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From Content to Engagement: The Mediating Role of Consumer Perceived Behaviour in Marketer-Generated Content on Social Commerce Platforms—Evidence from an Emerging Economy

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Abstract

Despite the rapid proliferation of social commerce, limited empirical attention has been directed towards understanding how marketer-generated content (MGC) shapes consumer digital engagement through consumer perceived behaviour—particularly in conflict-affected emerging economies characterised by constrained digital infrastructure. This study addresses this gap by developing and testing an integrated mediation model in which MGC influences consumer digital engagement (CDE) both directly and indirectly through consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) as a mediating mechanism. Grounded in the consumer engagement theory, signalling theory, and social influence theory, the study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via Smart-PLS 4.0, drawing on data collected from 234 Palestinian SMEs actively engaged in social commerce activities. Empirical findings confirm that MGC is positively associated with both consumer perceived behaviour (H1: $\beta = 0.440$, $p < 0.001$) and consumer digital engagement (H2: $\beta = 0.293$, $p < 0.001$), while consumer perceived behaviour shows a significant positive association with digital engagement (H3: $\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$). Critically, consumer perceived behaviour emerged as a significant partial mediator of the MGC–digital engagement relationship (H4), with the model explaining 38.0% of the variance in digital engagement. Theoretically, this study advances the consumer engagement literature by uncovering the pathway through which MGC translates into sustained digital engagement on social commerce platforms—a pathway previously unexamined in conflict-affected emerging market contexts. Empirically, the study contributes rare evidence from Palestine, positioning this digitally constrained economy as a meaningful frontier for social commerce and digital inclusion scholarship. Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for resource-constrained SMEs seeking to optimise MGC strategies to enhance social commerce engagement and commercial conversion.



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1. Introduction

In the era of digital connectivity, social media has become a dominant space in which brands and consumers interact, influence, and co-create value, which is significant in the era of digital transformation, where people spend most of their time per day browsing social commerce content on the Internet [1]. The rapid growth of social commerce has

made digital content a central tool through which firms attempt to influence consumer perceptions and encourage engagement, with the global digital content market projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 14.84% between 2022 and 2027 [2].

Digital content plays a significant role in increasing brand visibility, facilitating consumer interaction, enhancing engagement, and improving firms' communication effectiveness within social commerce environments.

In today's digital age, understanding consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) in digital interaction is crucial for businesses wishing to enhance their marketing campaigns and brand awareness, and build stronger connections with their audience [3]. In this study, consumer perceived behaviour refers to managers' perceptions of consumers' behavioural tendencies and interactive responses toward marketer-generated content within social commerce environments. Unlike consumer attitude or purchase intention, CPB captures perceived behavioural responsiveness during digital interaction processes. In the online engagement setting, different characteristics of marketer-generated content (MGC) influence consumer behaviour to varying degrees, with interactive and entertaining content supporting consumption and driving engagement to a large degree [4].

Xiao et al. [5] underscored the influence of perceived consumer behaviour on digital interactions, notably in advertising, and showed its impact on purchase decisions. Using data from TikTok short videos, four drivers, namely expectations, entertainment, connection strength, and sales approach, were identified as key factors enhancing consumer interaction and purchase behaviour [5]. Tian et al. [6] corroborated these findings in a similar context. These dynamics are particularly relevant in conflict-affected economies such as Palestine, where SMEs rely heavily on low-cost platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp Business due to limited advertising resources and constrained digital infrastructure.

This study examines how SME managers perceive the role of marketer-generated content in shaping CPB and consumer digital engagement (CDE) within social commerce platforms. Accordingly, this study examines the mediating role of CPB in the relationship between marketer-generated content (MGC) and CDE. While prior research primarily focused on user-generated content (UGC), relatively less attention has been given to how consumers interact with brand-generated content, particularly in newly emerging digital markets. This study thus seeks to explore the behavioural process of consumers on social commerce, beginning with perception and ending in interaction and action. Additionally, the existing literature offers limited insight into how managerially perceived consumer behaviour mediates the MGC–engagement relationship, particularly in conflict-affected emerging economies characterised by platform dependency and infrastructural constraints [7].

Moreover, although the influence of CPB within marketer-generated content on digital engagement is recognised, the theoretical underpinnings that predict consumer engagement with such content are not well defined [8,9]. This study answers the call for more knowledge about consumer variation in responding to consumer engagement and consumer behaviour. It attempts to do so by presenting empirical evidence based on data collected from Palestinian SMEs, where managers serve as informed proxies for assessing consumer behavioural responses to digital content. By highlighting this process of perception of engagement, this study offers new insight into how content can be strategically designed to promote increased digital engagement. This study seeks to answer the main research question regarding the impact of consumer perceived behaviour on consumer digital engagement within marketer-generated content on social commerce and the influence on consumer purchases. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does marketer-generated content influence consumer digital en-

gement through managers' perceptions of consumer perceived behaviour within Palestinian social commerce SMEs?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Perceived Behaviour

Consumer perceived behaviour refers to how individuals interpret and understand the actions, attitudes, and choices of consumers in the marketplace. It encompasses how consumers perceive and respond to various marketing stimuli including product features, advertising messages, pricing strategies, and overall brand image. Understanding consumer perceived behaviour is crucial for businesses to shape effective marketing strategies and enhance customer satisfaction [10].

