Karolina Sallaku

UNCOVERING THE NEW PARADIGM OF SOCIAL MEDIA CULTURAL NARRATIVES

The Disruptive Role of User-generated Content Sharing Behaviour in the Publishing Industry

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that attests to its scientific quality.

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In an era where AI and robotics will prevail,
may reading save humanity.

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Editorial Note

Colour versions of the VOSviewer maps are available online via the QR code provided here and at the following link: *https://h7.cl/1gHKb*

Post-factum abstract

In recent years, a novel phenomenon has gained prominence in the publishing industry, transforming how literary content is shared, interpreted, and experienced within social media communities. This phenomenon, conceptualized as Digital Literary, marks a fundamental shift in reading behaviors, moving from solitary and passive acts to interconnected and co-shared digital consumption practices. This work explores how User Generated Content (UGC), Social Identity, and Value Co-Creation interact within digital literary environments illustrating how sharing practices contribute to emerging forms of participatory reading and meaning-making. Specifically, it reviews the state of the art in consumer behavior research related to UGC, and identifies the core themes that characterize digital literary sharing. Building on these insights, it introduced and validates the new construct: Digital Literary Sharing (DLS). This work offers both theoretical and practical implications, providing scholars, publishers, and digital platforms with new perspectives to understand, assess, and leverage sharing behaviors in the broader context of Digital Literary Consumption.

Preface

*Angeloantonio Russo**

The publishing industry is facing a significant transformation. Declining readership, changing consumer habits, and the growing influence of digital platforms are challenging traditional business models. Publishers are now required not only to rethink content strategies but also to adapt their organizational processes and the ways they engage with key stakeholders. In this evolving landscape, social media have become central arenas for shaping cultural value, distributing content, and connecting directly with audiences.

Dr Sallaku's monograph examines how digital sharing behaviours are reshaping the publishing sector. By focusing on the #BookTok phenomenon on TikTok, the work shows how consumers and creators collaboratively circulate literary content, drive engagement, and influence market outcomes. The act of sharing is presented as more than social behaviour: it is a strategic lever through which publishers can increase visibility, foster community engagement, and strengthen relationships with authors, readers, influencers, and other stakeholders.

The book also addresses the intersection between consumer behaviour and management practice. Dr Sallaku illustrates how publishers can integrate insights from digital sharing into decision-making processes, including marketing strategies, influencer collaborations, and community management. By aligning stakeholders around shared goals and leveraging user-generated content, publishers can not only enhance commercial results but also contribute to the cultural vitality of reading communities.

Methodologically, the monograph combines a systematic review of the literature with qualitative and quantitative analyses. Patterns of sentiment, narrative strategies, and community interactions among BookTok creators and users are carefully examined, and the Digital Literary Sharing construct

* Full Professor at Lum University, Casamassima (Ba).

is developed and validated empirically. This approach provides a clear understanding of how sharing unfolds in digital communities and how it can inform practical decisions within publishing organizations.

Dr Sallaku's research demonstrates that the simple act of sharing has the potential to reshape cultural consumption and industry practices. By connecting consumer behaviour, social media dynamics, and management strategy, this monograph offers both scholars and practitioners a comprehensive view of how digital sharing can drive engagement, industry growth, and sustainable value creation in the contemporary publishing ecosystem.

Introduction

An introduction to a Disruptive Shift in the Digital Literary Landscape

In the past decade, the escalation of Web 2.0 and the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) have driven the success of social media networks, redefying consumer behavior in the process (Bigne et al., 2018). These platforms provide consumers with unique digital spaces to engage, share, and create content in real-time, transforming how interactions unfold and relationships are formed within online communities (Dessart et al., 2015). Social media have evolved into shared space where brands and consumers connect, build new forms of social interactions and meanings, contributing to the formation of unique brand narratives and social identities (Farivar & Wang, 2022). Central to this shift is User-Generated Content (UGC), a core element of digital branding strategies, as it drives consumer engagement and, provides competitive advantages by placing consumers at the heart of brand narratives among digital communities (Rossmann et al., 2016; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). UGC on social media platforms plays a crucial part for both consumers and companies, serving as a strategic tool to maintain relevance and visibility within digital audiences (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022). Through the creative contributions of users and social media creators, several forms of digital content circulate across platforms, providing mutual benefits for both individual users, who achieve audience attention, as well as organizations, that build deeper relationships with consumers (Appel, 2020).

