1: Self-presentation definitions

Given that other people infer an individual's self from what they see, individuals are concerned with how other people evaluate and judge them (Ward and Dahl, 2014). Therefore, self-presentation also considers others' perspectives,

resulting in presentations of the self that are adjusted to receive positive feedback from others (Schlenker and Pontari, 2000; Sabik, Falat and Magagnos, 2019). Goffman (1973) has introduced the dramaturgy approach to demonstrate the process of self-presentation. It analyses interpersonal interactions and how people perform (i.e., display their 'ideal selves') to project a desired image to others (self-presentation). Goffman uses theatre to illustrate individuals' contrasting behaviours between front stage and backstage, with the individual represented as an actor performing in front of an audience and subsequently retreating back to a non-performer role in the backstage area.

Inevitably, people desire to receive positive judgements, feeling respected and valued and being treated with affection (Steele, 1988). Hogan (1982) argues that the motivations behind self-presentation are derived from two fundamental needs of human social life: status and popularity. This is also consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model, which explains human motivation in terms of attempts to achieve and grow into a higher version of the 'self' (Maslow, 1943). The idealised form of 'self' intends to go beyond the individual 'self' to connect and contribute to something larger − potentially status and acceptance within society (Maslow, 1943). Some evidence suggests that the need for status can be achieved by individuals enhancing themselves, with self-enhancement being the strongest, most consistent motivation underlying the formation of the ideal self and stimulating people to present that ideal self (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran and Shahar, 2016; Sedikides, 1993).

On the other hand, to be accepted into a group, and to later gain popularity, individuals may need to present themselves in a particular way to belong (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In addition, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggest that group belonging is found more often for people with interdependent selves, as they tend to focus on themselves with others and on fitting in with their society. Consequently, self-presentation is undertaken to match the particular image a person wishes to project or to raise the expectations of the wider audience (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987; Berger, 2014). Various orientations toward and goals for self-presentation exist, and self-presentation, therefore, may not always occur in the same direction due to differences in people's ideal goals.

Researchers have made efforts to define the factors that drive self-presentation, with previously published studies on the drivers of self-presentation looking at the question and arguing from many different angles. A number of researchers focus on personality traits (Brailovskaia and Bierhoff, 2016; Grieve, March and Watkinson, 2020; Seidman, 2013; Lee, Ahn and Kim, 2014) and argue that 'extraversion' is the most relevant trait for self-presentation (Arpaci, Baloglu and Kesivi, 2018; Lee, Ahn and Kim, 2014), while others suggest that neuroticism (Leary and Allen, 2011) and narcissism (Grieve, March and Watkinson, 2020) are related to self-presentation. On the other hand, Arkin, Appelman and Burger (1980) find that self-presentation is more connected to individuals with high social anxiety. These contradictory findings may be due to different foci of activities for self-presentation.

This indicates that self-presentation is not a skill in which every individual is equally proficient. Individual differences are found to be a prominent element impacting self-presentation, which may lead to fluctuations in ability. Furthermore, another predictor of this can also be explained by 'self-monitoring', which reflects how individuals observe and regulate their self-presentation and actions in accordance with guidance received from social cues (Snyder, 1974; Kowalski et al., 2018). Snyder (1974) developed the term 'self-monitoring' and has measured individuals' self-monitoring using scales. Lennox and Wolfe (1984), however, have later modified these scales to measure people's sensitivity to the expressive behaviour of others and their ability to modify their self-presentations.

The level of self-monitoring indicates the height of individuals' concerns about their appearance and the impressions that others have of them. The self-monitoring construct groups individuals into low and high self-monitoring categories, in which individuals with a higher level of self-monitoring are more sensitive and responsive to the expressions of relevant others than those with a lower level. People use social cues, such as watching and mimicking desirable behaviour, as a guideline for managing their impressions and regulating their own self-presentations. Following this line of reasoning, high self-monitors are more likely to perform self-presentation.

In contrast, low self-monitors are those who believe in their own behaviour and have a low motivation to regulate their 'selves' for a given situation. They appear to maintain a high congruence between their 'selves' and their expressive behaviours. Examples can be seen in advertising reactions. High self-monitors are more responsive to advertising that is image-oriented, while low self-monitors prefer quality-based advertising (Snyder and Debono, 1985). Another useful example is how high self-monitors prefer a product that is capable of enhancing their image, while low self-monitors consider a product's performance (Debono, 2006). This reflects the fact that high self-monitors are concerned about the kind of person they can be or how others would perceive them if they possessed a particular product. Franzese (2007) has found that an increased need for social approval is also related to decreased authentic behaviour; thus, there is evidence to suggest that the self-monitoring construct is related to inauthenticity. To this extent, high self-monitors lack authenticity as they try to manage their self-presentations to be consistent with the expectations of others.

Thus, self-presentation can vary according to the function of the audience, while the audience depends on the context. For example, a café includes vendors and strangers, while offices include colleagues and clients. Self-presentation, however, is constrained by the audience's knowledge of a person's behaviour. To this extent, the dramaturgy approach by Goffman (1973) seems to be restricted when a merged audience is present, leading to confusion as to which 'front stage' is appropriate in any given situation and time. This causes conflict with Goffman's analogues. Challenges, thus, arise when presentation is found to be inconsistent with other evidence (Marder et al., 2016a). In addition, research suggests that some people can distinguish self-presentation that is intended to signal a desired identity to the target (Ferraro, Kirmani and Matherly, 2013). As this identity related behaviour could consequently be considered inauthentic, other people could negatively perceive the self-presenters 'self' (Kirmani, 2009). Toma and Hancock (2013) suggest that, for self-presentation to occur successfully, it must be carefully constructed so that the audience believes the image presented to be true.

This explains how individuals tend to adjust themselves in an idealised way by developing their identities and roles using self-presentation techniques (Goffman, 1973; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Self-presentation, which is perceived as an inauthentic act, can also be seen as a way to deceive others (Drouin et al., 2016). Goffman (1973) argues that individuals enact self-presentation in their everyday lives. Leary and Kolwalski (1990), however, argue that this may apply to certain circumstances in which people are motivated to control their impressions, since some individuals engage in daily interactions without any intention to foster an impression. In addition, Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006) point out that such deception may not be intentional, as individuals might simply be trying to describe their ideal selves. Whitty et al. (2012) further support this by revealing that planned lies happen less often than spontaneous ones. However, the key problem with these explanations may be that it does not consider a wide range of contexts, for example, social media − where everything can be planned prior to the actions being publicly published online for others to see.

One criticism of much of the literature on offline self-presentation is that it is overly simplistic, only accounting for regular elements, such as a controlled view of the ideal self and the presence of the physical body. This prevents individuals from claiming something that is noticeably different from the physical setting of the 'self' (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008), and, thus, a number of challenges are inevitably removed before they even arise. A more comprehensive piece of research would examine online self-presentation, which is gaining more interest due to the abilities and appealing features of social media. What makes self-presentation in social media important is that most people have moved major parts of their everyday interactions to social media platforms. Social media also facilitates self-presentation to large audiences without the need for interactions in a physical space (Marder et al., 2016a). For example, social media is a controlled environment, in which individuals are usually given time to sculpt a profile before their own selves are rendered publicly available to others (Walther, Slovacek and Tidwell, 2001)

Although Arundale (2010) points out that current self-presentation theories would be out of date because they were developed long before internet use became

widespread (Goffman, 1973), Miller (1995) explains that electronic interaction can be seen as an extension of self-presentation, implying that the older theories may still be applicable. With the progress of technology, therefore, online interaction can be viewed as the front stage, and offline interactions reflect the backstage, which can be used for preparing online interactions and personas (Miller and Arnold, 2009). Despite criticisms of Goffman's theory, scholars still apply it across a range of contexts, such as online dating (Toma, Hancock and Ellison, 2008), tourism (Lyu, 2016; Qiu et al., 2019) and politics (Chen and Chang, 2019; Colliander et al., 2017; Dupree and Fiske, 2019). While self-presentation can appear in various formats and settings, this research particularly focuses on online interaction through social media. Individuals have access to more tools and mechanisms within social media than in offline life. Such tools are different from those found in the offline setting, a fact which individuals can creatively use to conduct self-presentation. This will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.1 Self-presentation in social media

It has been reported that one of the most influential reasons for individuals to appear on social media is self-presentation (Kramer and Winter, 2008; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). According to Bareket-Bojmel, Moran and Shahar (2016), there is evidence to suggest that approximately half of Facebook posts are produced as part of self-presentation, using manipulating and dishonest content to mislead others (Tsikerdekis and Zeadally, 2014). It has also been found that most individuals admit they feel comfortable lying in online social media because they know everyone else does the same or worse (Drounin et al., 2016). A likely explanation is that the public nature of social media provides a range of activities that individuals can undertake freely, from updating their statuses, to posting their photos, to commenting on and sharing others' posts. All these social media functions not only connect individuals to people in their own networks, but also make it an effective arena for individuals to facilitate and carry out selective self-presentation (Jansson-Boyd and Zawisza, 2017; Tosun, 2012).

Existing research suggests that social media displays social information, which promotes self-presentation to emphasise aspects of users' lives to others (Van

Dijck, 2013; Vogel and Rose, 2016), with Facebook profiles usually predominantly displaying a positive and desirable form of self-presentation that tends to twist reality (Alfasi, 2019; Harris and Bardey, 2019; Nadkani and Hofmann, 2012; Toma and Hancock, 2013). For individuals to ensure that their most positive physical attributes are presented, the photo (i.e., selfie) must be a good illustration of self-presentation (Chua and Chang, 2016; Huang and Park, 2013; Smith and Cooley, 2012), as pictures may be taken multiple times to capture the best image (Hess, 2015) and as technological advancements allow digital photos to be beautified in the most positive way (Fox and Rooney, 2015). This selection of photos allows individuals to present themselves in any way they wish, and, hence, it provides information about individuals (i.e., that they are good looking), which affects how other people treat them. For example, the attractiveness of the photo leads to positive feedback (i.e., admiration or attention from others, who subsequently have a high willingness to connect with the poster) (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019; Harris and Bardey, 2019; Wang et al., 2010). The expectation of positive feedback also encourages individuals to continually present themselves (Chua and Chang, 2016; Dumas et al., 2017).

Shared materials signal, not only explicit, but also implicit cues (Walther, 2007; Kramer and Haferkamp, 2011). Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) argue that most self-presentation on social media is implicit rather than explicit – what they refer to as 'show rather than tell' (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008, p.1816). A notable example concerning online activities is as follows. People writing Facebook statuses describing themselves creates a direct, explicit cue through wording, while photos represent an implicit cue, which allows for many interpretations, such as interpretations of facial expressions (Vilnai-Yaavetz and Tifferet, 2015).

These cues result from resource allocation, which renders individuals able to create appealing content and desired aspects of their selves to impress others. Common ideal characteristics individuals often project through self-presentation tactics include, for example, popularity, thoughtfulness or well-roundedness (Walther, 2007; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018). Therefore, on social media, much available online content is subject to the nature of self-presentation and remains visible long after its creation (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). When compared to

traditional media, in which exposure to content is limited, social media offers greater exposure to presentations of ideal selves from friends' edited profiles and information (Andsager, 2014; Harris and Bardey, 2019). These cues are easily observed through a constant flow of information on newsfeeds (Perloff, 2014).

This constant flow of information also stimulates social comparisons (Alfasi, 2019; Chae, 2017), even when individuals may realise that others' lifestyles do not accurately reflect reality (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019). This may be an advantageous resource for high self-monitors; thus, when they experience a degree of uncertainty, many cues are available from others to give them clues as to expected behaviour. High self-monitors could engage in social comparison to improve their self-presentation more easily and more frequently via social media. However, some scholars argue that online self-presentation may be mitigated due to reduced pressure, as feedback from others is not immediately revealed as in face-to-face context (Hancock and Dunhan, 2001; Tanis and Postmes, 2003).

Some users, however, may have come to expect that, since social media content from their networks is personally delivered, it has a higher level of realism. For example, individuals are likely to interpret friends' posts as being 'realistic' when compared to depictions from the media, as there is an awareness that traditional media is substantially edited (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007; Hernandez-Ortega, 2019; Warner-Soderholm et al., 2018). This effect tends to be minimal when looking at posts from people they know or feel close to, but posts from these people tend to manipulate them without their acknowledgment that these posts may be edited for self-presentation. All of these effects are possible because the nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC) makes content editable before it is posted and modifiable afterwards, thus allowing self-presentation to be 'constructed' in a way that enables individuals to control how others perceive them (Walther, 1992). This process is considered to be more controllable than conventional offline relationships.

By contrast, Marder et al. (2016a) address the challenge of self-presentation on social media by considering the presence of multiple online audiences, who hold a different subset of standards toward what they observe. Some of them may find

certain content appropriate, and some may find it inappropriate (Hogan, 2010; Marder et al., 2016a). Such heterogeneous standards problematise online self-presentation. This view has further been shared in previous literature by Marwick and Boyd (2011). There is also the danger that individuals can lose control over their self-presentations on their own profiles due to comments that are revealed publicly or contents tagged by others in their networks during performative interactions (Birnholtz, Burke and Steele, 2017). It is almost certain that people have fewer incentives to care for others' self-images (Litt et al., 2014). This implies that other-provided information may not be consistent with the 'selves' individuals would like to present online.

Social media platforms enable widely connected networks, and, thus, the opportunities, previously seen as advantageous to online self-presentation, could also be drawbacks due to these negative effects (Rui and Stefanone, 2013). The risk of fragmented self-presentation, therefore, exists for many individuals, as content provided by friends also affects other people's impressions of the profile owner (Walther et al., 2008). Under these circumstances, however, users can still control their privacy settings, including which elements to present and with whom they wish to share. For example, Birnholtz, Burke and Steele (2017) suggest that individuals can 'untag' information that is inconsistent with their desired images. This strategy is used to maintain their ideal selves by placing increased distance between their online self-presentations and information they do not like. These unwanted, other-provided pieces of information may also lead to protective self-presentation (Rui and Stefanone, 2013).

However, different social media platforms have different motives underlying their use. Therefore, the degree of self-presentation is not the same across all social media platforms. In support of this, Kim, Seely and Jung (2017) have found that individuals are concerned about desirable versions of their selves on Instagram, while this finding cannot be extrapolated to Pinterest. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) have also found that the degree of self-presentation on Instagram is more prominent than on Facebook. Other research has determined that self-presentation content appears more frequently on YouTube than on Facebook (Smith, Fischer and

Yongjian, 2012). However, Roma and Aloini (2019) illustrate a similar degree of self-presentation across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Research suggests that the visuality feature is what enables individuals' self-presentation (Harris and Bardey, 2019), and different social media platforms have different formats and architectures (Roma and Aloini, 2019).

These modern technological changes have also reduced the amount of effort individuals must put into projecting their subtle signals (Berger and Ward, 2010). Prior to social media platforms, for example, having a luxury image would require spending time with the 'right' people in the 'right' places. The advent of social media, however, has made it easier for people to convey particular images through their online posts. This, in turn, has led to changes in the ways people behave, as it becomes easier to acquire at least some of the relevant performances without having to physically be with the 'right' people or in the 'right' places (Berger and Ward, 2010). These observations will be reviewed in the next section.

3.3.2 Self-presentation and the role of engagement

As was pointed out in the previous section, self-presentation on social media has changed how individuals communicate with others. It is now known that, to conduct self-presentation online, individuals not only present their ideal images by telling useful information (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012) but they also embrace objects with which they wish to connect to communicate their ideal selves to others through, for example, brand related behaviour online (Belk, 2013). Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) argue that individuals use brands as subtle cues to present their 'selves' by letting the brand communicate those 'selves' to others.

Self-presentation on social media, therefore, can be conducted when individuals put effort into forging reference relationships with focal objects such as brands, products and organisations to form associations (Schau and Gilly, 2003). This can be exhibited by a wide range of strategies. For example, people engage with the World Health Organization (WHO) – an organisation universally evaluated as positive – to convince both themselves and others that they care about other people (Fiske et al., 2002). Alternatively, engaging with 'luxury brands' gives individuals

sophisticated images and/or reminds them that they are wealthy enough to afford such luxuries (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). Moreover, the characteristics of posts themselves influence how individuals engage with them and present themselves. For example, emotion laden posts tend to be used for self-presentation as responding to them requires greater effort and allows individuals to present their empathy (Mayshak, 2017). Linguistic choices within posts also matter for self-presentation as the language of posts that individuals engage with can be the reflection of individuals (Labrecque, Swani and Stephen, 2020)

These object associations allow people to present their ideal selves in a number of ways, subject to their own needs. While some present themselves to get along with others, some do so to differentiate their 'selves' from others (Berger and Heath, 2007; Escalas and Bettman, 2005). For example, one might engage with an unpopular opinion regardless of its being incongruent with the majority because they believe this presents a positive image of themselves as an opinion leader or someone who is concern about public issues (Liu, Rui and Cui, 2017). However, once their needs are fulfilled, they tend to stop using objects (i.e., products) for self-presentation activities within a similar domain to the identity that has already been communicated (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019).

Social media offers multiple mechanisms for carrying out self-presentation. Individuals take part in these social interactions with objects such as brands and products through liking, commenting on and sharing brand- or product- related content (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran and Shahar, 2016). These social media functions have been used to emphasise engagement activities with focal objects (Creevey, Kidney and Mehta, 2019; Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014). However, self-presentation motivation also affect choices of engagement; commenting and sharing content are actions that have been found to be more driven by self-presentation rather than liking content is (Swani and Labrecque, 2020). A possible explanation could be that commenting and sharing allow an individual to express their thoughts on a topic, serving as a display of the individual's knowledge (Labrecque, Swani and Stephen, 2020). This reflects the fact that individuals play active roles in engaging with brands and products online

(Harmeling et al., 2017; Kozinets et al., 2010). Therefore, self-presentation does not limit them to a passive role, such as brand or product consumption.

On the other hand, individuals also scroll through their Facebook feeds and observe others' activities (Wright, White and Obst, 2018). In this way, they are largely exposed to contents that contributes to others' self-presentations aimed at individual engagement (Steinbekk et al., 2021). Content may not only be shared by friends within an individual's network, but also by public figures and organisations. For example, athletes use a range of self-presentation tactics on social media by selectively presenting content, such as their performances, to emphasise good aspects of themselves and drive engagement with their account (Doyle, Su and Kunkel, 2020). FTSE 100 companies also use social media to disclose positive information, specifically posts about their improving earnings, in order to encourage stakeholder engagement (Yang and Liu, 2017). These activities instantly appear in the individuals' newsfeed, which has an interactive role and is seen by other people in their networks.

Most studies have not treated the 'self' in relation to engagement with focal object (i.e., brands and products) in much detail, and, thus, research on these subjects has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons. For example, among the early studies, Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg (2009) focus on individuals' tendencies to include important brands as part of their self-concepts. Brodie et al. (2011) treat self–brand connections as relational constructs to engagement, which have the potential to be consequences in an interactive relationship. Wallace, Buil and Chernatony (2014) have discovered that self-expression is one of the key motivations for liking and commenting on a brand's Facebook content. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) discuss how individuals intentionally link themselves to brands on Facebook to manage and create identities by expressing cues (i.e., likes) to reflect their selves. This falls in line with other studies, which suggest that individuals engage with products to signal their identities (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019; Xu and Liu, 2019).

Even fewer studies have attempted to illustrate the presentation of the ideal self through certain phenomena, which appear to share some qualities related to engagement with focal object (i.e., brands and products). For example, Pasternak,

Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2017) highlight how individuals use eWOM with brand related content to reflect their self-presentations. Presi, Maehle and Kleppe (2016) illustrate a 'brand selfie' by posting photos that show expressive consumption activities related to brands. This can include a person, product/brand logo, surroundings and technology. The explicit brand logo shows brand associations, while brand logos have the benefit of increasing exposure to conspicuous displays, which is a costly signalling to others. Although it is not a requirement, to increase the visibility of brand logos, individuals can emphasise them by tagging those brands online in the photo, which creates a form of engagement with the focal object. Arvidson and Caliandro (2016) use the term 'brand public' to explain that consumers use social media devices (i.e., hashtags on Twitter) to publicise their self-presentations; in this case, they examine the '#LouisVuitton' hashtag. Individuals believe that such association helps them better present their identities. As tagging is one way individuals can engage with a focal object, these examples illustrate that self-presentation can be a part of engagement activities with focal objects, such as brands, in online social media.

These online activities represent the implicit self-presentation cues individuals give by selectively associating their selves with certain objects. This is accomplished through associated activities, which are intended to implicitly tell a desired statement, enabling other people to make many interpretations (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008). However, it is possible that individuals will develop online associations with particular object for the purpose of self-presentation, despite never actually owning or consuming these objects (Sekhon et al., 2015; Kumar and Nayak, 2019). For example, research has found social media actions that occur prior to purchase (e.g., posting about products that are relevant to communicating the self without ownership) (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). Moreover, engaging with posts dishonestly has also been observed. Dishonest engagement might include 'liking causes that you don't contribute to', 'liking causes that you don't understand', 'liking musicians you don't listen to', 'liking sport teams you don't follow', 'liking brands you don't buy', or 'sharing a post you're not interested in' (Wright, White and Obst, 2018; p. 11-12).

In the past, critics have questioned the ability of these virtual counterparts in that they may be seen as synthetic and less valuable than physical activities (Siddiqui and Turley, 2006). More arguments against this, however, have been summarised by Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012), who assert that online activities are widely considered a more powerful and influential source of communication than offline activities, as individuals appear to be driven through self-presentation in public settings (i.e., social media) to manage the impressions they make on others through their acts of association. Research shows that people are likely to engage even more with focal objects if they know that their activities are observed by others (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit, 2016b), and people's reactions could also affect (and cause individuals to adapt) engagement behaviour (Orsingher and Wirtz, 2018; Wirtz, Orsingher and Cho, 2019). However, the need to impress others disappears when the focal object is privately consumed (Graeff, 1996).

Thus far, this section has argued that self-presentation, with the help of object associations on social media, allows individuals to portray their ideal selves to others in various ways (i.e., engagement) regardless of actual ownership and/or consumption. This practice is perceived to be effective at letting other people make desired suppositions about the individual's conduct (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit, 2016b; Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012).

3.4 Chapter conclusion

The main goal of the current chapter was to ground the 'self' literature to support understandings regarding various factors of the 'self' to which individuals are exposed prior to their actions. The review suggests that the self-concept consists of multiple selves; however, in this chapter, the review of the 'self' literature positions the ideal self as a particularly important facet. Although individuals' ideal selves may conflict with reality, social media platforms have been found to support individuals in expressing their ideal selves online. This is possibly due to the lack of physical interactions and weak ties engendered by social media. Based on this, individuals conduct online self-presentations to illustrate their ideal selves to other

people. To accomplish this, individuals also use their online brand associations to help create desired images to present to others. This can be achieved via engagement (i.e., likes, shares and posts), as expressed in Chapter 2. At this point, it seems possible that the brands with which individuals associate online could be used as only one part of their self-presentations. In summary, it was important to understand how social media affects individuals' selves differently and how this could change their manner of online behaviour in numerous ways.

Therefore, this explanation adds a new perception of engagement (reviewed in Chapter 2) alternative to the prevailing perspective that engagement represents individuals' genuine acts (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Individuals' motivations to engage with brands may not be genuine. If the main reason for engagement is self-presentation, this casts doubt on the degree of authenticity. At present, this appears to be an emerging area within the field of study, to the extent that engagement relates to the self. Chapter 4, thus, reviews the combination of these concepts (Chapter 4).

Chapter 4 : Conceptual Development

Chapters 2 and 3 in this thesis have considered the literature on engagement and the self, respectively. These distinct concepts are underlined by different ideas; therefore, considering them together raises important questions. This demonstrates another potential area for examining the relevance of engagement in consideration of the self. Engagement is always perceived as authentic, while self-presentation is often regarded inauthentic. This combination could suggest an alternative perspective, which may happen in engagement, apart from the existing, well-understood paradigm based on genuine behaviour (often assumed in the literature). As the preceding chapters have defined the subject's promising interest, this chapter will now move on to reviewing the revealed concepts as follows.

Most engagement research has investigated the consumer as a predominant subject (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). This shows that most of the existing literature focuses on engagement as an activity performed by those who have a strong relationship to a focal object. The illustration of this relationship is not limited to consumer purchases or consumption, but, within the environment of technology, it has progressed to the voicing of opinions and contributions to a focal firm (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). This can also be seen through engagement antecedents, stemming from pre-existing relationships. Previous research has identified key antecedents of engagement in the nomological network, including involvement, participation, trust, loyalty, commitment and satisfaction (Brodie et al., 2011). All these are considered to be the essence of strong relationships that promote engagement as it has commonly been understood, because consumers often engage with focal objects (i.e., brands) when they feel connected to them (Brodie et al., 2011). These activities reflect genuine behaviour, which leads them, voluntarily, to contribute their resources beyond normal transactions (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

As such, the genuineness found within engagement also reflects through engagement dispositions, which suggests individuals' willingness and tendency to

engage by contributing resources (e.g., time, energy and effort) toward focal actors (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). However, a strong disposition to engage can also be found in other individuals who develop particular views regarding the focal object − not limited to consumers. This is especially true in the social media context, which, as an engagement platform, facilitates connectedness (Brodie et al., 2019). Thus, recent scholars suggest considering more actors in engagement (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019), and a disposition is considered a central condition for engagement (Storbacka et al., 2016). Therefore, with respect to the current assumptions concerning engagement, it appears that strong relationships and strong dispositions between individuals and focal objects are essential (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Storbacka et al., 2016; Brodie et al., 2019).

This thesis looks at engagement through relationship and disposition as these are two important constructs within engagement that are often the focus of engagement studies (Brodie et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2010; Kumar and Pansari, 2016). Previous studies have discussed engagement as a concept emerging from relationship marketing, in which robust relationships progresses to engagement (Kumar et al., 2010; Kumar and Pansari, 2016). Moreover, the number of engagement antecedents that are well understood in the literature are also based on a pre-existing relationship with the focal object. Disposition also plays a significant role in the definition of engagement provided by Brodie et al. (2019): 'a dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actor's dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system' (p.11). This reflects the importance of an individual's disposition, i.e., state of willingness and tendency to 'do' something (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). Brodie et al. (2019) also suggest looking at engagement through the lens of 'disposition' as disposition can be applied to any actors, including non-humans. This supports the notion that these two constructs, relationship and disposition, are of importance.

While displays of strong relationships and dispositions tend to be perceived as prerequisites to engagement, as the extant view of engagement expresses, if they are not, in fact, true, Figure 4.1 shows that engagement could potentially reflect a

different level of relationship and disposition toward focal objects. Combining these concepts allows this thesis to incorporate the two dominant views of engagement in the literature.
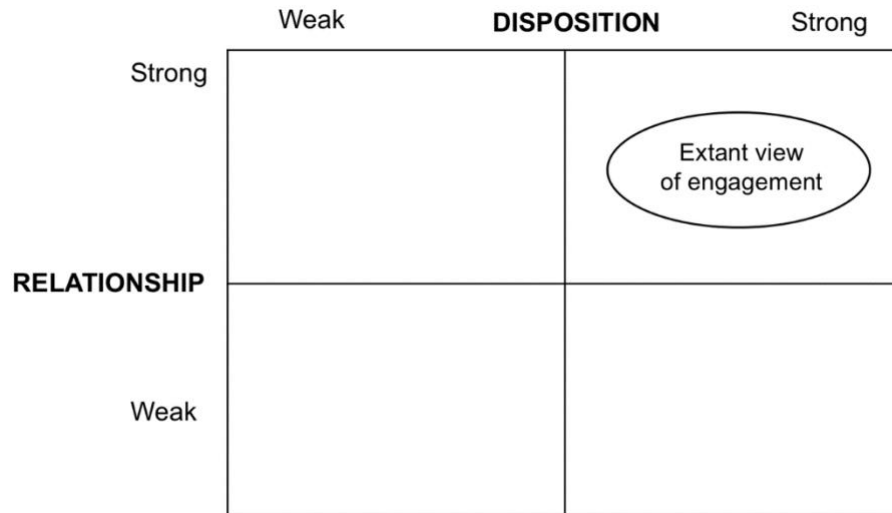
Figure 4.1: Relationship and disposition in engagement

Engagement with a focal object can be undertaken by individuals who do not actually buy the product and/or do not have any particular views regarding it. For instance, those who are non-paying consumers (Groeger, Moroko and Hollebeek, 2016), are engaging for brand selfie (Presi, Maehle and Kleppe, 2016) and/or are part of the brand public (Arvidson and Caliandro, 2016) can be actors with various relationships and dispositions toward the focal object. Such engagement could possibly occur pre-purchase; thus, a relationship may be lacking. Moreover, Fehrer et al. (2018) suggest that engagement behaviour may even occur prior to engagement disposition. Thus, the scope of considering relationships within engagement should be broaden; individuals may engage, not because of their relationships to the focal object, but because their relationships to other actors in their networks influence them (Fehrer et al., 2018). This could reflect an even weaker relationship and/or disposition toward the focal object.

Such activity, however, could manifest as engagement that appears genuine and seems to express a strong relationship and disposition toward the focal object. It is, therefore, questionable whether engagement, lacking a relationship and/or

disposition, is always driven by genuine behaviour. A possible explanation may be that, when individuals do not develop a sufficient relationship with the focal object, it is difficult for them to possess those relational constructs (well understood from the conceptual basis) as their antecedents for engagement. This absence should make researchers reconsider what they know about engagement. Alternatives motivations could be applicable, and, thus, it is feasible that such engagement, with different properties, might occur for a number of less obvious reasons.

This rather complex perspective might stem from the relationship between engagement and an individual's ideal self. They may use engagement to project their ideal selves to others through the self-presentation process. This can be accomplished by developing social media links with the brands they believe to have the qualities necessary for presenting their ideal selves (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). To this extent, the components of the self-presentation process reflect the antithesis of authentic behaviour because self-presentation is adjusted to reflect a more desirable aspect of the 'self' to the audience (Wood et al., 2008). Thus, what is reflected may be neither genuine nor original. This alternative mode of engagement challenges the existing body of theory, which narrowly predicts engagement to be based on individuals' genuine acts, resulting in long-term engagement with a brand (Brodie et al., 2011; Harmeling et al., 2017).

The problematic issue of engagement and the 'self' has led this thesis to more deeply examine the complex relationship between individuals' selves (i.e., the ideal self) and engagement. Studies investigating this relationship are considerably fewer in number compared to research examining other areas in the engagement field. Additionally, no study has ever considered the level of genuine association in these engagement activities. Engagement activities with a focal object on social media should not necessarily be assumed to reflect 'genuine engagement'. On the other hand, some actors tend to perceive engagement as reflecting genuine behaviour, and, therefore, this may have impact on both observers and the focal firm involved (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). A person's engagement, which is unconnected to his or her genuine behaviour with a focal object, can be both enduring and valuable when others believe in that person's level of engagement with the focal object and

are subsequently affected by this perception. This thesis, therefore, investigates this emerging area by exploring how engagement can be affected by individuals' ideal selves and the effect on others.