Consumers' perceived behaviour plays a critical role in driving the activity in organisations, where customer perceived value is the basis for all marketing decisions. In today's digital age, understanding consumer behaviour has become increasingly important for business development [11]. The consumer determines the law of the market, which means that business improvements depend on consumer perceived behaviour, necessitating companies to contact the consumer as efficiently as possible to increase performance [12].

Informativeness, entertainment, creativity, and incentives have been found to exert a significant positive impact on perceived advertising value [13]. This means that the consumer perceives the behaviour. In addition, the concept of consumer perception is typically associated with specific behaviours such as emotional and cognitive responses. These engagements are associated with increased competitiveness in the virtual market [14].

According to Hirschfeld and Caigada [15], the impact of content marketing on user-generated content highlights the commercial value added by content marketing [15]. Engaging in conversations, storytelling, and customer interaction through such content positively influences perceptions of brand personality and overall attitudes towards the brand, while brand engagement, perceived credibility, perceived benefit, and perceived risk play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions [16]. Customers are overloaded with promotional messages which act as a good marketing strategy; moreover, buying behaviour is notably affected by promotional messages, predominantly delivered through SMS. Frequent daily messages can be irksome for customers, prompting a desire to reduce communication. However, the majority of customers acknowledge the usefulness of engaging with brands [17].

Therefore, it is important to improve consumer trust because customer trust, perception, online behaviour, and e-service quality have a positive, individually significant effect on customer preference. Simultaneously, their combined influence is positive and significant, highlighting the interconnected impact of these factors on shaping customer choices and preferences in the studied context [18]. In the present study, consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) is conceptually distinguished from related constructs. Unlike consumer attitude, which reflects evaluative judgments toward a brand or product, and unlike behavioural intention, which captures planned future actions, CPB specifically refers to managers' perceptions of how consumers cognitively and behaviourally respond to digital content during social commerce interactions. This distinction is important because CPB operates as a firm-level perceptual construct that captures the observed behavioural tendencies of consumers including their responsiveness, interaction patterns, and engagement signals as interpreted by SME managers within digital marketing contexts.

2.2. Digital Engagement

Engagement is the result of media products delivering an aesthetically pleasing experience that genuinely captivates and delights audiences [19]. Foundational scholarship

defines customer engagement as a multidimensional behavioural manifestation characterised by cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions that extend beyond transactional interaction [20,21]. Customer engagement refers to building relationships with customers at every touchpoint. This involves understanding customer needs, preferences, and pain points, as well as tailoring brand-related experiences to meet and exceed those expectations [22].

Additionally, the digital landscape introduces unique methods and channels for consumers to navigate and complete transactions, reflecting the evolution of commerce in response to technological advancements and changing consumer behaviour. Consumer engagement in digital environments involves sequential stages of discovery, evaluation, and post-purchase interaction, reflecting the evolving nature of the consumer journey in social commerce settings [23].

Prior research [24] found that the use of powerful words and cognitive language in Fintech messages enhances consumer engagement by leveraging the central route of information processing [24]. Social commerce platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, play a critical role in leading consumer engagement and play a pivotal role in bridging the brand with consumers through effective engagement [25]. Social commerce primarily depends on the content of “promotional messages”, and platforms act as outlets for marketer-generated content with which consumers engage [26].

Recent studies further demonstrate that short-form video content on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels plays an increasingly significant role in stimulating consumer digital engagement through entertainment value, algorithmic visibility, and interactive features [27].

2.3. Marketer-Generated Content

Marketer-generated content (MGC) refers to content created by marketing professionals or teams within a company or organisation to promote products, services, or the brand itself. This content is strategically developed to engage, inform, and influence the target audience, ultimately shaping brand awareness, lead generation, and conversions with shared content on the Internet and social commerce [28].

MGC has a positive impact on consumer behaviour, subsequently influencing sentiments, and ultimately shaping purchase decisions. MGC plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and motivating consumers to take action, leading to increased sales and brand loyalty [29]. Noguti found that consumer-oriented content facilitates effortless pleasure and utility seeking. The data suggests that it is shared within tight-knit social circles, fostering interactions between brands and products. It enhances consumer learning, thereby improving purchase outcomes [30]. In addition, MGC is strongly and positively associated with purchase intent [31].

Prior research [32] found that marketer-generated content positively impacts perceived quality and brand trust more than user-generated content, reflecting stronger relationships between firm-generated content and consumer perceptions. This indicates that MGC plays a vital role in influencing many company activities and customer perceptions. This prompts us to further explore the role of MGC in business development given its potential for a substantial positive impact on brand reputation, customer trust, and overall company success. Hence, MGC contributes to increasing consumers’ perceived tangible enjoyment and tangible originality in the company’s offerings, thereby positively impacting brand trust and purchase decisions [33].

Indeed, firms are keen to create strong and continuous content on social commerce platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook because modern consumers rely heavily on these platforms for information and engagement. The shift towards social

commerce has surpassed traditional sources, such as newspapers and magazines. Therefore, establishing a robust presence on these platforms allows firms to reach their target audience effectively, engage with them in real time, and build brand loyalty in a dynamic and interactive environment [34].

