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Citation:

Peeroo, S and Samy, M and Jones, BT (2017) Facebook: a blessing or a curse for grocery stores? International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, 45 (12). ISSN 0959-0552 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-12-2016-0234>

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Document Version:

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**Facebook: a blessing or a curse for grocery stores?**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</i>
Manuscript ID	IJRDM-12-2016-0234.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Social media, Customer engagement, Relationship marketing, Customer Empowerment, Retail sector

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – Increasingly businesses are using Facebook to communicate and engage their customers. However, there is a dearth of research as to why and how customers interact with businesses on social media in the grocery sector. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the roles played by online brand communities (OBCs) and social customers in the creation as well as the destruction of value.

**Design/methodology/approach** - Netnography was adopted as an approach to gain insight into the various ways customers engage with grocery stores on their official Facebook pages. Messages posted on Tesco's and Wal-Mart's Facebook pages are thematically analysed and critical discussion is linked back to the extant contemporary debate on social media.

**Findings** – This study shows that customers respond to company posts for the following reasons: to communicate with the stores, to converse with other customers, to express their emotions, to share their experiences as employees of the stores with customers, and to share their positive or negative actions with members of the online communities. The study further highlights the role of social media in the co-creation and co-destruction of customer, consumer and supermarket value and builds contemporary theory and informs practice.

**Practical implications** – Retailers should use social media to enrich the customer experience by encouraging customer engagement, co-creation of value and responding efficiently to customer needs in real time.

**Originality/value** - This paper contributes to knowledge by uncovering the various ways customers react with the business. The social customer is both a curse and a blessing to Tesco and Walmart as they can create or destroy value for the business.

**Keywords** — social media; customer engagement; relationship marketing; customer empowerment; retail sector

## Facebook: a blessing or a curse for grocery stores?

### 1. Introduction

The web has created numerous channels where customers share opinions on products, services and brands (Tiruwa et al., 2016). Vast arrays of social networks are now the platforms where brand related conversations occur between a company and its customers and among customers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013, Yadav, 2015). Currently, businesses of all sizes are experimenting with social media marketing, dealing with the question of how to get in on what appears to be an especially viral way to get their message and their products promoted (Labrecque, 2014).

With the advent of Internet technology, communities of consumers shifted online and more than 50 percent of the top 100 global brands have an online brand community (OBC) (Manchanda et al., 2012). Businesses within most sectors are drawn by the potential benefits of adopting social media platforms (Ureña et al., 2015). Research shows that managers have joined the social media world fearing to lose the social media battle, which highlights the importance of relationship marketing in the technology era. (Harvard Business School, 2010, cited in Schultz and Peltier, 2013). Yet, many managers are still unsure of the opportunities and threats pertaining to social networks. However, in practice companies seem to be exploiting social media just as any other conventional communication medium and they are not directly interacting and are not actively seeking to obtain highly engaged customers through social media. Companies fail to make digital platforms engaging and valuable to customers (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). It is therefore crucial for businesses to understand why and how customers engage with corporate social media platforms.

Retailers need to understand how during a single visit on an online platform, they might grasp customers' attention, build a relationship with them and convince them to commit themselves within an increasingly fragmented, interactive and complex retail environment (Demangeot and Broderick, 2016). Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) suggest that further research be carried out to understand the expectations and motivations of customers who are interacting with businesses on social media. Anderson et al. (2014) studied the motivations of customers for engaging and interacting with apparel retailers on social media and recommended further research in different retail sectors. Responding to these calls for research, this paper focuses on the grocery sector to provide knowledge as to why customers engage and interact with such businesses on their Facebook pages. Unlike the apparel sector where customers are highly involved in the purchase decision, the grocery

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3 sector offers products such as food where customers display a lower level of involvement. So, the main purpose  
4 of this research is to analyse how customers react to corporate messages on the official Facebook page of  
5 grocery stores to gain an understanding as to what motivates customers to interact with such businesses via  
6 social media. The aim of this paper is to explore the roles played by OBCs and social customers in the creation  
7 as well as the destruction of value.  
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14 The paper is organised as follows. It begins with a literature review, which examines the main concepts of social  
15 media, customer empowerment and customer engagement. The netnography method is then outlined and is  
16 followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings. Finally, the conclusion, limitations, and suggestions for  
17 future research directions are then presented.  
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## 22 23 **2. Literature review**

24  
25 Social media have gained wide acceptance and are heralded as a social media revolution (Arnaboldi and Goget,  
26 2016; Jurgens et al., 2016). Social media platforms bring together people having a commonality of thought,  
27 interest and involvement in products, services, issues or lifestyles (Kozinets, 2002). Corporations have been  
28 engulfed in the new wave of technology, which allows for instantaneous communications with their customers,  
29 which is vital for reputation management and business sustainability.  
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### 34 35 36 *2.1 Social media within a business context*