Chapter 5 : Research Methodology

Previous chapters have presented the current literature on this subject, combining the distinct concepts of 'engagement' and the 'self', resulting in a different perspective on engagement, which the thesis will research. This chapter clarifies the methodology used to fully answer the research question.

First, Chapter 5 opens with a discussion of the research philosophy (Section 5.1) to provide a background for understanding the later discussion surrounding the research paradigm and to justify and ground the philosophical position for this thesis (5.1.1). This leads to a discussion of how the research belongs under the umbrella of the interpretivist paradigm (5.1.2). This philosophical stance provides the foundation for an exploratory qualitative method (Section 5.2). Therefore, to meet the specific requirements of the research, semi-structured interview techniques are established to gain rich data (5.2.1), and an explanation of the research instrument guiding the interviews is also provided (5.2.2). Lastly, the various steps involved in the decision-making process are elaborated, including participant sampling, site selection, ethical considerations, interview procedures and data analysis method (Section 5.3). Chapter 5 then closes with a brief conclusion (Section 5.4).

5.1 Research philosophy

Within any research, philosophical thinking about the nature and development of knowledge is a key guide (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Research philosophy reflects each researcher's worldview and influences how the research is developed, which methods are selected and how findings are interpreted to generate convincing outcomes (Crotty, 1998; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As all studies are influenced by its underlying research philosophy, researchers must have a good background understanding of philosophical ideas to develop appropriate research designs (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). Identifying the researcher's philosophical position ensures that the study design will be effective, that a clear framework will be declared and that the researcher has considered other possible designs, which might otherwise have been neglected (Carson et al., 2001; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). To evaluate research, it is necessary to

consider it from a worldview consisting of philosophical assumptions generated through the concepts of *ontology*, *epistemology* and *methodology* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In this thesis, the term 'paradigm' will be used to represent a way of investigating these philosophical assumptions.

According to Barron (2006), *ontology* is 'a concept concerned with the existence of, and relationship between, different aspects of society, such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures' (p.202). Hence, ontology (reality) concerns the nature and form of reality towards a philosophical assumption (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), which is the starting point of research that prepares a foundation for further assumptions. It refers to the researcher's worldview concerning what can be known about reality and the world. In contrast with science's scope of research, which usually follows one traditional approach, research in the social sciences involves wider philosophical debates for outlining and explaining reality. Therefore, one question that must be asked is whether reality can be evaluated objectively – in which case the researcher would need to be independent from that reality, allowing the truth to exist in a consistent way, regardless of who the researcher is – or subjectively – in which case knowledge is socially constructed and dependent on the researcher's perceptions, with the truth shifting according to the researcher's interpretations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Each of these ontological perspectives influences *epistemology*, which is the knowledge individuals believe can be learnt about the world and what constitutes acceptable knowledge and general assumptions in a field of study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). As epistemology is concerned with how individuals understand reality in the world, it also impacts *methodology*, which Sarantakos (2005, p. 30) defines as 'a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted' (p.30). Methodology, therefore, refers to the techniques researchers use to acquire knowledge.

Perhaps the belief that there is a set of things available to be known, combined with how people can pursue knowing those things, as expressed in each paradigm, is what opens the key debates between philosophical positions in social science research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This accords with Guba (1990), who argues that 'each paradigm cannot be proven or disproven in any foundational sense; if that were possible there would be no doubt about how to practice inquiry' (p.18). Hence, one paradigm cannot be pronounced 'better' than the others, since they all reflect responses to different interests. This is highly subjective – based on the view that different research projects require an extensive variety of research

designs (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). Drawing upon this, research paradigms are discussed in the following section to justify the current author's rationale for choosing the approach that appropriately reflects the needs of this research – the interpretivist paradigm.

5.1.1 Research paradigms

Paradigms represent sets of beliefs, which consist of different philosophical assumptions about *epistemology*, *ontology* and *methodology*, as introduced in the previous section (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Harre (1987) defines the paradigm as 'a combination of metaphysical theory about the nature of the objects in a certain field of interest and a consequential method which is tailor-made to acquire knowledge of these objects' (p.3). This section discusses research paradigms on a continuum of opposing extremities. The most widely discussed paradigms in social science are divided into two schools of thought – positivism and interpretivism – which reflect the contrasting worldviews of objectivism and subjectivism (Malhotra and Birks, 2003) (Table 5.1).

The positivist school of thought has gained popularity over the years (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This perspective assumes that a single, objective reality can only be learnt by value-free reflection through highly-structured, observable phenomena, such as quantitative methods using statistics to generate credible data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Accordingly, the deductive research approach is embraced, so the conclusion results from a set of true premises, which positivists seek to explain relationships between constructs and test theories to verify the truth. The positivist remains distant from the research phenomenon to remove his or her influence over the data, thus believing that the outcome of the research is a bias-free and 'law-like' generalisation (Weber, 2004). However, positivism is only appropriate for particular fields of research – usually those which seek to validate or test existing theories or hypotheses. One major drawback of positivism is that, when the nature of the research becomes complex or the area under research starts to lack predefined theories, it fails to generate rich insights into the observed phenomenon to discover new conclusions. Rather, this requires an exploratory approach with subjective meanings.

In opposition to the dominance of positivism, interpretivism focuses on the notion that the world is too complex to make single statements of truth and that there is, thus, no absolute truth (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Schwandt (2003) distinguishes interpretivism from positivism as understanding and explanation, respectively. Under this paradigm, there are multiple realities, for which a probable explanation may be

that these multiple realities exist as a result of the level of informed knowledge and subjective meanings (Carson et al., 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Interpretivists believe that context-free data cannot exist alongside predictive, causal relationships and yield rich insights into the studied phenomena. As a result, the interpretivist researcher is always part of the research process, tending to favour an inductive approach using qualitative assessment to interpret reality. A conclusion is developed after gathering data, which allows knowledge to be expanded. Within the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher could influence the research interpretation, and reality is considering subjective, according to social construction, and dependent on the nature of human interactions (Weber, 2004).

Having discussed the orientations associated with each paradigm, this thesis adopts the view that the meanings of individuals' selves and their activities, such as engagement, are socially negotiated. They are, therefore, not fairly imprinted on individuals but are, rather, formed through environments, experiences and goals, which vary from person to person. Hence, knowledge cannot be formed without interpretation. As the researcher must understand the philosophical positions of the paradigm adopted in this study, the following section discusses the interpretivism paradigm, which has been chosen as the main research philosophy for this thesis.

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontology		
Nature of 'being'/nature of the world	Direct access to real world	No direct access to real world
Reality	Single external reality	No single external reality
Epistemology		
'Grounds' of knowledge/relationship between reality and research	Possible to obtain hard, secure, objective knowledge	Understand through 'perceived' knowledge
	Research focuses on generalisation and abstraction	Research focuses on the specific and concrete
	Thoughts governed by hypotheses and stated theories	Seeks to understand a specific context
Methodology		
Focus of research	Description and explanation	Understanding and interpretation
Role of researcher	Detached, external observer	Experience what they are studying
	Clear distinction between reason and feeling	Allow feelings and reason to govern actions
	Aim to discover external reality rather than creating the object of study	Partially create what is studied, the meaning of the phenomena
	Strive to use rational, consistent, verbal, logical approach	Consider using pre-understanding to be important
	Seek to maintain clear distinction between facts and value judgements	Distinction between facts and value judgements less clear
	Distinction between science and personal experience	Accept influence from both science and personal experience
Techniques used by researcher	Predominately formalised statistical and mathematical methods	Primarily non-quantitative

Table 5.1: Positivism vs Interpretivism (Carson et al., 2001; p.6)

5.1.2 Paradigm adopted in this study

After considering the range of philosophical stances, it is the researcher's responsibility to justify a suitable choice for his or her study. In line with the research aim and objectives, the stance driving this study is interpretivism.

To clarify, this thesis aims to _explore how engagement can be affected by an individual's ideal selves and the effect on others._ The literature review chapters have discovered that, in the extant research, little emphasis is given to integrating the concepts of engagement and the 'self', which has resulted in a number of research gaps for this thesis to

address. Further research is needed to provide a better understanding of this field. This research, therefore, must explore the viewpoints of individuals who have engaged with focal objects on social media in relation to their selves, as well as the impacts of those engagements.

The reasoning for adopting interpretivism is further supported by the nature of the research objectives. The first research objective is *to explore the role and impact of the ideal self on actor engagement in online social media*. It is normally assumed that engagement reflects genuine behaviour (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019), which can be seen by the key antecedents found in the literature, such as trust, satisfaction and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). However, there seems to be a lack of understanding regarding the alternative drivers of engagement. Based on this, it is possible, however, to consider the role and impact of the ideal self on engagement. Individuals may engage to present their ideal selves. This thesis, therefore, investigates an alternative antecedent to the engagement literature, as well as different properties of the relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects in engagement activities.

In addition, the second research objective is *to understand how the self-presentation (via engagement activities) of others can influence individuals and other actors*. Displays of self-presentation (via engagement activities) could have an influential, mobilising effect on others' attitudes and behaviours toward the focal object (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). However, the existing literature does not sufficiently explain how this impact takes place when such engagement may be subject to self-presentation. A more conclusive understanding of the impact of engagement has, therefore, become necessary.

Lastly, based on the outcomes of first two objectives, it is critical to consider organisations' perspectives on this topic. Hence, the third research objective is *to investigate whether and to what extent firms are aware of engagement for self-presentation*. Firms are increasingly developing 'engagement marketing', which relies on engagement as a source of knowledge for marketing decisions (Harmeling et al., 2017). It is essential to explore how far companies understand that the engagement they count on could be inauthentic and how they handle such engagement.

This research deals with phenomena involving the formation of perceptions and beliefs toward individuals (which can be subject to individual meanings) alongside the derived practice engagement activities (which are complex, intentionally formed and shaped

by individual goals and experiences). An exploratory understanding of these phenomena is necessary. The present research can, therefore, fall logically into the interpretivism approach, as it explores subjective meaning and because self-presentation of the 'ideal self' via engagement activities requires interpretation. To examine these issues in a way that further contributes to both theory and practice, the researcher must 'enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007, p.116). However, the use of interpretivism does not preclude the researcher from engaging with theory and identifying concepts to explore in the thesis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Although a degree of priori knowledge about the topic under investigation exists, the interpretive approach is beneficial as researcher is able to adapt the approach accordingly to the dynamics of the situations (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). For example, it is common in qualitative research for data to be collected, coded and subsequently categorised using concepts from the literatures.

Thus, interpretivism, which allows the researcher to interpret the results and fully answer the research questions by generating rich, in-depth knowledge, seems to be the most appropriate philosophy for this study. The research design offered by an interpretivist position will allow the study to most fully explore the investigated phenomena. Therefore, the present research design is discussed in the following section, as is the rationale behind the selected design.

5.2 Research design

Although both qualitative and quantitative methods can be appropriately used with any research paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), the assumptions made within the paradigm influence the overall research process, including research design and methodology selection (Sarantakos, 2005). This section justifies the research approach adopted by this thesis.

As highlighted by the adopted research philosophy, which holds that reality is multiple and subjective, interpretivism is closely related to qualitative methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). When qualitative methods are employed in a research design, this means that the author has found the domain to be complex and that the available theories have not sufficiently explained the examined phenomenon. In such cases, and when there is a lack of previous literature on the topic, the qualitative approach is recommended (Carson et al.,

2001). This method is also used when a researcher seeks to answer an inquiry by retrieving perceptions about phenomena from participants' viewpoints and subsequently understanding these viewpoints. Belk, Fischer and Kozinets (2013) also suggest that qualitative research 'provides unique insights into how consumers, marketers, and markets behave, and into why they behave as they do' (p.5).

Since conclusions are derived after data collection and analysis are completed (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), and because the qualitative method is open-ended with responses not being pre-determined, the research process can be adjusted and refined according to the situation or participant feedback or to proceed further when richer insights are needed (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). These primary advantages render the qualitative method attractive. Researchers are required to observe and interpret what is happening to provide powerful understandings and enable the exploration of new knowledge and insights regarding complex phenomena. Therefore, this thesis conducts a two-phase qualitative research study (Figure 5.1), and the second phase was designed after the first phase was completed to explore further essential insights and answer necessary questions.
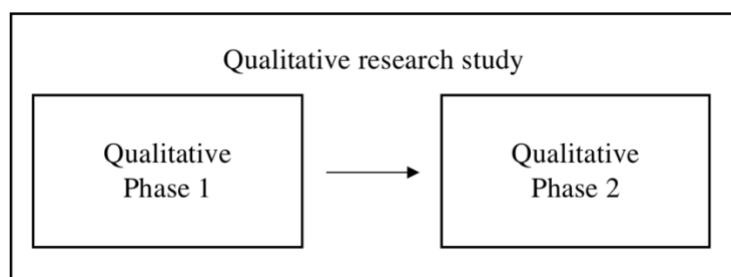
Figure 5.1: Research design

Having defined the appropriateness of the qualitative method to this research, the following presents a detailed account of the chosen qualitative components and techniques that are most applicable to the research questions.

5.2.1 Two-phase qualitative design: The semi-structured interview

This section justifies the research technique utilized in this thesis. While interviews were the primary tool used in this thesis, other techniques can be used to acquire data qualitatively, such as observations, documents and netnography (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Kozinets, 2010). These techniques reflect different research concern. Netnography has received considerable interests for use in online contexts as it explores and interprets the decisions behind the actions of groups under investigation by using publicly viewable online

contents that individuals post about focal objects (i.e., online reviews) (Azer and Alexander, 2018; Kozinets, 2010). Although, netnography has been employed in a number of engagement studies (Azer and Alexander, 2018; Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014), given the context of the present study, conducting a netnography might limit the ability of this research to interpret the insights of the participants.

This thesis is about asking people about their motivations for engagement activities (i.e., liking, commenting, sharing and posting). Thus, it involves questions regarding why individuals behave in the certain ways, why they use certain captions to express their engagement, why they choose to share some content but not the other content, and what makes them check-in at certain places. Moreover, the same focal object used by different participants in their engagement activities could hold different meaning. Therefore, interpreting the meaning of engagement with a focal object requires the engaged participants to explain their motivations. This suggests that without participants' involvement in this process, the researcher alone cannot fully interpret the meaning behind these engagements. Thus, netnography would not have been successful approach for this thesis. There is a need to personal things and engagement activities with individuals. Interviews were, therefore, selected as an effective technique for this thesis as they allow the research to explore and understand motivations behind engagement activities by encouraging participants to voice their motivations.

This thesis employs interviews to collect data from individuals, who are engaging actors, in the first phase of the study and from organisations in the second phase. The interview technique was deemed appropriate given its accordance with the research's needs and directions. Interviewing is an effective technique for gaining in-depth understandings of participant behaviour and new research data, due to the freedom of expression given to interviewees (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013; Yin, 2009). However, the depth of the retrieved data differs according to the chosen interview form (Punch, 2005).

There are three types of interviews, ranging on a continuum from entirely unstructured, to semi-structured to fully structured (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Unstructured interviews are the richest data sources, as they allow interviewees to talk freely about their own opinions on the subject. However, this type of interview is not easy to conduct due to the free flow of information, and it is less easy to draw comparisons from such interviews. Conversations could easily take wrong or irrelevant directions. On the other hand, fully structured interviews seem to be the least effective for generating rich data as they are

conducted using the same set of questions for each interviewee, without the option to adapt questions based on previous interviews or to advance discussion to follow up on other relevant topics. This lack of flexibility could restrict a researcher's exploration, preventing it from gaining rich data and creating too great a resemblance to survey methods (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Malhotra, 2010).

This thesis, therefore, uses semi-structured interviews, as they involve loosely structured, open-ended questions – allowing for some flexibility, evolution and modification, while maintaining data comparability (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The semi-structured interview remains a powerful tool for analysing participants' views in-depth. For example, during a semi-structured interview, the researcher can adjust and add questions immediately if the participant's responses are failing to answer the point or to encourage the participant to reach further into a subject (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). During this process, the research can, not only understand the participant's perceptions, but also draw inferences from the interviewee's body language, intonation and mood (Bradley, 2013). Such observational data can be valuable for supporting the research findings. The semi-structured interview is the most widely-used technique, and, for the above reasons, it has been employed in this thesis.

Interviews vary according to setting – for example, face-to-face or via telephone (Bradley, 2013; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Hoping to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' perceptions, this thesis used both face-to-face and telephone interviews. Conducting face-to-face interviews has been confirmed as important by a wide range of researchers, including Given (2008), who claims that physical interactions with interviewees face-to-face creates connections, which better facilitate discussions. In addition, for the practical reason of convenience and to overcome distance and timing issues – which are well-known hindrances to interview studies (Bradley, 2013; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004) – telephone interviews were also employed in the second phase of the research to increase the availability of data. Miller (1995) suggests that 'telephone interviews are not better or worse than those conducted face-to-face' (p.37). Thus, the current researcher believes telephone interviews to be an acceptable and valuable data collection method (Sobin et al., 1993).

Interview processes also vary by number of interviewees, ranging from individuals to group interviews, or a mixture of both (Bradley, 2013). For this thesis, the interviews took place with one individual interviewee at a time. This was deemed most appropriate to allow for maximum interaction between researcher and interviewee. This can be illustrated through the first phase of the study, in which interviewees were asked questions about their

engagement activities as displayed on their Facebook profiles. Individual interviews offered the interviewees greater comfort to discuss such issues, which they might not have wanted to say out loud in front of many people. In the second phase of the study, interviews took place with organisations, and it would have been both inappropriate and inconvenient for other organisations to be present. Conducting interviews with one individual at a time allows the interviewees to become the centre of attention and can eliminate group pressure (Wilson, 2012); hence, it is appropriate when there is a sensitive issue to be discussed. When interviews are restricted to one participant at a time, interviewees may feel more comfortable in voicing their opinions than they would in a group interview setting.

Thus, this section has explained the reasons why this thesis employs one-on-one, face-to-face and telephone, semi-structured interviews. Section 5.2.2 moves on to consider the research processes involved during data collection.

5.2.2 Research instrument

To make sure that the research questions are answered fully and effectively, interview protocols for the first (Appendix 1) and second phases (Appendix 2) of the study were developed as research instruments to list all the topics to be addressed during the interviews and to help data collection and analysis run smoothly. The interview protocol for this research was developed according to guidelines (Gillham, 2005) that follow a funnel approach, suggesting that interviews begin by exploring broader issues and continue to address increasingly specific aspects of the research (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003). During the interview protocol design, the research aim and objectives were intermittently revisited to ensure that all topics in question were adequately covered.

Questions were posed in a way that allowed participants to talk as much as possible, with open-ended questions added to drive detailed and in-depth discussions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Verbal probes were also used to enable flow and to gain richer interview data. The use of non-verbal gestures was also elaborated, such as short pauses and expressions of interest, and space was given to allow participants to mention any further areas of interest that might be useful (Carson et al., 2001; Corbetta, 2003). Interview questions were also read and edited many times to make sure that the language maintained a neutral, jargon-free fashion, helping participants easily understand the questions and discussions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

In the study's first phase, instead of using the term 'ideal self', the researcher referred to 'who you would like to be'. In the second phase, 'inauthentic engagement' was substituted with 'engagement that could result from different relationships and dispositions toward a focal firm'. Questions were ordered in a way that would produce a natural conversation, beginning with general questions relating to individuals' everyday activities and time spent on Facebook (first phase) or companies' general thoughts regarding their engagement activities in online social media (second phase). Such questions were designed to ease participants into talking about themselves, which has been found to be necessary before moving to more thought-provoking and personal questions (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003).

Pilot studies were undertaken to test the validity of the interview questions, determining whether they were clear and easy to understand, ensuring the collection of relevant and comparable data (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This also allowed the researcher to ensure that she was able to lead the interviews smoothly and effectively. Two pilot studies, with social media users who had recent records of engagement activities, were conducted for the first data collection phase, and one pilot study with an organisation that regularly posts on social media was conducted in the second data collection phase. The pilot studies proved effective, so no changes were made; and the real interviews were subsequently conducted. Each of the interviews followed roughly the same format. Throughout the entire interview, the researcher made an effort to help interviewees feel conversational and to ensure that they were comfortable with the interview structure (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013; Shankar, Elliot and Goulding, 2001).

5.3 Data collection

This section discusses how data collection was conducted in each research phase. There were various points to consider, including participant selection, site selection, ethical considerations, interview procedures and data analysis approach.

5.3.1 Participant selection

When selecting participants to be interviewed for a research study, it is generally necessary to recruit participants who have relevant experience with the phenomenon under examination. To do this, a sampling method of selection can be used to narrow the pool of

potential participants. Sampling can be divided into probability and non-probability types (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Sampling method selection may be influenced by research objectives, targeted participants and data collection. In general, samples in qualitative studies tend to represent non-probability sampling (e.g., convenience, snowball, quota or purposive sampling), as these types involves collecting data from various perspectives and viewpoints on a given phenomenon (Given, 2008; Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). A qualitative study has no rules as to sample size. The sample does not need to be as large as in a quantitative study to guarantee credibility. However, the sample does have to be large enough to reach saturation –the point at which answers become repetitive and reveal no new data for the researcher to investigate (Bradley, 2013; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006).

The sampling approach adopted in this thesis was, therefore, non-probability sampling, and both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to target particular groups of people who meet the research criteria (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling was chosen for this research because the targeted participants understood the central phenomenon of the study, and this rendered them more informative (Neuman, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Snowball sampling is also well accepted in qualitative research when participant recruitment becomes difficult; it is accomplished by asking participants to recommend future participants for the research (Bryman, 2008; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

The first phase of the research study

In the first phase, the targeted participants were regular Facebook users, who had recent records of engagement activities with focal objects. As this focus was quite broad, it was necessary to determine a particular participant group from a large potential sample. Purposive sampling was, therefore, employed, focusing on Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 34. This age range was selected following the guidance of statistical evidence, which illustrates that the main active Facebook users are between 18 and 34 years old. This age group accounted for more than 50% of all Facebook users in 2018 (Statista, 2018b).

The sample for the first phase was gathered via online Facebook groups. The researcher asked group administrators for permission to post in their groups to recruit

participants for the interviews. However, it was found that group posts tended to reach only a proportion of the group members and remained unread by many. Another difficulty of recruiting participants through Facebook groups was that individuals tended to share similar backgrounds with their contacts. Members in the same group often share commonalities, such as interests, demographics and education. Thus, the sample contained a disproportionate number of people from Thailand because recruitment was conducted within the same Facebook groups.

Therefore, at a later stage, snowball sampling was employed, and the recruitment was supplemented by asking participants to refer other potential participants to enable a larger sample and capture diverse nationalities. Accordingly, the research included participants from the United Kingdom, Eastern and Western Europe, North America, India and New Zealand. There is also evidence to suggest that some countries represented in the sample rank among the top ten countries in the world for their numbers of Facebook users – including India, the United States, Mexico, Thailand and the United Kingdom (Statista, 2018c). This is a strong illustration of the rich data the sample has provided, as participants were highly involved users.

In interviewing these participants, the researcher expected to uncover insights into the reasoning behind their ideal selves (which impact their engagement activities) as well as into how they are potentially impacted by the social media engagement activities of others. The researcher succeeded in obtaining 30 participants (Table 5.2). At the 30-participant point, the researcher found that no new themes were emerging from the interviews, and, thus, data saturation had been reached.

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of origin
Participant 1	Female	25	Thailand
Participant 2	Female	26	Thailand
Participant 3	Male	25	Thailand
Participant 4	Male	24	Thailand
Participant 5	Female	32	Thailand
Participant 6	Male	27	Thailand
Participant 7	Male	24	Thailand
Participant 8	Male	28	Thailand
Participant 9	Male	34	Thailand
Participant 10	Male	24	Thailand
Participant 11	Female	31	Thailand
Participant 12	Male	27	Thailand
Participant 13	Female	25	Thailand
Participant 14	Male	28	Thailand
Participant 15	Male	27	Thailand
Participant 16	Female	29	Thailand
Participant 17	Female	23	Thailand
Participant 18	Female	27	Thailand
Participant 19	Female	28	United Kingdom
Participant 20	Male	28	Turkey
Participant 21	Male	27	Italy
Participant 22	Female	33	Greece
Participant 23	Female	34	Spain
Participant 24	Male	26	United Kingdom
Participant 25	Female	32	India
Participant 26	Female	22	United Kingdom
Participant 27	Female	19	Cyprus
Participant 28	Female	29	Mexico
Participant 29	Female	25	United States
Participant 30	Female	22	New Zealand

Table 5.2: Participants' details (first phase of the research study)

The second phase of the research study

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with organisations, which are active on social media, to gain their perspectives regarding the result of the engagements uncovered in the first phase. Only purposive sampling was employed in this phase because the sampled organisations had to belong to, or be related to, the industries mentioned by participants in the first phase. This allowed for a direct comparison of the results. Participants were contacted via LinkedIn, and, based on their roles and experiences in their organisations, participants appeared to understand engagement. Thus, they were considered qualified to comment on these issues in relation to their organisations' views. In total, seven interviews, covering six industries (Table 5.3), were found to be sufficient for understanding the results of the first phase from the organisations' perspectives.

Participant	Gender	Industry	Role	Years of experience	Participants' country of origin
Participant 1	Female	Tourism (Thailand)	Media Editor	2 years	Thailand
Participant 2	Female	Retail (Thailand)	Brand Manager	5 years	Thailand
Participant 3	Female	Food services (Thailand)	Digital Marketing Executive	1 year	Thailand
Participant 4	Male	Automobile (Thailand)	Managing Director	7 years	Thailand
Participant 5	Female	Food services (Thailand)	Marketing Manager	4 years	Thailand
Participant 6	Male	News and Media (United Kingdom)	Digital Editor	4 years	United Kingdom
Participant 7	Female	Education (United Kingdom)	Alumni Relations Officer	2 years	United Kingdom

Table 5.3: Participants' details (second phase of the research study)

5.3.2 Site selection

The context of this thesis is social media, which Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined as '…a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content' (p.61). A possible explanation for why social media is a suitable environment for engagement may be that it promotes an interactive relationship between actors in the same network – e.g., between individuals and other individuals or between individuals and focal objects, such as

brands (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Consequently, social media is a powerful tool for building relationships among a network's actors.

The first phase of the research study

After evaluating the features of different social media types – including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – Facebook was chosen as the main investigation platform for the study's first phase. In addition to the fact that Facebook is the most popular social media platform with the largest number of active users (Statista, 2018a), Facebook currently offers various functions that promote deeper engagement, through its profiles and newsfeed, than do other platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter. It seems these other platforms provide limited functions; Instagram is only linked to photo-based applications, while Twitter is designed for short texts.

Facebook's characteristics offer various benefits for this research. On Facebook, functions that promote engagement include the ability to react (i.e., 'like'), comment, share and post about a whole range of topics and focal objects. In addition, the Facebook newsfeed is a place where bonds between users and focal objects (i.e., brands) are strongly promoted. On the Facebook newsfeed, individuals can see posts from Facebook pages that they can 'like'. They can also see their friends' activities, including their friends' engagements with focal objects – some of which may differ from the observing individuals' own choices. Exposure to such a range of objects is believed to promote further engagement (Luarn, Lin and Chiu, 2015). Thus, the Facebook platform is highly interconnected, and interactivity is maximised (Dessart, 2017; Solem and Pedersen, 2016).

On this theme, Malhotra, Malhotra and See (2013) suggest that 'brands have embraced Facebook as a key marketing channel to drive engagement and brand awareness' (p.18). In 2018, Facebook had more than 80 million business pages (Hootsuite, 2018), rendering it the largest global centre for companies to build online relationships with people. Therefore, the extant literature on social media engagement shows that Facebook represents the ideal environment for examining engagement (Chauhan and Pillai, 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014).

The second phase of the research study

On the other hand, in the second phase, the social media platform focus is not limited to Facebook. Rather, any social media platform organisations preferred to discuss were included. This aspect of the study was widened to encourage organisations to comment more freely about their experiences regarding engagement activities, as different organisations may prefer different engagement platforms. Constraining the interviews to focus only on Facebook could have limited some of the insights the organisations were able to give. Still, to collect data according to the research design, the researcher must consider ethical issues, which may arise during the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The next section describes these ethical considerations.

5.3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are significant factors feeding into research success (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). The principle underlying ethical choices help protect participants from issues, such as misconduct and impropriety, in the research. Qualitative studies face a number of ethical issues due to the control the researcher has over data collection and interpretation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). However, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants' rights are protected. Thus, the plans for this thesis have been reviewed, and ethical approval has been acquired from the Ethical Committee of the Marketing Department, Strathclyde Business School. This approval was gained prior to any interviews being conducted.

The first phase of the research study

To ensure that the thesis follows the standard code of research ethics, ethical approval for the first phase was granted in July 2018. Participants were informed in advance about the research and about the format of the interviews using a participant information sheet specifically designed for the first phase (Appendix 3). Participants' Facebook profile activities framed the interview to help the researcher deeply explore the participants' perceptions of a particular topic (Figure 5.2). Participants were asked to open their Facebook profiles; then, some initial questions were raised regarding their engagement activities, and further discussion was generated about their posts. This technique gave participants a visual illustration of their engagement activities, helping them answer the researcher's questions easily and clearly, overcoming the issue of self-recall. Rich data were successfully gained this way, as participants could talk continuously and fluently about their profiles.
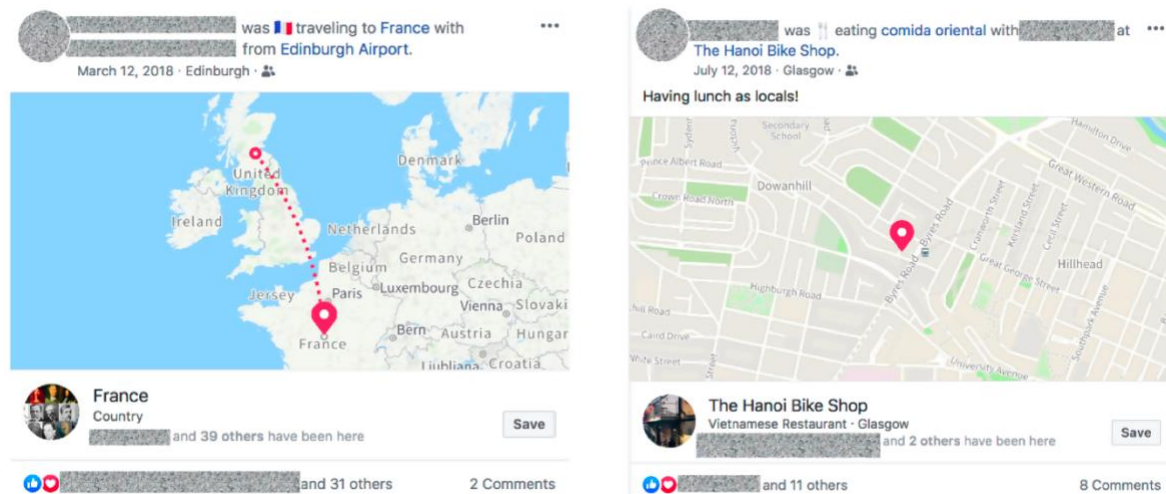
Figure 5.2: Engagement activities displayed in participants' profile

The second phase of the research study

The ethical approval for the study's second phase was acquired in July 2019. Participants were informed in advance about the research and about the format of the interviews via a participant information sheet specifically designed for the second phase (Appendix 4). The interviews involved presenting examples of quotations found in the first phase and asking participants to comment on those results in relation to their organisations. This technique allowed the participants to recall situations they may have experienced, and their comments were used to understand the results of the first phase from the organisations' perspectives.