A prior study [4] revealed the distinct influences of various characteristics related to Mini-Program Generated Content (MPGC) on consumer engagement within the WeChat platform. This research highlights that the sentiment of titles, the transactional nature of title content, and the presence of punctuation negatively impact consumer engagement in terms of consumption. Conversely, titles featuring knowledgeable or entertaining content as well as those with interactive elements positively influence consumer engagement. Furthermore, transactional text content hinders consumer participation, whereas entertainment fosters it positively. Vividness and interactivity in marketer-generated content are positively associated with consumer engagement and interaction [4].

MGC, with its inherent economic value, plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer trust and enhancing sales. Moreover, it contributes to reducing costs within companies, thereby optimising operational efficiency. By strategically leveraging MGC, businesses can cultivate stronger relationships with consumers and foster loyalty and brand advocacy [35]. This not only bolsters revenue streams, but also streamlines expenditures, ultimately bolstering the bottom line. As a multifaceted asset, MGC serves as a cornerstone in the economic ecosystem, facilitating growth, sustainability, and profitability for enterprises across diverse industries [36].

3. Research Gaps

In a virtual world characterised by rapidity and modernity, there are still some theoretical gaps that have not been fully filled, and empirical studies on digital marketing practices are scarce. Filling this gap is vital for developing contextually grounded and theoretically strong marketing frameworks. However, the literature has not yet addressed three critical aspects in this context:

First, while in-depth research has addressed the role of user-generated content (UGC) in enhancing consumer engagement, studies on marketer-generated content (MGC) are still limited, particularly regarding the relationship between perceived consumer behaviour and digital engagement [37]. More specifically, the mediating role of consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) in the link between marketer-generated content and digital engagement outcomes has received limited theoretical and empirical attention.

Second, the literature offers a limited understanding of how marketer-generated content shapes consumer perceptions and influences digital engagement outcomes using social commerce platforms. Additionally, the role of individual consumer differences in moderating this relationship has been largely overlooked [38,39]. In particular, the role of managers' perceptions of consumer behaviour as a mediating mechanism between MGC and digital engagement outcomes remains underexplored.

Third, in Palestine, empirical research on marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement remains virtually non-existent, particularly in the context of SMEs operating under conditions of economic uncertainty, restricted digital infrastructure, and platform dependency. Despite the growing reliance on social commerce platforms among Palestinian businesses, no published study has specifically examined the MGC–CPB–CDE pathway in this conflict-affected emerging economy [40,41].

4. Hypothesis Development

Building on established theoretical frameworks, the relationship between consumer perceived behaviour and consumer digital engagement on marketer-generated content

(MGC) has been used to check each direct correlation. Marketer-generated content and consumer perceived behaviour represent distinct but complementary facets of symbolic communication, each designed to capture interest and foster interactions in online environments. Consumers' perceived behaviour (CPB) refers to how people receive and internalise communication-shaping attitudes, beliefs, and readiness to interact. Finally, consumers engage in digital engagement (CDE) [42] which captures the quantity to which audiences actively interact and respond to content across virtual channels. Specifically, we assume that CPB serves as a crucial mediator, translating content material exposure into significant digital interactions. In the present study, these hypotheses are examined through the perceptions of SME managers, who serve as informed observers of consumer behavioural responses to marketer-generated content. The following hypotheses formalise the proposed relationships:

H1: *Marketer-generated content (MGC) is positively associated with consumer perceived behaviour (CPB).*

H2: *Marketer-generated content (MGC) is positively associated with consumer digital engagement (CDE).*

H3: *Consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) is positively associated with consumer digital engagement (CDE).*

H4: *Consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content (MGC) and consumer digital engagement (CDE).*

Figure 1 presents the proposed research framework.

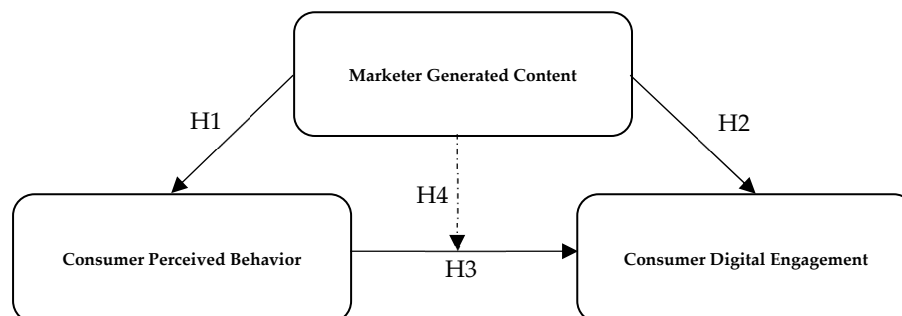


Figure 1. Research framework.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is anchored in three complementary theories: the signalling theory, the Consumer Engagement Model, and the social influence theory. First, the signalling theory, originally proposed by Spence [43] and which comprises four primary elements, namely the sender, the signal, the receiver, and feedback, can be used to examine the impact of messages on other aspects [44]. This theory assesses how the five specific signal attributes contribute to diminishing information disparities. These attributes encompass the visibility, expense, believability, recurrence, and uniformity of the signal [45]. This theory applies to the content received by consumers on MGC to describe consumer interactions in which different parties have asymmetric information. As some information is private, information asymmetries occur between those who own the information and those who could possibly make better decisions if they had access to it.

