

Brand trust and engagement in social commerce

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Abstract

With the surge in social media (SM) users around the world, the scope of social commerce (SC) in brand engagement is a prominent area of discussion. The present study empirically investigates the effect of social commerce construct (SCC), multi-dimensional constructs of social presence theory (SPT) and consumer generated content (CGC) on brand trust and brand engagement in SC platforms. An online survey was conducted among 625 Indian consumers who had made more than one purchase using SC platforms in the previous 6 months. Structural equation modelling technique was employed for testing the hypotheses and conceptual model. The results suggest that each element of SCC, SPT and CGC positively contributes to brand trust and engagement. Further, the study provides insight into brand trust and brand engagement in SM, which prompts brand usage intention of the consumers. The insights can be used by managers to create long-term customer relationship management action plans that emphasize brand trust and engagement.

KEYWORDS

brand engagement, brand trust, brand usage intention, social commerce, social presence

1 | INTRODUCTION

Technological improvements in the domain of e-commerce, as well as widespread consumer use of social networking sites, have altered the social media (SM) landscape and firms' involvement with their customers on online platforms (Felix et al., 2017; Muninger et al., 2019). SM platforms enable informal interaction between companies and consumers (Laroche et al., 2012; Shaari & Ahmad, 2017). In 2022, the number of SM users have exceeded more than 4 billion globally (Statista, 2022) and it has changed the conventional trends of branding and brand engagement strategies of companies drastically (Anderson et al., 2016; Karikari et al., 2017). With an upsurge in the number of SM users, brands prudently think how people perceive them, their immediate competitors and the world at large (Pauwels et al., 2013). SM plays an important part in customers' day-to-day purchasing decisions (Gupta, 2019; Norouzi, 2017; Venkateswaran & Sudhakar, 2016) and has become a conduit for brand engagement and brand usage by them (de Vries & Carlson, 2014; Harrigan et al., 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). Social commerce (SC) is a new e-commerce trend in which online transactions

are linked and embedded to SM actions (Liang et al., 2011) and it converges e-commerce platforms and SM technologies into commercial features to build a huge customer base and economic exchange of goods and services (Tajvidi et al., 2018). Customers' social interactions may affect how they connect with brands, how they plan to spend money and how they actually make purchases in SC (Shen, 2012; Zhang et al., 2017).

Social presence theory (SPT) is used in this study to understand the impact of SM brand engagement on online SC platforms for brand usage. SPT seeks to understand how digital interfaces affect the 'feeling of being with another' during human-computer interactions (Biocca et al., 2003). In order to fit the SC platforms, a multi-dimensional concept of social presence (SP) is proposed in this study to represent the diverse sentiments combined with different IT artefacts on brand usage intention (Biocca et al., 2003; Cui et al., 2013; Karikari et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2016; Tu, 2000). Lu et al. (2016) suggests a multi-dimensional approach to SP stating two advantages. First, it highlights the SP characteristics that have a major impact on users' online behaviours, giving a clearer picture of how social factors influence user perceptions, beliefs and

behaviour. Second, it discovers the antecedent causes for each dimension of SP.

While Leong et al. (2020) and Nadeem et al. (2020) studied the influence of SP solely on brand trust, and Lu et al. (2016) examined the impact of multi-dimensional constructs of SP on trust in online sellers and purchase intent, the present study aims to examine the impact of the multi-dimensional constructs of SPT on brand trust, engagement and usage intention in SC platforms. Therefore, it is deduced that multi-dimensional constructs of SPT alludes a comprehensive understanding of brand trust and engagement behaviour in SM. As the SC platform expands brand interaction options of the firms leading to brand usage intention, an integration of SPT in this framework becomes a novel contribution to both academia and industry. SPT has received less attention in the context of SC, and the authors' work highlights the importance of this theory, which will call for the attention of future researchers in this domain and its application in other possible fields. This study, therefore, responded to the demand for investigating company–consumer social brand engagement from the angle of SPT with multi-dimensional constructs of 'SP in web, perception of others and SP of interaction'.

Consumers nowadays frequently log on to SM to search for product information and customer comments, since they rely more on content created by others (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008; Presi et al., 2014; Van Dijck, 2009). Users spend a lot of time on SM, posting numerous forms of information about their interests, dislikes, preferences, online purchases, products used, movies watched and so on, without being together physically (Karikari et al., 2017; Yadav & Mahara, 2018). Consumer generated content (CGC) is usually shared in SM because information about various brands can assist other potential customers in making purchase decisions (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). In the study, we use *comments, online reviews and ratings, likes and shares* in SM as constructs of CGC. SM users are not only sharing content (e.g., photographs, texts and videos) with friends and strangers, but they are also offering a platform for constant contact with companies and sharing experiences in order to build consumer-brand relationships for imparting brand trust among them (Bendoni & Bashutkina, 2018; Sakai & Yamanishi, 2013). While brand trust has been suggested as a prerequisite to consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; van Doorn, 2011), it has also been asserted that trust is an outcome of brand engagement (Harrigan et al., 2018). From the point of view of customers, there is a need to find out the reason and motivation for brand engagement in SC platforms using SM tools.

Despite numerous studies attempting to investigate the antecedents and consequences of consumer engagement (van Doorn, 2011), user responses to content on SM platforms (de Vries et al., 2012; de Vries & Carlson, 2014; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013) and motivations for customer engagement in SM platforms (Zhang et al., 2015), studies on brand engagement in SM background are nominal (Dolan et al., 2016). There is a lack of available literature that examines the effect of SC on brand engagement and trust with the integration of SC construct (SCC), SPT and CGC. No previous study in the field of SC has considered these

factors in combination and with their sub-factors in the context of brand trust and brand engagement. The present study is carried out with two objectives: (1) To conceptualize, integrate and validate the dimensions of SCC, SPT and CGC on brand trust and brand engagement in the SC context. (2) To test the effect of brand trust and brand engagement on the brand usage intention of consumers in SC.

The article is further structured as follows. There is a literature overview on the concepts of SC, SP, CGC, brand trust, brand engagement and brand usage intention, followed by development of the hypotheses and the conceptual model for validation. A quantitative survey, consisting of 38 self-reported measures, was carried out using purposive sampling and 625 responses were collected. Structural equation model analysis was done using IBM AMOS 24 for testing the hypothesized model in the study. The article then presents the research results. The empirical findings reveal that the SCC had a significant positive effect on brand trust and engagement. Further, each dimension of SPT and CGC contributes significantly to brand trust and engagement. The specific characteristics of SC influence the role of both brand trust and engagement in this setting. Also, brand trust and engagement in SC contribute to brand usage intention. The findings are then compared against the domain knowledge and discussed along with their implications in theory and practice. The major contribution of the study is that, it is a pioneering attempt to validate a model to predict brand usage intention in SC context using multi-dimensional constructs of SPT. Finally, the study's shortcomings, potential future research directions and concluding remarks are presented.