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38 With the advent of social media, OBCs can be created at a low cost, hence providing opportunities to businesses  
39 to add value to existing brands and to build stronger and more meaningful relationships with their customers  
40 (Gonzalez-Lafaysse and Madrid, 2016, Wirtz et al., 2013). Additionally, OBCs being interactive provide mutual  
41 benefits as businesses learn about customers' perceptions of their brands and products. As such customers are  
42 exposed to a plethora of information from the company and from the user generated content (UGC) created by  
43 the OBC members (Wirtz et al., 2013).  
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51 The growing popularity of Web 2.0 and social media has fundamentally modified how customers interact with  
52 companies and brands online. They adopt a social approach while using online platforms (Malthouse and  
53 Hofacker, 2010; Yadav and Pavlou, 2014). Greenberg (2010) describes the social customer as someone who is  
54 connected to peers through the web or mobile devices, who expects to get information as and when needed and  
55 who is willing to share this information to other customers on social media platforms. Web 2.0 applications  
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3 made it easy for individuals to generate information and to give easy access to information to others  
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5 (Constantinides et al., 2008; Shao, 2009).  
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### 8 9 *2.2 User Generated Content and customer empowerment*

10 Social media offer a platform to customers to create and share UGC on OBCs, thus adding value to the brand  
11 (Tiruwa et al., 2016). Muntinga et al. (2011) refer to all UGC related to brands as COBRA i.e. Consumers'  
12 Online Brand Related Activities. They identified three distinct levels of involvement with UGC, namely:  
13 consuming, contributing and creating. The consuming COBRA type represents the lowest level of involvement  
14 and indicates participating without actively contributing to or creating content. The contributing COBRA type is  
15 the intermediate level of online brand-related activeness. Customers who contribute to brand-related content join  
16 and participate in a conversation on a brand's fan page on a social networking site, contribute to brand forums,  
17 and post comments on blogs, videos, pictures, and any other brand-related content generated by others. Finally,  
18 the creating COBRA type is the utmost level of online brand related activeness. Those customers actively  
19 produce and publish brand-related content that others consume and contribute to. Web 2.0 has empowered  
20 customers by giving them a voice through their UGC (Constantinides et al., 2008).  
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32 Kimmel (2010) argues that customers are no longer content to select goods produced, distributed and promoted  
33 by companies, which determines what customers want and need. In consumer-to-consumer (C2C) marketing,  
34 consumers are increasingly taking control of the marketplace and they take a more active role in marketing  
35 functions such as the creation or modification of products (Kimmel, 2010). In addition, Blasco-Arcas et al.  
36 (2016) argue that OBCs enable both customer-customer and customer-firm interactions and that these  
37 interactions make customers feel empowered. When customers perceive that they have been empowered, they  
38 engage with, trust and feel passion and pride for the brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Therefore businesses need to  
39 respond to the social media consumer if companies do not want to experience the negative consequences of  
40 consumer backlash on a public platform (O'Brien, 2011). Businesses that embrace social media as a strategy  
41 must acknowledge that they are losing an element of control to the consumer (O'Brien, 2011; Horn *et al.*, 2015).  
42 Among the various social media platforms, Facebook is the platform that has been widely adopted by brands  
43 and companies (Ho, 2014).  
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### 2.3 Facebook, a corporate marketing tool

Facebook is the most popular social media platform worldwide (Pereira et al., 2014) boasting 1.23 billion active monthly users (Facebook, 2014, cited in Ballings, and Van den Poel, 2015). As of June 2016, it stands at 1.67 billion users and the growth rate is phenomenal (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/facebook.htm>). Unlike other social media platforms, Facebook actively seeks to attract businesses to use their medium as a marketing tool by enabling users to access the network through applications and also gaining access to corporate websites via social plug-ins (Pereira et al., 2014). In a recent worldwide study by Reuters, it was revealed that more than 50% of the respondents read their news through social media and Facebook is their main source (Newman et al., 2016). Business understands the market share of Facebook in reaching to audiences through a unique progressive design that connects people worldwide.

Typically businesses set up a single Facebook account or several Facebook accounts to connect and interact with their customers via wall posts (Jansen et al., 2009). When a fan 'likes' a post and engages with the post, the message may appear in the news feeds of his/her friends on Facebook. Therefore, Swani et al. (2013) contend that 'liking' is comparable to word of mouth (WOM) since individuals share the messages they like with each other. De Vries et al. (2014) argue that the number of 'likes' indicates the popularity of the post and encourages customer engagement (CE). Additionally, corporate Facebook pages are OBCs as the fans who have 'liked' the page share a common interest (Pöyry et al., 2013). Kietzmann et al. (2011) and Fournier and Avery (2011) caution businesses of the dangers in starting or manipulating conversations on social media. Customers tend to resent marketing messages on social media platforms, which they mainly use to connect with family, friends and colleagues. As this new marketing paradigm evolves, there is genuine excitement about the potential of social media to add value for businesses, but also apprehension about the difficulty of seizing the full promise of this new medium (Lipsman et al., 2012, Newman et al., 2016).