Secondly, the Consumer Engagement Model theory provides a foundation for refining engagement strategies and maintaining relevance amid changing market dynamics.

Consumers' brand loyalty positively influences brand love, attachment, and advocacy intentions, indicating a strong alignment between individuals' self-perception and their affinity, emotional connection, and endorsement of a brand [46]. By applying our study to the Consumer Engagement Model theory, the role of consumer perceived behaviour in MGC becomes integral in influencing consumer digital engagement and digital consumer perception. The model's various stages, from awareness to advocacy, are significantly affected by the strategic deployment of consumer engagement.

Third, the social influence theory is positively associated with consumer digital engagement. In this theory, consumer perceived behaviour in MGC is associated with shaping consumer behaviour through compliance, identification, and internalisation. This encourages interaction and feedback to amplify the impact further, contributing to higher levels of consumer engagement in the digital realm [47].

Together, these three perspectives form a framework that can be used to analyse the MGC-CPB-CDE process. The signalling theory helps understand how MGC works as a signalling mechanism, while the Consumer Engagement Model explains the behavioural aspect of consumer reaction. Finally, the social influence theory helps explain how this behavioural aspect is reinforced by social processes, an issue that is especially relevant to Palestinian SMEs.

6. Methodology

6.1. Research Design

This study adopts a positivist, quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the structural relationship between consumer perceived behaviour and digital engagement within marketer-generated content (MGC) on social commerce platforms. A deductive approach was employed, whereby hypotheses were derived from the Consumer Engagement Theory, signalling theory, and social influence theory, and tested against empirical data [48]. Although the model is parsimonious, comprising three theoretically grounded constructs, parsimony is recognised as a methodological strength that enhances interpretability and reduces overfitting in structural models [49].

6.2. Population, Sampling, and Data Collection

The target population comprised directors and senior marketing managers of Palestinian SMEs actively engaged in social commerce content creation. Two eligibility criteria were applied: (1) active use of at least one social commerce platform (Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp Business) and (2) a minimum of one year experience in digital content management. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, and data were collected using structured online questionnaires distributed through LinkedIn groups, Palestinian Chamber of Commerce directories, and WhatsApp Business networks over a three-month period (January–March 2024).

Out of the 271 distributed questionnaires, 234 valid responses were retained after excluding incomplete or low-quality responses, yielding an effective response rate of 86.3%. Participants included Palestinian businesses in the private sector. The sampling frame was informed by PCBS statistics [50]. The minimum required sample size was estimated at 227 participants based on a population size of 1370, a 90% confidence level, a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error, and a response distribution of 50%, following Cochran's sample size determination approach [51].

The demographic information for the sample is provided in Table 1 below. In terms of gender distribution, males form the majority of the sample (63.2%), while the most common age range is 25–44 years (70.5%). In terms of education level, the largest group consists of individuals with a Bachelor's degree or above (72.8%). Occupation-wise, respondents

were distributed across the products, services, and industry sectors (44%, 40.6%, 15.4% respectively). Regarding company size, small enterprises constitute the majority (59.0%), followed by medium-sized firms (29.1%) and large companies (12.0%).

Table 1. Sample demographic profile ($n = 234$).

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male/Female	63.2/36.8
Age	25–34 (dominant)	40.2
	35–44	30.3
	Other	29.5
Education	Bachelor’s Degree or Above	72.8
	Below Bachelor’s Degree	27.2
Work Role	Managerial/Technical/Admin	41.9/38.0/20.1
Field	Products/Services/Industry	44.0/40.6/15.4
Company Size	Small/Medium/Large	59.0/29.1/12.0

6.3. Measurement Instrument

A structured questionnaire measured all constructs using validated multi-item scales on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Consumer perceived behaviour was measured using six items adapted from [52], while digital engagement was operationalised using five items adapted from [53]. All items were contextually adapted to reflect the Palestinian social commerce context. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and back-translated by an independent bilingual expert to ensure linguistic equivalence [54]. Content validity was confirmed by three academic experts, and a pilot test with 25 firm directors confirmed Cronbach’s Alpha values above 0.70 for all constructs prior to full data collection. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

In order to prevent common method variance, procedural checks were carried out during the process of data collection by ensuring respondent anonymity and splitting the predictors from the criteria. Harman’s one-factor test revealed that no single factor accounted for most of the variance, indicating that common method variance is not a threat to the study’s findings [55].

7. Data Analysis

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was performed using SmartPLS 4 (version 4.1.0.9; SmartPLS GmbH, Bönningstedt, Germany) [56]. PLS-SEM was selected over CB-SEM given the study’s predictive orientation, non-normal data distribution typical of emerging market surveys, and medium sample size [49]. The measurement model was assessed for internal consistency reliability ($CR > 0.70$), convergent validity ($AVE > 0.50$; factor loadings > 0.70), and discriminant validity ($HTMT < 0.85$) [57]. The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples to generate path coefficients (β), t -statistics, p -values, R^2 , and effect sizes (f^2).