2 | REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Concept and construct of SC

SC is a subset of e-commerce that uses social networking sites to communicate and collaborate with customers online (Kim & Park, 2013). SC has emerged as a broad domain for both practitioners and academicians due to its quick acceptance and progression as firms can directly sell products at lower prices (Habibi et al., 2014a, 2014b; Labrecque, 2014; Laroche et al., 2013). SC is carried out through platforms where people may collaborate online, seek advice from reliable sources, locate goods and services and then make a purchase (Liang & Turban, 2011). SC as such promotes businesses by increasing handy interactions with customers, highlighting the relationship quality, aggregating transactions and ultimately fostering loyalty to the company (Hajli, 2014). Earlier studies support the idea that through the use of technology (Gonçalves Curty & Zhang, 2013; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Turban et al., 2017), interaction/information communication (Leal et al., 2014) and relationship of customers (Kim & Park, 2013; Liang & Turban, 2011; Palmatier et al., 2006) in SC platforms lead to brand engagement and purchase intention.

SC is described by Liang and Turban (2011) as the delivery of e-commerce activities and transactions through the SM environment,

and it includes three key components: social technology, community interactions and commercial activities. It is the blending of social and business activity. SCC consists of social platforms that allow consumers to share their ideas with peers in the same category or network (Shanmugam et al., 2016). Hajli (2015a, 2015b) discovered that SCC considerably contribute to consumer purchase intention. The interaction of consumers occur in a collaborative online environment where consumers are motivated to share their shopping experience (Curty & Zhang, 2011). The investigations by Cheng et al. (2019) and Escobar-Rodríguez et al. (2017) demonstrate a substantial positive association between an individual's perception in the SC platform and their inclination to trust. The feeling of familiarity and intimacy among members in a SC environment is positively driven by consumer trust in a brand (Li, 2019). Few of the pertinent studies in the field have revealed that recommendations add value to the members of the community which enhances brand engagement in SC platforms (Heinonen, 2011; Keller, 2009). The study assumes that SCC may have high impact in creating brand trust and brand engagement of consumers and hence we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a. SC has a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 1b. SC has a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.2 | Multi-dimensional constructs of SP

The concept of SP in SPT broadens the potential of a communication medium to transmit social cues on the SC platform (Short et al., 1976). Instead of being a general theory of social cognition, SPT embodies social interactions and sheds light on how technology might influence, skew and enhance specific aspects of social cognition (Biocca et al., 2003). The 'context of mediated communication' is where the theory has been used (Cui et al., 2013), which also includes SM research to clarify the idea of SP. The primary conception of SP is that it is the communication channel quality, which can be used to identify the manner in which individuals interact socially and communicate, as well as to indicate the degree of consciousness present during a communication exchange (Lim et al., 2015). In this context, the perceived warmth of a medium that transmits a sense of human interaction, sociability and sensitivity is characterized as SP (Rice & Case, 1983). Users' impressions of a person as real or as 'being there' as well as the degree to which two communicators have strong interpersonal and emotional ties to one another are all factors that go into measuring SP (Cui et al., 2012). SPT was used as a one-dimensional conceptualization in a large number of previous e-commerce studies (e.g., Gefen & Straub, 2004; Hassanein, 2014; Hajli et al., 2016), where the level of SP is compared to the level of awareness of the other person throughout a communication exchange. The studies hitherto focused on the one-dimensional element of SP; however, the SC platforms let users communicate with other members as well as the computer-mediated channel. According to Frank Biocca (2002), there

are three levels of SP: perceptual awareness of copresence with others; subjective judgement, which expands the psycho-behavioural accessibility of others; and related SP, or inter-subjective SP, which brightens the vibrant interactions between participants. Alhulail et al. (2018) advocate a thorough examination that takes into account the multi-dimensional structure of SP. The SP interaction improves customer engagement and increases consumer purchasing intentions (Hajli, 2014). Hence, a multi-dimensional construct of SP is proposed in the study with three constructs—SP in web, perception of others and SP of interaction (Lu et al., 2016).

2.2.1 | Social presence in web (SPW)

In essence, SC is a form of e-commerce where customers conduct online transactions primarily through SM platforms or websites. These buyer-web connections can be equated to interpersonal interactions when the website is viewed as a social component (Kumar & Benbasat, 2002; Pavlou et al., 2007). Human connection and presence are considered essential for establishing trust in the platform. A website with a high SP gives more information and social cues, making it appear more transparent; yet, untrustworthy actions will be avoided in a more transparent atmosphere (Lu et al., 2016). Therefore, SP in web should enhance users' brand trust towards SC platform. It can also be argued that SPW will have a beneficial impact on brand engagement because web presence leads to more involvement in the platform (Bendoni & Bashutkina, 2018; Gummerus et al., 2012; Habibi et al., 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, we posit that:

Hypothesis 2a. SPW has a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 2b. SPW has a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.2.2 | Perception of others (PO)

Information and insights on individuals' behaviour from previous public interactions are available through SM (Jacovi et al., 2014). Shopping has always been a social activity that has a greater effect on the perception of others in SC (Leal et al., 2014). According to social psychology research, humans can absorb and be influenced by other people's understanding and experiences (Marsden, 2010). Users and adopters take advice from similar folks even if they are random strangers (Cialdini, 2001). According to Godes et al. (2005) and Norouzi (2017), when customers make purchasing decisions, their social contacts with others influence their ideas, attitudes and behaviours. Consumers who visit another person's SM profile become more interested and aware of a brand, which increases the likelihood of brand engagement (Vogel & Rose, 2017). Perception of others acts like a social cue to users for brand trust and purchase intention (Cialdini, 2001). Consumers can make sense of the existence of other purchasers based on

numerous indications in social applications such as customer reviews, choice lists and popularity lists, in addition to engagement in SC (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Consequently, people prefer to follow the footsteps of their online predecessors and engage in 'herd behaviour' (Chen et al., 2011). Thus, it can be hypothesized as:

Hypothesis 3a. PO has a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 3b. PO has a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.2.3 | Social presence of interaction (SPI)

Chat tools and chat plug-ins included in the website and apps from SC vendors are employed for interactions with buyer and seller. This allows purchasers to be exposed to more social information, allowing them to acquire trustworthy beliefs in the brand (Pereira et al., 2014). To maintain a good customer relationship, a few tactics such as selecting special words and conveying emotional symbols like a smile are used to increase SC brand engagement (Lu et al., 2016). The computer-mediated interactions such as e-mail and teleconference have been maintained in order to transfer SP and as a result to form user ideas to brand trust (Qiu & Benbasat, 2005). While the subjective quality of the platform boosts SM interactions, it also increases customer SP, which is likely to escalate brand engagement (Nowak, 2013). Therefore, we posit that:

Hypothesis 4a. SPI has a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 4b. SPI has a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.3 | Consumer generated content

CGC refer to any particular opinion uploaded to the internet by words, images or other visible expressions (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008; Presi et al., 2014) and has a greater influence on user's brand trust and engagement in SC platforms where the contents are usually shared in SM (Labrecque, 2014). CGC is an activity in which online users express and share their thoughts, ideas and feedback about the products that they have purchased (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). CGC assists the online buying process, similar to an intermediary between the business and consumers, to learn about the product experience of others and its brand value (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Barnes, 2014). Consumers use SM platforms to gather information to aid in their purchasing decisions and brand preferences (Lueg et al., 2006). The study measures CGC using three constructs—comments, online reviews and ratings and likes and shares.