### 2.4 Social media: Benefits and opportunities

In this social media age, businesses have the opportunity to reach out and communicate to customers anywhere in the world and at any time, they can even interact with customers and join their conversations (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Rao, 2012). The ease and speed with which information can be retrieved and shared, the ability to engage with stakeholders, the richer experiences for users, and enhanced web metrics are just a few of the positive impacts that have encouraged many organisations to use social media communication (Postman, 2009,

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3 cited in Lovejoy et al., 2012). Lipsman et al. (2012) and Wirtz et al. (2013) contend social media can help  
4 companies engage and build long-term loyalty with existing customers, connect with new customers, and grow  
5 their business.  
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10 Park and Kim (2014) identified four benefits that customers gain from using social networks: social benefits by  
11 interacting with other members of the community, informational benefits by accessing information about the  
12 products and services of the company, hedonic benefits, by enjoying and having fun on the social network for  
13 e.g. games, and finally economic benefits by obtaining promotional deals. These benefits encourage community  
14 members to continue visiting and being active on social networking sites, therefore offering opportunities to  
15 firms to strengthen relationships with their customers.  
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23 Additionally, tools of Web 2.0 seem to ease co-creation of value by the company and the customer (Harrison  
24 and Barthel, 2009; Thackeray et al. 2008). Co-creation “involves [customer] participation in the creation of the  
25 core offering itself [...] through shared inventiveness, co-design or shared production of related goods” (Lusch  
26 and Vargo, 2006, p. 284). It is argued that Web 2.0 is the paradigmatic domain of the ‘prosumer’ (consumer and  
27 producer), where consumer-produced content, especially reviews of products and services posted on social  
28 media, influence both customer and company behaviour (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Consumers are  
29 encouraged to actively participate in the creation of new products by suggesting and evaluating new product  
30 ideas; developing, assessing and challenging product concepts; discussing and improving prototypes; testing and  
31 experiencing the new product features by running simulations; and requesting information about or just  
32 consuming the new product (Füller et al., 2009). Co-creation activities on the Internet contribute to perceived  
33 consumer empowerment (Füller et al., 2009). According to O’Brien (2011), the highest level of value a social  
34 media empowered consumer can provide to a business is to co-create products and services. Vargo and Lusch  
35 (2010) define CE as customer experience co-created with a company. CE refers to the customer's physical,  
36 cognitive and emotional connection with the business (Patterson et al. 2006).  
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51 CE is defined as “a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase,  
52 resulting from motivational drivers” (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254). This definition highlights that behavioural  
53 manifestations do not only mean purchases, but also include other activities of the customer such as WOM,  
54 customer co-creation and complaining behaviour (Bijmolt et al., 2010), recommendations, helping other  
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3 customers, blogging, writing reviews and even engaging in legal actions (van Doorn et al., 2010). The  
4 consequences of this consumer engagement process are consumer satisfaction and loyalty, consumer  
5 empowerment, connection and emotional bonding, trust and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011b). Gummerus et  
6 al. (2012) found that CE activities in OBCs result in perceived economic, social and entertainments benefits,  
7 while Pongpaew et al. (2014) report that customers seek informational, entertainment, economic and self-  
8 portrayal benefits when engaging with brands on Facebook. Moreover, Abdul-Ghani et al. (2011) show that  
9 customers engage with firms to obtain hedonic, utilitarian, reputation and enhanced knowledge benefits.  
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### 18 *2.5 Social media: challenges and threats*

19 The advent of social media brings along numerous threats to businesses (Horn et al., 2015). There are three  
20 major sources of threats to organisations: (1) empowered customers who can spread rumours and complaints in  
21 a very short time span, (2) employees who can either deliberately voice their discontent as private social media  
22 users and/or they can involuntarily harm the reputation of the company while being responsible for managing  
23 the social media accounts of the organisation, (3) the corporation itself which may not use a social media  
24 platform or may not have a web care team, therefore preventing the business from detecting and reacting to  
25 online discussions and comments about the company and its products and services (Horn et al., 2015).  
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34 Complaints are rife on social media platforms and are a specific form of negative WOM (Einwiller and Steilen,  
35 2015). The voice of the consumer may turn into a potentially serious threat when it carries negative content (Lee  
36 et al. 2014). Co-destruction of value may occur where value is destroyed either for all parties or for one party  
37 only (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). Co-destruction denotes the joint destruction, or impoverishment of  
38 value by businesses and customers (Echeverri and Skálén, 2011). Additionally, Smith (2013) found that co-  
39 destruction of value occurs whenever dissatisfied customers seek revenge from the company for e.g. by  
40 engaging in negative WOM with the intent to cause corporate reputational damage.  
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49 Leeflang et al. (2014) argue that when organisations fail to engage customers they have to face the potential  
50 threat of customer enragement, a situation where customers can easily become value destroyers instead of value  
51 creators for companies (Verhoef et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2010). Businesses are then compelled to be  
52 reactive, or even pro-active, to avoid negative brand image consequences which in turn may lead to increased  
53 value co-destruction.  
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3 Consequently Jin (2012) refers to social media as Pandora's box because they can perform as a virtual brand  
4 community as well as a virtual anti brand community. Anti brand communities are groups of users who organise  
5 group actions against a brand and become a forum where customers express their discontent; where anti brand  
6 information is exchanged and lawsuits and boycotts are encouraged (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009).  
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11 Similarly, Champoux et al. (2012) contend that the open-comment platform of Facebook and the anonymity  
12 offered by the Internet produce the ideal conditions for public outrage to be vented on corporate walls.  
13 Furthermore, Horn et al. (2015) argue that social media have empowered customers and the public by giving  
14 them a voice and weakened the position of companies by rendering them vulnerable to customer attacks,  
15 negative publicity and corporate reputation damage. Additionally, Pfeffer et al. (2014, p. 118) found that social  
16 media users can generate an online firestorm, which they define "as the sudden discharge of large quantities of  
17 messages containing negative WOM and complaint behaviour against a person, company, or group in social  
18 media networks". Similarly Horn et al. (2015) refer to repetitive and systematic customer attacks as 'shitstorm'.  
19 A shitstorm denotes emotional and often irrational criticisms carried out by many consumers. Rational negative  
20 opinions usually form the basis for shitstorms, which eventually grow through irrational and assertive content  
21 added by other dissatisfied users.' (Horn et al., 2015, p. 4).  
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34 When UGC contains negative brand information, it may damage a brand, which may result in harmful  
35 consequences (Cheong and Morrison 2008). However, Colliander and Wien (2013) note that when businesses  
36 are under customer attacks, other customers may come forward on social networks to defend the brand.  
37 Customers are inclined to listen to those who do not work for the company (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011). They  
38 argue that this consumer defense phenomenon is effective in counteracting the spread of negative WOM and can  
39 even enhance the image of the brand.  
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### 46 47 **3. Methodology**