Common method bias was assessed using Harman’s single factor test, which indicated that a single factor accounted for 28.4% of total variance, which was well below the 50% threshold, and that the full collinearity VIF values all fell below 3.3, confirming that bias is not a concern [55,58]. Procedural remedies including anonymous responses, random item ordering, and reverse-coded items were also implemented.

7.1. Reliability

The analysis included 234 valid cases, and no data were excluded based on listwise deletion. Construct-level reliability was assessed using composite reliability (CR), with all values exceeding the 0.70 threshold (CPB = 0.792, CDE = 0.837, MGC = 0.848), confirming internal consistency across the 12 retained items. The reliability statistics summary is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability statistics summary.

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	234	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	0.0
	Total	234	100.0

^a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

7.2. Descriptive Analyses

The results in Table 3 show the descriptive analysis, where consumer digital engagement (CDE) recorded the highest sum score (42.54), highlighting the strong effect of advertising messages on consumer interactions. Consumer perceived behaviour (CPB) and marketer-generated content (MGC) recorded mean scores of (31.02 and 29.18), which reflects their role in predicting consumer engagement outcomes.

Table 3. Descriptive analyses statistics.

		Statistics		
		CPB	CDE	MGC
N	Valid	234	234	234
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		31.0171	42.5427	29.1752
Median		32.0000	44.0000	29.0000
Mode		32.00	46.00	29.00 a
Std. Deviation		3.84793	5.27366	5.05074
Variance		14.807	27.811	25.510
Skewness		−0.595	−0.329	−0.136
Std. Error of Skewness		0.159	0.159	0.159
Kurtosis		0.499	−0.429	−0.686
Std. Error of Kurtosis		0.317	0.317	0.317
Minimum		16.00	29.00	16.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the three constructs based on the summed item scores. CDE recorded the highest sum score (M = 42.54, SD = 5.27), followed by CPB (M = 31.02, SD = 3.85) and MGC (M = 29.18, SD = 5.05).

7.3. Convergent Validity

Table 4 shows the convergent validity test results based on factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). According to [49], factor loadings above 0.5, CR above 0.7, and AVE above 0.5 indicate sufficient convergent validity. The

outcomes displayed in Table 4 generally prove the sufficiency of the measurement model since they demonstrate good internal consistency and construct validity. Although the AVE for CPB (0.488) is just below the required level of 0.50, the CR (0.792) is greater than the required minimum of 0.70 as proposed by [49].

Table 4. Convergent validity.

Construct	Indicator	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Consumer Digital Engagement	CDE4	0.729	0.837	0.562
	CDE5	0.784		
	CDE6	0.754		
	CDE7	0.731		
Consumer Perceived Behaviour	CBP4	0.693	0.792	0.488
	CBP5	0.685		
	CBP7	0.701		
	CBP8	0.715		
Marketer-Generated Content	MGC2	0.759	0.848	0.582
	MGC4	0.774		
	MGC5	0.762		
	MGC7	0.759		

7.4. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity—Fornell and Larcker [59]

Table 5 presents the Fornell–Larcker criterion for the discriminant validity measurement. The diagonal includes the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct, while the off-diagonal includes correlations between constructs (CDE.CPB.MGC). Following Fornell and Larcker [59], discriminant validity is achieved when the diagonal numbers are larger than the related off-diagonal correlation, implying that each construct should relate more heavily with its own indicator than other constructs. Since every number on the principal diagonal is greater than their individual off-diagonal numbers, discriminant validity is hence confirmed for the measurement model.

Table 5. Discriminant validity.

Construct	CDE	CPB	MGC
1. Consumer Digital Engagement	0.750	-	-
2. Consumer Perceived Behaviour	0.558	0.699	-
3. Marketer-Generated Content	0.481	0.440	0.763

Discriminant validity—HTMT Criterion [57]

The Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion is depicted in the table proposed by [57]. The HTMT captures the ratio of between-construct correlations to within-construct correlations and provides a stronger discrimination validity measure than standard methods. Discriminant validity is considered reasonable using the HTMT criterion when values are below 0.85 (strict) or 0.90 (relaxed). The values in Table 6 indicate that the measures are distinct from each other, confirming the fitness of the measurement model as it relates to discriminant validity.

Table 6. Discriminant validity—HTMT.

Construct	CDE	CPB	MGC
1. Consumer Digital Engagement	0.691		-
2. Consumer Perceived Behaviour	0.787	0.559	-
3. Marketer-Generated Content	0.626	0.603	0.587

All HTMT values are well below the 0.90 threshold recommended by [57], confirming adequate discriminant validity across all constructs.

7.5. Structure Model

Table 7 presents the structural model results. The structural model results supported all hypothesised relationships, as all t-values exceeded the critical threshold of 1.96. The strongest direct relationship was observed between MGC and CPB ($\beta = 0.440$, $t = 7.890$), followed by CPB and CDE ($\beta = 0.429$, $t = 7.685$), and MGC and CDE ($\beta = 0.293$, $t = 4.802$). R^2 values indicate that MGC explains 19.3% of the variance in CPB ($R^2 = 0.193$), while MGC and CPB together explain 38.0% of the variance in CDE ($R^2 = 0.380$).