Comments deliver filtered information about a seller's reputation and their product which is likely to cause a consumer's brand trust

and engagement in SC (Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006). The trust of the seller is greatly influenced by comments on SM platforms (Lu et al., 2016). SM platforms offer consumers a new way to share their thoughts and opinions about a product with others online (Thakur, 2018). Online retailers and shoppers usually request consumers to share post-purchase product reviews on their platforms and also in SM (Zhou et al., 2019). Consumer reviews comprise consumers' opinions about the quality of the product and service of the SC vendors (Thakur, 2018). Online reviews are key indicators of information for shoppers impacting online purchase decisions (Mosteller & Mathwick, 2016). In SC, online reviews and ratings are recognized as the most essential factor of trust in producing a sequence of consumer behavioural outcomes when compared to forums and communities, referrals and recommendations (Ahmad & Laroche, 2017; Ali et al., 2020). The most important aspects of reviews, such as their frequency, intensity or quality, have a considerable ability to explain customer purchasing behaviour and to increase their level of trust (Hajli, 2015a, 2015b). Reviews in descriptive form and ratings on an abbreviated scale are regarded as the most influential indicators of customer engagement (Thakur, 2018). Through the integrity of the information source, online reviews and ratings have a higher credibility than vendor generated information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Consumers build trust in a brand over time by sharing their online experiences through text, images, videos, likes and emoticons (Chua & Jiang, 2006). Consumers share their experiences with a specific brand on SM platforms to their personal networks, becoming viral marketers and mobilizing messages on behalf of a brand through social networks, thereby endorsing their trust in the brand (Yuki, 2015). The engagement in SC platforms are usually assessed with the help of click-through rates, page views, likes and shares (Lehmann et al., 2012; Tsai & Men, 2013). Clicks, likes, comments and information sharing are all examples of brand engagement on SC platforms (Wallace et al., 2014). Administrators of Facebook brand pages can utilize text, links, voting, calls to action, contests, questions and quizzes to engage their audiences at various levels (de Vries et al., 2012). This suggests that comments, online reviews and ratings, likes and shares in SM platforms will contribute positively to brand trust and brand engagement. Based on the existing literature and arguments, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5a1. Comments have a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 5a2. Online reviews and ratings have a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 5a3. Likes and shares have a positive effect on brand trust.

Hypothesis 5b1. Comments have a positive effect on brand engagement.

Hypothesis 5b2. Online reviews and ratings have a positive effect on brand engagement.

Hypothesis 5b3. Likes and shares have a positive effect on brand engagement.

2.4 | Brand Trust

Trust is habitually measured as the basis of e-commerce and the most fundamental element for its usage (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Brand trust is reflected as an originator of consumer engagement (Roderick et al., 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). Trust is essential for a consumer to have an affiliation with a certain brand because without trust, the advancement of a consumer's commitment to a brand may not be promising. A consumer who believes in a brand is also eager to provide information about his or her perceptions, preferences and habits (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Horppu et al., 2008). In anticipation, trust means that the product is competent, accountable and fair. Trust cannot be understood in isolation since it is coupled with other notions such as perceived beliefs and prior experiences. Trust breeds willingness and loyalty (Sharma, 2021). Brand trust mediates the influence of brand equity on consumer reaction (Upadhyay et al., 2022). Communication has an impact on consumer-based brand equity via social networking sites (Arya et al., 2022). SM marketing has a huge impact on customer reaction by increasing brand equity and brand trust (Upadhyay et al., 2022). In the context of SC, trust refers to online community trust, which is 'community members' psychological situations of assurance that the online community and other followers have the capability to provide what has been guaranteed and put their benefits first' (Hsu et al., 2012).

Consumers' concern for brands in SM and other online venues is mostly fueled by brand trust (Chahal & Rani, 2017). Attar et al. (2021) explains the role of SM activities and trust in SC platforms towards purchase intention. Customers strongly perceive that a brand can satisfy their solid needs. The intention of the brand must be good and directed towards customer well-being. Numerous studies have discovered that brand trust has a favourable relationship with a variety of other components, including consumer engagement and customer loyalty (Kang et al., 2014). Previous research on consumer involvement in the context of SM has typically focused on how customer interaction contributes to the establishment of brand-specific relationships such as brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty (Kang, 2018; Kang et al., 2014). The following hypotheses are formulated based on the above-mentioned relationships:

Hypothesis 6. Brand trust has a positive effect on brand engagement.

Hypothesis 7. Brand trust has a positive effect on brand usage intention.

2.5 | Brand engagement

Engagement with a brand is narrated through the involvement and emotional connect of customers. Brand engagement is defined as 'the

consumer's inherent desire to communicate and collaborate with members of the public' (Algesheimer et al., 2005). It is concerned with a psychological state. While having a direct interaction with any brand, a certain level of cognitive, behavioural and emotional characteristics are witnessed in engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014). According to Hollebeek (2011), specific levels of emotional and cognitive behaviours of customers rather than direct interaction to a brand will motivate them to engage more in the brand.

In the SM paradigm, engagement refers to actions such as sharing stories, videos, images, liking and mentioning on the public page. Because of SM, the outdated roles of the vendor and customer in the exchange process have been transformed (Sashi, 2012). A change is observed in the consumers' role from mere transaction-oriented to relationship-oriented by way of contributions made by them in the form of free review videos, feedbacks and ratings (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). A higher level of involvement implies more collaboration and exchanges, which leads to more beneficial outcomes from such encounters. Consumers' brand engagement symbolizes communication between consumers and brands (Goldsmith, 2011). In order to surpass the competition, several commercial organizations prioritize brand engagement in SM platforms (Meesala & Paul, 2018). It is proved that consumer engagement with a certain brand will result in brand usage intention (Bazi et al., 2020). Based on the above, the following hypotheses is formulated:

Hypothesis 8. Brand engagement has a positive effect on brand usage intention.