However, despite UGC's broad presence in literature, significant inconsistencies in terminologies still persist. First, concepts such as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), traditional word of mouth (WOM) or consumer engagement are often used interchangeably within the UGC realm (Rossman et al., 2016; Sheth, 2020; Haines et al., 2023), generating ambiguity and fragmentating the understanding of UGC's scope and applications. This absence of a comprehensive conceptualization, combined with frequent misclassification, marks a significant challenge for scholars attempting to

understand the UGC's distinct role in consumer behavior across digital platforms (Rajamma et al., 2020). Moreover, such conceptual overlap hinders the development of robust measurement tools to assess consumers' propensity to disseminate content, an essential step for understanding the impact of UGC on digital strategies (Jebb et al., 2021). While general and not specified forms of UGC have been explored from a social or value co-creation perspective, the content dissemination behavior remains underexplored, creating a crucial research gap. Specifically, there is a need to address the overlap between isolated constructs such as eWOM or engagement and develop an appropriate metric to assess these behaviors effectively from a dual perspective.

Second, scholars predominantly rely on two major theoretical lenses: Social Identity Theory and Value Co-Creation Theory, to explore UGC and guide the development of related measurement models.

On one hand, from a social identity perspective, UGC is commonly interpreted based on group membership and the way these dynamics define consumer behavior. Because UGC often emerges within social media communities, where individuals connect and communicate with one another on specific topics or brands (Murray & Waller, 2007), comprehending group psychology becomes essential. Moreover, considering that social media significantly affect the formation of social structures where individuals express their identities and create social connections (Stadter, 2018), group dynamics exert a critical part in influencing social communication patterns and motivations to disseminate content (Pan et al., 2017). These platforms are strategic realms for cultural development, amplifying brand communities and stimulating the spread of popular subcultures occurring through users expressing distinct identities and interests among global audiences (Zhong, 2021). Such digital settings encourage the growth of brand-centric communities, which is central to modern UGC's impact on consumer behavior (Malthouse et al., 2016). Thus, Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a robust lens for understanding how individuals' identities and the need to belong influence their behaviors within digital communities, particularly regarding UGC creation. SIT suggests that individuals have personal and social identities, with group individualities forming based on demographic affiliations, social connections, and memberships (Turner & Oakes, 1986; Cinnirella, 1998; Oakes et al., 1991). When individuals identify with a social group, they tend to define themselves through that group, often displaying positive biases toward in-group members and negative biases toward out-group members. This idea of community identification, derived from SIT, helps explain why consumers with a strong sense of belonging to a brand or community engage in UGC (Fujita et al., 2019). In social environments, group identifications empower users to create content that aligns with their group identity. In addition, the social belonging propensity encourages individuals to actively participate in disseminating content for branding narratives. As a consequence, these behaviors intensify community

ties and stimulate the creation of cohesive brand cultures that further attract and retain members (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Value Co-Creation Theory is applied from an analytical perspective as the outcome of content dissemination in terms of unique mechanisms that explain how brands and consumers collaboratively produce value through joint collaborations and interactions. In this frame, both parties benefit through joint value creation (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). It occurs because social media platforms stimulate value co-creation (Singaraju et al., 2016) by enhancing UCG's effects on consumer attitudes and behaviors (See-To et al., 2014). Through the vast, often cost-free digital resources available on line, consumers are motivated to disseminate content, strengthening community and brand bonds while contributing directly to the brand's value (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). While Social Identity explains the motivational basis for UGC behaviors, Value Co-Creation addresses the mechanisms of value generation, where digital tools enable seamless content sharing and participation (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). However, only some studies comprehensively adopt both theoretical lenses to examine UGC (Kucharska, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2020) from the perspective of determinants and outcomes.