Table 7. Structural model results.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-Value	Decision	f ²	VIF
H1	MGC → CPB	0.440	0.056	7.890	Supported	0.239	1.000
H2	MGC → CDE	0.293	0.061	4.802	Supported	0.112	1.239
H3	CPB → CDE	0.429	0.056	7.685	Supported	0.240	1.239
H4	MGC→CPB→CDE	0.189	0.038	4.991	Supported	—	—

Interpretation for F-Square

However, the effect sizes (f^2) calculated based on [60] showed different levels of impact in the relationship investigated. Among these relationships, the largest effect size was that of CPB → CDE ($f^2 = 0.240$), followed by MGC → CPB ($f^2 = 0.239$), and MGC → CDE ($f^2 = 0.112$). All three relationships indicate small to medium effects.

T-values

The T-values of all paths are greater than the critical value of 2.3263 at an alpha of 1%, which indicates that all relationships in the model are statistically significant. Thus, all the hypotheses, H1 through H4, are supported by the findings of this study.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was utilised to identify multicollinearity among the independent variables in the model. VIF measures range from 1.000 to 1.239, which is lower than the cut-off of 5, as suggested by [61]. The findings support the absence of multicollinearity issues, with independent variables not being highly correlated. This increased the stability of the regression model by maintaining the salience and validity of each predictor in predicting the dependent constructs.

7.6. PLS Predict

According to [62], a model is highly predictive if the PLS-SEM RMSE is always less than the LM RMSE for any construct indicator. The requirement is satisfied in the present study; therefore, the findings confirm that the PLS-SEM model has a good out-of-sample forecasting ability to confirm its validity as a predictor instrument for consumer behaviour patterns and consumer digital engagement (CDE) outcomes, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. PLS Predict.

Construct	Indicator	PLS-SEM		LM_RMSE	PLS_SEM-LM	Remark
		Q ² Predict	RMSE	RMSE		
Consumer Digital Engagement	CDE4	0.102	0.815	0.827	−0.012	High Predictive Power
	CDE5	0.177	0.757	0.777	−0.02	
	CDE6	0.219	0.701	0.711	−0.01	
	CDE7	0.155	0.737	0.749	−0.012	
Consumer Perceived Behaviour	CBP4	0.163	0.724	0.746	−0.022	High Predictive Power
	CBP5	0.233	0.696	0.708	−0.012	
	CBP7	0.155	0.73	0.742	−0.012	
	CBP8	0.194	0.756	0.776	−0.02	

8. Hypothesis Testing

H1: Marketer-generated content (MGC) has a significant positive impact on consumer perceived behaviour. MGC exhibits a positive and statistically significant effect on consumer perceived behaviour, with a path coefficient of 0.440 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The high t -value (7.890) further confirmed the strength of this relationship. This finding indicates that consumers' perceptions and behavioural tendencies are positively associated with marketer-generated content. Hence, H1 is supported.

H2: Marketer-generated content (MGC) has a significant positive impact on consumer digital engagement. The results reveal a significant positive effect of MGC on consumer digital engagement, with a path coefficient of 0.293, a t -value of 4.802, and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This demonstrates that the content generated by marketers is positively associated with consumers' engagement on digital platforms. Accordingly, H2 is supported.

H3: Consumers' perceived behaviour has a significant positive impact on consumer digital engagement. Consumer perceived behaviour also shows a strong positive influence on consumer digital engagement, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.429, t -value of 7.685, and p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the way consumers perceive and interpret digital content is associated with their likelihood of engagement. Therefore, H3 is supported.

H4: Consumer perceived behaviour mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement. Consumer perceived behaviour also significantly mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement. The specific indirect effect is positive (0.189) with a t -value of 4.991 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the mediating effect is statistically significant. This means that marketer-generated content (MGC) indirectly predicts consumer digital engagement (CDE) by influencing perceived behaviour. The data supports our hypothesis that consumer perceived behaviour significantly mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement. The total effect of MGC on CDE was 0.481, yielding a variance accounted for (VAF) of 39.3%, which confirms partial mediation. Figure 2 presents the model of the study.

The hypothesis-testing results are summarised in Table 9.

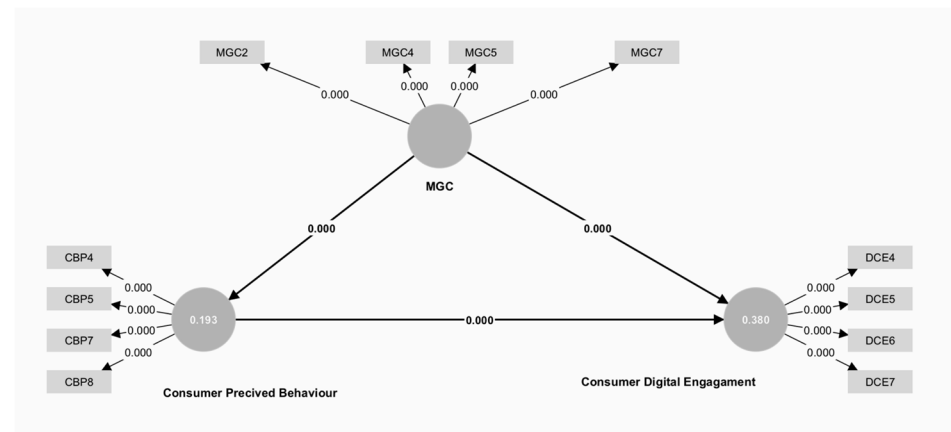


Figure 2. Model of study.