2.6 | Brand usage intention

According to Ajzen (1991) in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, behavioural intention is a prominent predictor of behaviour. Interaction-based customer value enhances fresh magnitude of continuance intentions (Zhou et al., 2013). Scholars observed that the process of company customer identification has a substantial impact on the retention of interaction intentions. In a recent study by Purohit et al. (2022), the significance of understanding the continuance intention of consumers relating to mobile payments is explored. The status of a brand impacts its enjoyment and usage (Kumar et al., 2021). As sensitive information like financial and personal information are transmitted between the parties, trust in an online environment is required for completing online transactions and assurance that the firms would not participate in opportunistic conduct is required (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Pavlou, 2003). Previous research has indicated that brand trust influences online purchasing intentions positively (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; Verhagen et al., 2006). Consumer purchasing intentions are heavily influenced by their engagement with a brand.

Based on the above discussions, a conceptual model is presented in Figure 1. In the proposed model, the authors have extended the work of Lu et al. (2016) and Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018)

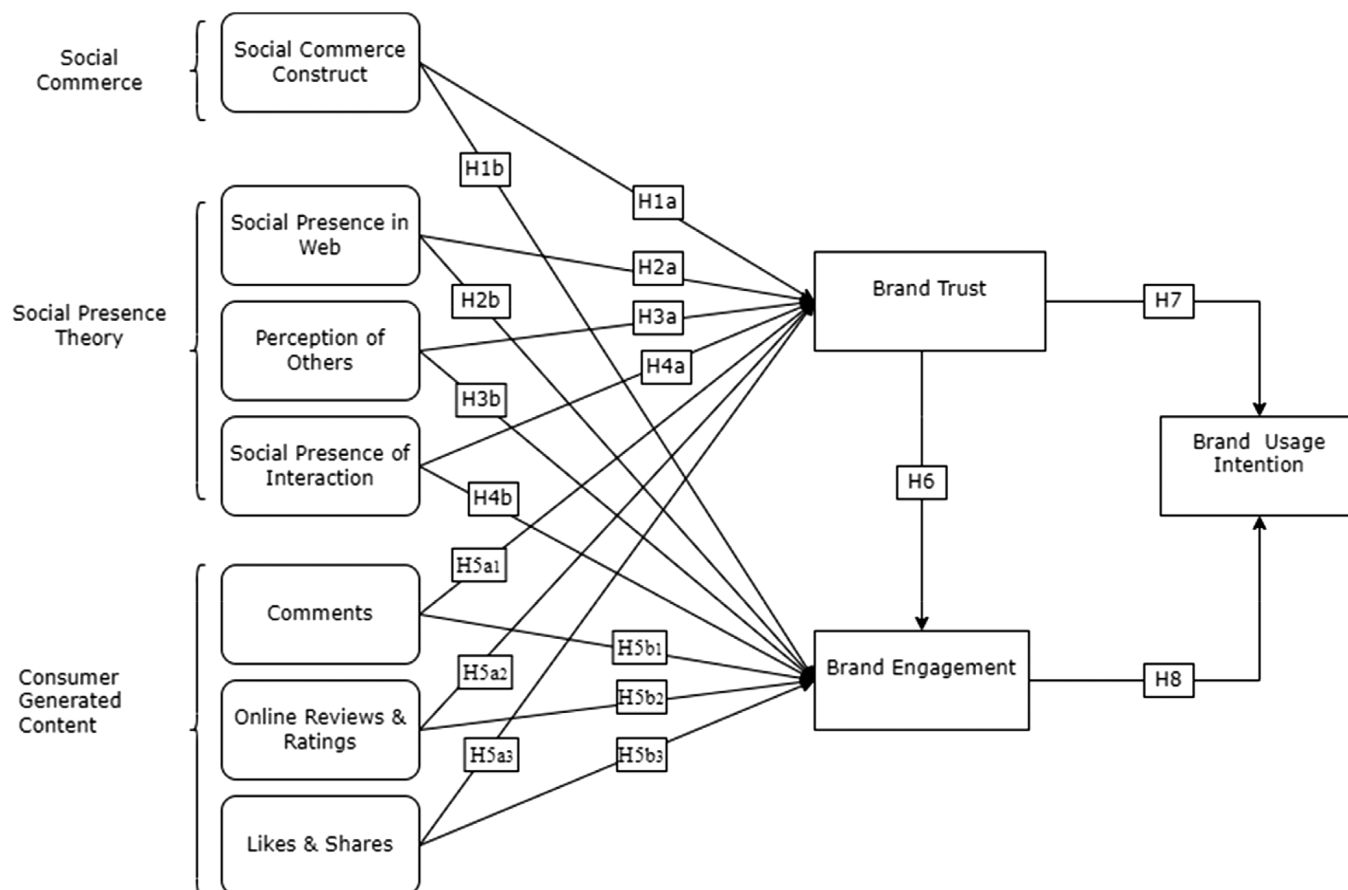


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

by examining the effect of each of the multi-dimensional constructs of SP on brand engagement. The model further investigates the effect of brand trust and engagement on brand usage intention of consumers in SC by integrating and validating the elements of SPT, CGC and SCC.

3 | METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey method has been adopted to test the conceptual model (Figure 1). Consumer behaviour research in the SC context is needed in general, (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016) with regional, national and cultural variations (Alsajjan & Dennis, 2010). As a result, the data for the study were gathered from India which represents the aforesaid conditions. It is found that Indians are very enthusiastic in SM platforms and utilize them for purchasing various items as India is the second largest market globally after China in SC platform with potential of 1.5 billion active social network users expected in 2040 (Statista, 2020). The study was conducted in Cochin, Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad, the IT hubs of India, which are huge cities with a diverse population from all over the country. The development of a questionnaire was the first step in the empirical validation of the conceptual model.

3.1 | Measures

Appendix Table A1 lists the measurement scale used for measuring each construct of the study. All scale items were chosen from existing literature and reworded to fit the topic of the study. They were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure legitimacy of the items used in the questionnaire, following the methodology adopted by (Thakur, 2018; Chahal & Rani, 2017), a six-member expert panel consisting of three academicians and three practitioners in SM were chosen. Three academicians have been selected for their significant publications in reputed journals in the field of SC. The three practitioners were the ones who managed the SC platform for reputed brands. To evaluate content validity, the experts were engaged to rate the items using a 5-point scale. Based on the evaluations by the six experts, the item-level construct reliability was above the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating a sufficient level of content validity (Hew & Kadir, 2016). In order to ensure that the questionnaire is free of ambiguities, it was given to 10 postgraduate students in commerce and they were asked to fill it up without any explanation. The meaning of the items was then explained to them and were asked to fill out the questionnaire once again to see if there was any change in response after the explanations. The variance in responses was identified using

a paired sample *t*-test, which tested the variance of each item before and after the explanation response. A few items were redrafted based on the variance identified as significant grounding the *t*-test result. This redrafted questionnaire was again reviewed by the expert panel and finalized for pre-test and piloted with 50 samples. Based on the input and findings from the pre-test, the questionnaire was modified to improve reliability and validity before being used in the final survey.