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49 Netnography is a participant-observation method used for data collection to research the consumer behaviour of  
50 online communities and cultures present on the Internet (Kozinets, 2002). The aim of this netnographic research  
51 is to analyse the reactions of customers of grocery stores to messages posted by the grocery stores on their  
52 official Facebook pages. Facebook has been chosen, since it is the most widely used social platform companies  
53 use to engage and interact with their customers (Kabadayi and Price, 2014). The researchers have carried out  
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3 non-participation observation during the netnographic research similar to studies carried out by Rageh et al.  
4 (2013) and Colliander and Wien (2013).  
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8 For a rigorous and reliable research approach, the researchers have adhered to the five stages and procedures  
9 recommended by Kozinets (2002). The five sequential steps are (1) making entrée, (2) data collection and  
10 analysis, (3) providing trustworthy interpretation, (4) research ethics, and finally (5) member checks.  
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16 Tesco and Walmart were selected based on the 2013 Global Food Retail report, which positions them as the  
17 leading grocery stores in the world. These two grocery stores have been selected as they both have implemented  
18 an international strategy and have stores in several countries. Tesco is the grocery market leader in the UK and  
19 operates in 11 countries with 6902 shops around the world. Walmart is an American multinational retailing  
20 corporation and is the largest retailer in the world with 11,695 stores in 28 countries. Both grocery stores use  
21 social media to engage customers and Facebook is the social media platform attracting the highest number of  
22 customers for both grocery stores. In May 2017, Tesco has 2,248,822 users who have liked its page while  
23 Walmart has 33,190,043 users who have liked its page. Both Tesco and Walmart have a social media guideline  
24 to ensure that discussions are relevant and helpful for the users and that they reserve the right to delete content  
25 posted to Facebook or block users from posting if the content is deemed to be offensive, abusive, illegal or  
26 contrary to their guidelines. However, Walmart has explicitly asked its customers not to respond to customer  
27 queries directed to the company as they have a dedicated Walmart social team.  
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40 The official Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart are relevant to the topic of the research, therefore meeting  
41 the criteria set by Kozinets (2002). On both Facebook pages, there are high numbers of postings and particularly  
42 so during the data collection period ranging from 6 April 2014 to 6 May 2014 because of the Easter Festival.  
43 Additionally, there are a large number of discrete posters on both Facebook pages.  
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49 Data were collected for a one-month period similar to the non-participant observation netnography of Colliander  
50 and Wien (2013) who examined the phenomenon of customers who defend companies and brands against  
51 negative WOM generated by other customers. Therefore a one-month period was considered a suitable length  
52 of time to capture comments and gain access to the window of the world of Tesco and Walmart social media  
53 brand communities. As recommended by Kozinets (2002), conversations occurring on the official Facebook  
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3 pages of Tesco and Walmart were downloaded until saturation of data occurred. Similar to previous research  
4 conducted by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Stavros et al. (2014) on social media, the unit of analysis consisted  
5 of the content of the Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart and the coding units were the individual posts and  
6 comments by customers of these grocery stores. For this study, the codes for the thematic analysis have been  
7 derived from the literature review as well as from the data collected itself. A directed approach to content  
8 analysis has been adopted (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Constant comparative method has been used to perform  
9 the qualitative data analysis with the NVivo software (Kozinets, 2002) in order to generate insights. Open  
10 coding has first been applied (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to bring meaning to the data, closely examining and  
11 comparing data for similarities and differences. Each code represents a distinct aspect of the phenomenon being  
12 studied. Then axial coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was used to interconnect the various categories  
13 identified in the previous stage in order to uncover any fundamental underlying trends and patterns.  
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25 The third step of netnography is to provide trustworthy interpretation (Kozinets, 2002). Kozinets (2002) argues  
26 that research is reckoned to be reasonable and trustworthy when conventional procedures of netnography are  
27 followed while collecting and analysing data. Triangulation of data has been used to enhance credibility of the  
28 study. As stipulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation is achieved through the use of a large number of  
29 customers who have posted comments. Opinions and experiences of customers could be corroborated against  
30 viewpoints and beliefs of other customers, therefore constructing a rich picture of needs, attitudes and  
31 behaviours of the users under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004). Additionally site triangulation has been achieved  
32 through the participation of customers from two different grocery stores (Tesco and Walmart) in order to lessen  
33 the effect on the research of particular local factors belonging to one specific grocery store. Shenton (2004)  
34 debates that findings may be perceived as more credible when similar findings arise from two or more different  
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47 The ethical procedure recommended by Langer and Beckman (2005) has been adopted in this research since the  
48 comments posted by customers of Tesco and Walmart on the official Facebook page are not password restricted  
49 and are available to the public. However anonymity and privacy of the participants have been respected.  
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55 Finally, the fifth step is carrying out member checks (Kozinets, 2002). Member check is a technique whereby  
56 part or all of the research findings are given to the participants of the research in order to seek their comments  
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(Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, the researchers did not carry out member checks as Langer and Beckman (2005) argued that it was unnecessary to present the findings back to members of the community who participated when the research was conducted entirely unobtrusively.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