In both the first and second phases, all participants were asked to sign a consent form to agree to the interview being recorded and to field notes being taken to capture highlights expressed by each participant. Although no vulnerable individuals, such as children, were involved, participants were offered privacy, through which they were guaranteed that the information collected would be treated anonymously and confidentially (i.e., by replacing participants' names with codes to ensure confidentiality in line with ethical guidelines) and that the data would be destroyed after the completion of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Ethical issues remained at the forefront for the entire length of the study. The researcher allowed the participants to talk freely and continually emphasised the voluntary nature of their participation, allowing them the right to withdraw at any time.

5.3.4 Interview procedure

To conduct interviews collecting relevant data from participants, it is important that the interview guides and formats are carefully studied and prepared. For this thesis, interviews were grounded in an interview protocol, which outlined the topics to be covered. Interview guidance, as developed by Gillham (2005), was also used. This guidance incorporates five phases: the preparation, initial contact, orientation, substantive and closure phases.

First, in the preparation stage, time and location arrangements were agreed upon between the researcher and the participant to ensure that these arrangements were appropriate for the interview. The researcher also made sure that interview kits (i.e., prepared questions and recording equipment) were ready to use. The researcher then moved on to the initial contact phase, which formed an introductory part of the interview, to determine whether the participants were happy with all elements of their participation, such as the interview setting and surroundings. The orientation phase then began, which gave participants the background to the research and the purpose of the interview. Explanations were given regarding how interviews would be carried out and what to expect. After ensuring that the participants understood everything clearly, the substantive phase began. This took the form of interviews typically beginning with a simple question, which was intended to open the conversation and encourage participants to talk. It also acted as an icebreaker question, allowing the conversation to encompass experiences that were familiar and comfortable to the participants. Interviews then moved on to more targeted questions to generate data for the main research.

The interview questions did not proceed linearly but were rather fluid. The researcher felt the need to move back and forth between different interview questions to allow the participants the freedom to explain themselves and to, thereby, gain fully rich data. As such, some parts of these sections were revised as conversations opened space for alternative ideas to emerge. For instance, the researcher 'probed' for more explanation from some participants to understand deeper meanings underlying observed data; this then opened new topics. In some cases, the responses of previous participants suggested it was necessary to add additional lines of probing to future interviews, encouraging a better and more thorough response. This informal pattern of questioning is an important step of semi-structured interviews, helping the talk to flow freely without the restriction of pre-set questions. Silverman (2013) confirms that the 'interviewer will have a prepared set of questions[;] but these are only used as a guide, and departures from the guidelines are not seen as a problem

but are often encouraged' (p.204). Following this stage, the interviews moved to a closure phase, in which the researcher asked participants whether there was anything else they wanted to mention or ask. Upon completion, the researcher thanked participants for their time.

These procedures were followed for every interview; however, they may have involved different details to extract rich data. Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 present examples of interviews from the first and second phases, respectively. These will be discussed below.

The first phase of the research study

In the first phase, the preparation stage involved the researcher and participants agreeing on the schedule of the interview, and the researcher reminded the participants to bring their mobile devices. Then came the initial contact phase, in which the researcher determined whether the participants were happy with every element of the interview. As one of the research objectives demanded an exploration of the impact of the ideal self on actor engagement activities in online social media, the interview questions related to the reasoning behind individuals' choices of engagement activities on their profile. Thus, the orientation phase involved clarifying the structure of the interview – asking participants to open their own Facebook profiles to discuss during the interview. In the substantive phase, simple questions, such as 'What do you normally do on Facebook?', were asked at the beginning to open the conversation. The interviews ended with the closure phase. 30 interviews were successfully conducted, ranging from 25 to 50 minutes long, with an average length of 30 minutes. This first phase of the research study was conducted between July and October 2018.

The second phase of the research study

The second phase was conducted to consider how the results of the first phase were perceived by organisations. Therefore, it involved asking organisations to comment on the data acquired from the first phase. In the preparation phase, most organisations asked for the data to be sent to them, so they could review it before the interview. Then, during the initial contact phase, because some interviews were to be conducted over the phone, network and signal issues were checked to make sure the researchers and the interviewees could hear each other. Subsequently, the orientation phase began with the researcher explaining the interview

structure – that the researcher was going to show quotations from the data and ask the participants to comment on those quotations from their organisations' perspectives. In the substantive phase, questions, such as 'Can you tell me about the online engagement activities people undertake with your company on social media?', were asked to open the conversation. The interview was completed with the closure phase. Seven interviews were successfully conducted, varying in length from 20 minutes to 40 minutes, with an average of 30 minutes. These interviewers were conducted between July and August 2019.

Thus far, this section has demonstrated the detailed procedures involved in conducting the study's interviews. As this information was being gathered, it became necessary to extract and use the data. The next section explains the steps taken to analyse the data for this research.

5.3.5 Approach to data analysis

Unlike a quantitative study, in which data analysis begins after the data collection period, qualitative research analyses data in parallel and continuous with the interviews (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013). While interviews continue to take place, transcription and data analysis begins after the first few interviews. For this thesis, preliminary notes and particular quotes that appeared relevant to the research were highlighted. The researcher read the data many times to become familiar with and make sense of the data. This allowed preliminary thoughts and interpretations to come to mind, which helped the researcher spot both similarities and differences in the data to understand the whole picture. As the research evolved, themes began to develop, which informed the ongoing data collection. The themes that emerged from this research are detailed below.

As the research study involved participants from a range of countries, those from Thailand were allowed to choose between having their interviews conducted in Thai or in English. This was partly due to practical considerations, as Thai is the researcher's native language, but it was also intended to provide comfort and a convenient environment for participants from the same country. It was believed that the choice of language also helped tap into rich data and enhance overall communication. For those interviews conducted in Thai, back-translation, performed by a professional translator, was employed to ensure the validity of meaning, and the forward and back processes of translation were also read by the researcher to make sure that the senses of the participants' statements were accurately captured. This method is acceptable and widely used for research studies undertaken in

foreign languages (Bontempo, 1993; Chen and Boore, 2009). In several engagement and social media related studies, researchers have conducted some qualitative interviews in foreign languages. Exemplary studies are, for example, Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015), who conducted a qualitative study in French for their research regarding consumer engagement in the online brand community; Pongpaew, Speece and Tiangsoongnern (2017), who also conducted qualitative research in Thai regarding customer brand engagement on Facebook brand pages; and Pasternak, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2017), examined eWOM on social media in their qualitative study using interviews in Russian.

After reading the transcriptions repeatedly, the researcher began analysing the data. Thematic analysis was found to be the most appropriate method for this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p.78), and it is one of the most common approaches for analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2008). Through this data analysis process, researchers examine detailed perspectives on issues and use both open and axial coding. Saldana (2009) defines coding as a way to group 'similar coded data into categories or "families" because they share some characteristics – the beginning of a pattern' (p.8). In this thesis, the researcher began with lower level codes, which involved breaking the data down from chunks of raw data to develop open codes. The data were categorised and labelled into relevant open codes, which captured similarities in the essence of the data from the first coding cycle; these were not predetermined. To continue further analysis, the open codes were grouped into categories of broader codes, representing higher-order concepts (axial coding), which subsequently developed in a vertical route, resulting in themes (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe a theme as 'a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes' (p.282) about collected data. In the present thesis, there is a lack of extant research on the topic under investigation – engagement for self-presentation. Themes, therefore, emerged inductively from the data. In terms of defining themes, working titles were developed, with definitions assigned for each theme. These were cross-checked for credibility and trustworthiness. Member checking was also employed, with some participants (who previously stated their willingness to be contacted) to determine whether they also agreed with the findings and interpretations of the data. This was done to avoid misinterpretation, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The contacted participants largely agreed with the data but added further explanatory comments at this

stage. Then, the themes were analysed. The following provides some examples of the coding process, which developed into themes (Tables 5.4 and 5.5).

The first phase of the research study

Themes	Axial Codes	Open Codes	Sample Quote 1	Sample Quote 2	Sample Quote 3
Self-differentiation	Different, distinguish	Exceptional, stand out, new, first, unique, distinct, interesting, before others	'I think…having an image of a biker in my profile allows me to be **exceptional** and **stand out from the rest of the crowd**' (Participant 6, Male).	'It has to be **new** so that I'm pretty sure that I'm the **first** or second to "share" this among my network of people' (Participant 22, Female).	'They are **something new** or **something that I don't see on the wall of my friends,** so I decided to share' (Participant 21, Male).
Group belonging	Group of people, group identity, acceptance	Connect, match, surrounding, reference group, association, linkage, conformity, community	'I'm with some people that I know for sure that many people know them, and it **looks good to have them around**; I "check-in" **to let others know**' (Participant 23, Female).	'It looks like **I can talk about range of issues**. But this doesn't mean that I'm interested in it all…I still keep up my engagement….As I said, I use Facebook to **connect with people**' (Participant 14, Male).	'I choose to "post" many things such as brand contents [JS100] that **match the community I currently interact with**, even it doesn't really reflect who I am' (Participant 1, Female).
Self-enhancement	Signify status over others, enhance position	Expensive, money, ethical, wealth, time, taste, social status, reputation, concern for others, life balance	'Flying used to be an **expensive** thing to do, so it's like I can fly; **I have money** you know. Check-in is a tool of **saying out loud that I fly**' (Participant 20, Male).	'Maybe if I want to be completely **ethical** like I just said, I should stop buying right now, but I still don't stop this habit' (Participant 27, Female).	'This is a clever way to **show off your wealth** compared to other things that people like to show…it's like I show what I value – that **I have time** and **I have taste**' (Participant 12, Male).

Table 5.4: Theme development (first phase of the research study)

The second phase of the research study

Themes	Axial Codes	Open Codes	Sample Quote 1	Sample Quote 2	Sample Quote 3
Brand awareness	Familiarity, well recognised	Communication to public, external, company presence, exposure, awareness	'We like this kind of engagement, so their **friends would see our company presence**' (Participant 4, Automobile).	'We just look at it as CPR [cost per revenue,] and then we have nothing to lose because **museum exposure is communicated**' (Participant 1, Tourism).	'I don't mind whether they will buy our products or not…Either way is fine to me…At least these **people create brand awareness for us.** It's better than nothing' (Participant 2, Retailer).
Trust	Trust, confidence	Trust, reliable, brand image, impression, not neglect, great choice, firm belief	'People would tend to perceive our brand as **trusted and reliable because we have a lot of engagement from other users as well**' (Participant 2, Retailer).	'But if not, and they do not match our kind of customers, I'm afraid it would have an effect on our **brand image**' (Participant 3, Food services).	'We think we could make an **impression** not only to that specific person, but also to other people, so they would think that this organisation **does not neglect** their clients and that we try to do something. It's also **our image**' (Participant 1, Tourism).
Control	Uncontrollable, unexpected	Threat, influence, uncertain, variety, uncontrollable, fast, sudden	'I'm very conscious of the fact that, if people comment more, then all of a **sudden visibility goes through the roof**' (Participant 6, News and Media).	'Social media is so **fast**…We cannot risk any chance of things going wrong because this can be **uncontrollable**' (Participant 4, Automobile).	'Particular posts have high engagement compared to the others because people start tagging each other, and it goes on and on just **out of control**' (Participant 5, Food services).

Table 5.5: Theme development (second phase of the research study)

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research methodology guiding the direction of the study and has provided justifications for the selection of a suitable methodology. The nature of the research was necessarily exploratory to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, the interpretivist paradigm was considered the best fit. Data collection was undertaken via interviews with Facebook users (first phase) and organisations (second phase). The details and justifications associated with data collection have been explained, including participant sampling, site selection, ethical considerations, interview procedures and data analysis approach. The following chapters will, therefore, present the study's findings.

Chapter 6 : Findings and Discussion (First phase)

Chapter 5 overviewed the methodological approach adopted in this thesis: an exploratory study using semi-structured interviews to examine the effect of individual's ideal selves on engagement activity. This chapter presents the research findings, along with related discussion in light of the existing literature on engagement and the 'self', highlighting how this research could contribute to the body of existing knowledge in the field.

To explore the impact of the ideal self on actor engagement activities in online social media, the first section (6.1) introduces how individuals create the ideal self through online self-presentation. This evidence provides a foundation, which suggests how individuals present their ideal selves online, which leads to discussion of the process of self-presentation via engagement activities. This process is subject to the varying levels of relationships and dispositions that individuals have to focal objects (Section 6.2). Each type of engagement for self-presentation is then discussed in further detail (Section 6.3): strong relationship and weak disposition (6.3.1), weak relationship and strong disposition (6.3.2) and weak relationship and weak disposition (6.3.2). The chapter continues by discussing further findings and drivers related to engagement for self-presentation (Section 6.4): the drivers of self-differentiation (6.4.1), group belonging (6.4.2) and self-enhancement (6.4.3).

To understand how the self-presentation (via engagement activities) of others can influence individuals, the final section of this chapter discusses the impact of engagement, with interviewees describing the impact of their friends' engagement activities, as seen on their Facebook newsfeeds. These views surfaced mainly in relation to the source of such engagement (Section 6.5). The chapter ends with a conclusion, which sums up the results and discussions (Section 6.6).

6.1 Presentation of ideal self on social media

To investigate how engagement helps individuals present their ideal selves, it is important to start by exploring self-presentation on social media – in this study, Facebook. Self-presentation is a process used to portray desirable information about oneself (i.e., an ideal image), or to avoid an undesirable portrayal, to present a positive impression to an audience (Goffman, 1973; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). This section discusses the findings from the first phase interviews. Participants explained that their Facebook selves differ in key ways from their everyday lives – that is, only the good and positive aspects of their selves are presented to other people on Facebook. For example:

> *'I think I curate myself on Facebook, for example I manage what I want others to see and not to see. I take care of my own image, not letting anything appear on my profile without my approval'. (Participant 2, Female, Thailand)*

The evidence presented here supports the idea that individuals selectively choose particular aspects of the self to present online (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008), with the majority of people emphasising only the positive aspects of their lives to ensure desirable interpretations by others (Vogel and Rose, 2016). This is manageable within the computer-mediated communication environment, as information can be easily edited prior to posting and can be modified afterwards (Walther, 1992). Thus, social media is full of edited profiles, which ensure that only good and positive aspects are presented to the world (Andsager, 2014).

Some participants specifically expressed concern about the need to present their ideal selves on Facebook due to the diversity of their 'friends' list, and the various relationships represented:

> *'My Facebook friends are not limited to my very close friends, but also include relatives, colleagues, customers, etc. I have to think before I post because self-image is very important, so I adjust myself online into a better version of myself'. (Participant 5, Female, Thailand)*

This multiple audience situation is one in which individuals often find self-presentation a challenge, since audiences vary in their knowledge about and expectations of individuals' behaviour. They hold different standards and opinions

about what they observe (Marder et al., 2016a). This pressures individuals to present an ideal self, which is perceived to be appropriate for their audiences.

Other participants expressed that Facebook can be a place where they can manage their ideal images for the purpose of future success:

> *'You never know about these social media things; it's so easy to have some conversations with people. Some opportunities could come up in the future from the discussions in your post. So, I just try to stay attractive here'. (Participant 24, Male, United Kingdom)*

Individuals tend to behave in a way that increases their chances of finding opportunities in the future – e.g., by providing specific information and an image that is related to a particular situation to increase the person/environment fit and degree of compatibility with opportunities (Sekiguchi, 2007). These individuals, therefore, recognise the importance of presenting the ideal self on Facebook for the purpose of long-term benefit.

More often than not, participants also use Facebook's capabilities to facilitate interactions and build on actions not available to them in the offline environment:

> *'In everyday life, if I am not familiar with someone, I won't just begin a conversation, but in Facebook we can interact through 'like' or 'comment' when they post something that I can discuss. I think in Facebook I am more talkative, friendly, and able to express something that I can't do in everyday life'. (Participant 12, Male, Thailand)*

> *'For me, Facebook helps me on some occasions...when I want to get people updated with cool stuff about myself...sometimes true, sometimes not…I would share relatable posts as I don't want to actively ask people to talk to me, but what I shared are what get things going'. (Participant 24, Male, United Kingdom)*

> *'Many things can't be mentioned in real life, but on Facebook there are tools such as some contents and brands to help you communicate better. These aren't available in real life and there are always people to support what you post online'. (Participant 6, Male, Thailand)*

Several lines of evidence suggest that the lack of physical interaction and nonverbal expression on social media promotes new ways of communication and tools through online associations (Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008), which especially helps those, who are less socially skilled, to better express themselves and become more sociable through wider interactions (Moore and McElroy, 2012). Therefore, social media offers users a greater capability to present their ideal

selves than is often available in the offline environment. A great deal of previous research has focused on the ideal self and social media (Michikyan, Dennis and Subrahmanyam, 2015; Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012), and this thesis confirms many of the findings from these previous studies. Although these findings are not new, this section sets the scene to show how individuals present their ideal selves on social media, which may involve some inauthentic behaviour. Individuals' inauthenticity has several potential impacts on activities within Facebook, including engagement. The following section will consider how individuals engage with focal objects on Facebook to accomplish the purpose of self-presentation.

6.2 Engagement for self-presentation

The previous section has provided the background showing that individuals present their ideal selves on social media. This suggests that individuals' intentions to present their ideal selves to others on social media could drive them to engage online. As noted in earlier chapters, gaps identified in the existing literature relate to engagement being treated as genuine consumer behaviour showing strong relationships and dispositions. However, this research has determined that some engagement could, in fact, result from individuals' inauthentic behaviour aimed at self-presentation, reflecting a different level of relationships and dispositions.

Relationships may be reflected through relational antecedents, purchases, consumption, voicing opinions and contributing to the firm (Brodie et al., 2011; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). The absence of these factors may signify a weaker relationship. Dispositions are seen through individuals' readiness and tendency to engage (i.e., time, energy, effort) (Brodie et al., 2019), and weaker dispositions may reflect lower levels of willingness or desire to engage. Therefore, when one or both of these elements (strong relationship/strong disposition) are missing, engagement may become less authentic. This raises the question as to what constitutes engagement and calls into doubt the assumption that engagement reflects voluntary, genuine behaviour, consisting of strong relationships and dispositions to focal objects.

In this study, as key themes emerged from the data analysis, three different types of engagement for self-presentation emerged (Figure 6.1): 1) strong relationship and weak disposition, showing a pre-existing relationship with particular focal objects but a lower disposition to engage (staged engagement); 2) weak relationship and strong disposition, in which there is no strong relationship to the focal object but a willingness to engage (contradictory engagement); and 3) weak relationship and weak disposition, in which engagement manifests though both elements are low (faked engagement). All engagement manifests for self-presentation to varying degrees.
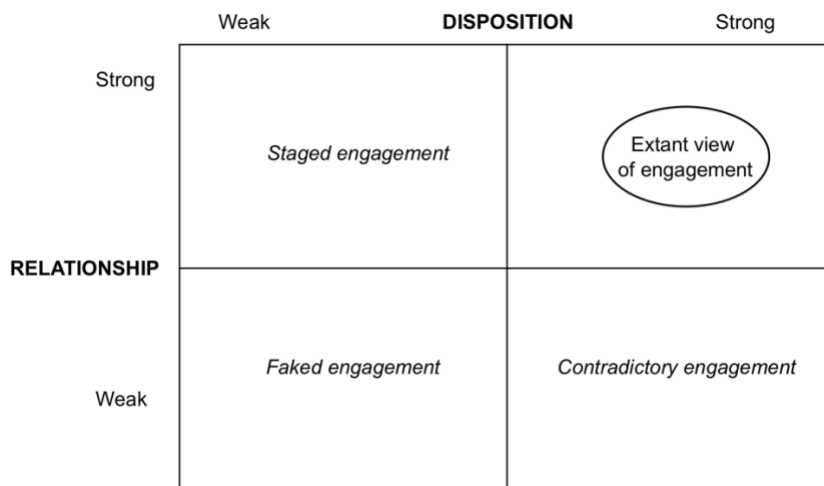
Figure 6.1: Relationship and disposition in engagement (typology)

Engagement, as identified in the present research and in alignment with engagement literature, reflects activities beyond normal transactions. Specifically, engagement activities displayed on social media might include liking, commenting, sharing or posting. Facebook features allow individuals to tag focal objects in their posts via 'check-ins', hashtags and photos. Individuals consciously undertake these actions. Therefore, the representation of engagement in this research is consistent with that found in other studies on the subject, particularly in the context of social media (Barger, Peltier and Schultz, 2016; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Dolan et al., 2016; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014).

While various literature has been written on the subject of engagement with the consumer/customer as the focal subject (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014), the focal subject may also be other actors in an online 'ecosystem' (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016). Engagement platforms (i.e., social media) also act as intermediaries that ease more actors into engagement in a dyadic relationship in which connectedness is recognised (Brodie et al., 2019). This research also shares these views to the extent that engagement, which is engendered by different levels of relationships and dispositions between focal objects, can be undertaken by any actors (i.e., any individuals).

In reviewing the literature, no studies were found to explore the possibility that engagement could be inauthentic and created for the purpose of self-presentation, subject to different levels of relationships and dispositions. Therefore, to the best of the author's knowledge, this research is the first to investigate the relationship between engagement for self-presentation and to classify this into three different types, according to their levels of relationship and disposition. Detailed findings and discussion regarding each engagement type are elaborated in the following sections.

6.3 Types of engagement for self-presentation

This section presents the three different types of engagement for self-presentation, which have been drawn from Figure 6.1. They are introduced in this order: 1) strong relationship and weak disposition (staged engagement), 2) weak relationship and strong disposition (contradictory engagement), and 3) weak relationship and weak disposition (faked engagement).

6.3.1 Strong relationship and weak disposition (staged engagement)

Analysis of the interviews suggests that the first type of engagement for self-presentation reflects individuals with a strong relationship with, but a weak disposition toward, focal objects. It seems that individuals selectively pick particular

focal objects they consume to engage because they believe this helps them present the stories they want others to see. This suggests that, apart from the existing relationship, the resulting engagement activities are driven by self-presentation rather than a state of readiness to engage; this, in turn, makes the disposition element of engagement weak. Thus, the first dimension reveals staged engagement activities concerning 'lifestyle' reflections, which participants want to be seen as living. This motivates them to engage with focal objects that will emphasise their experiences and reflect such a lifestyle. In this way, individuals display their distinctions, such as where they are at a moment in time or what they have just done, via engagement with a focal object. Some participants also openly note that they would not mention their time doing something mundane.

> *'I "check-in" to let others know that I have been here, as it is a famous noodle place [Roong-rueng]; I want others to see that I eat good food. But when I go for street food, I wouldn't check-in as this wouldn't provide me with the image I want'. (Participant 2, Female, Thailand)*

> *'I also share…"Omakase" [Japanese foods]….They are well known for high-end, premium foods, and that it's very difficult to book a table. I post because not many people have access to these kinds of foods. I think it reflects my taste and differentiates me from the rest of the crowd. Many people ask me about my experience, and I receive good feedback every time after I post something like this. I wouldn't engage with those places that many people already go to'. (Participant 5, Female, Thailand)*

> *'I usually try to kind of post something about myself, especially when I'm doing something cool, so I emphasise that. I am having a good drink in a nice place like Laboratorio Espresso [Café], so of course I would post to check-in. I expect people to see that I do cool stuff and react to my post, and usually they do. When I see a lot of reactions, I am happy; it's nice to see people reacting'. (Participant 21, Male, Italy)*

Staging experiences with foods is emphasised on social media through engagement activities, which allow individuals to present their ideal selves to others. Wong et al. (2019) call this phenomenon 'foodstagramming' – individuals publishing food posts on social media, displaying, not simply what is on the plate, but also a lifestyle. This research argues that such engagement comes about more often due to the motivation for self-presentation because individuals realise that their consumption of these focal objects communicates something special about their

lifestyles. This part of an individual's story could reflect an unusual part of his or her lifestyle, rather than necessarily reflecting the real, everyday story. It would appear, therefore, that the purpose of letting others know 'where they are' or 'what they do' is to present the exceptional elements of the ideal self. Therefore, a pre-existing relationship with the focal object may not result in a level of disposition, as suggested in the literature (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2019).

Staged engagement activities are also used to reflect participants' levels of 'knowledge'.

> *'I've "shared" this content from CNN, instead of other local publishing houses. I just feel that CNN has an international reputation, and I want others to see that I consume this stuff; but it doesn't mean that I don't read local news headlines'. (Participant 4, Male, Thailand)*

> *'Some posts I "share" with the use of captions to describe what I know or how I feel toward the post [The Standard]. I just think that doing this makes me look knowledgeable to others. You can see that many people also do this on Facebook just to make themselves look good'. (Participant 10, Male, Thailand)*

> *'Often, I check-in at university [University of Strathclyde]; I have many posts of this kind. I just want to tell others that I study hard, and I have a good education…just so I look clever in society back in my country'. (Participant 27, Female, Cyprus)*

While other publicly visible goods are often used as self-presentation tools, knowledge is normally private and difficult to communicate. Consequently, such focal objects are, thus, embraced through their engagement as a tool to help show off the individuals' knowledge to others for self-presentation. This indicates that a willingness to engage stems from self-presentation rather than resource contribution (i.e., usefulness or voluntary knowledge-sharing). For example, engagement with news/media companies tells others that the individuals consume news and have fluent language skills to read and understand news in foreign languages (usually English). Sharing news is often examined as a method of expressing knowledge (Berger, 2014). Some also engage to show their ability to evaluate and critique by expressing their opinions. Engagement with a university could also reflect a level of education and knowledge. Based on this, Packard and Wooten (2013) suggest that

individuals talk about particular issues to signal the level of knowledge they have in those domains, which adds to their self-presentation.

Furthermore, positive engagement does not necessarily mean that participants enjoy and appreciate their experiences with the focal object. It is possible that the presentation of such activity is about a hidden agenda. Participants use engagement activities to communicate a secondary statement that they want other people to know, not necessarily sincere information about the focal object.

> *'My caption in this post was "UK 50 Best Fish and Chips, with a thumbs up" because they say that they are in the top 50 [Merchant Chippie]. People who see this post might think that I like this place because of the thumbs up, but no, I didn't actually find it tasty at all. I checked-in at their place because they say they are top 50, so it looks like I come for good food'. (Participant 8, Male, Thailand)*

> *'I've posted about how my Garmin helped me so much in accomplishing my training for the Sydney Marathon. In other words, I want to spread a message that I am fit enough to run the Sydney Marathon – that's it. You know…Garmin can't really help if my body is not ready'. (Participant 30, Female, New Zealand)*

The positive expressions in staged engagement activities make it seem as though participants trust in and are satisfied with such focal objects. Trust and satisfaction are antecedents to engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010). However, these engagement activities are not as straightforward as they seem. Although, participants develop some relationships to the focal objects (i.e., through purchases), they do not appear to engage based on trust and satisfaction. Moreover, such relationships are unlikely to lead to individuals' dispositions to engage with the focal object. Individuals' true intentions to engage are based on their desires to use the focal object to present ideal aspects of themselves to others. As the true intention is self-presentation, positive WOM is more likely to produce a positive impression – as this confirms one's own expertise (i.e., 'my decision was great') (Wojnicki and Godes, 2017) and also because other people prefer to interact with individuals with positive mindsets (Kamins, Folkes and Perner, 1997). Individuals tend to share positive things to avoid being seen as negative, even when they are not actually happy with the focal object as stated.

In contrast, the interviews in this research suggest that participants do not always engage with brands in a positive valence. Participants use negative engagement activity to present themselves to other people, issuing complaints to associate themselves with the particular image of a brand.

> *'I just want others to know that I drive this car [Mercedes Benz], so I post in the form of a complaint that the after-sale service makes it so expensive to change the tyres. That's how I let others know about my car'. (Participant 4, Male, Thailand)*

Although engagement research predominantly focuses on the positive, the negative valence of engagement should also be considered (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). Azer and Alexander (2018) discuss how overpricing may trigger negatively valenced influencing behaviour, as reflected in this example. However, the negative engagement found in the current research may not involve a level of anger or stress, as displayed in other studies (Bowden et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2016). Negative engagement activity in this research was used as a method of self-presentation (i.e., a way for people to express that they could afford certain products or services). For some individuals, negative WOM is aimed at facilitating a certain impression of being experienced and intelligent (Amabile, 1983). While this may not involve extreme emotions due to the absence of strong dispositions, such posts may develop negative consequences for other people who view them. However, negative engagement may not result in negative effects due to downward comparison. While it may make other people aware of individuals' negative experiences, those people tend to feel more comfortable when facing unpleasant situations or feel satisfied when they experience something better than others do (Buunk and Gibbons, 2007).

This section has illustrated various examples of staged engagement – showing how engagement activities could happen inauthentically, aiming for self-presentation based on a relationship without disposition. This is contrary to the findings of Brodie et al. 2019, which suggest that engagement entails 'actors' dispositions to invest resources' (p.174). However, the absence of engagement disposition may be adequate for now, as Fehrer et al. (2018) suggest that engagement behaviour leads to engagement disposition (i.e., cognitive and emotional). This contrasts with the

majority of previous research findings, which have suggested that engagement disposition (i.e., cognitive and emotional) leads to engagement behaviour (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). In addition, Fehrer et al. (2018) also suggest that low engagement behaviour (i.e., no substantial effort to engage) could exist in engagement activity; this accords with low disposition to engage, as observed in this study. To this extent, Fehrer et al. (2018) assert that there is no significant relationship between low engagement behaviour and genuine variables in nomological networks (i.e., loyalty, satisfaction, involvement). Thus, these genuine antecedents within nomological networks may not be observed via engagement with low disposition.

Despite existing relationships with the focal objects and the fact that individuals may have used a whole range of products and brands, it seems that staged engagement activities only occur with focal objects that project the individuals' ideal images, resonating with what they want to present to other people about themselves. Different individuals may have divergent views regarding what is seen to have a better ability to present their ideal selves. Bearden and Etzel (1982) state that brands used by many different types of people may not be as efficient at communicating a particular image about the individuals who use that brand. Thus, symbolic products are shared more than utilitarian ones (Chung and Darke, 2006), and premium brands are mentioned more often as they signify better images (Lovett, Peres and Shachar, 2013).