3.2 | Sample

Data sampling were purposive in order to target users of a SC platform. 2000 questionnaires were administered to SC platform customers who had made more than one purchase in the previous 6 months (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, You Tube and Telegram). The genuineness of the purchase was cross-checked based on the self-reported responses of the customers regarding the details of the product purchased. Of the total 652 responses received, 27 were determined to be incomplete and were eliminated from further analysis, yielding a usable sample of 625, reflecting a valid response rate of 32%. The collected sample size surpasses the suggested minimum of 10 times the maximum number of inner or outer model links pointing at any latent variable in the model (Bentler &

Chou, 1987; Hair et al., 2010). As self-reported data have been used, it was essential to address the possibility of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To eradicate potential CMB, the subsequent steps were taken: (a) scale items for different variables were disjointedly disseminated throughout the questionnaire, (b) respondents' anonymity was highlighted and (c) respondents were encouraged to reply honestly by emphasizing the purely academic nature of the inquiry. Furthermore, Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1976) was performed, and the variance for the single component was judged to be <50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). When all the measurement items were loaded onto a single factor, it was found that the total variance explained by the single factor alone was 31.19%, thus providing no evidence of CMB.

4 | DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 | Sample profile

The demographic features of respondents given in Table 1 correspond to the profiles of existing SC users (Statista, 2020) and also corroborates the findings of previous studies, thus eliminating non-response bias (Armstrong & Overton, 1977).

TABLE 1 Demographics of respondents.

Respondents characteristics	Frequency (n)	%	Previous literature
Gender			(Braun, 2013; Joinson, 2008)
Male	240	38.4	
Female	385	61.6	
Age group			(Chen, 2020; Statista, 2020)
Below 25 years	331	53	
25–35 years	165	26.4	
36–45 years	90	14.4	
Above 45 years	39	6.2	
Educational qualification			(Lu et al., 2010)
Post-graduation	175	28	
Graduation	253	40.5	
Professional degree	173	27.5	
Below graduation	24	4	
SC usage			
Less than 2 years	206	33	
2–5 years	259	41.4	
5–7 years	92	14.7	
More than 7 years	68	1.9	
Frequency of purchases in SC platform			
Less than once in a month	110	17.6	
Once in a month	189	30.2	
Several times in a month	227	36.3	
Several times in a week	99	15.8	

Source: Primary data.

TABLE 2 Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of measures.

Constructs	Number of items	VIF	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	SCC	SPW	PO	SPI	COM	ORR	LS	BT	BE	BU
SCC	4	1.877	0.90	0.89	0.693	0.83									
SPW	5	1.073	0.91	0.85	0.671	0.44	0.82								
PO	3	1.304	0.87	0.79	0.684	0.52	0.48	0.83							
SPI	4	1.775	0.89	0.91	0.682	0.28	0.41	0.32	0.83						
COM	3	1.783	0.86	0.87	0.678	0.35	0.57	0.42	0.36	0.82					
ORR	3	1.356	0.84	0.82	0.651	0.47	0.49	0.45	0.45	0.41	0.81				
LS	4	1.228	0.89	0.77	0.686	0.55	0.32	0.42	0.54	0.58	0.49	0.83			
BT	3	1.322	0.86	0.83	0.678	0.41	0.53	0.35	0.40	0.36	0.37	0.56	0.82		
BE	5	1.039	0.92	0.93	0.711	0.32	0.38	0.47	0.37	0.56	0.55	0.58	0.46	0.84	
BU	4	1.040	0.88	0.84	0.654	0.30	0.28	0.32	0.47	0.38	0.23	0.43	0.33	0.46	0.81

Note: Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients were used to assess data dependability for all constructs, and all values were determined to be more than 0.7. (Nunnally, 1978). Bolded diagonal elements are the square root of AVE.

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; BE, brand engagement; BT, brand trust; BU, brand trust; COM, comments; LS, likes and shares; ORR, online reviews and ratings; PO, perception of others; SCC, social commerce construct; SPI, social presence of interaction; SPW, social presence in web; VIF, variance inflation factor.

Source: Authors calculation.

4.2 | Robustness

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method was used to categorize study variables defined by common underlying elements (Hair et al., 2010). All components had significant loadings on their respective parameters ranging from 0.75 to 0.88. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin sample adequacy score was 0.83, which surpassed the least accepted value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($BTS < 0.001$) and met the required conditions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). The number of items, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and discriminant validity of the constructs are shown in Table 2. Preliminary normality checks were performed, and all variables had acceptable skewness and Kurtosis ($+/-1.5$) (Hair et al., 2010). Variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were also computed to test for multi-collinearity and found to be within acceptable limits of <10 (Hair et al., 2010). To validate the variable factor structure, confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS 21.0. The proposed 10-factor measurement model matched the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2/df = 1.95$; $RMR = 0.035$, $CFI = 0.961$, $AGFI = 0.902$; $RMSEA = 0.043$) and is a good approximation of the structures underlying the observed data (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). The extracted average variance for each construct was more than 0.50, indicating convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that the instrument has discriminant validity since the square root of the AVE of each latent variable is larger than the inter-construct correlations among the latent variables (Hair et al., 2010). Table 3 shows the authors' definitions of the various dimensions employed in the study. To summarize, there is sufficient support for the suggested theoretical model, allowing testing of hypotheses to proceed.

4.3 | Results

The structural model and the accompanying hypothesized relationships were then tested as the subsequent phase in the investigation. The testing of the structural model revealed that the data fit the model quite well ($\chi^2 = 282.42$, $df = 10$; $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.84$; $CFI = 0.95$, $AGFI = 0.893$, $RMR = 0.045$, $RMSEA = 0.048$) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2018). Following that, the standardized path coefficients were investigated to put the model's hypotheses to test (Table 4). These standardized path coefficients demonstrated the predicted effects, and they are offered to assess the relative significance of the proposed paths (Bentler, 2016).

Table 4 displays the hypotheses tested as well as the structural equation model's estimated path coefficients. All the seven dimensions are contributing positively and significantly to brand trust and brand engagement. Table 4 provides direct effect of statistically significant paths and all the 18 paths were statistically significant with positive regression weights on their dependent variable. The r^2 value for BT, BE and BU are 0.38, 0.31 and 0.25 respectively. It is found that SCC and COM have high positive direct

TABLE 3 Authors' definition of dimensions in the study.