Customers react to company initiated messages on the official Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart by posting comments. These customer posts are a form of CE, which embraces all consumer-to-firm interactions and consumer-to-consumer communications about the brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). This study reveals that customers engage with grocery stores by posting comments which are addressed to them and which have been grouped under the category of consumer to business conversations (C2B), and also post comments to other customers and which are referred to as consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conversations. The comments posted by customers have further been classified as favourable or unfavourable customer posts for the grocery stores. The main findings of the study have been summarised in Table 1, and examples of customer posts have been provided. The verbatim quotes used are representative of the online world of blog post communication. It is the nature of postings that they are short and not rich, detailed or necessarily explicit in their meaning.

*Insert Table 1 here*

##### 4.1 C2B conversations

Customers engage in conversations with grocery stores to participate by taking actions desired by Tesco and Walmart for e.g. answering questions. C2B conversations also arise when customers post queries directly related to the company post. When Tesco and Walmart post an advertisement for a product or service, customers want to know more about the price, availability, conditions attached to the offer, the features and benefits of the product, advice and explanation of how to use the product or service. This corroborates findings of Brodie et al. (2011b) who found that in virtual communities, conversations occur on prices, performance, quality and personal experiences with specific brands. Similarly, Park and Kim (2014) identified informational benefits as one of the motivators of customers for joining brand social networks. Customers also use the official Facebook page of Tesco and Walmart to obtain further information irrespective of the content of the company post. They just comment on any company posts, by posting their unrelated queries. This clearly indicates that customers perceive the official Facebook page of Tesco and Walmart as a direct communication channel. Such