These staged engagement activities can be considered a form of conspicuous self-presentation; the elements chosen for presentation must have the potential to communicate the meanings required by the individual and must also involve external observation. These results partly share a portion of the findings from previous work – e.g., in the exploration of 'conspicuous consumption', namely the notion that individuals use showy behaviour to present products they want others to recognise (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). This also accords with the 'brand selfie' phenomenon, through which individuals intentionally involve a brand logo or an actual product image to form an association with those objects (Presi, Maehle and Kleppe, 2016). The assumption is that, if association with objects can be used to communicate

individuals' ideal selves, individuals' associations with those focal objects via engagement activities should also be able to communicate these ideal selves.

However, conspicuous consumption and brand selfie activity may require actual objects to be in the picture. This is not the case for engagement on social media, which can happen through liking, sharing and posting to develop an online association. Individuals can, thus, mention their experiences, which may be intangible and cannot be presented as a body, to others by engaging with such focal objects online. Engagement activities within this category can, therefore, be seen as staged, which renders them inauthentic. The following section continues this analysis, moving on to discuss another form of engagement.

6.3.2 Weak relationship and strong disposition (contradictory engagement)

The second engagement type concerns situations in which actors reveal a weak relationship to, but a strong disposition to engage with, the focal objects. This suggests that, apart from the state of readiness/desire to engage, the resulting engagement activities are driven by self-presentation, not by an existing relationship, which makes the relationship element of engagement weak. Thus, claims presented through contradictory engagement activity do not adequately reveal the genuine story and are likely to mislead other people's understanding about the individuals. In the examples below, engagement with focal objects occurred to present an overstated version of reality.

> *'I click that I'm "going" to events like concerts [Coldplay, Ed Sheeran], but most of the time I don't make it. I just want others to know that I like live music and have great taste in music, which they will see because my activity appears on their newsfeeds…I do like all this music, but maybe not to the level that I would go to the concerts'. (Participant 2, Female, Thailand)*

While the disposition to engage appears within the engagement activity (i.e., desire about music), this research found that a lack of relationship between individuals and the focal object makes engagement activity with that focal object carry exaggerated stories about the individuals. The motivation for self-presentation

also leads individuals to distort and exaggerate what they say, rendering reality more extreme (Burrus, Kruger and Jurgens, 2006; Heath, 1996). Thus, when individuals present a favourable view of themselves via engagement (i.e., great taste in music), their portrayed behaviours and practices may not be accurate versions of reality (Gregg, Sedikides and Gebauer, 2011; Hepper et al., 2011).

Other participants expressed concern about issues, such as 'environmental and social responsibilities'. They engaged online with focal objects to spread awareness about what is right, with the notion that, by doing this, they became good citizens in the eyes of others, despite failing to comply with the practices they mention in their contradictory engagement activities.

> *'I've "shared" this post from National Geographic because I wanted to spread awareness of the environmental issues of plastic cup use....Well, I know what I have to do but I don't commit to it myself because I don't carry my own cup around. I always forget. But I think my post shows others that I care about this issue'. (Participant 2, Female, Thailand)*

> *'This is from Greenpeace; it was about shopping, and I expressed my dissatisfaction that people keep buying new stuff that they already have such as clothes. I wanted to raise awareness of the issue that our society (the first world society) takes things for granted. But in reality, I understand that girls or even boys love shopping, which I do as well'. (Participant 27, Female, Cyprus)*

These examples, which targeted environmental and social responsibility, reflected that the disposition to engage may be directed at an issue, rather than at a focal object. However, engagement with focal objects was used as a vehicle to present the posters. Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggest that context-based factors could affect engagement behaviour, such as political, legal or environmental concerns, which surround and influence individuals and encourage their actions. For example, an ongoing environmental campaign promoted by society (e.g., a movement to reduce plastic waste by using reusable plastic bags) may render individuals more sensitive to related issues and motivate them to publicise their feelings to others through engagement. These engagements also illustrate negative valence – influencing behaviour that seems to show dissatisfaction – which could negatively influence others' perceptions and cause them to turn away from the focal objects (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Such engagement activities could influence and

mobilise other people in the way proposed by the individuals (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Previous research has shown that concerns about public evaluation could pressure individuals to express themselves more negatively in certain situations (Schlosser, 2005). These engagement activities reflect the purpose of 'going green to be seen', presenting the notion that the individual is prosocial rather than pro-self, a trait seen as more desirable to others (Griskevicius, Tybur and Bergh, 2010, pp. 392). However, self-presentation via engagement of this kind does not appear to be backed up by actual behaviour.

Contradictory engagement may also include activity that is intentionally ambiguous to make others 'infer' positive conclusions from a post. Participants engage with focal objects, which, perhaps, represent their interests or relate to the actual product/services they consume, to present themselves to other people, even when they do not actually consume these focal objects. To accomplish this, participants may engage with similar products but different brands.

> *'Riding motorbikes is not something that people in my community often do, so I think…having an image of a biker in my profile allows me to be exceptional and stand out from the rest of the crowd. I feel good about having this image, so I emphasise it through posts. For example, I want others to perceive me as a "biker", so I share a lot of brand content about motorcycles such as Triumph and Ducati. I think this is a better way to show my interests and to avoid others thinking I'm a show-off, even though I don't own those brands'. (Participant 6, Male, Thailand)*

Participants may also consume one object but engage with another, even if these objects are an upper line of products under the same brand or company.

> *'I "shared" this post from Apple [mobile phone] because they launched a new model of an iPhone in a new colour, and it's a limited edition. I own an iPhone, but this one is a newer model…I wasn't gonna pay for any upgrade…but who knows?' (Participant 25, Female, India)*

> *'I went to the airport, flying abroad, and I "checked-in" to the airline [Thai Airways] business class lounge because I got an invitation from the credit card company that I use – but I fly economy…but I guess people would assume that I fly in business class'. (Participant 3, Male, Thailand)*

The online environment enables people to reveal and share aspects about themselves to whatever extent they choose (Schau and Gilly, 2003), letting others infer further stories from the information they present. However, by letting others infer stories from unclear or misleading engagement activities, unpleasant results could occur for the focal firm as engagement could develop in a way that is unrelated to the firm itself (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Thus far, this section has shown several examples of contradictory engagement activities within the sphere of weak relationships and strong dispositions. The research suggests that this form of engagement can be undertaken by individuals with weak relationships to focal objects, who engage outside the scope of their actual transactions. While transactions are not the only measure indicating a relationship (Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017), the absence of this evidence may signify a weak relationship. This suggests that varying levels of relationships in engagement activities may come with alternative motivations, such as self-presentation. This low relationship in engagement activities also contrasts with most of the extant research, which assumes that a strong relationship with focal brands stimulates engagement beyond normal transactions (Brodie et al., 2011; Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

Individuals producing contradictory engagement may appear to be no different from non-paying customers who also engage (Groeger, Moroko, and Hollebeek, 2016) or those who express psychological ownership (Kumar and Nayak, 2019). This suggests that, perhaps, ownership, of any kind, may no longer be necessary, since individuals may develop mental states concerning the focal objects, regardless of whether they possess those objects materially (Carrozzi et al., 2019; Sinclair and Tinson, 2017). However, this explanation could overlook much of the behaviour of individuals whose motivations may be different. The importance of contradictory engagement lies in the possibility that these individuals are also driven by intentions, which could be construed as disingenuous, and tend to engage with focal objects as a tool for self-presentation rather than as a reflection of genuine behaviour. Consequently, claims made in contradictory engagement activities point toward self-presentation to provide a desirable image to others.

However, the issues that individuals define through engagement with focal objects may actually reflect their views or a broader focal phenomenon, revealing a strong dispositions to engage, which involves cognitive and emotional aspects (Brodie et al., 2019). It is possible that individuals may develop thoughts and feelings about the products and brands that lie outside their material realities (Schau and Gilly, 2003), which then increase their willingness and desire to engage, resulting in engagement behaviour (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). However, as pre-existing relationships are missing in such engagement, it occurs in a misleading or aspirational way, which may lead others to misunderstand the story. Therefore, these contradictory engagement activities show only a part of the true story, as well as other inauthentic elements intended to reach other people. This reflects the alternative explanation that this strong disposition is not driven by a strong relationship, as expected in the literature (Brodie et al., 2019). Having only the disposition to engage could make engagement activities be seen as inauthentic since they are based on self-presentation, which is not perceived as genuine. This leads us to yet another type of engagement, consisting of a different level of relationship and disposition.

6.3.3 Weak relationship and weak disposition (faked engagement)

The final type of engagement involves a weak relationship alongside a weak disposition. This faked engagement happens when individuals engage with focal objects despite not using those objects or having particular views about them. This low relationship with and disposition toward focal objects could manifest as engagement motivated simply by self-presentation. Such engagement activities reflect a whole new ideal image individuals wish to present to others. Faked engagement may appear as 'recommendations' to other people. However, these recommendations do not always reflect a real intention.

> *'I used to share posts about Google Pixel [mobile phone] when it had just launched, along with a caption that said something like "it's worth buying". But actually, I have no plans to change to a Google phone. Other people probably think that I'm interested in changing phones, and that makes me look like an early adopter among my friends'. (Participant 10, Male, Thailand)*

Research shows that sharing opinions or recommendations often reflects individuals' genuine concerns to help others (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) call this 'endorsing behaviour', while Brodie et al. (2011) describe this as 'advocating'. Batson (2014) argues that the act of helping other people may be used as a trigger for a personal feelings of joy and self-esteem. In opposition to these suggestions, this research has found that individuals' desire to help others through recommendations may be undertaken with the key, disingenuous intention of self-presentation. Although positive engagement is beneficial to a company and it is what most companies desire (Harmeling et al., 2017), there are possible drawbacks.

When individuals have no experience with the focal object, as evidenced through weak relationships and dispositions, the information in their recommendations may be inaccurate. Thus, Van Doorn et al. (2010) mention that actions, such as positive recommendations, could result in negative outcomes if there is a poor fit between those people and the focal object. Moreover, other individuals who perceive such faked engagement may form expectations about a focal object, and they might leave negative comments afterwards if their experiences are different from their expectations (i.e., below expectations) (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019; Hu and Li, 2011). While online reviews are among the most influential information sources (Mathwick and Mosteller, 2016; Thakur, 2018), negative reviews may have a greater impact than positive reviews (Chen and Lurie, 2013). The results for the company are, therefore, not straightforward. Further insight has been offered into how recommendations could occur with a negative valence through issuing warnings against the focal object.

> *'I post to warn people about this brand [MG] because they always have problems with their cars. I've read about problems in many reviews, but I've never used it. But sharing this kind of stuff creates awareness for my friends on Facebook and makes it look like I'm a good guy…'. (Participant 4, Male, Thailand)*

This finding is in line with the literature, which suggests that negative influencing behaviour could take the form of engagement through warnings (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Although previous research suggests that negative engagement is

based on perilous experiences (Azer and Alexander, 2018), even on review sites it is difficult to establish whether a post involves a genuine level of experience. Indeed, this research has found that individuals engage negatively with focal objects via recommendations without necessarily having prior experience with those objects.

Some participants engage with focal objects to present areas of their 'activities or interests' that do not exist in reality – openly declaring that they have no interest in or even experience with such things:

> *'I "shared" this post [Van Gogh Museum] because perhaps I just want to be a more rounded person, like I can talk with anyone about anything including art…it's just like I have my interest in this piece of art…hmm, I've never been there yet. I would say art is not really my thing'. (Participant 20, Male, Turkey)*

> *'This gallery is forced to shut down soon. I'm not into this, but I feel like if I show support against the shutdown policy that I want the gallery to remain open so next generations have the opportunities to see them, I think it benefits how I look in the eyes of others…so I share it [DailyMail]'. (Participant 26, Female, United Kingdom)*

> *'I used to "share" things about running events that were sponsored by Nike [sports brand], although I am not a sporty guy, and I'm not interested in doing marathons….But at that time, I felt it was a cool way to enhance my look. It's like I have hobbies and activities to do'. (Participant 3, Male, Thailand)*

Sharing about particular topics presents characteristics about individuals in those domains (Packard and Wooten, 2013). Therefore, presenting such activities or interests through faked engagement renders individuals more able to show their appreciation, concern for others or life balance – providing ideal images of themselves through self-presentation, despite a lack of real interest. Research has shown that the online environment makes it easy for individuals to display their connections to activities and interests without having to physically meet the right people and be in the right places (Berger and Ward, 2010). This ability is increased through social media engagement, since individuals can simply 'share' posts from focal objects straight into their own profiles to be perceived as having the activities and interests they would like to be seen as having.

Other participants in this thesis discussed faked engagement activities aimed at 'attraction', believing that certain engagements with focal objects are of interest to

their target audience, and, thus, such engagement activities would imply a mutual interest and render them more appealing.

> *'I "posted" a lot about the FIFA World Cup in July – for example, which team won which match, or the man of the match. I "posted" as though I was actually watching it in front of the TV, but I didn't. Maybe I just want to let others see me as a rounded girl who also watches sport. The sporty girl image I guess, and it's attractive to guys'. (Participant 1, Female, Thailand)*

> *'I've "shared" this clip about cooking mince pies on Facebook [Twisted] with a caption saying that I'm going to do it this weekend, but I don't normally go into the kitchen and don't intend to really cook mince pies. I share because it looks good on my profile and girls like it'. (Participant 3, Male, Thailand)*

Self-presentation strategies to attract potential partners have been studied in contexts, such as online dating sites, where individuals post manipulated photos or personal information (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Toma, Hancock and Ellison, 2008). However, this research found, within the Facebook platform, that engagement activities are used to attract partners presenting the 'better than average' effect, showing the individuals to be greater than most others of the same gender. For example, consider the above perceptions that fewer girls watch football and fewer men cook; these activities are seen as rendering the posters more able to attract their targets (Alicke and Govorun, 2005). However, individuals appear to have a weak relationship to and disposition to engage with such focal objects for any reason other than self-presentation. This renders such engagement activities fake.

For other participants, in their quests to better align themselves with others, faked engagement activities were used to discuss 'current topics of conversation' taking place within the circle of social media users the participants followed.

> *'Recently, I engaged with JD Sport. I've commented to tag my friends in one of the posts about the FIFA world cup….I think it helps me relate more to my friends' activities because everyone has been talking about the matches….Well…it's not really about me as I have no interest in such things, but this helps me to get along with friends and to show them that I also have some relations with the things they're interested in'. (Participant 27, Female, Cyprus)*

> *'I've "shared" this content from Kate Spade because the brand was on the news headlines for about a week. A number of people have been talking about the owner; so I've "shared" it because it's the "talk of the town" at the moment, but*

I've never owned its products because I don't like the colourful style'. (Participant 1, Female, Thailand)

These findings reflect engagement activities with focal objects that are related to the current topics of discussion among people in the user's society. Individuals engage with relational content, which makes them better able to integrate with the people around them (Dolan et al., 2016). To this extent, individuals use engagement to socialise with others and foster interactions from others (Brodie et al., 2013). However, this research has found that such behaviours are inauthentic as individuals engage with focal brands despite having a weak relationship with and disposition toward the focal objects. Therefore, the process of socialising is not triggered by involvement, participation and emotional bonds, as found in the literature (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2013), but, rather, by this manifestation of engagement serving the users' own self-presentation needs.

Thus far, this section has discussed faked engagement reflecting weak relationships and dispositions. This finding is opposed to most studies to date, which have held that engagement results from both a strong relationship with (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) and a strong disposition toward (Brodie et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016) a focal object. However, these arguments, perhaps, rely too heavily on treating engagement as representing genuine behaviour (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Indeed, self-presentation could trigger engagement, as individuals believe that focal objects can help them present themselves; this result has not previously been described in the field of engagement.

Extant research shows that individuals are largely motivated by things that reflect a degree of similarity or congruity to their 'selves', in order to ensure their self-consistency (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Escalas and Bettman, 2005) and to be clear of who they are (Kunda, 1999). Escalas and Bettman (2005) also suggest that individuals avoid situations and behaviours that risk contradiction with their existing 'selves'. This perspective, however, is contrary to the findings of the current research, which accounts for fake content individuals present to others through engagement activities. This evidences that people contradict themselves.

These results are likely related to the growth in the social media facility, as it seems that individuals' faking behaviour has been widely examined. Social media has a huge range of focal objects to offer those who wish to present their ideal selves to the world (White, Argo and Sengupta, 2012). Much recent research has given attention to fake news online (Fulgoni and Lipsman, 2017; Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri, 2019); fake, duplicated social media accounts also exist (Atodiresei, Tanaselea and Iftene, 2018); and people often fake Facebook profiles to be selected for jobs (McLarnon, DeLongchamp and Schneider, 2019). Individuals using social media can create purposeful deception activities to derive their desired outcomes. However, no research has yet attempted to investigate faking behaviour in engagement activities.

Mazar, Amir and Ariely (2008) argue that individuals lie when it offers benefits they are unable to achieve with the truth. Cantarero, Tilburg and Szarota (2018) found that there are two types of lies: beneficial lies (told to attain a positive outcome) and protective lies (told to avoid a negative outcome). Using these definitions, lies in engagement are beneficial, rather than protective. Although lies are received disapproval in most cases, their consequences are questioned depending on whether other people realise that the lie is a lie. Engagement appears to be genuine, and, thus, its impact could result in others believing the faked engagement and the inaccurate details it carries. This would further impact whatever is involved in such engagement.

Activities under this type of engagement reflect fake stories that individuals create to present to other people. Through this mechanism, they communicate this connection with the expectation that their audiences will recognise and interpret the meaning from the perceived value they communicate, despite their having weak relationships with and dispositions toward the focal objects. Hence, their engagement activities tend to be largely or wholly unrelated to themselves. This research extends the phenomenon to engagement literature, in which engagement, which is understood as deriving from strong relationships and dispositions, could, in fact, be inauthentic and based on individuals' disingenuous behaviours.

6.3.4 Section summary

As self-presentation is among the most influential reasons for individuals to appear on social media (Kramer and Winter, 2008; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012), this thesis suggests self-presentation as an alternative motivation for engagement on social media. Engagement for self-presentation could contain adjusted or enhanced information, the contents of which, produced as part of self-presentation, often mislead others (Tsikerdekis and Zeadally, 2014). Hence, such engagement could appear inauthentic, suggesting an opposing perspective to the extant view of engagement, which assumes that it reflects individuals' genuine activities (Brodie et al., 2011). Accordingly, this section has indicated different types of engagement for self-presentation based on varying levels of relationship and disposition between individuals and focal objects (i.e., staged, contradictory and faked) (Table 6.1). This also provides an alternative explanation to the understanding that most engagement is based on individuals' strong relationships with and dispositions toward focal objects (Brodie et al., 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Storbacka et al., 2016). This inauthentic behaviour, aiming for self-presentation through engagement, could be presented through various drivers, which are discussed in the following section.

Types of engagement for self-presentation	Key findings		Insights
	Relationship	Disposition	
Staged engagement	strong	weak	Individuals select particular focal objects they consume to engage with because they believe this helps them to present the stories they want others to see
Contradictory engagement	weak	strong	Individuals do not consume the focal object but have a desire to engage with them. Claims presented through engagement do not reveal the genuine story and are likely to mislead others' understanding of the individuals
Faked engagement	weak	weak	Individuals engage with focal objects despite not using those objects or having particular views about them. They are motivated simply by self-presentation.

Table 6.1: Key findings of engagement for self-presentation

6.4 Drivers of engagement for self-presentation

The previous sections have found that participants engage with focal objects to present their ideal selves to others, in the absence of a relationship with and/or disposition toward the focal object, thereby rendering the engagement inauthentic. Thus, self-presentation is an alternative antecedent to engagement. The research has also determined that actors are motivated to use engagement to present their ideal selves through four drivers, which have been derived from the interview data: self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. While engagement antecedents, as identified in most literature, include involvement, participation, loyalty, satisfaction, and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011), this research presents a different nomological network for engagement. Each of these drivers is discussed below.

6.4.1 Self-differentiation

Several participants highlighted that they used their engagement activities to differentiate them from others. Self-differentiation can be defined as 'the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods' (Tian, Bearden and Hunter, 2001, p.52). According to this definition, most scholars have focused on self-differentiation through one of numerous actions; however, no attempt has been made to explain self-differentiation through engagement activity, which is the gap this study aims to fill. This is evidenced by participants' certainty that not many others share their stated interests; thus, they engage with focal objects to emphasise their differentiation.

> *"I 'share' those things…such as new advanced technology that just launched by high-tech or start-up companies [Tech Insider]. My background is in Engineering, so I kind of understand what they are or how they work. As they appear on my profile, so they also present my appearance to others…not many people on Facebook express interest in these things, so that probably makes me distinct from others'. (Participant 8, Male, Thailand)*

> *'Riding motorbikes is not something that people in my community often do, so I think…having an image of a biker in my profile allows me to be exceptional and stand out from the rest of the crowd. I feel good about having this image, so I emphasise it through posts. For example, I want others to perceive me as a 'biker', so I share a lot of brand content about motorcycles, such as Triumph and Ducati. I*

think this is a better way to show my interests and to avoid others thinking I'm a show-off, even though I don't own those brands'. (Participant 6, Male, Thailand)

'I "share" many posts about cars [Lamborghini] – many of which are about supercars. In all honesty, I don't know much about their strength, speed, acceleration….Supercars are aggressive and I think girls and supercars are an extraordinary combination because only a few girls show interest in this kind of stuff – so maybe I want to be above average'. (Participant 13, Female, Thailand)

Research identifies this effort as 'rule breaking', seeking a source of differentiation from one's own reference group (Frank, 1997; Lynn and Harris, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Moreover, the use of luxury brands, such as Triumph, Ducati and Lamborghini, also represents employing product scarcity to improve individuals' differences and uniqueness from ingroup members (Frank, 1997; Lynn and Harris, 1997; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). This lack of availability could result in greater differentiation (Kauppinen-Raisanen et al., 2018). Tian, Bearden and Hunter (2001) have developed the concept of 'creative choice counter conformity' to explain the phenomenon in which individuals seek something dissimilar to express their own distinctiveness. Reflecting this phenomenon, Wolter et al. (2016) suggest that more common brands may be perceived as indistinctive, and, thus, engaging with such brands would lower the individuals' level of distinctiveness and the unique images they wish to emphasise.

Other participants commented that they wanted to be among the first to engage with certain kinds of posts to differentiate themselves.

'What I "share" [Bloomberg] is something that is not all over Facebook. It has to be new so that I'm pretty sure that I'm the first or second to "share" this among my network of people. I don't like to have something on my wall that everyone is already posting about'. (Participant 22, Female, Greece)

'In my case for example, I share…interesting facts about the brands [Forbes Italia]….Some posts involve quite technical stuff….They are something new or something that I don't see on the walls of my friends, so I decided to share'. (Participant 21, Male, Italy)

Participants engaged with posts about something 'new', hoping to be the first to do so, thereby differentiating themselves from others. This method marks individuals as trend leaders (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Tian, Bearden and

Hunter (2001) suggest that some individuals stay ahead of trends through 'unpopular choice counter conformity', which could involve technical jargon difficult to understand, as mentioned above. However, this may attract followers, who wish to develop their own distinctions (Fisher and Price, 1992). Accordingly, engagement with the focal object could occur in a way that discourages others' adoption, as those with high needs for differentiation may be less willing to share positive WOM with their networks as they are afraid others would copy them and that their focal choices would be normalised. Moldovan, Steinhart and Ofen (2015) define this as 'share and scare', which could lead to engagement focusing on complexity to limit others' access. As a result, negative consequence may fall on the focal brand.

These examples of engagement activities illustrate that individuals' needs for differentiation may be more detailed than simply the need to be individuated (Maslach, Stapp and Santee, 1985). For example, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) state that situations in which individuals perceive themselves as being under threat of becoming very similar to others pressure them to develop their own uniqueness. In contrast, Nail (1986) argues that independent individuals are more driven to behave in a way that is incongruent with social norms. This leads them to recognise the use of engagement activities with focal objects as a tool for presenting their ideal images, which offers them key differentiation from others. Consequently, participants in this research favoured extraordinary foci, engaging with particular focal objects on Facebook to emphasise such distinction and assuming that other people would see and appreciate that distinction. This suggests self-differentiation to be one of the drivers of engagement for self-presentation . The following section moves on to discuss the second driver of such activities.

6.4.2 Group belonging

While the previous section discussed self-differentiation, studies argue that, in contrast, individuals also have a need to fit in with their social environments and not diverge from established groups (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This research suggests that, for some, group belonging is another driver leading them to inauthentically engage with focal objects to present themselves. Group belonging can be defined as 'a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of

interpersonal relationships' (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.499). Some participants commented that the engagement activities they undertook could be simply a tool to help them gain the acceptance of others, blend in, and be part of a group. For example, the participant below engages with the focal object to please the people whom she was with at that moment and, more importantly, as a way of telling other people that she was around this group, which is popular and well-known in her network:

> *'I've "checked-in" in this post [Royal Concert Hall] not because I'm satisfied with the place or something like that but I guess when I'm with some people that I know for sure that many people know them and it looks good to have them around; I "check-in" to let others know. Sometimes people also want you to check-in with them as well'. (Participant 23, Female, Spain)*

Unlike traditional media, in which others' reactions are virtually absent, the online environment offers a greater opportunity for individuals to infer others' attitudes. Therefore, by posting with popular and well-known people, a positive effect can be generated as individuals' self-definitions are shaped by their surroundings (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It is also more likely that individuals will receive a high number of 'likes', a virality metric signalling others' agreement (Alhabash et al., 2015; Stavrositu and Kim, 2014; Lee-Won et al., 2016). Achieving high agreement with others provides individuals with instant belonging to such groups. Thus, in the above quotation, engagement activity was undertaken to show other people that the poster belonged to the group, in the hope that others would find her more interesting. Her wide range of good connections also made it seem that she knows many other people; such connectivity is often promoted in social media use, with individuals tending to show their large connectivity networks online rather than admitting to having limited connections (Edwards, 2017).

Other participants mentioned that engagements with focal objects were intended to match what people in their communities were engaging with and to avoid being perceived as outside the group.

> *'I choose to "post" many things such as brand contents [JS100] that match the community I currently interact with, even it doesn't really reflect who I am. But I*

don't want to differentiate myself from my community; otherwise, they would eliminate me from the group'. (Participant 1, Female, Thailand)

Research suggests that the threat of social exclusion can increase an individual's need to belong (Berger, 2014; Mead et al., 2011). Indeed, interactions with particular cohorts of people could influence participants to engage with a focal object; thus, individuals tend to prefer brands used by their reference groups, hoping to gain access to group membership (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). People seek to link value with people they perceive to be somewhat similar to themselves (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Libai et al., 2010). Having common ground can make conversations flow easily and increase the perceptions of similarity between individuals or group members (Berger, 2014). Opportunities to connect with other like-minded individuals are easy on social media (Hall-Phillips et al., 2016) and are one of the reasons why people engage in a brand community (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015). As these engagement activities illustrate individuals' affiliations with focal objects, other people may, therefore, perceive individuals as being like-minded, without knowing that such engagement activities are presented inauthentically as a method of increasing group participation. The impact of this engagement, therefore, is based on inauthentic behaviour.

Other participants used engagement to create an impression with others despite their own different interests.

'I tagged my friends here, in this post [Baanice], because I know that this content matches their preferences. It's like I "share" for others to keep in good contact with them; everyone loves knowing that others are thinking about them, right?' (Participant 11, Female, Thailand)

'To keep in touch with someone, I can't just connect with them in their posts, but I also have to raise discussions in my own posts so that they start talking to me first. I post a lot about many things [UNILAD] in order to open up as many conversations as possible, because different people are concerned about different issues…so it looks like I can talk about range of issues. But this doesn't mean that I'm interested in it all…I still keep up my engagement…As I said, I use Facebook to connect with people'. (Participant 14, Male, Thailand)

Ellison, Charles and Lampe (2007) suggest that people use social media to expand their relationships among those with whom they have weak ties and deepen

existing relationships among those with whom they have strong ties. This can be expressed through engagement, with the purpose of making a good impression and gaining positive feedback from others. Engagement is done, not because these topics are the most interesting to the poster, but because they can help in developing relationships. Individuals do not need to be in some form of community with genuine shared interests to develop relatedness to others; there is not always the need for such formal group membership (Scott and Lane, 2000). Some impersonal bonds are attractive enough for individuals to identify themselves with others regardless (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Reed II, 2002), so relatedness can also occur through sharing information with friends. Moreover, as individuals develop a feeling of being important to other people, their sense of belonging to a particular group develops (Chen, 2011).

These examples show engagement activities that aim for group belonging functioning in two ways. Firstly, they indicate a level of interest for others, and, thus, other people tend to feel good about the participants themselves. Secondly, other people understand that participants share their interests, which develops their sense of belonging. As people may not recognise that engagement may be directed at group access, the level of trust people have for individuals makes these engagements successfully persuade others to believe in the action (Harmeling et al., 2017). Individuals have a natural tendency to develop relationships and identify themselves with social membership groups to which they already belong or to aspire toward membership in groups to which they wish to belong (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). They may feel that connections with such focal objects could enhance their connections with other people (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Participants, therefore, engaged with focal objects online in the hope that the people in such groups would notice these engagement activities and respond accordingly.

Therefore, the participants desired to belong to a group or to something greater than themselves. This finding adds the more specific view that engagement activities on social media can be tools for helping individuals connect and blend in with those around them. Engagement does not just emerge from interactions between

individuals and the brand, but it also ties to other actors in networks, who are important for engagement to occur (Fehrer et al., 2018). While other research identifies that individuals engage to connect with other trusted and likeminded people for discussion (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2015), this research expands the argument to include the inauthentic driver of self-presentation for group belonging rather than true interest. The next section considers the third driver of engagement for self-presentation.

6.4.3 Self-enhancement

Interviewees reported self-enhancement to be one of the drivers causing them to inauthentically engage with focal objects for self-presentation. Self-enhancement can be defined as 'operationalized tendencies to dwell on and elaborate positive information about the self relative to negative information' (Heine and Hamamura, 2007, p.4). Individuals believe that their Facebook engagement activities can enhance their selves in the eyes of other people through interactions, such as interests, lifestyles and selections. These notions were reflected variously by the interviewees, as shown below.

> *'Sharing a lot of stuff on your Facebook feed makes it look like you know more than others. For example, I used to share posts from "Tech Insider" because I wanted others to see that I also follow and have interest in this stuff. By posting about technology, I build myself a better image of being a tech guy, an early adopter, those kind of images in the eyes of others'. (Participant 7, Male, Thailand)*

In this example, the focal object is the same as that discussed by another participant in a previous example under a different driver (participant 8, section 6.4.1). It is worth noting that engaging with the same focal object can be motivated in different participants by different drivers, since the same focal object can hold various meanings for different people. Therefore, Kirmani, Sood and Bridges (1999) suggest that individuals tend to use those focal objects they believe are prestigious, and which provide a highly reputable image, to enhance themselves.