Dimensions	Definitions
Social commerce construct	It comprises of the willingness of a consumer to recommend the purchase of a new product based on suggestions, reviews and ratings in online forums and communities.
Social presence in web	The extent to which brands in social commerce (SC) platforms provide a feeling of personal interaction, sociability, human warmth and customer sensitivity.
Perception of others	The belief that there are many other purchasers who are either interested in or have used a specific brand and prefer to share the information relating to brands.
Social presence of interaction	It refers to the consumers' attitude and perception regarding the computer mediated interactions through SC platform of brands.
Comments	It indicates the consumer generated positive comments on the product, service and the overall outlook of brands in SC.
Online reviews and ratings	It is the extent to which consumers post defined, logical and accurate reviews and ratings of brands in SC.
Likes and shares	It comprises the willingness of consumers to like and share contents regarding brands in SM platforms regularly.
Brand trust	The extent to which the users feel that the brand is honest and safe so that they trusts the brand in SC.
Brand engagement	It is defined as the involvement and emotional connect of consumers to collaborate and exchange high positive effects gained through the use of brands in SM platform.
Brand usage intention	It indicates the sense of consumers to prefer a particular brand based on their engagement, experience and knowledge in comparison with other brands in SM platform.

effect on Brand Trust. SPI, LS and ORR have the highest beta coefficient influencing brand engagement positively. Both BT and BE also contributes significantly to brand usage intention. Figure 2 depicts the validated model.

5 | FINDINGS

According to the findings of the study, the SCC had a significant positive effect on brand trust and engagement, which is consistent with the existing literature (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015; Tajvidi et al., 2018). All the three dimensions of SPT contributes positively to brand trust and brand engagement. In the context of online brand communities, the positive effect of SP on trust is validated and supports prior findings by Leong et al. (2020), Lu et al. (2016) and Nadeem et al. (2020). Among SP constructs, SPI has contributed the most to brand trust and engagement. This might be because, interaction (e.g., formal or informal) will create social cues and allow customers to build relationships with the brand, which may increase their trust and engagement with the brand. Brand engagement and brand trust are positively impacted by dimensions like SP in web and perception of others. This validates our argument that multi-dimensional constructs of SP using SPT in SC platform can enhance brand trust and engagement positively (Lu et al., 2016). The technological environment is primarily where SP in web is anchored in the online brand perception. This online presence fosters transparency and certainty, which raises engagement. The level of engagement and trust in the brand may be further impacted by the perception of others among the community members. People may learn from and be impacted by the wisdom and experiences of individuals they know or trust, according to studies in social psychology (Lu et al., 2016). Similarity in perception increases brand trust and

engagement opportunities, which in turn increases the likelihood that a brand will be used.

In terms of CGC, the three dimensions had a highly positive significant impact on brand trust and engagement, corroborating with the findings of Labrecque (2014). In CGC constructs, comments on SM platforms are the highest predictor of increasing brand trust and the significant positive effect of comments on brand trust are also established in related studies (Lu et al., 2016; Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006). This might be due to the reason that positive comments about brands on the SC platform will increase the user's trust in the brand. Our research suggests a strong relationship between online reviews and ratings to brand engagement, which supports the findings of past studies (e.g., Chen & Xie, 2008; Thakur, 2018; Zhou et al., 2019). This is because consumers do not just look at a brand's performance or feature specific reviews; they also look at the overall ratings, reviews and likes by other users on the SM platform. Customers are more interested in online reviews that relate to their brand experiences (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). Wallace et al. (2014) noted that brand engagement in SC platforms include likes, comments and shares, which is established in our findings.

Similarly, we found that brand trust positively contributes to the predictive model of brand engagement (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Hsu et al., 2012). These results emphasize the necessity of developing long-term brand trust in order to promote brand engagement. Brand trust also had a significant effect on brand usage intention, which corroborates the literature empirically (Chahal & Rani, 2017; Kang et al., 2014). Lastly, our study re-validated the findings of Karikari et al. (2017) that brand engagement in SM might generate consumer brand usage intention. In our study, we discovered a highly significant relationship between brand engagement and brand usage intention, which supports the findings of previous studies (Algesheimer

TABLE 4 Structural model path analysis result.

Hypotheses	Paths	Path coefficients	p-value	Supported (yes/no)
Hypothesis1a	Brand trust ← Social commerce construct (SCC)	0.42	.000***	Yes
Hypothesis5a ₁	Brand trust ← Comments (COM)	0.42	.000***	Yes
Hypothesis4a	Brand trust ← Social presence of interaction (SPI)	0.33	.001***	Yes
Hypothesis5a ₂	Brand trust ← Online reviews and ratings (ORR)	0.32	.006**	Yes
Hypothesis2a	Brand trust ← Social presence in web (SPW)	0.26	.009**	Yes
Hypothesis5a ₃	Brand trust ← Likes and shares (LS)	0.25	.000***	Yes
Hypothesis3a	Brand trust ← Perception of others (PO)	0.16	.034*	Yes
Hypothesis4b	Brand engagement ← SPI	0.48	.006**	Yes
Hypothesis5b ₃	Brand engagement ← LS	0.47	.001***	Yes
Hypothesis5b ₂	Brand engagement ← ORR	0.42	.003**	Yes
Hypothesis6	Brand engagement ← Brand trust (BT)	0.39	.011*	Yes
H3b	Brand engagement ← PO	0.34	.000***	Yes
H1b	Brand engagement ← SCC	0.21	.000***	Yes
H5b ₁	Brand engagement ← COM	0.19	.001***	Yes
H2b	Brand engagement ← SPW	0.17	.042*	Yes
H7	Brand usage intention ← BT	0.45	.005**	Yes
H8	Brand usage intention ← Brand engagement	0.38	.018*	Yes