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3 unrelated queries confirm that businesses can no longer simply publish content they wish potential customers to  
4 see (O'Brien, 2011).  
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7 Customers also seek entertainment benefits from virtual communities. Customers seem to interact more with  
8 companies on their Facebook page when company posts involve fun and enjoyment. For instance Walmart had a  
9 game on Easter day inviting customers to tell the number of eggs they could find in a picture. This Walmart post  
10 obtained an overwhelming 21829 comments posted by customers indicating the number of eggs they could  
11 locate. This corroborates the findings of Park and Kim (2014) who postulate that entertainment benefits  
12 motivate community participation.  
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19 When communicating to Tesco and Walmart, customers at times inform companies about the type of benefit  
20 they would like to get. Muntinga et al. (2009) refer to this behaviour as remuneration. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau  
21 et al. (2004) found that brand-related online activities may be partly driven by prospects of money, job-related  
22 benefits or other rewards. So while communicating back to the grocery stores, customers of Tesco and Walmart  
23 look for informational, functional, entertainment and economic benefits.  
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29 Among the C2B conversations, some customers post comments, which either add or destroy value for the  
30 grocery stores. These comments have been categorised as favourable and unfavourable customer posts.  
31 Favourable customer posts turn customers into co-creators of value, while unfavourable customer posts make  
32 customers become co-destroyers of value.  
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37 When satisfied customers post positive comments and show their appreciation to grocery stores, they generate  
38 positive WOM, which adds value for the company. Sashi (2012) refers to these customers as advocates.  
39 Similarly Dessart et al. (2015) acknowledge customer referral as a form of behavioural CE and term it as  
40 endorsing. Moreover, while replying to company initiated messages, customers at times make suggestions to the  
41 company and these suggestions turn customers into co-creators of value for the organisation (O'Cass and Viet  
42 Ngo, 2011). Additionally, this study reveals that customers willingly inform the company of the products or  
43 services that they would want the store to offer for sale. These types of comments are very valuable for any  
44 organisation as the customer is readily providing marketing intelligence, thus creating value for the business.  
45 Verhoef et al. (2010) argue that co-creation is a form of CE, which contributes to perceived consumer  
46 empowerment (Füller et al., 2009). Loyal customers post favourable comments, which may positively impact  
47 the organisation. For example customers post comments to tell the company what makes them patronise the  
48 store. Dessart et al. (2015) argue that prolonged CE with a brand can result in customer loyalty.  
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3 *'Thanks for Tesco, And all the local & express Store's [sic], i [sic] for one appreciate polite staff and*  
4 *bargain prices every day thanks Tesco, I'm [sic] a BIG FAN !! [sic]'*  
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7 However, this study also reveals that instead of generating CE, Tesco and Walmart causes customer enragement  
8 when customers destroy value by posting negative comments. These negative comments are negative WOM and  
9 are detrimental to the organisation (Colliander and Wien, 2013). Customers use the Facebook page of the  
10 grocery stores to complain about a product or service. Similarly, Jin (2012) claims that many customers write to  
11 companies on the companies' Facebook pages to complain when they are dissatisfied with a product. Customers  
12 at times complain about something directly related to a company post, but they also post complaints not linked  
13 to the company post. This shows that customers see this Facebook page as a direct communication channel with  
14 grocery stores.  
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22 Additionally, analysis of data reveals that customers post messages to criticise actions taken by Tesco and  
23 Walmart. Customers express their discontent about the actions taken by the company and not its products. For  
24 e.g. customers are very critical of Tesco as a profit making business. Some customers feel that Tesco is driven  
25 solely by its profit motive and does not pay enough attention to the welfare of customers or to the society in  
26 general as illustrated by the comment below:  
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33 *'Tesco will celebrate when they know they can make money from it.'*  
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36 Brodie et al. (2011b) warn that interventions of marketers are accepted in online communities only if they  
37 contribute to the community and that customers tend to react negatively when marketers have commercially  
38 driven communications. In such cases, the customers expressed their feelings of discontent by posting sarcastic  
39 and sceptic comments. Comments are labeled as sarcastic when irony is used to mock or to convey contempt.  
40 Customers post such comments to express their anger and/or disappointment following an action of the  
41 company or an event that has occurred. Sarcasm brings negative value and can potentially harm the relationship  
42 between the two parties. This study reveals that sarcasm is the most common form of emotional expression on  
43 Tesco and Walmart Facebook pages. Tesco posted a question to ask customers about any exotic food they  
44 would like to taste. Numerous customers commented sarcastically referring to the horsemeat scandal in which  
45 Tesco was allegedly involved:  
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55 *'Maybe [sic] a random foodie question from me.... Are you still selling horse?'*  
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58 The sarcastic comments indicate clearly that these customers have not forgotten the horsemeat scandal, and that  
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3 they are still upset. Sarcastic comments may indicate that the relationships between Tesco and its customers  
4 have been damaged.  
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7 Customers also express scepticism when posting comments. Sceptic comments are those comments that  
8 incorporate an element of doubt or lack of conviction about something. Customers let companies know that they  
9 remain dubious or have a feeling of incredulity about promises made by companies. Sceptic comments are  
10 posted when customers have lost trust in the company and this may damage or have already damaged the  
11 relationship between the customer and the company. For instance, for an offer that seemed very interesting, a  
12 customer posted a comment asking about hidden conditions attached to that offer:  
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19 *'Sure. Whats [sic] the catch?'*  
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22 However, analysis of the C2B conversations reveals that customers post comments to express positive emotions.  
23 Customers post or share comments when they are emotionally or cognitively involved to some degree with the  
24 company post (Yu, 2014). From an emotional perspective, CE may be characterised by feelings of an individual  
25 towards a brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Customers have expressed their emotions by posting enthusiastic and  
26 humorous comments.  
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32 Enthusiasm echoes an individual's core level of interest and excitement about the virtual community while  
33 enjoyment mirrors the level of pleasure and happiness felt by the customer when interacting with the online  
34 brand community and its members (Dessart et al., 2015). Enthusiasm is associated with positive emotions felt  
35 by customers who post enthusiastic comments when they are happy or excited and they express their hedonic  
36 shopping value. Customers use humour in their comments when they find an event or a situation amusing or  
37 funny. This form of CE brings positive value to the OBC (Kumar et al., 2010).  
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44 From the examples provided above, it is clear that customers of Tesco and Walmart have been empowered since  
45 they can express their opinion by posting comments in which they share their emotions with others. When  
46 members of the community are emotionally engaged, the nature of the relationship changes (Brodie et al.,  
47 2011a; Harridge-March and Quinton, 2009). Positive emotions linked with enthusiasm and humour, tend to  
48 strengthen the relationship between the grocery store and the customer, while negative emotions related with  
49 sarcasm and scepticism may damage the relationship between the two parties.  
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#### 4.2 Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) conversations

The other type of conversation occurring on the Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart is C2C conversations where customers engage in dialogues with other customers. During these C2C conversations, customers post comments in which they offer advice to other members of the community or help other customers within the community. This represents behavioural CE (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010) incorporating customer co-creation. The study further reveals that customers post comments in response to another customer's query. They provide the answer or solution to their peer in lieu of the company. They act as co-helpers by assisting fellow customers and hence creating social benefits (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). Customers who help other customers are valuable to organisations as they provide customer service on behalf of these companies.