Other participants expressed that they engaged to enhance their 'selves' by using the 'check-in' feature on Facebook for 'showing-off' and as a tool to exhibit their wealth to other people.

> *'There's a meme saying "Did you know? You can fly from any airport without announcing it on Facebook". I did that habit too; I check-in at the airport when I go for my vacation.[Turkey to Greece]....Flying used to be an expensive thing to do, so it's like I can fly; I have money you know. Check-in is a tool of saying out loud that I fly'. (Participant 20, Male, Turkey)*

> *'I show off a lot by "checking-in" to places I visit....This is a clever way to show off your wealth compared to other things that people like to show....It's like I show what I value- that I have time and I have taste....Some cafés [Amorino] I visit are not that remarkable, but because people go there, I think I have to go, "check-in" and post a picture....Sometimes I feel like, if I go to a café and I don't post a picture or "check-in", then there's not much point visiting. Nobody will know about it' (Participant 12, Male, Thailand)*

These examples suggest that such activities require both money and time to show the individuals' outgoing characters; thus, this public act is related to perceptions of status (Schwartz et al., 2012). Individuals believe that such information enhances them, and this underpins their need to share their experiences via engagement with the focal object though posting photos (Coary and Poor, 2016; Diehl, Zauberman and Barasch, 2016) and checking-in (Kim, 2016; Wang and Stefanone, 2013) so that they can present themselves to others in the best light possible. Research has shown that some people feel their activities would be wasted without letting other people know about them (Lo and Mckercher, 2015).

The following examples show individuals presenting themselves as ethical people.

> *'I've shared this make-up brand, which is not made for me [male] but I like it because the brand concept and its story are attractive [Bodyshop]....Their make-up is cruelty free. Perhaps others can see that I care about animal rights and these sensitive issues. Most of the time, I don't actually check whether the products I use are tested on animals'. (Participant 10, Male, Thailand)*

> *'I've shared how these high street brands' [H&M, New Look] clothes were made from child labour, so stop buying otherwise they're gonna make children do it. Maybe if I want to be completely ethical like I just said, I should stop buying right now, but I still don't stop this habit'. (Participant 27, Female, Cyprus)*

Due to people increasing expecting firms to behave in a socially responsible way, (Mishra and Modi, 2016), individuals also know that being responsive to such ethical issues is essential for receiving praise from others (Rim and Song, 2016). Research has highlighted that the human spirit is reflected through individuals' choices of products and services (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2010). As people often assume that individuals' posting behaviours are linked to their preferences (Lo et al., 2011), individuals dedicate portions of their engagement activities to mentioning important issues, enhancing their images in others' eyes while admitting that they do not take the issue as seriously in real life. This involves both positive and negative engagement as evidenced in section 6.4.3 when participant 10 positively engaged with a brand, while participant 27 negatively engaged with a brand. This outcome is contrary to that stated by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), who have found that self-enhancement tends to be associated with positive rather than negative actions.

Individuals engage with focal objects in different ways to enhance their online images. Self-enhancement is often facilitated through WOM (Berger, 2014), and engagement is often carried this way, as well. This often involves favourable information (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran, and Shahar, 2016), which also contributes to advancing both concrete (i.e., skills) and abstract (i.e., status, popularity) goals (O'Mara and Gaertner, 2017). Bareket-Bojmel, Moran and Shahar (2016) report that 50% of Facebook activities represent self-presentation for the purpose of self-enhancement. Research also indicates that self-enhancement emerges in two versions: simple self-enhancement, through which individuals try to promote themselves positively, and compensatory or defensive self-enhancement, in which individuals, who have negative views of their 'selves', seek favour from others (Shrauger, 1975). It is widely known that self-enhancement involves a need for positivity and developing a favourable view of a person among others, so what that person promotes to others is an enhanced version of reality (Gregg, Sedikides and Gebauer, 2011).

6.4.4 Section summary

This section has demonstrated the drivers behind engagement for self-presentation: self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. This provides alternative antecedents within a nomological network based on self-presentation, regardless of the level of relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects. Using focal objects for self-presentation in engagement activities takes various forms, and this suggests that each object reflects different meanings to different individuals. For example, one object that is a means for self-differentiation to one person could be a means for group belonging to another person. Individuals are subject to individualised differences; they have different values and needs and variant forms of expression. As their engagement activities are observed by online crowds, it is possible that a second-order effect will occur, in which these activities will impact other people. This provides instant evaluation of such focal objects influencing other people's attitudes and possibly affecting their behaviour, even when engagement is based on inauthentic behaviour for self-presentation. Building from this, the following section will discuss how individuals perceive the engagement activities of other people in their networks.

6.5 Impact of engagement for self-presentation

Prior sections have discussed how individuals perform engagement for self-presentation with focal objects on social media; this engagement could be directed at other people within the posters' own networks. Early research confirms this, claiming that the relationship between individuals and objects is 'never…two-way (person-thing), but always three-way (person-thing-person)' (Belk, 1988, p.147). The connectedness of engagement on social media allows for interactions between more than two actors (i.e., individuals and brands), but it also connects other actors (i.e., other people) to influence these individual–brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2019; Fehrer et al., 2018). Thus, the members of this triadic engagement relationship in networks could impact each other (Fehrer et al., 2018). Although previous sections have acknowledged that engagement activities may be driven by individuals'

inauthentic behaviour and may be subject to a wide variety of motivations, the impact such engagement activities have on other people tells a different story. Some of the interviews revealed individuals who were not impacted by other people's activities on Facebook as they have a level of awareness that others might be acting inauthentically. However, other individuals believe what they see in their Facebook newsfeed and claim to be affected by it.

6.5.1 No impact

Some participants recognised inauthenticity in social media activities, as the online environment enables people to pretend to be something better than or different from reality. Therefore, some participants were cautious about what they saw other people doing on Facebook and understood that posts simply reflect the ways in which people wish to present themselves online. Thus, these observers are subject to less impact.

> *'Not for me; other people in Facebook have no impact on me. I've seen so many examples of people trying to present themselves online in a way that is too unrealistic, so I no longer care about them'. (Participant 17, Female, Thailand)*

> *'Maybe I am pessimistic about the Facebook thing...but I feel like everyone's life is pretty much the same; it's just how we show it to the world right?' (Participant 20, Male, Turkey)*

> *'I don't think what people post reflects who they really are because you might be a very mean person, but you might be posting that you are participating in these charities. As I'm grown up, I believe that this doesn't determine someone as a person, so it's basically what you promote'. (Participant 27, Female, Cyprus)*

This suggests that some people can identify inauthentic engagement behaviour. Participants acknowledge this and claim that hidden intentions behind Facebook engagement mean that they do not pay too much attention to others' posts. It may be that observers are capable of distinguishing inauthentic self-presentation (Gosling, Gaddis and Vazire, 2007; Sievers et al., 2015). Although these participants appear unaffected by other people's Facebook activities, it is important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses. The third-person perception concept suggests that most individuals tend to believe that they are less exposed than others to media influence (Davison, 1983). In the context of this research, individuals perceive that

they are less influenced by social media (Zhang and Daughetry, 2009) – in particular, the engagement of other people (i.e., comments) (Chen and Ng, 2016).

A possible explanation for people falling into this bias may be that individuals often believe they are more intelligent and discerning than others (Sedikides and Strube, 1995). Accepting that one is influenced by social media can be equivalent to accepting one's own gullibility (Perloff, 2009). Moreover, an indirect impact could still also be possible without the recipient's acknowledgement. Research suggests that incidental exposure can influence individuals even when it is not fully processed (Dreze and Hussherr, 2003; Yoo, 2009). Conforming to the perceived behaviour of other people may be unconscious. In line with this reasoning, it is not always possible for individuals to determine social media's effect on themselves (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973). However, some of the issues emerging from these findings may relate specifically to negative impact; participants acknowledge that inauthentic activity takes place, and, therefore, this could lead to negative evaluation. This area should not be neglected, as acknowledging the inauthentic engagement acts of others does not always protect individuals from the impacts of those acts. The next section examines impact in more detail.

6.5.2 Impact

Several interviews revealed participants who took other people's activities on social media seriously. These participants stated that they believe what they see online (i.e., others' engagement activities). Indeed, people's opinions through engagement activities could have 20 times more impact than those delivered by the company or the brand itself (Goh, Heng and Lin, 2013). Participants mentioned that, when they see others' engagement activities, they look for the owner of that particular post because their level of trust in that person affects the impact of the post. Their relationships with and the credibility of the engagement source (i.e., friends and acquaintances) altered the level of impact, particularly with posts originating from trusted sources in the participants' networks.

> *'You know right now we have to screen out fake news from real news on Facebook because anyone can spread anything; everyone can become a publisher of their own content. So, it's important to look at who shares content when you read it. If*

content is from trustworthy friends, then that will improve my willingness to engage further because at least I know their posts are real'. (Participant 14, Male, Thailand)

The issue of doubting online posts is not unique to this study. It was also raised by Warner-Soderholm et al. (2018), who have found that only 20% of their sample unquestionably trust what they see on social media. However, most individuals have attachments to their initial perceptions of trust (Rusman et al., 2010), and, thus, when posts originate from those perceived to be trustworthy, individuals regard them as more persuasive (Willemsen, Neijens and Bronner, 2012). As stated previously, individuals consider people in their network to be sources that are more trustworthy than the brands themselves (PwC, 2018). However, trust in such posts can develop into trust in a brand, encouraging individuals to engage further (Brodie et al., 2011). When this is the case, it is likely that individuals will ignore content in favour of the source. Posts from people participants favour tend to impact them more deeply than those from people they do not favour, regardless of the posts' content. For example, participants mentioned the impact of posts from people with whom they had close relationships.

'Sometimes when I see that many of my friends like these pages, it triggers an idea of what are they about, and I often "like" them because I feel that I want to see what my friends see. I want to be updated with the same things they see'. (Participant 7, Male, Thailand)

'When I see my friends "like" something on my newsfeed…sometimes there are things I'm not interested in, but because many of my friends like it, I start to doubt my opinion and whether I should do something with it as well…because others around me do that'. (Participant 16, Female, Thailand)

The interviews revealed that the participants conformed with other people and aligned with engagement practices after they saw the same engagement activities from many people at the same time. Witnessing other people's engagement can provide individuals with a social proof, which they use to determine appropriate behaviour about what is desirable or undesirable, particularly by observing the behaviours of people they consider similar to themselves (Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren, 1990; Nolan et al., 2008). This is because individuals tend to feel that

people within their networks share their connections and interests. This high network overlap among people improves the trustworthiness of content and helps people act in the same ways as other ingroup members (Peng et al., 2018). Thus, a closer relationship between participant and the poster positively impacts the evaluation of the content and increases people's propensities to share the same post (Gunawan and Huarng, 2015; Ketelaar et al., 2016). This may suggest that individuals consider certain posts as more suitable for their attention to develop something in common with others and continue acting in the same network.

Participants also tend to value credible people, who are perceived to be specialists or experts in particular areas.

> *'One person I really admire is knowledgeable, so I am interested in reading whatever she posts. I actually follow her in order to "like" particular brand pages she posts about'. (Participant 1, Female, Thailand)*

> *'I often value posts that are "shared" by gurus or experts in this field. For example, my friend, who works in the banking field, shared a post from Bloomberg with his opinion. I think that post is credible because he is a specialist in the field. So, I will read and "like" such posts because I believe they are somewhat true'. (Participant 15, Male, Thailand)*

Research shows that, when people are seen as knowledgeable about a topic – specifically from their 'experience, education, or competence' (Horai and Fatoullah, 1974, p.601) – they are perceived to be more credible. Posts from credible sources are more likely to be internalised and positively influence the use of the content (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012; Gunawan and Huarng, 2015). Such impacts could mirror that which results from expert endorsement, yet experts are not necessarily celebrities with public recognition; they are just as likely to be ordinary individuals within the participants' own networks (Biswas, Biswas and Das, 2006). This impact may be even more powerful when individuals know these people personally. Hence, it is likely that participants believe these posts are true and trustworthy when they believe that the owners are experts in the posts' subject areas. Participants also mentioned that people, whom they perceive to be experts in one area, make posts in other areas, thereby extending the impact of their posts.

'It is more specific as I look at the user who posts, I feel like different people have different levels of credibility, so only certain people can impact me. For example, I know this person has great taste in coffee, so his posts always impact me and make me want to follow those coffee brands or cafés he tried. I "like" the brand page in order to stay updated with them and also to remind me that I want to visit this place. But his great taste in coffee also extends to other things – the next time he posts about restaurants, I would be interested the same way too'. (Participant 26, Female, United Kingdom)

This suggests that a positive effect occurs in that the posters' perceived credibility in coffee selection influences his perceived credibility on another subject. These two posts are interconnected in the individual's mind because they are linked to the original owner of the posts. This reflects the 'spillover effect', in which individuals use their perceptions of one focal object to infer their perceptions of another, especially on social media where perceived evaluation transfers easily (Borah and Tellis, 2016). Thus, the effects of engagement may occur outside focal actors' control as individuals' attitudes and behaviours could depend on the perceptions they have of the posts' owners, who may just use those engaging in posts as a vehicle for their own self-presentation.

Thus far, the results of this research explain how engagement posts impact individuals differently, as participants seek out the owner of the posts, and this determines the impacts of those posts. Individuals commonly have their own perceptions toward one another, and those perceptions influence their actions and likelihood to engage. For example, other people's engagement behaviours affect the engagement behaviours of an individual, and the relationships between other people and the individual affect the relationships between the individual and the focal object (Fehrer et al., 2018). Although individuals are likely to place greater attention on native sources, such as friends and acquaintances in their networks (Jin and Phua, 2014; Lin and Horst, 2013), not all of an individual's friends have equal impact. This may have a different effect from weak and strong ties (Dubois, Bonezzi and Deangelis, 2016) and low and strong influencing power (Harmeling et al., 2017) – explaining why certain sources exert greater impact than others.

This also allies with the concept of significant others, who are highly influential to individuals. Therefore, what they hold to be important may greatly

affect other individuals in their circles (Andersen and Chen, 2002). Individuals' perception of source credibility also compensates for inauthenticity, and, thus, they overlook others' online intentions because they believe in those people (Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri, 2019).

Assumptions of engagement impact may also be based on findings in the literature concerning WOM, which has been perceived as unbiased, credible, and trustworthy (Arndt, 1967). Individuals believe that WOM posters have little to gain from their actions, and, thus, such engagement activities are impactful (Thakur, 2018). The effects of engagement, which are well known in the literature – such as purchase, loyalty, satisfaction and trust – could, therefore, affect other actors (i.e., other individuals and organisations) (Brodie et al., 2013; Pansari and Kumar, 2016). As these perceptions occur on Facebook, which is an interactive platform, neither indirect or direct impacts can be overlooked, given the potentially powerful effect of familiar information sources.

6.5.3 Section summary

Participants expressed various views about the impacts of engagement for self-presentation. Some stated that they were not impacted at all. However, others still perceived the engagement activities of other people to be authentic, and, thus, those engagements impacted them further, even though inauthentic behaviour could be driven by participants themselves (as discussed in earlier sections, 6.3 and 6.4). This suggests a rather contradictory result. A possible explanation may be shown by prior work, which suggests that people have a limited capacity for identifying fake information due to truth bias (Levine, Park and McCornack, 1999).

The existence and recognition of engagement for self-presentation, which may seem inauthentic, calls into question the extent to which people might misunderstand genuinely authentic behaviour as inauthentic, and vice versa. This would result in a confused situation. As people are connected in their networks, their engagement behaviours tend to influence other actors (Fehrer et al., 2018; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). This effect is heightened through the engagement platform (i.e., social media) (Brodie et al., 2019). Moreover, as each actor is involved in

multiple levels of aggregation (i.e., micro, meso, macro and meta) in an ecosystem, the effects of engagement could expand to other levels across multiple contexts (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018).

This section has aimed to show that there are secondary or further impacts from engagement that are inauthentic, and, if not carefully managed, they could lead to a spiral of uncontrollable consequences. This would impact many stakeholders, including focal firms/brands. Whether or not they are beneficial or detrimental to businesses, these engagements are worthy of acknowledgement from companies seeking to optimise their engagement marketing. The next chapter will examine companies' perspectives on this issue.

6.6 Chapter conclusion

Thus far, the thesis has found that engagement may be viewed from an alternative perspective. The most obvious result is that social media engagement can be inauthentic and driven by self-presentation. Thus, such engagement for self-presentation may result in engagement activities, which are built up with varying levels of relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects. Consequently, the thesis has classified engagement under different types: 1) strong relationship and weak disposition (staged engagement), 2) weak relationship and strong disposition (contradictory engagement), and 3) weak relationship and weak disposition (faked engagement). This suggests alternative antecedents to engagement literature centred around self-presentation – that is, self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. Given the different properties and motivations in engagement for self-presentation, such engagement, which may not reflect individuals' genuine behaviour, might affect other actors by influencing and mobilising their attitudes and behaviours toward the focal objects. This impact may extend to other stakeholders, such as the focal firm, since there is a chance that people could make decisions about the products and services based on these inauthentic activities. Chapter 7 will present the findings and discussions regarding the company's perspectives on the Chapter 6 results.

Chapter 7 : Findings and Discussion (Second phase) – Organisational perspective of engagement for self-presentation

Chapter 6 presented the findings and discussion regarding engagement for self-presentation and its impact, as revealed in the first phase of this study. After the completion of the first phase, however, it became necessary to apply an organisational perspective to the interpretation of the results. Therefore, to further deepen the thesis, semi-structured interviews were arranged with organisations. Chapter 7 presents the results of this second phase, which considered engagement for self-presentation from the organisational perspective, including whether and to what extent firms are aware of engagement that is subjected to different levels of relationships and dispositions, as well as the impacts such engagement might have on them. The results presented within this chapter are based on the interviews conducted with organisations that belong to the industries mentioned by participants in the first phase. This allows for direct comparison of the results of the two phases. The chapter will proceed as follows.

Chapter 7 begins by presenting organisations' understandings of engagement on social media. The organisations were introduced to the concept of engagement for self-presentation, which was divided by level of the relationship and dispositions (as found in the first phase of the research). They were later asked whether they acknowledged these kinds of engagement, which may present alternative views toward engagement activity in general. Some organisations did recognise this phenomenon (Section 7.1). Next, the thesis presents the results of organisations' perspectives regarding this engagement. The organisations commented on the engagement activities, and their statements are expressed via three themes: brand awareness (7.1.1), trust (7.1.2) and control (7.1.3).

7.1 Engagement with different relational and dispositional levels

This section presents the results regarding engagement, involving varying levels of relationships and dispositions, from the organisations' perspective – discussing whether and how organisations have encountered these experiences and their strategies for managing them. However, before progressing to this issue, it was important to ask organisations about their generic views and expectations toward social media engagement. Most organisations in this sample appeared to believe that individuals engage based on genuine intentions, with strong relationships and dispositions toward the focal object.

> *'Engagement on Facebook is very important to us…Our objective of being on Facebook is to stay in touch and keep our visitors updated with new knowledge. We aim to use this as a channel to educate people, for example, about textiles, antique fashions or our own organisation. This is basically the platform that is easiest and fastest for us to connect directly with people all the time…and it is where our frequent visitors get in touch with us'. (Participant 1, Tourism)*

> *'We use social media to reach our customers more easily. We have our customer base here, so we use this channel to promote new or seasonal menus….We often boost posts to get the content delivered to the right group of people…and these methods improve our engagement rate'. (Participant 3, Food services)*

> *'Engagement for us is a big deal, because as long as we see engagement and people interacting with the page, we know that it's doing the job we want it to do….We want to be able to provoke nostalgic feelings, which lead to an increased warmth with the alumni community in terms of how much they engage with us. We want to increase the level of engagement with the people on the page….We also look at posting at different times throughout the course of the day because we have alumni across multiple time zones; we obviously want to make sure that as many of them see the content and engage as possible'. (Participant 7, Education)*

These organisations mentioned social media engagement from a range of people, including visitors, customers and alumni, whom they assume to be driven by genuine behaviours. This suggests that organisations recognise the relational and dispositional aspects of engagement (Brodie et al., 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). However, a few organisations held different expectations regarding engagement, mentioning the current trend of people engaging with them to ensure that others in their networks see the posts.

'I try and grow an audience and be able to point people in the right direction…Because they want other people to see that they know what's going on around Glasgow because the thing is as soon as they comment, then other people can see that they have commented. So, I get the sense that a lot of people like or say things because they know what their pals are going to see'. (Participant 6, News and Media)

This suggests that some companies are aware that individuals' engagement may not necessarily be driven by genuine motivations but can be subject to different levels of relationships and dispositions to engage. These results further support the idea, presented by other recent studies, that engagement is not limited to consumers, as found in early research in the engagement field (Brodie et al., 2011). Instead, any actors (i.e., any individuals) may engage with focal objects (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018; Brodie et al., 2019).

Therefore, at this point in the interviews, the notion was introduced that engagement can be based on individuals' different levels of relationships and dispositions to focal objects (Figure 7.1) and may be pursued for the purpose of self-presentation. Organisations were shown quotes relating to each type of engagement identified in the study's first phase. These different engagement forms were explored, and the organisations were encouraged to comment on examples from their own organisational perspectives.
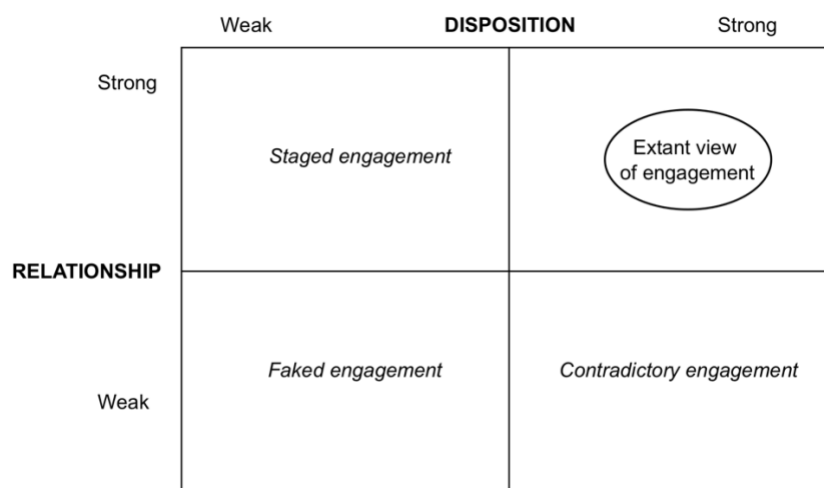

Figure 7.1: Relationship and disposition in engagement (typology)

Some organisations seemed entirely unfamiliar with these kinds of engagement. Previous studies have asserted that engagement is based on genuine behaviour from individuals with strong relationships with and dispositions toward focal objects (Brodie et al., 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), and organisations have taken this at face value, without considering alternative types of engagement.

> *'To be honest, I haven't really thought about that before…and I think it would be quite hard for people to make up memories not having come to university'. (Participant 7, Education)*

However, several organisations could recall such engagement after being presented with the option.

> *'Knowing this confirms my previous thoughts….Not all of them are our customers; we have quite a large number of followers in our social media accounts….Of course they could have various reasons to engage'. (Participant 2, Retail)*

> *'Before this interview, I didn't think about this point, but when you asked it made me recognise…oh well I agree with you….I have found that they are not within our target group'. (Participant 3, Food services)*

> *'I never realised these kinds of engagement exist, but when you showed me those quotes, it made me realise that it's happened to us too'. (Participant 4, Automobile)*

This suggests that organisations' expectations might differ from what they are actually experiencing. It may be difficult for them to assume the exact motivations behind individuals' engagement when such engagement is often designed to mask true intentions, which are opposed to genuine constructs (Brodie et al., 2011). However, it would be helpful for companies to consider the purposes behind individuals' engagement, such as whether their desires are connected and linked to what the organisations expect, since behaviour directed toward different goals may lead to conflicts of interest. Van Doorn et al. (2011) suggest that, if individuals' goals are aligned with a company's goals, these engagement activities will positively affect the company. In contrast, if the goals of both parties are not aligned, engagement activities tend to have more negative impacts. Although it seems organisations acknowledge that some engagement may happen inauthentically, many tend to

believe there are no differences among the different types of engagement that are subject to varying levels of relationships and dispositions.

> *'From my perspective, I feel the same for all these [Figure 7.1]….These engagements are good for our brand and help promote our brand to a wider audience'. (Participant 2, Retailer)*

> *'I don't feel any differences among these different kinds of engagement [Figure 7.1]. I think it's good for us'. (Participant 1, Tourism)*

Organisations seem to be generally happy with engagement in any form, without recognising the true and diverse impacts these various forms may have. They seem not to have fully developed an alertness to the idea that engagement, based on different levels of relationships and dispositions and driven by different motivations, may come with unexpected consequences. In what follows, Chapter 7 moves on to discuss organisational perspectives toward the results from the study's first phase regarding such engagement in relation to the sampled companies. Three key themes arose from the interviews: brand awareness, trust, and control.

7.1.1 Brand awareness

The first theme identified from the interview was brand awareness, 'the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds' (Aaker, 1996, p.10). This term emerged inductively from the data. Organisations commonly refer to this term because they recognise that social media engagement creates awareness not only in their consumers but also their other stakeholders. Thus, in this sample, organisations tended to see any engagement, regardless of the level of relationship and disposition, as beneficial. Consequently, organisations described examples of engagement under 'strong relationship and weak disposition' as follows:

> *'Oh wow, I see a lot of engagement in this way. They all take photos after picking up their new car in a handover area and later I will see that they've checked-in with us using that photo. So, I decided to decorate the new space for car picking up and the services area − to encourage people to take photos and proudly post them online. We like this kind of engagement, so their friends would see our company presence − we promote it and it works! More engagement, more check-in posts'. (Participant 4, Automobile)*

'We have experienced this a lot. Actually, the main aim of our café is to attract this type of customer, the ones who come and take photos, checking-in on Facebook to show that they have visited our café. Many magazines and blogs have talked about us a lot, and our café is kind of perceived as photo-worthy. It is also because of them − all this engagement with us online is what has led to the growth you see today. Most of our customers who visit us are somewhat like that, I would say 80%'. (Participant 5, Food services)

The link between check-ins on Facebook and self-presentation is shown in the extant literature (Kim, 2016). Therefore, engagement is used to show activities to others rather than to connect with organisations, *per se* (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014). Although organisations seem to recognise that engagement could be only temporarily through a one-time check-in opportunity (Van Doorn et al., 2010), and that individuals' true intentions to engage may not be based on genuine antecedents as stated in the literature (Brodie et al., 2011), they see this engagement as adding positive value to the company. Check-ins with a business on Facebook are perceived as a cost-efficient means of online advertising (Kim, 2016).

Additionally, the examples have shown that, not only are individuals engaging with companies, but the companies are also managing content to promote online visibility; this is described through engagement activities showing 'weak relationship and strong disposition' and 'strong relationship and weak disposition'.

'We use content to stimulate engagement not limited to our visitors. The content involves…rare or unique photos of textiles that are not available publicly on the internet, or sometimes we arrange the content so as to follow current trends to draw people's attention. For example, when there is a fashion exhibition, we relate that content to the textiles shown at the museum. By doing this, we are able to draw the attention of people who are interested in those fashion shows….Saying that, no matter why they engage, in our opinion we think it's a good thing…we just look at it as CPR [cost per revenue,] and then we have nothing to lose because museum exposure is communicated'. (Participant 1, Tourism)

'I believe that many of our followers engage with us because of the content that we post. As I said earlier, content, such as lifestyle, fashion and other stuff that is not about the products, builds high engagement….This is something we have seen….I guess they engage with us because they have a particular interest in fashion and our bag is fashionable….I don't mind whether they will buy our products or not….Either way is fine to me….At least these people create brand awareness for us. It's better than nothing'. (Participant 2, Retailer)

'It's something we kind of know that, although we're a café, mostly customers come, not because of our drinks, but because they want to take a photo in our café. So, we also try to upload as many photos as possible every day for people to engage with and also as ideas for them to take photos and later post and share'. (Participant 5, Food services)

Although engagement could happen organically, many organisations try to manage their engagement marketing in a way that brings the most benefits to their organisation and improves their engagement rates in online social media (Schmitt, Skiera and Van den Bulte, 2011). The organisations in this sample mentioned engagement marketing plans to better capture and promote more engagement with focal object through content. Digital content marketing is being used to foster engagement and brand awareness (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). If successfully implemented, it can be perceived as the art of communicating to people without excessively selling products (Bicks, 2016). Organisations, therefore, design and adapt content, matching their audiences' lifestyles, to facilitate engagement (Dolan et al., 2016), particularly because overly commercial content reduces individuals' likelihood to engage (Swani, Milne and Brown, 2013). Therefore, content does not need to be directly related to a company to spread brand awareness. Having content from other areas could encourage engagement from other people interested in those issues, thereby raising brand awareness among them. Posts related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) serve as a good illustration of content that does not involve individuals' purchasing anything; thus, organisations promote themselves and their CSR content by inviting individuals to engage and share ideas regarding social issues (Loureiro and Lopes, 2019).

It seems that most of the organisations interviewed in this research were happy with engagement of any kind, since they believed that it promotes brand awareness. This is illustrated through their statements mentioning all types of engagement with different levels of relationship and disposition.

'We don't care about the reasons why people engage with us. As long as it is not negative, it's a good thing that they engage….Even if they engage because the museum helps their image construction or for whatever reason, at the end of the day, they promote our visibility to the online world'. (Participant 1, Tourism)

'When they engage with us, I consider it as a form of advertisement. We have no problems regarding these people; we like it that so many people know our showroom; that's what we want....I think different people have different networks of friends, so as long as it is positive engagement and their friends see it, then it's positive for us'. (Participant 4, Automobile)

Comparing these findings to those from other studies confirms that organisations tend to see engagement as benefitting their own organisational performance (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), even engagement that is mismatched to their objectives or that does not directly contribute to the firm (e.g., purchasing). It seems the sampled organisations believed that individuals pursuing engagement activities may indirectly contribute to the organisations from their resources (Harmeling et al., 2017). For example, when individuals engage with brands on social media, this engagement could leverage their network assets, which, in turn, provide access to their numerous connections and, thereby, increase the firms' abilities to reach more potential consumers and spread visibility (Harmeling et al., 2017). It has been reported that, when individuals post, those posts are seen by around 35% of their social media networks (Bernstein et al., 2013). Therefore, it might be sensible for firms to encourage individuals to write posts including their brands, as these posts will help raise brand awareness (Stephen and Galak, 2012). As individuals are exposed to and interacted with brands on social media, brand awareness is created, not only with the actors engaging, but also with others in their networks (Barwise and Meehan, 2010; Hutter et al. 2013).