In this landscape, few studies comprehensively combine these theoretical lenses to explore the dual impact of Social Identity and Value Co-Creation on UGC formation and dissemination in social media contexts. This study aims to address the gap by focusing on a specific case of UGC that is prominently emerging on a popular social media such as TikTok, considered as an expression of "digital literary" or "digital and social reading". This phenomenon comprises people creating and sharing digital content connected to books and readings (Guiñez-Cabrera & Mansilla-Obando, 2022; Martens et al., 2022; Merga, 2021), identified with #BookTok since 2020, as a lively online platform for individuals to express their love for books enthusiastically (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). In recognising its cultural relevance, the Italian encyclopedia Treccani officially introduced "BookToK" and "BookToker" as neologisms in 2023 (Treccani, 2023). The #BookTok movement has nurtured a thriving social media reading community and has significantly influenced the global publishing industry. In 2021, #BookTok was instrumental in supporting the sale of over twenty million printed books, marking its disruptive effects on traditional publishing channels (Harris, 2022). Nearly 59% of Gen Z readers say that #BookTok and book influencers help them rediscover the love for reading, with more than half relying on #BookTok for book recommendations and 68% being inspired to new readings, never considered before (Brown, 2022). The BookTok phenomenon is driving exceptional sales for TikTok authors like Sarah J. Maas, who sold nearly five million printed copies in 2024, surpassing the combined sales of the year's top 10 new releases (Roeloffs, 2024). Another viral BookTok author, Colleen Hoover, sold 800.000 copies in the first days of 2022 with her novel "It Starts With Us" (Cadden, 2022).

Hoovers' latest work, "It Ends With Us" was adapted into a movie in August 2024, selling more than 32 million copies (Hershberger, 2024).

The popularity of this digital movement is radically changing the focus of publishers, who now actively track BookTok trends and even enlist influential BookTokers (BookTok creators) to promote upcoming releases, underlining the powerful influence of this phenomenon on the literary market (Barnett, 2023). This strong social engagement for BookTok represents a unique expression of UGC, where consumer enthusiasm and creativity determine industry trends, transforming social media into a platform of cultural significance for literature (Maddox & Gill, 2023).

Given these premises, the present work is positioned at the intersection of three key domains: Social Identity Theory (to understand group dynamics), User-Generated Content (to examine patterns of communication in digital content creation) and Value Co-Creation (to analyze the outcomes and effects of these actions) within social media settings. Because of the fragmented application of these theories, the conceptual ambiguity surrounding UGC, and the need for a specific metric to gauge digital content dissemination, this study aims to address these gaps through three main research questions:

(1) What is the current state of research in the nexus of Social Identity Theory, Value Co-Creation, and UGC within social media studies?
(2) What are the sentiment polarities and the main narrative patterns within UGC communities such as #BookTok?
(3) How can a Digital Literary Sharing construct be operationalized and developed?

To tackle each research question, this study is structured into three chapters: Chapter One presents a structured literature review based on a sample of 84 studies retrieved from Scopus and EBSCO, utilizing VosViewer and manual content analysis to address the first research question. Chapter Two applies sentiment and thematic analysis to a dataset of 19,199 user comments collected on TikTok through Python and analyzed with NVivo to address the second research question. Finally, Chapter Three presents a quantitative empirical analysis involving 36 (pilot study) + 398 (main study) of U.S participants using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to develop and validate a novel construct for content dissemination, referred to as "Digital Literary Sharing" (DLS).