Customers also criticise other customers when they disagree with comments posted by complainants. They openly criticise other customers whom they believe are wrong. When customers defend a company when faced with negative UGC, it is a highly appealing form of behavioural customer engagement for the organisation as it shows high level of customer loyalty (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Colliander and Wien (2013) argue that very often customers respond to complaints before the companies do by giving the company the benefit of the doubt. For e.g. several customers accused Tesco of being driven only by profit motives when it advertised for its new Tesco Current Account and a customer defended the store by posting the following:

*'Omg [sic] Tesco is a competitive business just like everything else OBV [sic] there Guna [sic] make profit etc! Get it! ... If u [sic] don't like them don't comment'*

Additionally Kumar *et al.* (2010) contend that customer loyalty is triggered through positive online interactions with the brand and the community members and by actively defending the company when faced with negative UGC. These favourable comments that are posted during the C2C conversations add value for the grocery stores.

However destruction of value also occurs during C2C conversations. Customers use the Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart to provide information about better deals at competitors' outlets, hence destroying value. The ability to provide information about competitors has given a voice to the customer (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). Likewise, Bernoff and Schadler (2010) cautioned that in this era anyone with a smartphone or a computer could instantly inflict lasting brand damage.

Customers also post comments to warn customers about some products, and this negative WOM will most

probably damage the image of the brand (Cheong and Morrisson, 2008). Other customers also claim to have moved to competitors' stores and have posted comments to inform the OBC. Findings also reveal that customers show empathy to customers whom they believe have been treated unjustly by the grocery stores. When customers provide support to other customers on Facebook, it puts additional pressure on the company to solve the issues raised by customers. This shows how social media have empowered customers who now can easily publicise the problems they are facing and gain support from the other members of the community (Lee et al., 2014). These unfavourable comments may influence customers to shop elsewhere, as customers in this social media era tend to rely more on customer reviews than advertising (Lim et al., 2012).

Co-destruction of value arises during interactions between the company and its customers where instead of creating value for both parties, value is destroyed (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Smith, 2013) Though a qualitative approach has been adopted, it was observed that an overwhelming 65.79% of comments posted by customers on the Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart are categorised as negative comments for the grocery store. This clearly illustrates that customers take to Facebook to vent their frustration when grocery stores do not live up to their expectations.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the role played by OBCs and social customers in the creation as well as the destruction of value. This has been addressed through an analysis of the reactions of customers to company initiated messages on Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart. Findings have revealed that customers engage in conversations with Tesco and Walmart seeking informational, functional, entertainment and economic benefits. Additionally, this paper has shown that customers are cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally engaged while interacting on the Facebook pages of Tesco and Walmart. And finally, findings show that social customers can be both a blessing and a curse to Tesco and Walmart as they can create or destroy value for the business.

In addressing issues that surround the role of social media in the co-creation and co-destruction of customer, consumer and supermarket value this paper builds theory and informs practice. Operating at the theory-practice interface it contributes to and extends academic debates in the areas of social media, brand communities, branding, marketing, value creation, and value destruction. Customers become co-creators of value when they offer advice or help other customers within the community, when they refer products or services to other customers, when they make suggestions to the grocery stores, and when they defend the company and its employees. Additionally, Facebook empowers customers to co-create value when they act as customer care

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3 officers while replying to queries of other customers or providing solutions to solve problems faced by other  
4 customers. Another contribution of this paper is to add knowledge to the body of literature on co-destruction of  
5 value by identifying the various ways customers can harm and threaten grocery stores on Facebook. Co-  
6 destruction of value occurs whenever customers complain, criticise actions of the companies, recommend their  
7 peers to boycott the grocery stores and to patronise outlets of competitors. These actions of customers harm the  
8 organisation as they destroy value (Leeflang et al., 2014, Verhoef et al., 2013). Additionally, this study  
9 contributes to knowledge by positioning Facebook as a customer service channel, where customers expect  
10 companies to respond to their queries, or to solve the problems they are facing in real-time.  
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18 The results of this study suggest a number of implications for retailing, marketing and brand managers. Grocery  
19 stores are increasingly using social media to drive meaningful conversations with customers and to connect with  
20 them. Managers should know how to harness social media to enrich the customer experience through customer  
21 engagement. This can be achieved by using the information that customers unknowingly or willingly reveal  
22 about themselves to personalise the customer experience by sending accurately targeted information.  
23 Additionally, since customers have turned the Facebook page into a customer service channel, businesses should  
24 provide multi level customer service channel so that customers can choose through which channel they wish  
25 their queries or complaints be dealt with. This may help businesses to provide service to individual customers  
26 more efficiently, thus leading to higher customer satisfaction level. Businesses should also encourage customers  
27 to co-create value. This can be achieved by making customers aware that their voices have been heard and  
28 inform them about actions that the firm has taken so that customers feel valued which will further motivate them  
29 to co-create value.  
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42 The limitation of the paper is related to the nature of the netnography method, which constrained the analysis to  
43 those customers who have commented on Facebook, therefore neglecting other sources such as offline customer  
44 feedback. Another limitation is that the authors have used only one social media platform, Facebook, which is  
45 the platform where both Tesco and Walmart have the highest number of customers. Future research might offer  
46 a comparative analysis of the use of Facebook by grocery stores and might also analyse the social media  
47 strategies adopted by these firms. Another avenue for future research could be to focus on one grocery store  
48 operating in several countries to identify differences and similarities between social media communication in  
49 different country contexts. As this research spanned over a one-month period, future researchers could conduct a  
50 similar study for the same or different month in another year to act as a point of comparison. This is in essence a  
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3 baseline netnographic study that is time and space bound and that can therefore be reproduced for the purposes  
4 of comparative study.  
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Table 1: Findings of the study