***Denotes *p* value <.001.**Denotes *p* value <.01.*Denotes *p* value <.05.Source: Authors calculation.

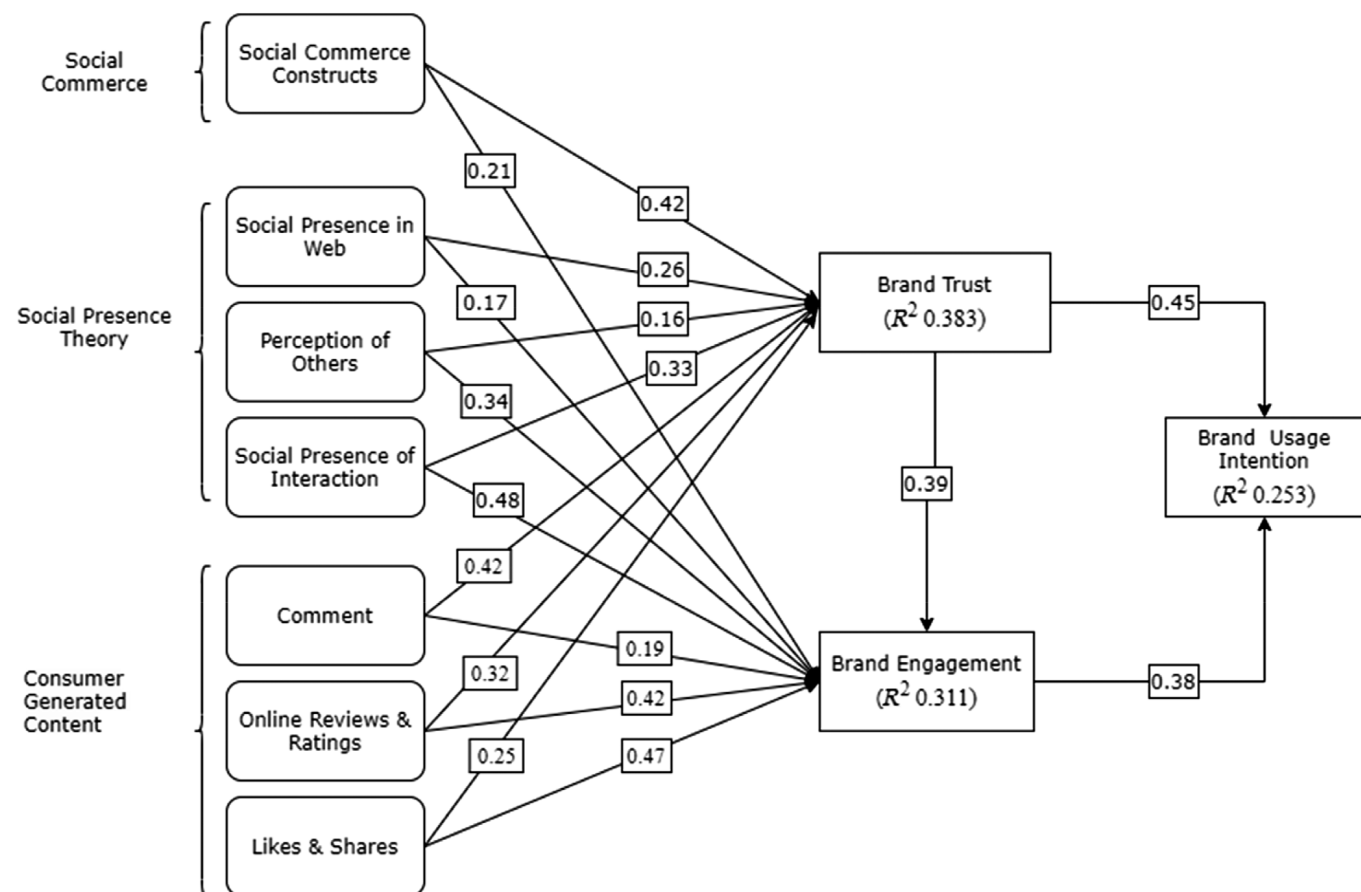


FIGURE 2 Validated model.

et al., 2010; Hsieh & Chang, 2016) that such consumer engagements or contributions have a variety of outcomes for brand usage intention.

6 | DISCUSSION

This study has brought out useful results in the context of brand trust and engagement in SC. As revealed by the above results, the proposed research model was able to achieve an acceptable level of accuracy in the predictive capacity of the constructs employed in the study. The results of model path estimates indicate that brand trust and engagement were positively influenced by the SCC. In a similar way, each component of the SPT and CGC contributes significantly. Brand trust and engagement in SC have a positive impact on brand usage intention. The results have intriguing theoretical and managerial implications that are covered in the following sections.

6.1 | Theoretical contribution

A major contribution of this study to the literature is the application of multi-dimensional constructs of SPT and CGC on brand trust and engagement and examining consumer's intention to use. Three new broad predictors namely, SCC, SPT and CGC, which positively influenced brand trust and brand engagement are new in the literature with regard to SC platforms. By incorporating three broad variables into SPT, which proved to contribute significantly to brand trust and brand engagement, the study gained a new perspective on the predictors of brand engagement and brand trust. This helped in deepening our understanding of the significance of the theory of collectivist cultures, which value the interests and aspirations of the whole community over those of the individual and which will explore different predictors in the areas of brand engagement and brand trust. Further, the findings of the study that comments, online reviews and ratings and likes and shares have effect on brand trust and brand engagement is a re-validation of the findings from the past literature in this domain (Fournier & Avery, 2011). The effect of online reviews and ratings on customer brand choices is crucial (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; de Matos & Rossi, 2008) as against the company sponsored advertisements and promotional acts, online reviews, ratings, likes and comments are becoming a new sensation and a more trustworthy source of information for customers (Willemssen et al., 2011). In tandem with the existing literature (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Zulfanef, 2006), the study points out that CGC is vital in building trust in a brand. Thus, the positive contribution of dimensions in SPT and CGC to brand trust and engagement is novel in the literature. The engagement of customers with the brand tends to build a stronger relationship for brand usage intention.

6.2 | Managerial implications

This study offers managers with critical insights for execution. Many attractive features of SC platforms like reasonable cost, wider reach

and reputation have prompted the managers to make use of it in the most desirable manner. Due to the gaining importance of SCC in brand engagement and brand trust, managers could formulate strategies to enhance the willingness of consumers to recommend the purchase of new products through SM platforms (Çal & Adams, 2014; Harrigan & Choudhury, 2012; Zailskaitė-Jakstė & Kuvykaite, 2012). The current study has the following implications for SM strategists. To begin, SM strategists could encourage members to rate, review and recommend on SC platforms. In other words, members may possibly feel empowered to write and recommend what they feel and think about a specific product that is of interest to the users. According to our findings, user interaction via SCC frequently results in suggestions for others. As a result, SM strategists could pay more attention to user feedback and act accordingly in order to improve users' experiences. Managers will be able to set the priorities on their websites/platforms based on the consumers' source of information when making an online purchase by comprehending consumer behaviour and how SCC affect their decisions.

Effect of multi-dimensional constructs of SP established through this study envisages brands to increase computer mediated interaction with senses of human contact, sociability, human warmth and sensitivity to the consumer. Managers may design techniques to encourage individuals who are interested to share information about brands in SM for enhancing their engagement with the brand. Creative content strategies in SM may be viewed as essential to capture the attention of the customer and one that would encourage return visits to connect as business SM platforms boost more communication and interactions among consumers. For instance, users of the SC platform may start debates by posting amusing facts about their companies, or about forthcoming and ongoing brand events on SM networks. This may be accomplished by using innovative messaging, brief videos or graphics. Since SM presence encourages interactions, businesses could look for methods to comprehend and use the phenomena of SM to effectively engage with customers.

This research pursues to deliver managers an insight to initiate CGC, which seeks to notify managers concerning the factors to focus for producing advanced levels of CGC, thereby assisting prospective consumers for brand usage intention. When consumers post-logical and accurate reviews, ratings and positive comments about the products and services of a brand, managers shall ensure that consumers are envisaging trust in their brands, which will encourage the consumers to engage with the brand. In the hospitality industry, for instance, companies can build a consistent relation with their customers by using favourable reviews, ratings and comments from them, which will increase their acceptance among users. Brand engagement comes into play in a competitive world, and it is the ticket to better brand recognition, trust and continued usage. The firms currently formulate a SM plan to engage their customers using many interactive posts such as filters, contests on the review and pictures with the product. Brands must foster customer engagement and encourage repeat visits to their websites if they want to increase the likelihood that customers will post online reviews after making a purchase. This can be done by providing few incentives for future purchases to those

who do so. This will help the decision-makers to formulate strategies that could increase the involvement and emotional connect of consumers to collaborate and exchange high positive effects gained through the use of brands in SM platforms. This research work offers useful vision for managers to instigate long-term customer relationship management action plans that focus on brand trust and brand engagement.