Table 9. Results of hypotheses.

Hypotheses	The Effect	The Hypothesis
H1: Marketer-generated content → Consumer perceived behaviour	Significant	Accepted
H2: Marketer-generated content → Consumer digital engagement	Significant	Accepted
H3: Consumer perceived behaviour → Consumer digital engagement	Significant	Accepted
H4: Marketer-generated content → Consumer perceived behaviour → Consumer digital engagement	Significant	Accepted

9. Results

This study sought to examine the impact of consumer perceived behaviour on consumer digital engagement within marketer-generated content (MGC) while also investigating the potential effects of key variables. In addition, the findings of this study establish that marketer-generated content (MGC) is positively associated with consumer perceived behaviour and digital engagement. It establishes the requirement for high quality, engaging content that affects consumer attitudes, and eliciting interaction. Consumer perceived behaviour is also essential in increasing digital consumer engagement, highlighting the requirement for understanding consumer responses to marketing content. The findings derived from the hypothesis testing are summarised as follows:

H1: Marketer-generated content has a significant positive impact on consumer perceived behaviour. The findings reveal that marketer-generated content is significantly associated with consumer perceived behaviour, with a coefficient of 0.440 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This highlights the contribution of professionally designed marketing content to shaping managers' perceptions of consumer attitudes and behavioural responses. These results align with those of [63], who found that effective communication through transparent messaging and engagement is crucial for fostering consumer trust, which moderates the relationship between marketing efforts and consumer perception [63]. This finding is broadly comparable to studies in other emerging digital markets. The MGC–CPB relationship observed here ($\beta = 0.440$) is consistent in direction with and somewhat stronger in magnitude than effects reported in Southeast Asian social commerce contexts [32], where firm-generated content has likewise shown a strong association with consumer-perceived responses. This relatively stronger effect may reflect the heightened salience of marketer-generated content in infrastructure-constrained economies such as Palestine, where social commerce platforms often serve as a primary—rather than supplementary—communication channel between firms and consumers.

H2: Marketer-generated content is significantly associated with consumer digital engagement. The results show that marketer-generated content is positively associated with digital engagement with a coefficient of 0.293 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that interesting and quality content generated by marketers is important in evoking the interaction of consumers with digital media, which is in line with past research indicating that effective, brand-directed marketing tends to be more influential in fostering engagement, thereby reinforcing the critical role of quality marketer-generated content in digital marketing strategies [64].

H3: Consumer perceived behaviour has a significant positive impact on consumer digital engagement. The findings highlight that consumer perceived behaviour is associated with consumer digital engagement, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.429, t -value of 7.685, and p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the way consumers perceive and interpret digital content is associated with their likelihood of engagement. Therefore, H3 is supported. These findings suggest that consumer perceived behaviour is associated with the degree to which consumers engage with digital content, corroborating the mediating effect, which aligns with [65] finding that successful promotional practices have a positive influence on e-customer behaviour, leading to positive purchasing decisions. Thus, it is important to understand and leverage consumers' perceptions of the development of promotional messages to promote digital engagement and enhance consumer responsiveness [65].

H4: Consumer perceived behaviour mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement. Consumer perceived behaviour also significantly mediates the relationship between marketer-generated content and consumer digital engagement. The specific indirect effect is positive (0.189) with a t -value of 4.991 and a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the mediating effect is statistically significant. This means that marketer-generated content (MGC) is positively associated with consumer digital engagement (CDE) by influencing perceived behaviour. Although statistically significant, the modest magnitude of the indirect effect suggests that CPB represents a partial mediating pathway, indicating that other mechanisms may also contribute to the MGC–CDE relationship in the Palestinian SME context. The total effect of MGC on CDE was 0.481, yielding a variance accounted for (VAF) of 39.3%, confirming partial mediation. This is consistent with the findings of [66] that customer engagement on social commerce conveys the effect of entertainment, perceived prices, and dependence on the intention to consume on social commerce.

This finding is linked to the main research question: What is the impact of consumer perceived behaviour on consumer digital engagement within marketer-generated content (MGC) on social commerce and how does it predict consumer digital engagement outcomes? Hence, based on the results of the data analysis and hypothesis findings, consumer perceived behaviour indeed plays a critical role in consumer digital engagement within the context of marketer-generated content. This suggests that stronger digital engagement may be linked to more favourable consumer responses in social commerce contexts, although purchase behaviour was not directly measured in the present study. It should be noted that these findings establish statistically significant associations between MGC, CPB, and CDE based on the PLS-SEM model. Given the cross-sectional design, however, the directional language used above (e.g., “influences,” “predicts”) reflects theoretically guided interpretation rather than confirmed causal pathways, and should be read as such.