Early studies assert that brand awareness is likely to be high when individuals have strong associations with the brand (Pappu, Quester and Cooksey, 2005); thus, scholars have found that brand awareness and engagement have positive effects, which suggests that, the more individuals engage with a brand, the higher the brand awareness they develop (Hutter et al., 2013). However, even with no brand associations, individuals are also likely to adopt decisions based on familiarity drawn from social media posts (Hutter et al., 2013). As brand awareness could range from mere recognition (i.e., how it looks, its characteristics) to complete dominance (Aaker, 1996; Sasmita and Suki, 2015), such exposure makes social media an effective platform for facilitating and enhancing engagement to achieve brand

awareness (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012; Hutter et al., 2013). Organisations, therefore, expect this engagement to have several advantages for the company, such as increased product preferences and purchase intentions (Pappu, Quester and Cooksey, 2005). Hence, the effectiveness of engagement marketing also depends on the organisations' capacities to identify, gather and use resources from individuals (Hollebeek, Srivastana and Chen, 2019).

It may also be the case that organisations simply desire a volume of engagement. Many firms value high social media metrics, such as numbers of likes (Peters et al., 2013). This shows that organisations apparently care about quantity over quality (i.e., volume over intention) where online engagement is concerned. They believe it promotes company visibility and presence to large networks of potential consumers. Therefore, firms make every effort to engage individuals with the brand, with the common belief that 'any publicity is a good publicity'. For example, Berger, Sorensen and Rasmussen (2010) have found that negative book reviews actually increase sales for unknown authors. This suggests that a larger volume of information can increase interest and stimulate awareness of the focal object. Although this engagement does not represent individuals' genuine behaviours, firms may not necessarily focus on authentic engagement as all they want is, simply, brand awareness. This can, for example, be seen when companies sponsor sporting events (Cornwell, 2019).

However, as engagement activities on social media are often exposed to many people, it is important to get the fundamentals of brand presentation right, as this contributes to awareness and how other people perceive the brand (Bilgihan, Peng and Kandampully, 2014). When engagement attracts individuals who do not fit with the brand (Harmeling et al., 2017), or when it occurs for the purpose of self-presentation via individuals with weak relationships and/or dispositions to the focal object, it could lead to individuals excessively giving low quality contributions to the organisation, thereby affecting other individuals' perceptions about and awareness of the brand (Barreda et al., 2015). Thus, individuals' social media engagement could become less valuable to the brand, which could backfire for the brand (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). Engagement serves as a means for communication

about the organisation and helps people know more about the brand. When marketing efforts effectively establish brand awareness, those who develop a strong brand awareness may contribute and become engaged more than brand users. The next section moves on to further examine another theme arising from the sampled organisations' comments regarding engagement for self-presentation.

7.1.2 Trust

The second theme drawn from the interviews reflects trust, defined as 'willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence' (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande, 1992; p.316). It appears some organisations in this sample believed that having engagement activities from many individuals would improve people's levels of trust in them; others, however, were concerned that some individuals' engagement would ruin the trust that other people already had in them. This raised mixed reactions, as exemplified below, concerning engagement with 'strong relationship and weak disposition' and 'weak relationship and strong disposition'.

> *'They post their photos and tag us....It's so good that our customers think that our brand helps them in their presentation...and they engage with us because they believe that other people would appreciate it. That means that our products are good enough for them....They think our brand is able to help them look good, right − then go on....I see only benefits from all these kinds of engagement, no drawbacks. People would tend to perceive our brand as trusted and reliable because we have a lot of engagement from other users as well'. (Participant 2, Retailer)*

> *'Our posts about CSR projects always receive a lot of likes, which have nothing related to our sales. Many people just value posts like that, and that creates trust they have to us that we also do good things, we don't just sell cars and create pollution. Obviously, people like to associate themselves with good stuffs, right?' (Participant 4, Automobile)*

It appears that individuals engage because they trust the focal objects to help them fulfil their goals, such as self-presentation (i.e., fashionableness and social responsibility). Organisations seem happy about these engagements, whether or not the individuals' interests and goals reflect genuine behaviour. Firms may assume that engagement builds trust (Brodie et al., 2011), yet there may be nothing behind these

engagement activities, which firms believe to involve trust, as they are not necessarily based on genuine behaviour. However, as these activities are visible to others in the individuals' networks, firms can benefit from this. The extant research has considered trust in various ways, including people's trust in the individuals delivering the content (Williams, 2012). Therefore, influence from others is considered as a social persuasion tool, which can attract new potential consumers and effectively contribute to firm performance because it is generated by consumers (Itani, Haddad and Kalra, 2020; Van Den Bulte et al., 2018). New consumers may be led by the volume of engagement (i.e., likes) to confirm their trust toward the firm (Mochon et al., 2016). Thus, such engagement may create value through networks (Fehrer et al., 2018), and it is in the interests of the firm to encourage this form of engagement as people trust the opinions of their contemporaries more than they trust the firms' own messages (PwC, 2018). By approaching the subject in this way, organisations may be able to acquire trust from more people.

However, because people tend to trust what other individuals say on social media, organisations seem to worry that people's levels of trust in them could be lessened by inaccurate information presented through engagement activities with 'weak relationship and weak disposition'.

> *'We are worried, though, if it is negative and they are not our visitors…they would not be able to convey accurate information, so it would be negative for us….We would still consider contacting them or commenting on their posts to see if we can be of any help and make things right. At least in this way, we show we're making an effort to do something, and we think we could make an impression, not only to that specific person, but also to other people in their Facebook feed who happen to see it, so they would think that this organisation does not neglect their clients and that we try to do something. It's also our image'. (Participant 1, Tourism)*

> *'There was one time when someone accused us of mistreating the animals, like we should not use animals for show in terms of business. But it turned out he'd never visited our café. I don't know if he's an animal activist…or just wanted to show off and try to be cool, but we didn't abuse our animals at all'. (Participant 5, Food services)*

These organisations commented on misinformation issues related to social media engagement activities – misinformation which could cause distrust in and misunderstandings about the organisations. It may be difficult for some people to

distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information when that information is published by people they trust (Warner-Soderholm et al., 2018). Inaccurate information can involve both positive and negative claims. Negative information can negate trust and ruin a brand (Roy et al., 2019). While most organisations seem more concerned about negative engagement, as it may be logical to assume that positive engagement will have positive effects (Tsao et al., 2015), positive engagement could also cause negative consequences. For example, people tend to set their own standards after reading overly positive feedback from individuals without knowing that that feedback may be inaccurate. Then, when these people do not find the actual performance/object to be as good as their self-defined expectations, the positive reviews they originally read can elicit negative responses, which, thereafter, affect trust (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019). This could create a form of disconfirmation. Therefore, organisations should adopt more comprehensive strategies for considering both positive and negative engagement and efficiently managing these vulnerabilities.

Some organisations in this sample also tried to improve their situations by correcting issues in engagement, which might have caused doubt or ruined trust. Research has shown that giving sufficient information about products or organisations to individuals is a crucial step to helping people trust the firms. Though informational content normally tends to have a negative relationship with engagement, it exerts a positive influence, in the face of a risky event, to regain trust (Tellis et al., 2019). Therefore, firms may consider directly providing information, so people will have less information asymmetry (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014). Although people may consider indirect communication from other people to be more trustworthy, even these individuals are not trustable sources (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019), organisational communication in response to issues generates more beneficial outcomes and indicates that the organisations make efforts to solve complaints (Crijns et al., 2017; Kelleher and Miller, 2006). This is crucial for mitigating negative impacts (i.e., negative brand evaluations) and regaining trust (Noort and Willemsen, 2012).

On the other hand, some of the organisations in this sample were concerned about the potential for negative images, which could destroy the trust others have in them, as evidenced by organisations' comments concerning engagement with 'weak relationship and strong disposition'.

> *'When I read this, I have to question whether the image they present is in accordance with who they are. So, hmm, I don't think there is any problem with us if the image is in accordance with who they are or if they are successfully presenting themselves in that way and people believe it. But if not, and they do not match our kind of customers, I'm afraid it would have an effect on our brand image. We care so much about our brand image; we set it above average, and we want to maintain it as inaccessible'. (Participant 3, Foods and beverage)*

This organisation apparently showed some discomfort in welcoming engagement from the 'wrong' group of people (i.e., those having weak relationships with the focal brand) – especially those who appear to project an image contrary to that maintained by the brand. Engagement from such individuals has the potential to weaken other people's trust in the brand due to the mismatch between the brand image and the posters. If it is assumed that individuals' engagement also represents organisations, how an organisation thinks about this could partly relate to how celebrities represent a brand. When the celebrities' images match those of the brands, this tends to bring about more positive responses than when those images mismatch (Till and Busler, 2000), as the image and identity of the celebrity may be transferred to the brand (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999). Similarly, engagement from the wrong group of people could cause negative consequences for the brand. For example, when consumers see dissimilar others engaging with a firm, this could cause them to doubt the credibility of the content and the brand. Subsequently, this tends to weaken whatever trust these people already have in the brand (Berger and Heath, 2007; Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014). Hence, the organisation represented by the above quotation, which was concerned about maintaining its luxury brand image, wanted only engagement from people who lived up to that image so that the firm could hold onto the trust others had in the brand.

Trust is an important construct, which is widely examined in engagement literature as an antecedent or outcome of engagement with focal objects (Brodie et

al., 2011). It develops from a pre-existing relationship in which individuals believe in the stated function of the brand. Engaged individuals are likely to form a quality relationship with the brand, which enhances trust (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Dessart, 2017). Thus, scholars tend to assume that trust will lead to a long-term relationship with the brand (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). However, this thesis has found that trust is more likely to be trust in a focal object's ability to aid the self-presentation process rather than trust in the focal object's function (i.e., product performance and quality). This is, therefore, a different kind of trust, which is not necessarily based on a pre-existing relationship. Such engagement appears to be temporary, with some individuals taking advantage of a particular scenario or using engagement as a photo opportunity. Similarly, Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggest that engagement can be temporally momentary. This temporality, as described in other research, occurs based on true necessities, yet the temporality found in this thesis concerns tools for self-presentation as an antecedent. This is somewhat contrary to most of the literature, which had perceived engagement as a long-term concept (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2019). Although this research found that engagement could occur temporarily, attached to a particular moment, its impacts have the potential to last for the long-term among others (i.e., observers).

As organisations appear to acknowledge this, they seem to consider, not only the individuals who engage, but also other people within the posters' networks. Additionally, they tend to follow the flow by encouraging individuals to engage in the hope that trust can be built via engagement activities (Liu et al., 2018), thereby increasing the exposure of brand related information via posters' networks (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014). As PwC (2018) found, 'trust in a brand' is among the first factors that influence shopping decisions; however, people increasingly trust the opinion of other individuals, 'what somebody in their network says about the brand' (PwC, 2018, p.5) more than they trust the brand's slogans. Some firms try to maximise the benefits arising from these engagements by leveraging individuals' persuasion capital. In the eyes of others, the information contained in engagement activities is perceived as being more authentic and, therefore, more persuasive to others than cold contact from companies (Harmeling et al., 2017). Thus, trust in a brand can be transferred from other trusted individuals via social media (Liu et al.,

2018). Perhaps for this reason some organisations are also concerned that influence from individuals could damage trust and worry that these engagements, if not managed appropriately, may lead to a negative impression on other people within the posters' networks. It appears that this form of engagement might suit some companies better than others. The following section discusses the final theme, which emerged from the interviews with organisations.

7.1.3 Control

The final theme raised by organisations in this sample related to control. Social media engagement has transformed individuals from passive consumers to active contributors and given them greater influence over a broader group of people (Harmeling et al., 2017; Kozinets et al., 2010). This transfer of control in social media can be seen as both an opportunity for and a threat to organisations. Firms' taking advantage of uncontrolled spreading was demonstrated when the sampled organisations were shown examples of engagement with 'weak relationship and weak disposition'.

> *'As the page got more popular, I was a bit nervous about how you'd have to place engagement….I'm very conscious of the fact that, if people comment more, then all of a sudden visibility goes through the roof. Like, I recently posted something, and that photograph itself had a million reads….People started commenting from California and stuff [Glasgow local news]'. (Participant 6, News and Media)*

> *'It happens quite often that some particular posts have high engagement compared to the others because people start tagging each other, and it goes on and on just out of control. So, when looking at the analysis for those posts, I found many people who never engaged with us before, and I don't know who they are as they are different from the demographic group we often see'. (Participant 5, Food services)*

These organisations gave examples of engagement rates being higher than normal due to posts moving out of control, and, thus, reaching broader demographics, who had little relationship with and/or disposition toward engaging with the company. This can occur because of people's ability to engage with their extended networks, spreading posts to second parties, third parties, and so on, throughout the broad-reaching connections of those networks (Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfalt, 2017). Individuals can spread brand stories very quickly, beyond the organisations' control, especially in the social media environment (Hennig-Thurau et

al., 2010). This widely distribute the content, may make the brands more preferred and involve individuals in the co-creation process (i.e., product ideas) (Leeflang et al., 2014; Reichstein and Brusch, 2019; Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013). However, brands could appear everywhere on social media without gaining attention from the right audience (Fournier and Avery, 2011), and this lack of control has a downside, especially for strong brands and brands experiencing negative sentiments. These brands are easily exposed to activities that risk tarnishing the brand value. Such companies, therefore, have much to lose from the limited ability to control the flow of information and lessen the influence of misbehaving individuals (Chun and Lee, 2017; Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013). This indicates that the issue of social media control is not without risk, as firms will face challenges. Following this line of thought, other organisations in this research sample mentioned keeping themselves in safe positions to prevent losing control and to avoid negative effects, which might follow from engagement with 'weak relationship and strong disposition'.

> *'Social media is so fast....We cannot risk any chance of things going wrong because this can be uncontrollable. Once we were asked to organise an event, which would take place in front of our showroom, but we turned it down because we recognised that this would cause huge traffic jams. We see this as a risk that people could attack us, saying that we are causing trouble. So, as well as content that we post, we consider things carefully to prevent any negative feedback it may cause....On social media anyone could say anything; negative engagement could go viral. Maybe eco-friendly people can go on and link it to air pollution, global warming blahblah....It's possible'. (Participant 4, Automobile)*

Social media presents a further threat in that individuals are able to spread information quickly to a wide range of people (Effing and Spil, 2016). Negative information about an organisations online often carries far greater weight than positive information in relation to people's attitudes and the organisation's reputation (Chiou and Cheng, 2003). This could be dangerous for firms (Harmeling et al., 2017). For example, McDonald's 2012 campaign to promote positive WOM and highlight about the quality of its vegetable and meat through hashtag #McDstories produced adverse responses and negative WOM when people started using the same hashtag to share about negative stories (e.g., stories about bad customer service and

food poisoning) (Burke, 2019). General Motors invited consumers to suggest ideas for improving its advertisement, which resulted in the company being attacked about the global warming issues of its previous car model (Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013). It is very easy for individuals to trigger negative effects for firms on social media (Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013). When firms ask individuals to engage with them via firm-initiated engagement, the outcomes could be unexpected due to uncontrollable situations and may have dark sides for the brands (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2018). Therefore, some organisations choose not to make many movements on social media that could initiate excessive engagement as such engagement comes with risk. However, without firm-initiated engagement, individuals may opt to engage with firms via individual-based preconditions, such as psychological factors (i.e., identity relevance) (Prentice, Wang and Lin, 2020; Van Doorn et al., 2010). In the interviews for this research, the sampled organisations mentioned situations in which they cannot control social media engagement from individuals outside their target consumer group (reflecting 'strong relationship and weak disposition' and 'weak relationship and weak disposition').

> *'Since they are our customers and they engage, it's good to see that. But talking about the self-presentation thing, one little concern is that we have quite a limited space, and of course we aim high for spending per head per table; so if they engage for self-presentation or even dine with us in order to check-in or get their photo taken, their spending tends to be lower than those who come for the luxury experience and exclusive service. This will have an effect on our target sales'. (Participant 3, Food services)*

> *'We had a kitchen takeover project with a famous chef from America, so we posted, and those posts were shared a lot; but unfortunately our bookings went the opposite way. So, I started contacting those people saying how can I help, and I got virtually no response. So maybe the engagement could have been for self-presentation....It's something we cannot control....The restaurant is quite niche; we don't want to go mass market....I think we have to carefully design our target group next time we boost our posts in social media so as to exclude those who aren't target customers...because on the negative side, it's a waste of time and resources for the company. I mean we have to contact them anyway in case they are our target customers, but then it often turns out they're not'. (Participant 3, Food services)*

The control individuals wield via their social media engagement may, therefore, lead to unintended effects beyond organisations' control (Pansari and

Kumar, 2017). While engagement is open for any individuals to contribute, instead of offering real contributions, some use this chance to mock firms (Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013). For example, one organisation in the sample assumed that engagement for self-presentation may relate to dining for self-presentation, and its concern was that this would impact target sales. Sales are, indeed, the ultimate objective for most organisations (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), but waste of resources is also a key concern. Although much literature suggests that online engagement favourably affects brand performance and sales (Malthouse et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017), this result is based on engagement occurring due to genuine constructs. Previous studies, however, have not dealt with engagement for self-presentation, which is subject to different levels of relationships and dispositions. Scholars have determined that making self-presentation posts on social media about products can reduce individuals' purchase intentions for that product as they have already fulfilled their needs (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). Thus, such activity appears to be only temporary action, which could make firms miss opportunities to manage their limited resources to serve long-term clients with long-lasting benefits. It may, thus, be the case that such engagement brings about unsatisfactory sales and poor performance.

To this point, this section has shown that the issue of control for engagement on social media presents both opportunities and challenge for organisations. However, as social media is a complex and rapidly changing market, controlling the direction and quality of communication in engagement can be even more of a challenge (Heinonen, 2011). Organisations have been found to devote considerable resources to managing these engagements (Verhoef, Werner and Manfred, 2010). While any social media engagement could also face the issue of control, engagement for self-presentation may require more awareness as it often carries more of inauthentic content. Thus, when posts spread out of control, the information communicated to others about the focal organisations could be inaccurate. Moreover, when people find out that engagement has been done for self-presentation, while the company has nothing to do with this, they may still form a negative impression of the brand (Ferraro, Kirmani and Matherly, 2013). Therefore, these engagements become more of an issue, and inappropriately managing them can result in organisations

risking losing consumers and ruining their reputations (Roehm and Brady, 2007). Fake news could serve as a good illustration of how organisations lose control over the placement of inaccurate content, which may conflict with the brand and impact the organisations (Palmguist, 2019).

While some organisations in this sample remained unsure of the impact of loss of control, others actively attempted to reduce the volume of engagement that is not directly related to them. Thus, some organisations preferred lower engagement, staying in their comfort zones (Harmeling et al., 2017) and managing engagement marketing to involve only engagement from relevant, genuine individuals, which is more predictable, rather than from individuals driven by inauthenticity (i.e., self-presentation). In this way, organisations can be more effective in their fields and prevent negative outcomes by managing engagement overload. These results reflect that some organisations may not want to be exposed to the mainstream (Berger and Ward, 2010). Therefore, as social media control does not rest within the firm, the focus is on protecting the brand (Gensler et al., 2013).

This transfer of control has shifted some power from brands to individuals via social media (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Black and Veloutsou, 2017) as firms involve individuals in those activities that were reserved for the company. For instance, when individuals' engagement activities stimulate WOM, this can be perceived as an advertising function of the brand (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2018). Individuals, then, rather than the organisations, design and spread the messages. Thus, in the case of engagement for self-presentation, the messages communicated could be about self-presentation, yet, at the same time, such engagement also represents something about the firm. Social media empowers individuals, giving them influential voices, and firms cannot control their conversations (Fournier and Avery, 2011). On social media, brands and individuals are equal actors (Peters et al., 2013). However, organisations placing too much concern on the risk of losing control over the brand can lead to lower chances of their maintaining relationships with and connecting to consumers (NG, Sweeney and Plewa, 2020). Organisations should make their decisions regarding engagement marketing carefully as engagement may affect content and the outcomes of other

marketing functions, which impact the wider customer group (Hollebeek, Srivastana and Chen, 2019).

7.2 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, organisations' perspectives from the second phase interviews have been discussed. Some regarded engagement for self-presentation in a positive light in certain situations, but they also expressed concerns about the undesirable impacts that engagement may have in certain situations. It is believed that these kinds of engagement could be both advantageous and harmful to the organisations in question. Since such engagement for self-presentation occurs without a strong relationship with and/or disposition toward the focal organisation, it appears to be only a temporary state – an opportunity for individuals to use engagement with focal objects as a vehicle for self-presentation. This strongly contrasts with the existing understanding that engagement is a long-term concept based on genuine constructs (Brodie et al., 2011). Although most of these engagements for self-presentation may be only temporary, their impacts could last longer on the focal actors involved (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Chapter 6 has shown that such engagement might affect other actors. Chapter 7 has explained further that such contributions also impact organisations, which could lead to organisational change. This is because organisations are currently using or are considering appropriate strategies for overall engagement marketing (i.e., to promote or to prevent alternative forms of engagement) (Harmeling et al., 2017), which would affect the population as a whole (Hollebeek, Srivastana and Chen, 2019). This chapter has, therefore, demonstrated the results from the second phase of the research study. It is now necessary to move on to the conclusion, which forms the last chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 8 : Conclusion

This final chapter concludes the thesis, presenting the contributions of the research. It begins with a summary of the study and of the key findings that respond to the research's aim and objectives. These results have been gathered via a qualitative methodology consisting of a two-phase data collection period (Section 8.1). The chapter then continues by drawing out the four main theoretical contributions of the thesis (Section 8.2). Firstly, it presents the finding that engagement may occur for the purpose of self-presentation – reflecting different relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects (8.2.1). Secondly, the research proposes self-presentation as an alternative antecedent to engagement (8.2.2). The third finding relates to the temporality of engagement (8.2.3). Finally, engagement for self-presentation might affect organisations (8.2.4). Accordingly, the thesis suggests managerial implications (Section 8.3). Chapter 8 then includes an explanation of the limitations of the thesis (Section 8.4) as well as suggestions for areas for future research (Section 8.5). The chapter ends by providing a conclusion (Section 8.6)

8.1 Summary of the research

This thesis has focused on online engagement, and the impacts of that engagement, in the social media context. It has considered the role of the ideal self in engagement, which problematises individuals' motivations for engaging with focal objects online. This suggests that people could hold a broader range of relationships, dispositions, motivations and drivers beyond the genuine behaviour presented in the existing literature. Consequently, the impacts of such engagement on other actors may also differ from those of genuine engagement, which are usually expected. Therefore, the overall aim of this thesis was to explore how engagement can be

affected by an individual's ideal selves and the effect on others. The corresponding research objectives were as follows:

1) To explore the role and impact of the ideal self on actor engagement in online social media.

2) To understand how the self-presentation (via engagement activities) of others can influence individuals and other actors.

3) To investigate whether and to what extent firms are aware of engagement for self-presentation.

These objectives were addressed via a two-phase qualitative research study. The first phase explored Objectives 1 and 2 through semi-structured interviews with 30 social media users. The findings identified three types of engagement, with varying degrees of authenticity, reflecting different combinations of relationships and dispositions: 1) staged engagement (strong relationship and weak disposition); 2) contradictory engagement (weak relationship and strong disposition); and 3) faked engagement (weak relationship and weak disposition). These engagements were found to be objectified for self-presentation and this thesis has identified self-presentation as an alternative antecedent to engagement literature. This phase further uncovered the drivers centred around the purpose of engagement for self-presentation: self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. Taken together, these findings suggest the role of the ideal self in promoting engagement. Following this direction, engagement for self-presentation was determined to affect, not only the individuals who observe the activity, but also other actors, such as the focal firms involved.

This finding highlighted the importance of engagement's impact on other actors, and it became clear that questions needed to be asked of organisations. This necessity evolved into the development of the third research objective. Consequently, the second phase of the study was designed to understand the results of the first phase from the perspective of organisations, resulting in seven semi-structured interviews covering six industries. Interestingly, most of the sampled firms had not considered the possibility that engagement could be inauthentic and driven by self-presentation and that such engagement activities might appear to be temporary rather than long-

term. However, when examples were discussed, the firms were able to recognise this engagement in relation to them. Consequently, different viewpoints were held for the reasoning behind this. Three themes were identified from these interviews: brand awareness, trust and control. The following sections discuss the research contributions and implications developed by this thesis.

8.2 Research contributions

8.2.1 Contribution 1 – Engagement as self-presentation and typology

The first contribution relates to the current understanding of engagement as reflecting individuals' genuine behaviour towards focal objects (Brodie et al., 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Existing research assumes that there is a strong relationship (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) and a strong disposition (Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019) between individuals and focal objects. However, this thesis uses the lens of the ideal self to consider actor engagement activities in online social media. This suggests that individuals may engage with focal objects to present their ideal selves. Subsequently, literature concerning the 'self' was consulted in relation to engagement, attempting to combine research from two fields within this thesis. Thus far, little research in the field of engagement has considered the aspect of the self, yet this literature tends to examine objects becoming part of a person's self-concept, which assumes the strength of the associations (Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg, 2009; Prentice et al., 2019; Xu and Liu, 2019; Itani, Haddad and Kalra, 2020). However, most extant research still seems not to consider the concept of the self, which is a core generating individual differences in engagement behaviour.

This thesis problematises the intentions of individuals driving engagement. When engagement facilitates self-presentation, it makes engagement activity more inauthentic. This is evidenced by engagement with few pre-existing relationships and/or dispositions. Therefore, this thesis classifies different types of engagement for self-presentation, which are subject to varying levels of relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects, into three typologies: 1) staged engagement

(strong relationship and weak disposition), 2) contradictory engagement (weak relationship and strong disposition), and 3) faked engagement (weak relationship and weak disposition). Thus, engagement for self-presentation brings an alternative perspective to earlier research, which suggests that strong relationships and strong dispositions are a condition for engagement (Storbacka et al., 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Brodie et al., 2019).

Engagement for self-presentation should be considered by both academics and practitioners as it provides a different mechanism and source of values from genuine engagement. Whereas genuine engagement is activated by consumers' genuine behaviour, engagement for self-presentation is initiated by a need for self-presentation and is, therefore, described as inauthentic. Engagement for self-presentation comes with a different set of antecedents. However, it is not an opposite phenomenon to genuine engagement; it is merely a different process, which individuals undergo and which results in a different nomological network. Neglecting the differences between these forms of engagement can result in a biased view of individuals' contributions to firms and can limit the firms' capabilities to make the most of engagement.

8.2.2 Contribution 2 – Self-presentation as an antecedent of engagement

Existing engagement research assumes that individuals express genuine relationships, dispositions and behaviours, whether positively or negatively valenced; thus, engagement antecedents are well understood, from the conceptual viewpoint in the literature, to reflect people's genuine behaviour towards focal objects. The literature also proposes antecedents, which are centred around pre-existing relationships, such as involvement, participation, commitment, loyalty, trust and satisfaction (Brodie et al., 2011). Researchers and practitioners largely focus on these relational antecedents (Brodie et al., 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). However, very few have attempted to look at the subject from this precondition of individuals (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Prentice, Wang and Lin, 2020; Itani, Haddad and Kalra, 2020). From this perspective, alternative motivations may be in operation, which facilitate engagement with focal objects even when there are weak relationships and/or dispositions.

This builds on the previous contribution – the varying types of engagement for self-presentation reflecting different levels of relationships and dispositions between individuals and focal objects. This research proposes that it is essential to expand the present knowledge of engagement antecedents to include those driven by alternative motivations. It has also found alternative antecedents, which are motivated by various drivers aiming for the self-presentation of the ideal self: self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement. This suggests that the ideal self plays a role in promoting engagement. Consequently, the thesis proposes these alternative antecedents within a nomological network of service-relationship-centred self-presentation. This is likely to be amplified on social media, which allows all individuals equal opportunities to engage with any focal objects of their choice, regardless of their actual relationships with and dispositions toward those focal objects. However, these alternative antecedents may only be applicable to some individuals, as different people are subject to different needs for self-presentation (Kowalski et al., 2018). Alternative antecedents may, thus, result in engagement outcomes and impacts that differ from current expectations and understandings.

8.2.3 Contribution 3 – Engagement and temporality

This contribution of the thesis also derives from the basis of different relational and dispositional levels within engagement for self-presentation and its alternative antecedents. Most of the literature treats engagement as a long-term concept. Fehrer et al. (2018) explain that, for engagement to occur, it must involve interactive experience, not only with the focal object, but also with other actors. This reflects a dynamic engagement process built of high levels and intensities of constructs over time. Thus, the type of engagement treated in existing research often assumes genuine behaviour and a quality relationship between consumers and the focal object (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). However, Van Doorn et al. (2010) describe temporality as one of characteristics in the 'scope' dimension of engagement; therefore, engagement can be temporal.

Similarly, this thesis has found engagement driven by motivations for self-presentation, and such inauthenticity, along with different relationships and dispositions, may render some engagement temporary at one particular moment. For

example, individuals may engage with products to virtually signal their identities, yet they may cease engagement with such products, and with other products in the same category, after their goal of building a particular identity has been fulfilled (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). A likely explanation is that, while engagement activity with the focal object can occur, these individuals are not always actually engaged. This can be due to a lack of relationship and disposition between the consumer and the focal object.

However, though engagement activities with focal objects may be temporary, their impact on other actors (i.e., other individuals and focal firms) may have ongoing consequences. People may make judgements based on the engagement activities they observe, and firms may make decisions based on the engagement activities actors have with them. Attitudes can become embedded in people's minds, and the effects of firms' actions may last for the long-term. Though some engagement activities suggest that engagement may no longer be directed at the company (as found in prior research), by using the company as a vehicle for engagement to present their ideal selves, the impacts of individuals' actions will still affect the focal firms.

8.2.4 Contribution 4 – Engagement for self-presentation might affect organisations

The potential impacts of engagement have been widely examined in the literature. However, when engagement becomes inauthentic, unexpected impacts may occur. In the first stage, engagement can influence the people observing it (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Given that most people make decisions based on what they see within their networks, engagement for self-presentation can have a huge impact. While positive engagement may be assumed to bring positive consequences, this research has found that even positive engagement can be undertaken by individuals with little knowledge about the focal products or service (i.e., those with a weak relationship and/or disposition). Thus, it is possible that such engagement activity may involve inauthentic content and information about the focal firms, and misunderstandings can occur. Some people may also have the ability to identify inauthentic behaviour (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019), and, in this way, the

impacts of inauthentic action may differ when it is seen as inauthentic. Still, being overly exposed to the self-presentations of others may dilute some individuals' preferences toward focal objects (Ferraro, Kirmani and Matherly, 2013). This interpretation can lead to both negative and positive effects for the focal company.