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Angeloantonio Russo for his invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and insightful mentorship throughout this journey. His encouragement and expertise have been a constant source of inspiration and motivation. I also wish to dedicate this work to myself, in recognition of the patience, self-belief, and quiet resilience that carried me through countless hours of solitude. Without these qualities, this achievement would not have been possible. This work stands as a testament to the strength found in perseverance, self-trust, and the determination to see a vision become reality.

I.
Foundations and context of user-generated content between social identity and value co-creation

1. Introduction

In recent years, the world has seen a significant surge of digital transformation, derived from the rapid technological advancements and the broad adoption of digital tools and platforms. This transformation has fundamentally changed how businesses operate, communicate, and interact with consumers (Melović et al., 2020; Moi & Cabiddu, 2021). As a result, previous established marketing models have been forced to evolve and adapt to novel digital media and platforms, giving rise to more interactive approaches and tactics known as digital marketing (American Marketing Association, 2024). Unlike traditional marketing, which primarily focuses on face-to-face interactions, conventional print, and broadcast media, digital marketing leverages digital channels (i.e., websites, search engines, emails, and social media) to reach and engage global audiences across the internet (Hien & Nhu, 2022; Kotler et al., 2020).

The growth of digital marketing has been powered by consumers' escalating reliance on smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media, making them experience more ubiquitous digital and physical daily lives (Moi & Cabiddu, 2021; Nalbant & Aydın, 2023). This shift has allowed businesses to connect with consumers on a more personal level, enabling interactive designs and immersive experiences, by leveraging real-time behavioural data to dynamically adjust and optimize their marketing strategies (Moi & Cabiddu, 2021).

Digital transformation has enabled companies to move beyond simple product promotion toward more meaningful, two-way consumer conversations (Kotler et al., 2020). In this novel digital marketing arena, consumer involvement in creating meanings, content, and cultural movements

has emerged as a critical component of success, as businesses increasingly recognize the value of building lasting relationships and brand communities with their audiences (Kotler et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Central to this transformation are social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which have redefined the mechanisms of brands engaging with consumers (Putri, 2023; Elliott & Truman, 2024). These platforms offer a dynamic environment where users can interact with brands and other consumers in real time, raising new business opportunities for brands to communicate directly and authentically with new digital spectators (Putri, 2023; Elliott & Truman, 2024). Different from traditional marketing mostly one-sided, social media platforms facilitate ongoing interactions where users consume content and contemporarily determine the narrative about brands, products, and services (Hien & Nhu, 2022). This two-way communication enables brands to respond to consumer feedbacks, build trust, and create more personalized experiences able to resonate with preferred target groups (Kotler et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). This primary relevance of social media networks lies mostly in their ability to facilitate direct, personal and active interactions, leading to deeper connections and influencing consumer behavior in ways that traditional marketing could never achieve (Kotler et al., 2020).

In this landscape, User-Generated Content (UGC) has emerged as a critical factor in driving brand interactions and consumer involvement in digital marketing. UGC comprises any content generated by consumers, including reviews, social media posts, social videos or blogs, that are subsequently disseminated across digital platforms. This content has grown significantly in influence, determining how consumers perceive brands, in turn, affecting their decision-making process (Santos, 2022).

From this perspective, UGC represents not only a strategic tool but also a pivotal shift in terms of consumer behavior moving from a passive consumption to an active participation within social communities, where consumers are positioned as co-creators of brand narratives and thereby affecting a brand's overall public image (Achrol & Kotler, 2022). Consumers tend to trust peer-generated material more than traditional marketing content, since UGC often conveys higher credibility and loyalty, encouraging a notable diffusion of UGC through an active digital community participation (Achrol & Kotler, 2022).

Conversely, the UGC terminology is being applied without a precise definition, creating ambiguity among scholars with its overlapping usage across distinct studies and sectors (Santos, 2022). It is frequently treated as an intuitive or self-evident concept, presumed to be universally understood and therefore left undefined (Chaffee, 1991). In this vein, UGC is implicitly treated across distinct contexts without being clearly conceptualized. Santos