10. Conclusions and Direction for Future Research

This study makes three primary contributions to our understanding of marketer-generated content (MGC) and consumer engagement. First, it empirically validates that

professionally generated MGC is strongly associated with consumer attitudes and linked to interactive behaviours within online settings. Second, it highlights how changes in consumer perception link promotional communication to subsequent engagement, thereby extending the existing frameworks that have thus far viewed perception and engagement as discrete outcomes. Lastly, by drawing on data from Palestinian SMEs operating in a conflict-affected emerging economy seldom examined in digital marketing scholarship, this study extends the generalisability of the perception–engagement relationship to culturally and socioeconomically diverse settings. In comparison with studies from more digitally developed markets, the effect sizes observed here suggest that MGC plays a proportionally more influential role in shaping perceived consumer responsiveness in infrastructure-constrained economies, where digital channels often substitute for, rather than supplement, traditional marketing infrastructure. For practitioners, the findings imply that firms must (1) create economical content calendars that leverage Facebook and WhatsApp Business, which are the leading platforms used by Palestinian SMEs; (2) emphasise building trust and using messages that speak to consumers’ needs during times of economic instability; and (3) track engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares as a substitute measure for consumer perceived behaviour under scarce resources.

The following limitations can be identified in this paper. First, due to the cross-sectional approach, the possibility of drawing cause-and-effect conclusions about the relationship between the variables under consideration is precluded; hence, further research ought to employ longitudinal and experimental approaches. Second, data was collected by means of surveying the managers of small- and medium-sized businesses, but not directly from consumers, thus giving rise to the issue of perceptual bias. Third, common method variance poses some threat despite the measures taken to counteract it. Fourth, the findings were obtained from a single market context. Fifth, although the model is parsimonious by design, the sample spans firms of varying sizes, sectors, and primary social commerce platforms (see Table 1); unobserved heterogeneity across these dimensions—as well as variation in managerial roles—may influence the observed path coefficients, and future research should examine sector-, platform-, or role-based moderation effects. Future studies should test the model on multiple platforms and cultures, use longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, and employ advanced text mining techniques to uncover the most effective features.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Based on the nature of the data, research design, and methodology, the study did not require formal ethics approval under the applicable institutional requirements. The study involved voluntary adult participants, using non-sensitive and non-identifiable data, and did not involve high-risk human experiments, clinical, biomedical, vulnerable-participant, or intervention-based research. Accordingly, the exemption letter issued by the Research Management Centre, Multimedia University, confirms that the broader project, including the submitted manuscript, is exempt from formal ethics review.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and academic use of the responses were explained before participation.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality and to comply with the informed-consent conditions of the study.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument Used in This Study

The original doctoral survey covered additional constructs from the broader dissertation project. Here we report only the items for the three constructs in the final model—marketer-generated content (MGC), consumer perceived behaviour (CPB), and consumer digital engagement (CDE)—in both English and Arabic. The MGC items frame marketer-generated content as promotional messaging, one of its main forms on social commerce platforms [4].

(Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree/5; غير موافق بشدة = Strongly Agree/بشدة موافق) (A1)

Table A1. Survey instrument used in this study.

Construct	Code	English	العربية
Marketer-Generated Content (MGC)	MGC2	Our marketers' content encourages customers to share feedback and engage.	يشجع محتوى المسوقين لدينا العملاء على مشاركة ملاحظاتهم والتفاعل.
	MGC4	We monitor and respond to comments on our promotional content regularly.	نراقب التعليقات على محتوانا الترويجي ونرد عليها بانتظام.
	MGC5	Our tailored promotional messages boost consumer interaction on social media.	تعزز رسائلنا الترويجية المخصصة تفاعل المستهلكين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.
	MGC7	We strategically create promotional posts to enhance digital engagement.	نقوم بإنشاء منشورات ترويجية بشكل استراتيجي لتعزيز التفاعل الرقمي.
Consumer Perceived Behaviour (CPB)	CPB4	I perceive promotional messages as persuasive in guiding my online shopping choices.	أرى أن الرسائل الترويجية مؤثرة في توجيه خياراتي عند التسوق عبر الإنترنت.
	CPB5	Promotional content enhances the user's understanding of the product's value.	يعزز المحتوى الترويجي فهم المستخدم لقيمة المنتج.
	CPB7	Promotional messages create a sense of urgency that influences my buying behaviour.	تخلق الرسائل الترويجية شعوراً بالإلحاح يؤثر على سلوكي الشرائي.
	CPB8	Users are more likely to purchase a product after engaging with its promotional messages.	يكون المستخدمون أكثر عرضة لشراء منتج بعد التفاعل مع رسائله الترويجية.

Table A1. Cont.

Construct	Code	English	العربية
Consumer Digital Engagement (CDE)	CDE4	Clear, tailored marketing messages enhance digital engagement.	تعزز الرسائل التسويقية الواضحة والمخصصة التفاعل الرقمي.
	CDE 5	Strong promotional messages excite consumers and increase brand interaction.	تثير الرسائل الترويجية القوية حماس المستهلكين وتزيد من تفاعلهم مع العلامة التجارية.
	CDE 6	Fun, engaging ideas on social media boost consumer involvement.	تعزز الأفكار الممتعة والجذابة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مشاركة المستهلك.
	CDE7	Interacting with consumers on social media generates higher digital engagement.	يولد التفاعل مع المستهلكين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تفاعلاً رقمياً أعلى.

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