	Favourable customer posts		Unfavourable customer posts	
	Type	Example	Type	Example
C2B	Customer query	<i>'Are these for toddlers and up? Are they in infant sizes?'</i>	Complain	<i>"Not a lot, after just going to Tesco I came home empty handed! Most things are out of stock, buy 1 get 1 free but only 1 of the items left! Bread with tomorrow's date on it, pathetic for Tesco! One angry customer I am afraid"</i>
	Participation – perform action desired by company	<i>"Chicken and lamb potatoes mixed veg and mushrooms gravy followed by Easter cake Easter eggs"</i>	Criticise action of the company	<i>"Why should I shop at Walmart when I could spend my money at a more modern and fun store? Walmart is one of the last stores to use pork suppliers that still use pig gestation crates. It is a cruel practice, one that Walmart could easily stop if they wanted to."</i>
	Express enthusiasm	<i>"YES I've been waiting for this!"</i>	Post sarcastic comments	<i>"Could of [sic] eaten anything from Tesco don't think you have a clue what's in your meat given the recent horse meat scandal !! [sic]"</i>
	Express humour	<i>"Yum yum.... cake on good Friday ...Tart on Sunday ... scales on Monday lol [sic]"</i>	Post sceptic comments	<i>"Won a bunny but sadly no voucher arrived via email - thanks for nothing - I would be interested to know if any one actually won a hudl?"</i>
	Ask for additional incentive	<i>'Aren't you even giving it as a prize? Yummy.'</i>		
	Provide suggestions to the company	<i>"If you could get more employees to man your north little rock store, that would be great. A back up of 100 customers and only 5 registers open is not good"</i>		

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C2C	Customer Referral	<i>"I've only just begun shopping with Tesco but I must say, so far, I'm impressed. The quality is much better than my previous store choice &amp; the driver was helpful &amp; kind, despite his obviously heavy work load [sic] &amp; the abysmal weather, he was happy to carry my shopping through to my kitchen &amp; waited for me to check the dates without rushing me. Yes there were a few things that were closer to the bb/ub [sic] dates than I'd have liked, but the short u/b's [sic] I froze &amp; the short b/b's [sic] I just kept a close eye on &amp; use them before they went to waste. I would highly recommend Tesco's [sic] &amp; am having another delivery tomorrow. I switched to Tesco's [sic] because of the new £1 delivery &amp; the clubcard points, and I'm so glad I did"</i>	Provide information about competitors	<i>"Going to asda [sic] to get the eggs cheaper or Aldi"</i>
	Give advice to other customers	<i>"If you buy something on Tesco at reduced cost and it scans at higher cost then complain You will get the item free plus double your mpney [sic] back, it has happened to me on several occasions This is Tesco policy but perhaps not many people know about it.</i>	Warn customers against a product or service	<i>"do [sic] not buy Banquet products. they [sic] cage their chickens."</i>
	Help other customer	<i>'click on the link provided (it worked for me) and search on that site'</i>	Retaliate - inform customers of actions taken out of	<i>"Sorry Tesco, but I have defected to Aldi! They let me buy one item at a good price without making me buy</i>

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			dissatisfaction	<i>another two I don't need! The roast lamb I did in my new electric skillet was out of this world!"</i>
Criticise other customers	<i>"I don't get it. If someone doesn't like Walmart why even be on this page? This is a helpful service page so I just see any reason for so much rudeness!"</i>	Provide support and encouragement to other customers	<i>"... And to Violet, so sorry that happened to your family. My mother is 93. Just about every time we go to our wm [sic] there is not one available. She can only go when I take her. She has to wait on me to do her shopping. Its her big outing for the week and she loves to shop. So get more carts wm [sic]. But. Our wm [sic] never questions if you need one or not. Its none of their business. You could have an unseen health problem. Heart issues or severe arthritis. An obvious problem such as the knee. Come on. So sad! That is so not right for them to have treated him that way."</i>	
Defend the company and its employees	<i>"Sick of hearing about horse meat comedy, I don't think Tesco's would knowingly sell you anything that you did not want... The supplier is at fault not Tesco..."</i>	Negative customer referral	<i>"Everyone should do this country a favor [sic] and quit shopping at wal mart [sic]. Start shopping somewhere that is willing to pay there [sic] employees a decent wage give them benefits instead of the ceos [sic] putting all the money in there [sic] pockets cause [sic] obviously they have more money then [sic] they will ever need and there [sic] greed is disgusting please go away wal mart [sic]"</i>	