Firms increasingly depend on the resource contributions of a range of actors and take engagement as a source of knowledge in their engagement marketing endeavours (Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Firms view engagement as a valuable resource, which they cannot acquire if consumers are not providing it (Harmeling et al., 2017). Accordingly, firms tend to expect that content and metrics reflect individuals' genuine behaviours, and they are willing to respond in a like manner, as they believe this would help them better satisfy their consumers. Therefore, it is worth considering the relationship between engagement and wider organisational change. As genuine engagement can affect organisations over time, there is also the potential that engagement for self-presentation could lead to organisational change when organisations use such engagement to develop the directions of the companies.

Nevertheless, the resources on which organisations rely may not actually be reliable since they could be the inauthentic actions of individuals with levels of relationships and dispositions to the focal object that differ from what they express on social media. Hence, there is the risk that companies may make decisions and react to feedback and comments that are based on engagement for self-presentation and waste a lot of resources (i.e., money and time) investigating or responding to an issue that may not accurately reflect an actual concern – or even exist. The risk is that this could be taken into the organisation's wider decision-making process, which would also affect the population as a whole (Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen, 2019). This has the potential to confuse firms. For example, following its announcement that it was releasing an SUV model, Porsche received negative responses in online discussion forums because, at that time, people valued Porcshe for its speed, not for being family-oriented (Deighton, Avert and Fear, 2011). However, if Porsche had complied with those demand, it would not be seeing a great success of the Porsche Cayenne today. This suggests that firms must carefully consider the feedback they

receive before taking action, as feedback may not reflect the true desires of authentic consumers; it can be from those with weak relationships and/or dispositions, who engage based on inauthentic intentions (i.e., self-presentation), or, in the case of actual consumers, they may not know what they need until they see it. It is true that social media engagement offers massive opportunities to firms, but, at the same time, firms must also be aware of and prepared for the drawbacks. The acknowledgement of this issue is important since it concerns future engagement marketing.

8.3 Managerial implications

In addition to the four theoretical contributions, this thesis also reveals valuable managerial implications for practitioners, demonstrating several ways in which firms could manage these engagements (Table 8.1).

Research Contribution	Managerial Implication
Engagement as self-presentation	Understand different types of individuals who engage with the firm to manage and trigger their engagements more effectively
	Move individuals to higher order boxes (i.e., strong relationship and/or disposition) to enhance resources and maximise the firm's performance
Self-presentation as an antecedent to engagement	Understand individuals' motivations to engage centred around self-presentation to allocate resources (i.e., firm input) more efficiently
	Adapt engagement strategies to suit different needs of individuals to promote more engagement
Engagement and temporality	Understand the meaning behind engagement metrics and that they do not always reflect genuine, long-term engagement.
	Constantly revise engagement marketing and strategies to be relevant to the audience to encourage ongoing engagement
	Develop genuine relationships with individuals to lead to long-term engagement
Engagement for self-presentation might affect organisations	Be aware that engagement for self-presentation may be inauthentic, the impacts of which differ from genuine engagement
	Consider the mood and tone of engagement, instead of focusing on the engagement metrics alone, to pre-screen the engagement before taking it into consideration
	Provide sufficient amount of accurate information about the products and company to lessen the negative impact when things go wrong (i.e., firm-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer)

Table 8.1: Managerial implications

Firstly, the investigation of the phenomenon that engagement for self-presentation may be inauthentic has shown that social media engagement can be conducted by individuals with varying levels of relationships with and dispositions toward the focal object, while previous research has often expected engagement to come from those with strong relationships and dispositions (i.e., consumers). Consequently, companies' messages and communication on social media are tailored for these groups of people. To trigger further or deeper engagement, however, firms must think beyond the current group of consumers to include other stakeholders (Brodie et al., 2019; NG, Sweeney and Plewa, 2020). Firms can increase engagement by targeting individuals with different levels of relationships and dispositions.

However, firms must understand the different types of these individuals. This would require in-depth knowledge of their audiences, helping firms to understand which areas require improvement. This also depends on their capacities to identify and facilitate resources from individuals (Hollebeek, Srivastana and Chen, 2019).

Consequently, firms may explore how existing individuals' resources can be enhanced by moving individuals into higher order boxes (Figure 8.1), with the goal of increasing the number of people who engage with a strong relationship and disposition, as presented by the extant view of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Brodie et al., 2019). Research shows that engagement disposition may follow engagement behaviour (Fehrer et al., 2018). Therefore, as engagement behaviour already exists in engagement activities, it may be possible to enhance the disposition to engage, especially among those with low disposition. For example, if firms successfully moved engagement with 'strong relationship and weak disposition' into 'strong relationship and strong disposition', these individuals would more likely be fully engaged and contribute more to the firm's performance, both directly and indirectly (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). It is important for managers to figure out how to activate more engagement of this kind, as failure to achieve this could result in missed opportunities for organisations.
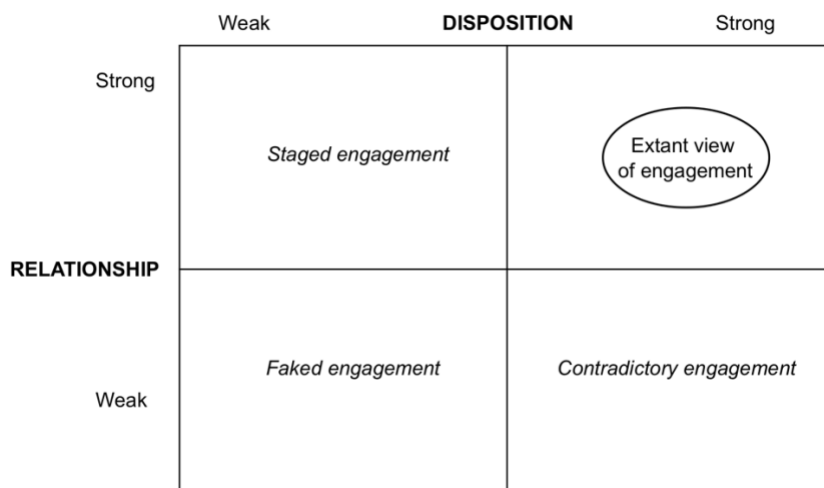

Figure 8.1: Relationship and disposition in engagement (typology)

Secondly, this thesis offers evidence for alternative antecedents to engagement literature. Firms must understand that individuals' needs to present their

ideal selves differ from genuine antecedents. For example, individuals who engage for the purpose of self-presentation may require minimal business-oriented input from the firm. Knowing this, firms may not need to take part in heavily initiated engagement with these individuals, as engagement occurs from preconditions based solely on the individual (Prentice, Wang and Lin, 2020). Consequently, firms would not need to expend much effort or investment in engagement, so they would be able to manage their resources more efficiently. However, firms can also promote further and deeper engagement by adapting strategies to suit different needs. Firms could adapt content in line with the self-presentation needs of their audiences (i.e., self-differentiation, group belonging and self-enhancement) to encourage their audiences to engage. This may mean, for example, that, in certain cases, firms could focus less on developing content about their products, needing simply to create hype. However, it is important to keep in mind the associated risks, such as those regarding trust and control, inherent in such action.

Thirdly, this thesis urges firms to consider the possibility that engagement for self-presentation can render engagement activities temporary. Firms must understand that the engagement rates they see may not have long-term effects and that they cannot rely on simply counting the numbers of 'likes' or 'comments' as these metrics may be insufficient for explaining loyalty to or engagement with the brand. To maintain high engagement rates and ongoing favourable situations, firms must constantly revise their content and maintain their relevance to suit these individuals' needs (i.e., self-presentation) and encourage continuous engagement (Kumar et al., 2010). This could be adjusted based on the performance of the engagement (Meire et al., 2019). It may be necessary for firms to put more effort into encouraging engagement as individuals who engage to signal their identities tend to cease engagement activities with the focal object after they achieve their goals (Grewal, Stephen and Coleman, 2019). A possible explanation is that this form of engagement is not based on genuine behaviour. Acknowledging this, firms may attempt to develop genuine relationships with these individuals to build a quality, long-term connection. This can also help stimulate ongoing engagement, which could contribute to companies' performance in the long run.

Finally, it is important for firms to acknowledge that, although it is engagement, engagement for self-presentation is not the same as genuine engagement. Managers must understand how engagement for self-presentation, which is driven by inauthentic behaviour, may affect their organisations. Although some people may be able to identify others' self-presentation activities, thus being subject to lower impact, the inauthenticity of such engagement can impact other actors who do not recognise it, including firms. It may be worth considering whether firms are effectively responding to this form of engagement, including whether the information contained in the engagement reflects authentic matters, and, if not, whether this would have a further impact on engagement marketing and the organisation as a whole. Firms may be unable to take information given through these types of engagement straight into their decision-making processes without first checking the nature of the engagement. This can be done by delving deeper into the sentiment and linguistic style of the engagement rather than simply its volume (Kim, 2018). This could be one way to capture the richness of engagement, as the tone is a better measure for determining genuine content, as opposed to metrics that are easily manipulated for inauthentic behaviour and could be filled with low quality engagement.

Scholars suggest that low engaged consumers are no different from non-engaged consumers in terms of their contributions to the focal firm (Fehrer et al., 2018). These individuals often only use the firm as a vehicle to present their ideal selves, so they are not usually thoughtful about potential impacts on the company. As such, brand messages can easily be hijacked (Verhoef, Van Doorn and Beckers, 2013), a situation in which the communication delivered by these individuals has a higher impact and reach compared to statements delivered by the firms (Hernandez-Ortega, 2019). Firms also acknowledge this, as was evident in the news that a company was caught for writing fake reviews of their products on the Sephora site (CNN, 2019a). In the negative event that individuals' engagement for self-presentation contains inauthentic and inaccurate information about the company and causes harmful effects, firms must also provide sufficient information about the organisation to improve the situation (Tellis et al., 2019). For example, there was a recent case in which a young celebrity posted her picture sitting on the floor of a

train, which implied that the train was overcrowded. This led other people to start criticising the company. The company went on to clarify that the celebrity had actually had a seat in one of the first-class carriages (CNN, 2019b). The firm was forced to look into the issue and correct the misunderstanding to protect its own reputation. Apart from the communication from the company side, firms may consider initiating controlled engagement strategies by hiring micro-influencers, who are often perceived as accessible and in-group by the crowds, to constantly talk about the brands (Zhang, Kuo and McCall, 2019). This allows firms to gain the benefit of having accurate messages delivered to individuals in an impactful, consumer-to-consumer way. Although this thesis extends the engagement literature, these implications should be interpreted cautiously due to a few limitations, which also open the door to future research. These are discussed in the following sections.

8.4 Limitations

As with any research, this thesis is not without its limitations. In the first phase data collection, participants were free to talk about any engagement activities with any focal objects on their Facebook profiles. While this procedure provided a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon and enhanced the conversation across different types of focal objects, it was not context specific. Thus, the relationship between certain products or industries and the ideal self could be stronger than others. For example, luxury goods are often framed as relevant to identity rather than generic goods, which are used for their functionality (Prentice and Loureiro, 2018).

In addition, this thesis explored a sample population from 11 nationalities to gather various opinions. Although it found no noticeable differences between country of origin in the relationship between the ideal self and engagement activities, many other pieces of research in the field state that there are cultural differences in both self-presentation (Arpaci, Baloglu and Kesivi, 2018; Rui and Stafanone, 2013) and engagement activities (Tsai and Men, 2014). However, the issue of culture was not emphasised in this thesis as the aim of this thesis was not to present a study of culture

or cultural differences; rather, the focus of this thesis was social media, which is a global phenomenon. In addition, this thesis also concentrates on a young sample (between the ages of 18 and 34), which accounts for more than 50% of active Facebook users (Statista, 2018b). Although this population is relevant for this research, the effect may not be the same for older individuals, who may use social media and engage for different purposes.

The focus on engagement activities within the Facebook platform – as well as Facebook's rich functions, which support engagement activities very well – was suitable for the objectives of this thesis at the current time. However, the thesis also acknowledges Facebook movements (i.e., testing hidden 'like' counts). As social media users are known to be motivated to post in ways that gain high numbers of likes – e.g., posts that may involve extreme content, which impacts people's lives – Facebook realises that this affects the mental health of its users. Thus, Facebook has launched a test to make such engagement metrics private to improve people's experiences and the wellbeing of social media users, helping them focus on themselves and not on others (Conger, 2019). It would impact the present results if this process was rolled out across Facebook in the future. Moreover, focusing on Facebook may also limit the investigation, as the results may be different for other social media platforms (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016; Roma and Aloini, 2019).

In second phase data collection process, interviews were conducted with seven organisations, representing six industries mentioned by participants in the first phase. Hence, the second phase contained a relevant sample found to be sufficient to address findings from the first phase in organisational contexts. However, this sample of firms may be relatively small and represent a limited range of industries. These limitations, therefore, provide fruitful areas for future research, which are discussed in the following section.

8.5 Future research

The research contributions and limitations serve as a basis for further exploration. To begin, future research may use different research methodologies and

sample populations (i.e., age range) to investigate the extent to which engagement for self-presentation can be said to be inauthentic. For example, there may be differences in the needs for self-presentation among individuals at different age and life stage. In addition, the four research contributions also generate a new set of further research agendas (Table 8.2).

Research Contribution	Future Research Questions
Engagement as self-presentation	How can firms optimise the use of existing resources with each type of engagement for self-presentation?
	How can firms make individuals within each type of engagement for self-presentation develop stronger levels of relationships and dispositions to enhance organisational performance?
	What types and classifications of actors engage inauthentically for self-presentation?
Self-presentation as an antecedent to engagement	Are the roles of alternative antecedents centred around self-presentation applicable across all contexts?
	Which contexts generate stronger relationships between self-presentation and engagement?
	What are the potential consequences of engagement for self-presentation?
Engagement and temporality	To what extent do firms benefit from temporary engagement?
	How can firms make temporary engagement turn into long-term engagement?
	What are the different benefits and costs of temporary engagement and long-term engagement?
Engagement for self-presentation might affect the organisation	How can firms reliably identify different types of engagement for self-presentation?
	How do different types of engagement for self-presentation affect firms?
	How can a firm manage engagement for self-presentation, and what mechanisms should be used to ensure that such engagement does not damage the reputation and others' perceptions of the firm?
	How does the impact of engagement for self-presentation on firms vary across industries and product types?

Table 8.2: Future research

Firstly, the different types of engagement for self-presentation provide potential areas for future study. Understanding the differences between these types of engagement for self-presentation will be essential for firms, who wish to make the

best use of current resources provided by the engagement activities of any individuals – even inauthentic activities. Knowing this may help firms understand more about individuals' behaviours. Existing research also provides a preliminary understanding of actors (i.e., individuals) other than consumers (Brodie et al., 2019). This thesis has further identified different types of individuals with varying levels of relationships and dispositions to focal objects. Future study could extend this notion in the domain of engagement for self-presentation by focusing on a broader range of actors, seeking other types of actors who engage inauthentically and determining how to define them and their motivations. To examine ways in which engagement activity could enhance companies' performance, future research could also explore how to make these individuals, who have different levels of relationships with and dispositions toward focal objects, develop stronger relationships and dispositions.

Secondly, alternative antecedents to those presented in the engagement literature have been found within engagement for self-presentation involving a range of focal objects on Facebook. There is no reason why these findings should not be applied to other contexts. Thus, this thesis encourages future research to explore and test this assumption in relation to various types of products, industries and social media platforms. Different contexts generate different capabilities for self-presentation, and, therefore, a more systematic exploration of which product types and social media platforms are more conducive to self-presentation via engagement is necessary. For example, luxury goods are often used for self-presentation rather than generic goods (Prentice and Loureiro, 2018), while Instagram is found to be related to self-presentation to a greater extent than Facebook (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016).

The investigation of contexts could also extend into the offline environment. Although online and offline engagement share some mutual antecedents, engagement in online social media seems to require far less effort than offline engagement. Therefore, further research should consider whether self-presentation can be considered an alternative antecedent in the offline environment. Understanding how individuals engage in different contexts is crucial for firms' performance – e.g., for the firm to understand which platform should be used under which condition and

how to adopt it to the best effect. This would allow firms to better manage their resource allocations. This thesis also urges future researchers to elaborate further on the consequences of engagement within the nomological relationship to engagement for self-presentation.

Thirdly, while most scholars widely assume engagement to be a long-term phenomenon (Brodie et al., 2011), studies would benefit from considering the temporary aspects of engagement. A comparison of benefits and costs between temporary engagement and long-term engagement would provide valuable insights for firms. Although most firms may see temporary engagement as being of less value, this thesis encourages firms to identify benefits that may have been previously unseen within temporary engagement. For instance, as temporary engagement found in this thesis tends to be initiated by a precondition based on the needs of individuals (Prentice et al., 2019), it seems that firms do not need to be involved in the process. This can be seen as free marketing from individuals. Knowing this, firms can encourage this form of engagement to maximise ongoing exposure for the company. Future studies could seek to optimise the benefit of temporary engagement. However, most companies clearly prefer long-term engagement, and, therefore, another potential area for research would be to consider how to turn temporary engagement into long-term engagement. This may require an exploration of the genuine antecedents that lead to long-term engagement (Brodie et al., 2011) to explore ways to enhance these constructs with individuals who engage inauthentically.

Finally, perhaps the most evident avenue for future research is the impact that engagement for self-presentation may have on firms. It is known that firms use knowledge from engagement activities for decision-making (Harmeling et al., 2017), yet it seems challenging for firms to inspect engagement for self-presentation to the depth that would enable them to classify reliable and unreliable engagement. The use of inauthentic information could mislead firms' directions, and, thus, another potential area for research is revealed. The different forms of engagement for self-presentation also make this more complicated for firms to handle as they originate from individuals with varying levels of relationships and dispositions, including their

own consumers, who engage inauthentically. Hence, these engagement activities may affect firms in various ways. A more systematic study is needed to identify the range of impacts and consider possible methods for firms to effectively manage these inauthentic forms of engagement for self-presentation. Moreover, such impacts and how each organisation manages engagement may be inconsistent across industries and product types. For example, in a more competitive industry, in which the product cycle is fast (i.e., a retailer), a company may be quicker to adapt compared to a less commercial industry (i.e., education). Product types (i.e., generic or luxury) may also influence the extent to which a company cares about who is engaging. This, therefore, opens yet another area for further exploration.

8.6 Summary

Taken together, this thesis provides a new understanding regarding an alternative perspective of engagement by considering engagement through the lens of the ideal self. This extends the existing research on engagement by encompassing the aspect of the self, which, to date, has been subjected to limited views. Consequently, this thesis argues that engagement could be objectified for self-presentation and identifies three types of such engagement based on varying relational and dispositional levels. These examinations have built the study's first two contributions. The findings have been necessarily addressed from social media users' perspectives; however, to produce a thorough piece of research, they have been taken further and investigated from an organisational perspective. From this, the study's remaining research contributions have been derived. Engagement for self-presentation seems to be considered a temporary activity, which individuals use as a vehicle to present their ideal selves, and it might affect organisations in unexpected ways if other individuals and/or an organisation itself makes decision based on inauthentic engagement. Hence, considering such engagement with different properties is significant for gaining new insights into how engagement may occur.

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Appendix 1: Interview protocol (first phase of the research study)

<u>Phase 1: Introduction</u>

'Thank you for coming today, the purpose of this interview is to explore your brand engagement activities on social media. There is no right or wrong answers as I just would like to know what you do, so please feel free to say anything'

'I would like to ask for your permission to audio record this interview'

<u>Phase 2: Discussion</u>

1. Could you briefly tell me what do you normally do on Facebook?

2. How long do you normally spend on Facebook each day/week?

3. How often do you check your newsfeed?

4. How would you like to see yourself on Facebook?
i)   What do you do express that?

'Do you mind to show me your Facebook newsfeed? It would be easier for us to begin some conversation from that'

5. Can you tell me about your brand engagement activities on Facebook (i.e. like, comment, post, share)?
i)   Do you think much about the brands you engage with?
ii)   What is important to you when engaging with brands on Facebook?
iii)   How do you engage?

6. How would you describe the relationship between you and those brands that you engage?

i)   Which brands do you actually use their products?

ii)   Can you think of brands that you never use/purchase?

7. We talked earlier about who you would like to be on Facebook, do you think it impacts the choice of brands you engage with?

i)   How does this brand help to communicate 'who you would like to be' to others?

ii)   What is the reaction/feedback you expect to get from your Facebook friends when you engage with a brand?

8. Can you tell me about your Facebook friends?

i)   How well do you know them?

ii)   How closely do you follow them?

9. What do you think about brand engagement activities of your Facebook friends?

i)   Do you think those activities are genuine?

ii)   How does it impact you?

iii)   What make you think/feel this way?

Repeat questions for more stories as many as interviewee is willing to share

Phase 3: Closure

1. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

2. Thank you

Appendix 2: Interview protocol (second phase of the research study)

<u>Phase 1: Introduction</u>

'Thank you for your time today, the purpose of this interview is to explore your perspective on engagement activities of social media users to your company. There is no right or wrong answers as I just would like to know what you think, so please feel free to say anything'

'I would like to ask for your permission to audio record this interview'

<u>Phase 2: Discussion</u>

1) Can you tell me about online engagement activities people undertake with your company social media? For examples, likes, comments, shares, and posts.
   i)   Do you use any strategies to encourage people to engage?

2) Why do you think people engage with your organisation?

3) How much do you know about people who engage with you online?

4) How important is engagement with social media to your organisation?

'My PhD research has revealed engagement could be a result of different level of relationship and disposition to a focal firm [<u>'Strong relationship' could be from purchase, consumption, voicing opinion, contributing to firm, involvement, participation, trust, satisfaction, loyalty etc. ; while 'Strong disposition' could reflect high willingness for resource contribution</u>]. This means people may or may not be company's customers and they are varied in their willingness and desire to engage….as such, people may engage with company for the reasons other than what we expect such as self-presentation… '

SHOW THE MATRIX AND SAMPLE QUOTES FOR EACH QUADRANT

5) What is your view on this?

SHOW THE SLIDE AND TALK THROUGH THE QUOTES FOR EACH QUESTION

 i) **Strong relationship and weak disposition** – to what extent does it matter if *customers,* with preexisting relationship but *lower willingness* to engage, use your products/services in their engagement activities just to support their self-presentation?

 ii) **Weak relationship and strong disposition** – what if they are *not your customers* but they have *high willingness* to engage from having particular views about your products/services, so they engage with you to support their self-presentation, which often occur in a misleading or aspirational way that lead others to understand that their engagement is genuine while it is not?

 iii) **Weak relationship and weak disposition**- how about if *'anybody'* just simply use your products/services *without strong relationship and willingness to engage* as part of their engagement activities only for the reason to support their self-presentation for the image they are totally not?

6) Before today, were you aware that this kind of engagement might exist?

i) Can you recall any incident of these kinds of engagement?

ii) Could you identify such engagement?

7) To what extent do you care whether engagement with your company would be in this fashion?

8) What is the impact of engagement on your organisation?

9) Do you know that engagement could result from low levels of either relationship or disposition, does it make you think differently about it?

Phase 3: Closure

 3. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

 4. Thank you

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet (first phase of the research study)

Name of department: Marketing

Title of the study: Inauthentic engagement: The role of self-presentation in consumer engagement behaviour

Introduction

Thank you for your considering taking part in this research. This research is being conducted by Archareeporn Thanvarachorn, a second-year doctoral student from Marketing Department, Strathclyde Business School. Should you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me directly by email (archareeporn.thanvarachorn@strath.ac.uk).

What is the purpose of this investigation?

This research aims to investigate how brand engagement can be affected by a consumer's ideal self and the impact of that engagement on others. The context of this research is taking place within a social media setting, which provide more opportunities for individuals to engage with the brand.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. If you agree to take part, it is your right if you decide to stop being a part of the research at any time without giving an explanation and this will not have any detrimental effect.

What will you do in the project?

The interview can be arranged at the place and at a time that is most convenient for you. It will involve a conversation, which I will ask you to discuss your brand engagement activities and what you observe in online social media. I will audio record the interview and take notes for the accurate information. All records will be transcribed for the analysis. If you need a copy of the transcription, I will send you after the transcription is complete.

Why have you been invited to take part?

The research is investigating consumers, who are social media users and have a recent record of brand engagement activities. Therefore, you are being invited to take part in this research.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

Potential risks are no greater than what might be experienced in everyday life.

What happens to the information in the project?

Your response to this interview is anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The information collected will be used for academic purposes only, and your participation will not be identifiable. Any information collected will be stored in a computer protected by a password and the security process. All the audio recording will be transcribed and deleted upon the completion of the research. Transcriptions may also be read by my supervisors.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you wish to receive research findings after the completion, please feel free to contact me for further information and progress of the research.
If you do not wish to be involved in this research, I would like to thank you for your time and attention.

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Appendix 4: Participant information sheet (second phase of the research study)

Name of department: Marketing

Title of the study: When engagement is inauthentic: The role of self-presentation in actor engagement behaviour

Introduction

Thank you for your considering taking part in this research. This research is being conducted by Archareeporn Thanvarachorn, a third-year doctoral student from Marketing Department, Strathclyde Business School. Should you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me directly by email (archareeporn.thanvarachorn@strath.ac.uk).

What is the purpose of this investigation?

This research aims to investigate how engagement can be affected by an individual's ideal self and the impact of that engagement on others. The context of this research is taking place within a social media setting, which provide more opportunities for individuals to engage with the focal objects.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. If you agree to take part, it is your right if you decide to stop being a part of the research at any time without giving an explanation and this will not have any detrimental effect.

What will you do in the project?

The interview can be arranged at the place and at a time that is most convenient for you. It will involve a conversation, which I will ask you to discuss your perspective on engagement activities of social media users from company point of view. I will audio record the interview and take notes for the accurate information. All records will be transcribed for the analysis. If you need a copy of the transcription, I will send you after the transcription is complete.

Why have you been invited to take part?

The research is investigating companies, which are active in their social media accounts. Therefore, you are being invited to take part in this research.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

Potential risks are no greater than what might be experienced in everyday life.

What happens to the information in the project?

Your response to this interview is anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The information collected will be used for academic purposes only, and your participation will not be identifiable. Any information collected will be stored in a computer protected by a password and the security process. All the audio recording will be transcribed and deleted upon the completion of the research. Transcriptions may also be read by my supervisors.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you wish to receive research findings after the completion, please feel free to contact me for further information and progress of the research. If you do not wish to be involved in this research, I would like to thank you for your time and attention.

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Appendix 5: Interview transcript (first phase of the research study)

Participant 10
Duration 35.36 minutes

What do you normally do on Facebook?

That's a difficult question because I use social media a lot. I 'share' very often, basically every day. That is my personal preference. Personally, I like to read others' online posts, and when I see something interesting, I 'share' it. Sometimes, if it is very good, not only I do share the post, but I also copy keywords that I think they are particularly good and use them for my caption.

Any examples?

I share a lot from The Standard. Some posts I 'share' with the use of captions to describe what I know or how I feel toward the post. I just think that doing this makes me look knowledgeable to others. You can see that many people also do this on Facebook just to make themselves look good. It's like I summarise the key points for my friends in my social media circles. People might therefore assume that I read a lot.

Also, Facebook has a 'check-in' feature, which functions like a memory for me because in the future it will remind me where I have been and what I have done in the past. So I use 'check-in' very often.

I actually engage a lot in social media. For example, when I see pages sharing tourist attractions, coffee shops or architecture I like, I 'like' loads of them on Facebook as a way of showing others my interests. But if I see something I really like, I click the 'love' button on Facebook.

You're only asking what I do on Facebook, right, or do you want to know about other social media as well?

I focus on Facebook, but if you have other points you want to mention, it could still be really useful.

I use many social media platforms including Instagram, but I only use it to look at photos, so my engagement in Instagram is low.

In fact, I am not sure whether it would be useful for you. I like the 'ask-question' feature of Instagram although I'm not really the kind of person who asks questions. I prefer to read the answers to questions that other people ask. When I read the questions that people ask, it is like I know more about those people by reading what they answered. So, this is how I use Instagram, but I don't know if it is considered as engagement.

In your opinion, what do you think about the answers given by those people?

From my point of view, based on the mood, tone and language that they use, I think their response is real.

What makes you think this way?

It is so real. Their wording is so straightforward about what they dislike or suchlike. Everything looks real.

Can you tell me about posts of your friends?

It's lucky that my friends are from many backgrounds so I have the chance to see different types of posts in my newsfeed. Some posts that I never thought I would be interested in, I end up engaging with the post because I see my friends 'share' it many times and I feel that quite a few people are interested in it so it must be something important. So I will 'like' that page to see if there's anything interesting like the post I just found from my friends. I only 'share' if there is something that's really interesting.

How do those posts impact you?

I do actually feel that my friends' posts have an impact on me.

I like looking at people's lives. So if I 'like' aspects of people such as their perspectives, the way they live, or their career success, I'm attracted to their posts. I want to follow what they use and where they go, because I think that's part of what they do to make themselves become the people they are today, whom I admire. So if I want to be that kind of person, this may be a good starting point for me to develop that way. So I copy some of their behaviors by starting to engage with those brands in the same way as they do, the same way they read, or the same way they are interested in things - I get to see what they see.

But it's not the case that one person can impact me in every way or through every post, maybe just particular posts.

Normally, for how long do you use Facebook each day?

How long do I use Facebook each day, right? Let me think about it. If I wake up in the morning, I will use Facebook for around half an hour. After that, I will use Facebook again before I work for about an hour or one and a half hours. I will use it again for three to four hours later on. So, I think it is at least four and a half hours in total because during the day I also use it bit here and there.

The thing is, I am so active on Facebook, I like to share stuff on my profile and read online stuff on Facebook. So when I have free time, I scroll down my newsfeed so that I know I'm up-to-date and see if my friends have shared anything interesting.

You mentioned that you like to 'share' things on Facebook, what sort of things?

My friends know I study marketing and I discovered for myself that marketing is right for me. Therefore, the online posts that I share are related to marketing, advertising, business and design. I also like designing and graphics since I was young. I can do graphic design to a certain level.

What make you share this?

Just because I like it. Actually, I like interior design and architecture. I've liked designing for a long time, but the reason I shared that home design is because I want my home design to be like that style. I want to have a bedroom like that. When I see beautiful home designs on any social media, such as Tumblr and Pinterest, I save them and post them on Facebook.

How do these posts help you to express yourself to your friends?

I think these are the interests that my friends already know about because I express them very often. Most of the time, I share what I am interested in.

What about these posts?

Yes, let me explain. Someone used to tell me to create my own hashtag. I did, and everyone knows this is my hashtag.

I like dogs and cats, and I like to share stuff about them. In the case of dogs, my friends know that I like Corgis very much. When it comes to music, my friends know which bands I like. Talking about actors, my friends also know who I really like. Additionally, I also have my own page about coffee reviews, and my friends know I like coffee shops − I am crazy about coffee!

Many of my friends say that by coming to my Facebook profile, they are able to update themselves with current issues and trends because my profile has a complete set of what should be known. This also extends to my friends asking me for suggestions for things like cafés to visit or products to use because they think I know. Getting this feedback motivates me to seek to post and share stuff that grabs attention and attracts others despite my real interests. So I think in the social media world, you have to create your own hashtag for particular characteristics so other people remember you.

So which posts do not represent your real interests?

Many of the ones from Wongnai, but you can see that I share them very often because food is something that easily grabs people's attention.

So this stuff with which you engage does not represent your real interests, but are they the brands you use?

Hmm not always. I think I can engage with any brands on social media, right?

For example, it could be that someone in my network shares particular posts. I might see it, and it feels right to me. The design is okay, the product is okay, and other things about it are good. I simply engage with the post. It is easy for me to engage with my friends when they share things.

What do you consider before you engage with brands or particular posts from someone?

Actually, it depends on many things. Sometimes I focus on the name of the page and logo because by nature I am interested in design. So the page name has to imply something about the page, not just be a general name. I am quite a detailed person, I also 'like' a brand because of its logo and how they design their brand page. When I press 'like', that also represents me so the page I 'like' must have something extraordinary about it because if it's ordinary then it could be any page, right? So when I see a page with an interesting name and logo, I click the 'like' button because I believe that the name and logo are developed for a reason and represent its character to some extent.

Is there anything else that makes you engage?

I think it depends on the content of the brand, not the person who shares it. Sometimes, the product is not for me like cosmetics, but I like the way the brand presents its products, and it has a good story. For example, The Body Shop. If we look further into my profile, we can see that I just shared a post from The Body Shop. I realise that the brand has very good content and people are talking about it, so I engage with the brand. I've shared this make-up brand, which is not made for me but I like it because the brand concept and its story are attractive – it's about how their make-up is cruelty free. Perhaps others can see that I care about animal rights and these sensitive issues. Most of the time, I don't actually check whether the products I use are tested on animals and if I do know, I would say it doesn't matter that much to me.

If a page relates to a tourist attraction, I would take a look at the pictures and their graphic styles, but I focus mainly on the content. After that, I would see the page and find interesting stuff. However, currently I think Facebook reduces the reach, and it shows up less often. Hence, liking a page does not significantly affect my life.

There was a time when I saw one video that my friend 'shared' from a page. It was so cool, so after I watched it, I just thought 'I cannot miss this kind of stuff'. I 'liked' it and also 'shared' it so as to keep connected with this stuff − it's such a quality post.

So I engage because the brand has great content. I think it is a good idea to like pages that have good content so I am also surrounded with good stuff.

What kind of feedback do you expect from people when you engage with this stuff?

I do expect something, to a certain point. I like to share my experiences because it wasn't necessarily easy to gain that experience, and I think I have a story to tell. To illustrate using my post from yesterday, I would expect that people would like my post. If they 'like' it, I know that my post was interesting enough. I am glad to have some 'likes'. If they 'comment', I would appreciate that. It means my post has an impact on those people and it means that they pay attention to what I'm doing. So to be honest, I expect my friends to like and comment.

How much do you care about people giving you positive feedback about your posts?

I used to expect loads but not any more. I still expect something but not that much.

 In the past, I used to share posts about Google Pixel when it had just launched, along with a caption that said something like 'it's worth buying'. But actually I have no plans to change to a Google phone. Other people probably think that I'm interested in changing phone and that make me look like early adopter among my friends.

Can you tell me more about your other engagement activities on Facebook?

Oh yes, I think the brand also influences whether or not I choose to 'like' it or take part in other forms of engagement. It's just the same as how I choose to buy something because of the brand.

The way that the brand posts has to be interesting enough to attract me because it makes me feel that the brand has something special to offer on my profile.

In the same way, when I engage, my profile reflects myself to others. For example, I often engage with a page called 'Cloud Check' because the content on that page is compatible with what I like − Korean related content and many other things. Therefore, whatever that page shares, including things that I am not interested in, I find it interesting enough for me. That becomes the nature of a brand. Although the brand's content may be the same as other pages, the way it is expressed is better, so I engage with this page a lot.

What do you think about the pages or the brands with which you engage?

I think that how I engage on Facebook defines me. It's just the same way when you buy something because of the brand. But in social media you don't buy, you engage because of the brand. I think it works that way.

I also like to post as a commitment for myself, reflecting what I want to achieve in the future. Maybe who I would like to be. So my engagement is like a pathway for me to achieve the goal that I want to succeed. I share because I have commitments. For example, I shared so many posts about meditation.

Can you tell me more about your posts that you say you commit to doing? For example, you mentioned about meditation?

This happened because I saw my friend shared it and it seemed to me like a great hobby. Then I persuaded myself to try it as well. I am that kind of person who posts as a commitment to achieve something.

So have you done it?

Yes and I posted it on Facebook. Let me tell you this, I do not post, like … "today I did meditation for ten minutes". There must be some evidence that I did something first. For example, I summarise my life at that period of time, what I had done recently, at this point I did this, and now I am working on this. Hence, I posted to share what I listened and what I read on social media. It really works. I want people in my social media circles to know this, and it doesn't matter what they think. I just want to let them know I experienced something good.

Sometimes I want to tell people that I've started weight training, but I don't want to say it straight through a post because people would think that I'm showing off. So on a leg day, I've 'shared' a post from Adidas about how my Ultra Boost is perfect for a leg day during my

weight training, so other people know that I'm doing that. You see? I don't take a photo of myself going to the gym, but I make reference to it indirectly.

How do you use your engagement with brands to communicate yourself in the manner you want to on Facebook?

I think this is done by the posts that I share, I like, every day. I keep telling people that I am going to do this and I am going to do that. Therefore, in the future, if someone finds something related to me, they don't forget to think of me.

Some people think that posting on social media is related to privacy issues. Why do you have to tell everything about yourself? Is it necessary to do so? In my opinion, however, sharing is one of the ways that I can present myself, and the more I tell stories, the more people know my background. Moreover, I think it builds a connection to the people who follow me to recognise something I post and think of me. So my communication is done through my posts.

What do you think about the posts of other people in Facebook?

There are some people who like to post really obviously that they are using this brand and are clearly trying to show off something. However, I prefer other people to share things that are relevant for me instead.

Do you think any activities on your Facebook profile represent something like that too?

Are you talking about self-presentation? I think my regular posts are part of how I create my self-image and project it to others but it is not done as a way of making others feel like I'm showing off or something like that. Yes, sometimes I want to show off something, but in a way that it is not too obvious so that it would not make my friends feel like "here he comes again, he's showing off again".

Through my posts, they know that I do this, I do that, I care about this, or these are my perspectives, things like that. The more I share on Facebook, the more I can express myself. I don't see why I have to keep it to myself. Why don't I share what I like and what I don't like? When I share something, some of my friends who are not that close to me see it and comment that they like it too. This creates a conversation, which in turn makes me think "why don't I share it", and this motivates me to share more. I hope that maybe in the future these things that I post may benefit me in some way such as in my career.

Thank you so much for being here today, it is really appreciated.

Participant 13
Duration 32.56 minutes

What do you normally do on Facebook?

I post photos, and because I rarely read newspapers, I follow and engage with news and latest trends on Facebook because Facebook is so up-to-date with everything around the world. Just by accessing my newsfeed, I can see everything that's been posted from my friends and pages I follow. It is like I open Facebook, and I know everything I need to know because it is all in my newsfeed.

For how long do you use Facebook each day?

Approximately half an hour or an hour. I think it is quite a lot for me.

How do you express yourself on Facebook?

I think my self on Facebook differs from my real self to the extent that I can control and select only the best parts of me to display on my Facebook profile. The reason for this is because I feel that Facebook is not a personal space, it's a public place where many people can access your information by looking at what I post. I have more than 1,000 Facebook friends but only a few close people − the rest are people from university I know by sight or friends of friends. I don't want that many people to know my personal stuff, so my posts don't involve anything emotional. I take a lot of care before I post something, I think a lot before I post something.

What kind of story do you express on Facebook?

Mainly about travelling or life in general. I do not reveal personal issues or comments that are emotionally related. I prefer to reveal more about the place I went to eat and travel.

So what do you think of friends' activities you see in your newsfeed?

Actually, it really depends on each person. Some people acknowledge that Facebook is a public place. They are aware of the words they use in their posts. They do not post anything that is personal and self-centred. They post more general things. This is my type.

But some use Facebook as a personal place and they want to reveal themselves no matter what other people say. This type tends to be teenagers, posting and commenting with opinions quite aggressively. They want people to know more about them or something like that.

How do these activities impact you?

They don't really. On Facebook, what I care mostly about is my own profile and what appears on it. I don't really care about posts from my friends, because I'm not particularly close to most of my Facebook friends, so what they do or their opinions don't really impact me.

Can I say something I just thought of? Actually, engagement activities of people in the past is different from the present. The posting rate in the past was low, but today, people post a

lot of things. That makes it uninteresting. I think people post a lot more on Facebook now than a few years ago, so my newsfeed is full of other peoples' activities that are sometimes too much for me to look at.

Oh right, so how have you reacted to this changing trend?

I use Facebook less. If talking about posts on Facebook, I've started not to believe them because posting is so random and messy.

Coming back to yourself, how do you engage or post on Facebook?

In the past, I posted things very randomly. I took photos of everything without meaning to communicate anything. After I started working, I began to care about my own image and now try to present myself in a positive way. I was psychologically influenced to understand that I had to create an image that looked good. This affects the way I use Facebook as well because I can't post just anything on my profile – I have to select only good things to post.

Therefore, I could not take photos and post like I used to because I had to make it look good. This is part of how I build my self-image to present to others. For example, when travelling, this is a great way to create a good image for myself.

Can you show me such posts? What is important to you when engaging with these hotels?

I have to look beautiful, rich and intelligent. In the past, I didn't use Facebook that much. I posted randomly. Now, I have a lot of beautiful photos at nice places so I post only the best ones.

What about other brands − what is important to you when engaging?

For instance about the news, I engage with only sources that I trust because I don't know if I can trust news from random sources. Nowadays, most media houses try to post the news immediately as fast as they can but nothing guarantee it's true. However, I do not engage with stuff such as artists, singers or video pages in general.

Can you explain this post to me?

I shared a post about cars because I think they were beautiful, they had new models, or this model was strong.

How about these posts?

Well, I 'share' many posts about cars – many of which are about supercars like Lamborghini, Ferrari, Porsche.

What do you want to communicate?

I think people would perceive me as a car lover. That's it.

How would you describe the relationship between you and these brands with which you engage?

Well, in all honesty I don't know much about their strength, speed, acceleration. But the posts I 'share' tend to be their unique models.

So what make you engage?

Hmm, supercars are aggressive and I think girls and supercars are an extraordinary combination because only a few girls show interest in this kind of stuff - so maybe I want to be above average.

How about this post from Mazda?

Actually, this post from Mazda has nothing to do with Mazda, it's just a picture of a Mazda car on a road trip in China and my caption was 'I wanna go there for the third time'. I just want to go to China and also to let others know that I've been there twice already.

Can you talk me through all these posts?

Most posts about supercars are beasty and aggressive. In most photos, they would use a spotlight for the sake of beauty. But this one is different, the spotlight was off, which gave another mood to the supercars.

This was a green one, which is quite different because normally supercars tend to be red, orange, yellow, right? But this one is green. So I shared it.

What about this post?

This one was during the FIFA world cup, I shared this from FIFA because I wanted to cheer up those countries. Well, my country didn't get to go to the world cup match, so I decided to cheer up other countries instead.

Do you normally watch sports?

No, I don't. That day was the first time I posted something like that. I accidentally saw it somewhere in my newsfeed so I shared it.

Apart from wanting to cheer up those teams, what else made you engage with FIFA?

I don't know. Maybe because the FIFA world cup only happens once every four years, right? So it's the topic of the day.

How about this post?

I worked as a volunteer for the UN. It was a place where people don't usually have a chance to visit. I worked there and I felt good about it.

Can you talk me through this post?

Do you know Siam2nite? They are really famous for taking photos of people. I'm nervous to even say this out loud but I think if I ever had a chance to have them take a photo of me, I would feel good. They are famous and other people would look up to me because my photos are taken by famous photographers.

Do you mind explaining more?

They are famous and they take photos only for beautiful people, right? If they took a photo of me, would it mean I'm beautiful? Joking.

What other feedback do you expect from others when you engage on Facebook?

If I post my photos, then I expect people to see and 'like' them or something like that. I don't want comments because I'm afraid of getting something I don't want to see or to answer. I don't want people to come and ask me too much but I just want to let people know only what I reveal.

What do you reveal?

Since a post could mean a thousand words, I don't think I can control the expectations of people who see it. However, I should at least expect something. It depends on what I post.

For example?

In the case of a 'checking-in' post, I only engage with places where I think I won't go there very often. So most of my 'check-in' posts occur while I am travelling.

How does engagement with those places communicate who you would like to be to others?

Oh, I mentioned that my ideal values are beauty, wealth and intelligence. I am not beautiful, so I don't know how to express that. I can't make myself beautiful, so I shouldn't express beauty right here. For intelligence, I don't want to express it, for intelligence is a sensitive topic, so I don't want to express it right here. But I wouldn't mind if people infer something from my post and perceive me as intelligent. That would be good.

However, I do express my social status, because it makes me look good. In the past, when I travelled abroad, I didn't post a thing. Recently, I started to post more.

Can you explain more about the term 'social status' and how you express it?

In the past, I didn't try to express it, but currently, it is me who goes to eat this and travel to there. There is no need to conceal it unlike in the past. I engage with hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions and so on to show others I spend my holidays abroad.

That's very good point. Thank you so much for coming to this interview.

Appendix 6: Interview transcript (second phase of the research study)

Participant 7
Duration 34.26 minutes

Can you please tell me about the engagement activity on your [Organisation's Facebook] page?

Sure. We have around, I think it's just under 25,000 followers on our Facebook page as it stands at the moment and there's a wide range of engagement from previous alumni of the university. We tend to see quite a lot of engagement when we ask people certain things that provoke nostalgic looking back on their time at university and being able to tag the first person they met on campus, the first person they met in class, who they made friends for life when they were here. We see a large engagement in relation to those kind of things but we have to be quite mindful about the content that we're posting to ensure that there's a wide range of content and that we're meeting the themes and objectives that we've set out for the page from our own point of view as well.

So what is your objective of doing this page?

The goals and objectives of the page are to increase the visibility of alumni development programs. We want to be able to provoke nostalgic feelings which lead to an increased warmth with the alumni community in terms of how much they engage with us. We want to increase the level of engagement with the people on the page. We want to keep the memories of [*Organisation name*] alive for alumni, engender pride and instil a sense of belonging with those people. We also want to look at reaching out to audiences that may not currently engage with a person. So, we run a variety of different events in our alumni pages and as another way of being able to speak to maybe a slightly younger audience. And then it also promotes the wider university activities, news, events from our own point of view as well as from across the faculties as well.

Normally what kind of content do you post?

Oh, that's a good question. We have a number of key themes that we look to promote. Those can range from anything from the alumni community. So, welcome to your global alumni community, which is sitting at 172,000 people. It's to make them aware that once their time at [*Organisation name*] comes to an end, we're able to stay in touch with them and share memories of their time at University. It also gives us the opportunity to provide updates on the University itself, whether that be campus updates in terms of things that are happening or updates with regards to some of the partnerships that the university has. We do so many different things. Let me just think.

We use it to promote alumni benefits and services. So, there are a number of benefits and services open to people once they finish with the university. We use it to share good news stories from alumni who've gone on to do great things after their time at [*Organisation name*] and it's an opportunity for them to showcase their achievements and it's really nice to be able to share that with people. In-house, we run a variety of brainstorming meetings. Those help us to develop different campaigns. So, we're looking at starting to introduce a

campaign called the A to Z of [*Organisation name*], and basically we're going to take each letter of the alphabet and then share fun facts and ideas and information about the university.

We also take advantage of being able to reach out to particular alumni during specific holidays, things like Easter, Halloween, Christmas and we use a key dates planner to plot in things like Thanksgiving, being able to reach out to our American and Canadian audiences, as well as picking out key dates throughout the year that we'd like to take advantage of.

Things like International Friendship Day was something we shared the other day. So, it's a wide variety of different themes and we're also able to promote a number of different events that happen. We have a number of alumni groups that are based across the globe. There's one that we're just looking at launching within Glasgow which is our largest alumni base but we also have a number of alumni groups dotted across the globe and we use them to promote different events that are happening to invite people along to come and hear what's been happening at [*Organisation name*] since they left. We also use it to promote any trips that happen in line with the principal where the alumni relations team would go along with him and he may well give a presentation, say to those in Hong Kong or Singapore. And that's really nice to get those people together in a room whilst he's over in that country and he's able to give them a bit of an update as to be what's been happening. And we also use it to promote some of our fundraising activities. So, within my wider team, there's an individual who supports the Alumni Fund, which is basically funding which has been given from alumni donors and it goes to different things like sports clubs, supporting students on scholarships and a wide variety of things like that. So, there are many different themes and we try and provide a range of content throughout the course of the weeks/years/months on the page, so that we're giving a good range of information as well. I hope this is what you're after.

Yes. You mentioned earlier that you want to raise the engagement in your page. Do you use any strategy to encourage people to engage more?

Yeah. As I mentioned before, we're looking at a more campaign-based approach moving forward. We've done a bit of work to look at who our key audiences within the page are, where they're based, how old they are, that kind of thing. And we're always looking at targeting our content to raise engagement. And I think engagement for us can be anything from a like or a reaction but more so when people comment and share their memories or their thoughts and opinions. We almost take that as a marker of how well the engagement is and compare it to previous things that have been posted to benchmark what particular things go down well. And we also look at posting at different times throughout the course of the day as well, so that we're able to capture... Because we have alumni across multiple time zones, we obviously want to make sure that as many people see the content as possible.

Facebook provides you with a scheduler. So, you're able to schedule content in advance. If you had particular things that you know were definitely happening, events or key things that were milestones throughout the year, you're able to schedule those in advance. You can schedule the day, the time and then plot in the content along with the support and hyperlink or an image. It's not a case of needing to be on the page all the time. You're able to schedule stuff in advance, which works really well in instances where people are off on holiday, because we're quite a small team, just to keep things going.

How much do you know about people who engage with you online?

We know quite a lot about the people that engage with us. Our page was created in 2016. It's been up and running for two and a half years now and we see it as a really valuable tool for sharing media, whether that's photos and videos. Do you want me to run through the demographics and stuff?

So, we have 24,400 followers. Around 14,500 of these are in the UK. Those are based across Glasgow, London or Edinburgh, and around 10,000 of them are international and we see bigger pockets of people across Malaysia, India, Greece and Singapore. When looking at the demographics, 52% of users are women and 48% are men. And then, we've further broken that down into age bracket percentages. So, 8% of users are between the 18 and 24 years old, 35% are between 25 and 34. That's our biggest market on the page. 35 to 44 year olds, there's 28% of those. 45 to 54 year olds, there's 16% of the audience. 55 to 64 are 7% and then 65+ are 4%. So, we know quite a lot more. We've done a bit of work around looking at social media strategy recently in terms of what our purpose is, what our goals are, where we're looking at pulling content from on a daily/weekly/monthly basis and what our key messages are and trying to align those so that there's a good range.

Do you know if these people are alumni?

Yes. From comment and what they search. The majority of them from what they share and their memories. I would say the bulk of people like the page because they're alumni.

Apart from the fact that they are alumni, do you think is there any other reason why people engage with the page?

Possibly because they're from Glasgow and they're keen to keep up with advancements in local universities or there's a bit of curiosity from people in terms of wondering what's going on but I think in the main the majority of people are alumni but there may well be people who like the page from other universities or other individuals who work at universities, who like us to see what we're up to, to maybe get an idea of the kind of content that we're sharing to maybe get some ideas for themselves.

For your team, do you think how important is engagement to you?

Engagement's really important to us. Because the alumni relations team manage the page, a big focus of our job is to engage with alumni to make them feel warm, to remind them of their time at university, to listen to their stories, listen to them sharing memories. And engagement for us is a big deal, because as long as we see engagement and people interacting with the page, we know that it's doing the job that we want it to do. So, as and when we see drops in that, then we'll need to re-evaluate the messages that we're pushing out and try and work out why things maybe aren't going to plan.

I think a lot of the time it's also dependent on the number of users who are online at any given time and the people who see your post when it's posted, because I think sometimes there can be so much traffic across Facebook, that you may well not see these things because there's so much other stuff going on. Sometimes we post things that we think are going to go down particularly well and just due to the traffic or the number of people who are on the page, sometimes things don't go as well as we hoped and then things, we don't think are going to go well, do. So, sometimes it can be a little bit tricky to work out what works well but we're clear on our aims, objectives and the themes that we want to push out.

Okay…Normally people would assume that engagement is from people with high relationships. So, in this case, they would be alumni or students, and they have high willingness to engage which reflects in the level of their disposition to engage. But according to my PhD research- I found that in fact people who engage with the organisation online may be different in the level of relationship and disposition. This means that they may not be students or alumni, and they may engage for other reasons that we may not expect such as self-presentation.

Okay.

What is your view on this, if people engage with you online because of self-presentation?

Do you mean someone saying they went to *[Organisation name]* when they didn't?

To be honest, I haven't really thought about that before because in the main when we get people engaging with us, it's because they have particular thoughts on the course they've studied, on their time at *[Organisation name]* and what they did. So, whether they've spent time on campus, whether they were based at *[Organisation name]* , whether they were based at a different campus, and whether they spent time using some of the facilities like the union or the library. So, a lot of the posts we do tend to focus in on particular facilities or particular nights out at the Union and then you tend to get people sharing.

I can't say we've come across many people who have done that and I think it would be quite hard for people to make up memories that not having come to university, not having known about *[Organisation name]* and our ethos and values and all of those kind of things. I think in the main, the majority of people who like our page are alumni.

Obviously there are the wider university channels. Those are targeted at much larger organisations and you'll see that there are much bigger numbers in terms of their following. So, the main university page probably has a combination of current students, prospective students or people who are looking to come to *[Organisation name]* and they want to find out a bit more about what life is like here. There's probably a lot of alumni in there because I think, almost from our point of view, when you think about having gone to university, you maybe want to just like the university page rather than knowing the *[Organisation name]* exists.

So, we're doing quite a lot of work with the main page to try and make our messaging more prominent and look at how we can start to introduce the alumni message a lot earlier in the student journey, because sometimes people are more familiar with the wording of graduate rather than alumnus.

Going back to the main university page, you'll also find that there are friends of the university and industry contacts. So, they have a much wider pool of their following, whereas, I would say, our focus on individuals are much more targeted towards being alumni and not much else than that. I'm not saying that there are not any other people on there because before I joined and before I came, I liked the page obviously to find out a bit more about the activities. So, I think there's probably a level of curiosity from other universities as to what we're doing, probably from other individuals who live and work in Glasgow and want to keep up-to-date with maybe what's happening but I've never encountered anything where somebody's been trying to be somebody they're not, and we've had to do something about that.

I think we don't really tend to - touch wood - encounter any negative behaviour on the page either, which is really good. But I'm sure that may well pop up sometime and we'll have to address it as things go on. But in the main, it's a positive community. It's a really nice space for people to be involved in and we have two other channels as well. So, I know that you're looking at the Facebook page but we have an Instagram channel, which has around 850 users and we have a LinkedIn page which has just under 3000. So, we try and promote our messaging along the lines of "choose the social channel that's right for you," and we target content based on that.

Sorry. That was a bit of a ramble to your question but I can't really give you examples of things when that's happened. It's really interesting that that's something that you found out as part of your research.

That's okay but what is your plan if there is negative stuff?

On our page at the moment, there is a section which details a bit more about the community and the purpose of the community. I think it's called Our Story on the page but you'll be able to go in and see it, if you want to read a bit more about it, but ultimately it details the sort of thing that we'll share and then it also details the kind of conduct and behaviour that will be accepted and not accepted, and in the instance of particular negative things, if it's towards the university or if it's language that we probably wouldn't want to see on the site, we would probably then look to remove the comments. But again, that doesn't really tend to happen very often at all and it's a public page where people are entitled to have their own opinions and as long that doesn't get to the stage where it's being particularly nasty or hateful towards the university or their time here, then people are more than entitled to post.

Okay. I will give these examples that I found out in my first study about the way that people engage with the organisation online [Showing examples]. When you read this, please explain what do you think if these people engaged this way with *[Organisation name]* online.

If these people?

Basically, this one reflects that they are alumni with preexisting relationship but lower willingness to engage, so they engage just for self-presentation to show that they graduated from a good university or to show their group of people.

Okay. No. I don't think we've ever encountered this kind of thing. The only thing I would say is the set up. I don't know what the setup of other people you spoken to but the setup of our page is that you need to be registered with Facebook. So, I have a Facebook account but then I'm a manager of our page. So, in my newsfeed, I see my own personal newsfeed as opposed to individuals' newsfeed. So, I don't know whether that would be more likely... Do you know what I mean? I don't know whether that would be more likely to appear if the person was following loads of different individuals and that was all I'm seeing on my page is my friends and my friends' comment. So, when we post, people interact with the post rather than checking in at *[Organisation name]* . So, I don't really tend to see any of that kind of thing.

That's okay. But in case you experience this in the future, what would you feel about this kind of engagement?

What would I think. I think a lot of the time, people check in because it's the thing to do and I would probably agree, not that I do it but I see a lot of people doing the second one when

they're going somewhere. It's almost the done thing to let everybody know where you're going on holiday or where you're going on your travels. And I guess checking in is a behaviour that Facebook have engendered in people. So, rather than just being able to enjoy what you're doing, a lot of people find that they need to constantly validate what they're doing, where they are, who they're with, rather than just being in the moment and enjoying it, which is more what I would probably do. But I notice from a personal point of view, not from the *[Organisation name]* page, from a personal point of view I notice a lot of people checking in whether they're going away or whether they're somewhere just to highlight what they're doing and maybe to look a bit cool, I guess. Less so much the third one, posting pictures of cars and stuff. I understand what you're asking but it's not something that I...

That's okay. I have a second set of examples. This engagement activity are from people who are not alumni or students but they have high willingness to engage. So, they engage with *[Organisation name]* **for self-presentation. In this case, if you experience such engagement, what would you tend to think or react?**

Okay. So, yeah, again, I think probably less so from the *[Organisation name]* side of things just because we don't tend to see individuals who like the page, checking in or anything like that in our newsfeed, but I would say from a personal point of view, I think a lot of the time Facebook is a space for people to present the world that they want people to think they're living rather than the actual world they're living, if that makes sense.

A lot of times, like, "Oh, I'm having such a good time. I'm doing this and this and I'm all happy and smiley," but maybe on the inside it's not as happy as it would seem. This is my own personal point of view. It's obviously not the university's point of view but I think from seeing the kind of things that my friends post or people that I'm friends with that are not necessarily close friends, a lot of the time I get the impression that Facebook is the platform to show how amazing your life is when in reality it's probably not as great as you're trying to make it out, which I guess ties into the self-presentation thing.

Okay, how about if anybody with low relationship and willingness to engage just simply use university for self-presentation in their engagement. If you receive this type of engagement to the *[Organisation name]* **, how would that impact on you? How would you deal with this?**

I don't think we probably will. It would be more so on something like our LinkedIn group, where people are free to be able to post whatever. They're free to be able to promote a book that they've just launched. They want to let the community know about it, because we wouldn't ordinarily promote it on their behalf, because if we did that, we'd end up promoting so many different things, because we have a lot of alumni. But I'm struggling to see when we would encounter this kind of thing. Is it business pages you've been speaking to and have they had thoughts on this?

Some of them, yes. Different organisation in different industries experience different things. There is no right or wrong answer.

Yeah. Definitely. I think this is probably unlikely to appear on our pages because, as I said, I have my own personal page and I just have admin rights to our one. So, we see our feed of things, we see our feed of events and different stuff like that but then when I go into the newsfeed as such, it isn't the newsfeed of all of our followers who would be posting. It is the newsfeed of my friends. So, I'm not sure whether that's valid for your study or not, if you're purely looking at businesses. But I want to be as helpful as possible obviously. I think what a

lot of these quotes are trying to say, and I do see it from a personal point of view, but less so from an alumni community point of view, because it's very few and far between that we get people who post about themselves. They post in relation to, "Oh, here's [*Building name*]." It's really strange. Their memories and their comments and stuff are all in relation to the university rather than being, "Oh, I've now graduated and I'm doing x, y and z, and I'm doing very well for myself," not to put words in your mouth. I'm not sure if this is relevant for our page. I'm sorry.

So, what would be the impact if such engagement occur? Will you change your strategy to posting content or stuff?

I think, in terms of posting content, we've obviously got a strategy and that strategy is fairly recent, based on what's been happening in the community, how we look at driving people and engage, how we look at driving new people, how we look at engaging people who've been there for a number of years. So, people who've been there since 2016. I think we would probably only look at changing up the overall strategy or the ways that we post and look to engage with people, if those things were then not getting good levels of engagement. So, if we were to pull something that a lot of thought and stuff has gone into and it ends up getting two likes and nobody's commented on it, then we would probably need to start rethinking the content that we're sharing. Why is that not working? Is it down to a lot of people not being on the platform at that given time? Is it down to the fact that people just aren't interested in that sort of thing? Is it more that they just want to speak about themselves and their time and the people that they've met and the experiences that they've had, which we're very much trying to do? So, a lot of the posts that we've shared recently encouraged people to tag their friends. A few days ago was International Friendship Day. Of the 24,000 or so that people that are on the page, we had 50 interactions with that page. The post said, "It's International Friendship Day. If it wasn't for *[Organisation name]*, I would never have met dot dot dot. Tag your friends for life," in the post kind of thing. And just under 300 people commented on that. Somebody would tag, "Oh Joy. You know you were one of the first people I met at *[Organisation name]* and my time at *[Organisation name]* would never have been the same without you," and there has been so much of that. And it's really, really nice to see and people are just tagging one another and it goes on and on and on. And it's not necessarily just in the day that you post it either. Because so many people are commenting on it, either when it first goes live or whether it is later down the line or towards the evening, it tends to then go on for three or four days afterwards.

So, I think if we were posting things like that and they weren't getting any engagement, and a lot of the time there are certain things we post which don't get high levels of engagement, but they're part of our strategy and they're part of the main themes that we want to promote and they're part of the wider team that we're part of, that we see those just as important. It's just they don't necessarily get the greatest levels of engagement, because if you post something with relation to fundraising, for example, people automatically think that you're going to ask them for money or for a donation, whereas we're just sharing some of the activity that donors have enabled current students to have. Has that been helpful?

It's very helpful. Thank you very much for your time.