6.3 | Limitations and future research

This study has several drawbacks. The results are not generalizable, and the conceptual model was tested using only Indian consumers in SM. Although interesting findings are derived, future examination is recommended to stretch out this model in other areas with various social settings. This study relied on self-reported data from respondents and had the limitations of a study of this type. This study recognizes the limitation of using a non-probabilistic testing approach, which may introduce bias into our findings. Although this is not new (e.g., Mai & Olsen, 2015), the results of the study ought to be treated with caution and rather urge future exploration to test the model in other settings. This study could not address all the possible antecedents of brand trust, brand engagement and brand usage intention which are indicated by low r^2 values. More study is needed to determine the effect of additional variables such as firm generated content, market trust, trust in the seller or vendor in SC and others on brand engagement and usage intention. Likewise, future studies are encouraged to build on the model presented here and explore various elements of concern such as the moderating effects of customer demographics on the SC platform (e.g., age, gender, type of SC platform used and usage frequency), and the differential impacts of social comparison on SC brands. Finally, it will be exciting to investigate the effects of other social aspects and market features on SC brand engagement.

7 | CONCLUSION

The study has examined and validated the impact of SCC, multi-dimensional constructs of SP and CGC on brand trust and brand engagement in SC platforms. A quantitative survey was used to collect data from 625 Indian consumers, and structural equation modeling was used to validate the model. The results showed that multi-dimensional constructs of SP contributed positively to brand trust and brand engagement. The study also showed that CGC strongly influences brand engagement and brand trust, demonstrating that SC vendors and brands must concentrate on consumers' responses on SM platforms to build brand trust, which may then result in usage and engagement. The findings showed that SC platforms can greatly help business firms on consumer brand engagement as SCC influences consumer brand engagement and trust. This study yields a better understanding of the constructs that link dimensions of SC with brand engagement and brand trust that led to usage intention.

The brand engagement factors and their impact on business brand building, taking into account the interactive nature of SC platforms, are explored in this study. The insights of the study call for attention to the brand managers to create long-term customer relationship management action plans that emphasize brand trust and engagement.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no possible conflicts of interest with the research, writing and/or publishing of this work, according to the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Items in the study.

Item label	Item description	Mean	Factor loadings (EFA)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social commerce construct (Hajli, 2014; Hajli, 2015a, 2015b)					
SCC 1	Before I go shopping for a new product, I'll ask my friends on forums and groups for their recommendations.	3.44	0.81	.953	.808
SCC 2	I am willing to promote a new product that is worth purchasing to my online community friends.	3.39	0.84		
SCC 3	I am eager to share my personal purchasing experience of a new product with my friends through forums and communities, as well as ratings and reviews.	3.35	0.86		
SCC 4	I would want to purchase a new product based on web suggestions.	3.34	0.82		
Social presence in web (Gefen & Straub, 2004)					
SPW 1	In the Social Commerce platform brands, there is a sense of human touch	3.17	0.75	.765	.267
SPW 2	The Social Commerce platform brands have a feeling of personality	3.06	0.88		
SPW 3	The Social Commerce platform brands have a sense of friendliness.	3.27	0.83		
SPW 4	The Social Commerce platform brands have a personal feel to them.	3.49	0.86		
SPW 5	The Social Commerce platform brands exhibit human sensibility.	2.96	0.77		
Perception of others (Lu et al., 2016)					
PO 1	Many more buyers are interested in the brand	3.21	0.81	.797	.253
PO 2	Many other purchasers are providing information about the brand	3.51	0.79		
PO 3	Many others have also used the brand	3.74	0.88		
Social presence of interaction (Caspi & Blau, 2008; Hess et al., 2009)					
SPI 1	Interacting with social commerce platform firms allows me to understand their attitudes	3.36	0.85	.497	.089
SPI 2	I can envision how they would appear if I communicate with them on a social networking platform	3.59	0.77		
SPI 3	Communication with social commerce platform companies has a human touch	3.21	0.81		
SPI 4	Communication via social media is warm	3.11	0.87		
Comments (Pavlou & Gefen, 2004)					
COM 1	The brand's items are receiving positive comments on social media channels	3.63	0.84	.675	.367
COM 2	In social media networks, brand service receives good comments	3.61	0.81		
COM 3	Overall outlook of brands are positive in the social media platform	3.65	0.82		
Online reviews and ratings (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018)					
ORR 1	Online reviews and ratings on brands are defined	3.54	0.83	.437	.594
ORR 2	Online reviews and ratings on brand products are logical	3.50	0.78		
ORR 3	Online reviews and ratings on brand products are accurate	3.44	0.81		
Likes and shares (de Silva, 2019)					
LS 1	I regularly like the brands in social media	2.89	0.85	.292	.382
LS 2	Liking of brands in social media is something that I do often while on a social media platform	3.22	0.86		

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Item label	Item description	Mean	Factor loadings (EFA)	Skewness	Kurtosis
LS 3	I regularly share content of brands in social media	2.89	0.84		
LS 4	I enjoy while sharing content of brands through social media	3.28	0.76		
Brand trust (Habibi et al., 2014a, 2014b)					
BT 1	Brands are honest	3.63	0.86	.921	.335
BT 2	I trust the brands	3.61	0.83		
BT 3	Brands are safe	3.65	0.78		
Brand Engagement (Habibi et al., 2014a, 2014b; Laroche et al., 2012)					
BE 1	I use social media to follow businesses and their branding	3.14	0.77	.665	.247
BE 2	I participate in social media brand engagement activities because it makes me feel better	3.23	0.87		
BE 3	I participate in social media brand engagement activities because it allows me to share my experiences with others	3.42	0.85		
BE 4	To achieve my own objectives, I participate in brand engagement initiatives	3.23	0.88		
BE 5	Because of my emotional commitment to the brand, I participate in brand engagement activities on social media.	3.16	0.84		
Brand Usage Intention (Hollebeek et al., 2014)					
BU 1	Following my engagement with brand X, it makes sense to promote the brand	3.43	0.88	.697	.353
BU 2	Even if another brand offers the same qualities as brand X, I would choose to use brand X	3.39	0.76		
BU 3	If another brand is equally excellent as brand X, I choose to use brand X because of my previous experience with brand X	3.35	0.76		
BU 4	If another brand is identical to brand X in every manner, it appears wiser to use brand X due to my familiarity with the brand	3.39	0.83		

Note: All scales anchored by 1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree.