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EXPLORING THE CO-CREATION OF VALUE BY ACTOR NETWORKS OF A POLITICAL  
BRAND COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEM: A STUDY OF MOMENTUM

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## Abstract

The co-creation of value through resource-integrating actor ecosystems has become a research priority of the marketing discipline. Simultaneously, interest in political brands has increased significantly, with the volume of published articles growing each year. Despite the inherent relevance of value co-creation as a theoretical lens, researchers in political branding have yet to utilise the theory to investigate political brand communities. This research aims to investigate the process of value co-creation within the ecosystem of a political brand. To achieve this, the thesis focuses on Momentum, a UK political group identifying as a 'grassroots movement' closely linked to the Labour Party since its foundation in 2015.

The thesis utilises a critical literature review to inform a new conceptual framework of the process of value co-creation. An interpretivist qualitative research approach comprised two distinct phases to develop a rich understanding of the conceptualised process. Phase one consisted of an 18-month netnography of Momentum's community Twitter pages, and phase two consisted of 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data collection took place between May 2020 and September 2021. Both data collections involved active members of the Momentum brand community, investigating the interactions and behaviours surrounding the community's co-creation of value. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis.

Analysis of the findings contributes new understanding of how an ecosystem of individuals (actor networks) engage within a political brand community to co-create value, undertaking a range of activities (brand community cultivation, negotiating brand parameters, authenticating the ecosystem, the business of activism, authenticating the ecosystem), assume longer-term roles (storytelling, thought leadership, supporting educating, satirising, polemic instigator), and navigating a range of interaction types (adversarial, supportive, humorous, serious). The research also identifies factors that initiate actor-led engagement, facilitate and inhibit it, and the benefits that the actor sought in undertaking value co-creation activities. The findings of this research offer evidence for a new conceptual model of value co-creation in political brand communities. Future researchers and practitioners can use the framework to evaluate the health of value co-creation in political brand communities.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis and offers an overview of its purpose, components, and structure. This research aims to investigate the process of value co-creation within the ecosystem of a political brand. Taking a service-dominant logic perspective, further routed in institutional theory, this thesis offers new insight into the complex, iterative, and phenomenological nature of value co-creation in political brand ecosystems (i.e., actor networks). This was achieved by examining an active and important political brand community, Momentum, utilising immersive researcher-as-participant netnographic and interview techniques. Momentum is a political group, or 'grassroots movement', of the UK Labour Party (Dennis, 2020). Argued to be the Labour Party's most prominent group in terms of membership numbers and influence, with its own policy generation and campaigning, the group has been described as a 'party within a party' (Dennis, 2020). This section consists of five parts which aid the reader in navigating through the thesis, including the theoretical and conceptual background to the research and rationale, the guiding research objectives, a summary of the research methodology, the overall structure of the thesis document, and an overview of research contributions.

## 1.2 Research Background

The 'brand' has been a central concern of the marketing literature for several decades (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Though initially focusing on commercial settings such as organisations and products, the literature has more recently identified other areas where the construct is useful (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007). The application of branding to different settings and contexts has become specialised and more sophisticated. These include charities (Kylander and Stone, 2012), higher education institutions (Palmer, Koenig-Lewis and Asaad, 2016), sports (Hill and Vincent, 2006), places (Anholt, 2008), and personal brands (Harris and Rae, 2011). The political context is among the most critical applications that have emerged beyond traditional commercial settings (Pich and Newman, 2020).

Political branding's rising profile as a research priority is reflected in a growing body of scholarly work (Needham and Smith, 2015; Grimmer and Grube, 2019; Pich and Newman, 2020). Although good progress has been made, applying branding to political contexts is complex, and a holistic picture of a political brand has not yet been achieved (Pich and Newman, 2020). The investigation of political brands has been somewhat limited to parties, their leaders or policy, known collectively as the 'political brand trinity' (Reeves, de Chernatony and

Carrigan, 2006; Pich, Armannsdottir and Dean, 2015). The nascent discourse has also tended to simplify political brands to messages communicated by managers and interpreted by voters (Nielsen, 2017). Many conceptualisations have characterised the electorate as decreasingly sophisticated in political engagement, with the brand acting as a shorthand differentiator (Smith and French, 2009). Consequently, within the existing literature, the ‘consumers’ (voters) of political brands have been viewed as largely passive recipients of forms of brand value (Nielsen, 2017). Critically, however, this is out of step with contemporary thinking present within the broader marketing discourse (Le, Phan Tan and Hoang, 2022) and the changing nature of political participation in the United Kingdom and worldwide. Existing scholarship has called for more research on different types of political brands (Pich and Newman, 2020). A literature gap has therefore been identified concerning the nature and processes of political brands, in particular, that the nature of value co-creation surrounding political brands is yet to be explored.

It has been purported (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2016 etc.) that marketing has transitioned from a goods-centred to a service-dominant logic (SDL). This contemporary theoretical lens offers a new perspective of exchange and value (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). The service-dominant logic is now represented by an extensive body of literature exploring various settings from this standpoint (see: Morosan and DeFranco, 2016; Osborne, 2018). Central to this new approach to marketing is the understanding that value is ‘co-created’ through the engagement of various actors (individuals who make up the value co-creation process), recognising that consumers are consciously active within the creation of value, integrating resources for each other’s benefit (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016; Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019a). Literature on value co-creation (VCC) suggests that value is realised in use, rather than exchanging goods and services. Emerging perspectives have been explored within commercial brands (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009). Still, the literature is limited in exploring VCC around brand contexts, particularly political brands (Pich and Newman, 2020). Given the natural significance of engagement and participation within the political process, this is a significant limitation of the existing literature. Chapter three further explore the literature gaps relevant to this study. This research offers new insights into value co-creation through networked actor engagement surrounding a political brand. The following section outlines the research objectives which will structure this intent.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

This thesis will explore value co-creation by resource integration in actor engagements by a political brand ecosystem (i.e. the brand community). As previously indicated, this research adopts the service-dominant logic and engagement literature explored in Chapter 3. Using this



foundation, this thesis develops a conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) that directs the research and informs the three objectives that define the study's purpose.

1. *To explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem.*

The first research objective seeks to understand what form actor engagement takes within the political brand community environment. Specifically, it aims to identify the types of value-creating activities undertaken by actors surrounding a political brand, in addition to the resources mobilised, roles adopted, and interactions required to facilitate them. This research objective recognises the need to be specific in what is meant by value and the processes by which it is co-created. In other words, the research seeks to break down actor engagement to its 'component parts'. To achieve this research objective, all significant routinised activities (engagements), utilised resources, adopted roles and interactions will be identified.

2. *To investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within a political brand ecosystem.*

The second research objective focuses on why the involved actors engage as they do within the brand ecosystem. This requires investigating motivating phenomena, helpful and obstructive environmental factors, and the meaning attached to actions in the form of perceived benefit to the individual actor. Concerning objective one, this can be seen as the meaning that connects all the actor engagements and explains how the iterative process operates in a political brand network. This research objective will have been achieved when all key factors, institutional norms, and arrangements that explain the process of value co-creation engagement have been identified and explored through rich descriptions.

3. *To conceptualise the processes of value co-creation in actor engagement by members of a political brand ecosystem and to identify the actors involved.*

The third research objective seeks to put together the components and meanings of value co-creation through actor engagement into a conceptual framework that will evolve through data collection and analysis. This objective will be successfully achieved when a coherent and evidence-based conceptual framework is created. The following section explores the methodology that was devised to achieve these research objectives.

## 1.4 Methodology

This research utilises a qualitative methodological approach consistent with existing studies in this area (Nielsen, 2015). Specifically, this study consists of two distinct phases, the first

comprises of an 18-month immersive netnography and the second, a series of 31 semi-structured interviews with actors within the observed ecosystem. Netnography is a form of ethnographic research that has been widely applied within marketing studies (Kozinets, 2020). Unlike broader ethnography, netnography focuses on analysing purely online communication and behaviours. Such a method has become necessary due to the increasing prevalence of virtual exchanges on websites (Heinonen and Medberg, 2018). The quantity of those exchanges and the content to which they often relate has been identified as highly valuable in understanding a range of phenomena (Heinonen and Medberg, 2018). Collectable information includes basic 'profile' data such as name, geographical location, preferences and affiliations etc., but also more complex anthropological data such as the chronicling of daily life, sharing of ideas, opinions and as a means of disseminating self-expression or self-image with other users (Kozinets, 2020). Observations of customer-generated content can allow a researcher to develop rich understanding of networked actors' inner workings online without interrupting the process during research (Boon, Pitt and Salehi-Sangari, 2015). For several reasons, a netnographic approach has been selected as the most appropriate method for this research project. First, netnography allows the researcher to document and analyse the co-creation activities of actors within their natural environment (Kozinets, 2010). This offers greater reliability of findings compared to other methods where the presence of a researcher may alter the data collected. Second, netnography is a proven approach in marketing and social media research. The technique has been successfully used by researchers examining co-creation in virtual communities (e.g. Lizzo and Liechty, 2020), user-generated content (e.g. Cuomo *et al.*, 2020), and brand communities (e.g. Özbölük and Dursun, 2017). Third, unlike other anthropological research methods, netnography has a defined and systematic framework detailing how it should be conducted (Kozinets, 2020). This thesis conducted a netnography on the social media platform Twitter.

Semi-structured interviews can be described as 'non-standardised' conversations with a purpose (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). The semi-structured approach has been selected because it offers greater flexibility to the researcher. Firstly, exciting themes can be followed within the dialogue (Gray *et al.*, 2020). Secondly, it allows the researcher to utilise tools used for accessing sub-conscious needs, motivations, attitudes and perceptions of participants, known as projective techniques (Mason, 2018). Within this research project, 31 semi-structured interviews ranging 30-60 minutes in length constituted the second phase of data collection, taking place between July-September 2021. There are several reasons for this, first, it will allow for the use of purposive sampling (where interviewees can be invited from observations made in the netnography phase). Second, it will enable the researcher to investigate the netnography findings in further detail. This means that a deeper understanding of the observed phenomena can be sought overall. The majority of interviews were conducted

with actors identified from the netnography phase. This helped to assess the trustworthiness of the netnographic phase of data collection.

Data analysis followed the 6 stage process to thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved the researcher transcribing the data within both phases: coding, developing themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report in the form of a findings chapter. This final consideration is discussed in the following section.

## 1.5 Research Findings

The findings of this research are guided by the aim and objectives of the research, outlined in 1.3. Phase 1 findings suggest that actors within the political brand community undertook a range of value co-creating activities. This includes activities which: cultivate the brand community online; negotiate the brand parameters of both the Labour Party and Momentum; authenticate actors within the ecosystem; the groups everyday activism; and advocacy for the brand and its values. The findings of the research also indicate that an actor may assume six different roles in the undertaking of value co-creation. these are the roll of: storyteller; thought leader; supporter; educator; satirist; and polemicist. The netnographic analysis also indicates four value co-creation interaction types: adversarial; supportive; humorous; and serious. Phase 2 data was analysed, and five triggers of engagement behaviours were identified. These included: a sense of moral duty; a need for purpose; love of brand community; encouragement from peers; and personal development. Interview data provided insights facilitators and inhibitors of engagement behaviours. The factors included: camaraderie; open forum; low barriers to participation; and knowledge of group norms. Inhibitors which were identified alone in authentic experiences; Fear of judgement; confrontation fatigue; and creeping political apathy. Finally, analysis of the data identified actor perceived benefits of actual engagement. Long-term orientated perceived benefits included: belonging; purpose; status and power; interpersonal relationships; vindication; and acceptance.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

This thesis document comprises of ten chapters which are outlined below:

**Chapter 1** provides an overview of this research's theoretical and methodological background, adopted research objectives, and study rationale. This included the conceptual issues to be addressed by the thesis, political branding and value co-creation.

**Chapter 2** focuses upon the special context of this research, the UK political group Momentum, offering a detailed discussion which aids understanding in subsequent chapters. This chapter comprises a justification for the selection of the study organisation and a comprehensive overview of its background, development, structure, goals and objectives.

**Chapter 3** provides a theoretical background and grounding to the research project. A critical narrative approach is taken to explore the various constructs that this research concerns but have rarely been discussed collectively until now. This approach allows for a wide-ranging discussion in which relevant prior scholarship can be suitably addressed. Concepts discussed within the critical narrative section of the literature review include the idea of value, co-creation, the service-dominant logic paradigm of marketing, the brand and branding, brand community, and political branding. Then, a conceptual framework which brings together the core concepts on which this research is based is developed and presented. This chapter covers the conceptual framework's development and an explanatory discussion. This helps to go further context to the preceding research methodology which are identified in Chapter 4.

**Chapter 4** provides an introduction and comprehensive discussion surrounding the research design and methodological approaches which are used in this research. This begins with a discussion around research philosophy, acknowledging the epistemological and ontological positions this research has taken. The approach taken, data collection and analysis techniques are then described and justified in the context of this research. This chapter identifies why the interpretive netnographic approach was most appropriate and coherent with other similar studies in this area.

**Chapter 5** presents the findings from the first phase of data collection. This chapter of the thesis details the findings from the 18-month period of netnographic data collection. The analysis of these finding specifically focuses upon the first research objective: *To explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem*. The chapter details the value co-creating activities the political brand community engaged in, the resources utilised, the roles adopted, and the typologies of interactions.

**Chapter 6** describes the findings from the second phase of data collection. The chapter presents the findings of 31 interviews conducted with actors who engaged with others in the brand community. This analysis answers explicitly the second research objective: *To investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within the political brand ecosystem*. The chapter discusses the meanings attached to actor engagement and the initiating, facilitating, obstructing factors, and perceived benefits.

**Chapter 7** thoroughly discusses the research findings and their contribution to the theoretical understanding of value co-creation within actor networks surrounding a political brand. This begins with an extensive discussion of the theoretical insights provided by the findings and how they relate to existing scholarship in this field, this is followed by a revisit to the conceptual framework where additional detail based upon the findings is used to adapt further and develop understanding gained in the existing literature. This addresses objective 3 of the research.

**Chapter 8** concludes the thesis document. This chapter aims to give a full overview of the research project in the form of contributions to theory and practice. In addition, a discussion around the limitations of this research and proposed avenues for future research is offered.

# Chapter 2 Research Context

## 2.1 Introduction

This research is concerned with the UK political group 'Momentum'. This chapter of the thesis aims to provide a contextual understanding of this organisation. Firstly, full justification for selecting this political group as a focus of research is articulated. Then the context is considered at two levels. First, Momentum's broader context is considered. This involves dissecting the past and present of the UK Labour Party, to which it is intrinsically linked and has a complex relationship. Then, a detailed discussion of the group's 'internal' matters is offered, including its development, purpose, and function in UK politics today.

The purpose of providing a discussion around the research context is threefold. First and foremost, this contextualisation chapter 'sets the scene'. In other words, it offers an orientation from which the research problem, design, data analysis and discussion can be better understood. This is particularly important in this research as it consists of a qualitative netnographic exploration of a single political group. Second, this chapter will establish why Momentum was selected as the focus of this research. This relates to its relatively unique status and position within British politics. This section explains and justifies why Momentum was selected as the political brand for study. Third, this chapter begins a detailed investigation into this actor-network and the wider ecosystem, scoping and defining its history, systems, and actors. This will aid the entrée to data collection and the understanding and analysis presented in subsequent chapters.

## 2.2 Selection of the Organisation of Study

In this chapter section, the argument of why Momentum represents a suitable and 'critical' case for study is put forward. As this chapter will establish, Labour comprises several competing groups that all compete to maintain influence over the Party. Many groups operating within the labour Party other than Momentum could be considered relevant case(s) for study (Pickard, 2019).

The UK political group Momentum serves as a compelling case organisation for exploring the concept of co-creation of value within an academic paper due to its distinctive grassroots structure and participatory ethos. Momentum emerged within the context of the Labour Party, leveraging digital platforms and community organising techniques to engage supporters in political activism and decision-making processes. As a decentralised network of activists, Momentum embodies principles of bottom-up collaboration and collective action, making it an ideal context for studying how value is co-created among diverse stakeholders within a

political movement. By examining Momentum's practices through the lens of value co-creation, the research can deepen understanding of how political movements harness collective engagement and resources to drive political influence. The rationale for the choice of Momentum can be understood from 7 critical perspectives:

1. At the time of data collection, Momentum was the largest group of the Labour Party (Morris, 2021).
2. The relationship between Momentum and the Labour Party is unique (Dennis, 2020).
3. Momentum has greatly influenced party direction in recent years (Rhodes, 2018).
4. Between 2015-2019, Momentum had a particularly close involvement in a notable period of party leadership (Hotham, 2021).
5. Momentum and its members are markedly active in campaigning online within and outside the Labour Party (Hotham, 2021).
6. Momentum has an unusual 'grassroots' structure that emphasises the role of its members in decision-making (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016).
7. The group has not been widely explored within the political brand literature.

Momentum is the largest sub-group associated with the UK Labour Party today (in terms of membership). The scale of the group, therefore, identifies it as one deserving of greater academic study, given its appeal to a vast number of people within a major political organisation. The relationship which it holds to Labour is unique, it is not officially recognised or affiliated to the Party but its organisational objectives and requirement for membership clearly identify its fundamental link to the Party. Momentum has become the most influential organisation associated with Labour in recent years, including its leadership. Momentum also represents a critical case as a group most active in campaigning. Finally, Momentum has a unique grassroots structure, which is particularly relevant to the concepts explored within this thesis.

## 2.3 The UK Labour Party

### 2.3.1 Development of the UK Labour Party

The Labour Party is one of the oldest continuously operating parties in the UK (Thorpe, 2015). Originating from the late 19th century labour movement, Labour has emerged as one of the country's two leading parties. This section explores the UK Labour Party as the broader ecosystem context of this research. This section of the chapter first considers the origins of the Party, this is followed by the Party's electoral success as well as its ideological development and the key groups and fractions within it, such as Momentum.

### 2.3.1.1 Party Origins

The UK Labour Party originated in the late 19th century when a coalition of trade unionists and socialists sought to give representation to the working classes following the extension of suffrage (Brown, 2018). The emerging Labour Party sought to unify other socialist movements of the time, including the Independent Labour Party (IPS), the Scottish Labour Party, the Fabian Society, and the Social Democratic Federation (Thorpe, 2015). This association was first known as the Labour Representative Committee, seeking to support Members of Parliament (MPs) that furthered the labour Movement's cause. In February 1906, 'The Labour Party' was assumed as the name of the parliamentary division of the labour movement (Brown, 2018).

### 2.3.1.2 Electoral Success and Power

The first Labour government was formed in 1924, led by Ramsay MacDonald. This minority administration only lasted between January and November of that year (Thorpe, 2015). MacDonald's second ministry held government from June 1929 to August 1931 (Heppell and Theakston, 2016). The third Labour government, led by Clement Attlee, was formed in 1945 following a landslide victory in the first post-war election. This government is often seen as Labour's most successful, overseeing the implementation of the Beveridge Report, nationalising key industries, and helping to found NATO. Attlee's post-war government is notable for being the first time in British history that a socialist party formed a majority government (Brew, 2017). Harold Wilson led the fourth Labour government and was in power between 1964 and 1970 and again between 1974 and 1976. James Callaghan's premiership saw the sixth Labour government to see power from 1976 to 1979. It was marked by economic difficulties, high inflation, and increasing tensions within the Labour Party (Blick, 2006). Tony Blair led the seventh and most recent Labour government and was in power between 1997 and 2010 (Bogdanor, 2007).

### 2.3.1.3 Ideological Development

Randall (2018) identifies that the Labour Party is uniquely attached to ideological perspectives in British politics and has welcomed a diverse range of beliefs rooted in progressive politics throughout its history.

The UK Labour Party has undergone several ideological changes from its formation to the present day. As identified in earlier sections, a centrist ideology began to form in the Labour Party during Tony Blair's time as leader, often referred to as "The Third Way" (Bevir, 2005). This was a significant departure from the Party's socialist roots and was motivated by a desire



to make the Party more electorally palatable to the British public (Powell, 2000). Under this ideology, the Party won three consecutive general elections in 1997, 2001 and 2005. Still, critics argue that it led to a loss of support amongst the grassroots and a disowning of the Party's core socialist values (Wickham-Jones, 2005).

Following the 2010 general election, the Labour Party again began to return ideologically to the left under the leadership of Ed Miliband (Goes, 2016). This was in response to the UK Labour Party's election defeat and the UK Coalition government's implementation of austerity measures, which were seen as harmful to the most vulnerable in society (Atkins, 2015). The UK Labour Party, under Miliband's leadership, advocated for a more interventionist approach to the economy and proposed policies such as a freeze on energy prices, rent controls and an increase in the minimum wage (Atkins, 2015). Following Miliband's resignation in the wake of the UK Labour Party's defeat in the 2015 General Election, the Party elected Jeremy Corbyn as its new leader. Under Corbyn, the UK Labour Party moved even further to the left. It advocated for socialist policies such as nationalisation, rent controls and higher taxes on the wealthy (Whiteley *et al.*, 2019).

Jeremy Corbyn's election to party leader was seen as unorthodox as he had no ministerial or shadow ministerial experience in 32 years in parliament and a known reputation as an independent-minded MP who was willing to break ranks and vote against his own party if his conscience told him (Seymour, 2017). Consequently, Corbyn's election represented one of the party's most significant changes in direction (Whiteley *et al.*, 2019). His brand, based upon a no-frills image and a return to traditional socialist principles, portrayed a sense of being an anti-political convention. Under his leadership, many younger people who had not previously engaged in politics joined the party, hoping to find a new direction for the country (Whittle, 2021).

Following the 2019, the Labour party elected Keir Starmer as its new leader in 2020. Under his leadership, the Party has shifted back to the centre ground, seen by many as Blairite. Starmer's leadership has been marked by an ongoing ideological split in the Party, with some MPs advocating for a return to socialism while others supporting a more centrist approach (Barnfield and Bale, 2022).

### 2.3.2 Groups, fractions, and affiliated organisations

As previously identified, the Labour Party comprises a broad spectrum of members representing different interests and ideologies. Several groups and fractions have formed within the Labour Party to represent these different beliefs (Thorpe, 2015). Additionally, a number of important affiliations can be identified with external groups and organisations

(Crines, Jeffery and Heppell, 2018). The following sections identify the key group's fractions and affiliated organisations of the Labour Party. This helps to understand the role which Momentum plays within the Party.

Several prominent groups within Labour can be identified, representing primarily ideological, identarian, and organisational issues. Table 2.1 (below) gives an overview of the key groups that currently operate or have operated in the past in relation to the Labour Party. this is accompanied by a description of the group and an identification of their ideological orientation.

**Table 2. 1** Key Groups within the Labour Party

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Ideology:</b>	<b>Dates:</b>
Blue Labour	Party Sub-group	Blue Labour is a campaign group which seeks to promote 'small-c conservative' policies within the Labour Party. The group believes that the Party has lost touch with its working-class base, particularly outside of London.	Small c-conservatism, centrism	Since 2009
Labour First	Party Sub-group	Labour first is a political group within the UK Labour Party which seeks to protect the parties right leaning contingent ensuring that moderate voices are heard. The group has argued that this is required to be electable.	Moderate right	Since 1980
Progressive Britain (Progress)	Party Sub-group	Progressive Britain, formerly known as progress, is a political organisation closely related to the New Labour project and the leadership of Tony Blair. The group can be understood as sitting to the centre right of the Party's political spectrum.	The third way, Blarism, Brownism	Since 1996
Fabian Society	Party Sub-group	The Fabian society within the UK Labour Party is the oldest still in existence, it seeks to promote democratic socialism via reform rather than revolution.	Socialism, progressivism	Since 1884
Labour Together	Part forum	A network of labour activists who seek to provide a platform in which new ideas and thinking relating to left wing or progressive politics can be discussed.	Socialism progressivism	Since 2015
Open Labour	Part forum	Open Labour is a group which was founded in order so that party members we're able to discuss ideas tactics and campaign strategies.	Socialism	Since 2015
Momentum	Party Sub-group	Momentum is a political organisation, self-describing as a political movement which seeks to promote far left ideas. The group was founded out of the leadership campaign for Jeremy Corbyn with whom it is still closely associated. Momentum is the focus of this	Grassroots, socialism, Corbynism	Since 2015

		study and is described in section 2.4.		
Militant	Party Sub-group	Militant was a group within the Labour Party which advocated Trotskyist ideas between 1964 and 1991. The group had a contentious relationship with the party leadership, Neil Kinnock sought to remove the group from the national executive committee on multiple occasions.	Trotskyism, radical left	1964-1991

*The Researcher adapted from Young (2000)*

In addition to its key groups, the Labour Party can be understood by its key fractions. The table below (2.2) identifies the broad ideological groupings that make up the modern Labour Party.

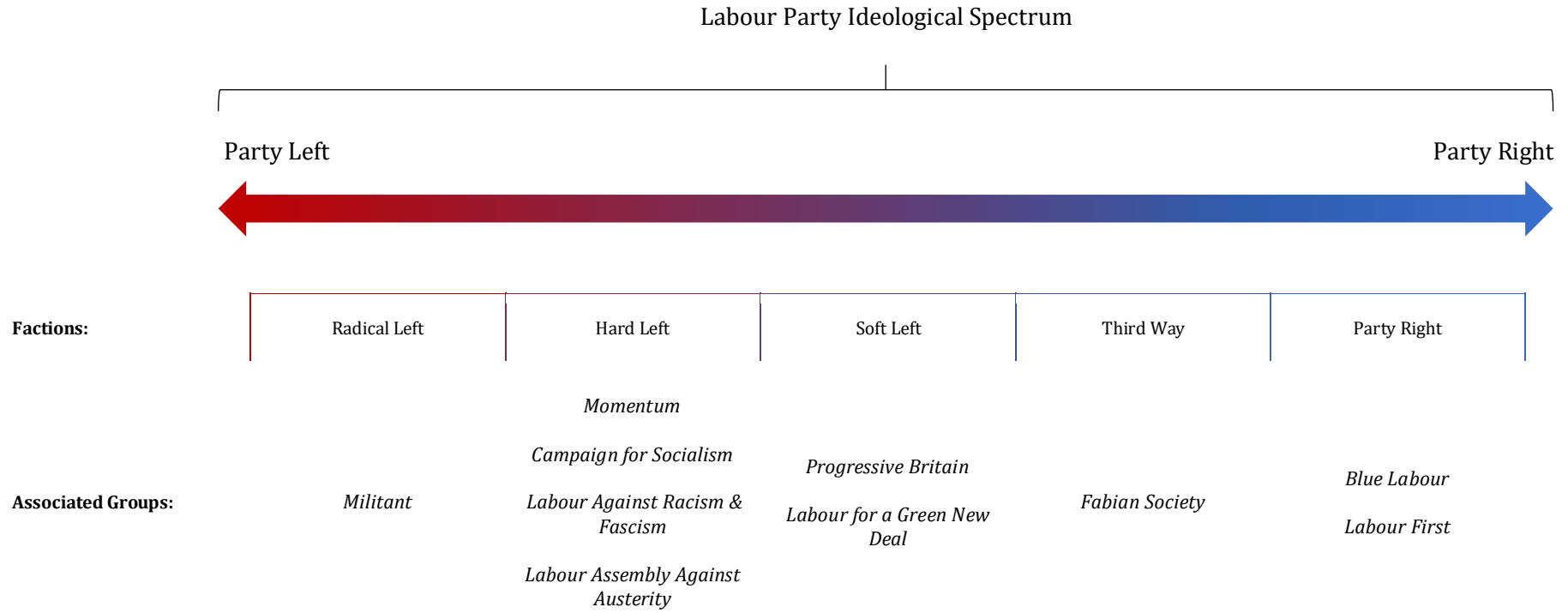
**Table 2. 2** Key Fractions

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Party Right	A contingent of Labour Party members associate themselves with small-c conservatism, particularly regarding social issues. The party right is associated with the previously identified Blue Labour Group.
Third Way (New Labour)	Named after Tony Blair and strongly associated with the New Labour Project and the ideology of the 'third way', this faction sits to the centre of the political spectrum but is perceived by the hard left as right-wing. Key politicians associated with Blairism include David Miliband and Keir Starmer.
Soft Left	Ideologically to the left-wing of the Labour Party but perceived as more willing to compromise than the 'hard left'. Notable party politicians said to be on the 'soft-left' include Ed Miliband and Andy Burnham.
Hard Left	Ideologically to the left of the Party, supporting strong socialist principals such as nationalisation of all industries. Key politicians to the hard left include Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingston, and Dennis Skinner.
Radical/ Far Left	Ideologically to the extreme left of the Party, often advocating for revolutionary socialism. Strongly in support of Trotskyist and Marxist ideas.

*The Researcher, adapted from Young (2000)*

Figure 2.1 further demonstrates the Party's groups and factions in relation to the disparate ideological underpinnings found within the Labour Party. It relates that Momentum is only one of several groups vying for influence over the Party.

**Figure 2. 1** The Labour Party Ideological Spectrum



*The researcher adapted from Webb (2022)*

The Labour Party also hold close relationships with other political organisations and unions towards which they have historical or ideological associations (Crines, Jeffery and Heppell, 2018). The table below presents a brief overview of key associated organisations.

**Table 2. 3** Key Affiliations

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Ideology:</b>
The Co-operative Party	Political Party	The cooperative Party is a centre-left political Party with which the Labour Party shares many values and history. Labour MPs are permitted to stand on a joint Labour and Co-operative ticket.	Progressive, Co-operative movement
Party of European Socialists	Affiliation of Parties	The Party of European socialists brings together Socialist, Social Democratic, Labour, and democratic parties in the European Union, UK, and Norway. The goal of this organisation is to create unified action for progressive Europe.	Democratic Socialism
Socialist International	Affiliation of Parties	Socialist International is an organisation of affiliated parties that advocate for democratic socialism.	Democratic Socialism
Trade Union Congress	Affiliation of Parties	Trade Union Congress is a federation of trade unions in the United Kingdom, made up of 48 unions with a collective 5.5 million members.	Socialism, Trade Unionism

*Adapted from the Labour Party Website (2022)*

## 2.4 The Momentum Group

### 2.4.1 Introduction

Momentum is a political group operating close to the UK Labour Party. Momentum has been variously described as a group, movement, and a party-within-a-party, and as such, is difficult to define (Dennis, 2020). This section will explore the group, establishing why it represents a unique and critical case political brand community. To do this, the nature of the group is first explored, then its development is studied, followed by an investigation of its ideological underpinnings, the key relationships it holds to affiliated organisations, and its structure.

### 2.4.2 Defining Momentum: A party within a party?

The Momentum group is a challenging organisation to define. In some respects, the group acts like a political party, with members, policy generation, and independent campaigning. However, the group does not contest seats in parliament; instead, it pursues representation

through the Labour Party (Dennis, 2020). Its stated aim is to build 'a mass movement for progressive change', intending to transform the Labour Party into a more ideologically left-wing and democratic organisation in order to achieve socialist objectives (Shaw, 2015). However, Momentum is not an official Labour Party organisation, and its relationship to the Party is complex and occasionally contentious (Dennis, 2020). Furthermore, the previous sections have identified, the Labour Party is a broad church with members who hold various views on socialism. This means that Momentum's activities often conflict with those of other groups and factions within the Labour Party (Dennis, 2020).

### 2.4.3 Development of the group

Momentum was founded in 2015 following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, by his 'Jeremy for Leader' campaign team (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016). Upon its founding, the group stated that it intended to 'build on the energy and enthusiasm' from Corbyn's campaign 'to grow Labour's grassroots movement across the country' (Shaw, 2015). This reflects the popular approach to politics taken by the group.

Momentum remained closely aligned with the politics of Jeremy Corbyn during his tenure as Labour leader. Further emphasis was placed on pro-social justice, pro-economic equality and, anti-austerity, and anti-war platforms (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016). From early in the development of the group, it faced significant opposition from Labour Party MPs and members who accused Momentum of being a 'party within a party', or of entryism by hard-left activists (Dennis, 2020). Despite this, Momentum grew its reported membership to a peak of 42,000 (Morris, 2021).

The group's first electoral challenge was the 2017 United Kingdom General Election, in which Momentum encouraged its members to campaign for local Labour Party candidates (Pickard, 2018). The group also released a series of promotional videos and posters to help promote Labour's platform and policies. Momentum gained attention for its active social media presence, which it used to share campaign information and engage with voters (Rhodes, 2018). Momentum was credited for playing a key role in Labour's unexpected relative success and was seen as one of the driving forces behind Corbyn's popularity and influence amongst parts of the Labour Party (Dorey, 2017). The Labour party performed better than expected during the general election, winning 262 seats and increasing its vote share from 2015 by 9.5%.

After the election, Momentum saw its peak in support. However, Momentum was criticised during this time for its perceived influence on the Labour Party and its potential to divide the

Party further (Dennis, 2020). Throughout 2018 and 2019, the group gathered pace and support for Corbyn's Labour Party. Momentum members campaigned against the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU).

Momentum played a significant role in the 2019 general election, helping to raise support for Labour among young people and mobilising Momentum members across the country to campaign for Labour (Sloam and Henn, 2019). Labour lost the 2019 general election, with the Conservative Party winning a landslide victory and Prime Minister Boris Johnson securing his position as the head of government. Though Jeremy Corbyn did not immediately resign, it was acknowledged that the Party would change direction with a new leader.

After Jeremy Corbyn's resignation as Labour leader in April 2020, the group entered a turbulent era in its history (Cutts, Goodwin and Heath, 2020). Momentum's influence within the Labour Party waned with the moderate Keir Starmer's reorganisation. Whilst membership numbers are not published publicly, it is speculated that they have declined since the 2019 election (Cutts, Goodwin and Heath, 2020).

#### 2.4.4 Group Ideology

Momentum is a UK-based political group that supports 'leftist' policies and ideologies. At its core, Momentum is characterised by a solid commitment to what can be broadly described as 'progressive values' (Shaw, 2015). This commitment manifests itself through Momentum's advocacy for various issues, including workers' rights, environmental protection, anti-racism, and anti-austerity measures which are explored within this section (Fuchs, 2016). Momentum's apparent ideology is closely aligned with other leftist organisations, as outlined in the following section.

Several key leftist concepts inform Momentum's apparent ideology. Firstly, Momentum believes in equality of outcome, not equality of opportunity (Chiengkul, 2020). Momentum asserts that everyone should have the same access to resources, regardless of background or circumstances. This belief informs Momentum's advocacy for measures such as free healthcare and education and its support for initiatives aimed at tackling poverty and inequality. Secondly, Momentum is committed to the idea of collective action. This means that Momentum states that social change can only be achieved through the concerted effort of groups working together. This belief informs Momentum's support for trade unions and other worker-based organisations. Thirdly, Momentum states commitment to the idea of social justice. This means that Momentum believes that everyone should be treated fairly and equally, regardless of their

background or circumstances (Momentum, 2022c). This belief informs Momentum's advocacy for measures such as affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws. Finally, Momentum states support in the principle of solidarity. This means that Momentum states support the idea of people coming together to support each other, regardless of their differences (Momentum, 2022c).

Momentum has faced criticism from more centrist and conservative groups for its deep commitment to progressive values. Critics argue that the group's policies are overly radical and disruptive to UK politics (Shaw, 2015). Other groups and factions within the Labour Party have also critiqued Momentum, with some believing that the group threatens to undermine the Party's chances of winning future general elections (Dennis, 2020).

#### 2.4.5 Key relationships

Momentum is closely associated with several individuals and other organisations. The first key relationship to address is that which it holds to the UK Labour Party, which is complex and, at times, contentious (Dennis, 2020). Momentum is not officially affiliated with the Party, but membership of the Labour Party is a requirement for joining Momentum (Momentum, 2022a). In addition, the organisational objective of Momentum is to work within the Labour Party to transform it into a more democratic, accountable organisation that is fit to lead the country (Momentum, 2022d). In particular, the strong ideologically driven differences between the group and the new party leadership have caused issues and intensified internal debate on policy and democratic processes. The Party under Keir Starmer's leadership has been accused of seeking to delegitimise the group and its members. In addition, Starmer was charged with attempting to remove the influence of grassroots organisations like Momentum through leadership election changes (Parkinson and Scott, 2021).

Momentum maintains working relationships with other political and apolitical organisations (Momentum, 2022a). Like the Labour Party, Momentum has close ties to the Trade Union movement. The group is also affiliated with the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance (CLGA), a coalition of UK-based left-wing organisations which advocate grassroots democracy for the Labour Party. The CLGA is elected to the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC). Momentum is also associated with socialist organisations in the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales. The Campaign for Socialism is a Momentum affiliate in Scotland focusing on campaigning for left-wing policies and supporting candidates. The Welsh Labour Grassroots (WLG) is a similar group and describes itself as a 'sister organisation' to Momentum in Wales (Momentum, 2022a). In the below table, a complete list of key affiliations is presented.



**Table 2. 4** Affiliations of Momentum

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Ideology:</b>
Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union	Union	Trade union representing workers in the food industry. Supported Jeremy Corbyn's Leadership Campaign.	Trade Unionism
Fire Brigades Union	Union	Trade union representing workers in the fire service. Supported Jeremy Corbyn's Leadership Campaign.	Trade Unionism
The Communication Workers Union	Union	Trade union representing workers in the postal, cable, communication industries. Supported Jeremy Corbyn's Leadership Campaign.	Trade Unionism
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association	Union	Trade union representing workers in the transport and travel industries. Supported Jeremy Corbyn's Leadership Campaign.	Trade Unionism
Campaign for Labour Party Democracy	Party Campaign Group	Self-described as a 'rank-and-file' organisation. A party campaign group aiming to increase the influence of ordinary members.	Grassroots Socialism
Campaign for Socialism	Party Campaign Group	A group which campaigns for socialism within the labour movement in Scotland.	Socialism
Labour Against Racism and Fascism	Party Campaign Group	Campaign group which focuses upon racial inequality and anti-fascism activities.	Anti-racism
Labour Assembly Against Austerity	Party Campaign Group	A labour campaign group which focuses on opposing all forms of austerity within central government.	Socialism
Labour Briefing	Forum & Party Group	A group which serves as a platform in which socialist ideas can be discussed amongst different factions and groups within the Labour Party.	Class Unity
Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	Party Campaign Group	A group which campaigns for labour leadership to adopt A nuclear disarmament policy, advocating for none military and foreign policy responses.	Nuclear Disarmament
Labour for a Green New Deal	Party Campaign Group	A campaign group which seeks to promote the adoption of what is described as the 'green new deal', which are set of policies which seek to redistribute wealth and grow the economy through investments in renewable and sustainable policies.	Eco/ green socialism
Labour Hub	Party Support Group	A party support group which seeks to offer help to all members of the Labour Party and create bridges between different groups and factions within it.	Socialism
Labour Representation Committee	Party Campaign Group	A campaign group wishing to advance left-wing policy within the UK Labour Party.	Socialism
Left Futures	Party Group	A network of Labour Party members aiming to support journalistic	Socialism

		efforts which advanced the causes of socialism.	
Momentum Black Caucus	Party Campaign Group	A party campaign group focused upon ethnic equality within the Labour Party.	Socialism, Ethnic Equality
The World Transformed	Socialist Event	An event originally organised by Momentum in which attendees discuss left wing ideas and create new policies to be brought to the National Party.	Socialism
Tribune	Left-wing publication	Left wing publication which provides news stories and opinion pieces from a left-wing perspective.	Socialism
Welsh Labour Grassroots	Party Campaign Group	A Labour Party campaign group which seeks to promote grassroots socialism within the Welsh division of the UK Labour Party.	Grassroots Socialism

*The researcher based Momentum (2021)*

Due to the fundamental relationship to the Labour Party, the group has several key associations with prominent party individuals. Momentum's most notable Labour Party association is to former leader Jeremy Corbyn (Watts and Bale, 2019). As previously identified, the group developed out of his leadership campaign and a key original objective of Momentum was to support his leadership. As such, Momentum has a close relationship with Corbyn with speeches and other events involving Momentum and the Party (Watts and Bale, 2019). Other key associated party figures include others within Corbyn's former Labour Party Cabinet, including John McDonnell, Diane Abbott, and Rebecca Long-Bailey. Zarah Sultana and Paula Barker are also well-known associated Labour Party politicians.

#### 2.4.6 Membership, Leadership and Organisation

Membership numbers of Momentum are not published. Sources suggest that Membership to Momentum peaked in 2018 at around 40,000, following what was regarded as a positive result in the 2017 General Election. In more recent years, since the General Election of 2019, membership has fallen. Most recent estimates of current membership are around 20,000-30,000 (Morris, 2021). A notable characteristic of the group's membership is that it has attracted and engaged a higher-than-average rate of younger people (Banaji and Mejias, 2017). There is no fixed rate for membership, instead, Momentum members can pay according to their self-determined ability.

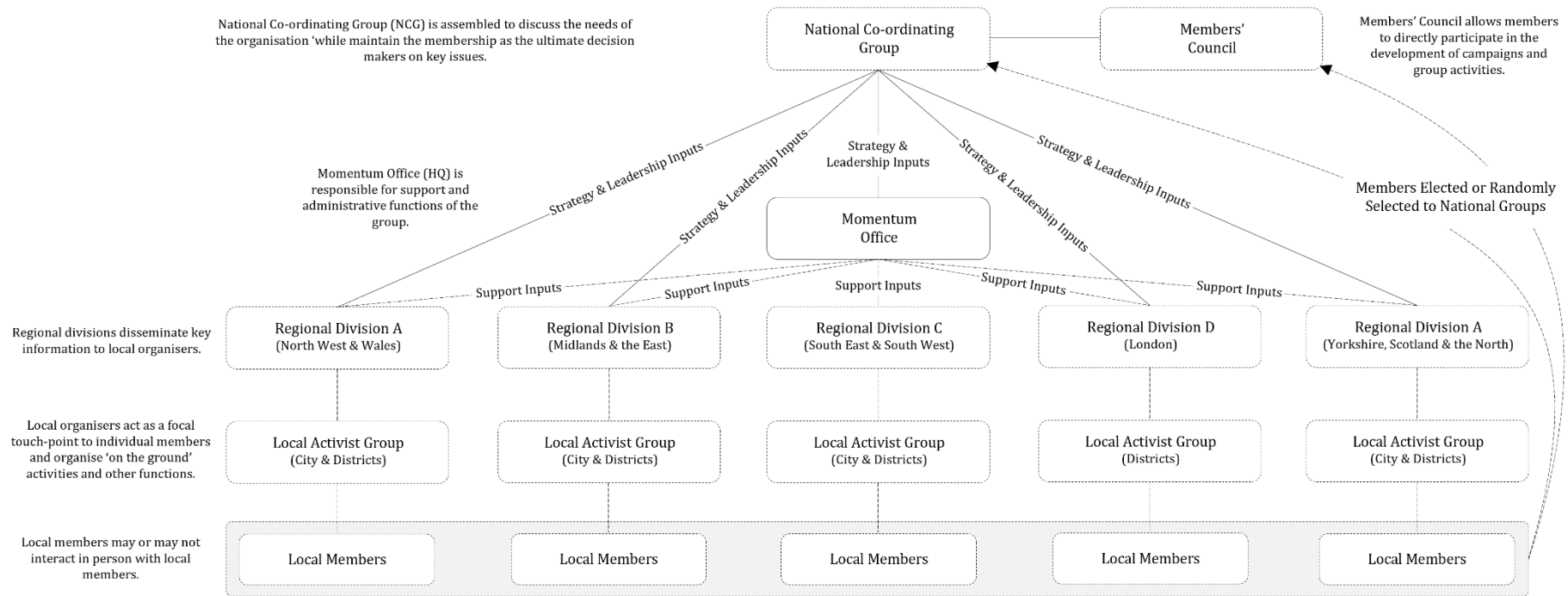
As Momentum has no formally elected leadership, key decisions are made by the Momentum National Coordinating Group (NCG). The NCG is Momentum's main decision-making body, which meets every two months (Momentum, 2022b). The NCG is made up of 34 members, who

include Momentum members from across the UK, members of affiliated trade unions, and other related organisations (Momentum, 2022b).

As a grassroots organisation, Momentum does not have a significant hierarchy. The group has a central office that deals with the administration of the group, including membership. There is no 'leader' of Momentum. Instead, the NCG provides strategic direction for the group (Momentum, 2022b). The NCG is made up of Momentum members from across the UK, members of affiliated trade unions, and other related organisations. Momentum is organised into local groups, which are then subdivided into regions. These local and regional groups organise Momentum's activities, including campaigning and events (Momentum, 2022b). A visualisation of the group structure can be seen below (Figure 2.2)

Momentum's website ([www.peoplesmomentum.com](http://www.peoplesmomentum.com)) hosts a range of resources for Momentum members, including an online community forum, campaign materials, and a calendar of events.

**Figure 2. 2** Apparent Structure of the Momentum Group



*The researcher based upon Momentum (2022b)*

## 2.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the context of this thesis. It delves into the historical development, key factions, and ideological underpinnings of the Labour Party while also revealing the emergence and evolution of Momentum within the contemporary political landscape. The UK Labour Party has undergone a complex evolution marked by shifting ideological currents and a degree of internal factionalism. Initially rooted in the trade union movement and socialist principles, the party has traversed various ideological terrains, encompassing Fabian socialism, social democracy, and, more recently, New Labour centrism. The party's key factions have included the traditional left, represented by groups such as Momentum, and the centrist "soft left" and "Blairite" factions, which have vied for dominance within the party apparatus. The chapter identified that Momentum emerged as a grassroots movement after Jeremy Corbyn's ascension to the Labour Party leadership in 2015. Initially conceived to support Corbyn's left-wing agenda and mobilise activists within and outside the Labour Party, Momentum quickly evolved into a distinct political force with its own separate but related organisational structures and ideological orientation. Drawing inspiration from Corbynism and advocating for transformative socialist policies, Momentum has positioned itself as a radical voice within the Labour Party, challenging established power structures and advocating for greater democratisation and inclusivity. In conclusion, the context chapter evaluates the UK Labour Party and Momentum, elucidating their respective histories, ideologies, and dynamics within the broader political landscape. By examining the interplay between these two entities, the chapter sheds light on the complexities of contemporary British politics and the challenges facing progressive movements in the 21st century.

# Chapter 3 Critical Narrative Literature Review

## 3.1 Introduction

### 3.1.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter explored the research context of this study, establishing that this thesis is focused on a political organisation known as Momentum. In this chapter, a review of the extant literature is conducted using a critical narrative approaches. This will assess how value, value co-creation, ecosystems and brands have been conceptualised within the marketing literatures. Consequently, this chapter will offer a theoretical grounding that will serve as a foundation for the rest of the study. The chapter is organised into the following sections. First, the adopted literature review method is described. Next, relevant subjects and concepts are identified and presented within a 'literature map'. This includes an exploration of the service-dominant logic, the concept of value, the co-creation of value, the concept of branding, and brand communities. An exploration of the background of those subjects in the form of a critical review follows this. The review considers the concept of value, co-creation, conceptions of branding, brand communities and political branding.

### 3.1.2 Literature Review Method

The literature review is an integral part of the research process. The review typically involves analysing, discussing and synthesising existing literature in the research area or areas of interest (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Beyond identifying relevant literature, the review enables the identification of research 'gaps', that is to say, areas of contemporary understanding that have not been satisfactorily explored (Hart, 2018). Although commonplace, there is no single method of conducting a literature review. The method selected by the researcher depends upon the objective of the review and often, the discipline's conventions (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey, 2011). Within the field of marketing, the two most frequently used approaches are the narrative (or "traditional") and systematic review (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). The narrative literature review seeks to descriptively analyse, synthesise and explore the heterogeneity of the extant studies of a particular phenomenon (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). This method constitutes a qualitative approach in which the discussion of published journals, conference papers, books and other sources often includes the author's critique. The systematic literature review seeks to conduct a statistical analysis of the literature (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). In this respect, the systematic method is a quantitative approach.

The narrative review is regarded as a highly flexible method and useful in applications where there is a need for a conceptual debate or to address a fragmented body of literature and offer

a rationale for future research (Rozas and Klein, 2010). Although valuable, the narrative review has been increasingly scrutinised for academic rigour in several areas. First, a narrative review is broad in its purpose. Consequently, it can lack the necessary focus of an effective academic literature review (Boland, Cherry and Dickson, 2014). Second, a description of the search and selection criteria is not provided within the narrative approach. This raises questions of validity and the potential for bias within the review (Booth, Papaioannou and Sutton, 2021). Third, the assessment of the quality of included literature is often not considered in a narrative review, which raises additional validity issues (Gough, Thomas and Oliver, 2012). The final critique of the “traditional” literature review is that it contributes inferences which are typically not ‘evidenced-based’. Instead, the narrative review depends upon the author’s judgment in drawing conclusions, this is increasingly problematic with the volume of published scholarly work growing each year (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009).

Critical narrative literature reviews can significantly benefit doctoral researchers. By adopting a critical narrative approach, these reviews provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of complex phenomena, enabling researchers to explore divergent viewpoints and trace the historical evolution of ideas (Bryman and Bell, 2018). This holistic perspective is essential for doctoral-level research as it allows researchers to identify gaps in knowledge and develop more nuanced understandings of their research topics (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2018). Moreover, critical narrative literature reviews offer an opportunity for theoretical development. Researchers can identify conceptual gaps and propose novel theoretical perspectives by engaging critically with existing theories and frameworks (Creswell, 2018). This can lead to theoretical innovation within their field, paving the way for new insights and discoveries. The theoretical synthesis and refinement process that critical narrative literature reviews promote is crucial for advancing scholarly knowledge and driving intellectual progress (Creswell, 2018). By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing theories, researchers can refine and improve upon them, building a more robust and nuanced understanding of their research topics. This, in turn, can lead to the development of new theories and frameworks, contributing to the advancement of their field (Bryman and Bell, 2018).

### 3.2 Literature Mapping

This section of the chapter seeks to map the concepts relevant to this study's research aim. Therefore, this offers guidance to how concepts within the marketing literatures were filtered, connections were made, and key relationships were expressed. The section utilises concept mapping to visualise how the key ideas under review relate. Rowley & Slack (2004, p. 36) state that concept mapping is a ‘way of identifying key concepts in a collection of documents or a research area’. The authors go on to address the valuable role a map can play in structuring the

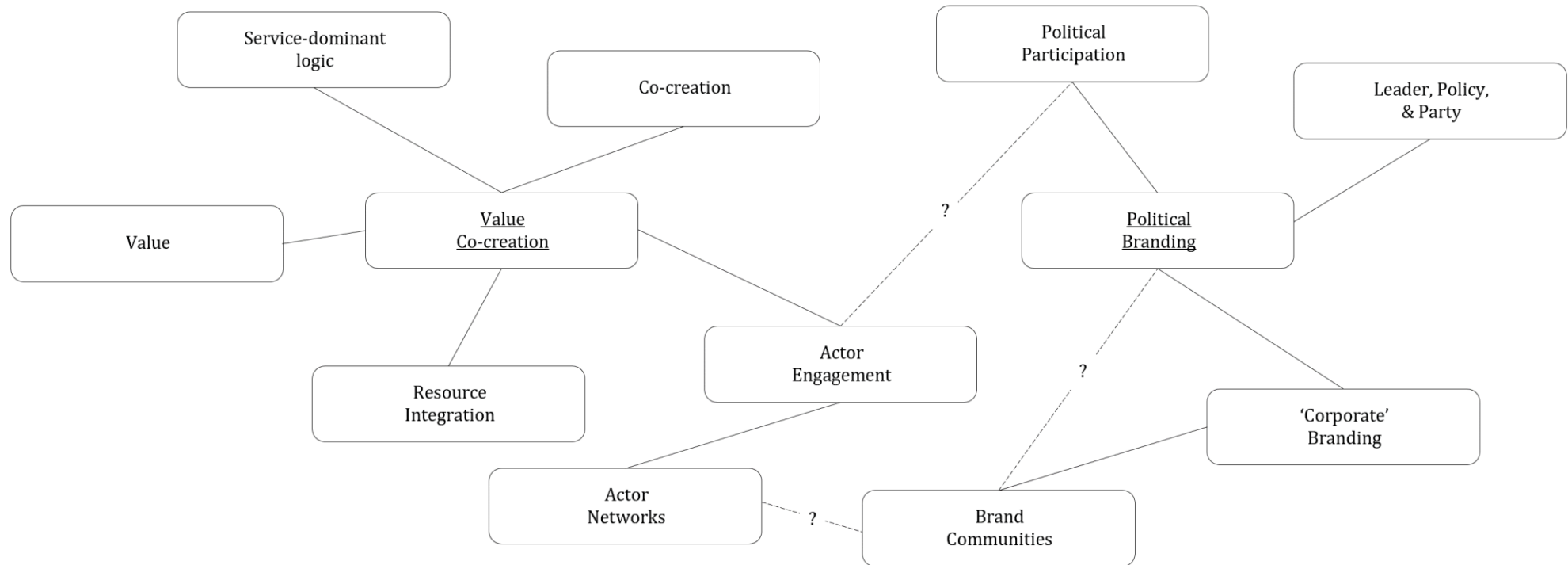
literature review itself and as an exercise in identifying meaningful relationships and potential literature gaps. Figure 3.1 identifies the concept map created for this thesis.

The figure below first identifies this study's two most significant concepts, as defined by the research aim (see Chapter 1). These are 'value co-creation' and 'political branding'. The thesis introduction identified that the marketing literature explores the former of these concepts well, while the latter is still an emergent concept. An apparent literature gap examines the relationship between value co-creation and political branding, thus motivating this study. While many academic concepts can be attached to the central focuses of the study, the map below identifies those on which this research has opted to focus. The selection of these concepts was, in part, related to the potential connections they may establish between the core focuses of the study. This is illustrated in the concept map by dashed lines.

Closely connected to value co-creation are the concepts of: service-dominant logic; resource integration; actor engagement; actor networks; co-creation; value. Political branding relates to the concepts of: leader, policy and party brands; corporate branding; political brand communities; and participation. The initial scoping of the literature suggests that similarities exist between the idea of participation and actor engagement. Furthermore, conceptualisations of actor networks hold relevance to the conceptualisations of brand communities explored by marketing scholars. This and the following chapter will examine these concepts and culminate in identifying the specific literature gaps this research will examine.



**Figure 3. 1** Concept Map Relating to Value Co-creation and Political Branding (with Potential Relationships/ Literature Gaps)



*The researcher*

### 3.3 Critical Review

#### 3.3.1 Setting the Scene: The Service-dominant Logic

Value co-creation, the primary focus of this thesis, is closely aligned to a prominent strand of marketing theory known as service-dominant logic (SDL) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). In this section of the literature review, service-dominant logic is explored as the theoretical lens of this thesis. In short, the service-dominant logic can be defined as:

*'A metatheoretical framework that identifies service (singular) – the process of using one's resources for the benefit of another actor (or oneself) – rather than goods, as the fundamental basis of economic and social exchange'. (Vargo, Koskela-huotari and Vink, 2020)*

In their seminal paper, Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue that the 'traditional' goods-centred view is no longer the dominant logic by which marketing scholars seek to understand products, value, resources or exchange. At its centre, the concept of service-dominant logic is rooted in resource-based theory of a firm's operant and operand resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Vargo and Lusch (2008, p. 9) posit that SDL represents 'a mindset, a lens through which to look at social and economic exchange phenomena so they can potentially be seen more clearly'. This section first presents a critique of the goods-dominant logic, followed by an exploration of the service-dominant logic related to value co-creation.

##### 3.3.1.1 Goods-dominant Logic

Goods-dominant logic (GDL) represents a firm-orientated understanding of exchange, conceptualising value to be embedded within goods, exchanged within a marketplace and ultimately destroyed by the consumer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In other words, the value in goods is considered inherent and deliberate, it relies upon effective management processes to interpret needs and satisfy them economically. Lusch and Vargo (2014) identify a framework consisting of three 'centricities' of goods-dominant logic which are problematic as foundational assumptions of the marketing discipline and can be viewed as the limitations of the theoretical lens. Lusch and Vargo (2014) primarily relate the GDL centricities (or limitations) to its routing in economics rather than marketing theory. Value within the marketing literature is complex and multifaceted, a concept which can be explored from multiple perspectives, contrasting economic aspects which focus on notions of consumer rationality. First, the authors identify a goods-centricity, this is described as a tendency to view organisations as creators of tangible units of products rather than providers of solutions to problems and facilitators of experiences. Within GDL thought, the firm's success is measured by its ability to produce 'goods' which are competitive at the point of exchange. The second identified is firm centricity predominantly

views the firm as the proactive actor within the economic exchange. Lusch and Vargo (2014, p. 6) note that the firm is viewed within goods-dominant logic as the sole 'innovator, developer, producer, distributor, and promoter of goods, and thus is seen as representing the heart of markets and exchange'. GDL considers markets largely passive through firm centricity, consisting of pre-existing unfulfilled demand that the firm seeks to 'exploit' with its goods. The third and final centricity Lusch and Vargo (2014) identifies is exchange value. Exchange-value centricity is considered as a focus on the value realised at a particular point in time within a market through exchange. Marketing scholars acknowledge, in the emergence of the 'service dominant logic', that the traditional modes of understanding of value creation routed in the exchange of goods are poorly suited to contemporary discussion of marketing. As previous sections have identified, the form which value can take may differ between situations and the individuals seeking to make use of it. The following section identifies how a shift to a service-dominant logic aids understanding of the complex processes and networks of value co-creation.

### 3.3.1.2 Service-dominant Logic

The service-centred view has developed to address the outlined weaknesses of the assumptions of goods-dominant logic (Kuzgun and Asugman, 2015). In SDL, services rather than goods are considered the basis of the central exchange (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011). Services are 'the application of specialised competencies (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, p. 2). SDL considers companies' offerings as the 'services' that its goods can render rather than tangible items (Lusch and Vargo, 2014). Within the service-centred view, the customer, not the firm, is considered the proactive actor of exchange, as they seek services which will contribute to their well-being, thereby becoming co-creators of value (FitzPatrick *et al.*, 2015). A further distinction between the two dominant logics is the emphasis on value-in-use over exchange-value, which reflects that services generate value for the actor during use rather than at the point of exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). As a result, service-dominant logic stipulates that firms should focus on facilitating the customer's value creation process through its service offering, through goods, or directly (Lusch, Vargo,.

Service dominant logic can be understood through 10 foundational premises (FPs) (Table 3.1). Foundational premises 1 to 8 were initially proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004). The authors later added FP<sub>9</sub> in 2006 and FP<sub>10</sub> in 2008 whilst also modifying the existing premises to reflect developments in SDL scholarly work.

**Table 3. 1** Modified Foundational Premises and Axioms of Service-Dominant Logic

		<b>Original Foundational Premise</b>	<b>Modified and New Foundational Premises</b>	<b>Description</b>
FP <sub>1</sub>	AXIOM 1	The application of specialised skill(s) and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange	The application of operant resources (knowledge and skills), "service," as defined in S-D logic, is the basis for all exchange. Service is exchanged for service
FP <sub>2</sub>		Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange	Because service is provided through complex combinations of goods, money, and institutions, the service basis of exchange is not always apparent
FP <sub>3</sub>		Goods are a distribution mechanism for service provision	Goods are a distribution mechanism for service provision	Goods (both durable and non-durable) derive their value through use - the service they provide
FP <sub>4</sub>		Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage	Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage	The comparative ability to cause desired change drives competition
FP <sub>5</sub>		All economies are services economies	All economies are service economies	Service (singular) is only now becoming more apparent with increased specialisation and outsourcing
FP <sub>6</sub>	AXIOM 2	The customer is always a co producer	The customer is always a co-creator of value	Implies value creation is interactional
FP <sub>7</sub>		The enterprise can only make value propositions	The enterprise cannot deliver value, but only offer value propositions	Enterprises can offer their applied resources for value creation and collaboratively (interactively) create value following acceptance of value propositions, but cannot create and/or deliver value independently
FP <sub>8</sub>		A service-centred view is customer oriented and relational	A service-centred view is inherently customer oriented and relational	Because service is defined in terms of customer determined benefit and co-created it is inherently customer oriented and relational
FP <sub>9</sub>	AXIOM 3	Organizations exist to integrate and transform micro-specialised competences into complex services that are demanded in the marketplace	All social and economic actors are resource integrators	Implies the context of value creation is networks of networks (resource integrators)
FP <sub>10</sub>	AXIOM 4	-	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary	Value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning laden

FP <sub>11</sub>	AXIOM 5	-	Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.	Value is organised through the institutions to which actor belong.
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*Adapted from Vargo and Lusch (2008, p. 7)*

The foundational premises cover a broad range of elements, in other words, they underpin a wide range fundamental principles of marketing. Foundational premises six, seven, nine, ten and eleven are particularly interesting to value of co-creation within ecosystems. Ecosystems can be understood as complex systems through which interactions may take place. Limited research has been conducted on value co-creation within ecosystems, particularly political brands and brand communities (Pich and Newman, 2020). These foundational premises relate to the value co-creation and consumption process and form the basis of the conceptual framework guiding this study. In FP<sub>6</sub>, Vargo and Lusch (2008) state that the customer is always the co-creator of value. In this statement, the authors put forward that value is realised in use rather than exchange. As conceptualised in the section, value is dependent upon the customer's participation and the firm cannot 'determine' or 'produce value' independently. This leads to FP<sub>7</sub>, which states that the firm can only offer 'value propositions', meaning the resources which can facilitate collaborative value creation. FP<sub>9</sub> states that all social and economic actors are resource integrators. Vargo and Lusch (2008) state in the tenth foundational premise that 'value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary'. This implies that value differs from consumer to consumer depending on consumption circumstances. FP<sub>11</sub> states that 'value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements' (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p8).

### 3.3.2 The Concept of Value

As the previous section identified, value is a central issue in the marketing discipline and the SDL lens, which this study has adopted (Axiom 2). Value is considered the focus of any marketplace interaction (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005). Accordingly, it is a central concern of contemporary marketing literature and practice (Gummesson, Lusch and Vargo, 2010; Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Kumar and Reinartz, 2016; Eggert *et al.*, 2018). Despite the attention received, value remains an elusive and contested concept (Geraerdt, 2012). Marinov (2019) recognises that value can have many or no meanings to an individual, which is reflected by much of the extant literature on the subject. This issue is raised by Karababa and Kjeldgaard (2014), who states the meaning of value assumed in scholarly work often lacks a wider discussion of the multifaceted nature of the concept, instead focusing on a particular element of value to which the study is concentrated (for instance Chu and Keh, 2006; Satar, Dastane and Ma'arif, 2019). Lack of explanation of what is meant when we refer to value is problematic, as

it represents a fundamental and deeply complex construct in marketing. Consequently, this section offers an overview of the different conceptualisations of value.

### 3.3.2.1 Dimensions and Typologies of Value

This section explores the types of value explored within the existing literature. Although several scholars have proposed to define the typologies of value (Holbrook, 1994, 2005; Woodall, 2003; Eggert *et al.*, 2018), the literature lacks an agreed framework for the dimensions of perceived value. Furthermore, Smith and Colgate (2007) reflect that many existing typologies lack consistency and are not compelling as the basis of marketing research. Through the extant conceptualisations, several dimensions of value have been identified, such as *functional*, *economic (often used interchangeably with functional)*, *social*, *epistemic* and *emotional (also referred to as hedonic)* value (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991; Holbrook, 1994, 2005; Vakulenko, Oghazi and Hellström, 2019). Though helpful, much of the work in this area talks about concepts similar or related in meaning, contributing to the complexity apparent when looking to understand value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Smith and Colgate (2007) identify four broad dimensions of value (Table 3.2); (1) Functional; (2) Experiential; (3) Symbolic; and (4) Sacrifice. Although not comprehensive, these categories offer a sound basis to group the various descriptions of value present within the literature.

**Table 3. 2** Dimensions of Value

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Related Concepts</b>	<b>Key papers</b>
<b>Functional</b>	Value originates from the perceived quality and expected performance of goods or services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instrumental value</li> <li>• Utilitarian value</li> <li>• Practical value</li> <li>• Material value</li> <li>• Use value</li> </ul>	Woodruff (1997) Sheth et al. (1991) Woodall (2003) Walter and Lancaster (1999)
<b>Experiential</b>	Value originates from perception gained through assessment of experience of products and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedonic value</li> <li>• Sensory value</li> <li>• Emotional value</li> <li>• Social/ relational value</li> <li>• Epistemic value</li> </ul>	Sheth et al. (1991) Holbrook (1999; 2005) Liu et al. (2005) Lapierre (2000) Ravald and Grönoos (1996)
<b>Symbolic / Sign</b>	Value originates from an individual's ability to express identity, social membership and prestige.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressive value</li> <li>• Social Value</li> <li>• Intrinsic value</li> <li>• Desired value</li> <li>• Possession value</li> </ul>	Holbrook (1999; 2005) Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) Holbrook (1999; 2005) Parasuraman (1997)
<b>Sacrifice</b>	Value originates from the rational assessment of personal investment and economic and other forms of cost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic costs</li> <li>• Psychological costs</li> <li>• Personal investment</li> <li>• Risk</li> </ul>	Walter et. al (2003) Grönoos (1997) Ravald and Grönoos (1996) Woodall (2003) Bolton and Lemon (1999)

*Adapted from Smith and Colgate (2007, pp. 11–14)*

Functional value can be defined as the perceived utility of a good or service and can be understood as the capacity for functional, utilitarian or physical performance (Salehzadeh and Pool, 2017). In other words, what an individual believes that it can do. Woodruff (1997) suggests three components of functional value: (1) correct or appropriate features functions or attributes; (2) sufficient performance; and (3) appropriate outcomes or consequences. In the functional value conception, firms may develop their value proposition through one of the outlined components. For instance, reliability and quality can improve the product's performance (Smith and Colgate, 2007). Consequently, functional value is 'created' by possessing desired functional, practical or physical attributes. Functional value has traditionally been considered the firm's focus through notions of the value chain (see Porter, 1985). Consequently, it is closely associated with the economic perspective of value addressed in the previous section (Russell-Bennett, Previte and Zainuddin, 2009). The notion of experiential value is examined in the following section.

Experiential value relates to a good or service's perceived capacity to evoke an emotional response (feelings and affective states). Goods and services acquire emotional value when associated with 'specific feelings or when precipitating or perpetuating those feelings' (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991, p. 161). Therefore, the offering is consumed as an intrinsic 'end in itself' and self-orientated. Experiential value is described within the extant marketing literature as existing in several forms. For instance, sensory values consist of elements of an experience that appeal to the consumer's senses, such as the aesthetic or aroma found within a retail environment (Keng *et al.*, 2007). Alternatively, a firm may wish to capitalise on 'social-relational' value comprising interpersonal benefits. Epistemic value relates to ideas around curiosity, novelty and knowledge. A typical example may be the media, which is consumed in various forms. Many organisations are also keen to create what has been described by scholars as 'emotional value' (see for instance, Barlow and Maul, 2000; Oriade and Schofield, 2019; Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, Kadic-Maglajlic and Miocevic, 2020). This can be described as what is gained through positive emotions such as enjoyment, fun or a sense of adventure (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008). This shows an increasing awareness and appreciation within marketing practice from the different forms that value can take and be utilised for competitive advantage. In addition, there is a need for procedures to manage the complex processes around the management and creation of those forms. The symbolic interpretation of value is examined in the following paragraph.

Symbolic value can be understood as the association or attachment of a good or service to some form of psychological meaning (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008). According to the marketing literature, symbolic value may be realised within goods and services from several sources (Hammerl *et al.*, 2016). For instance, symbolism may relate to an individual's self-identity. Many goods have associations that consumers feel reflect themselves, such as the social group

they belong to. This is described as 'social value' and can motivate consumers' consumption choices (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008). Accordingly, social value has been widely explored in relation to the consumption of luxury goods (Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Young, Nunes and Drèze, 2010). This indicates its recognised importance in the context of luxury goods, but this concept is overlooked in other areas. Symbolic value has also been discussed in terms of 'spirituality' in consumption, which Holbrook (2005) describes as the relationship with oneself and is considered by marketing scholars under the concept of 'self-worth' (Smith and Colgate, 2007). Lastly, 'conditional meaning' in the context of symbolic value relates to symbolism, which is only realised during socio-cultural events and traditions such as giving gifts during cultural holidays (Bourdieu, 1985). Social value is, therefore, extrinsically motivated and focused on facilitation to influence others or gain self-recognition (Russell-Bennett, Previte and Zainuddin, 2009). Further understanding of the processes through which social value is created and consumed, particularly within the various niche contexts of contemporary marketing, is required. A final key dimension to consider is sacrifice value, this is explored below.

Within the marketing literature, value is considered in terms of maximising perceived benefits and minimising perceived sacrifice (Kuzgun and Asugman, 2015). 'Sacrifice value' is concerned primarily with the 'costs' of acquiring the benefit rather than the benefits themselves (Shukla, 2011). Firms seeking to compete within this value dimension focus their efforts on offerings that reduce the perceived sacrifices. Naturally, this involves the economic costs associated with an exchange, such as the purchase price, running costs, or switching from an alternative. Examples include the budget sectors of many industries, but they are particularly prevalent in retail, aviation, and hospitality (Carpenter, 2007). However, sacrifice value may also be realised through 'psychological-relational costs' such as convenience or the avoidance of cognitive difficulty, expensive search or attachment costs (Smith and Colgate, 2007). Finally, from the sacrifice cost perspective, firms may create propositions that manage or reduce the risk that the consumer may perceive as being attached to the good or service (Smith and Colgate, 2007). This may be financial or personal risks and is typically addressed through guarantees or warranties. However, it may also relate to the firm's reputation as being fair or offering above what is required by law in company policy. The four critical dimensions addressed in the above pages demonstrate the complexity surrounding the conceptualisation of this construct and fragmented literature. Value can consequently be understood from one of several different perspectives. Indeed, the following pages will demonstrate that studies in this area should consider the multiple and phenomenological nature of value.



**Table 3. 3** Typology of Value

	<b>Extrinsic</b>	<b>Intrinsic</b>
<b>Self-orientated</b>	Economic (Functional) Value	Hedonic (Emotional) Value
<b>Other-orientated</b>	Social Value	Altruistic Value

*Adapted from Holbrook (2006, p. 715)*

Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) suggest multidimensionality to perceived value, postulating that the consumer can be influenced by one or more dimensions of value when making a consumption decision, identifying that the concept of value is complex and contested. Holbrook (2006) develops this further by conceptualising value typologies, creating four categories to which the dimensions belong: extrinsic, intrinsic, self-orientated and other-orientated. Similar to the dimensions explored above, Holbrook's (2006) typologies of value (Table 3.3) relate in some respects to the previously identified. This highlights a recurrent issue within the value literature, as some terms are used interchangeably. Extrinsic value is where a product serves instrumentally or functionally as a 'means to an end'. Intrinsic value 'is appreciated for its own sake as a self-justifying end-in-itself' (Holbrook, 2006, p. 715). Holbrook (2006) conceptualises value to be either self-orientated or other-orientated, being of benefit to the consumers themselves or other actors (because of how they respond to it or under the effect it has on them) (Holbrook, 2006, p. 715). This again shows that value is a complex and multifaceted idea which has been explored from numerous perspectives. In the following section, conceptions of value within the marketing domain are explored, ultimately leading to the theoretical lens this study has taken.

### 3.3.2.2 Value in Marketing

Vale has been considered from several aspects within the marketing literature, typically routed in conceptualisations inherited from economic and managerial perspectives of exchange, use and utility as outlined in the previous sections (Ng and Smith, 2012). To traditional economic theorists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx, value is an intrinsic part of the good, representing the sum of inputs (such as labour and materials) by the firm (Woodall, 2003). Within the marketing discourse, conceptualisations of value are now primarily routed in notions of 'perceived value' (see Ravald and Grönroos, 1996; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Gallarza, Gil-Saura and Holbrook, 2008; Lusch and Vargo, 2014; Itani and Loureiro, 2019). The perceived value consists of actors' understanding of physical, service and technical attributes concerning goods use, indicators of quality and price (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996). Whilst perception is emblematic of marketing conceptualisations of value, the way it is created differs between scholars. The following sections identify four key ways marketing discourse has considered the value concept: value-in-exchange, value-in-context, value-in-behaviour, and value-in-use.

## *Value-in-exchange*

The concept of value was first discussed within marketing through the value-in-exchange perspective (Eggert *et al.*, 2018). Value-in-exchange is directly taken from economic theory, postulating that value is identified by a rational assessment of the sacrifices incurred against benefits gained in any given transaction (Chesbrough, Lettl and Ritter, 2018). In other words, the perceived benefits at a time of 'exchange', the 'exchange' has received a large amount of attention in marketing and can be understood as trading goods, services and resources between two or more parties (Grönroos, 2008). Though popularly understood as the transaction of goods and services for money, the exchange can also be symbolic, involving tangible and intangible elements such as brands (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008). This perspective of value suggests that the firm's priority is to create 'value offerings' which provide the most favourable perception of benefits against sacrifices in the marketplace (Skålén *et al.*, 2015).

Value-in-exchange remains a popular conceptualisation in marketing practice (Eggert *et al.*, 2018). However, several criticisms of the value-in-exchange perspective have emerged within the marketing discourse. First, emphasis on exchange suggests that value is created independently and consumed by the involved actors. Sheth and Uslay (2007) argue that this creates a firm-centric sense of a 'producer to consumer' transition of value. This limiting aspect largely ignores the roles of other actors as value is made and used. Second, the perspective overlooks longer-term benefits, which may be valuable in many consumption circumstances (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Consequently, the exchange perspective is unsuitable for understanding the experiential aspects of transactions (Eggert *et al.*, 2018). Finally, the perspective oversimplifies the nature of transactions, Zafirovski and Levine (1999) argue that even the most basic exchanges relate to broader and more complex socio-economic factors than what is acknowledged within value-in-exchange. From these critiques, new conceptualisations of value have been formed. In the following sections, these interpretations are explored in relation to this research.

## *Value-in-use*

The marketing literature has conceptualised 'value-in-use' to address the weaknesses of the exchange perspective outlined above. Value-in-use can be defined as 'a consumer's outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service' (Macdonald *et al.*, 2011, p. 671). The use perspective contrasts the 'output orientation' of value-in-exchange with a 'process orientated' view, which seeks to understand the experiential aspects of value (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). The concept of value-in-use purports that perceived value is not realised in the exchange itself but in use of a good or service (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Thereby stating that consumption

experience is critical to understanding the creation of value (Eggert *et al.*, 2018). Service constitutes the knowledge, skills and resources which form the basis of what is exchanged to create value (Grönroos, 2008). Under this perspective, consumers (actors) are considered 'resource integrators', seeking to create value for themselves and others (Baron and Harris, 2008). This infers that marketing has evolved to consider the consumption and creation of value a simultaneous process involving a network of actors. Furthermore, the concept understands value creation as a continuous process in which actors jointly integrate resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

As with the exchange perspective, scholars have argued that value-in-use does not go far enough in offering a holistic view of the complexity of the value concept (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014). First, it overlooks the complex interactions between actors in exchanges (Chandler and Vargo, 2011), emphasising the individual. Therefore, it fails to recognise the full range of actors active in creating value and surrounding the creation and consumption of value. Second, the perspective reveals little about the role of pro-social behaviours of the actors involved. This shows that a greater understanding is required of the complex creation and consumption of value and the involvement of multiple individually motivated actors. The following section identifies a further conceptualisation of value which address the above issues.

### *Value-in-context*

The limitations identified in the previous section are partially addressed by the extension of value-in-context, which seeks to understand the role of context in exchange and the effect on actors coming together to create value (Quero, Ventura and Kelleher, 2017). Value-in-context has been described as a 'system perspective' of value creation, encompassing an understanding of the complexity of interactions between actors (Löbler and Hahn, 2013). This conceptualisation also recognises that exchanges often involve various actors integrating resources at several levels (Gummesson and Mele, 2010). Chandler and Vargo (2011) propose three levels of context – micro, meso, and macro. The micro-context frames the exchange between individual actors in 'dyadic' exchanges. This level can be understood as service-for-service transactions between actors utilising their resources and competencies to benefit each other. The meso-context relates to indirect service-for-service exchanges between dyads. Here, the unit of analysis is triads, as the two actors serve one another through a third actor. The macro-context frames exchange amongst triads, conceptualising 'synergies of multiple simultaneous direct and indirect service-for-service exchanges that enable actors to serve in a particular context' (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, p. 44). Therefore, the macro-level context in the realisation of value is understood through complex networks. Chandler and Vargo (2011) additionally conceptualise a 'metalayer' of context, above all three levels, which evolve and change over time. Though value-in-context offers a valuable extension to our understanding of

value, it does not offer insight into the nature of the behaviours actors exhibit when creating perceived value (Butler *et al.*, 2016).

### *Value-in-behaviour*

In the discussion of the exchange, use, and context perspectives of perceived value, it has been identified that little attention has been given to the pro-social behaviours that actors enact during the creation of value. This has been a limitation for scholars understanding value creation within the emerging discourse of social marketing and new media (Zainuddin and Gordon, 2020). From this weakness, a further 'extension' to the conceptualisation of perceived value has emerged within the marketing literature described as 'value-in-behaviour' (French and Gordon, 2015). Bulter *et al.* (2016, p. 149) state the value-in-behaviour perspective conceptualises that 'consumers can perceive value that is, or is not, realised through the performance of behaviour. Here, the orientation of consumer value perceptions is not towards exchanging goods or services or using and experiencing them but towards performing pro-social behaviours. Pro-social behaviour can be defined as action which is intended to benefit others or society or as action which complies with socially accepted norms and routines (Elisenberg and Beilin, 2014). Value-in-behaviour is considered as holistic behavioural approach which enriches understanding of perceived value (Zainuddin, Dent and Tam, 2017).

### 3.3.2.3 Value in Political Science

This literature review has primarily discussed the notion of value from a marketing perspective. This section explores the same idea within the field of political science. The concept of value in political science is multi-faceted and is centred upon the notion of 'values' rather than 'value'. Values are intrinsic to human societies and serve as guiding principles that shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in the political arena (Ryan, 2014). This section aims to provide a detailed exploration of the various aspects of value in political science, examining its significance, sources, and implications within different contexts. The significance of values in political science underpins the norms and principles upon which political systems are built (Margalit and Shayo, 2021). In democratic societies, values such as freedom, equality, and justice are considered foundational, providing the basis for formulating laws and policies. These values reflect the aspirations of the populace and serve as benchmarks for evaluating the legitimacy and effectiveness of political institutions (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2022). Moreover, values influence political behaviour at both individual and collective levels. They shape citizens' political preferences, influencing their voting behaviour, party affiliation, and participation in political activities. Similarly, values inform the decisions of political leaders and policymakers, guiding their policy choices and priorities. Thus, understanding the values

held by various actors is essential for comprehending the dynamics of political processes and outcomes (Surridge, 2020).

The origins of values in political science are diverse and multifaceted, stemming from a combination of cultural, historical, ideological, and socioeconomic factors. Cultural values, shaped by traditions, customs, and shared beliefs within a society, often significantly influence political attitudes and behaviours (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2022). For instance, individualism in Western societies contrasts with the emphasis on collectivism in many Eastern cultures, leading to different governance and social organisation approaches. Historical experiences also form values, as societies learn from past events and struggles. For example, the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and other forms of oppression has profoundly influenced the value placed on human rights and social justice in many countries (Hofstede, 2011). Ideological values play a crucial role in shaping political discourse and policymaking, as different ideological perspectives offer competing visions of the state's role, the distribution of resources, and the nature of social order. Whether grounded in liberalism, conservatism, socialism, or other ideologies, these values inform political and policy debates. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors such as class, race, and gender intersect with values, shaping individuals' perceptions of their interests and identities. For instance, economic inequality can lead to prioritising values related to economic justice and redistribution among marginalised groups (Rohan and Zanna, 2001).

The prevalence of diverse values in political science has several important implications for the study and practice of politics. Firstly, values serve as lenses through which political phenomena are interpreted and evaluated. Scholars and analysts bring value orientations to their research, influencing the questions they ask, their methods, and their conclusions (Rohan and Zanna, 2001). Thus, awareness of one's values and biases is critical for maintaining objectivity and rigour in political analysis. Secondly, clashes between conflicting values often lie at the heart of political controversies and conflicts. Debates over issues such as abortion, immigration, and environmental regulation reflect deep-seated value differences among individuals and groups. These value conflicts can impede consensus-building and policymaking, leading to polarisation and gridlock in political processes. Moreover, values shape the trajectory of political change by influencing the mobilisation of social movements, the formation of political alliances, and the adoption of policy reforms. For instance, the civil rights movement in the United States was driven by values of equality and justice, leading to significant legislative and social changes.

In conclusion, the notion of value within the political science context revolves around a range of 'values' which are complex and affect the political process differently from marketing contexts. This thesis will focus on marketing conceptualisations of value.

### 3.3.3 The Co-creation of Value

As the earlier section identified, creating value for the customer is the foremost priority of any business. Through the economic perspective and prevalent understanding of the value being realised in exchange, the firm was traditionally considered the sole agent in creating value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). More recently, however, a significant body of work has acknowledged the roles of several other actors coming together, both directly and indirectly, to 'co-create' value (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 2016; Eggert *et al.*, 2018; Ranjan and Read, 2019; Manser Payne, Peltier and Barger, 2021). The idea of co-created value has risen to prominence facilitated by the emergence of new technology and what has been termed 'Web 2.0', with communication between the firm and its customers becoming greatly more interactive in recent times (Bell and Loane, 2010). This section will explore the notion of value co-creation as it has been conceptualised in the marketing literature.

Although co-creation has become a significant term in marketing discussion (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019a; Ranjan and Read, 2019), it is frequently used broadly without explanation of its theoretical underpinnings (see for instance Grover and Kohli, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2014; Eaton *et al.*, 2015). This is problematic as not all work referring to co-creation is referring to the same concept (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018) identify the term 'co-creation' is associated with wide ranging concepts, including, the design and development of new products, collaboration of users and innovators, customisation of products, prosumption, co-production, communities and networks, retailing, knowledge and learning, open business models, service exchange and service systems. All of the broad interpretations of the co-creation concept lack theoretical underpinning and are consequently difficult to build upon. In part, this is a misuse of an emerging conceptualisation used by authors which are interested in loosely connected ideas of collaboration. This study is concerned with value co-creation as it benefits from a wide academic conceptual underpinning and a clear call for further research. Consequently, this section explores the extant academic conceptualisations, models and frameworks of the 'value co-creation' concept.

#### *Distinguishing Value Co-creation from Co-production and Collaboration*

Earlier papers in this field explored notions of the role of the customer as 'co-producer' rather than co-creator. These papers focus on the simple involvement of those outside the firm in its internal processes. However, this is distinct from the more limited perspective of 'prosumption', terminology derived from the amalgamation of production and consumption, of which co-production is sometimes confused (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). One early definition for instance (Wikström, 1996, p. 10) defines co-production as 'buyer-seller social interaction and adaptability to attain further value'. This view suggests a more complex

conceptualisation than consumers' simple involvement in production elements. Instead, it intimates a longer-term relationship with an expectation of benefits for those involved. Furthermore, the definition identifies the role of interaction between the firm and the customer, offering an explanation of how value is created. Wikström (1996, pp. 6–7) further states that 'the interaction between the parties should generate more value than a traditional transaction process, during which seller and buyer meet briefly, exchange finished products and services and then go their separate ways'. Long-term interactions are a vital theme in the definitions of co-production and value co-creation. This illustrates a changing prevailing logic of the collective value creation, conceptualising the process-orientated understanding. Ramírez (1999) suggests that notions of co-production have existed for several decades but that it is through the emergent technologies at the turn of the century that they can be more fully realised, intimating a change in business logic. This relates that this is a relatively modern phenomenon as communication technologies of the 2000s largely underpin it.

The co-production concept has been critiqued in some quarters for the focus it places on the idea of production rather than creation, offering a limited view which is often misunderstood as the transfer of work by the firm to the customer (Etggar, 2008; Ostrom *et al.*, 2010; Cova, Dalli and Zwick, 2011). The following section introduces the development of value co-creation in further detail.

### *Evolving Academic Definition of Value Co-creation*

In table 3.4, Prahalad and Ramasamy (2004) offer a seminal conceptualisation of 'value co-creation'. This definition is helpful as it does not only offer an explanation of the author's understanding of what value co-creation is but goes further, offering a critique of elements which are commonly mistaken for value co-creation. This provides clarity for the terminology. Prahalad and Ramasamy (2004) consider value co-creation to involve the joint creation of value between the firm and consumers in which the customer can co-construct their service experience to suit themselves. Prahalad and Ramasamy (2004) place emphasis on the role of dialogue and experience. Whilst earlier papers considering the conceptual domain of co-production focus only on the roles of the firm and consumer, value co-creation focuses upon the exchanges and experiences beyond those actors (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

**Table 3. 4** What Co-Creation is (and is not)

What Co-Creation Is Not	What Co-Creation Is
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer focus</li> <li>• Customer is king or customer is always right</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-Creation is about joint creation of value by the company and the customer. It is not the firm trying to please the customer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering good customer service or pampering the customer with lavish customer service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit her context</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass customisation of offerings that suit the industry's supply chain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint problem definition and problem solving</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer of activities from the firm to the customer as in self-service</li> <li>• Customer as product manager or co-designing products and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an experience environment in which customers can have active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences; product may be the same but customers can construct different experiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product variety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience variety</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segment of one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of one</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meticulous Market Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing the business as customers do in real time</li> <li>• Continuous dialogue</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staging experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-constructing personalized experience</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand-innovation for new products and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovating experience environments for new co-creation experiences</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)*

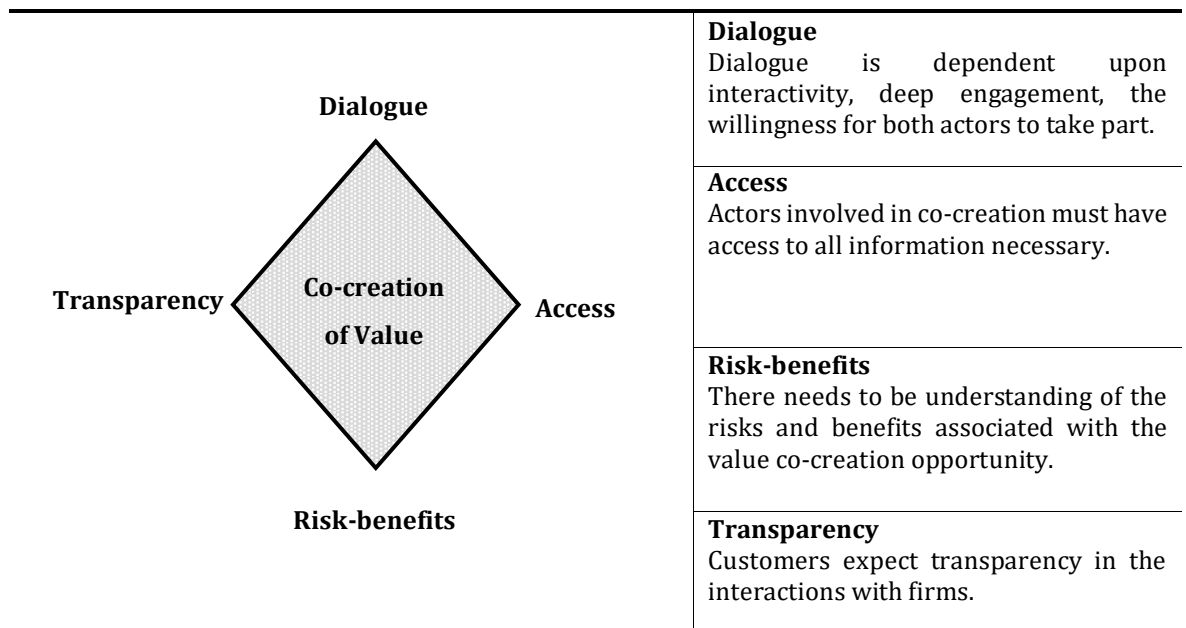
Since the seminal work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy in (2004), a growing body of academic work has sought to extend and update the definition of value co-creation. Alves *et al.* (2016a, p. 1632) identify that the value co-creation concept has been explored from four distinctive approaches and disciplines. These are: (1) co-creation's logic as a driver of business innovation; (2) the development of new products and services; (3) the experience of consumers in co-creation processes; and (4) consumers' experiences of brands. This identifies that value co-creation, even with strengthening theoretical underpinning, continues to be utilised in various forms and that the focus of this thesis, the experience of brands, is a significant area.

### *Evolving Conceptualisations of Value Co-creation Processes: From the Firm to Actor Engagement in Networks (Ecosystems)*

Whilst the academic definition of value co-creation is relatively established, conceptualisation of its processes and mechanisms continues to develop. Several conceptual models have been created within the academic discourse to explain the co-creation of value, facilitators, inhibitors, and other aspects of this process. Understanding the value co-creation models will help inform conceptualisation within the political brand context for this thesis. This section of the chapter considers the evolution of leading conceptualisations of value co-creation processes. The first model this section considers is the DART model, created by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and shown in Figure 3.2 below.



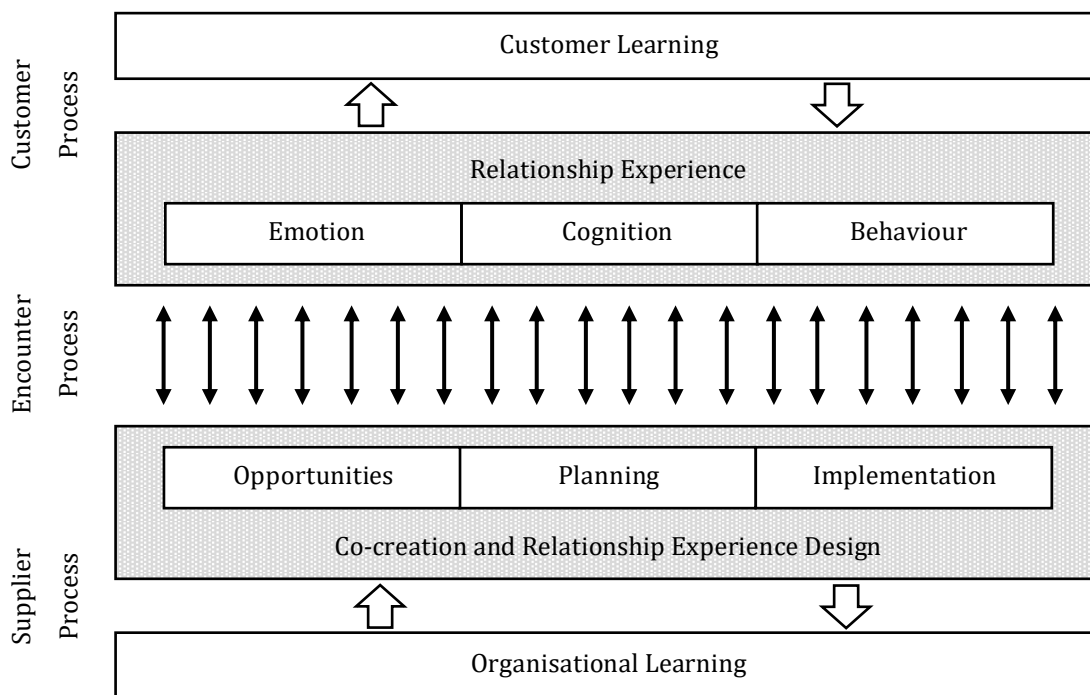
**Figure 3. 2** Firm-orientated Value Co-creation: The DART Model



*Adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)*

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 9) describe as the ‘building blocks of interaction’ consisting of Dialogue, Access, Risk-Benefits and Transparency. The model theorises that the market can be viewed as the platform of dialogue, representing the engagement and interactivity of actors. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) put forward that value co-creation is dependent upon free access to the production process information which can be used and disseminated by the customer. Where in the past much information was protected by the firm, the DART model suggests that transparency of information is necessary to promote the dialog. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that the provision of dialog, access, and transparency allows the customer to access personal risk benefits individually. The DART model can be considered a firm-centric conceptualisation which still considers the management process is as the core driver of co-created value. A development of value co-creation is reflected in a model developed by Payne et al. (2009) (Table 3.3), which opens conceptualisation to processes between two entities, particularly the firm and its customer.

**Figure 3. 3** Dyadic Conceptual Framework for Value Co-creation



*Adapted from Payne et al. (2009)*

Payne et al. (2009) present a process-based conceptual framework that seeks to identify the processes of value co-creation explicitly within the context of the service-dominant logic, discussed in 3.3.1. Figure 3.3 shows the three major components. First, customer value-creating processes are described as the processes, resources, and practices customers use to manage their activities. Second, supplier value-creating processes are similarly considered processes, resources, and practices that the supplier uses to manage its business and relationships with the various other stakeholders. Third, the encounter process, which are the processes and practices of interaction and exchange within customer and supplier relationships. The encounter process is considered central to the successful development of co-creation opportunities. Little within the extant literature conceptualises value co-creation within the growing number of specific or unique marketing concepts, such as political branding.

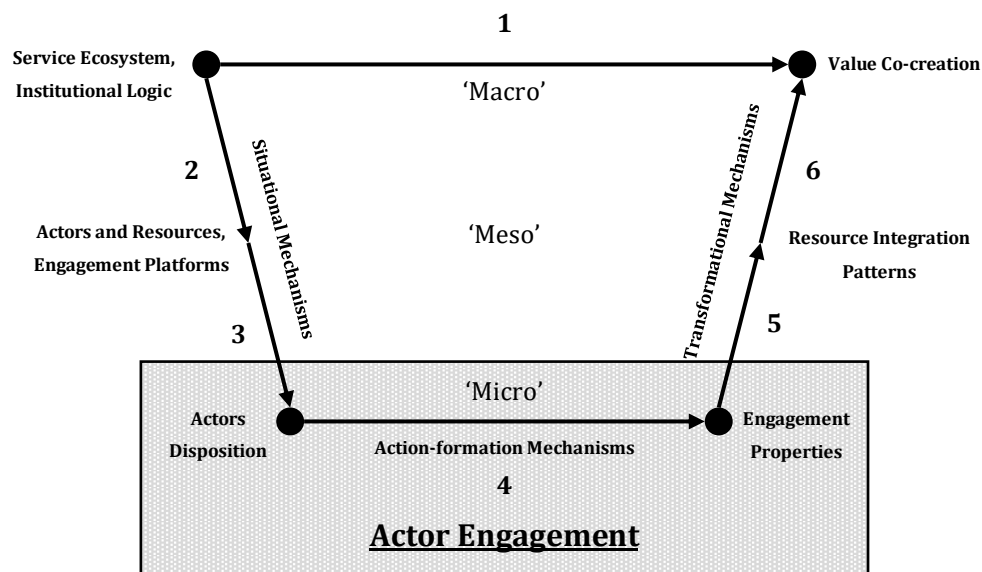
Payne et al. (2009) state that the amount of information, knowledge and skill are central to the customer value-creation process, suggesting that the firm can increase competitiveness by integrating the available resources. The framework (table 3.3) shows two key elements of the customer value-creation process, relationship experience and customer learning. The former is made up collectively of emotion, cognition, and behaviour, which govern the approach customers take as actors within the co-creation process. The aspects of the relationship

experience process form the basis of customer learning. On the other hand, the supplier value-creating process consists of co-creation, relationship experience design and organisational learning. Payne et al. (2009) posit that co-creation and relationship experience design consist of co-creation opportunities, planning and implementation. Co-creation opportunities can be provided through technological advancement, industry changes, and changes in customers' preferences and lifestyles. Planning within the framework refers to understanding and supporting the value co-creation process. Implementation and metrics refer to the supplier's need to deliver on the planned co-creation opportunities and measure their effectiveness. Similarly to customer learning, the suppliers' experience of the various co-creation and relationship experience design elements inform future actions. The encounter process, illustrated within Payne et al.'s (2009) conceptual framework, is all two-way interactions and transactions between the organisation and customer within the co-creation process.

Whilst providing further grounding for conceptual understanding of value co-creation, exploration of dyadic relationships (predominantly from the perspective of the firm-to-consumer) limits understanding of value co-creation to a customer-to-firm orientated process. In more recent years, the literature has evolved to consider a multitude of different actors involved within the value co-creation processes. Furthermore, contemporary scholars have sought to address the various levels of factors at which aggregate affects these processes. Storbacka et al. (2016) reflect that whilst significant attention is lent to understanding the macro aspects of value co-creation, firm-to-consumer less is understood of micro factors and the role and nature of actor engagement. Exploring multiple levels of value co-creation engagement lends depth to the conceptual understanding of the process (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Figure 3.4 shows the conceptualisation by Storbacka et al. (2016) of understanding value co-creation through actor engagement. The authors argue that focusing on firm-orientated aspects, such as the ones outlined above, limits understanding within value co-creation research. The Storbacka model conceptualises a multi-level understanding (macro, micro and meso) of value co-creation orientated upon actor engagement.

**Figure 3. 4** Actor Engagement-orientated Conceptualisation of Value Co-creation



*Adapted from Storbacka et al. (2016)*

Storbacka et al.'s (2016) model is divided into three mechanisms: situational; action-formation and transformational. Situational mechanisms exist at the 'macro', 'meso' and 'micro' levels and contribute to the conditions in which actor engagement can participate in the co-creation of value. Within this conceptualisation, the authors introduce the notion of institutional logic and service ecosystems as situational mechanisms. These concepts are explored in detail within the following section but can be understood as factors influencing the conditions of engagement. These inform the actors, resources, and engagement platforms. Storbacka et al. (2016, p. 3011) identify engagement platforms as the connecting environments that allow interfaces, processes, and actors to engage with other actors, facilitating actors to engage in resource integration.

The identified situational mechanisms of the Storbacka (2016) model create the conditions for action-formation. The action formation mechanisms exist purely at the micro level. The first is actor disposition. Dispositions can be understood as an actors ability to appropriate, reproduce, or innovate upon connections in response to the situation (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016). Brodie et al. (2019b) identify that actor disposition is influenced by previous experiences, access to engagement platforms, and the network of actors surrounding them. Brodie et al. (2019b, p. 11) define actor engagement (AE) as a 'dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system'.

**Table 3. 5 Updated Propositions of Actor Engagement**

	<b>Original Foundational Premise</b>	<b>New Fundamental Proposition</b>	<b>Description</b>
FP <sub>1</sub>	CE reflects a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships.	AE dispositions occur through connections with other actors that lead to resource contributions beyond what is elementary to the transactional exchange.	Dispositions reflect an actor's readiness to invest resources in connections with other actors. Actors include individuals, groups, organisations, and technologies. Connections contribute to framing an actor's disposition while simultaneously representing the context for engagement. Each actor provides a set of possible dispositions for engagement, manifesting in resource contributions and generating a set of new connections that shape the networks the actor and other actors inhabit.
FP <sub>2</sub>	CE states occur within a dynamic, iterative process of service relationships that co-creates value	AE emerges through a dynamic, iterative process, where its antecedents and consequences affect actors' dispositions and network connections.	The dynamic and iterative nature of engagement in service relationships is supported by empirical research. The interactive character of AE means that its consequences reach beyond the focal actor. AE creates benefits for multiple actors in the service ecosystem and explains how networks grow based on new connections and intensified connectedness.
FP <sub>3</sub>	CE plays a central role within a nomological network of service relationships.	AE is a multidimensional concept, subject to the interplay of dispositions, and/or behaviours and the level of connectedness among actors.	AE is viewed as a multidimensional concept emphasizing emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions and further including connectedness. Connectedness as a new property of AE explicitly recognizes that the interaction between actors is affected by further relationships with other actors within the service ecosystem. Connectedness explains how engagement dyads interconnect to form overall network structures.
FP <sub>4</sub>	CE is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions.	AE occurs within a specific set of institutional contexts, generating differing AE intensities and valence over time.	AE is influenced by the institutional context of that service ecosystem. As actors engage, the institutional arrangements are impacted and evolve, subsequently influencing future engagement; thus highlighting the dynamic nature of AE. An actor's institutional context provides

			norms and values that affect actor dispositions, explaining the different intensities and valence of AE across contexts.
FP <sub>5</sub>	CE occurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing engagement levels	AE is coordinated through shared practices that occur within engagement platforms.	AE practices are characterized by the routinized, habitual, and/or self-regulated behaviours actors employ to work with and/or around other actors in seeking to meet their needs. Engagement platforms, i.e. physical or virtual touch points designed to provide structural support for resource investments, facilitate the development of shared engagement practices

*Adapted from Brodie et al. (2011, p. 258) and Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola. (2019, pp. 8–12)*

In table 3.5, Brodie et al. (2011) establish five fundamental propositions of actor engagement, evolved from the author's earlier conceptualisation of 'customer engagement'. The evolution from customer to actor engagement reflects a new conceptual routing within institutional theory and service-dominant logic. A fragmented body of literature represents the notion of actor engagement as the foundation of value co-creation. The final aspect of action formation mechanisms to consider within the Storbacka model is 'engagement properties'. Storbacka *et al.* (2016) identify that these properties have been conceptualised in many different forms of actor engagement. Van Doorne et al. (2010) identify five dimensions of customer engagement behaviour: valence; form; scope; nature of impact; and customer goals. Verhoef *et al.* (2010) consider the antecedents, impediments, and firm consequences as central engagement properties. Engagement properties of also been explored from behavioural perspectives (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Verleye, Gemmel and Rangarajan, 2014). The perspectives of engagement in value co-creation is further explored in later sections.

The final mechanisms Storbacka et al. (2016) identified are 'transformational'. These mechanisms exist at all levels (micro, meso, and macro) and constitute the procedures between actor engagement, resource integration, and the ultimate co-creation of value. Resource integration patterns can be understood as interactions between actors, engagement platforms, actor dispositions, and engagement properties. Resource integration is the culmination of the relationship between actors' networks and the resources they access (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016).

While understanding value co-creation processes has evolved from firm-orientated to firm-to-consumer-orientated and then again to service ecosystems, much remains to be understood. Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola (2019a) identify four limitations of the extant literature. Firstly, they identify a need to understand a broader range of actor types and dispositions. Second, there is a need to understand further how engagement in service ecosystems and value co-creation can emerge across interrelated network structures. Third, there is a need for the use

of different theoretical perspectives to understand engagement properties further. Finally, different research methodologies are needed in this field. It is evident from the literature that the co-creation of value within service ecosystems is complex, multifaceted, and presently under-explored. Storbacka et al.'s conceptual model has extended what is known of varying levels the value co-creation process. However, it does not particularly identify co-created value or forms it might take. To this end, it does not adequately facilitate an understanding of non-commercial or non-traditional contexts. Furthermore, the model does not fully answer two key points: (1) what causes an actor to engage? and (2) what do actors hope to gain from engagement? (Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010).

### *The Nature of Interaction and Engagement: The Ecosystem Perspective*

The increasing focus on actor engagement as the central basis through which value is co-created introduces the importance of actor networks. These networks have been conceptualised as 'ecosystems', and literature explores the symbiotic relationships of two or more actors which make up a co-creative network. Vargo and Lusch (2016, pp. 10–11) define these ecosystems as 'relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange'. Simply put, like-minded individuals come together to exchange services and utilise available resources for their own benefit and that of each other. While a significant perspective understanding of actor networks or ecosystems remains an emergent concept within value co-creation literature. With this emerging concept, broader theoretical understandings can be related to the rules and structures of these informal networks in institutional theory. The idea of institutional theory is explored in the following section.

#### 3.3.3.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is one of the most established, widely used and prominent approaches to understanding organisations (Tolbert, 2013). A significant body of work under the header of institutional theory explores the notion of social norms and shared expectations as defining elements of an organisation's structure, actions and outcomes (Scott, 2004; Greenwood *et al.*, 2008; Suddaby, 2010). This section will review institutional theory and its relevance to service-dominant logic.

The theory was brought to management studies through seminal papers by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) from earlier conceptualisations in sociology. The thought of institutions commonly derives from rejection of classical economic theory, particularly the understanding of agency in individuals to act with complete information and full rationality. Powell and DiMaggio (1983) write:

'New approaches share a scepticism toward rational-actor models of organisation, and each views institutionalisation as a state-dependent process that makes organisations less instrumentally rational by limiting the options they can pursue' (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991, p. 12)

Human cognition is considered, in reality, to be far more limited than the maximised perspective of neo-classical economic conceptualisations. It is posited that institutions facilitate 'parsimonious' rationality, reducing the need to engage independently (cognitive shortcuts) (Simon, 1978). That is to say, individuals do not act rationally to maximise efficiencies individually but reduce the requirement to consider the course of action by complying with the typical actions of the groups to which they belong. This suggests that individuals form 'institutions' to limit the degree of autonomy they exercise.

Some confusion exists as to what marks the difference between institutions and organisations. The chief difference between them is that an organisation represents a 'process' defined by clear aims and designated roles for its members. Furthermore, those actors who interact or exist within it are conscious of its existence (Scott, 2008). To this end, organisations are formalised, and their existence and structure are codified. An example of this would be a political party, with a recognised existence, defined leader and staffers. On the other hand, institutions constitute a 'natural product', which can be described as the consequence of social needs (Selznick, 1984). Thus, institutions are more ambiguous and lack clear actor roles and identifiable boundaries. An example of an institution may be a sub-group associated with a political party that does not have official recognition, leader or other roles. North (1990) considers institutions as the 'rules of the game' and organisations as the 'players'. Ultimately, there are no universally accepted parameters for analysis of what defines an institution instead of an organisation, even though this is required. Selznick (1984, p. 5) explains:

'This distinction is a matter of analysis, not of direct description. It does not mean that any given enterprise must be either one or the other. While an extreme case may closely approach either an "ideal" organisation or an "ideal" institution, most living associations resist so easy a classification. They are complex mixtures of both designed and responsive behaviour'

Institutions take many forms, Vargo and Lusch (2016, p. 11) consider formal codified laws, informal social norms, conventions or any other routinised rubric that provides a shortcut to cognition, communication, and judgment to constitute an institution. This indicates that instructions can be found around any group of actors to some degree.



Vargo and Lusch (2016) state that early conceptualisations of the service-dominant logic were limited to micro-level analysis, focusing primarily on the relationship between the firm and the customer. However, a growing range of literature has now 'zoomed out' on the subject to develop a more holistic understanding of the SDL perspective, including through networks. Before Vargo and Lusch (2016) paper 'Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic', however, institutional theory had not been widely discussed or applied in the marketing discourse (Yang and Su, 2014). This is perhaps surprising given the popularity of conceptualising an evolved logic from a good-centred to service-centred perspective in marketing. Adopting the first, sixth, ninth, tenth and eleventh foundational principles identified in Table 3.1 (axiom one - five) a theoretical framework of value co-creation in service ecosystems has emerged (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). The institutional perspective is still represented only by a fragmented body of literature, which is true of this study's key focus, political branding. This is further explored within the following sections.

### 3.3.4 Value Co-creation Activities, Roles, and Interactions

The establishment of the concept of value, the co-creation of value, and the service-dominant logic (S-D Logic) serve as the foundational framework for understanding the significance of value co-creation activities in contemporary marketing environments (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). As the above section identified, within the context of S-D Logic, value is viewed as inherently co-created through interactions between consumers and service providers, emphasising the dynamic and collaborative nature of value-creation processes (Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019b). Value co-creation activities represent the operationalisation of this theoretical perspective, where businesses actively engage with their customers to produce value jointly throughout the product or service development process (Payne *et al.*, 2009). Drawing upon the principles of S-D Logic, value co-creation acknowledges the active role of consumers as co-creators of value, possessing unique knowledge, skills, and experiences that contribute to the value proposition (Saarijärvi, 2012). In practice, value co-creation activities encompass diverse collaborative initiatives and engagement platforms to facilitate dialogue, knowledge exchange, and innovation between businesses and consumers (Lee and Kim, 2018). These activities may take various forms, such as online communities, crowdsourcing platforms, participatory design workshops, or collaborative innovation initiatives, depending on the nature of the industry and the stakeholders' preferences (Saarijärvi, 2012).

Adopting value co-creation strategies has been increasingly recognised as a means to achieve mutual benefits for businesses and consumers. For businesses, value co-creation offers opportunities for greater customer engagement and loyalty (Cossío-Silva *et al.*, 2016). Companies can empower and value customers by involving them in innovation, leading to a positive attitude towards the brand. Moreover, customers' collective wisdom and creativity

can be harnessed to develop more innovative and customer-centric solutions, thus enabling businesses to gain a competitive advantage in the market (Ercsey, 2017). From a consumer standpoint, value co-creation provides a sense of ownership and satisfaction as individuals see their ideas and contributions reflected in the final product or service (Harwood and Garry, 2010). Consumers can co-design experiences that align more closely with their preferences and needs through a collaborative approach, leading to higher perceived value and customer satisfaction. These benefits can further strengthen the relationship between businesses and their customers, ultimately contributing to the business's long-term success.

The value co-creation process entails a complex interplay of actors who assume distinct roles that contribute to the collaborative process and shape the outcomes of their endeavours. These roles, characterised by varying levels of engagement and influence, encompass a diverse spectrum of responsibilities and contributions, reflecting the multiple perspectives and interests of the stakeholders involved (Woratschek, Horbel and Popp, 2020). To foster effective collaboration and maximise the synergistic potential of collective endeavours, it is pivotal to comprehend the roles that actors may adopt in value co-creation. Consumers are at the forefront of value co-creation, who emerge as active participants and co-creators of value (Palma, Trimi and Hong, 2019). Placed at the heart of the co-creation process, consumers bring forth their unique insights, preferences, and experiences, thereby shaping the contours of value propositions. As co-creators, consumers assume agency in articulating their needs, desires, and aspirations, driving the iterative refinement and adaptation of products and services to better align with evolving market demands (Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010).

Businesses and service providers are complementing the role of consumers, who serve as facilitators and enablers of value co-creation initiatives. Leveraging their resources, capabilities, and expertise, businesses orchestrate collaborative engagements that foster meaningful dialogue, knowledge exchange, and innovation (Palma, Trimi and Hong, 2019). By proactively engaging with consumers, businesses harness their actors' collective intelligence and creativity, catalysing the co-creation of value propositions that resonate deeply with customer needs and aspirations (Palma, Trimi and Hong, 2019). Within value co-creation, actors may adopt distinct roles that reflect their unique contributions and interests. For instance, some consumers may assume the role of innovators and early adopters, actively generating novel ideas, concepts, and solutions that push the boundaries of conventional thinking.

Conversely, other consumers may adopt the role of evaluators and critics, offering constructive feedback, insights, and suggestions to refine and enhance the value proposition. Through their discerning perspectives and critical appraisals, these stakeholders contribute to the iterative refinement and optimisation of products and services, ensuring that they resonate

authentically with the target audience (Guzel, Sezen and Alniacik, 2020). In addition to consumers, businesses may also engage external partners, collaborators, and experts who bring specialised knowledge, skills, and resources to the co-creation process. These actors, ranging from industry experts and academics to technology partners and creative agencies, enrich the collaborative ecosystem with diverse perspectives and capabilities, driving multidisciplinary approaches to value creation (Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019b).

Adopting value co-creation activities offers numerous benefits for businesses and consumers. For businesses, value co-creation facilitates greater customer engagement and loyalty, as consumers feel empowered and valued by actively participating in innovation (Blasco-Arcas *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, by tapping into their customers' collective wisdom and creativity, businesses can develop more innovative and customer-centric solutions, thus gaining a competitive edge in the marketplace (Ercsey, 2017). From a consumer perspective, value co-creation activities foster a sense of ownership and satisfaction as individuals see their ideas and contributions reflected in the final product or service. This collaborative approach also enables consumers to co-design experiences that align more closely with their preferences and needs, leading to higher perceived value and customer satisfaction (Harwood and Garry, 2010). Value co-creation interactions among stakeholders play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and outcomes of collaborative endeavours. Grounded in the principles of service-dominant logic (S-D Logic), value co-creation interactions underscore the dynamic and relational nature of value-creation processes, wherein value emerges through the collaborative efforts of consumers and service providers (Alves, Fernandes and Raposo, 2016b).

Crucially, behavioural aspects lie at the core of value co-creation interactions, encompassing stakeholders' attitudes, motivations, and actions as they engage in collaborative endeavours. Positive interactions are characterised by mutual respect, trust, and reciprocity, wherein stakeholders actively collaborate, share insights, and co-create value in alignment with shared goals and aspirations. These interactions foster meaningful dialogue, knowledge exchange, and innovation, driving the co-creation of value propositions that resonate deeply with consumer needs and preferences (Agrawal and Rahman, 2015). However, negative interactions may arise from misaligned expectations, power imbalances, or conflicts of interest, leading to stakeholder dissatisfaction and disengagement. Such interactions hinder the co-creation process, impeding the flow of ideas, insights, and creativity and undermining the potential for value creation. Addressing negative interactions requires proactive measures to foster open communication, transparency, and collaboration, mitigating potential conflicts and fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect (Ercsey, 2017).

Moreover, the nature of engagement platforms significantly influences value co-creation interactions, with online and offline platforms offering distinct advantages and challenges.

Online platforms provide a virtual space for stakeholders to connect, collaborate, and co-create value across geographical boundaries and time zones. These platforms leverage digital technologies to facilitate real-time communication, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, fostering inclusive and participatory engagement among diverse stakeholder groups (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018). On the other hand, offline engagement platforms offer opportunities for face-to-face interaction, dialogue, and co-creation in physical settings such as workshops, seminars, or co-design sessions. These platforms enable rich and immersive experiences, fostering more profound engagement, creativity, and stakeholder relationship-building. However, they may also pose logistical challenges, such as geographic constraints, resource limitations, and scheduling conflicts, which may hinder participation and collaboration (Pinho *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the critical role of interaction types in value co-creation, research on value co-creation typologies still needs to be addressed in the scholarly literature (Saha, Mani and Goyal, 2020). While existing studies offer valuable insights into the principles and theoretical frameworks underlying value co-creation, a notable gap exists in understanding the nuances of different interaction modalities and their implications for value-creation outcomes (Saha, Mani and Goyal, 2020). By addressing this gap, this thesis can contribute to developing evidence-based typologies that elucidate the complexities of collaborative engagement and inform the design and implementation of value co-creation initiatives.

#### 3.3.4.1 Summary

This section of the chapter has considered the first of the key disciplines to which this research is concerned, a service-dominant logic perspective of value co-creation by actor networks (or 'ecosystems'). The remainder of the chapter concerns the thesis's second discipline of concern, political branding and band communities.

### 3.3.5 The Brand Concept

#### 3.3.5.1 Conceptualisations of the Brand: An Evolving Logic

The brand concept has ancient origins and a myriad of interpretations both within and outside the academic discourse. Though now multifaceted, the term originates from the literal 'branding' of livestock to identify ownership, later, it was used figuratively to describe elements uniquely representative of something, leaving a lasting cognitive recall (Healey, 2008). The terminology became associated with makers' marks and signs used to represent product origins. However, contemporary use of the term goes well beyond these early conceptualisations of trade symbols. A wide array of definitions and associated constructs now populate business and marketing literature. The term brand is argued by some scholars to be

over-defined and often misused (Stern, 2006; Pereira, Correia and Schutz, 2012). This is an issue *among academics and practitioners*, with many brand 'experts' offering their own definition and perspective of 'the brand' (Kapferer, 2012). Differing definitions of the same concept are challenging for research-based within the area, this section is therefore introduced to critique the extant conceptualisations of branding.

The complexity of the brand concept makes it difficult to identify a general unifying definition. As Gabbott and Jevons (2009) state, the definition used within scholarly work often depends upon the perspective the researcher is interested in, which has fragmented conceptualisations and strongly linked them to research tracks. These perspectives can be broadly categorised to goods-focused, image-focused, relationship-focused and stakeholder-focused (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009). Table 3.6 summarises those key perspectives and provides an overview of how they compare based upon significant branding literature developments.

**Table 3. 6** Four Principal Brand Conceptualised Groupings

Perspectives:	Goods-focused	Image-focused	Relationship-focused	Stakeholder-focused
<b>Description:</b>	Brands consist of a name and visual elements that are determined, controlled, and legally owned by the firm. Identification and differentiation is the core purposes of the brand.	Brands are complex knowledge, opinions, associations and emotions held by consumers. Image-focused literature can be divided into functional and symbolic images.	The brand is the focal point of relationships. Relationship-focused literature is the first to consider the customer as an operant resource.	The brand is constructed through social interactions within networks. Stakeholder-focused perspective considers all networked actors operant resources.
<b>Time period (Brand Era):</b>	1900s-1930s	1930s-1990s	1990s-2000	2000-present
<b>Exemplar works:</b>	Copeland (1923) Low and Fullerton (1994) Strasser (1989)	Gardner and Levy (1955) Goffman (1959)	Aaker (1991) Kapferer (1992) de Chernatony (1999)	Muniz et al. (2005) Ballantyne and Aitken (2007) Merz et al. (2009)
<b>Focus of conceptualisation perspective:</b>	Firm Inputs	Firm Outputs	Process	Process
<b>Brand Descriptors (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998):</b>	Logo Legal Instrument Identity System	Value System Image Shorthand Device Identity System	Value System Image Shorthand Device Identity System Relationship Personality Evolving Entity	Identity System Evolving Entity
<b>Actor relationships:</b>	Dyadic	Dyadic	Dyadic	Triadic/ Ecosystem
<b>Actor as resources:</b>	Customers are Operand Resources	Customers are Operand Resources	Customers as Operant Resources	Customers as Operant Resources
<b>Sub-conceptualisations:</b>	Brands as Identifiers	Brands as Functional Images Brands as Symbolic Images	Brands as Knowledge Brands as Relationship Partners Brands as Promise	Brands as Dynamic and Social Processes

*Adapted from Merz, He and Vargo (2009)*

### *Goods-focused Conceptualisations*

The application of brand names to consumer goods began on a notable scale in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, largely facilitated by the industrialisation of Europe and the United States of America (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that academic work started conceptualising the brand (see Goodall, 1914; Butler, 1917; Copeland, 1923 as cited in Merz et al., 2009), as the marketing discipline grew significantly. These early scholarly works were orientated towards branding individual goods, emphasising the role of differentiation through individual and collective brand elements such as product name, logo and graphic work such as product packaging and advertisement (Merz et al., 2009). In 1948 the American Marketing Association (AMA) offered a commonly cited definition of a brand, which is archetypal of goods-orientation understanding (p. 205):

A 'name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers'.

Criticism of the goods-orientated conceptualisation is common among later writers. The AMA definition, and those like it, have been negatively evaluated on several levels. First, these conceptualisations are considered reductive, with consideration only given to the firm's inputs, focusing mainly on the benefit to the organisation itself (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). Emphasis is indirectly placed upon elements the firm can directly control and claim legal ownership over to create a competitive advantage, omitting the participation of customers (Balmer, 2012). Second, goods-orientated conceptualisations do not explicitly state that visual elements, of which the brand consists, can generate cogitations beyond what is literally denoted to the customer (Bastos and Levy, 2012). This postulates that the customer passively receives the firm's brand efforts. Therefore, goods-orientated conceptualisations closely reflect goods-dominant logic as described within earlier section (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and hence overlook the relevance of customers in determining the brand. On a similar basis, the goods-orientated view can be critiqued for an absence of considerations for any other actor outside the firm, including those other than customers. Conceptualisations centred upon goods could be summarised as an oversimplification of complex terminology that is internally resource-focused, reflective of a good-dominant, and discounting of external actors. Despite these weaknesses, and now being considered outdated by some scholars (Keller, 2009; Conejo and Wooliscroft, 2015), it is still widely used and identifies the core origins of brands as identifiers, thus representing a foundation for more complex understanding.

## *Image-focused Conceptualisations*

The stream of brand literature we consider 'image-focused' originates from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when the nature of increased competition and homogeneity between rival goods meant that differentiation by graphical elements became an ineffective and limited basis of understanding brand consumption. The image-centred perspective can be considered a significant evolutionary step away from conceptualisations informed by a goods-dominant logic as it moves beyond the brand as a denotive instrument. Image-based conceptualisations recognise that brands are more than visual elements acting as differentiators. They also include the complex range of knowledge, opinions, and emotions that customers attach to products (Bastos and Levy, 2012). Value-focused conceptualisations can be subcategorised into 'functional value-focus' and 'symbolic value-focus' (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009).

Organisations sought to communicate the functional benefits of products, in other words, the offerings' ability to satisfy the utilitarian needs of prospective customers (Pantin-Sohier, 2009). Therefore, the firm or product's brand image sought alignment to positive attributes such as quality or reliability (Willmott, 2010). de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) posit that emphasis on functional benefits acts as a 'risk reducer' within the psyche of the customer and a differentiator. However, the increasing heterogeneity of functional benefit claims amongst competing products made academic conceptualisations somewhat limiting (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009). In practice, brand managers and agencies sought to innovate the differentiating capabilities of the brand further. Gardner and Levy (1955, p. 35) considered the symbolic images of brands to be significant, stating that 'ideas, feelings and attitudes that consumers have about brands are crucial to them in picking and sticking to the ones that seem most appropriate'. Of particular note in the development of understanding of symbolic images is that the brand image may represent a consumer's present or idealised self-image or representative of a social group (Hermanda, Sumarwan and Tinaprillia, 2019). Symbolic images represent the first understanding of the brand, representing something independent of the market offering, and recognising value to be created beyond a good's physical attributes and capabilities (Bhat, 1986).

Whilst Merz, He and Vargo (2009) discuss the image-focused conceptualisation of brands as being prominent marketing thought from the 1950s to 1990s, inferring that it is a past conceptualisation, it has remained a widespread understanding of brands in academia and practice. For instance, Iglesias, Ind and Alfaro (2013) found that marketing managers considered image very highly in their conceptualisations of the brand and a similar study by Juntunen (2012) found the same was true of managers within early-phase businesses. This is particularly true of the notions of the symbolic meaning of brands (see Hammerl *et al.*, 2016; Prónay and Hetesi, 2016). Within service-dominant logic thought, however, the consumer



continues to represent a passive recipient of the brand (operand resources), as the brand and its various meanings are 'produced' by the firm based upon their understanding of what the customer would want (Vargo and Lusch, 2017).

### *Relationship-focused Conceptualisations*

In the 1990s, a new conceptualisation advanced the brand literature beyond what had been realised within goods and image-focused perspectives (de Chernatony, 1999; Wood, 2000). The relationship-focused conceptualisation represented the most significant evolutionary development of branding since its emergence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the conceptualisations focused on goods and images were principally concerned with the firm's role, under this perspective, the consumers are operand resources who take an active role in co-creating the brands they consume (Lee and Kang, 2013).

The relationship focus considers brands as knowledge, relationship partners, and promise (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009). Merz, He and Vargo (2009) posit that relationship-focused conceptualisations first considered the 'relationship' to be centred between the customer and the firm, under which the brand represented 'knowledge'. Here, the focus of the brand literature was on the co-creative relationship between the firm and its consumers and considering value to be realised in using a brand rather than exchanging goods. Understanding of the customer and firm relationship has reinvigorated the academic discussion around how brand value is created. Similarly, at that time, notions of the brand as knowledge were reflected in the emergent brand equity literature (see Lassar, Mittal and Sharma, 1995; Aaker, 1996; Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000).

The second sub-conceptualisation of the relationship-focused brand understanding considers the relationship between the customer and the brand. Fournier (1998) describes the brand as a 'relationship partner'. The customer-brand relationship literatures sought to understand the role of the brand within the consumers' lives, such as how a brand provides a basis for self-expression. Merz, He and Vargo (2009) state that brand value is co-created through 'affective relationships', which the consumers' relationship with the brand. The authors further identify that the brand personality construct (see Aaker, 1996) is representative of this relationship focus literature, it states that consumers come to associate 'personalities' with the brands they use and even those which they do not.

Merz and Vargo (2009) describes the third and final sub-conceptualisation as the firm-brand relationship focus, in which the brand represents 'promise'. These literatures emphasise understanding the firm's 'relationship' with its brand(s) (Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004). This represents a significant development, as it is the first time within marketing

literature that the notion of co-created of brand value is attributed to internal actors, such as employees and not only external actors, such as customers (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009). Within the firm-brand literature, the employees and internal stakeholders of the firm are considered to be the firm's operant resources.

### *Stakeholder-focused Conceptualisation*

The stakeholder-focused brand literature concerns how brand value is co-created within groups of networked actors. This conceptualisation moves beyond the customer or employee to include brand community and all other stakeholders, as such, the brand represents a 'dynamic and social process' (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Merz, He and Vargo (2009) states that the stakeholder focus denotes that (1) brand value is co-created within stakeholder-based ecosystems, (2) stakeholders form the network rather than only dyadic relationships with brands, and (3) brand value is dynamically constructed through social interactions among different stakeholders. Ballantyne and Aitken (2007) support this perspective, postulating that 'the brand' is dynamically constructed by social interactions between networked actors. Accordingly, brand value exists within the cognition of the individual actor. Within the stakeholder-focused brand literature all stakeholder actors are considered operant resources.

#### 3.3.5.2 Political Brands

Traditionally, brands have been overwhelmingly considered from a commercial perspective within the marketing discourse: the brand of individual goods, businesses and groupings of companies (see Balmer, 2017). More recently, scholars have explored an increasing range of specialist branding contexts. Conceptualisations of brands beyond those belonging to a 'for-profit' firm are myriad and often not yet fully developed as subcategories of the broader branding discourse. The brand concept has now been applied to various contexts outside of the remit of 'traditional' commercial brands. These include charities (Kylander and Stone, 2012), higher education (Pinar, 2020), sports (Jankovic and Jaksic-Stojanovic, 2019), events (Yu, Wang and Seo, 2012), places (Hanna, Rowley and Keegan, 2021), personal (Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova, 2018) and political branding which is discussed below.

Politics is a prime example of a branding context needing further exploration. Political branding is a multifaceted and complex application comprising a range of political entities that can be 'branded'. This includes the political party brand (Smith, 2005), political groups, politicians and candidates (Speed, Butler and Collins, 2015). Research in this area has primarily focused upon three elements (the political brand trinity) of Party, Leader and Policy (Pich, Armannsdottir and Dean, 2015). The area has been considered to be highly important (Speed, Butler and Collins, 2015; Pich and Newman, 2020). However, the extant subject literature

remains fragmented and underdeveloped in many areas (Nielsen, 2017). The following sections discuss the conceptualisation and use of political branding as they relate to this thesis.

### *Defining the use of the brand concept in politics*

The application of the brand construct within the sphere of politics is primarily found within the field of political marketing, that is, scholarship concerned with the use of marketing concepts and strategies in promoting political entities (Pich and Newman, 2020). A fragmented, but growing body of literature now offers a theoretical understanding of political branding, which is explored in this section. Political branding is traditionally understood the use of a name, term, design, symbol, or other feature to identify a political entity or element such as a party, politician, movement, or policy. Political branding is often understood in practice to mean efforts to create an association in the public mind between a political entity and a desirable attribute. However, even the fragmented theoretical understanding already reflects elements of the evolved brand logic highlighted in earlier sections. Nielsen (2017) identifies that political branding applies many concepts from commercial branding to political contexts such as: brand loyalty (Needham, 2006); brand building (Harris and Lock, 2001); brand performance (Schneider, 2004); brand image (Smith, 2005); and brand dilution (White and de Chernatony, 2002). Despite the relatively recent interest in political brands, no agreement on its definition is present in the literature.

Earlier conceptualisations were focused on the role of political brands as unique identifiers, often under the assumption of an apathetic audience. For instance, Bale (2008, p. 270) notes that political entities are brands that consist of 'heuristic shortcuts for voters who have little time and little interest in politics'. This notion reflects a goods-orientated view and one focused on management processes. Pich and Newman (2020, p. 4) similarly define political branding 'as the critical application of traditional branding concepts, theories and frameworks to politics to provide differentiation from political competitors and identification between citizens and political entities'. However, Nielsen (2017) notes that as scholars have added to this body of literature, the conceptualisation has become fractured and comprises conflicting perspectives. More recent work has described actors interacting with political brands as simultaneously cognitive, rational, phenomenological, self-interested, group-centred, socially embedded, or culturally directed. Therefore, a consistent theoretical understanding of political brands is difficult to identify. In hoping to resolve the lack of clear theoretical underpinning for the political brand concept, Nielsen (2017, p. 126) puts forward a 'minimal definition':

'A political brand is political representations that are located in a pattern, which can be identified and differentiated from other political representations'.

While useful, this conceptualisation was described mainly in the earlier section as imaged-focused. The definition primarily concerns how political brands create understanding and awareness, differentiating them from others in the 'marketplace' for voters and wider opinion. This, therefore, lacks the contemporary understanding reflected by the broader commercial branding discourse. In particular, a theoretical knowledge of political brands rarely acknowledges the 'stakeholder focus' identified in Table 3.6. This limitation of conceptualisation is yet to be addressed by more contemporary papers. The following paragraphs explore the differences between commercial and political brands.

### *Do political brands operate as commercial ones?*

Several key differences between commercial and political brands can be drawn from the existing scholarship. In this section, several key differences are identified. First, the ultimate purpose of commercial brands is to sell a product or service, imbue it with perceived value, and distinguish it from its close competitors within the marketplace. On the other hand, political brands are ultimately used to create awareness of more abstract political concepts, such as a policy or ideology, or to imbue political organisations or individuals with positive associations (Smith and French, 2009). Political brands form part of a broader political marketing strategy to persuade and build loyalty (Needham, 2006). This presents new challenges for scholars and practitioners, such as what a brand does and how its elements should be approached. The second highlighted difference relates to the brand's positioning and how marketers utilise this. Commercial brands are often associated with specialised demographic groups, to which its components, such as image or values, have been deliberately formulated to hold the most significant appeal (Bucklin and Gupta, 2018). However, political brands are often broader in their targeted appeal. This adds additional complexity for political marketers, who must reconcile conflicting positioning messages (Smith, 2005, p. 1137). The third difference relates to the ownership of brands. Businesses typically create and maintain commercial brands, while political brands are developed and managed by governments or political parties (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Organisations primarily focus on generating profits while political brands focus on electoral outcomes (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Notably, many commercial organisations today have efficient structures in which decision-makers are centred around subject specialisms. Political organisations, however, may have a more complex structure with decisions involving broader stakeholders (Balmer, 2012). Finally, political organisations also have different core organisational objectives compared to commercial ones, for instance, recruiting new supporters or promoting messaging to the broader public. Commercial brands rely more on traditional formalised marketing approaches to messaging with various forms of advertising and public relations (Keller and Swaminathan, 2019), while political brands may use other methods like grassroots activism or events. In this regard, the stakeholder-focus brand logic is clearly a suitable perspective for further exploration. Indeed, as the later

discussion around the literature gap section identifies, specific calls for research are made for the ecosystem perspective in political branding (Pich and Newman, 2020, p. 11).

### *Social Media and Political Brands*

Political brands often connect with potential voters emotionally, with authenticity being essential to successful long-term support (Serazio, 2017). For this and other reasons, social media is particularly significant for political brands as it allows the organisers of a brand to connect with their supporters on a more individual level. Furthermore, social media has facilitated interactions among supporters of a political brand and with other entities, opening interactions and gaining volunteers for political participation (Busby and Cronshaw, 2015). Social media has a recognised influence in political campaigns and elections, broadly shaping and forming political attitudes (Jensen and Schwartz, 2022). Because of this, political marketing approaches have moved to an 'always on' strategy, in which political brands and their supporters constantly seek to advance the brand messages (Scammell, 2015). The benefit of the rising importance of social media usage for political brands is that it allows branding to become an interactive partnership between various interest groups (Zadeh, Zolfagharian and Hofacker, 2019). For instance, creating a brand image is now acknowledged as a co-creative process (Essamri, Mckechnie and Winklhofer, 2019). Social media also presents opportunities for smaller political brands, such as Momentum, to reach a more widely dispersed target audience more efficiently (Harris and Rae, 2009). Despite the discussion of the role of social media in contemporary brand management, political marketing literature has largely overlooked this important factor to date. Overall, social media has had a significant impact on political branding. It has allowed for better communication between political brands and their consumers and facilitated interactions with admirers and the brand.

### *Literature Gaps*

Value co-creation has not been directly addressed in the political branding literature. Furthermore, the role of other key stakeholders are not widely discussed, instead focusing on the dyad of voter-political brand (Nielsen, 2017). Consequently, the increasing awareness of the ecosystem perspective discussed within wider branding and S-D logic is not understood within politics (Pich and Newman, 2020). As previously identified, political branding discourse to date has focused on the brand's role as a shorthand differentiator for an apathetic electorate (Smith and Speed, 2011). Consequently, theoretical conceptualisations have not advanced beyond the image-focus. This places the political brand scholarship 'out of step' with a more comprehensive commercial understanding of brands and how they operate.

### 3.3.6 Brand Community

In the previous section about branding conceptualisations of the marketing literature, it was identified that brand communities are an essential development in understanding how brands are co-created through the interaction of networked actors. In this section brand communities are explored.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) first defined brand community as a 'specialised, non-geographically bound community, based upon a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand'. The 'members' of the brand community can but often do not own the brand around which they build a collective social grouping. What distinguishes a brand community from other consumption communities is that offering information about product categories or industries is the sole interest in one brand (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Members of such brand communities form an emotional attachment to the brand and community, of which their active involvement becomes a valued part of their lives (Arora and Stoner, 2009). In many cases, the members of brand communities are highly regarded by the brand themselves as sources of knowledge and innovation (Füller, Matzler and Hoppe, 2008), idea generation (Wu and Fang, 2010) and as highly influential advocates of the brand (O'Sullivan, Richardson and Collins, 2011). Papers suggest that brand communities typically centre around well-known and established brands with iconic histories (see for instance, Sicilia and Palazón, 2008).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p.413) identify many features which can be used to understand the makeup of the brand community structure (referred to as 'community markers'): (1) consciousness of kind (2) presence of shared rituals and traditions (3) sense of moral responsibility. The first, consciousness of kind, denotes a sense of collective between the brand and particularly other community members (Madupu and Cooley, 2010). Cova (1997, p. 307) emphasises that the 'link is more important than the thing'. Consciousness of kind can also serve to recognise the group as different to individuals who do not use the brand, or in other words, a distinct social category. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identify two key community processes of consciousness of kind, 'legitimacy' and 'oppositional brand loyalty'. The first relates to the process in which brand community members seek to identify the differentiation between 'true' members and those who occupy a more marginal position. Oppositional brand loyalty relates to a process behaviour enacted by brand community members whereby they provide 'opposition' to competing brands. The second feature Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identified is the presence of shared rituals and traditions. This can be understood as the vehicle by which meaning within the community is 'reproduced and transmitted' within and beyond the parameters of the brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). These rituals and traditions facilitate the maintenance of the culture which evolves within the brand community (Laroche *et al.*, 2012). Rituals and traditions may include celebrating the history of a brand or sharing

brand stories and experiences with those inside and outside the brand community (Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski, 2018). The third and final consideration of brand communities is sense of moral responsibility. This can be understood as a shared responsibility and sense of duty to the community. Moral responsibility includes integrating and retaining members and assisting in using the brand (Brogi, 2014).

Several papers (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Skålén et al., 2015) have identified that brand communities play an important role in creating value for the brand with which they are associated. Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) identify four thematic categories of these activities: Social Networking; Impression Management; Community Engagement; Brand Use. Hatch and Schultz (2010) state that brand communities are central to understanding the co-creation process of a brand.

### 3.4 Conceptual Framework Development

The review identified that value co-creation had not been explored within the political branding discourse or the emerging important marketing context of politics. In this chapter, the identified concepts of the literature reviews are assembled into a conceptual framework from which a methodology can be derived. This chapter is structured as follows; it begins with a discussion of how the framework was developed and how conceptual linkages have been made between the marketing logic and theory explored within the literature review and the domain of political marketing. Then, the conceptual framework itself is described.

#### 3.4.1 Development of the Conceptual Framework

In this section, the development of a conceptual framework is presented. The following paragraphs, therefore, provide a foundation from which the emergent conceptual framework can be understood. This section is divided into two broad focuses; the first considers the marketisation of the political process and the application of marketing concepts and theories to the domain of politics, extending what has already been considered to a services-orientated view of marketing. The second part more keenly explores the development of a conceptual understanding of value co-creation processes, in summary, positing that it is an iterative process driven by actor engagement.

##### 3.4.1.1 The marketisation of Political Processes

*Political Groups as Brand Communities, Service Ecosystems, and Institutions*

As section 3.3.5 of the literature review identified, marketing concepts and theories have been applied to an emerging body of scholarly work in political contexts (Pich and Newman, 2020). This section conceptualises an extension of these ideas to service marketing. Here, the thesis extends what has been discussed within the extended literature, taking a service marketing perspective to conceptualise political organisations as brand communities that co-create value as ecosystems through actor engagement.

This thesis conceptualises that political organisations such as parties, party sub-groups, fractions, pressure groups and leader campaigns are surrounded by highly motivated individuals or 'actors' who form complex institutions. In other words, people with an affinity toward a political brand naturally organise into groups with like-minded individuals to support and celebrate the brand. Additionally, these groups develop uncodified rules and routines over time. These groupings of actors work together as service ecosystems to allocate resources through individual actor engagement to co-create and consume various forms of value. These may be resources such as time, knowledge, or technology. Service ecosystems attached to a political brand can be conceptualised as operating as a brand community, as described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). This section considers the notion of political groups of various types such as brand communities, service ecosystems, and institutions.

As noted, a brand community is 'a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among brand admirers' (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). That is to say, individuals who admire a brand may form informal groups to share in this appreciation. In contrast to other types of communities, they are not limited to physical places as interactions and community activities can occur online (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). This research postulates that brand communities exist outside the traditional commercial brand contexts most frequently explored within the extant literature, namely for political brands. It assumes commonalities to commercial contexts such as networks of highly motivated individuals (or in SDL, actors) coming together as a community in celebration and benefit of the brand. Therefore, this research suggests that political brand communities will share, to a greater or lesser extent, the three characteristics of a brand-orientated community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), including *a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions*, and *a sense of moral responsibility* between members. This thesis also considers that other under-explored factors will play a role in initiating or 'triggering' actor engagement behaviour within the brand community within the external environment (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). The marked differences in commercial and political contexts for marketing, which this research will explore, will be a valuable contribution to the study.

To give a contemporary, theoretically underpinned understanding of the brand community, it is conceptualised within this study as a service ecosystem governed by institutional



arrangements. Service ecosystems are defined by Vargo and Lusch (2016, p. 11) as a 'relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange'. This adds a deeper layer and meaning to the actions of the community and its members, conceptualising that value co-creation is the central function of a political brand ecosystem. Pich and Newman (2020) identify that understanding ecosystems is required for the future development of political branding literature. Therefore, this study will make a further valuable contribution to this body of research by applying service ecosystem conceptualisation. A crucial part of understanding service ecosystems is their role as institutions, formed of institutional arrangements known as institutional logic. Institutional logics are defined by Thornton and Ocasio (1999, p. 804) (2012) as 'the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organise time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality'. In other words, a group or community's ways of thinking and doing give meaning to its members. The conceptual framework presented in this chapter (Figure 3.5) posits that as service ecosystems, political brand communities conduct value co-creating activities through various structures governed by these institutional logics. Institutions govern the activities undertaken by actors through 'setting the rules of the game as the basis for production, exchange, and distribution' organisations, therefore 'follow established rules, norms, and belief systems' to 'adapt to specific institutional environments in view of enhancing performance' (Yang and Su, 2014, p. 721). As complex member driven communities, institutional theory is adopted to understand the phenomenon outlined in this thesis.

### *Political Parties and Party Sub-groups as Facilitators of Value Co-creation*

It is posited within this research that political parties and party sub-groups, described here as *political brand communities*, actively contribute to the value co-creation processes. Primarily as facilitators, they integrate technology to offer platforms and resources through which actor engagement can occur amongst its members (actors). This thesis adopts the following definition of a platform, 'physical or virtual touchpoints designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value, between actors in a service system' (Breidbach, Brodie and Hollebeek, 2014, p. 596). Notably, the provision of platforms is a conscious and unconscious decision made by organisers of political parties and other sub-groups, fractions, and organisations. Actors utilise and adapt the resources provided to suit the value being co-created. As the adopted definition of engagement platform describes, engagement touchpoints can be physical or virtual (i.e. telecommunications such as online). The focus of this research is on virtual touchpoints. Virtual touch points interest this research as they form an essential part of political brand communities, as described in the following chapter. In particular, political actor engagement is focused on social media sites such as

Twitter (Harris and Harrigan, 2015). Online engagement represents a wide-ranging set of different behaviours from actors, including levels of engagement, as FP<sub>4</sub> identifies (Shawky, Dietrich and Weaven, 2022).

### *Political Participation and Interaction as Actor Engagement*

Further to the discussions above, this thesis considers that the political participation and interaction within political brand community, facilitated engagement platforms, constitutes actor engagement. This aims for the actor to generate value for others and themselves. This thesis adopts Brodie et al.'s (2019b, p. 2) definition of actor engagement, which views AE as 'a dynamic and iterative process that reflects actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system'. That is to say, value co-creation through actor engagement is a cyclical undertaking, which continues through revision after revision, responsive to changes and past performance. In the case of this research, the service ecosystem is the political brand community, and the actors are its members. The participation and interactions those actors engage in via an online platform facilitated by the political brand represent the basis for integrating resources and the production and consumption of co-created value.

This conceptualisation is in line with the evolving scholarly discussion of participation within the political sciences, which Ruess et al. (2021) acknowledge has moved from interpretations routed in electoral involvement to a broader range of activities outside of election cycles such as unconventional political acts (e.g., protests by environmentalists), non-partisan activities (e.g., volunteering for social enterprises) and engaging with others in online spaces. Within online political participation, actors within the political brand community continuously engage in resource integration processes with other networked actors. The following section explores and adopts a definition of resource integration from this perspective.

### *Political Actors as Unique Resource Integrators and Interpreters of Value*

As identified in the earlier sections, actor engagement constitutes the integration of resources amongst a service ecosystem comprising many individuals, potentially groups of individuals (Brodie et al. 2019). Resource integration 'is a process consisting of activities to assemble, master, and optimize resources, to plan and fine-tune usage events in real-time, and to reflect upon previous activities' (Bruce *et al.*, 2019) (p.185). The notion of political brand community actors as resource integrators is in line with the service-dominant logic approach adopted by this thesis and discussed within the critical narrative literature review, the foundational propositions (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) of this theoretical lens states:

*AXIOM 3* - All social and economic actors are resource integrators.

All actors within a service ecosystem work to integrate resource through engagement and interaction with one another. Further, the contributions of those actors make are unique as engagement and interaction are unique (Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019b). Recognition of this is important when developing empirical research in this field. A further foundational proposition (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) of the service-dominant logic states:

*AXIOM 4* - Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.

In other words, value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning-laden. This thesis postulates that the value actors within a political brand ecosystem create is interpreted uniquely as its ultimate value to them and others.

#### *A service-dominant logic perspective of value co-creation*

This thesis adopts the view that value is co-created iteratively through actor engagement within political brand communities (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016; Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019b; Wajid *et al.*, 2019). The following sections identify the theoretical routing of this conceptualised process.

#### *Service-dominant Logic and Value Co-creation*

This research's theoretical lens and underpinning is based on the service-dominant logic, which emphasises value co-creation. As stated previously, value co-creation has been applied in an increasing range of academic studies, often without exploring the term's meaning. Service dominant logic is defined here as a 'metatheoretical framework that identifies service (singular) – the process of using one's resources for the benefit of another actor (or oneself) – rather than goods, as the fundamental basis of economic and social exchange' (Vargo, Koskela-Huotari and Vink, 2020, p. 3). In line with the earlier discussions of value co-creation through actor engagement within service ecosystems, the service-dominant logic perspective 'sees all actors, simultaneously, as both service providers and beneficiaries' (Vargo, Koskela-Huotari and Vink, 2020, p. 24). This supports the conceptualisation that value co-creation is an iterative process.

The notion of groups surrounding brands acting as service ecosystems and institutions governed by institutional arrangements is also consistent with the service-dominant literature (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Axiom 5 states '*value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements*'.

The following section discusses this in greater detail.

### 3.4.1.2 Actor Engagement Ecosystems

Section 5.2.1.1 discussed conceptualising political groups as service ecosystems based on actor engagement. This section provides further discussion of the theoretical underpinning of this. This thesis adopts the conceptualisation of value co-creation through actor engagement ecosystems presented by Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola (2019b), which can be understood through five fundamental propositions, shown in Figure 3.7. This conceptualisation is used as it provides the most contemporary understanding, as identified by the literature review. Furthermore, actor engagement is vital to the role of actor-actor networks.

**Table 3. 7** Fundamental Propositions

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FP<sub>1</sub> - actor engagement dispositions occur through connections with other actors that lead to resource contributions beyond what is elementary to the transactional exchange.

FP<sub>2</sub> - actor engagement emerges through a dynamic, iterative process, where its antecedents and consequences affect actors' dispositions and network connections.

FP<sub>3</sub> - actor engagement is a multidimensional concept, subject to the interplay of dispositions, and/or behaviours and the level of connectedness among actors.

FP<sub>4</sub> - actor engagement occurs within a specific set of institutional contexts, generating differing actor engagement intensities and valence over time.

FP<sub>5</sub> - actor engagement is coordinated through shared practices that occur within engagement platforms.

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*Adapted from Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola (2019b)*

Within the developed framework, presented in the following section, various aspects of actor engagement are present after the fundamental propositions. First, actor dispositions are included within the framework, particularly as the starting point of the value co-creation process. Brodie Fehrer and Jaakkola (2019) emphasise actor disposition and, importantly, the context for engagement. The authors conceptualise traditional commercial contexts. This thesis posits that given the political nature of the brands within this context, the external environment will also constitute a 'trigger' to actor engagement. This thesis regards value co-creation as an iterative process involving multiple actors. The consequence of value co-creating behaviours of actor engagement extends beyond the actor and beneficiary themselves and continues the creation of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). The developed conceptual framework

presented in the following section considers the value co-creation process to incorporate the multi-dimensional nature of actor disposition, that those involved in the process may be involved to a greater or lesser extent and driven by unique emotional, cognitive, and behavioural factors. The conceptual framework also considers the role of institutional contexts and logics governing actor engagement behaviour.

#### 3.4.1.3 Institutional Logic

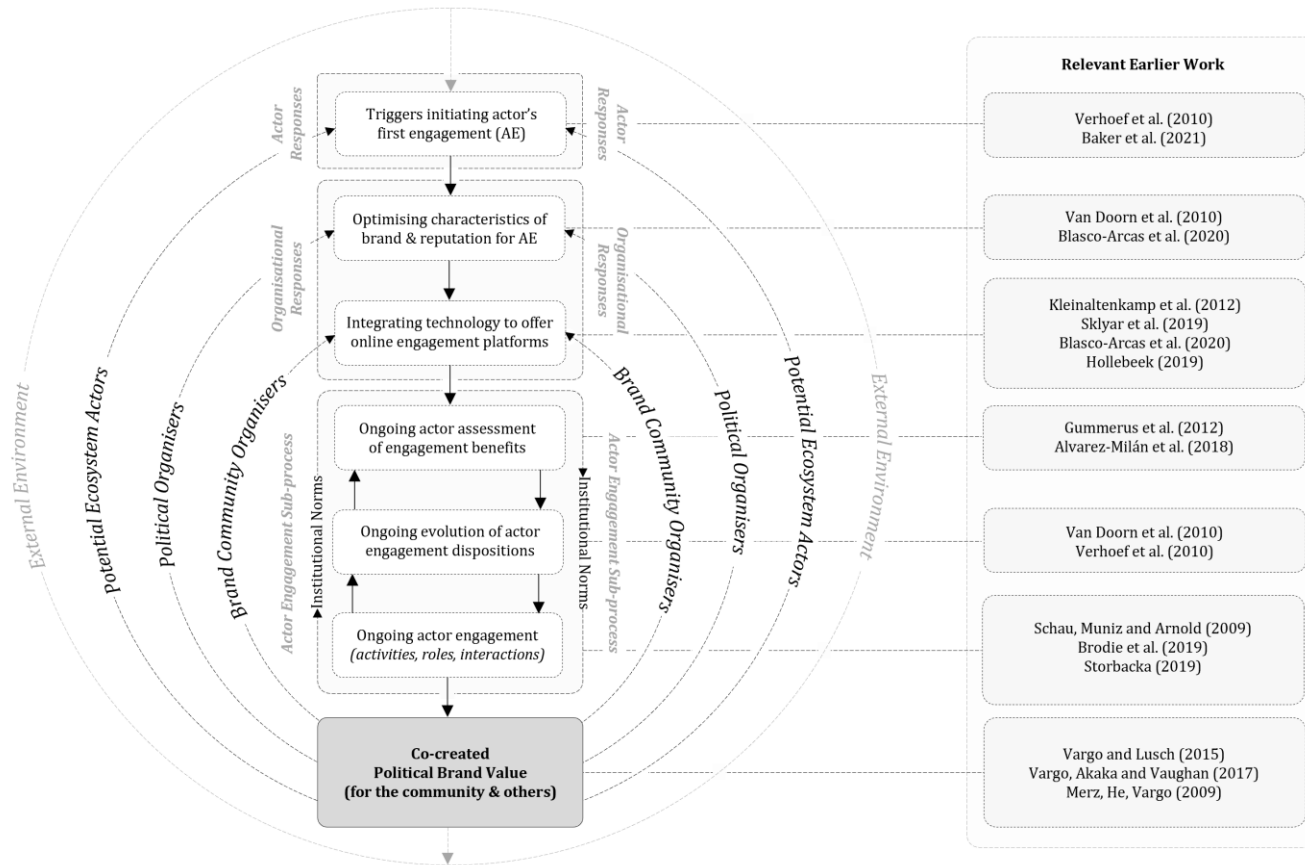
Earlier sections have identified that this conceptualisation of value co-creation processes surrounding political brand ecosystems states that the brand community is an institution governed by institutional arrangements that incorporate the idea of logic. Institutional logic can be seen as 'socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality' (Thornton and Ocasio, 2012, p. 804). This conceptualisation states that institutional logic governs behaviour, expectation, and understanding of benefits in actor engagement. Section 3.5 introduces conceptual framework and provides a discussion around it.

### 3.5 Conceptual Framework

#### 3.5.1 The Framework

This section seeks to offer an overview of the conceptual framework. First, the illustrative conceptualised process of value co-creation within actor networks is provided. This forms a basis for this chapter's remaining sections which detail each of the core components. These include: triggers initiating actor's first engagement; optimising characteristics of the brand and reputation for actor engagement; integrating technology to offer online engagement platforms; ongoing actor assessment of engagement benefits; ongoing evolution of actor engagement dispositions; ongoing actor engagement; and co-created political brand value. Figure 3.5 consists of the conceptual framework itself.

**Figure 3. 5** Conceptual model of value co-creation processes through actor engagement (AE) within political brand ecosystems



The researcher

**Table 3. 7** Overview of the conceptualised iterative process of value co-creation

<b>Process Component</b>		<b>Description</b>	<b>Conceptual Underpinning</b>
Triggers initiating actors first engagement	<i>Actor Responses</i>	An actor must make their entrée into the value co-creation, moving from a passive to an active state in the engagement and interaction of the brand community. It is suggested that this will be in response to some internal or external factor(s). This could be a response to internal earlier engagements of others (i.e., the desire to be included) or visceral reactions to the political environment external to the community and actions of other rival groups (i.e., the desire for counter action).	Verhoef et al. (2010) Baker et al. (2021)
Optimising characteristics of brand & reputation for actor engagement	<i>Organisational Responses</i>	In response to existing value co-creation engagement and management's desire to increase actor engagement and participation more generally, relevant organisers will seek to optimise the characteristics and reputation of the brand to facilitate the process of value co-creation amongst actors. This will include creating a feeling of openness to new, positively valued engagement and a community-building approach to marketing (campaigning).	Van Doorn et al. (2010) Blasco-Arcas et al. (2020)
Integrating technology to offer online engagement platforms		Relevant organisers in formally recognised or assumed informal roles within the institution will seek to organise the value co-creation process to one degree or another. This will involve integrating technology to provide engagement platform(s), primarily through social media platforms.	Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2012) Sklyar et al. (2019) Blasco-Arcas et al. (2020) Hollebeek (2019)
Ongoing actor assessment of engagement benefits	<i>Brand Community Actor Processes</i>	Within the sub-process governing the iterations of actor engagement, analysis of the existing literature indicates that actors assess the perceived benefits of engagement. In line with the SDL literature, this is individual and may differ entirely between actors engaged in the same activities.	Gummerus et al. (2012) Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018)
Ongoing evolution of actor engagement dispositions		The ongoing assessment of the perceived benefits leads to a continuously evolving actor disposition. It is likely that the greater the perceived benefit of engagement, the more positively valenced engagement behaviours will be. Similarly, weakening benefits will result in more negatively valenced behaviours.	Van Doorn et al. (2010) Verhoef et al. (2010)
Ongoing actor engagement (activities, roles, interactions)		This component of the conceptualised process of value co-creation is essential. The perceived benefits and evolving actor valence result in engagement being the focus of this research. This consists of various value co-creating activities and roles and interactions. This builds upon literature such as Schau (2009), which alludes to the activities of brand communities that generate value (e.g., impression management, social networking, community engagement, and brand use).	Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009) Brodie et al. (2019b) Storbacka (2019b)

Co-created political brand value (for the community and others).	<i>Outputs</i>	The output of the components above is the co-created value consumed by the community and those outside of it. This intern begins a new process that influences internal and external actors to engage.	Vargo and Lusch (2016) Vargo, Akaka and Vaughan (2017) Merz, He, Vargo (2009)
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*The researcher*

Table 3.7 gives an overview of the elements which make up the conceptualised process in brief. In the following sections, each of these are discussed with theoretical underpinings.

### 3.5.2 Actor Responses

The first part of the conceptual framework considers 'actor responses'. It acknowledges that an iterative process of continued actor engagement by an informal ecosystem must be preceded by an actor's individual choice to engage (Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010; Baker *et al.*, 2021; Ekman *et al.*, 2021). Essentially, this involves many factors, internal or external to the community, which cause an individual to respond with a form of engagement. Therefore, initiating stimulus for potential ecosystem actors must catalyse an 'individual admirer of a brand' to move from a passive to an active state. In other words, engagement begins as a response by actors to factors present in the external environment or the extant engagement in the ecosystem.

#### 3.5.2.1 Triggers initiating actor's first engagement (AE)

Although the importance of actor engagement as a basis for value co-creation has been noted (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016), relatively little attention has been given within the extant literature to the causal factors for an actor's first engagement behaviour. The actor must initiate actor engagement in response to factors within or outside the ecosystem. Existing research primarily focuses on responses to existing engagement by other actors, stating that an actors' first engagement behaviour is related to their behavioural, cognitive, or emotional attributes (Li, Juric and Brodie, 2018). Ekman *et al.* (2021) identify that behavioural and cognitive attributes relate to their strategic fit to the engagement types, which may manifest in the organisational mission or objectives, typologies of working and organisational structure. The authors state that emotional attributes relate to an actor's experience and manifest in their understanding of organisational motives, benefits accrued in past engagement, and the nature of their relationships on a networked and dyadic basis. Other authors, such as Baker *et al.* (2021) have discussed factors including psychological ownership as a causal factor in initiating an actor's engagement. Psychological ownership is defined as 'a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (or apiece of that target) is theirs (i.e., it is 'MINE')' (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2003). Dawkins *et al.* (2017) acknowledge that psychological ownership among actors is not stable, fluctuating through time in response to various internal and external



factors in the organisation. They further state that psychological distance is individually experienced. Dawkins et al. (2017) state that further research is needed into non-traditional contexts as extant literature focuses on commercial organisations. Another emotional driver of engagement, similar to psychological ownership, originates from what the marketing literature describe as 'brand love' (Padma and Wagenseil, 2018). This can be understood as the 'passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular brand' (Gumparthi and Patra, 2020, p.93). This shows further justification for selecting the organisation of study (Momentum) for the reasons outlined in chapter 2.

A lesser-explored area of initiators to actors' first engagement can be found in the external environment. Based upon the literature reviewed in the previous chapters, external environmental factors may likely play a significant role in the motivation of an actor engaging within the network within political branding. This thesis conceptualises factors from the external environment that may include what has been described within the literature as 'idol attachment' to political leader brands (Huang, Lin and Phau, 2015). As discussed in chapter 2, the focus of this study holds a powerful relationship to the personal brand of Jeremy Corbyn, and that interrelated brands similar to this play a factor in an actor's choice to engage within the ecosystem. An additional less well-explored area that may act as an initiating factor is the role that rival political ecosystems may play. In the original conceptualisation of brand communities, as acknowledged above, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) note that an essential characteristic of the community is establishing other groups which do not belong to it. Within the political context, framed by its adversarial nature outlined in Chapter 2, this thesis considers actors will respond to the external environment as part of the political process.

### 3.5.3 Organisational Responses

From the previously discussed section, the conceptual framework considers organisational responses to ongoing engagement and the desire for new engagement from potential ecosystem actors. Previous academic work has identified that management and other internal actors in an organisation affect the success of a co-creative process (see for instance, Storbacka, 2019a). The two considerations of organisational responses are (1) optimising characteristics of the brand and reputation for AE; and (2) organising actor engagement within the ecosystem. This recognises that the formal organisers of the brand and the informal community offer different forms of response to the value co-creation process and that effective brand management, which engenders engagement, proceeds the organisation and facilitation of community-led platforms. From the description in Chapter 2, Momentum is already known to Be highly active on social media sites.

### 3.5.3.1 Optimising characteristics of brand and reputation for AE

This thesis builds upon the theoretical foundation of engagement behaviour presented by Van Doorn et al. (2010), which acknowledges the importance of 'firm-based' antecedents to successful engagement. The authors argue that one of the most significant factors for engagement behaviours is the brand, positing that firms with more considerable brand equity or reputation engender higher levels of positive actor valence in engagement behaviours through brand commitment and brand attachment. Building a better reputation and brand equity is therefore vital to organisations to encourage proactive actor engagement surrounding the brand. Optimising the brand's characteristics and reputation indicates an openness by a political brand that acknowledges the influential role that actor engagement can play (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2017). This conceptual framework posits that political brand organiser actors will seek to shape the brands' reputation to encourage positively valenced engagement behaviours.

### 3.5.3.2 Integrating technology to offer online engagement platforms

The second aspect of organisational responses relates to the factors the community affects in an attempt to facilitate ongoing and future actor engagement. The conceptual framework adopts Blasco-Arcas et al.'s (2020) understanding of three organizing modes of engagement, which they consider through three aspects: orchestrating, facilitating, and stimulating. Orchestrating can be understood as understanding amongst actors of other actors' diverse needs, wants, and goals, as well as co-creating value through formalised activities and mechanisms. Facilitating can be understood as integrating resources to offer platforms that allow the ecosystem actors to interact and learn from one another. Stimulating can be understood as actions by the organiser that encourage engagement between more actors, introducing new ones that strengthen and develop the platform for the wider ecosystem (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2020). In relation to facilitating, the conceptualisation put forward by this thesis aligns with Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2012) discussion around resource integration and engagement platforms. In particular, this includes digital platforms and social media (Sklyar *et al.*, 2019; Zadeh, Zolfagharian and Hofacker, 2019). This thesis also relates the notion of orchestrating engagement, as identified above to institutional theory, which it uses to understand the institutional logic that brand ecosystems rely upon to understand actors' needs, wants, and goals Blasco-Arcas et al.'s (2020). Van Doorn et al. (2010) identify the organisation's role in facilitating interactions between actors within the ecosystem by providing resources and engagement platforms. As previously identified, engagement platforms are connecting environments that allow interfaces, processes, and actors to engage with other actors, facilitating actors to engage in resource integration (Storbacka *et al.*, 2016). This research conceptualises that the brand community organisers facilitate and nurture the provision of

virtual connecting environments for actors to engage and co-create value. Blasco-Arcas et al. (2020) state that the stimulating organising mode of engagement is where the community organisers proactively work to encourage or nurture actor engagement within ecosystems. Within this conceptualisation, political brand community organisers are likely to have developed a programme of methods refined through time to encourage and nurture engagement around the focal brand.

#### 3.5.4 Iterations of Actor Engagement

Following the outlined actor and organisational responses to the need and existence of value co-creation, the iterative process of ecosystem actor engagement is conceptualised within the framework. This conceptualisation draws from the work of Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Brodie et al. (2019b) to consider an ongoing evolutionary process in which an actor's engagement adapts and modifies through time based upon their assessment of engagement benefits and disposition. Various factors may influence the evaluation of actors' benefits and related disposition. Different forms of value are considered in actor engagement and change according to the need of the actor and ecosystem through the process conceptualised below.

##### 3.5.4.1 Ongoing actor assessment of engagement benefits

Actor engagement is considered a customer-based antecedent of engagement behaviour by Van Doorn et al. (2010), the authors believe that engagement will involve a continual evaluation of the costs and benefits of engaging within specific behaviours. This evaluation is based upon trade-offs an actor is willing to make regarding the available resources and the benefits they desire. The degree of engagement of an actor is also considered to be the result of their evaluation of invested resources and the benefit gained (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Van Doorn et al. (2010) state that, for instance, engagement behaviours such as participation in online communities are likely to relate to an actor's time resource. Therefore, different individual actors will evaluate independently of others, and the organisers can make some predictions for the community. Storbacka et al. (2016) introduce three critical categories of actor-perceived benefit, relational, informational, and motivational. Relational benefits refer to an actor's ability to engage with other actors on the platform, thereby indicating the need for the stage above of managing and nurturing the platforms to encourage strong relationships. Informational benefits relate to actors' ability to find information easily, mainly if it is not readily available elsewhere. The motivational factors identified by Storbacka et al. (2016) further indicate that the sought benefit of an actor is individual to them. It also suggests the role of organisers, community, and institutional logic in forming platforms that benefit actors who engage.

### 3.5.4.2 Ongoing evolution of actor engagement dispositions

This thesis adopts Ekman et al.'s (2021, p. 180) view that 'engagement disposition refers to an actor's inclination and ability to take up engagement initiatives proposed to generate potential business benefits'. As earlier sections of this chapter have identified, actor dispositions can be understood as an actor engagement proclivity or psychological states which relate to the emotional, behavioural and cognitive aspects of engagement behaviours (Li, Juric and Brodie, 2018). Hollebeek and Chen (2014), in their discussion of brand engagement, state that actor dispositions fall into positively and negatively valenced behaviour. The authors identify various factors that lead to engagement but do not discuss the notion of networked actors. This thesis posits, in line with the work of Ekman et al. (2021), that engagement dispositions result from immediate and ongoing evaluation by the actor in response to engagement cost and benefits and the engagement experience and longer-term organisational responses.

### 3.5.4.3 Ongoing actor engagement (activities, roles, interactions)

While the area of value co-creation within actor engagement ecosystems has been relatively well explored in recent years (Storbacka et al., 2016), there has been comparatively little exploration of the types of engagement and how it creates value for the creators, recipients and others within the service ecosystem (Ekman *et al.*, 2021). Brodie et al. (2019b, p. 183) describe actor engagement as 'a dynamic and iterative process that reflects actors' dispositions to invest resources in interactions with other connected actors in a service ecosystem'. Few studies offer in-depth insight into the various value co-creating activities that networks of actors undertake as actor engagement. This thesis explores how actors engage and create value for each other and others within the ecosystem. Consequently, this research considers actor engagement to comprise different activities, roles, and interactions that include the participation and interaction surrounding political brands (Brodie et al., 2019). The consequence of ongoing active engagement is the co-created value and feedback on an actor's evolving disposition and assessment of engagement benefits.

In line with the previously discussed papers, which consider value co-creation and the service-dominant logic (see for instance Vargo and Lusch, 2016) this research adopts the view that the activities, roles, and interactions that make up actor engagement are governed by institutional arrangements known as logics. Logics, defined in section 3.3.1, will mean that the aforementioned types of engagements will be unique to each service ecosystem but are capable of evolving through time in response to new information. This thesis builds upon the seminal work of Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009), 'How Brand Community Practices Create Value'. Though not strictly routed in SDL, this paper offers a clear appreciation for the forms of activities which a brand community collectively undertake to create value. Schau, Muniz and

Arnold (2009) identify four categories of collective value creation activities endeavoured by brand communities: impression management; social networking; brand use; and community engagement. Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009) state that impression management includes value-creating activities such as evangelising and justifying. Social networking involves welcoming, empathising, and governing. Community engagement involves documenting, badging, and milestoneing, and friends use, which involves customising and commoditising.

### 3.5.5 Co-created Political Brand Value (for the community & others)

The result of the process conceptualised within the framework is co-created political brand value which is consumed by actors within the community and those that side of it. This significant consideration of the conceptual framework seeks to answer important questions such as 'what value is being co-created?' and 'who consumes co-created value?'. This research will explore how forms of value, identified in section 3.3.2.2 of the critical literature review, including value-in-use, value-in-context and, value-in-behaviour created and interpreted. This thesis does not take the view of other research that the co-creation of value is an end in itself but instead continues the process see the causation of new organisational and actor responses on an ongoing iterative basis (Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola, 2019a).

## 3.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review covers the main concepts in modern marketing theory, focusing on the process of value co-creation and its connection with branding and brand communities. It defines value as a complex construct shaped by consumer and producer interactions, including utilitarian and hedonic dimensions. The review emphasises the collaborative nature of value co-creation, where both consumers and producers contribute resources, knowledge, and experiences. Additionally, it highlights the essential role of brand communities in fostering these interactions and enhancing value through shared identities and experiences. The review culminates in a conceptual framework that provides a structured understanding of the process of value co-creation, outlining the stages and mechanisms through which value is collectively generated and exchanged in contemporary market dynamics.

Moreover, this chapter provides an overview of how the principle constructs of interest have been developed into a conceptual model that this research will explore, forming the basis of the research aim and objective. It discusses the marketisation of the political context and how the concepts of value co-creation in the form of actor engagement within networks could be applied to political branding. The chapter explores theoretical perspectives that comprise the study's conceptual framework, noting relevant literature gaps, particularly identifying the iterative nature of value co-creation through actor engagement. Figure 3.5 presents the

conceptual framework of this research. This chapter offers a solid foundation for discussing and justifying the methodological approach of this study in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4 Research Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have introduced the objectives of this research, systematically and critically evaluated the literature, and presented a conceptual framework. This chapter provides a critical discussion of the research paradigm and methodology that was utilised within this study to understand the value of co-creation within a political brand community's actor-network. This research aims to achieve the objectives defined by the literature gaps identified in Chapters 3. To recap, the research aim is to 'investigate the process of value co-creation within the ecosystem of a political brand'.

Research is a systematic investigation involving the collection and analysis of data for a significant phenomenon (Smyth and Morris, 2007; Azungah, 2018). All investigations are influenced by the scholar's theoretical framework and research paradigm (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). A research paradigm can be defined as the set of beliefs the researcher holds regarding the nature of the world and their role within it (Rahi, 2017). The accepted paradigm shapes the assumptions, motivations, and propositions that form the data collection and analysis, in other words, what should be studied and how data should be collected and interpreted (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). The following sections discuss matters relating to the paradigm adopted for this research. The chapter also deals explicitly with research philosophy, incorporating a critical discussion of ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

The selected research design should reflect the aim and objectives of the study (Ogbeiwi, 2017). Consequently, the methodology chapter is a critical and detailed discussion of how the researcher addresses these factors. This study investigates the process of value co-creation within the ecosystem of a political brand. The first chapter identified that three objectives were set to achieve this:

1. *To explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem.*
2. *To investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within a political brand ecosystem.*
3. *To conceptualise the processes of value co-creation in actor engagement by members of a political brand ecosystem and to identify the actors involved.*

This chapter will explain how the selected research design could meet the aim and objectives.

## 4.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy can be defined as how researchers seek to understand how individuals acquire knowledge to orient themselves within the world (Antwi and Kasim, 2015). The set of

assumptions held by a researcher pertaining to the philosophy of their research is often termed as their 'philosophical stance' (Saliya, 2023). The stance comprises three fundamental issues of philosophy across nearly all disciplines of research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). The first concerns reality's nature, known as 'ontology'. Ontological assumptions shape how a researcher sees and studies the object of research (Wahyuni, 2012). The second philosophical stance, epistemology, refers to beliefs about what and how reality can be understood. Furthermore, it explores what this knowledge can comprise of and what forms of it are acceptable, valid, and legitimate (Saliya, 2023). The final stance is axiology, which relates to values and ethics in research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). Axiology is concerned with how the views and values of a researcher affect the methods and forms of data being collected (Shareia and Bubaker, 2016).

Table 4.1 demonstrates the relationship between the philosophical positions and the principal stances which researchers take, this includes: positivism (naïve realism); post-positivism (critical realism); interpretivism (constructivism); and pragmatism.

**Table 4. 1** Research Paradigms

<b>Fundamental Beliefs</b>	<i>Positivism (Naïve realism)</i>	<i>Post-positivism (Critical Realism)</i>	<i>Interpretivism (Constructivism)</i>	<i>Pragmatism</i>
<i>Ontology: the position on the nature of reality</i>	External, objective and independent of social actors	Objective. Exist independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence, but is interpreted through social conditioning	Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple	External, multiple, view chosen to best achieve an answer to the research question
<i>Epistemology: the view on what constitutes acceptable knowledge</i>	Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on causality and law-like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simplest elements	Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on explaining within a context or contexts	Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, the reality behind these details, subjective meanings and motivating actions	Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge dependent upon the research question. Focus on practical applied research, integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data



<i>Axiology: the role of values in research and the researcher's stance</i>	Value-free and etic Research is undertaken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance	Value-laden and etic Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing	Value-bond and emic Research is value bond, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective	Value-bond and etic-emic Values play a large role in interpreting the results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective p
<i>Research Methodology: the model behind the research process</i>	Quantitative	Quantitative or qualitative	Qualitative	Quantitative and qualitative (mixed or multimethod design)

*Adapted from Wahyuni (2012, p. 70)*

The following sections discuss the philosophical stances adopted within this thesis. The first section discusses ontological relativism, the second describes epistemological interpretivism, and the third explains axiological perspectives.

#### 4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology can be defined as how reality is understood (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Ontological assumptions explore what constitutes reality and how it exists. In particular, if there is an objective or subjective reality (Scotland, 2012). Consequently, researchers ultimately take one of two ontological stances, objectivism or subjectivism (Willis, 2007). A subjectivist approach was taken in this study. Subjectivism assumes that reality exists in the form of individual knowledge and is socially constructed. Consequently, the stance views reality as being phenomenologically (or experientially) interpreted by individuals (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). The subjectivist viewpoint, therefore, posits that there are multiple realities and that individuals will identify different meanings and interpretations of the same phenomena (Creswell, 2018). Subjectivism views reality as changeable and that the social world continually changes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). From this philosophical stance, researchers seek to understand the meanings of individuals' interactions, further analysing how knowledge is created.

The research objectives of this study identifies the intention to (1) *'to explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem'*, (2) *'to investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement*

*behaviours within the political brand ecosystem*' and (3) *'to conceptualise the processes of value co-creation in actor engagement by members of a political brand ecosystem and to identify the actors involved'*. This research, therefore, is concerned with individual knowledge, personal experience, and socially constructed realities. Adopting service-dominant logic (SDL) as a theoretical lens, this study explores the value co-created within a political brand's service ecosystem. In line with Axiom 4 of the theory, this research posits that value is 'always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary' (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 8). This axiom relates to the experiential nature of value, with the 'beneficiaries' being the actors involved in a given transaction. Consequently, as this research uses SDL as a theoretical underpinning, the subjectivist ontological position adopted within this work.

#### 4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns how reality is understood in the form of knowledge and what forms can be accepted as valid (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Within the business and management disciplines, the numerous forms of knowledge, including numerical, textual, visual data, interpretations, narratives, and stories, may all be deemed legitimate (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Research in these fields has typically taken either an interpretivist or positivist position, but increasingly, research has utilised other ones, such as: critical realism; postmodernism; intersubjectivity and pragmatism (Wahyuni, 2012). Each of the two leading epistemological positions in the business field offers the researcher strengths and weaknesses (Creswell, 2018).

The positivist stance considers knowledge to be formed of law-like causal generalisations created from a single observable social reality (O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). Positivism is closely associated with strictly scientific empiricist modes of understanding, the purpose of which is to remove human interpretation or bias (Myers, 2020). Positivist epistemology is concerned with what can be measured. Consequently, the stance treats individuals, organisations and other social entities in the same way as physical objects or natural phenomena (Myers, 2020). A leading criticism of positivism is that it ignores the subjective elements of knowledge, such as how the social world can be understood through experience or shaped through interaction (Scotland, 2012; Creswell, 2018). Consequently, positivist epistemology is not suitable for understanding or exploring meanings within social phenomena. Authors such as Hirschman (1986) and Goulding (2003) identify that marketing research is principally concerned with socially constructed phenomena, making positivism a limited epistemological position within the field of this study. In addition, pursuing value-free research is primarily considered unobtainable (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

Interpretivism developed from critique of the positivist stance (Scotland, 2012; Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Interpretivist epistemology seeks to explore social phenomena through the individual's perspective, emphasising that people are distinct from 'physical phenomena' because they actively create meanings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). The interpretivist epistemology is primarily concerned with studying those meanings and consists of several strands including: hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Interpretivist epistemology is closely associated with subjectivist ontology, echoing that meanings created by individuals are a subjective viewpoint that is not fixed or stable. Therefore, interpretivism offers greater suitability to the field of study in which this research is concerned. Methodologies typically involve in-depth investigations of small sample sizes, qualitative methods are used to analyse a range of data (Chowdhury, 2014). Like all philosophical stances, there are critical considerations of interpretivist epistemology to acknowledge. First, as interpretivism considers individuals to have a unique understanding of reality, the findings of interpretivist research are not generalisable in the same manner as positivist research designs (Payne and Williams, 2005). Second, suppose all individuals have their views of what constitutes reality. In that case, there is a possibility that the researcher will embed their perceptions and bias when designing, conducting and analysing research (Williams, 2000). Lastly, interpretivism considers meanings to be transient. Consequently, cause and effect linkages cannot be identified within the social world (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). This is the most appropriate approach to the stated research aim.

This thesis explores the co-creation value within a complex political brand ecosystem through the lens of service-dominant logic (SDL). In particular, the research seeks to understand how networks of actors interpret and understand the meanings of the various activities and norms of the group to which they belong. Discussing the concept of service-dominant logic, Peters et al. (2014) identify the epistemological considerations are often poorly addressed within the service-dominant logic literature despite of its apparent importance. The authors found that scholarship within this area had adopted either an object (e.g., positivist), subject (e.g., interpretivist), intersubjective or sign orientation to their respective epistemological positions. The interpretivist stance is adopted within this research as the most appropriate epistemological position for the context of this study. Interpretivism is rooted in 'verstehen', an empathetic understanding of the meaning of action from the actor's perspective. The theoretical lens of this study, value co-creation, is rooted in service-dominant logic of which axioms number 4 and 5 states, respectively, 'value is always uniquely and phenomenologically logically determined by the beneficiary' and 'value creation is coordinated through actor generated institutions and institutional arrangements' (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p.8). The interpretivist perspective, therefore, allows the researcher to understand the 'shared meanings within the culture of language, contacts, roles, rituals, gestures' (Hudson and Ozanne,

2010, p. 510) of the co-creation of value. Furthermore, this approach stresses a 'thick description' of social phenomena in the form of lived experiences which continuously evolve, change and redefine. Similarly, detailed ethnographic accounts are largely absent from the political brand literature. Thus, this research offers an opportunity to contribute a study which seeks *verstehen* in this field.

### 4.2.3 Axiology

Axiology relates to the role of values and ethics within research and seeks to explore how a researcher should treat their own and those of participants within the confines of a study (Creswell, 2018). Ethics and values play a significant role in research as the driving force behind a researcher, ultimately determining the research area, the philosophy adopted, and the choice of data collection techniques (Creswell, 2018). Axiological considerations also relate to both the ontology and epistemology selected. Regarding ontology, objectivists pursue axiology, which emphasises detachment and is value-free, whereas subjectivists seek axiology, which is value-bound, integral, and reflexive (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). Different epistemologies can be divided into value-free, value-bound, value-constituted, value-driven, and value-laden research (Djamba and Neuman, 2002). Value-free research seeks to detach the researcher from what is being researched, viewing them as independent. This stance is closely associated with positivist epistemology and quantitative methodologies.

Authors such as Douglas (2007), Gonzalez (2013), and Zyphur and Pierides (2020) have questioned whether the idea of value-free research is possible or desirable. This is particularly true of human subjects research (Soltis, 2006). As this study focuses on interactions and values created between actors, it could not be argued that the research could be value-free, nor would it be of additional benefit for it to be. On the other hand, value-bound research considers researchers to be part of what is researched, the researcher's interpretations represent a key contribution to their work, and the researcher is reflexive (Djamba and Neuman, 2002). Value-bound research is associated primarily with qualitative research, such as those routed in anthropological methodologies. Value-bound axiologies seek to acknowledge the subjectivity present within research as a foundation to overcome potential drawbacks. Reflexive practice is a long-utilised aspect of value-bound research, which seeks to offer greater rigour and quality to qualitative study (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009). Reflexivity is 'the concept used in the social sciences to explore and deal with the relationship between the researcher and the object of research' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2006). Value-laden research of the critical realist epistemology, acknowledges researcher bias in the form of worldview, experience, and upbringing. Value-constituted axiology relates to the power relations at the focus of postmodernism, the researcher is radically reflexive. Finally, value-driven research is initiated and sustained by the researcher's doubts and beliefs who is again reflexive, this forms the basis

of the pragmatist axiology (Djamba and Neuman, 2002). As the previous sections have identified, this research is routed within intersubjective interpretivism. Consequently, the axiological position of this work reflects that research is value-bound. The researcher is part of the observation and data collection, and the subsequent interpretations of the researcher form the key contribution of this work. As discussed, this is not a limitation when managed with transparency and reflexivity.

### 4.3 Research Design

Considering the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of this project, the next stage is to identify the research design utilised in the research. In addition to the philosophical stance is already highlighted, the research aim and objectives also play a significant part in the development of these areas, consequently, each section will offer an explanation as to why the methodological choices made best fit the research problem being investigated.

#### 4.3.1 Data Collection Approach

Research methods are typically characterised as being either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Rahi, 2017). The researcher must adopt the data collection approach best suited to many factors, including their philosophical stance, method of theory development and research aims and objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018).

The quantitative data collection approach aims to produce and quantify generalisable findings from a sample of the population of interest, emphasising a fixed and measurable reality (Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange, 2020). Consequently, quantitative methods are traditionally associated with research of objectivist ontology and positivist epistemology (Creswell, 2018). Bryman (2016) identifies four leading criticisms of the quantitative data collection approach. The first critique relates to ecological validity or the degree to which a study's findings reflect the real world. This is because quantitative research relies on highly structured instruments and procedures that can limit certain data collection types. Quantitative methods tend to be conducted under sterile 'laboratory conditions' which can restrain a participant's willingness impart useful data. As this study concerns a social phenomenon, a quantitative approach could limit the construction of a full picture exploring a brand ecosystem. The second critique was the concern of Cicourel (1964), who posited that quantitative measures developed in social science and the concepts they to explore are not 'real' but are assumed and are consequently spurious in claims of accuracy. This study focuses on rich data, which can help build an understanding of a complex network that this issue would particularly limit. Another limitation identified was the inability of quantitative study to distinguish between the social

and natural worlds. In other words, it ignores individual interpretations of social phenomena (Willis, 2007).

As previous sections of this chapter have already referred, the clear phenomenological position of this study's theoretical lens makes this limitation of quantitative methodologies problematic. This is evidenced by the successful previous research in this field, which primarily adopt qualitative approaches. The final critique identified by Bryman (2016) relates to the nature of social realities. Qualitative studies explore the relationship between a limited number of variables. A consequence of isolating other variables is a social 'unreality' which is fixed and artificial (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). Social phenomena, however, are continuously created through interaction and dialogue. Again, this is a fundamental limitation in the use of quantitative methods in this study as it seeks to explore the nature of those interactions,

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are concerned with understanding human behaviours from the perspective of the individuals involved and are associated with subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology following inductive reasoning (Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange, 2020). For many years, authors (see for instance, Borman, LeCompte and Goetz, 1986; Mays and Pope, 1995) have sought to address the criticisms which are commonly levied against qualitative methodologies. The first common critique of the qualitative approach is that it is subjective, based only of anecdotes and individual impressions, which may have little or no relation to other cases. Qualitative researchers are accused of being unable to separate their own experiences and biases from observations in descriptive accounts (Dzwigol, 2020). A similar issue that is raised about qualitative methodologies is that they are 'too' value laden in their design (Gonzalez, 2013). The charge of subjectivity can be overcome by adopting a 'disciplined subjectivity' approach (Dzwigol, 2020). This process recognises that bias is present within all research and emphasises introspection, particularly in developing self-consciousness of subjectivity. Utilising a transparent and systematic process will also help overcome this perception in academic work. Another criticism that is often made of qualitative approaches is that of external invalidity; in other words, the data collection is not replicable (Aguinis and Solarino, 2019). However, the purpose of qualitative research is different from that of controlled experimental approaches; therefore, the reliability issue needs to be addressed differently (Golafshani, 2003; Bakken, 2019).

The validity of the findings does not materialise only in the ability to replicate observations but also to account for changes. As Borman, LeCompte and Goetz (1986, p.44) put it, 'too approximate replication, a second researcher must occupy the same status and roll positions these are the subjects and use the same methods, sources, and conceptual frames as did the first researcher; Similarly a researcher doing a second pass through a researcher site must either not deviate from their original approach'. A third criticism of qualitative research is the

supposed 'triviality' of its findings (Dzwigol, 2020). In particular, the approach has been described as 'journalistic' and 'novelistic', with detractors believing it to offer entertaining insights but only ones constituting atheoretical descriptions that are not scientifically rigorous findings (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). This critique is based on a false premise that qualitative can never be rigorous, when in fact, like any other, good and bad examples can be found. Nearly all data collection tools available to the qualitative researcher can be conducted in a systematic and transparent method. Indeed, in many cases, this can be a codified framework approach that numerous scholars have tested. The researcher must acknowledge this potential limitation and explain how they can overcome it (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). In the subsequent sections, exploration of how this issue was overcome in this study is offered. Similarly, qualitative research has been disparaged for not being empirical. It is thought that this means qualitative research lacks precision because it cannot be quantified nor analysed mathematically. Borman et al. (1986) note that this is an erroneous judgment that empirical is equal to quantification. They argue that qualitative data may in fact involve greater utilisation of observational data than quantitative studies. The final critique made of the qualitative approach is that it lacks scientific rigour through a lack of systematic processes. Qualitative research is challenged for having fewer conventions of research design and rules of procedure in collecting and analysing data than quantitative approaches (Stratford and Bradshaw, 2016). Qualitative work can place greater emphasis on intuitive and artistic aspects of research than scientific merit, but this is not universally true, and the research has the opportunity to overcome this (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). The first aspect of this issue is that some flexibility in approaches can be useful in the appropriate circumstances, for instance exploratory research. Second, numerous tested frameworks in qualitative approaches can legitimately claim to be systematic (Borman, LeCompte and Goetz, 1986). The subsequent sections explain this study's systemised approaches to online ethnography and interviews. Mixed approaches are typically adopted for research that does not fit the traditional positions outlined (Harrison and Reilly, 2011).

This study adopts a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, this is the most appropriate choice for several reasons. First, qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representation of a hypothesis but rather with deepening the understanding of a social world. This includes remitting meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Maxwell, 2012). As this and previous sections of this thesis have identified, this study aims to explore the interactions and relationships contributing to value co-creation. Therefore, a quantitative or mixed methods approach would be restrictive and unsuitable for investigating the value co-creation process within a political brand's ecosystem. Secondly, while advocates of quantitative approaches would argue that the generalisability of the findings should be highly valued, this study focuses on a case study of a rare but essential phenomenon. Research in this context in any other form would be unable to produce more

generalisable findings. Finally, the broader issues identified in the paragraphs above have been addressed in relation to this research, and in the following discussion of the selected research methods, further explanation of their suitability is offered. Leading qualitative methods include: interviews; focus groups; observations; and ethnographic data collections such as netnography (Belk, 2017). Qualitative approaches help explore phenomena that little understanding or theoretical discussion exists before the research is conducted. Consequently, these techniques are associated with building theory instead of testing it (Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange, 2020). By collecting and analysing data at the same time, researchers can refine their theory with accuracy and consistency.

Theory development relates to the form of reasoning that the researcher may adopt when conducting a study (Creswell, 2018). Typically, the researcher identifies three forms of theory development: deductive; inductive; or abductive (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). The deductive approach to theory development begins with a theory and hypothesis created by the researcher. Observations are then made of the phenomena of interest to form the basis of a logical conclusion and confirmation of the theory (Hyde, 2001). Truth in deductive theory development generalises. This means if something is true of the observed, it is also true of all other group members (Azungah, 2018). Inductive reasoning, conversely, produces theory from specific observations. The inductive approach is typically used when a researcher wishes to form a hypothesis and theories (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Abductive reasoning is neither deductive nor inductive. Abductive reasoning starts with incomplete observation and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation to make and test hypotheses with the information available to the researcher (Okoli, 2021). In other words, the researcher forms conclusions based on available (if incomplete) pieces of evidence (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). For example, two friends have fallen out with one another, yet you later see them talking over lunch. The most likely conclusion to be drawn from this evidence is that they have 'made up'. The conclusion drawn by abduction is not always true but is most likely.

A multi-stage analytical strategy was used to conduct this research. This approach combined deductive and inductive methods to establish research objectives, theoretical constructs, and a methodological framework for analysis (Ali and Burley, 1999). According to Gambetti et al. (2015), the integrated deductive-inductive approach involves two steps: first, identifying gaps and under-researched areas using deductive reasoning, and second, a thematic analysis of the netnographic and interview data, as described in the following section.

#### 4.3.2 Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography constitutes an approach more than the method it is commonly misunderstood (Mcgranahan, 2018). Ethnography has been defined in many different ways (Hammersley,



2018). This study adopts the Brewer (2003, p. 99) definition, which describes ethnography as ‘the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting (if not always the activities) to collect data systematically, but without meaning being imposed on them externally’. This definition is selected as it incorporates many of the common aspects identified by Hammersley (2018). Ethnographies are regarded for the richness of the data they produce from a depth of fieldwork not found in other approaches, offering an immersive insight into the meanings and interactions of the social world (Brennan, Fry and Previte, 2015). Traditionally, ethnography was only associated with covert and overt observations of social groups, however as the nature of social interactions have changed new subdomains of ethnography have been developed. One prominent approach is netnography, which is utilised in this project and discussed in 6.4.3.1.

### 4.3.3 Methods and Phases of Data Collection

Data collection took place in two distinct phases. Phase 1 consisted of a netnography of the online community, and the second phase comprised of semi-structured interviews with members of the online community and management. The following sections describe how these data collection methods were utilised, including the processes which were followed.

#### 4.3.3.1 Phase 1: Netnography of Online Community

Netnography is a form of participatory qualitative research which ‘seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within that traces, practises, networks and systems of social media’ (Kozinets, 2020, p. 14). Like traditional ethnography, from which it is evolved, netnographic approaches constitute interpretivist inquiry which pursue ‘thick description’ over objective quantification through deep immersion in online cultures or communities (Kozinets, 2020, p. 313). Thick description can be understood by its four attributes: it gives context to an act; states intensions and meanings that organise the action; traces the evolution and development of an act; presents the action as a text that can be interpreted (Denzin, 1989, p. 33). As such, netnography relies upon the researcher to act as a research instrument, particularly sponsors participation, observation, and researcher reflexivity (Kozinets, 2020). Although a variant of traditional ethnography, significant differences exist between the broader approach and its subdomain. Most significantly, netnography is focused entirely on exploring online cultures and communities. Such a method has become necessary due to the increasing prevalence of website virtual exchanges (Heinonen and Medberg, 2018). The quantity of those exchanges and the content they often relate to has been identified as highly valuable in understanding a range of phenomena (Heinonen and Medberg, 2018). Netnographic participation and observations of actor-

generated content can allow a researcher to develop a rich understanding of networked actors' inner workings online without interrupting the process during the research (Boon, Pitt and Salehi-Sangari, 2015).

Like all data collection methods critiques of netnography can be found within the academic discourse. For instance, Lugosi and Quinton (2018, p. 3) posit that the more rigorous systematic approach of netnography is overly processed/ operations orientated, emphasising procedural techniques over the complexities of 'social scientific enquiry'. Ultimately, qualitative researchers must respond to the criticisms identified in the earlier sections, particularly the charge of poor external validity. Whilst the data collection could never be directly replicated, the systematic approach of netnographic accounts identifies the process used and allows changes to be accounted for. As 4.3.2 identified, this is the best practice for improved external validity in qualitative research. Furthermore, as Boellstorff (2012) points out, the purpose of ethnography is not to generate a hypothesis about the social world but to explore it in the knowledge that it is rooted in continuously evolving systems of meaning and cultural practices. The second critique of netnography is that there is typically no way of verifying the authenticity of the participants (Mkono, 2012). This raises both ethical and validity issues as participants may not be who their profile suggests regarding their age, role or place of residence. Similarly, problems surround the degree to which online content can be manipulated, curated or false (Xun and Reynolds, 2010). This issue is essentially context-specific; in the case of this research, the authenticity of many users can be verified by the group being studied. Furthermore, false or misleading users are considered part of the phenomenon being studied. Though some scholars, such as (Kozinets, 2020) have offered ethical codes of conduct, little agreement exists among scholars. This issue is overcome by greater transparency, in the following sections a detailed discussion of the approach used in this study is offered.

For several reasons, a netnographic approach has been selected as the most appropriate method for this research project. First, netnography allows the researcher to document and analyse the co-creation activities of actors from within their natural environment (O'Donohoe, 2010). Thereby offering greater reliability of findings compared to other methods where the presence of a researcher may alter the data collected. This is important as this research's philosophical position (section 4.2) has identified a need to observe a social phenomenon. This can only be effectively achieved within the environment in which it occurs. Few other approaches offer the study of social phenomena within their environment but have more significant constraints. Observational ethnography, for instance, involves a researcher's presence, which influences the observed behaviour and patterns (Hammersley, 2006). Second, netnography is a proven approach in marketing and social media research. The method has been successfully used by researchers examining co-creation in virtual communities (e.g. Lizzo

and Liechty, 2020), user-generated content (e.g. Cuomo *et al.*, 2020), and brand communities (e.g. Özbölük and Dursun, 2017). The proven successful application of this approach to similar research domains demonstrates that it is highly suitable for the objectives of this thesis. Third, unlike other anthropological research methods, netnography has a defined and systematic framework detailing how it should be conducted (Kozinets, 2020). This means that any individual can understand or replicate the data collection processes to a degree. Adopting the approach in this research consequently provides a more academically rigorous basis for the findings. In summary, whilst some criticism has been raised of netnography as a research approach, the significant advantages it yields for the objectives of this research demonstrate that it is the most appropriate method for this thesis in partnership with interviews (discussed in 6.4.3.2).

This study follows the guidance set out by various works of Kozinets (2010) to conduct the netnographic aspects of the research design. Other scholars have presented different approaches, including the LiLEDDA framework by Salzmänn-Erikson and Eriksson (2015) and the netnography guide offered by Wade (2020). However, Kozinets (2020) remains the foremost authority on netnographic studies, as evidenced by the range of published scholarship that references his work and guidance. Observing the guidance set out by Kozinets (2010) and (2020), the subsequent sections discuss the processes of netnographic data collection in this study. This consists of the preparation stage (described as ‘planning and entrée’); participation and observation; object selection; and data collection process.

#### *Netnographic Data Collection Preparation: Planning and Entrée*

Kozinets (2010) identifies that the first stage of netnography involves the researcher immersing themselves within the online community of interest. Within the entrée period, the researcher aims to understand as much as possible about the studied actors, what they discuss, how they behave and the degree to which they engage. The planning and entrée stage also confirms that the selected online community is suitable for the research, in this case, to ‘explore value co-creation roles, activities, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem’ (research objective one). In this study, the planning and entrée stage formed the pilot study conducted in August 2020. In addition to testing the research instrument, the researcher could enter and approach members and become more familiar with the community. In addition, at this stage, data collection strategies were refined, including the later interviews.

The planning and entrée stage also encompassed the collection of secondary sources relevant to the case organisation and community. This involved accessing the official Momentums website ([peoplesmomentum.com](http://peoplesmomentum.com)) and the large number of pieces written in the media about the group.

### *Participation and Observation Strategy*

The purpose of observation is to allow the researcher to see the world as the community member does in a natural environment. This technique involves prolonged engagement and deep immersion within the culture of an online community, aiding to the understanding of motives, beliefs, concerns, customs, and behaviours (Bowler, 2010). Observations are central to netnography and generate data from 'objects' and researcher field notes (Kozinets, 2010).

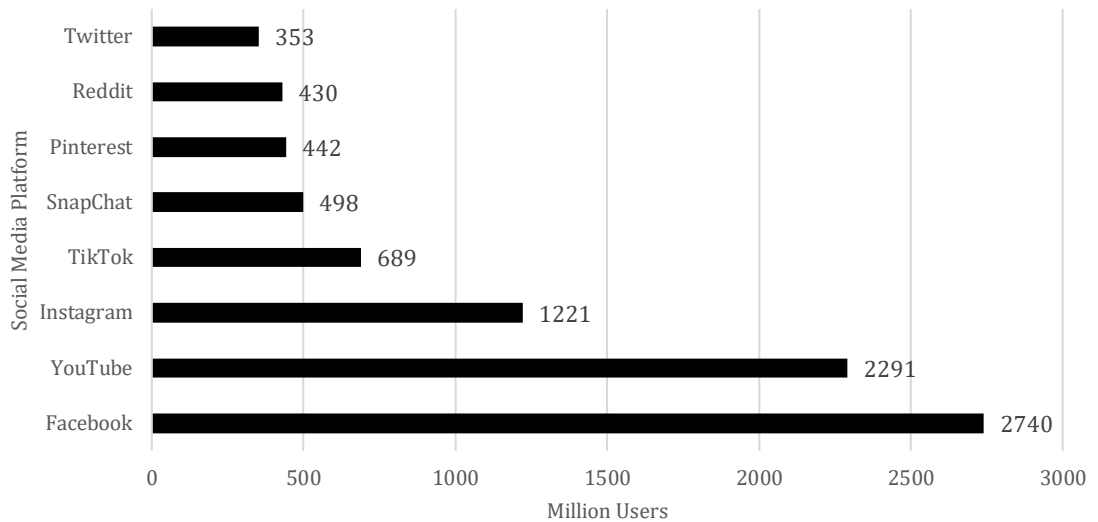
In ethnographic observations, the researcher can assume different roles within the observational setting. In principle, the role taken by the researcher can be categorised into one of four types, complete observer, observer as a participant, participant as an observer, or complete participant (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). As a complete observer, the researcher's aim is the highest degree of neutrality in the observational environment, and therefore, direct interaction with the subjects is as limited as possible. On the other hand, Observer as a participant involves the researcher taking a more active role in the environment, with participants being aware of the research purpose. As the researcher is still regarded as observer, interaction between the researcher and the observed is also minimal but not non-existent in this role. The participant as observer role involves full engagement with participants, and consequently, the usual 'walls' of researcher neutrality are removed entirely. The complete participant sees the researcher as fully embedded within the participant group and acts as a full member of the group rather than a researcher. Participants are unaware that the researcher is collecting data (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). In netnographic study, a good practice is argued to involve the researcher changing their role during the study, to offer for more natural engagement. First, an unobtrusive observation is conducted, the purpose of which is to gain a broad insight into the culture and roles of the community (Kozinets, 2010). At this stage, the researcher's role is parable to that of a complete observer, and data collection can take place with minimal interaction between the subjects and the researcher. The second stage involves a more participation-orientated form of observation. In this phase, the researcher acts as an active online community member. This can be seen as a shift towards a participant in the observer role, which aims to develop a deeper understanding of the community. This participation involved following and engaging in discussions, reading, replying, liking posts, and offering comments.

### *Data Sites and Netnographic Object Selection*

The observation strategy outlined in the previous section required identifying data sites from which observations could be made and data taken. Interactions and postings on social media

sites are extensive. It is estimated that some 500 million tweets and similar status updates on Facebook are made daily (Tankovska, 2021).

**Figure 4. 1** Social Media Usage 2021 (millions)



*Adapted from Tankovska (2021)*

Figure 4.1 above demonstrates the active users of the leading social media platforms. Facebook and YouTube are the major platforms used the most in terms of active users, while Reddit and Twitter are the lowest. Whilst the number of active users is significant, it is not the only consideration when selecting the platform for object selection. Another critical factor is who predominantly uses the platform and for what purpose. Twitter is the platform with the highest political postings and activism (Pond and Lewis, 2019). As this thesis is concerned with the political sphere, a focus is placed on Twitter, particularly the group's official national, regional pages and key ecosystem actors for identifying observation objects.

Because of the volumes of potential data created daily, the researcher must be able to identify appropriate 'observation objects' within this expanse of the published content. Observation objects can be understood as any collected data, such as posts, photographs and videos. Kozinets (2010) identifies a criterion comprising of six steps to evaluate appropriate observational objects: (1) the object should be relevant to the research context and research questions; (2) the object should be active recently and regularly; (3) the object should be interactive among all participants; (4) the object will provide substantial information; (5) the objects are heterogeneous; (6) the objects provides rich and detailed data. Two additional caveats were adhered to for practical reasons, first, the recorded objects must be written or spoken in English, and second, all 'spam' material was discounted. These criteria place the netnographic method of sampling as non-probability and purposive. This study will focus upon

posts and interactions between profiles associated with the case study organisation and relevant other bodies. Objects were identified from the official pages (both national and regional) on Twitter and supporting engagements in the public sphere. This ensured that data collection only included publicly accessible content. In summary, data or 'observation objects' are identified from the most appropriate sites within a relevant social media platform, as this section outlines. A six-step criteria is adopted to ensure each object fulfils an identified criterion.

The Twitter accounts of crucial ecosystem actors (such as @peoplesmomentum) of the and official accounts, national or regional, were visited a minimum of twice a week, but typically daily, during the netnography (from March 2020 until September 2021). Each time the social media accounts were visited, relevant activity on those sites were selected according to the six-step criteria outlined above. The following section discusses how the generated data was then recorded. Key actors were identified from extended observations of the key 'official' data site accounts (national and local momentum accounts).

### *Recording the Netnographic Observation Data*

Following the identification of suitable objects in the netnographic observation, data needs to be recorded to allow later analysis. This is important because the data on social media sites is not static, meaning that the original poster might remove it or it may be difficult for the researcher to relocate it later. Kozinets (2015) identifies two basic forms of recording netnographic data: saving and capturing. Saving can be thought of as storing data in the form of a computer-readable file, usually within a text document or pdf. In this form of recording, the formatting of the data is not necessarily maintained, but the exact words are, often in the manner of a transcript. When the data is captured, the recorded object is taken as it appears to the user, with all formatting maintained, however this means that it is typically not readable by computer software. Methods of capturing data include 'screengrabs' and screen recordings. The principal advantage of saving data is that it can be analysed via labour-saving software such as NVivo. However, the object's context is lost. As Kozinets (2015) points out, in data mining and content analysis, the context is not a concern, so data is saved, in netnography the context maybe relevant so the researcher selects the method of recording based on the salience of the context and or relevance of the visual formatting. Both approaches were used in this research. Data in the form of text such as posts, comments or threads were mostly saved directly from the data site into Word documents and stored along with identifying information such as the time, date and poster. Visual elements, images and videos were copied or recorded as a 'screengrab' and stored securely on file.

### *Immersion Journal: Fieldnotes taken during Netnography*

Researchers undertaking netnographic studies are advised to maintain fieldnotes throughout the collection of data, these reflections are known as an 'immersion journal' (Kozinets, 2015). Fieldnotes can be described as data sources authored by the netnographer, representing a first-hand account of their participation in the netnography (Kozinets, 2017). A researcher's reflection underpins notes upon human interactions present within the online observation. Kozinets (2015) considers fieldnotes to be more central to participation in netnography than activities such as posting or sharing. There are several benefits to making this type of reflection in participative research. First, it provides an additional source of rich data from which the researcher can form an analysis of the phenomenon studied. Second, it provides the researcher to engage with reflective practice which can improve the quality of the data collection more generally. Third, it is a reliable reference when recollecting events that may have happened many weeks or months ago. Fieldnotes were made during the online observations, reflecting upon the nature of the actors' activities, conversations, postings, and any other relevant information. This acted as a type of journal or diary. Following the netnography, interviews were conducted with members of the observed actor network with the findings of the netnographic phase being used to structure the discussion. This is explored in following section.

#### 4.3.3.2 Phase 2: Semi-structured Interviews with Members and Organisers

This section discusses the second phase of data collection, semi-structured interviews with members and organisers of the online community. Interviews can be defined as a discussion between two or more people with a research purpose, and are a common data collection method in many qualitative studies (Adhabi and Anozie, 2017). As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2018) point out, 'interview' is a general term covering multiple aspects and approaches. For instance, interviews typically take place on a 'one-to-one' basis but can be 'one-to-many' depending upon the study's aims. Similarly, the medium by which an interview is conducted can also vary. Interviews are commonly conducted in person, online or by telephone. In this research, a pragmatic and flexible approach was taken, which focused on the interviewee's preferences. This meant that interviews were conducted by various means, such as in person by telephone, but mainly online via MS Teams. The following section explores the typologies of interviewing and the approach adopted within this study.

#### *Typology of Interviewing*

Scholars have sought to understand typologies of interviewing from the standpoint of formality and structure, standardisation, and the respondent perspective (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornnhill, 2018). Formality and structure can be divided into three approaches: structured; semi-structured; and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are highly standardised, each participant is asked to answer a predetermined series of questions. The other approaches, semi-structured and unstructured, are non-standardised. The former relies upon a list of themes the researcher wishes to cover with the participant (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). The lack of standardisation and focus on themes rather than prescribed questions means that each interview can differ from the last, and it is useful when a participant offers profound insight into an area of interest. In the latter, interviews follow no guide or prescribed structure at all, allowing the research to explore further (Pole and Morrison, 2003) The typology adopted is dependent upon the strategy selected by the researcher. Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill (2018) identify three research categories for which the different typologies are most appropriate: exploratory; descriptive; and explanatory. The authors state that exploratory research should adopt either a semi-structured or in-depth approach, but in-depth interviews were best suited in most circumstances. Descriptive studies should instead use structured or semi-structured interview approaches. The authors conclude that explanatory research may use structured or semi-structured interviews to collect data but that semi-structured approaches are most suitable in most cases. This research, as described in the earlier sections, is descriptive.

There are several reasons for why semi-structured interviews are useful to this research. Firstly, as standardised questionnaires do not restrict the participant and researcher, semi-structured interviews offer deeper insight and accounts of personal experiences. Semi-structured interviews are used in this research to explore the roles and activities that members of the online community and organisers carry out from their perspectives. In addition, it allows the participants to describe what is most important to them. The selected typology of the interview is well suited to exploring these experiences in an informal way that does not interrupt the flow of exciting lines of inquiry. Secondly, the semi-structured approach allows the researcher to probe the context and meaning described by the participant (Pole and Morrison 2003). As interviews are used in this study to gather data about an individual's behaviours and connections, the ability of the researcher to probe further is essential as participants may wish to self-sensor some aspects that are useful to the research objectives. Thirdly, the semi-structured typology allows the researcher to build rapport with the interviewee. Unlike standardised structured interviews, this typology provides a more natural conversation discourse between the researcher and the participant. This puts the participant at ease and increases the quality of the collected data (Quinlan and Zikmund, 2019). This is particularly important in this research due to the nature of the participants, many of whom may not have taken part in research before. Like all methods and approaches, several issues can also be raised against semi-structured interviewing. First, the information collected from semi-structured interviews was filtered according to the interviewee's subjective perception. However, this is not a unique limitation to either the typology of interview, interviewing as a



technique more generally, or qualitative approaches. Research requiring data from individuals often face the issue of participant bias and perception. This issue can be managed with good interviewing techniques. Secondly, participants are not equally analytical, articulate, or wise, meaning that the data collected is not of equal value. Again, this is not specific to semi-structured interviews or data collection involving interviews of other typologies. In this study, interviews were conducted until the point of theoretical saturation; therefore, the divergence in the quality of interview data did not matter. Finally, the non-standardised nature of semi-structured interviews means a large amount of data is created. However, as the later section will identify, this study uses appropriate processes suited to large volumes of data, so this is not a concern within the context of this study.

### *Sampling for Interviews, Recruitment, and Participant Profile*

Sampling is selecting a suitable sample representative of the population of interest. The sampling process should determine the parameters or characteristics of the wider population (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). Sampling allows the research to conclude the wider population without needing a 'complete enumeration' or 'census' of that population (Ghuri, Grønhaug and Strange, 2020). The advantages of this are very practical, as it significantly reduces the time and resources required, and allows research where the population may not be entirely accessible or when it may be too large, and a complete enumeration would provide little new information. However, pertinent issues can arise in the use of sampling in research relating to bias or researcher error (Taherdoost, 2018). First, sampling error relates to the unrepresentative nature of a sample to its corresponding population and can be thought of as the differences between them. There are two common causes for sampling errors. The first is chance, by which the sample is unrepresentative because the researcher disproportionately selected, by accident, atypical cases within the population. The second reason for sampling error is researcher bias, which is, in other words, a motivated selection of different participants. Second, are measurement errors, which can be considered data unrepresentative of the population due to issues with the sampling plans or collection procedures.

Considering the potential issues, the different approaches to sampling are discussed and assessed for suitability in this research. Sampling can be conducted using several different techniques. Methods can be broadly divided into probability and non-probability sampling (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). Under the probability sampling approach, all members of a given population have an equal chance of selection (Reybold, Lammert and Stribling, 2013). There are four key probability sampling methods: systematic; cluster; simple random; and stratified (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Systematic sampling involves the use of intervals within the list of populations to determine the sample population (Bryman, 2016).

The benefit of systematic sampling is twofold. First, it spreads the sample more evenly across the population, thereby reducing the issue of measurement error. Second, it is easier to conduct than random sampling. However, the drawback of systematic sampling is that it can contribute to measurement error if there is hidden periodic traits within a population (Sharma, 2017). As the name implies, cluster sampling involves breaking a population into smaller groups (known as clusters) and randomly selecting the sample from within those groups (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Cluster sampling is more capable of dealing with larger populations than the other methods of sampling; it can reduce the variability of the created sample and be more time-efficient. However, the selection of clusters introduces the opportunity for bias to take effect in sampling and can consequently lead to sampling errors (Sharma, 2017). With simple random sampling, each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as a subject for interview. Furthermore, an individual's selection is independent of any other member of the population (Adams, Khan and Raeside, 2014). The advantages of random sampling are its simplicity, representativeness within the population of interest, and exclusion of bias, which plays a factor in selecting a participant. However, the major drawback of random sampling is that a complete and current list of the total population needs to be available to the researcher, which is often not possible, and this is the case within this study (Sharma, 2017). The final probabilistic sampling method is stratified sampling, which involves breaking the population down by characteristics and grouping members into an appropriate stratum. A random sample is then selected from each stratum. Stratified sampling intends to reduce the role of human bias in sample selection. Stratified sampling, therefore, is highly representative of the population study if the data is complete. Stratified sampling thus claims the validity of the generalisations to be drawn from the sample to the population. The drawback of stratified sampling is that the data required is often incomplete and populations cannot always be reliably separated into stratum. For circumstances where these methods are not appropriate several non-probability approaches can be used.

Non-probability sampling methods are nonrandomised, meaning that members of the population do not have any equal opportunity of forming the sample. The four key non-probability sampling approaches are: convenience; purposive; quota; and snowball (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Convenience sampling involves the researcher selecting the members to constitute a sample based on the convenience of access to those individuals (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Convenient sampling is a relatively fast as it does not require any form of planning or calculation other than generating lists. It could also be possible that the participants would be motivated and, therefore, more committed to participating, having been selected by the researcher. However, this may call into question the role of bias and whether the chosen sample is truly representative of the population. It could, for instance, be argued that selection could have taken place based on exaggerating certain viewpoints (Sharma, 2017). Though sometimes confused with convenience sampling, purposive sampling

is a subjective method in which the researcher relies upon their judgment when choosing population members to participate in interviews (Adams, Khan and Raeside, 2014). Whilst it does not seek to gain a statistical representation of the population, it represents a systematic approach aimed at offering the best representation available, mainly when there is no access to the whole population. A significant advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to build various methods into one research design. Purposive sampling is a straightforward sampling method that is not vulnerable to issues affecting statistical methods. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to select individuals that are most relevant to the research purpose, which can be important in many studies (Sharma, 2017). However, there are drawbacks with purposive sampling. For instance, there is a significant opportunity for bias to corrupt the findings if an appropriate selection criterion is not adhered to. Similarly, it can be difficult to defend the representativeness of the sample and therefore the generalisations which can be drawn (Sharma, 2017). Quota sampling is a non-probability approach where the researcher selects individuals according to specific profile criteria or other characteristics. Sharma (2017) states that quota sampling is useful for obtaining a representative sample when the research cannot get a probability sample. Drawbacks of this method include difficulties in identifying potential sampling errors, its time-consuming nature, and, as it is non-probability, generalisability is called into question. A snowball sampling technique relies upon a chain referral approach, whereby the researcher utilises the networks of individuals in the existing sample to identify new ones (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). This approach is useful when the population of interest is difficult to access or define. Furthermore, the approach is quick and labour-intensive when compared to other methods. However, the limitations of the approach include the lack of control in the identification of a sample and the likelihood of poor representativeness to the population (Sharma, 2017).

In interpretivist enquiry, such as this one, the researcher seeks to develop a deep emic understanding of the phenomena of interest supported by evidence. Interpretivist research does not propose to offer generalisations but rather insights into social reality. Consequently, data collection in interpretivist research does not need to follow random sampling approaches; rather, it needs to be theoretically informed and follow a systematic procedure (Hackley, 2003). This study adopted a purposive sampling approach, prioritising informational considerations over statistical ones, in line with interpretivist research. Having concluded that purposive of sampling is the most appropriate approach, given the research objectives and the philosophy within which this study is based, the subtypes of the purpose of sampling were then considered. There are seven ways in which purposive sampling can be utilised: critical case sampling; expert sampling; extreme case sampling; homogenous sampling; maximum variation sampling; total population sampling; and typical case sampling (Dodge, 2008). In interviews with members of the online communities, typical case sampling was adopted. Typical case sampling involves generating a sample that constitutes illustrative examples of the population's average

members. Though not intended to be definitive, this approach allows for the greatest opportunity to collect information. This is the most appropriate method in this context as it will be used to explore the observed actions of the netnography from the perspective of a typical community member. The expert sampling approach will be utilised to identify a sample for interviews with community organisers. Expert sampling involves the selection of individuals based on their expertise and interests. In this study, this sampling approach was utilised to identify the sample for interviewing managers of the political brand. This is because their perspective can only be found in individuals of their position.

Members of the online community and organisers of the political brand were recruited into the respective samples in the summer of 2021. Firstly, members of the online community were recruited from the netnographic observations of Twitter pages, in which the researcher was able to identify their suitability for inclusion in the sample through the observations of their online activities and informal discussions with them online. Invitations to interviews were largely arranged via the social media platform on which they were observed. Organisers and other recognised political group activists were approached either through online community member's networks, online or official channels. The following table identifies the profile of the participants who were interviewed with assigned interview codes.

**Table 4. 2** Profile of interview participants

<b>Interview Code:</b>	<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Self-identified Occupation:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Momentum member since:</b>	<b>Engagement with Brand Community:</b>
P1	M	65+	Retired	South Shields	2015	Weekly
P2	M	18-25	UG Student	York	2019	Daily
P3	M	18-25	UG Student	Nottingham	2019	Daily
P4	F	18-25	UG Student	Oxford	2018	Daily
P5	NB	25-35	PG Student	Brighton	2016	Daily
P6	F	18-25	UG Student	Liverpool	2019	Daily
P7	M	40-55	Trade Unionist	Kingston Hull	2015	Daily
P8	M	40-55	Trade Unionist	London	2015	Daily
P9	F	29-39	Teacher	York	2017	Weekly
P10	F	35-45	Teacher	Cheshire	2015	Daily
P11	F	18-25	Activist	Manchester	2019	Daily
P12	M	30-40	Charity Worker	Bournemouth	2016	Daily
P13	F	18-25	UG Student	Exeter	2021	Daily
P14	F	30-40	Social Worker	London	2018	Daily
P15	M	45-55	Councillor (Lab)	London	2015	Daily
P16	M	55-65	Councillor (Lab)	Scotland	2016	Daily
P17	M	55-65	Trade Unionist	Sunderland	2015	Daily
P18	M	40-55	Railway Worker	Durham	2016	Daily
P19	M	35-45	Retail Worker	Cardiff	2015	Daily
P20	F	55-65	NHS Worker	Kent	2018	Weekly
P21	F	45-55	NHS Worker	Kent	2017	Weekly
P22	M	60+	Retired	Yorkshire	2015	Daily
P23	F	40-50	Business Owner	London	2016	Daily
P24	M	35-45	Charity Worker	Northeast	2015	Daily
P25	M	35-45	NHS Worker	Southwest	2016	Daily
P26	F	35-45	Activist	Wales	2015	Daily
P27	M	55-65	Retired	Northwest	2017	Daily
P28	M	20-35	Trade Unionist	London	2015	Daily
P29	M	30-45	Councillor	Scotland	2016	Daily
P30	F	30-45	Activist	Southeast	2015	Daily
P31	M	35-50	Charity Worker	Yorkshire	2015	Daily

## *Theoretical Saturation*

Several techniques exist to help researchers identify appropriate sample sizes. The one selected is typically chosen based on the methods of a study. This thesis adopts theoretical saturation to determine sample sizes for both data collection methods. Theoretical saturation is commonly utilised within qualitative research designs exploring lesser-known phenomena (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Theoretical saturation can be defined as the 'point at which gathering more data about a theoretical construct reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging theory' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007, p. 611).

Scholars such as Low (2019) have identified that the relative simplicity of the concept of theoretical saturation belies its practical application within research, which can lead to issues with the data collected. The first issue is that identifying the point of 'saturation' is difficult, particularly as the quantity of new knowledge from the data collection is often not linear or predictable. Secondly, differing perspectives and methods of achieving theoretical saturation are present within the research. Codes are a common target of this approach. Code saturation involves the researcher capturing high prevalence codes until they consider no new ones to be realised. Code saturation can be understood as the researcher having 'heard it all'. Meaning saturation, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of the meaning within codes. Consequently, meaning saturation can be understood as when the researcher 'understands it all'. Bryant and Chamaz (2007, p. 15) state that 'meaning saturation flattens the curve to treat codes equally in their potential to contribute to understanding phenomena'. Code saturation may be achieved after relatively limited data collection, thereby constraining the value of a study's findings. Because of this, it is essential that theoretical saturation targets understanding beyond simple codes, emphasising the need to collect substantial amounts of data from which a range of meanings can be considered (Hennink, Kaiser and Marconi, 2017).

## *Interview Data Collection Procedure*

Interview data collection takes the form of the stages advocated by Pole and Morrison (2003, p.29): (1) pre-interviewing; (2) interviewing; (3) and post-interviewing. The pre-interview stage includes all activities before the interview, including inviting participants to interview, exchanging messages, and any other form of communication to help the participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). The purpose of this stage is to prepare interviewees ahead of the interview, thereby making the limited time available for data collection more efficient and effective. Crucially, ethical considerations were addressed before each interview, a written explanation of the research was provided, and the written approval of the interviewees was obtained (Pole and Morrison, 2003). The second stage is to conduct the interviews themselves. Due to government restrictions, interviews were conducted solely via an online meeting platform (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Each interviewee was allotted one hour. Allocation

of one hour was sufficient in a single interview. During the period before the interview started formally, the participant was again informed of the purpose of the study and associated details. Rapport was established within the time allowed for an informal discussion before the interview questioning, then a range of issues was discussed according to the approved interview guide. The final element of the process was the post-interview stage. Attention was paid to the security of the data and its management. Contact was maintained with individuals through linkages on social media and email.

#### 4.3.4 Timeframe

Research designs typically follow either a longitudinal or cross-sectional approach and in some rarer cases, a combination of the two (Creswell, 2018). Longitudinal research involves observing the same participants over extended periods to allow researchers to interpret thoughts, feelings, and actions (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). The principal benefit of this timeframe mode is that it will enable the researcher to observe changes in the research objects and provide a deeper understanding of a particular observational group or culture. Consequently, longitudinal studies are typically focused on a smaller sample group. A significant challenge of the approach can be the acquisition of willing high-quality participants who are prepared to commit to longer-term (i.e. multiple individual data collections) involvement with a research project. The cross-sectional approach involves data collection with a broader range of participants who share common characteristics. This means that the researcher can observe different groups and make comparisons between groups, broadening the scope of what can be collected in the form of valuable data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). When applied to observational research methods, the researcher selects participants based on their suitability relative to the exclusion criteria. The key benefit of cross-sectional approaches is that it allow the researcher to collect data on numerous characteristics simultaneously.

This study adopts a cross-sectional approach as the time frame method. The cross-sectional approach is most appropriate given both the practicalities and restraints of the project but also the requirements for data collection. Firstly, this project is focused on a specific case study that was particularly active for a specific period. Secondly, it is also inherent in political organisations and contexts to be fast-moving and quick to change. This makes longitudinal approaches less reliable. Finally, this research aims to develop a deep and rich understanding of a political brand. A cross-sectional approach allows for offering a highly detailed account.

## 4.4 Methods of Data Analysis

Considering the data collection phases, this section will discuss how the data was analysed. Data analysis is a process of abstraction and reduction, which aims to process the collected data to manageable and meaningful pieces from which accurate and reliable data can be presented (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Various analytical approaches are available to the qualitative researcher, including narrative analysis, content analysis, and thematic analysis. Narrative analysis is a social constructivist approach that focuses upon the stories that actors create, understanding how actors represent themselves, including others, and their experiences. Though narrative analysis can offer rich findings, it has been discounted in this research for several reasons. The method is not best utilised for observational data, such as the netnography, which constitutes a large part of the data collection. The focus of a narrative approach is to understand how and why a phenomenon occurs, which is not a primary concern of this study. Content analysis is 'a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding' (Stemler, 2001, p. 1). The principal advantage of a content analysis approach is its quantitative, systematic, and objective nature, ultimately benefiting from the validity of being replicable. Under this approach, only actual and observable data is counted, meaning that it cannot express abstract or latent ideas unless they are operationalised. However, content analysis was also discounted due to its limitations in providing the 'thick description' this interpretivist study seeks. Thematic analysis has variously been described as an analysis technique, method or methodology within its own right (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The thematic approach analyses data by constructing and assigning codes and themes. This approach has been described as highly suited to ethnographies and studies on phenomenology (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). The method has been utilised to analyse various ethnographic approaches as it captures latent meanings.

Data generated within this research includes captured 'observation objects' of online interactions, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, and field notes. Data analysis consisted of thematic analysis with appropriate variations for each data collection method. Though identifying a universal or accepted definition is not possible, the most cited conceptualisation of thematic analysis states that it is 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data', themes being 'a category identified by the analyst through his/ her data' which provide the researcher with a 'basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data' (Clarke and Braun, 2006, p. 79). This approach is regarded for its highly flexible nature, which can be modified to the needs of different studies. The thematic analysis provides rich and detailed yet complex accounts of the data, aiding towards 'thick description' (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Thematic analysis is a valuable tool for understanding the different perspectives of every research participant, allowing the researcher to explore similarities and differences and allowing surprising insights to emerge (King, 2004). Thematic



analysis is a well-structured approach to handling data, helping the researcher gain the most from a data set (King, 2004). Like all approaches to data collection, scholars have also pointed toward limitations of the method, which are essential to recognise. The first limitation to note is raised by Holloway & Todres (2003), who states that the inherent flexibility of the approach can be a disadvantage because it can cause a lack of consistency and coherence when developing themes from the data. Primary forms of thematic analysis do not allow the researcher to make claims about the use of language (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

### *Phases of Thematic Analysis*

This study follows the thematic analysis process recommended by Clarke and Braun (2006, p. 87), shown in Table 4.3. The first phase of analysis involves familiarisation with the data. At this point, the researcher transcribes if necessary and familiarises themselves with the data by reading, rereading, and making notes of initial thoughts and ideas. This phase was conducted with the research aim and objectives closely in mind to ensure that the analysis reflects the purpose of the study. From this, the second phase began generating initial codes based on interesting features of the data in a systematic process, collating data relevant to each code. Again, the research aim and objectives were consulted throughout so that the generated codes were relevant to study. The researcher followed a process of close readings to assess the data by codes. The third phase, searching for themes, involved collating codes into potential themes. To Clarke and Braun (2006, p.79), themes are ‘a common, recurring pattern across a dataset, clustered around a central organising concept’.

**Table 4. 3** Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description:
<b>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data</b>	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
<b>2. Generating initial codes</b>	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
<b>3. Searching for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
<b>4. Reviewing themes</b>	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
<b>5. Defining and naming themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
<b>6. Producing the report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

*Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87)*

The fourth phase is to review themes to ensure they work concerning coded extracts, the first level, and the entire data set, which is the second level. After this, themes are named and defined. Analysis continues to refine the specifics of each scene and the overall story the

analysis tells in relation to the research. Clarke and Braun's (2006) sixth phase of the thematic analysis process is the report's production. This is described as the final opportunity for analysis, comprising a selection of vivid, compelling extract examples and a final analysis of selected extracts that relate back to the analysis of the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

### *Semiotic Analysis*

Semiotic analysis is a methodical approach to exploring symbols and signs' significance within particular contexts. This analytical framework involves dissecting signs into their signifier, signified, and referent components and investigating how these elements interact to generate meaning. Semiotic analysis reveals how meaning is constructed and interpreted by analysing the relationships between signs and their cultural, historical, and social contexts. This method is utilised extensively in various fields, including literature, linguistics, media studies, and cultural studies, providing valuable insights into the intricate mechanisms that shape our perception of the world. Semiotic analysis plays a significant role in netnography, which involves ethnically studying online communities, social media platforms, and virtual spaces. Semiotic analysis enables researchers to uncover the underlying patterns of meaning and cultural significance by examining the symbols, signs, and discourses used in digital interactions. This approach allows a deeper understanding of how users construct identities, communicate values, and negotiate social norms within digital environments. It provides insights into the symbolic dimensions of online phenomena and their broader implications for social interaction and cultural production. By integrating semiotic analysis into netnographic research, we can better understand the intricate dynamics of online communication and digital culture.

## 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Like research in all areas of research involving human subjects, ethical considerations were an essential concern within the design of this project. A detailed analysis of ethical considerations was conducted of the two key methods to ensure proper ethical conduct was adhered to. Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the awarding institution on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

### 4.5.1 Netnographic Ethical Considerations

In addition to the general protocol of the University, ethical considerations relating to the netnographic elements of this study were guided by the Marketing Research Society's (MRS) Guidelines for online research (2023) and Kozinets (2020). Data collection in the form of netnography is challenging from an ethical viewpoint. First, is the issue described as the

'consent gap', which relates to the fact that user-generated data was not initially created for research, as Kozinets (2020) describes, users of many online platforms expect that their data is kept private. Consequently, there is a divergence between everyday users who populate social media websites with interactions and research practice. In many disciplines, publicly available published data is considered within the public domain. Second, there is an ongoing debate within the community of netnographers as to whether data collection truly involves what would be described as 'human subjects'. As human subjects are usually defined by their ability to be directly or indirectly identified from the data, data collection from historic postings could not reasonably, once anonymised, be described as involving 'human subjects' in the research sense. A third ethical issue of netnographic data collection is that there is no reliable way of knowing the identity of the poster of any content, nor the genuine nature of their intentions. Similarly, there is no way of identifying whether individuals active online would be considered vulnerable. This makes the treatment of sensitive or confidential data greatly more difficult.

Researching social media sites poses various ethical considerations that require careful consideration. Privacy is a significant concern as individuals frequently share personal information on these platforms without fully understanding the potential consequences. Researchers must find the right balance between extracting valuable data for scientific inquiry and safeguarding the privacy rights of users. Additionally, social media interactions are dynamic, making traditional consent procedures complicated. Therefore, researchers must ensure that participants understand the study's purposes, the data being collected, and any potential risks involved. Furthermore, there are concerns about data ownership and control since social media platforms have vast repositories of user-generated content. Researchers must consider the ethical implications of accessing and utilising this data, considering transparency, accountability, and potential exploitation. To help researchers navigate the challenges of netnographic research from a moral standpoint, Kozinets (2020) puts forward a helpful guide utilised in this research (Appendix 7). This study followed this ethical approach.

#### 4.5.2 Interview Ethical Considerations

Interviewing is perhaps the most common qualitative data collection instrument (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The popularity of interviewing is due, in part, to the relatively undisputed ethical use in research. Issues such as consent affecting other methodologies, including netnography, are not present or minimised within the interview situation. The purpose of the data collection can be explained to the participant, their consent explicitly confirmed, and the opportunity to ask questions or withdraw made readily available (Horton, Macve and Struyven, 2004). Furthermore, the purpose and function of the interview are widely understood by those who

may not have taken part in research before. However, ethical considerations could be addressed in relation to their use in this research.

Allmark et al. (2009) identify that interview ethical concerns fall under five distinct themes: privacy and confidentiality; informed consent; harm; dual role and over-involvement; and politics and power. Ethical considerations relating to privacy and confidentiality are raised in most inquiry forms (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). In the case of interviews, mainly semi-structured interviews, there is a risk that an interview might delve into areas unanticipated by the participant, posing harm to their confidentiality. There is a further possibility that the researcher will focus on the most sensational aspects of the discussion when diversions in the flow of conversation are not managed correctly. This may produce analysis that may not represent the wider phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018). Within this study, a potential confidentiality issue arises from the political nature of the phenomenon of interest. Being an emotionally charged topic, many interviewees held passionate and firm opinions and the dialogue could change track quickly. Participants may have inadvertently raised unintended topics during the interviews at the session's outset. For instance, as some of the participants were involved in political activism, disclosures of ethically questionable behaviours may be made. To mitigate this, participants agreed only to be referred to by pseudonym and a plan of action was adopted for any disclosures, including informing participants of the boundaries of confidentiality. In addition, opportunities to withdraw any part of their contribution were made clear to the participants before, during and at the end of the interview.

The ability for participants to give informed consent is a pertinent scrutiny for any primary data collection tool. As discussed, in the context of an interview, the participant easily gives reaffirmation of consent. However, some scholars have suggested that consent should be sought throughout the interview process. A model adopted by some researchers is described as 'continuous consent (Allmark et al., 2009), whereby the researcher probes in a way that requires a judgement by the participant. An example is 'can we talk about that in more depth?'. This approach was adopted in this study. Another issue is that without care by the researcher, the participant may only agree to take part in the research-based upon partial information. Full disclosure of the purpose of research at the outset is essential. In this research, consent sheets were prepared, which explained the purpose of the study and the explicit rights to withdraw their data. The consent forms could be taken/ stored electronically by the participant for future reference. The final ethical issue of informed consent concerns interviews with members of vulnerable groups (Valentine, Butler and Skelton, 2001). This research does not involve participants of vulnerable status.

Harm within research can take two primary forms, emotional and physical. Emotional harm can occur within research when discussions of sensitive or emotionally charged issues is required (Kostovicova and Knott, 2020). On the other hand, physical harm may be a risk within some interviewing conditions, such as the location of the interview. The risk can be present to the interviewer and interviewee in both forms of harm. Whilst this study involves political subjects, the risk of emotional harm being caused to either is the participants or researcher was judged to be minimal. Particularly as all interviewees were adults who could consent to their role in data collection. The interviews within this study took place primarily online, so the risk for physical harm was largely avoided.

Allmark et al. (2009) identify that some ethical concerns in interviewing relate to its interpersonal nature compared with other methods. They describe that managing the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is challenging. Whilst a friendly degree of involvement is deemed appropriate or even necessary, providing professionalism is maintained, there is a potential for undesirable effect. For instance, the potential for bias in the selection or treatment of different interviewees could unduly affect the data collected. Ultimately, the risk of overinvolvement and research is ever present and to a degree, can only be addressed by the professionalism of the researcher. This involves ensuring professional conduct and clarity of their role in the interview and the researchers being offered to the participants. Within this research, interviewed participants form part of the netnographic study, so whilst the researcher and participants may have been aware of each other before the interview, there were no existing close friendships.

The final ethical concern raised of the interview method relates to politics and power. It first recognises that researchers should be mindful of how an individual's position within an organised group may affect participation (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This effect is generally regarded as 'power', particularly in organisational research where participants may feel obliged to participate in data collection because of their position within the hierarchy. Additionally, an interviewee may feel forced to reveal private information when conducting research in an organisational setting. Within this research, interviews took place outside of any formal organisational setting, and the researcher had no formal position within the case organisation. This minimised the potential for any negative impact from power dynamics. The politics of interviews is associated with the neutrality of the researcher as the interview data is collected. For the majority of cases, researcher neutrality is regarded as highly important. In dyadic interviews, an interviewer can assume a position and offer encouragement or discouragement based on their personal beliefs.

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the various aspects of the research approach adopted by this study. It has outlined the researcher's research philosophy and the justifications for an interpretivist study, reflecting on its appropriateness to the theoretical lens outlined in the literature reviews. Then, two phases of data collection were identified, each comprising of a qualitative research method. The first phase includes of an 18-month netnography of the principal social media site utilised by the group. The second distinct phase was a series of interviews with members of the actor network, observed in the first phase. This chapter has also identified the method by which data was analysed, namely, thematic analysis. The following two chapters provide a discussion of the findings of this study.

# Chapter 5 Findings: Phase 1

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research objective of this thesis: *to explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem*. Accordingly, this chapter is focused on the 'component parts' of value co-creation within the brand ecosystem under investigation. To do this, the ecosystem's typologies of value-creating activities are identified and investigated. Then, the roles actors assume within the brand ecosystem to co-create value for themselves and one another are explored. Finally, 'interactions', the channels by which value is communicated, are investigated.

The results and analysis of this chapter are based upon 18 months of netnographic immersion in Momentum's Twitter pages and community. This started in March 2020 and ran until September 2021. The data was collected in the form of observed postings from various actors into the broader ecosystem but centred upon the official Twitter accounts of the group at national and local levels and as an immersion journal of the researcher.

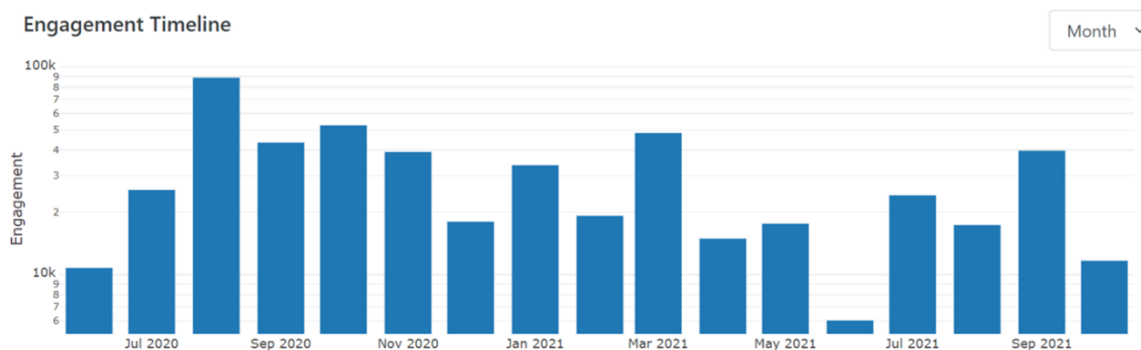
## 5.2 Overview of Momentum on Twitter (March 2020-September 2021)

**Figure 5. 1** NVivo Word Cloud of Ecosystem Tweets Between March 2020-September 2021



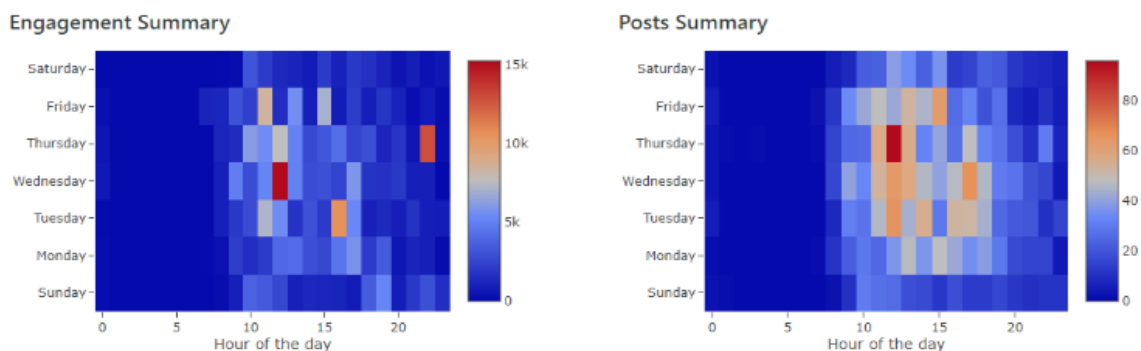
*The researcher via NVivo*

**Figure 5. 2** Twitter Engagements for @PeoplesMomentum over Observation Period



*The researcher via Vicinitas.io (2021)*

**Figure 5. 3** Twitter Engagement and Post Summary for @PeoplesMomentum

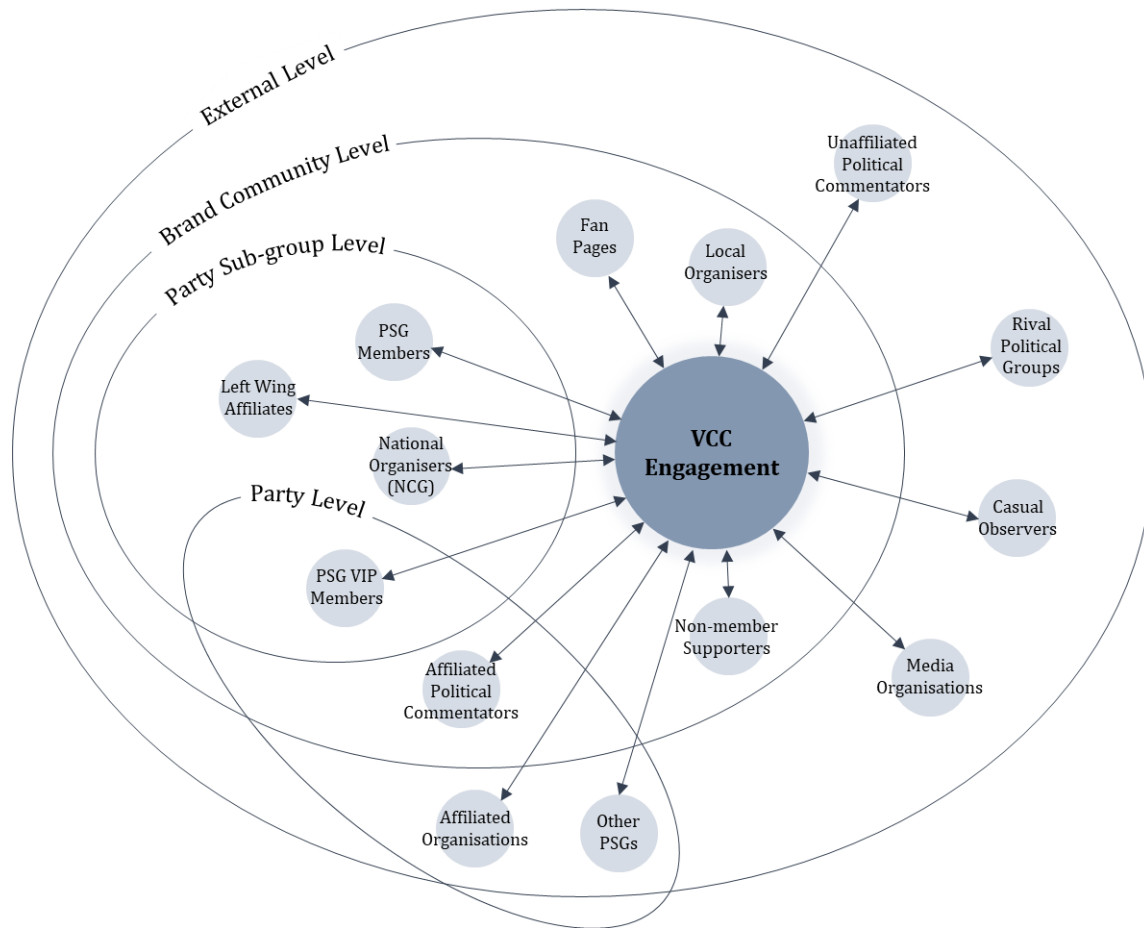


*The researcher via Vicinitas.io (2021)*

Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 give an overview of the political brand community’s activities on the online engagement platform at a glance. Rather than analysis, in itself, this is included here to offer basic orientation of the observed platform when the study took place. Figure 5.1 shows a word cloud of the analysed postings, demonstrating frequently used words. This gives an orientation to the observed group and the concepts that interested them during the observation period. Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 show other aspects of the Twitter space are considered. Figures 5.2, 5.3 show engagement levels and behaviours for @PeoplesMomentum. Figure 5.4 comprises of the apparent ecosystem map, identified during the observations. It shows the different categories of actors and their level within the groups environment. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 indicate the types of postings made by Momentum. While this does not constitute an analysis in and of itself, it is a helpful starting point for understanding the findings of the netnography.



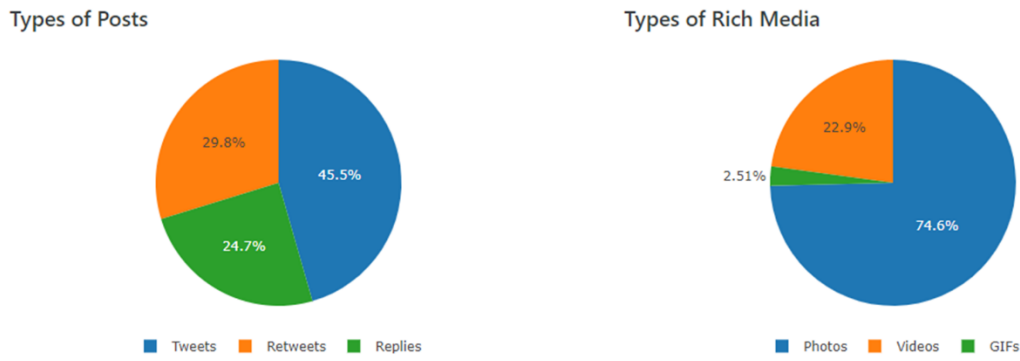
**Figure 5. 4** Apparent Ecosystem Map



**Key:**

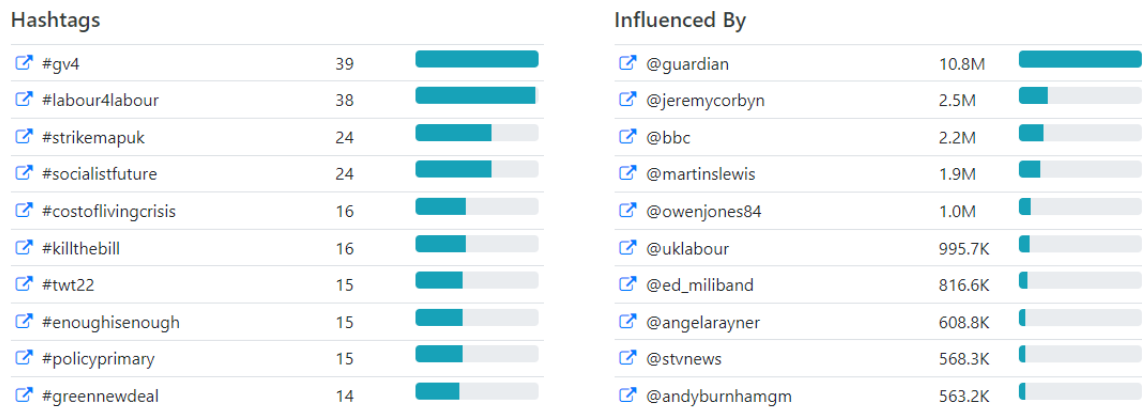
Group:	Description:
Fan Pages	Unofficial social media pages, blogs and other sites created or populated by brand admirers.
Local Organisers	Regional group organisers with responsibilities to facilitate local events and campaigns.
Non-member Supporters	Individuals (actors) who are not members, but support the cause and admire the brand.
Affiliated political commentators	Individuals with a media profile or following in their own right and are advocates for the brand.
Left Wing Affiliates	Affiliated organisations as identified in chapter 2 which the group has formal or informal links to.
PSG Members	The members of the group who form the principal network of motivated actors, who engage in activities.
National Organisers	Individuals responsible for organising the group on a national level in various capacities.
PSG VIP Members	Members of the group with a significant or amplified voice based upon their own following online or in a wider context.
Affiliated Organisations	Affiliated organisations include the Labour Party and its associated groups.
Others PSGs	Other groups and factions associated with the Labour Party.
Media Organisations	News outlets and other forms of media.
Casual Observers	Individuals present within the engagement space (Twitter). May receive engagements positively or negatively.
Rival Political Groups	Groups which are opposed to Momentum which are present in the space.
Unaffiliated Political Commentators	Journalists and other commentators which have not official link to the organisation.

**Figure 5. 5** Twitter Post Type for @PeoplesMomentum



*The researcher via Vicinitas.io (2021)*

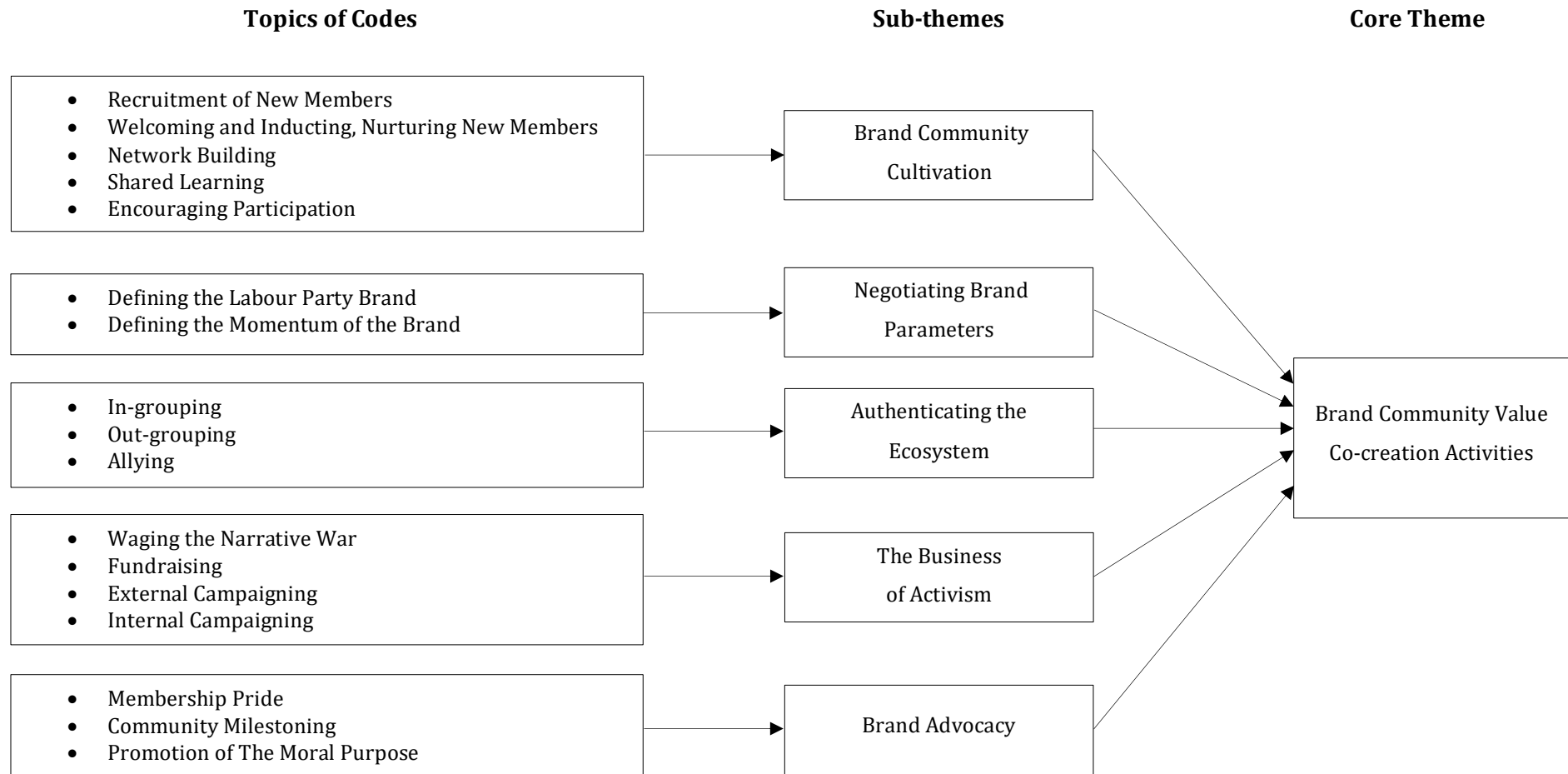
**Figure 5. 6** Twitter Hashtag and content sharing by @PeoplesMomentum

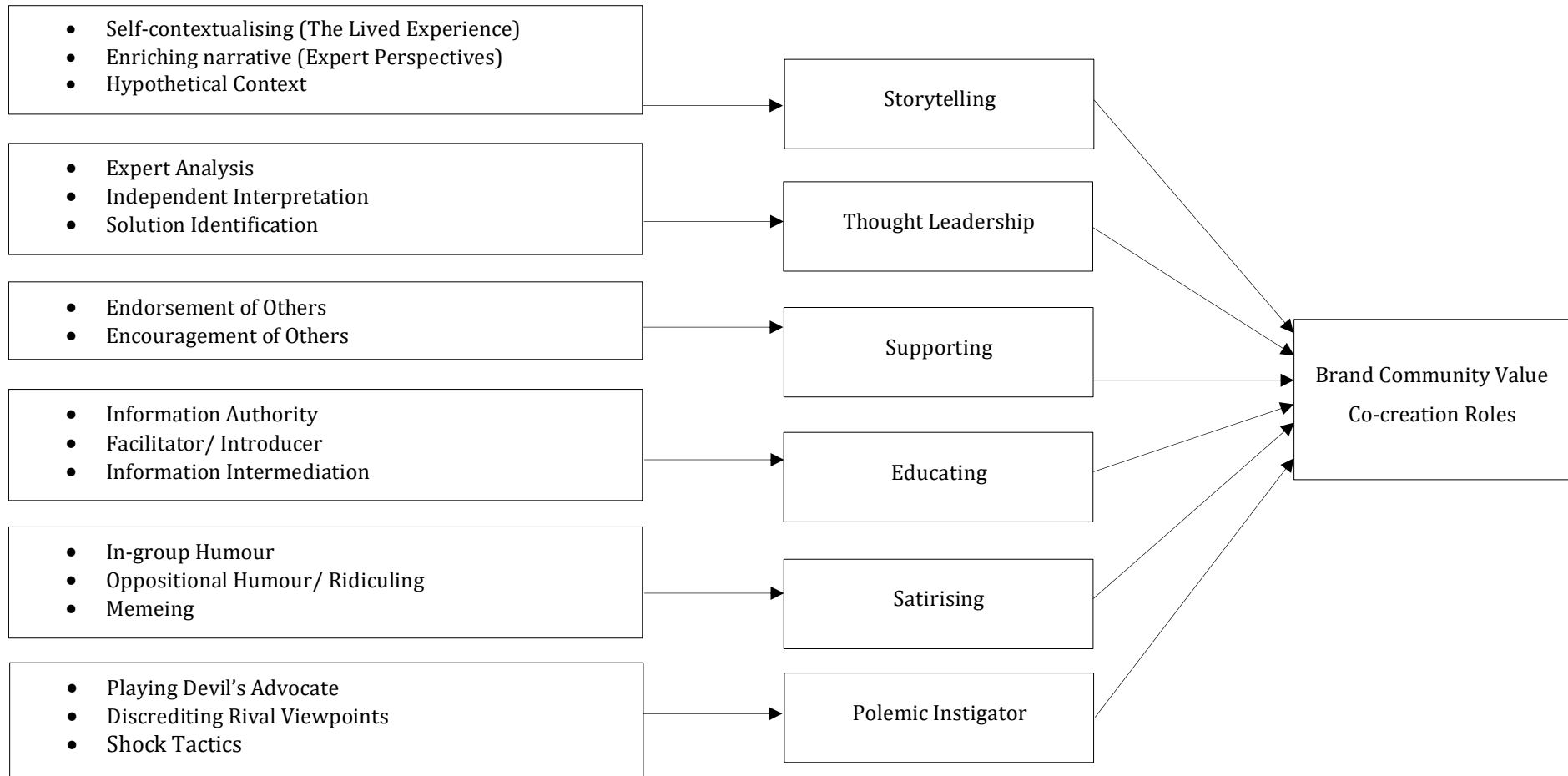


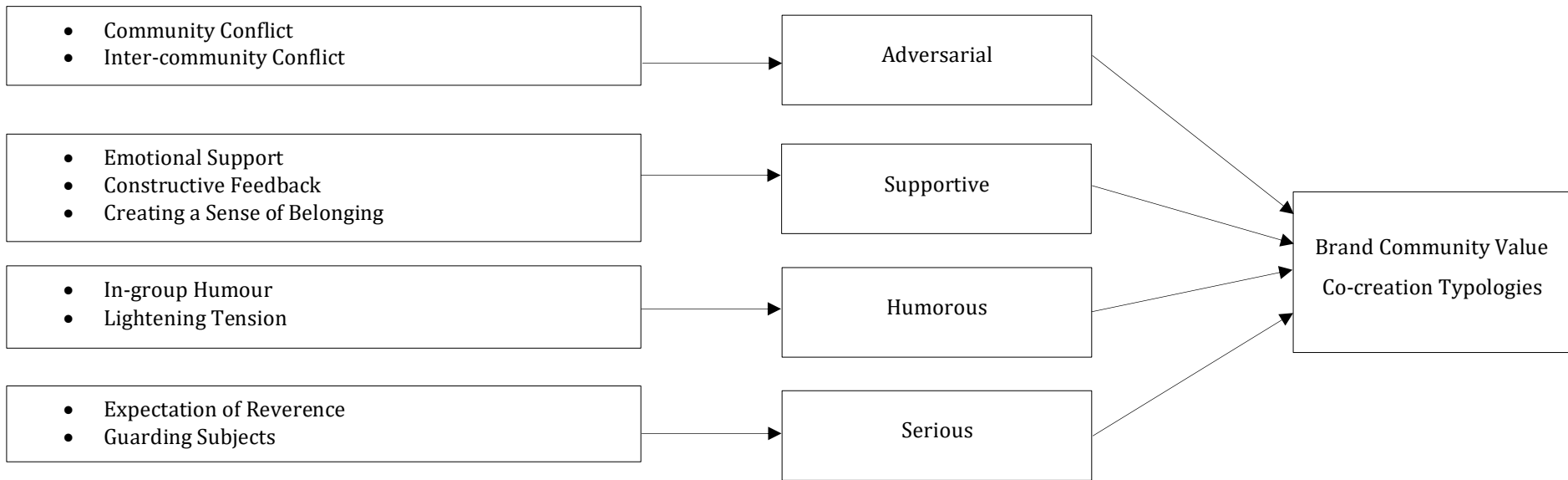
*The researcher via Vicinitas.io (2021)*

Figure 5.7 identifies the data structure of the thematic analysis according to Topics of Codes, Sub-themes, and Core Themes.

**Figure 5. 7** Netnography Thematic Map







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*The Researcher*

## 5.3 Value Co-creation Activities

Analysis of the first data collection phase identified five dimensions of value co-creation activities undertaken by the ecosystem of the Momentum brand, described here as Brand Community Cultivation, Defining Brand Parameters, Authenticating the Ecosystem, and The Business of Activism, Brand Advocacy.

### 5.3.1 Brand Community Cultivation

One of the five value co-creation activity dimensions relates to creating and sustaining the brand community. These activities centre around the membership lifecycle and the day-to-day functions of the online community. Five key activities that comprised the brand community's cultivation were observed within the netnographic phase of data collection.

**Table 5. 1** Five activities of Brand Community Cultivation

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Researcher Definition:</b>
Recruitment of New Members	<i>Activities that encourage people outside of Momentum to join the organisation officially.</i>
Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing	<i>Activities that make new members feel welcomed into the online political brand community and offer orientation of how the community operates.</i>
Network Building	<i>Activities undertaken to build and sustain long-term interpersonal relationships between group members for their mutual benefit and to further the cause of the community.</i>
Shared Learning	<i>Activities that encourage or facilitate knowledge exchange relating to the political brand community or related subjects.</i>
Encouraging Participation	<i>Activity that leads to widening participation amongst group members of the group organised or affiliated events, demonstrations, or democratic processes.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 5.3.1.1 Recruitment of Members

The recruitment of members is understood *as all value co-creation activities that encourage people outside of Momentum to join the organisation officially*. Activities of this nature occurred at all levels within the group and its current membership, though the approach utilised by different actors did differ. Communications by the official Momentum account were primarily direct calls to this action. They sought to reflect that a prospective member would be joining a collective, purposeful 'movement' rather than a passive 'club'. Activities surrounding the recruitment of new members indicate the significance of each member of Momentum.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 1

(@PeoplesMomentum, Twitter, 07/05/2021)

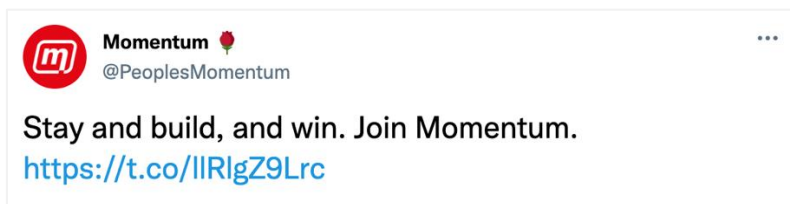
Membership benefits are commonly expressed, such as reference to the diverse community that makes up Momentum. This was often indicated in the use of language and symbolism. A recurrent use of the term 'building a movement', reflected the communal action and popular nature of Momentum's cause. Symbolism, in the form of 'emojis', is well utilised. Clenched fists of different skin tones were used within this group to indicate diversity, the belief in 'people power' and notions of solidarity between members.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 2

(@PeoplesMomentum, Twitter, 20/11/2020)

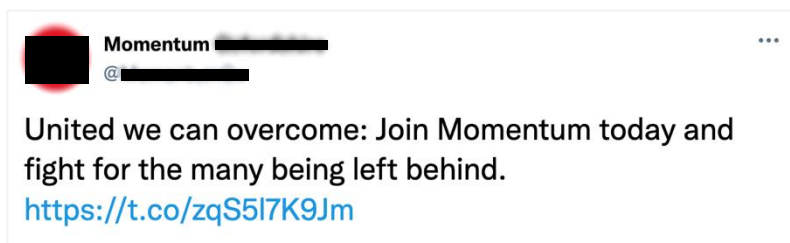
Actionability was a central focus of postings from the official account, with URL links provided to the reader to direct them to the registration forms on the official website (peoplesmomentum.com).



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 3

(@PeoplesMomentum, Twitter, 28/09/2020)

Whereas the official Momentum account engaged in recruiting new members on a routine basis, local groups often did it in response to events that were viewed as adverse to the brand community. This indicates that new members' recruitment helps create a sense of positive outcome from adverse events and the need to recover collectively.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 4

(Local Group 4, Twitter, 06/06/2021)



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 5

(Local Group 8, Twitter, 23/05/2020)

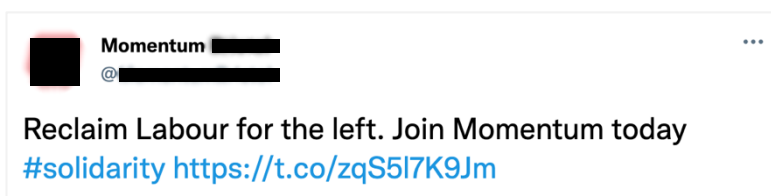




### Recruitment of Members Artefact 6

(Local Group 5, Twitter, 19/05/2021)

Local groups also emphasised the connection between Momentum and the Labour Party and the role they seek to play in shaping the party. Additionally, the nature of the group was clearly highlighted, and references to socialism, left-wing politics and solidarity were all recurrent themes in local group communications and discussions in relation to the recruitment of new members.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 7

(Local Group 2, Twitter, 02/05/2020)

Local groups also tended to indicate what new members may be able to get involved with upon officially joining the group, including within the specific geographical location. Many communications focused on the significance of membership and indicated that the group's actions were necessary.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 8

(Local Group 4, Twitter, 06/06/2021)



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 9

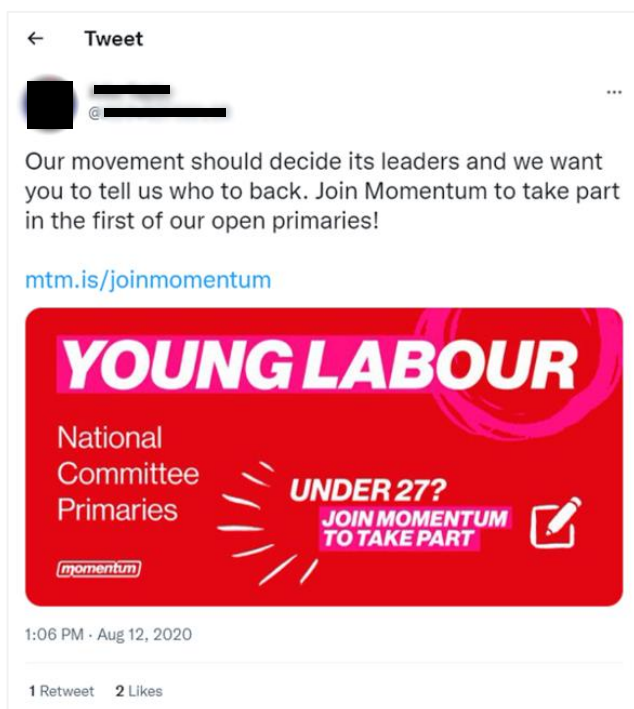
(Local Group 2, Twitter, 19/08/2021)

Recruitment of new members was not limited to official representatives of Momentum. Typical members and individuals affiliated more closely to the organisation also actively found prospective members and recruited them into the group. Unlike the planned activities in this area of the national and local organization, ordinary members often sought to recruit more opportunistically, when prospective members identified themselves in a number of different ways. Momentum members were much more likely to draw upon personal experiences and relationships to encourage the group's joining.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 10

(Ecosystem actor 94, Twitter, 7/05/2021)



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 11

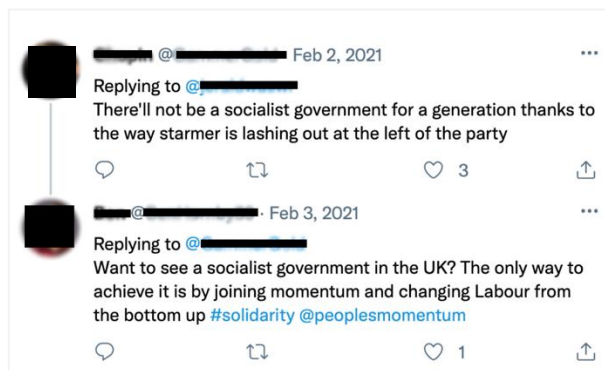
(Ecosystem actor 87, Twitter, 7/05/2021)



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 12

(Ecosystem actor 30, Twitter, 05/06/2021)

Members often try to appeal to individuals' pragmatism when the mainstream Labour Party does not correspond with the ideologies that they support personally.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 13

(Ecosystem actor 56, Twitter, 21/02/2021)

Members often related the benefits of membership to their own experiences and becoming part of Momentum. This took the form of addressing the feelings of reluctance that prospective members may have had. Drawing on personal experiences was appreciated by the people considering joining the community being seen as authentic.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 14

(Ecosystem actors, Twitter, 03/08/2020)

Members also used adverse events around the group to call for new members to join. Adverse events may include policy direction going against the group, or the Party losing a parliamentary seat. Following a defeat for Labour in a local by-election (to the Conservative party), group members pushed for new members and those who had left to return and continue the work of Momentum.



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 15

(Ecosystem actor 34, Twitter, 7/05/2021)



### Recruitment of Members Artefact 16

(Ecosystem actor 45, Twitter, 7/05/2021)

Recruitment of new members, therefore, is a central but diverse activity performed by all levels of the ecosystem. Both proactive and reactive rationales and different approaches can be identified. Within these activities, the value is co-created between the political brand, the recruiter and the recruited.

#### 5.3.1.2 Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing

Welcoming and inducting can be understood as *value co-creating activities that make new members feel welcomed into the online political brand community and offer orientation of how the community operates*. Welcoming activities were not a primary function of the official

account and were primarily undertaken by local groups and individual members. Welcoming activities were noted for their optimistic and friendly nature. Welcoming activities fell largely into two categories, proactive and reactive. Proactive activities are broader in approach and seek to welcome or provide orientating information to members who have joined recently.



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 1

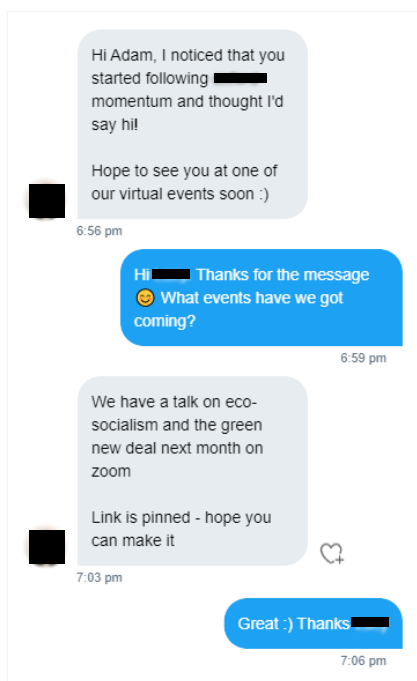
(Local Group 6, Twitter, 05/10/2020)

Other forms of welcoming and inductive activities were made in response to individuals making their status as new members known to existing ones. This can be thought of as reaching out to existing members, as there is no mechanism by which existing members may know who has joined Momentum.



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 2

Direct messaging apps, including those on the original platform, are utilised to nurture potential relationships with other members and welcome them to the Momentum.



**Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 4**  
(Ecosystem actor 39, Twitter DM, 19/08/2021)

### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 3

(Ecosystem actor 26, Twitter DM, 07/04/2020)

Inductive activities focus on informing less experienced group members about opportunities to get involved in different aspects of the brand community. All levels of the group engaged in these orientation-focused activities. A prominent induction activity from the perspective of the central organisation was to inform and encourage members to participate in the democratic process at the centre of Momentum.



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 5

(Local Group 9, Twitter, 27/09/2020)





**Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 6**

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 31/03/2021)

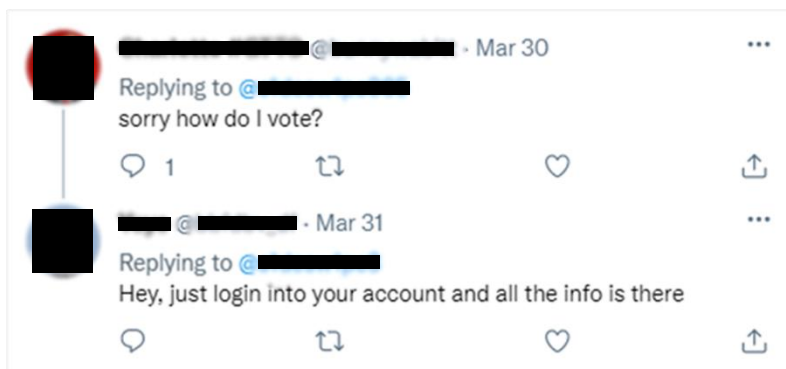
Encouraging participation in ‘offline’ events was also a significant orientation aspect for new members. Both the official account and those of local groups featured such information sharing.



**Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 7**

(Local Group 1, Twitter, 28/06/2021)

Existing members offer more practical orientation forms to new members, focusing on the 'how' questions. This includes explaining the purpose of aspects to the brand community, such as voting on the policies that the group advocates at the Labour Party conference.



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 8

(New Member 6 and Ecosystem actor 41, Twitter, 31/03/2021)



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 9

(Ecosystem actor 66, Twitter DM, 07/04/2020)

Actors within this ecosystem take particular pride in welcoming and inducting activities, and a great deal of importance is placed upon it.

The momentum members I have spoken with online, so far, have been both friendly and keen to welcome me into the group. An open request for help is rarely ignored and a noticeable sense people would go out of their way to answer any questions you might have is clearly present.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 04/05/2020)



Nurturing a sense of belonging is described here as *activities that create a sense of oneness with the wider community through kinship or expressions of solidarity*. Activities that nurtured a sense of belonging took various forms and approaches. The brand community developed customs in which members of the group were celebrated. In the tweet below, we can see an example of a 'hashtag' tradition known as #SocialistSunday, where members of the brand community reiterated or emphasised the group's moral purpose or the activities they had been up to relating to their activism on a Sunday.



### **Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 10**

(Local Group 4, Twitter, 17/10/2021)



### **Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 11**

(Ecosystem actor 29, Twitter, 16/08/2021)



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 12

(Ecosystem actor 33, Twitter, 14/02/2021)

This recurrent custom brought a degree of community celebration of what had been achieved that week. The tone reflected the ‘ups and downs’ of the life of the political brand, which can be seen in the above example. Postings of this type often constituted a jeering-up of fellow members when adverse events or circumstances had occurred.



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 13

(Twitter Profile Example 1)



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 14



### Welcoming, Inducting and Nurturing Artefact 15

(Twitter Profile Example 3)

Developing a sense of belonging activities also encompasses forms of expression. Brand community members often communicated this status on their public social media profiles. The three examples shown above demonstrate the different ways that brand community members publicly express their status as a members of Momentum. Some brand community members explicitly expressed their membership to the organisation, often before other significant personal descriptors. Members of the online community adopt left-wing symbolism. The rose, which has long been associated with the socialist cause and the Labour movement, is widely adopted in usernames and bios emojis. This can be understood as a means of identifying oneself to others as belonging to a single community. Another common practice amongst members of the ecosystem was to reference relevant political themes within their username or handle. This may have been supported by the organisation or associated public figures, such as Twitter profile example 2, or by disparaging references to the group's opponents. Members of the brand community also expressed their relationship to one another through shared hashtags, including those that may not be easily understood by actors outside of the group, such as #GTTO (Get the Tories out) or more literal expressions, such as #SaveOurNHS or #JohnsonMUSTGo.

In summary, actors within the brand community made efforts to welcome, induct, and nurture new members to create a sense of belonging to those who had just joined the community. The research suggests that this is an essential activity for both the existing member taking the first initiative and the new member, who was able to understand the community quickly.

#### 5.3.1.3 Network Building

Network building can be defined as *value co-creation activities undertaken to build and sustain long-term interpersonal relationships between group members for their mutual benefit and to*

*further the cause of the community.* Individuals within the group primarily conduct network-building activities, though official or local accounts facilitate many interactions of this nature. Online communities, therefore, offer a platform for building networks between the actors of an ecosystem, which contribute to the objectives of those individuals and the political brand. This occurs not only in online contexts but also in offline contexts. The account below shows an example of network-building behaviour that was facilitated by the page of a local Momentum group. Interactions of this nature are positive, with the actor seeking to make a positive, friendly relationship with a member of the 'in-group'.



### **Network Building Artefact 1**

(Ecosystem actor 3, Twitter, 27/02/2021)

Actors within the ecosystem may utilise methods other than direct 'outreach' to build networks. For instance, calls to reciprocate following each other's accounts are also commonplace. In these instances, the network building is not necessarily between official members of the brand community but those who are likely to be sympathetic to the brand message.



### **Network Building Artefact 2**

(Ecosystem actor 14, Twitter, 02/04/2021)

The above examples demonstrate how ecosystem actors may seek to build closer ties with other brand community members. The degree to which individual actors involve themselves in network-building activities is unique. Close and social relations with other members were essential to some actors and less critical to others.



### Network Building Artefact 3

(Ecosystem actors discuss 'Socialist Sunday', Twitter, 26/09/2021)



### Network Building Artefact 4

(Ecosystem actor 63, Twitter, /04/2021)

Friendship building within the ecosystem exist within a spectrum, between *membership extroversion and introversion*. Many within the observed spaces appear to actively seek out new interpersonal relationships with other members yet others hope to play a less active role in the socialisation of the brand community.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 12/06/2020)

In summary, network building and interpersonal relationships play a significant part in the co-creation of value in brand use for many actors. This value is multifaceted because interpersonal relationships themselves are a source of value for the actors who engage in them, and positive social environments facilitate other forms of value co-creation, which are explored in the different sections of this chapter. This research suggests that network building is vital to both the new and existing members.

### 5.3.1.4 Shared Learning

Shared learning can be understood as *value co-creation activities that encourage or facilitate knowledge exchange relating to the political brand community or related subjects*. Learning and education, as a function of the brand community, learning and education is something the central organisation is conscious of facilitating and encouraging, both on the social media platform and elsewhere, as the tweet below illustrates.



Shared Learning Artefact 1

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 21/07/2021)



Shared Learning Artefact 2

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 21/08/2021)

Within ecosystems, the community shares and dissects a wide range of knowledge. For instance, shared learning can involve the rudimentary understanding of brand use amongst



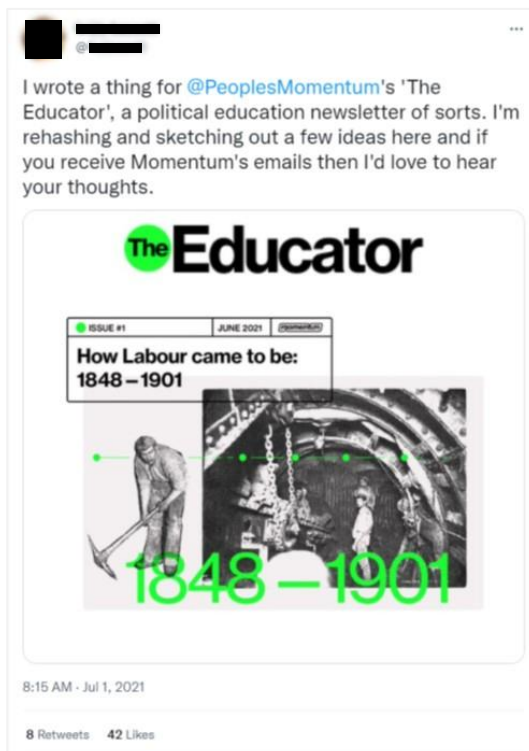
members, such as understanding what level of membership donation would be acceptable as in the example below (note: membership fees are defined by what member believes they can afford and is not set by central office).



### Shared Learning Artefact 3

(Ecosystem actor 14 and Local Group 3, Twitter, 02/04/2021)

The sharing of learning may also take the form of ideological or political discussion. In these activities, we see actors exchanging knowledge and other forms of information between themselves that is more complex with deeper meanings. Political debate is central to the group, though it rarely strays outside of its clearly defined political orientations. Instead, the political debate seeks to further understand developments within the political left. Thought-provoking postings often initiate political or ideological discussions by the official account, local group accounts or accounts of higher-profile members.



### Shared Learning Artefact 4



### Shared Learning Artefact 5

(Ecosystem actor 63, Twitter, 1/07/2021) (Left Wing Affiliate, Twitter, 8/12/2020)

The group has engaged, on several occasions, in political discussions around influential postings by the group's principal Twitter account and those of key members. This often takes place in relation to significant events, within or outside of the group. As a member of the brand community, I have enjoyed reading through long threads in which these ideas are discussed. Engagement within these discussions is not always as a contribution to the dialectic but manifest as endorsement behaviour such as retweeting or liking.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 08/12/2020)

Example of political discussion Shared Learning Artefact 6, shows ecosystem members responding to a post made by the central Momentum account on Twitter. It is common amongst these types of postings to have discussions and commentary among brand community members, which is mainly supportive. Actors who respond to these types of postings often emphasise, exaggerate, or add detail to the information contained within the original post, seeking to add credibility to the group message.



← Tweet

**Momentum** @PeoplesMomentum

There are now over twice as many Foodbanks as McDonald's in the UK.

2,651 Foodbanks

1,300 McDonald's

Everyone should have the [#RightToFood](#)

1:51 PM · Nov 18, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

56 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 151 Likes

Tweet your reply Reply

**#SaveOurNHS** @ [redacted] · Nov 18, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
They'll be paying us in gln next.

@ [redacted] · Nov 18, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
This day and age, 1821.

@ [redacted] · Nov 18, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
Absolutely agree, yesterday I put a motion to our full council to make Southampton a [#RighttoFood](#) city and the Tory administration voted against our motion. This despite a third of our children living in poverty, with growing rates of food insecurity. Shameful

(Example of political discussion 1,  
Twitter, 18/11/2021)

### Shared Learning Artefact 6

← Tweet

**Momentum** @PeoplesMomentum

The Conservative's Nationality and Borders Bill would allow the government to remove British citizenship without notice or right to appeal.

This government's racist polices must be opposed.

[#BlackLivesMatter](#) [#ToryRacism](#) [#Windrush](#)



Am I British?

3:30 PM · Nov 19, 2021 · Twitter Media Studio

1,465 Retweets 210 Quote Tweets 2,996 Likes

Tweet your reply Reply

**EX-LABOUR MEMBER** @ [redacted] · Nov 20, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
I was born in U.K. my parents were British Citizens with a British passport from [#Cyprus](#) Am I British ??

@ [redacted] · Nov 20, 2021  
If you're actually interested, they can only do this if you have dual nationality (where your parents are from etc are irrelevant to the law). The video suggests you may be deported to a country you are not a citizen of, which as far as I can tell is nonsense.

... [Show replies](#)

@ [redacted] · Nov 21, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
My parents told this to me too...I cannot believe what this beautiful open & welcoming country is becoming under this new Conservative administration ...after all the years of service & commitment by many migrants they can just discard of many... [@AntiRacismDay](#) [@SUTRBarnet](#) 😞

@ [redacted] · Nov 21, 2021  
Replying to @PeoplesMomentum  
Makes all that cheering for the stripping of Shamima Begum's citizenship a bit more sobering now doesn't it? In the big picture, what happened to her relegated the citizenship of people with 'exotic' lineages, second class. How come people didn't see that?

@ [redacted] · Nov 21, 2021  
She was a test case. Due to decades of media vilification, many do not empathise with black and brown people. The vilification is so effective, that anything we do, is our fault. Therefore it was easy with Shamima Begum. Had she been white, it would be a different story

### Shared Learning Artefact 7

(Example of political discussion 2,  
Twitter, 19/11/2021)

An essential way in which members of the brand community share learning is by relating discussions to their own experiences. In the example of political discussion 2, we can see members of the brand community discussing the sensitive issue of citizenship. Several brand community members related the themes described in the original post to their own experiences. Others offered information to individuals who would be affected by any change in citizenship rules. Discussion of other cases, particularly those of a high-profile political nature (such as Shamima Begum and the Windrush scandal), were also related to the themes addressed. These forms of storytelling enrich and reinforce the guiding narrative established by the original post and offer advice and new perspectives on the subject matter.

As a public space, the environs of social media allow hostile access to interfere with the brand community. This affects shared learning activities as these encompass the battle for political narrative. The research suggests that sharing knowledge and experience is an important aspect to the political brand communities co-creation of value.

#### 5.3.1.5 Encouraging Participation

Encouraging participation is defined here as *any value co-creation activity that leads to widening participation amongst group members of the group organised or affiliated events, demonstrations, or democratic processes*. Like many political organisations, in-person and virtual events are important in a community's life. Within the observed space, Momentum sought to encourage and widen the participation of organised events amongst its members or others open to the group. As discussed in relation to other value co-creation activities, the case organisation was keen to be seen as an active community and not a passive 'club'. In other words, to highlight its mission orientation. The promotion of events was principally conducted by the actors who had organised them; typically, this would be the main momentum account or those of local groups that had organised smaller events in their locality. As a group that intends to be run by its members, another critical aspect of encouraging participation was to increase the involvement of members in the democratic processes of the community.

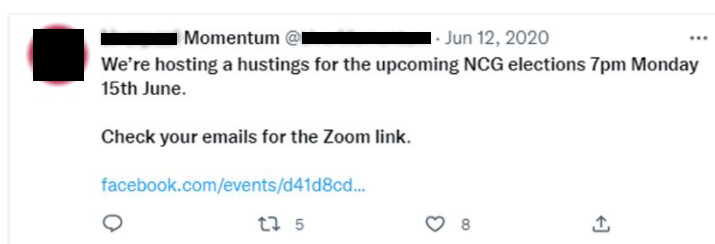
Organised events ranged in size from small general meetings of the local groups to larger demonstrations in public areas (when government COVID restrictions permitted). Social media was used to spread the message of when events would be held in the future and often to encourage members and others to attend those events. The encouragement of participation reaches beyond building awareness of events taking place for the benefit of the group by linking it in no uncertain terms to the organisation's political objectives and its members.



### Encouraging Participation 1

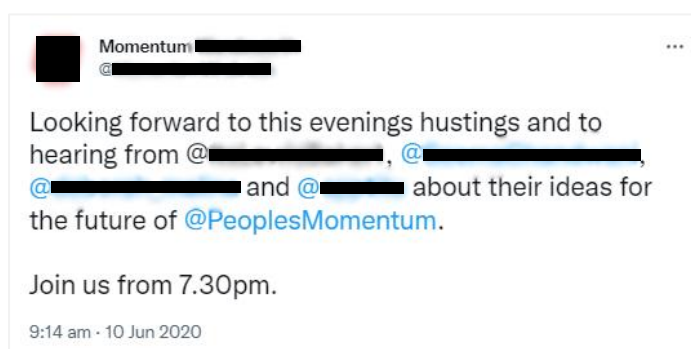
(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 18/10/2020)

In the example below, a local momentum group encourages its members to participate in the broader group's electoral process. The National Coordinating Group (NCG) is a democratically elected representative body made up of Momentum's members, whose job it is to form and shape the policy and campaign direction of the group. The hustings process is designed to allow those members voting in the election to hear each of the candidates' debate key issues and put forward their ideas for how Momentum should be organised.



### Encouraging Participation 2

(Local Group 2, Twitter, 12/06/2020)



### Encouraging Participation 3

(Local Group 10, Twitter, 10/06/2020)

Encouraging participation also included calls for members to take an active part in the life of the Labour Party. As membership of the party is a condition for membership to the community, and the fundamental goal of Momentum is to change the Labour Party, this form of engagement within the wider context was seen as very important.



#### Encouraging Participation 4

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 24/09/2021)

The above example further illustrates that the value co-creation activities centred around encouraging participation within the group and its processes typically made with explicit reference to a member's need to participate. In conclusion, actors within the brand community encouraged others within the network and those outside it to become more involved with on and offline events such as those explored in this section. This demonstrates Twitter's usefulness as a tool as well as the desire of the community to increase engagement.

#### 5.3.2 Negotiating Brand Parameters

The second dimension of value co-creation activities generated from this netnographic approach is negotiating brand parameters. Due to the nature of Momentum and its outlined organisational objectives, the negotiation of brand parameters also encompasses those of the Labour Party brand. Two facets of negotiating brand parameters are identified: defining the Labour Party brand; defining the Momentum brand.

**Table 5. 2** Two activities of Negotiating Brand Parameters

Name:	Researcher Definition:
Defining the Labour Party Brand	<i>Activities which seek to negotiate what Labour is, and stands for, and what it does not.</i>
Defining the Momentum Brand	<i>Activities that make new members feel welcomed into the online brand community and offer orientation of how the community operates.</i>

*The Researcher*

### 5.3.2.1 Defining the Labour Party Brand

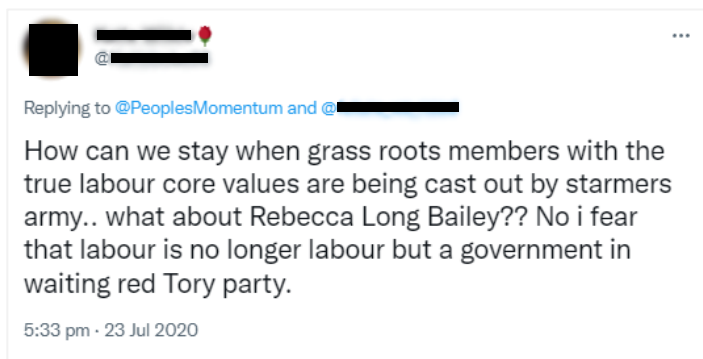
The first set of activities associated with negotiating brand parameters related to defining the Labour Party brand. Here, defining the Labour Party brand is understood to mean *all value co-creation activities which seek to negotiate what Labour is, and stands for, and what it does not.* Activities that help to define the community’s interpretation of the Labour brand encompass all levels of actors.

The Labour Party brand is negotiated within the Momentum community in several ways. The perceived brand identity, particularly in relation to political positioning, is a keenly discussed subject matter for the brand community. As described in the context chapter, Momentum identifies itself as further left on the political spectrum than many other groups, members, politicians, and present leadership of the Labour Party, which it disparagingly describes as ‘moderates’. A common theme the official momentum account addressed was the party changing direction since early 2020 when Jeremy Corbyn was replaced as Labour leader.



**Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 1**  
 (@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 18/10/2021)





### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 2

(Ecosystem actor 83, Twitter, 23/07/2020)

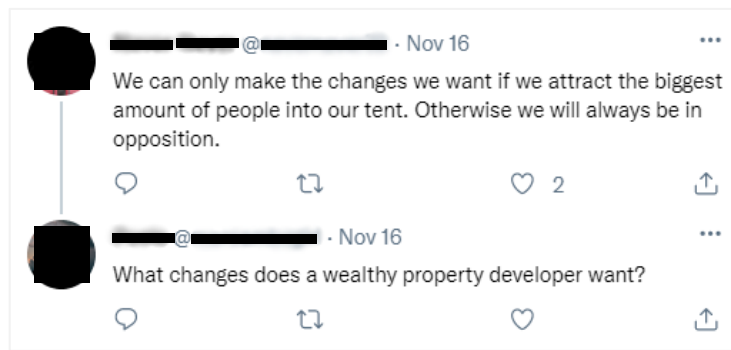
The image of the Labour Party brand was also discussed within the brand community. Emphasis was placed on Momentum's vision for a political movement funded and run by its members, in other words to be 'grassroots', and to move away from the New Labour mantra which welcomed funding from wealthy individuals and interest groups. In the example below, the subject of social class was approached in relation to these musings of party funding.



### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 3

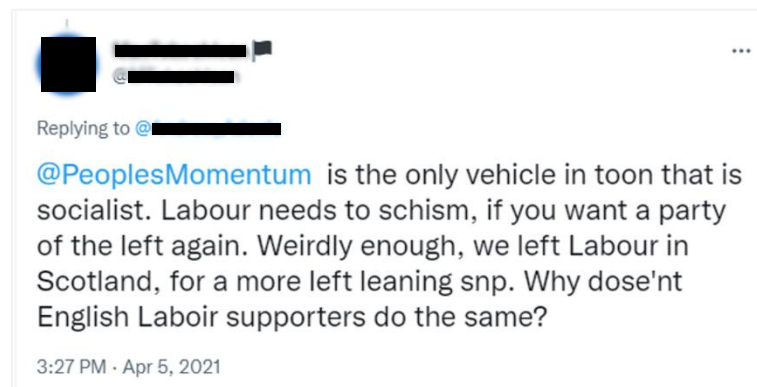
(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 16/11/2020)

The community negotiated the above issue, members debated the degree to which funding for the party from wealthy individuals was ultimately appropriate.



#### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 4

(Ecosystem actor 65 and 66, Twitter Interaction, 16/11/2021)



#### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 5

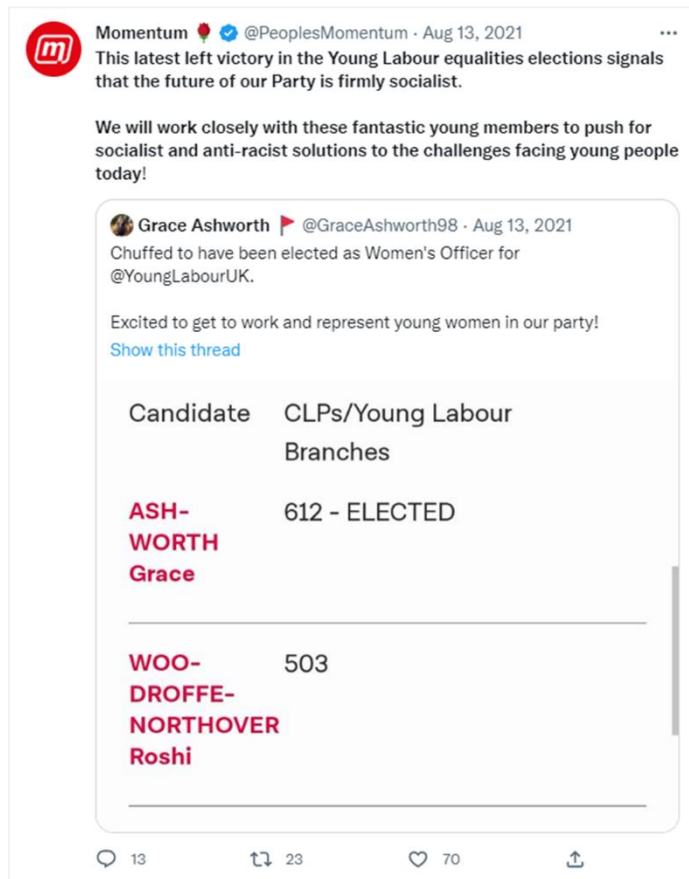
(Ecosystem actor 91, Twitter, 05/04/2021)



#### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 6

(Ecosystem actor 87, Twitter, 29/07/2020)

Therefore, a principal objective of this brand community was to redefine the Labour Party in its own image. In political terms, this meant moving to the left of the political spectrum, in terms of value co-creation activities, it meant being seen as an effective agent of change. Some posts emphasised the future direction of Labour’s positioning on the political spectrum. This adds to the sense that the community ultimately contributes to shaping the Labour Party brand through its influence and activism with younger community members in the coming years.



### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 7

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 02/10/2021)

The above examples, and others observed during the netnography, demonstrate a delicate symbiosis between the Labour Party and the members of the Momentum brand community. The Momentum community is simultaneously an ardent supporter of the party, and yet is also a fearless critic at the same time. As a group, the nature of Momentum suggests that it would undertake activities that would promote the party’s alignment to the further reaches of the left, other forms of brand definition are negotiated in the Momentum ecosystem. In particular, Momentum seeks to influence the Labour Party brand in its policy and leadership.

The Labour party's policy brand relates to the official party line on any significant issue. Notably this is the basis on which the Labour Party would campaign during an election. Party policy is an area that was discussed on an ongoing basis within the Momentum political brand community. Often, this constitutes more general calls by Momentum for the Labour Party to



adopt a more left-wing approach to policy creation and advocacy. This relates to the group's central message that the Labour Party should be fundamentally orientated further to the left of the political spectrum.



### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 8

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 18/02/2021)

In the below example, a more specific call for a change in party foreign policy is made and endorsed by members of the brand community. Within this example, the group suggests that the then present party foreign policy adopted by Starmer's shadow cabinet was neither morally defensible but also detracts from the party's electoral chances. Deviations from Momentum's preferred policy direction were often addressed in this severe fashion, calling upon the reader's conscience and judgment in relation to serious matters.



### Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 9

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 16/06/2021)

Members of the Momentum ecosystem also engage heavily in defining what the leader brand should be for the party. As Momentum was originally founded out of the leadership campaign of Jeremy Corbyn, there is a natural propensity for the group to engage in benchmarking and critiquing of the present Labour leader, Keir Starmer, relative to his predecessor. In the below posting, the group diminishes the ‘professional politician’ image of Keir Starmer's Labour Party and the highly polished ‘spin’ which is likened to those seen in the political television series ‘West Wing’.



#### **Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 10**

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 17/06/2021)

Ordinary members of the brand community also engaged in comparisons between Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer. A recurrent theme amongst members of the ecosystem related to measurements of genuineness between the current and former leader.



#### **Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 11**

(Ecosystem actor 27, Twitter, 23/06/2020)

An attachment to Jeremy Corbyn's leader brand within the brand ecosystem was still evident. The brand community was keen to point out what they believe to be an erroneous distancing from Jeremy Corbyn's time as party leader before the 2019 general election. Again this demonstrates a ‘balancing act’ between the simultaneous held dynamic of party supporter and critic was apparent within these activities.



### **Defining the Labour Party Brand Artefact 12**

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 26/11/2020)

In conclusion, the research findings suggest that members of the political brand community seek to define the Labour Party brand and derive value from this activity.

#### **5.3.2.2 Defining the Momentum Brand**

Defining the Momentum brand encompasses *all value co-creation activities that involve negotiating what the Momentum brand, independent of the Labour Party brand, is and is not.* Though similar in some respects, activities that sought to create the Momentum brand deviated from those that sought to define the Labour Party brand. The discourse around the Momentum brand was more open and complex than simply advocating its vision of the party brand. Here, the organisation sought to provide how its members could shape critical aspects of the brand and how it was interpreted.

The brand community sought to negotiate what type of organisation Momentum is. As the context chapter addressed, Momentum is a relatively unique entity in that it does not directly seek to gain power itself. Instead, it acts to influence a major party regarding policy direction and leadership, which it hopes will then be elected. As was also addressed, deciding exactly what term is most appropriate for Momentum is challenging in the absence of comparable entities or precedence. The organisation described itself as a 'movement' within the observed space and qualified this at regular intervals.



### Defining the Momentum Party Brand Artefact 13

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 04/08/2021)



### Defining the Momentum Party Brand Artefact 14

(Ecosystem actor 95, Twitter, 15/04/2020)

Actors within the Momentum ecosystem also sought to shape other aspects of the brand. As a self-described progressive movement, Momentum and its members seek to define a clear message with contemporary issues in left-wing politics. In summary, the findings suggest that actors within the political brand community seek to determine what the political brand community is and is not, and that this activity is an ongoing negotiation between members.

### 5.3.3 Authenticating the Ecosystem

The third dimension of value co-creation activities is authenticating the ecosystem. This is understood as activities where brand community actors identify, validate, and sort those who belong within the community from those who do not. Within this dimension of value co-creation activities, three principal subsets have been identified: in-grouping activities; out-grouping activities; and allying.

**Table 5. 3** Three activities of Authenticating the Ecosystem

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Researcher Definition:</b>
In-grouping	<i>Activities in which the community negotiates the markers and barriers which distinguish group belonging, then authenticates and sorts individuals based upon these criteria within engagement platforms.</i>
Out-grouping	<i>Activities in which the brand ecosystem identifies and sorts outsiders and rivals of the community.</i>
Allying	<i>Activities in which the political brand ecosystem identifies and sorts individuals and organisations that hold a special relationship to the community, being separate but welcome in the community's day-to-day business.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 5.3.3.1 In-grouping

Momentum members engage in activities that metaphorically draw a circle around other actors it considers to be 'one of us'. These activities are collectively described as in-grouping. In-grouping is defined here as *value co-creation activities in which the community negotiates the markers and barriers which distinguish group belonging, then authenticates and sorts individuals based upon these criteria within engagement platforms*. As the engagement platform explored within this study is ostensibly a public one, in-grouping activities formed a central basis from which community members could recognise other genuine members.

Actors within the Momentum ecosystem often used community-specific language to address one another. Typically, community members' meanings of certain phrases and expressions would require researching or asking a group member for an interpretation. This allows

ecosystem actors to recognise the degree of belonging another has to the group and the level of experience an individual group member has. This is because prolonged engagement with the brand ecosystem requires an individual to understand the full message being communicated effectively. As a criterion of group membership, exclusive language allows members of the ecosystem to exclude members without determinable group knowledge.

It has taken me a few weeks to get my head around the various forms of unique expressions and acronyms the brand community uses. I often found myself Googling phrases that appeared obvious to everyone else or asking people I felt might not judge me for not knowing the meanings.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 27/05/2020)

As outlined above, political expressions are not always entirely exclusive to the Momentum brand community. However, they did require the reader to hold special knowledge and appreciation for progressive politics in Britain and sought to exclude many outliers from the ecosystem. In a similar capacity, derogatory language and swearing, mainly about political opponents, were also used to authenticate an ecosystem member.

**Table 5. 4** Group Terminology

<b>Examples of political in-group expressions used by Momentum members</b>	
<b>Expression:</b>	<b>Meaning:</b>
BLM	Black Lives Matter
Gaslighting	Manipulation through false narratives
Intersectionality	A political theory which explores multiple oppressions
Toxic	Destructive or obstructive behaviour
Comrade	An individual with a shared cause (particularly socialism)
Eco- / green- socialism	An ideology in which aspects of socialism and green politics are combined
#TaxTheRich	The belief that government spending should be funded by high levels of tax for the wealthiest individuals.
BoPo	Body positivity
Social Justice	The equal distribution of privilege, wealth, and opportunity within society.
FBPE	Pro-EU (acronym for 'follow back, pro-EU')
Karen	Pejorative term for a privileged or entitled white woman
TERF	Transphobic feminist (acronym for 'trans-exclusionary radical feminist')
GTTO	Against conservative government (acronym for 'get the Tories out')
Boomer	Used as a pejorative term for people born between 1946-64
#JohnsonOut	Call to remove Boris Johnson as Prime Minister
Fake News	Falsified or misleading news items
Solidarity	Expression of unity or agreement with fellow members
#CapitalismKills	An expression of the belief that capitalism is directly linked to millions of deaths through starvation and climate change
<b>Examples of community specific in-group expressions</b>	
<b>Expression:</b>	<b>Meaning:</b>
JC	Shorthand and term of endearment for former leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn
#JC4PM	Advocacy for Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister
Jez We Can	Advocacy for Jeremy Corbyn's policies using a play on words based upon Obama's well known election slogan
Oh, Jeremy Corbyn!	A chant and term of endearment when used Jeremy Corbyn is mentioned by actors within the group

*The Researcher*





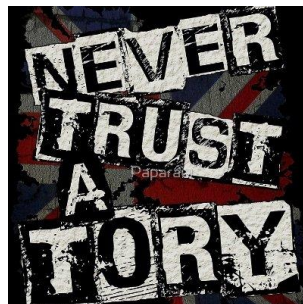
**In-grouping Artefact 1**

(Ecosystem actor 53, Twitter, 17/07/2020)

Members of brand communities also utilise in-group knowledge of identifiers, which allows actors to identify fellow members or those of a similar political disposition in the form of symbolism and imagery. There is a degree of overlap to other value co-creating activities identified elsewhere in this findings chapter relating to self-expression. Those same public markers can be used to identify other community members. The use of symbolism and imagery act as effective shortcuts to group identifiers such as language as they are, by their nature, visual and easy to interpret



**Semiotic Artefact 1**  
Example 1



**Semiotic Artefact 2**  
Example 2



**Semiotic Artefact 3**  
Example 3



**Semiotic Artefact 4**  
Example 4



**Semiotic Artefact 5**  
Example 5



**Semiotic Artefact 6**  
Example 6

(Examples of ecosystem actor profile pictures, Twitter, September 2021)



The above images show examples of ecosystem members' profile pictures on Twitter. Whilst images of this kind are not necessarily typical of all members, they do illustrate in the most explicit form the activity of identifying one's political allegiance and aiding others to identify fellow Momentum members. Several different themes can be found in the presentation of an actor's online profile. First, references to the previous Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn are common. While they decreased following his resignation from the Labour leadership, Momentum members continued to show and demonstrate their support for him. This typically used Jeremy Corbyn's image as a profile picture/ avatar, sometimes accompanied by words such as in the above example, 'I stand with Corbyn'. Other more literal forms relating to the theme of Jeremy Corbyn included slogans and text unaccompanied by images. Derogatory references to Momentum's principal opponents, 'the Tories' were also prevalent. This demonstrates that membership of the group is defined by what an individual supports and what they oppose. It is essential to recognise that using identifiers is a changeable and ongoing process and relates to events happening outside of the brand community itself. During the observation, references to the perceived 'ineptitude' of Boris Johnson during the coronavirus crisis was a common theme. Political issues that can be more clearly split left to right were also addressed in identifiers online, such as the National Health Service, as shown in the above example.

This research suggests that act within the political brand community engage in activities which help identify them as belonging to the group. This means that symbolism and iconography of the community is an important aspect to developing the sense of identity the groups need.

### 5.3.3.2 Out-grouping

Contrary to the in-grouping activities outlined in the above section, out-grouping can be understood as *all value co-creation activities in which the brand ecosystem identifies and sorts outsiders and rivals of the community*. Out-grouping is an essential function of the community that allows it to distinguish between friendly or unfriendly actors, but as a process that nurtures other brand value co-creation activities such as a sense of belonging between members and waging the narrative war.

The first out-grouping activity identified within the netnographic phase of data collection was determining the markers defining the out-group. Here, the Momentum brand ecosystem members sought to identify what distinguishes the out-group from the in-group. Defining these markers of the out-group involved comparisons to the in-group in reference to the forms of activism undertaken, the nature of that activism, and the motives of out-group members. Brand community actors considered their political activities to be of a higher quality and more authentic nature when compared to those of their rivals. In the instance below, a member of

the Momentum ecosystem claims that Conservative Party activists use dubious software on social media to give the appearance of a greater number of supporters (bots), that they engage in trolling behaviours, and that they are sanctioned by the party to lie when responding to questions.



### Out-grouping Artefact 1

(Ecosystem actor 53, Twitter, 16/12/2020)

Political brand communities seek to establish the out-groups lower ethical standards when campaigning. In the example below, an actor within the ecosystem defines individuals they perceived to belong to the out-group. The posting puts forward a notion that members outside of socialist organisations such as Momentum resort to violent reactions to progressive politics.



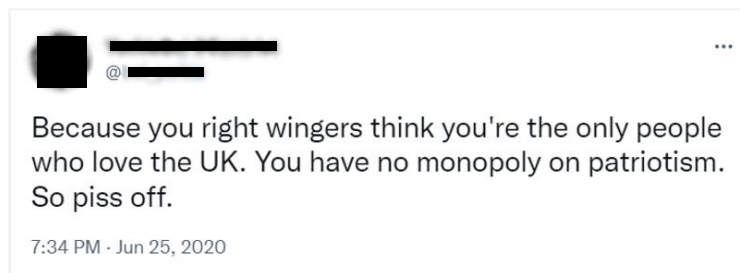
### Out-grouping Artefact 2

(Ecosystem actor 68, Twitter, 31/10/2021)



### **Out-grouping Artefact 3**

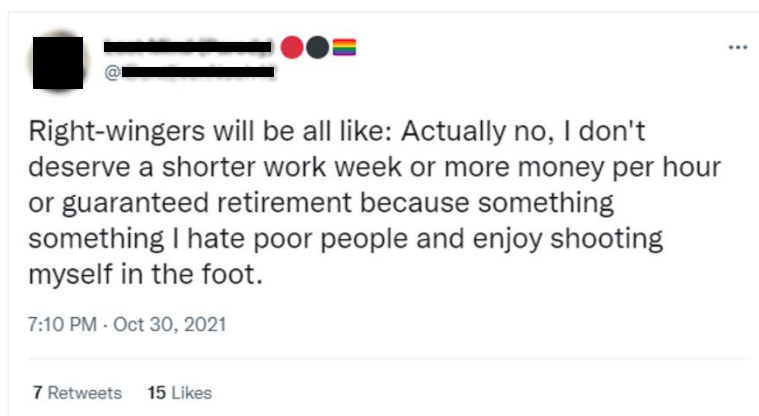
(Ecosystem actor 87, Twitter, 02/11/2020)



### **Out-grouping Artefact 4**

(Ecosystem actor 97, Twitter, 25/06/2020)

Brand ecosystems of political organisations prescribe motives to the actions of their political opponents. This out-grouping activity takes various forms and rationale because ecosystem actors vary in nature and credibility. Some actors within the ecosystem infer that there could be no logical reason that motivates those who are politically opposed to themselves.



### **Out-grouping Artefact 5**

(Ecosystem actor 55, Twitter DM, 30/10/2021)

The second facet of out-grouping activities is characterising 'the other', most frequently and in a derogatory or pejorative manner. Political brand ecosystems work to define labels that can be used to describe members of the out-group. The use of derogatory titles is related strongly to the notion that they are not only different but are so in a very negative 'anti-us' way. The

brand community often described its opponents as racist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, classist, liars, or climate-deniers.



### **Out-grouping Artefact 6**

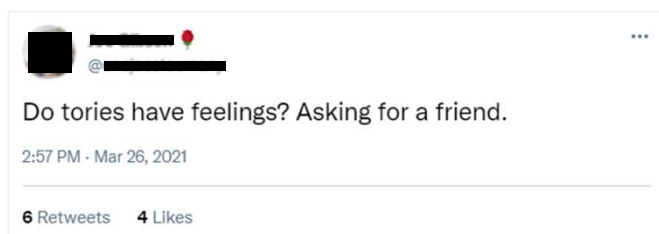
(Ecosystem actor 64, Twitter DM, 26/03/2021)



### **Out-grouping Artefact 7**

(Ecosystem actor 14, Twitter DM, 30/04/2021)

In the strongest possible terms, this derogation of the out-group served to highlight the perceived difference between those who formed Momentum and those who did not. This dehumanised the opponents of the brand and helped further facilitate other value co-creation activities identified within this chapter.



### **Out-grouping Artefact 8**

(Ecosystem actor 52, Twitter DM, 26/03/2021)

The findings of this research suggest that actors within political brand communities engage in activities which help to distance themselves from other groups and political interests. this

research evidences that identifying what the political brand is and is not is then reinforced by the identification of those that do not belong to the group.

### 5.3.3.3 Allying

Within the netnographic observations, a third group status consisted of individuals and organisations that were not officially affiliated with Momentum but with whom it shared strong working relationships and a sense of kinship. Allying is identified here as *value co-creation activities in which the political brand ecosystem identifies and sorts individuals and organisations that hold a special relationship to the community, being separate but welcome in the community's day-to-day business.*

Allying activities form around individuals who are associated with the group. Political brand communities endorse or offer other support to political figures who are broadly aligned with them ideologically when it is seen by the brand community that some form of injustice has been done towards them. In this sense, that individual is treated as though they were a member of the brand community and any threat towards them is valued as a threat to the group.



#### **Allying Artefact 1**

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 27/07/2020)

Allying activities also extended to organisations. These organisations must fulfil a group determined criteria, share ideological perspectives and political objectives with Momentum, and typically participate in a working relationship with the group.



## Allying Artefact 2

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 19/10/2021)

Allowing therefore can be considered as an important aspect, allowing members of the brand community to acknowledge a status between member and outsider.

### 5.3.4 The Business of Activism

The activism business is the fourth dimension of value co-creation activities and includes all collective efforts to affect political change, policy, and outcomes. Activism is the most clearly defined of the group's self-acknowledged collective purpose, consequently influencing a wide-reaching set of activity categories.

**Table 5. 5** Four activities of The Business of Activism

Name:	Researcher Definition:
Waging the Narrative War	<i>Activities which seek to influence the public perception of the community, associated organisations and ideologies.</i>
Fundraising	<i>Activities in which community members seek to raise funds for Momentum, beyond membership fees, it's causes, and associated individuals and organisations.</i>
External Campaigning	<i>Activities which contribute to the advocacy of clearly identified policies, ideologies, or election outcomes to the voting public.</i>
Internal Campaigning	<i>Activities which create awareness and membership 'buy-in' of externally advocated policies, ideologies or election outcomes.</i>

*The Researcher*

### 5.3.4.1 Waging the Narrative War

The brand community's central set of activities observed during the netnographic data collection phase was ongoing efforts to shape public discourse around politicians, events, and ideologies. Collectively understood within this thesis as 'waging the narrative war,' these actions are defined as all value co-creation activities that seek to influence the public perception of the community, associated organisations, *and ideologies*. These activities are wide-ranging, involve most of the actors within the ecosystem, and enjoy mixed success rates.

Members of the brand ecosystem work as effective 'public relations' agents on behalf of the brand community and its associates. Actors develop, support, and reinforce a dominant group narrative that is interpreted externally and internally. Active and continuous impression management takes many forms and involves many different actors. In its most basic iterations, it can be as simple as actors dismissing information that contrasts the dominant group narrative, described here as damage aversion tactics. An interesting case-in-point from the observations was the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party in October 2020. Members of the brand community sought quickly to establish that claims of antisemitism during his leadership were false and had been used to remove him from the party for political reasons.



#### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 1**

(Ecosystem actor 32, Twitter, 30/10/2020)





### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 2**

(Ecosystem actor 22, Twitter, 30/10/2020)



### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 3**

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 29/10/2020)

In the above examples, blame for what was interpreted as a false story was laid directly at the feet of the current labour leader Keir Starmer. A feature of impression management activities undertaken by the brand ecosystem is the speed at which they work, which is far quicker than traditional forms of public relations. The ecosystem starts immediately disseminating the narratives that the organisation would like to address.

Whether it is the nature of the platform or the community, the speed at which adverse news stories are picked up and dealt with in relation to impression management is very impressive. The brand community has often identified and communicated a competing narrative within moments of a story breaking, often far sooner than Momentum or the Labour Party can address it.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 30/10/2020)

Unlike other forms of impression management, particularly those conducted by a professional organisation, within brand communities, it is a more dialectic process in which actors



continuously market the group narrative to those who dissent against it. In the below example, we can see an instance of a so-called ‘Twitter spat’ in which two actors openly discredit one another’s point of view.



#### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 4**

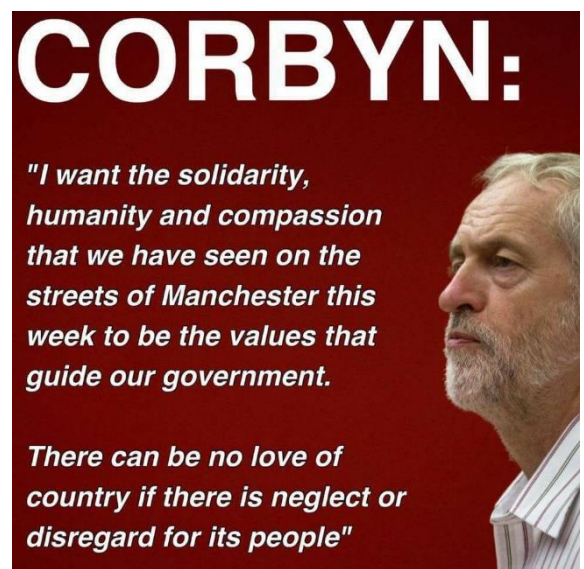
(Example of impression management, Twitter, 31/12/2020)

Impression management within the brand ecosystem also took visual forms. Images, memes, and other media were shared in and outside the community to shape the public perception of a cause that was essential to the community. In the two examples shown below, actors shared images of Jeremy Corbyn used with quotations attributed to the former leader, which many would interpret as positive in their central message.



#### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 5**

(Ecosystem actor 7, Twitter, 11/05/2020)



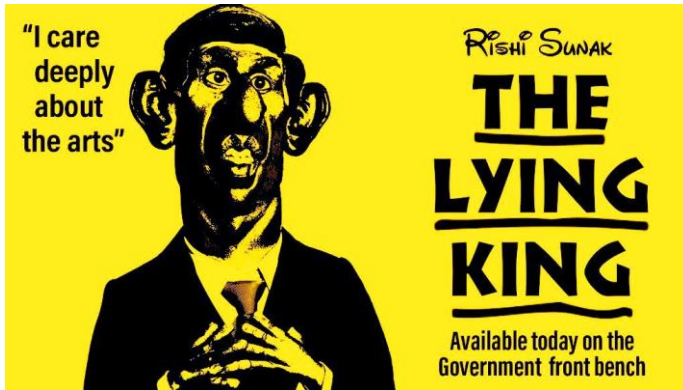
#### **Waging the Narrative War Artefact 6**

(Ecosystem actor 35, Twitter, 25/09/2021)

A second aspect of waging a narrative war relates to the defined out-groups of the Momentum brand ecosystem. Within these activities, community members seek to influence broader perceptions of the out-group, primarily its direct political opponents. Due to the adversarial

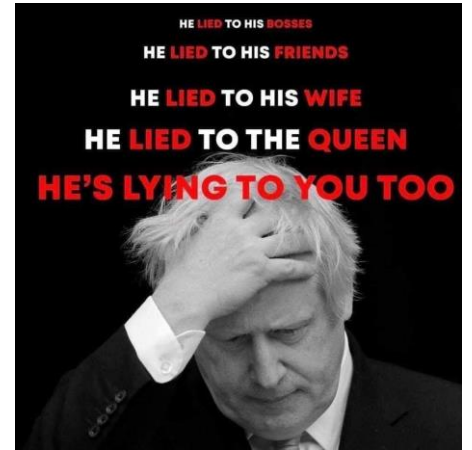
nature of politics, this typically involved making negative assertions against parties, organisations, and individual politicians. As with positive impression management, this may involve applying negative descriptions of opposing political groups or individuals generally or be more specific to current events.

Aspects of the 'narrative war' were highly visual. In analysing these aspects of the netnography took the form of semiotic analysis. This involves dissecting visual elements within an image to understand the underlying meanings, cultural connotations, and messages they convey. By deconstructing these elements, semiotic analysis aims to uncover the implicit and explicit messages the image communicates, revealing societal norms, ideologies, and power dynamics embedded within visual representations. This analysis examines various components such as colors, shapes, objects, and composition and their context within the image. The nature of the image discreditation varied between more literal expressions and those which called upon in-group humour. Seven examples of postings that aimed to discredit political rivals can be seen on the next page. These activities' Common themes were to attack rival political leaders' competency and integrity or to associate them with negative imagery.



**Semiotic Artefact 7**

(Example 1, Twitter, 05/10/2021)



**Semiotic Artefact 8**

(Example 2, Twitter, 01/06/2021)



**Semiotic Artefact 9**

(Example 3, Twitter, 06/07/2021)



**Semiotic Artefact 10**

(Example 4, Twitter, 05/06/2020)



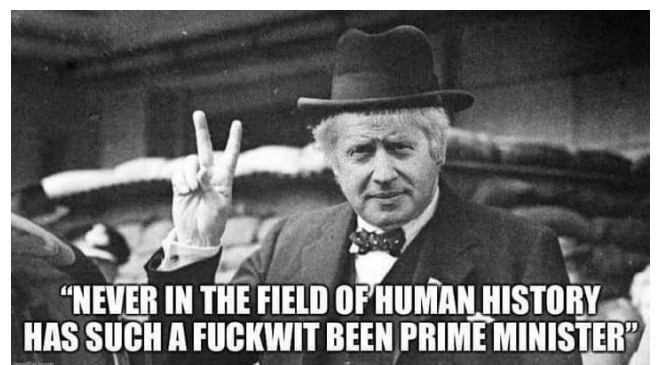
**Semiotic Artefact 11**

(Example 5, Twitter, 01/06/2021)



**Semiotic Artefact 12**

(Example 6, Twitter, 10/06/2021)



**Semiotic Artefact 13**

(Example 7, Twitter, 22/10/2021)

Uses of humour ranged from simple imagery intended to make the subject appear ridiculous to more specific criticisms. A recurrent theme addressed by the brand community in relation to Conservative leader and Prime Minister Boris Johnson was that he was untrustworthy and ineffective. Examples 2, 5 and 7 illustrate how this may be done, often, these were more serious and read like an unofficial and exaggerated political campaign by the Labour Party. Example 7, however, shows a more humour-based approach in which the creator manipulated an image of Boris Johnson to make him appear like wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, whom Johnson is known to admire. This image is accompanied by text which modifies part of a famous speech made by Churchill to express that Johnson does not have the ability to be Prime Minister. More complex uses of humour included imagined scenarios which satirised the Conservative government. In example 3, cartoon strip-like imagery is used to express an imagined situation in which Conservatives discuss rewards for NHS workers following the coronavirus pandemic. The post identifies activities that occur during the pandemic in recognition of the work of the NHS but were unpaid. It highlights that when one individual in this scenario suggests that healthcare workers be given pay raises and adequate equipment, they are thrown out the window of a high-rise building. Pay increases and PPE supply were key aspects discussed during this time by the brand community. This posting illustrates those same ideas conveyed in an exaggerated and satirical way. Other discreditation of rival groups took the form of more meme-like postings, in which rival political leaders were satirised with popular culture references.

In example 1, a post conveys a message created by an ecosystem actor that Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak had lied about offering adequate coronavirus support to the arts. To do this, an ironic reference to *The Lion King* musical is made using the well-known brand identity of the show but changing the title to the 'Lying King'. Additional detail is using the famous Disney font to spell Rishi Sunak, a reference to Sunak's brand identity, which uses a similar handwritten 'signature' style. Another widespread culture reference is made in Example 6 in which Boris Johnson and Donald Trump are made to appear as the 'Mini-Me' and 'Dr. Evil' characters from the *Austin Powers* franchise. This suggests that Boris Johnson is made in the image of Donald Trump. Negative associations to other out-group figures were a standard format.

Narrative building activities were also taken to defend the ideologies supported by the brand community. Ecosystem actors quickly utilised statistical information, historical comparisons, and other more academic forms of knowledge to discredit or disprove individuals who had attacked Momentum's ideological narrative. In the example below, an actor is responding to a claim made by an out-group member that standards of living had increased through free-market capitalism, which was introduced during Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister. This actor seeks to achieve this by presenting real statistical information relating to the



minimum wage relative to the idea of productivity, suggesting that wages had fallen since the rise in neoliberal fiscal policies.



### Waging the Narrative War Artefact 7

(Ecosystem actor 13, Twitter, 27/11/2020)

The final activity undertaken by the brand ecosystem relating to the shaping of narratives is storytelling. This involves community members sharing rich descriptions of their own or other people's experiences, the outcome being a contextualization of more abstract political concepts. In addition to the context storytelling provides, it also humanises stories and focuses on the campaigning and activism in which the brand community is engaged. The community's ordinary members primarily use storytelling, but is also used by key figureheads.

#GTTO #borisout  
@  
I was thrown out of my home by my mother's partner when I was 16.  
I got a job as a kitchen porter earning £3.68 an hour.  
I lived in a one room flat above a Chinese takeaway.  
1/2  
9:48 AM · Sep 18, 2020

#GTTO #borisout  
@  
I worked my way to restaurant manager while raising my two daughters on my own.  
I still can't afford a deposit.  
Don't tell me I should have worked harder.  
[#livingwage](#) [#corperategreed](#) [#socialism](#) [#GTTO](#)  
2/2  
9:49 AM · Sep 18, 2020

### Waging the Narrative War Artefact 8

(Ecosystem actor 31, Twitter, 18/09/2020)

Therefore, this research suggests that an important aspect of membership to political brand community is an actor's ability to engage in activities which help build the broader narrative around major political happenings. This factor was a key driver for many observed actors duration the netnography.

#### 5.3.4.2 Fundraising

The brand community actively raised funds for campaigning and other political activism work for itself and associated organisations. Fund raising is defined here as *all value co-creation activities in which community members seek to raise funds for Momentum, beyond membership fees, it's causes, and associated individuals and organisations*. Multiple levels of the ecosystem undertook these activities but often focused on the main Momentum account and local groups.

The official momentum account was used in August 2021 to raise funds for Momentum to attend the Labour Party conference and be represented in the proceedings. The context of this fundraising activity is essential. During this time, an increasing number of stories within the news reported that Labour leader Keir Starmer and his more centrist cabinet were seeking to reduce, if not remove, the influence of groups that sat further left of the party. Momentum and the closely associated former leader Jeremy Corbyn were regarded as specific targets of this action. Therefore, the fundraising was not only a contribution to the movement but also an opportunity to help secure the group's future within the Labour Party.



#### Fundraising Artefact 1

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 02/08/2021)

The request for funds was ultimately successful, and Momentum exceeded its target by £10,000. This resulted in a celebratory mood within the group. The acknowledgement and 'milestoning' of fundraising efforts are pivotal to this value co-creation activity. Participating members were invited to look at what was achieved and reminded of its purpose in securing the community's objectives.



### Fundraising Artefact 2

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 23/09/2021)

The brand ecosystem also encouraged fundraising for external campaigns that were related to its core objectives. In the example below, Momentum's official account was used to provide updates on an external fundraising campaign that provided legal funds for former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to take a libel case against a Panorama journalist. This highlights the idea that the brand community serves as part of a wider network of closely and less closely related entities working towards the same ends.



### Fundraising Artefact 3

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 04/08/2020)

The findings of this research highlight the important activity undertaken on social media regarding fundraising for the group and the causes that it believes to be important.

### 5.3.4.3 External Campaigning

External campaigning encompasses traditional political activities commonly associated with a political organisation such as Momentum. External campaigning is conceptualised here as *all value co-creation activities that contribute to the advocacy of clearly identified policies, ideologies, or election outcomes for the voting public*. External campaigning occurs offline and online and is undertaken by all ecosystem levels. It should be noted that online campaigning differs to the narrative-building activities outlined in section 5.3.4.1. Whereas narrative building focuses on engaging rival political groups for control and perceptions of narratives, external campaigning relates specifically to building awareness and demonstrating support for and communicating the community's set of policies to the electorate.

The community extensively used the online platform observed during the netnographic data collection to campaign for important policies. In the below example, a local momentum group uses the platform to advocate for what it describes as a green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.



#### **External Campaigning Artefact 3**

(Local Group 7, Twitter, 05/05/2021)

The official Momentum account was also used to campaign for the organisation's political objectives. The example below illustrates a key point about value co-creation activities. Campaigning often intersects with other critical activities identified elsewhere within this chapter. In the case of the example below, a degree of narrative building and out-group narrative destruction is present within a broader campaign message of increasing governmental funding for the National Health Service. This shows that value co-creation activities may generate different forms of value simultaneously.



 Momentum 🌹 @PeoplesMomentum · Dec 11, 2020

A decade of cuts and privatisation has pushed our health service to breaking point. Doctors, nurses and hospital staff have led this country through the pandemic, they must be given the resources they need to keep the country safe.



**Dozens of GP practices in England opt out of Covid vaccine rollout**

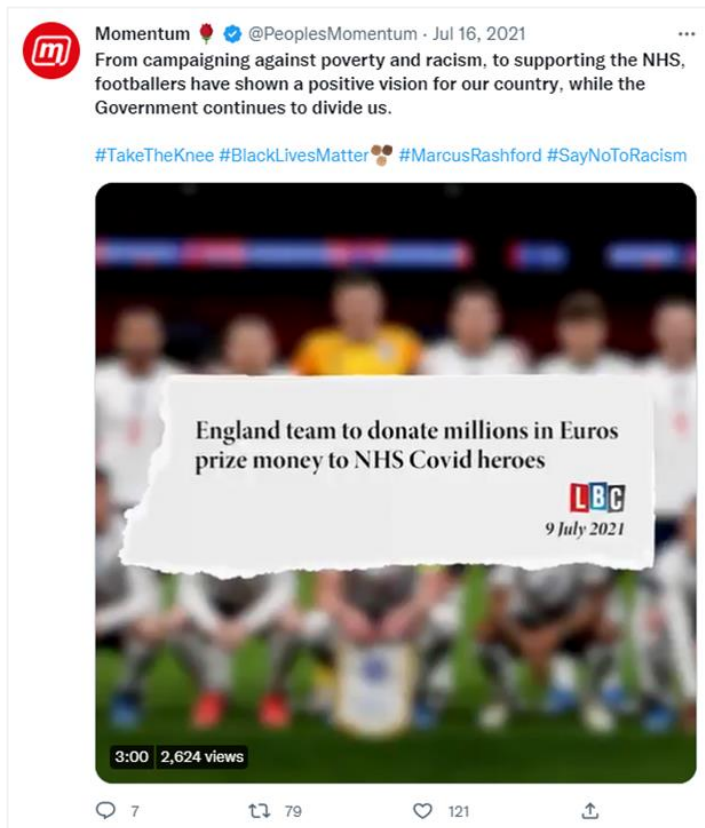
Exclusive: more than 100,000 patients will have to get jab elsewhere as GPs say they lack capacity to take part

[Read on The Guardian](#)

#### Fundraising Artefact 4

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 11/12/2020)

Similarly, the value co-creation activity of allying was also present in relation to external campaigning. The brand community would identify and negotiate which other campaigns to get behind and to support. The following example shows support being demonstrated for Marcus Rashford's food poverty campaign and Black Lives Matter.



### Fundraising Artefact 5

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 16/07/2021)

External campaigning has been identified within the findings of this research to be a critical facet off the groups undertaking of activism on Twitter. Actors within the community and the organisation promote and campaign for other aligned causes.

#### 5.3.4.4 Internal Campaigning

Whilst political campaigning often involves the expression of policies outside of the group, as explored in the section above, communicating these ideas between internal actors is central to the success of the group's activism. Internal campaigning is defined in this thesis as *value co-creation activities that create awareness and membership 'buy-in' of externally advocated policies, ideologies, or election outcomes*. Within the case organisation of Momentum, policies are decided upon by a democratic vote. This means that policy is internally negotiated and campaigned for by different group sections. While any member might have a say in forming policies in theory, not all community members always use this option, nor were they all mainly involved in the policy formation process.

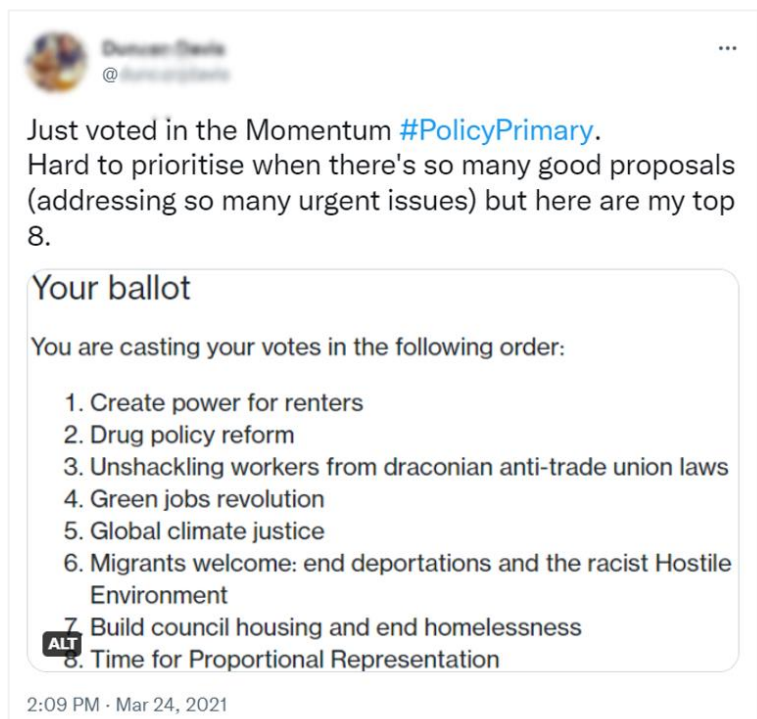
Internal campaigning was a key aspect addressed by the brand community, which sought to foster an open approach to encourage members to have their say in policy generation. The policy primarily occurs annually and allows members to select the policy the group will collectively campaign for at the Labour Conference. This indicates that the chosen majority of

any policies adopted and all members, regardless of the length of time with the organisation, could vote on these issues.



### Internal Campaigning Artefact 1

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 23/09/2021)



### Internal Campaigning Artefact 2

(Ecosystem actor 107, Twitter, 24/03/2021)



### Internal Campaigning Artefact 3

(Left Wing Affiliate, 26/03/2021)

The brand ecosystem was also able to use Momentum's internal campaign ability. Politically aligned individuals and organisations could get the community behind any policies that fit the group.



### Internal Campaigning Artefact 4

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 28/01/2021)

The findings of this research indicate that making other actors within the political brand community aware of different aspects and campaigns was an important activity for those observed.

### 5.3.5 Brand Advocacy

The fifth and final dimension of value co-creation activities relates to sustained efforts to facilitate long-term advocacy of the Momentum brand. Advocates are termed here as individuals who do not hold official positions but will promote the central messages and interests of the brand community. Three key types of brand advocacy activities are explored in this section, these are: membership pride; community milestoning; and promotion of the moral purpose.

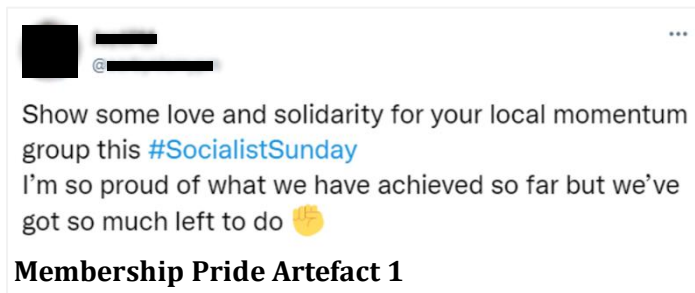
**Table 5. 6** Three activities of Authenticating the Ecosystem

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Researcher Definition:</b>
Membership Pride	<i>Activities in which ecosystem actors demonstrate their satisfaction derived from membership to the group.</i>
Community Milestoning	<i>Activities that involve acknowledging the progress of the brand community.</i>
Promotion of the Moral Purpose	<i>Activities that emphasise the group's moral purpose and its individual members.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 5.3.5.1 Membership Pride

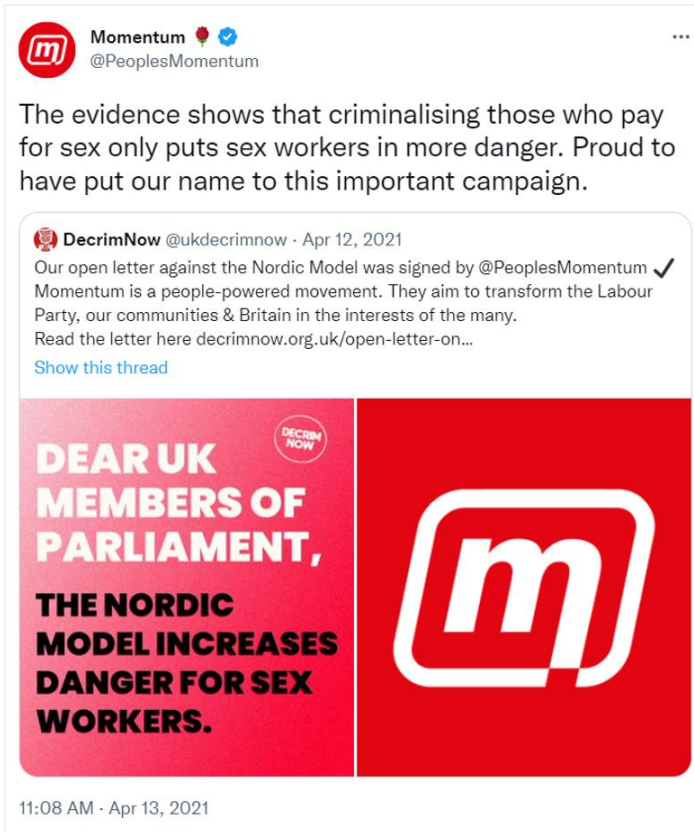
Actors within the brand ecosystem demonstrated their pride in belonging to the community through various activities. Membership pride is defined here *as value co-creation activities in which ecosystem actors demonstrate their satisfaction derived from membership to the group.* Membership pride is perhaps the most precise form of brand advocacy evident within the ecosystem. The promotion of the community and brand is directly communicated by language or visual means. While forms of membership expression have been addressed about authenticating other members, this section will explore individuals' choices in demonstrating their pride in the organisation. Activities in which pride of membership is demonstrated are principally undertaken by ordinary members, more influential members and to lesser extents by local groups. Nonetheless, the organisation reflects its willingness to accommodate these activities.



(Ecosystem actor 30, Twitter, 09/08/2021)

Within the brand ecosystem, community members made statements expressing their pride in what the organisation had achieved in the past and the present. Within Momentum, pride is felt by a member regardless of the level of personal involvement in achieving organisational objectives, the notion of success being a collectively earned achievement rather than an individual one. In the below example, the ecosystem actor reflects upon what the organisation has done so far, and how this has caused them to feel pride for the group and that this should motivate positive engagement with local groups of Momentum. The posting also used the previously described tradition of #SocialistSunday, which relates to the cultivation of the brand community. Pride of group membership can therefore contribute to nurturing a sense of oneself or others within the group. Pride was also shown for what the organisation is currently doing and the impact key members have on addressing key issues for the group. Posting from the main Momentum account refers to the work of a member of the NCG.





### Membership Pride Artefact 2

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 13/04/2021)



### Membership Pride Artefact 3

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 18/08/2021)

The brand community also expressed pride in its democratic processes. As already identified, Momentum classifies itself as a grassroots movement in which members have an equal and powerful voice in the direction and running of the organisation. Instances of this organisational structure provided high levels of satisfaction for individual members and the organisation itself. In the below example, the main Momentum account was used to express pride for both the newly introduced 'policy primary', the democratic process in which new policies are selected, and the group's success in having one adopted by the Labour Party.



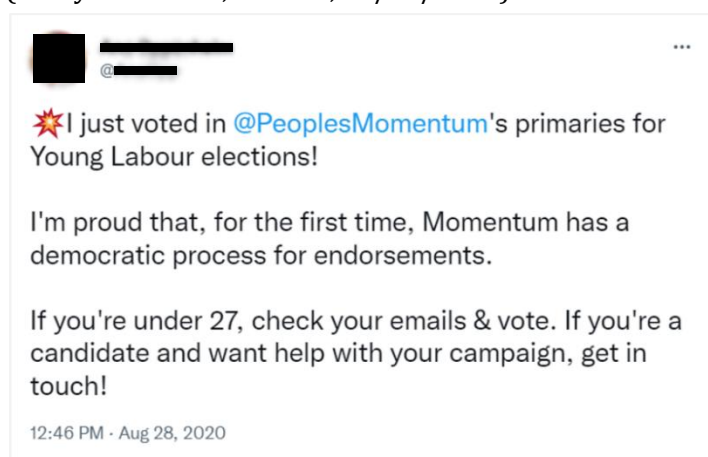
#### Membership Pride Artefact 4

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 07/10/2021)



#### Membership Pride Artefact 5

(Ecosystem actor, Twitter, 07/04/2021)



#### Membership Pride Artefact 6

(Ecosystem actor, Twitter, 28/08/2020)



Momentum members also demonstrated a pride for the social processes of the organisation, how it operated, the support structures, and the friendships which they were able to form within the community. Netnographic data collection identified that actors within the ecosystem are proud of how it operates as a community and how it aids the building of social and political relationships. The following typical tweet shows a member of the brand ecosystem reflecting upon the anniversary of the unsuccessful general 2019 election and the difficulty it brought to the community. The posting also identifies how this time held positive memories in terms of the social relationships they built up when campaigning as a group. This illustrates that actors sought to build pride through adverse situations.



#### **Membership Pride Artefact 7**

(Ecosystem actor 30, Twitter, 12/12/2020)



#### **Membership Pride Artefact 8**

(Ecosystem actor 28, Twitter, 13/11/2020)

Pride in group membership is also exhibited even when it is not addressed directly in an actors' communication. Expression of group membership satisfaction within the public-facing profiles online was also a significant example of the pride members felt for the organisation. This includes uses of group-focused self-descriptors, symbolism, and in-group expressions. Other sections of this chapter have identified that ecosystem actors commonly made references to their membership to demonstrate belonging to the group. This section identifies that this conspicuous use of membership status can also include reference to the satisfaction that this brings.

Within Twitter, a limit of 50 characters is imposed for a users' display name and 160 for their bio. The respective intended use for these platform features is to (1) show how the user prefers to be addressed and (2) to provide basic information about themselves. However, members of the brand community have utilised these spaces to reflect the pride that they feel for the community to which they belong. The use of emojis symbolising membership is common, as is the use of hashtags and in-group expressions that are often used alongside the user's display name. An individual's bio is often utilised to reflect their membership status, as previously outlined, and the strong emotional connection and sense of satisfaction derived from this status. With the display name and bio being restrictive regarding what the user has the space to include, direct references to membership indicate that a high degree of importance is attached to their status within the group and the satisfaction this creates.



**Membership Pride Artefact 9**  
(Example of membership pride 1,  
Ecosystem actor's Twitter bio)



**Membership Pride Artefact 10**  
(Example of membership pride 2,  
Ecosystem actor's Twitter bio)

Acknowledging the pride felt by a community member can be a literal expression within the Twitter bio. The above two examples illustrate ecosystem actor's use of their publicly

accessible profile information. Example of membership pride 1 makes the most literal expression of this satisfaction, whereas example 2 adopts an emoji to express their appreciation for their membership, reading as 'I love Momentum'. The analysis for this thesis revealed very many instances of this use of space to reflect pride within the community to which they belonged.

### 5.3.5.2 Community Milestoning

An important aspect of brand advocacy was acknowledging the community's progress with others over several years of existence. Community milestoning is defined here as *all value co-creation activities that involve acknowledging the progress of the brand community*. All community levels undertook activities that helped milestone the group's progress within the organisation but primarily focused on local groups and individual actors. Community milestone activities revolved around three key achievement types: turn out or level of engagement achieved; policy, political outcomes, or electoral victories; and important anniversaries and dates in the history of the community.

Achievements relating to the level of engagement of online and offline events, fundraisers and other activities were commonly referenced in the communications and postings of the official group, local groups, and ordinary individual members. For instance, political demonstrations, the group's postings sought to emphasise the number of people that had attended an event. This sought to demonstrate the group's success in assembling large numbers of people in public demonstrations. In the case of fundraising activities, the emphasis was switched to the level of money that had been raised. The below example shows a posting from the main group account illustrating the level of engagement the group had provided to an associated demonstration relating to NHS workers' pay.



### Community Milestoning Artefact 1

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 08/08/2021)

The brand ecosystem also sought to illustrate and mark its success in relation to electoral processes that determine Labour Party policy or other political objectives. Community milestones of this nature focused on emphasising past and present successes of its political work and campaigning. In the below example, the main party account is used to mark the group's success in having its social housing policy adopted by the Labour Party at the conference. This links to internal campaigning discussed in 7.3.4.4.



### Community Milestoning Artefact 2

(@peoplesmomentum, Twitter, 27/09/2021)

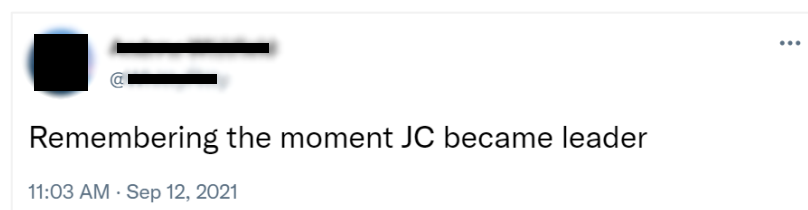
Members of the brand ecosystem also sought to mark key dates in the group's history. These activities are typically associated with positive anniversaries of Momentum, but in some cases, the group also reflected upon less favourable times within the group. The election of Jeremy

Corbyn as Labour Party leader is the key theme addressed in the below example, here, the actor acknowledges that many of the groups aspirations for UK politics were not achieved, but this could be the basis on which they continue to campaign for the group's interests.



### **Community Milestoning Artefact 3**

(Ecosystem Actor 54, Twitter, 12/09/2020)



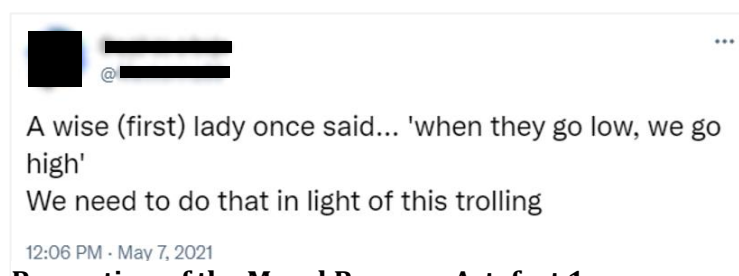
### **Community Milestoning Artefact 4**

(Ecosystem Actor 76, Twitter, 12/09/2021)

#### 5.3.5.3 Promotion of the Moral Purpose

A recurrent theme that has been addressed in other aspects of value co-creation activities has been the sense of moral purpose expressed by many of the communications of the brand community. Brand advocates often routed their actions in respect to the moral purpose they felt it expressed. Promoting moral purpose is understood *as all value co-creation activities that emphasise the group's moral purpose and its individual members*.

Members of the brand ecosystem identified that aspects of their conduct or behaviour within the online engagement platform was routed in the moral purpose of the community's work. In the example below, a ecosystem member addresses this concept directly with reference to a quote attributed to Michelle Obama. Drawing a parity between this quote and the behaviours in which the group engages illustrates the sense of moral purpose their work purveyed.



### **Promotion of the Moral Purpose Artefact 1**

(Ecosystem Actor 34, Twitter, 07/05/2021)



**Promotion of the Moral Purpose Artefact 2**

(Ecosystem Actor 94, Twitter, 29/10/2020)

Other examples of the promotion of moral purpose can be found in less literal parities. Posing rhetorical questions was a common method by which groups and individuals emphasised moral questions and the moral position of the wider group. In the example below, a reference is made to a recent news story involving a proposed new Royal Yacht, which was estimated to cost the taxpayer £190 million. In this posting, the local group questions this decision by drawing statistical figures about child poverty alone.



**Promotion of the Moral Purpose Artefact 3**

(Local Group 4, Twitter, 12/04/2021)



The sense of the moral quest of the brand community is a repeated theme across various interaction and value co-creation activities. The analysis of the findings indicates that the promotion of the moral purpose of the group was an essential activity to members of the political brand community.

## 5.4 Value Co-creation Roles

The second aspect of the netnographic data analysis is related to the roles adopted by ecosystem actors, though not officially recognised, to facilitate the value co-creation activities identified in section 5.3. In other words, roles can be understood as the sustained engagement behaviours which actors exhibit when undertaking value co-creative activities. The value co-creation role an actor assumes is not fixed, and an actor may assume more than one role simultaneously or transition between over time. Data analysis identified six key categories of value co-creation roles: the storyteller, the thought leader, the supporter, the educator, the satirist, and the polemicist.

### 5.4.1 The Storyteller

The role of the storyteller is focused upon providing real-life or real-world contextualisation of the narratives which the community has constructed together through the telling of stories. The storyteller adds corroborative detail and a 'human' perspective to more abstract political thinking. The role of the storyteller is defined here as *a set of engagement behaviours focused on lending verisimilitude to community narrative building activities using rich and meaning-laden real-world descriptions of their own, others', or imagined experiences which facilitate value co-creation*. The following paragraphs discuss different facets of the storyteller role.

Within the brand ecosystem, actors exhibited sustained engagement behaviours focused on telling stories that contributed to and enriched the narrative the rest of the ecosystem co-created. As alluded to above, this role used different methods depending on the actor in question. Storytellers may focus on their personal experiences and situations to give the community a deeper and more personal understanding of the area of interest. Momentum is engaged in a broad range of political issues. Accordingly, the types of individual stories told are diverse. Actors who referred to their own personal situation sometimes refer to these stories as 'lived experience', mainly when they related to experiences of discrimination based on their social class or identity. Observed themes within the netnographic data drew upon individuals lived experience of the journey to citizenship for migrants to the United Kingdom, experiences and treatment of asylum seekers, forms of homophobia and transphobia faced by actors, racial inequality, ableism, misogyny in the workplace and others. Storytelling in this form is often

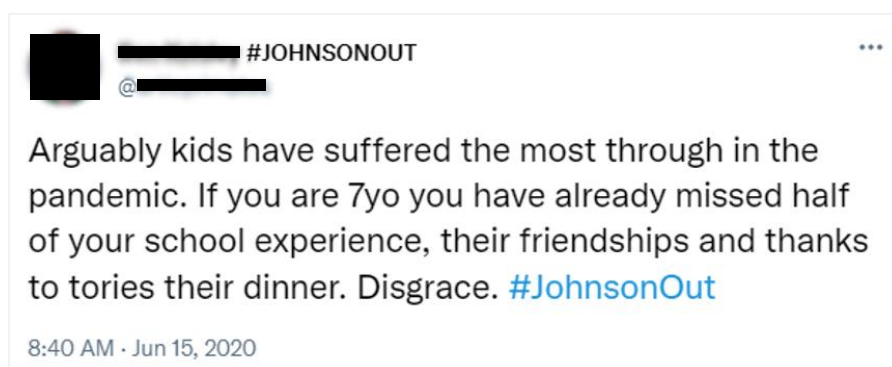
expressed as comments to related communications within the community but can also be an independent posting by the actor.

Many members have shared personal stories of the subjects discussed by the brand community, at times this has included information which is deeply personal, and I can only imagine this is highly emotive to them. It appears references to personal experience is valued by other members of the brand community who see it as courageous and a reminder of the groups purpose.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 04/02/2021)

Actors within the brand ecosystem may also choose to share stories about others which contributed similarly to personal experiences but allow a connection to those outside of the community. This also allowed storytelling to replace individuals who may not be able to partake in the brand community, such as young children, those living overseas, or people for whom English is not their first language. Stories of this kind may be sourced from an individual's personal network, professional experience, or volunteer work within charitable programmes.

The final method related to this role is using imagined or hypothetical stories. Within the storytelling role, an actor may not only call upon factual stories of their own or others true experiences, but instead posit hypothetical and imagined experiences. These stories are not imagined in the sense that they are false or designed to mislead. Instead, they are utilised by the storyteller to emphasise the real-world impact of discussed ideas even when real-life examples are unavailable. A real-world example may be unobtainable due to the nature and actors' network or the fact that the discussed policy is not in place, and therefore, no practical example exists.



### **Storytelling Artefact 1**

(Ecosystem Actor 54, Twitter, 15/06/2020)

The findings of this research suggest that some access within the community undertake storytelling roles for extended periods.



## 5.4.2 The Thought Leader

The role of the thought leader centres around engagement behaviours in which actors play a central role in the creation and dissemination of original ideas within the group in relation to the defining of brand parameters, determining the markers of the in-group and out-group, creation of narratives, and internal and external campaigning. Through sustained thought leadership, these actors develop considerable influence within the group and act as central nodes in the dialectical process of the in-group. Thought leaders are defined here as *engagement behaviours in which influential actors develop, discuss, and disseminate original thought within the group in relation to value co-creative activities*. This section will explore five central facets of the thought leader role: expert analysis; unique assessment; novel thinker; problem identifier; and reach advantage.

The first facet of the thought leader role was expert analysis. Expert analysis can be understood as actors who demonstrate high competency levels in interpreting current events or political arguments and effectively communicate this to other less well-versed members of the brand ecosystem.

Thought leaders also demonstrate the ability to offer unique evaluations of current situations. Within this facet, the thought leader is differentiated from their peers in relation to their ability to arrive at independent yet useful conclusions about political news, policy or other issues. This can be understood as what makes an individual worth listening to. This relates to narrative building identified in Section 5.3.4.1.

A number of actors within the ecosystem position themselves as ‘public intellectual’ types, they are highly involved in the ecosystem and contribute their own perspective to any relevant news. Since entering the brand community space the main subject of conversation seems to have been Keir Starmer becoming Labour leader. Many have been repetitive, but a few stand out for the interesting insight for analysis, offering depth and understanding of the more complex ramifications it will have for the group and the party. This has often been positively received by other actors, however it can sometimes be viewed as pompous if the actor does not have the credentials to back it up. Some actors within the ecosystem have built up a large following on the back of this, while engaging in very few other ways.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 09/05/2020)

The third facet of the thought leadership role is the ability to generate original solutions to issues the group or its associated organisations face. As with the second facet of the novel

thinker addressed above, it is the ability for originality and novel thought in identifying and promoting resolutions which distinguish an actor as a thought leader.

Thought leaders act to identify problems on a number of different levels. First, they may test the ideas of others and ensure that they stand up to testing. They may also identify problems on a larger scale within the organisation which they feel should be addressed. They then use their platform to make other actors aware and develop a response to those problems.

Prominent members of the community such as Hasan Patel (@CorbynistaTeen) and Mish Rahman (@mish\_rahman) have a significant following and their use of the online engagement platform to shape ideas within the community. It is also clear that interactions with their postings often garner greater interest than those from official or community accounts. I would like in this too the idea of 'influencers' in commercial social media marketing. It does feel more authentic.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 24/08/2020)

As already identified, thought leaders are individuals of influence who have developed a large following on social media platforms such as Twitter. The extensive 'reach' they enjoy because of this places them at an advantage in the marketplace for ideas as more people can engage with, understand, and adopt the ideas they have promulgated.

### 5.4.3 The Supporter

Sustained engagement behaviours support other ecosystem actors are described in this thesis as the supporter role. Supportive behaviours within the context of this ecosystem are wide-ranging and varied, and it also encompasses different levels of engagement on the part of the actor. The role of supporters should not be seen as passive or introverted.

The first facet of the supporter role to explore is the endorsement of others. While an actor in the supporter role may not actively contribute directly to the identified value co-creation activities outlined in this chapter's previous sections, they seek to endorse more active members in their contributions. Endorsing may take several forms, mainly facilitated by the social network. Endorsement behaviour might be as simple as liking a post or 'retweeting' it. More complex endorsement forms include commenting and directly stating agreement with the posting. Outside of the platform, a member of the ecosystem may mention another or their work by name.

Having become familiar with some of the key players within the brand community - and people who take a less active role. Something that has surprised me is that a lot of

accounts which appear inactive at first glance associated with the brand community are involved in endorsement activities such as liking and writing supportive replies. It would be interesting to know why they opt to only engage in this way.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 17/09/2020)

Encouragement is also offered by those assuming the role of supporter within the ecosystem. Individuals encourage others, particularly those who take more active roles value co-creation engagement, to continue their work in the form of motivation and praise. Encouragement often involves directly offering praise of another actor in response to a particular posting or sending a message on social media.

#### 5.4.4 The Educator

The educator role consists of sustained value co-creation engagement behaviours focusing on distributing knowledge within the brand ecosystem. The role of the educator is distinct from that of the storyteller and thought leader, as the expressed knowledge is underpinned with factual insight, theory, or conceptual understanding, rather than a descriptive narration of phenomena. Here, the educator role is defined as *engagement behaviours in which the actor provides an academic perspective and knowledge of relevant subjects which are being discussed within the wider community in support of value co-creation activities*. The role of the educator relates to the shared learning activity identified in section 5.3.1.4. Two facets of the educator role are explored within the following paragraphs.

People who contribute to the community discourse and discussion of narratives [on Twitter] are overwhelmingly biased in their activism work, acknowledging that their strongly held world view which informs much of what they do – often these are open biases. These actors ally with those who confirm their biases and disassociate with those who do not. A small number of actors appear to rely on academic or practical experience. These individuals do not refer to speculation when contributing to value co-creation activities.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 13/01/2021)

The role of the educator inside the brand value co-creation ecosystem is to provide an authoritative source of factual information, usually without expecting personal biases. Whereas the storyteller and thought leader offer original or rich descriptions to the community discourse, the educator, as an academic, provides the most respected source of information. Consequently, the educator role is assumed by actors whose knowledge is underpinned by qualifications, academic study, and practical experience. This means the educator role is

limited to individuals with distinguished positions within universities, industry, the public sector, unions, or party politics.

The role of the educator can also be seen as a facilitator for the value co-creation activity of shared learning, identified in section 5.3.1.4. The educator prioritises group learning by encouraging their own 'teaching' to be present within the brand ecosystem and allowing others with their specialist understanding of various topics to come forward and offer further insight, particularly based on real-world experience.

I quickly come across a few really interesting member accounts in which they talk a lot about the ideological aspects of the brand community. There has been fascinating discussion around those accounts. I've been interested in what a lot of members have been discussing in recent days after the death of George Floyd, many relating it to a wider discussion of political theories such as systemic racism and critical race theory. (Researcher, Immersion Journal, 28/05/2020)

In summary the role of the educator was assumed by some members of the political brand community, this involved exploring the basis of ideologies as well as the Labour Party's history.

#### 5.4.5 The Satirist

The satirist role can be understood as *sustained value co-creation engagement behaviours in which the actor mocks or ridicules political opponents of the brand community through the use of humour, irony, and exaggeration for the amusement of other members of the group*. The sustained use of satire by actors within the brand ecosystem is closely related to impression management and narrative creation activities. The satirist nurtures a sense of belonging between other ecosystem members, builds and reinforces narratives, and lends a comedic aspect to the campaigning. This section explores three facets of the satirist role: in-group humour; irreverence; jocularitas; memeing.

In-group humour was a key facet of the role of satirist within the brand ecosystem. The satirist sought to entertain fellow members of the brand community with culturally enshrined humour which often took the form of common subjects of ridicule, characteristics of the organisation which was a source of humour and reference to in-group language. In-group humour primarily focuses on light-hearted exchanges, which contributes to negotiating brand parameters and nurturing a sense of belonging.

Something I didn't expect to see within a political ecosystem was a good degree of humour in many of the exchanges between members - I assumed they would have taken themselves too seriously for that. Admittedly however, most jokes are at the expense of the Conservative Party or Boris Johnson.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 23/06/2020)

Humour exhibited by satirists within the brand community also included a healthy irreverence for opponents to the brand community, be those individuals, rival groups, or other institutions. Irreverence demonstrates disregard for those opposing entities and axe to bond members of the brand community together as a further action of defining brand parameters.

Jocularly is understood here as when a satirist comments or intervenes within an otherwise unhumorous exchange using jokes or witticisms of related subjects. This may act to further a fellow brand member's arguments or ridicule opponents. In other cases, it may 'take the heat' out of exchange by injecting humour.

The final activity of the satirist, though perhaps an entire role in of itself, is that of memeing. Memeing is the process by which a humorous cultural item, usually in the form of an image and text, is created and distributed amongst peers. Memes are a visual form of humour that usually revolves around mocking political opponents, but they can also reference positive aspects of the community. The creation and distribution of memes relate to several value co-creating activities outlined in previous sections of this chapter.

I've enjoyed viewing the memes which are shared within the brand community, they can be quite funny. Beyond simply adding a different dimension to the political discussion they help foster a sense of community, as they are ultimately made for the enjoyment of people who are of the same viewpoint.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 13/01/2021)

Analysis of the research findings indicates that some actors within the brand community engage with the community over a long time in the role of a satirist, in this role they inject elements of humour into the group's activities.

#### 5.4.6 The Polemicist

The polemicist role is orientated around debate and impression management within and outside of the community. This role is defined here as *sustained value co-creation engagement behaviours in which the actor engages in impassioned debate using various methods, including stating counterarguments, discrediting sources of information, discrediting opponents, and*

*ridiculing opponents*. The polemicist plays an active role in the impression management of the Momentum brand, particularly what is being described within this thesis as the business of activism. This role relates to activities discussed in 7.3.4. Actors of different experience levels and influence within the brand community may take the role.

Forming and then convincing others of the group-generated narrative was a key aspect of the role of polemicists. Working independently or with others, the polemicist first works quickly to identify an 'angle' from which news stories, policy suggestions, or events within the group should be interpreted by those within or outside the brand ecosystem. Then, polemicists take all the available opportunities to disseminate this viewpoint and convince others to adopt and advocate for themselves.

It's clear some ecosystem actors have a greater ability to be persuasive than others through powerful articulation of their ideas. Where many seek to explain that point of view, more convincing individuals are able to influence others to that same point of a view.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 19/03/2021)

The polemicist acts to discredit those who make rival cases to their own. Principally, this involves actors outside of the ecosystem, those who are defined to be in the out-group, but can also involve community members who do not share that particular perspective on an issue. The polemicist makes an exciting contribution to the campaigning of the group in this respect, the role is continuous and whilst there are aspects of self-motivated action, much revolves around the positive perception of the Momentum brand. The identified activity of authenticating the ecosystem is closely related to the role of the polemicist. As an interested actor within the brand ecosystem, polemicists sought to determine the degree of belonging an individual has to their group. The standards of in-group markers held by the polemicist tended to be greater than those of other actors. Those who dissented from the principal narrative to even a small degree would be seen as disingenuous or 'non-purist'.

Some individuals active within confrontational exchanges (aka, Twitter spats), use an onslaught of contradicting information - the result of which is often to 'shut-up' opponent. This is particularly when it involves members of the out-group.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 16/07/2021)

The polemicists may resort to 'shock tactics' in order to achieve their objectives. Within the netnographic data some actors were observed regularly exaggerating to emphasise points they wished to raise with a degree of poetic licence. In conclusion, actors within the brand

community engaged in the role of a polemicist over long periods, arguing against rival groups and detractors within the community itself.

## 5.5 Value Co-creation Interaction Typologies

The third and final element explored within the netnographic data analysis was the nature of value co-creation interactions. Interactions are characterised by different features and qualities that may either encourage or inhibit the various value co-creation activities undertaken within the brand ecosystem and shape the roles that support them. Identifying the conditions within which value co-creation takes place allows for a deeper understanding of how it can be managed and facilitated to benefit political brands. In the following section four interaction typologies are identified and defined: adversarial; supportive; humorous; and serious.

### 5.5.1 Adversarial

Adversarial value co-creation interactions occur when there is conflict between actors within or outside the group. Within these complex circumstances, actors form clearly defined allegiances between two or more actors. Adversarial interactions are defined here as *value co-creation exchanges characterised by conflict between two or more opposing sides, which could be individual actors inside or outside the brand community or organisations*. Conflict may centre around a wide range of differences between actors, including opinions, policy, or personality. Though the notion of conflict, particularly between the actors of a brand ecosystem, may be interpreted as a wholly negative experience, these circumstances still produce co-created value that an involved actor can interpret as valuable.

When engaging with political opponents on Twitter (particularly those identified as Conservatives) the atmosphere of the interaction is clearly adversarial - even as a non-participating observer. Emphasis is placed on 'straight to the point' effective communication, rebutting claims and discrediting opponents. Value is placed on not making errors in the form of spelling or references to dates etc. as this may provide petty ammunition to the other side.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 22/05/2021)

Adversarial interactions are particularly characteristic of value co-creating activities associated with the 'business of activism'. Waging the narrative war and external campaigning are both reliant upon a degree of confrontational interaction between two opposing groups. Adversarial interactions are predominantly the domain of the polemicist, though the satirist, thought leader and storyteller may also engage.

## 5.5.2 Supportive

In contrast to adversarial interactions, supportive interactions are hallmarked by encouragement, emotional help, and endorsement offered between actors. Within these interactions, the focus of the interaction is primarily constructive, and actors concentrate on unifying characteristics. supportive interactions are defined here as *value co-creation exchanges between actors which are characterised by high levels of support for one another, the community, and related causes.*

For all the hostility the group is capable of, it is ultimately also extremely supportive when the situation demands it, particularly when you are established as an in-group actor. This duality is complex, nuanced and warranting of further understanding.  
(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 20/11/2020)

Value co-creating activities of brand community cultivation were most closely associated with supportive interactions. This is largely because these activities are primarily internally orientated, and support was most commonly offered to those established to be within the in-group. It is also true that the specific activities identified in the cultivation of the brand community are premeditated on positive interactions such as welcoming or network building, which are more likely to be supportive to be effective. This typology relates to 7.3.4.

## 5.5.3 Humorous

Humorous interactions can be noted for their light-hearted nature, emphasising the amusement of the involved actors. The use of humour in value co-creation interactions is typically reserved for in-group members and those allied to the brand ecosystem. These interactions are defined here as *exchanges among actors characterised by a cheerful nature focused on the amusement of the in-group.* Humorous interactions take various forms and can contribute to the value co-creation activities which nurture a sense of belonging, define and identify true in-group members, and support narrative building and campaigning.

Many internal interactions can be jovial in nature, when the subject of the discussion, if any, is not perceived to be serious or deserving reverence many actors feel it appropriate to make jokes or share memes.  
(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 22/05/2021)

Unlike the other types of interactions identified here, those characterised by their humour do not directly relate to a single value co-creating activity. Instead, humorous interactions can be



found across the range of value co-creating activities. As identified in section 5.3, the satirist may intervene in even relatively adversarial interactions and inject humour into them. Therefore, it can be difficult to accurately determine what constitutes a humorous interaction to one that is not.

#### 5.5.4 Serious

Serious interactions are identified by the reverential attitude held towards the value co-creation activities by the collaborating actors. The serious attitude exhibited by members of the brand community while undertaking key activities illustrates the importance that is attached to them by the brand ecosystem. It consequently further reflects moral and ethical orientations collectively held. These interactions are defined here *as exchanges between multiple actors, which are noted for the high degree of reverence exhibited towards subjects and activities engaged within them.*

Interactions in which discussions of sensitive political issues such as race, poverty, gender, or disability are seen as very serious by many actors. There is a highly reverent atmosphere in these exchanges – a sense that these subjects are simply not made light of. This is exhibited in actors criticising those who do make light of the situation and abstaining from similar attitudes themselves.

(Researcher, Immersion Journal, 17/08/2020)

Serious interactions are typically found where an activity perceived to be of high importance is being undertaken by actors within the brand ecosystem. Within the netnographic phase of data collection, particular reference was held to issues pertaining to authentication of the ecosystem and group activism.

## 5.6 Summary

Netnographic analysis of the Momentum online engagement platform generated important insights into the forms and processes of value co-creation within a political brand community. The findings from this first phase of data collection detailed three core aspects to value co-creation within political brand ecosystems, namely, the social processes or activities which actors undertake to create value collectively, the sustained engagement behaviours, or roles that actors assumed to partake, and finally the nature of these interactions. It is clear from this analysis that the case study community was an active centre of value co-creation, generating diverse forms of value. This chapter conceptualises actors of political brand communities as operant resources that contribute to brand use. In Chapter 6, an analysis of the interview data

is presented in order to identify the triggers of these activities, the factors which facilitate or inhibit them, and finally, the perceived benefits of engagement.

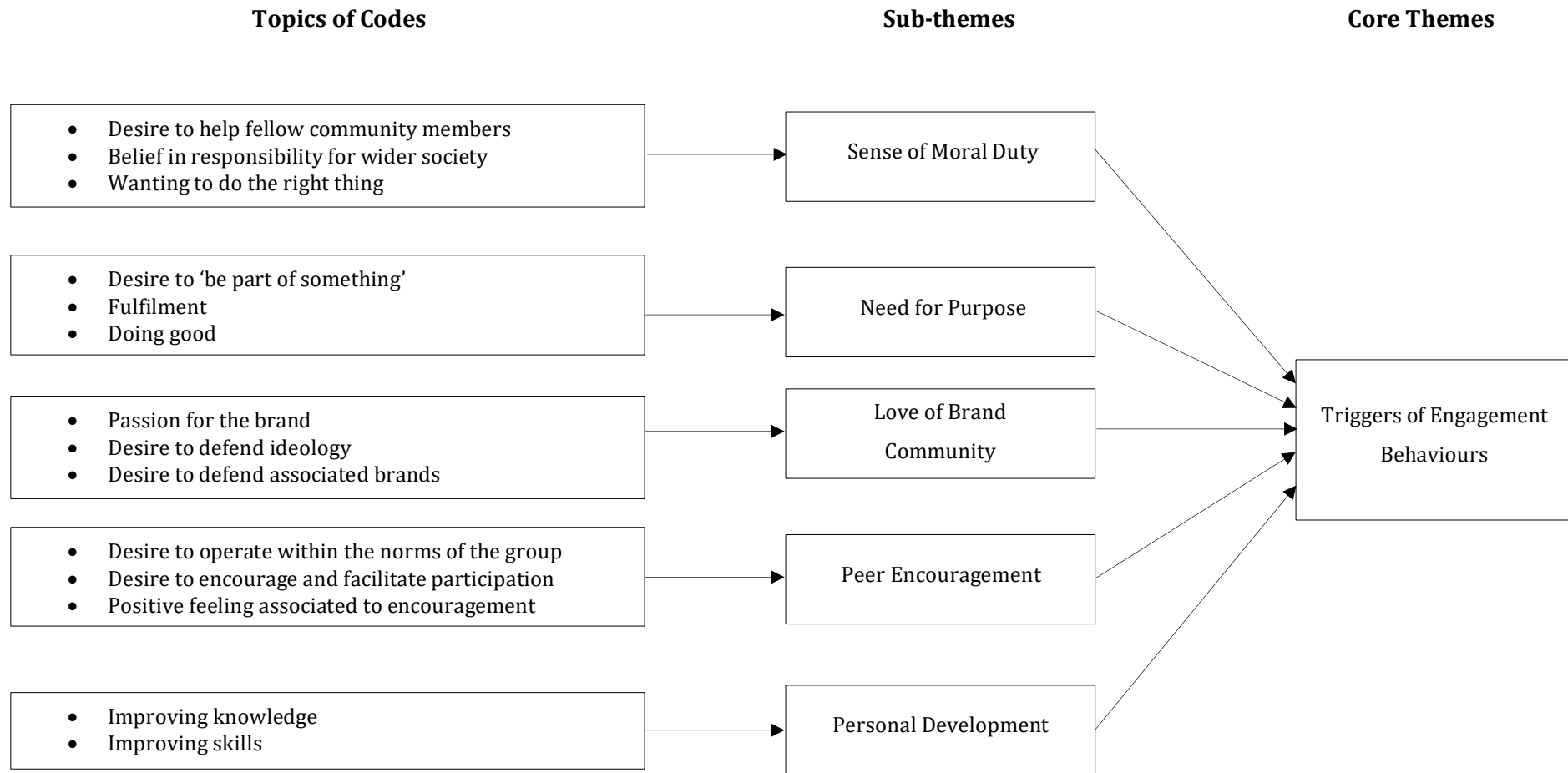
## Chapter 6 Findings: Phase 2

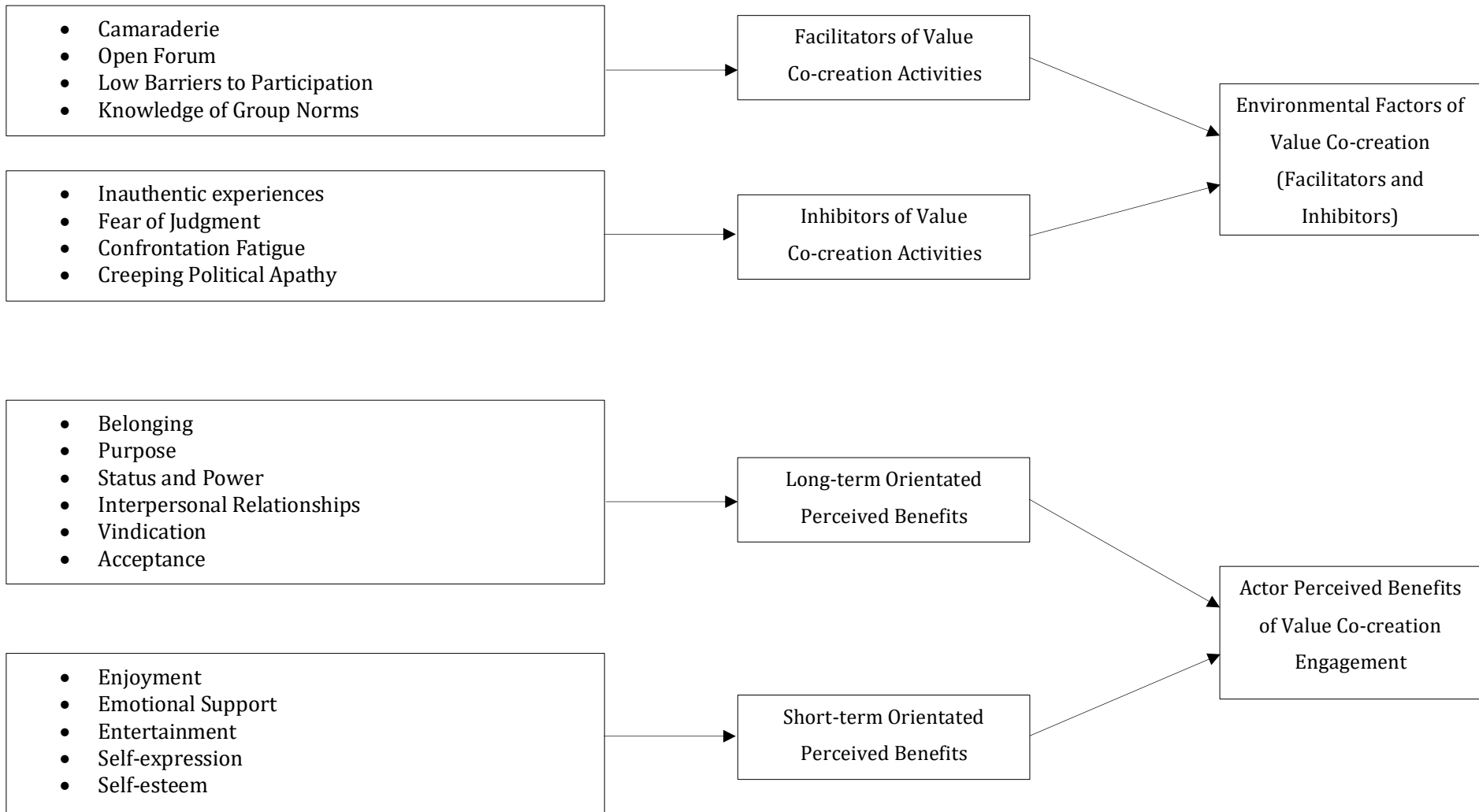
### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research objective of this thesis: *To investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within the political brand ecosystem.* This chapter builds upon the findings of phase 1 (Chapter 5) which identified the 'component parts' of value co-creation within the ecosystem, focusing on the activities, roles, and interactions to explore the purpose and meanings of those aspects. First, triggers of actor-engagement behaviours within the value co-creation processes of the brand ecosystem are studied. Then, the facilitators and inhibitors to engagement behaviours are identified and discussed. Finally, the perceived benefits of engagement to the ecosystem actor are considered. The findings of this chapter are based upon phase 2 of data collection, which involved 31 semi-structured interviews with members of the political brand community, taking place between July-September 2021. These interviews were conducted following the netnographic data collection and explored the meanings behind the activities, roles, and interactions observed within the online engagement platform.

Figure 6.1 identifies the data structure determined from the thematic analysis of 31 interview transcripts, as identified above this structure is based around these second order themes and aggregate dimensions.

**Figure 6. 1** Interview Thematic Map





## 6.2 Triggers of Engagement Behaviours

Triggers are initiating phenomena that directly lead to an actor's engagement behaviours within the brand ecosystem (Verhoef et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2021). In other words, 'triggers of engagement behaviours' can be seen as the base causes of an individual community member's involvement within value co-creating activities, roles, and interactions. Interview data identified four engagement behaviour triggers groupings: a sense of moral duty; love of brand community; peer encouragement; and personal development. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

**Table 6. 1** Triggers of Engagement Behaviours

Name:	Researcher Definition:
Sense of Moral Duty	<i>An altruistic obligation felt by an actor compelling them to act in a way that will help others, particularly those perceived to be victims of injustice and inequality, inside and out of the community.</i>
Need for Purpose	<i>The desire to gain meaningful resolve and acknowledgement of impact through their contribution to the community.</i>
Love of Brand Community	<i>A compulsion to provide support to the community due to the sense of duty fostered through emotional attachment.</i>
Peer Encouragement	<i>A desire of an actor to behave according to the expectations and encouragement of others within their social circle.</i>
Personal Development	<i>The desire of an ecosystem actor to improve personal abilities through engagement within value co-creation activities.</i>

*The Researcher*

### 6.2.1 Sense of Moral Duty

The first identified trigger of engagement behaviour is termed here as a 'sense of moral duty' and relates to an obligation felt by the actor in relation to their perception of morality. Critically, the forms of moral duty felt by members of the brand ecosystem are not limited to other members but to all individuals which an actor perceives as being vulnerable or disadvantaged by the nature of politics and society. A sense of moral duty is defined here as *an altruistic obligation felt by an actor compelling them to act in a way that will help others through value co-creation, particularly those perceived to be victims of injustice and inequality, inside and out of the community.*

The interview data showed that many actors within the brand ecosystem shared a sense of moral duty. This engagement behaviour trigger manifested itself in different forms. To many, a key motivating factor was following what their conscience told them was *'the right thing to*

do' (P21). Knowing what is right and wrong is seen as self-evident by many actors, and participants were often unable to articulate this rationale in any depth. In other cases, knowledge of what the right thing was is rooted in an actor's personal and professional experiences, an example from a charity worker can be found below.

*'In my work with the charity, I see the consequences of Tory government first hand. Ordinary and vulnerable people are treated like garbage. To me, it's not so much a case of 'why do you do this?' but 'how could you not?' (P24).*

The sense of moral duty had clear relevance to those who engaged in in-grouping and out-grouping activities. The intense feeling of right and wrong formed the central basis of people's acceptance or rejection by the in-group.

*'In Momentum we are facing challenges on two levels. Fighting for change within the Labour party as well as more generally against right wingers. It forges you together when you're an outsider in and outside of the party. That's why we stick together' (P15).*

Actors also drew upon their social position relative to others to identify why they felt a moral obligation to engage altruistically with the ecosystem. Some individuals regarded themselves as privileged due to their race, gender, social class, or family wealth and felt they had a responsibility to others not in that position. In the words of a university student, *'I'm pretty privileged really. People in my position should help others' (P4).*

Members of the brand ecosystem felt morally obligated to help those inside the community, particularly when they had received help in the past. An activist from Manchester felt that a political movement, particularly one which exposes socialism, should focus upon altruism as a driver of the community. A Manchester-based Activist said *'I believe in karma. If you take help from people, you should give back when you can. I wouldn't be a socialist otherwise' (P11).*

In summary, actors of the brand community initiated engagement behaviours out of a sense of moral duty for those inside community and in wider society. In the case of moral duty for members of the community, actors felt that they owed others within their network support because it was in the wider interest of the group and reciprocation was an institutional norm. Beyond this, actors felt a sense of moral duty to engage to address what they saw as injustices in wider society.

## 6.2.2 Need for Purpose

The need for purpose relates to an actor's desire for meaningful direction and control in their life. In contrast to the sense of moral duty, the need for purpose is orientated around the actor's own needs of self-actualisation. In other words, they need to realise their personal potential and have an 'impact' within their community. The need for purpose can be understood as *the desire to gain meaningful resolve and acknowledgement of impact through their contribution to value co-creation in the community.*

Ecosystem actors acknowledged that they were motivated to get involved within Momentum's engagement platforms because they desired to find greater meaning in their life and to set benchmarks against which they could measure their success. In the below example, a retiree, discovered that they had enjoyed having something to work towards, having ended their career. They then express gratitude towards Momentum for providing a platform that restored this.

*'When I retired, I was lost. I didn't realise it before, but I really needed to work towards something, to build things of significance. Jeremy and Momentum has given that back to me' (P27).*

*I found after university that missed student politics, being part of a group of like-minded people who saw the world as I do. I've realised it's important to me to be part of a community' (P5).*

Several other actors reflected that engagement had allowed them to feel part of something greater than themselves. This is often related to the need to change direction in life and to shift the focus away from selfish or nihilistic past behaviours. A recurring theme identified within the interview data was the desire to feel a part of something with long-term impact. In the below example, an interview participant reflected upon that passed and how they wished to build their lives into something more purposeful. A Student member said *'When I was younger, I was selfish, and I only thought about me. It's about being part of something bigger than yourself and I really responded to that' (P6).*

The theme of being part of a purposeful movement was evident across several interviews. Related to this was a desire to find a community to which an individual could belong and develop a greater sense of purpose.

*'There's an African proverb, 'It Takes a Village', it means that you can't stand alone, you need to be part of a community. I'm a strong believer in finding a community that speaks to you, that becomes an extension of you' (P4).*



The need for purpose is identified here as an important trigger of actor engagement. Actor's within the political brand community began their engagement due to a need to have and be recognised for meaningful actions.

### 6.2.3 Love of Brand Community

The third trigger of engagement behaviour is termed here as 'love of brand community'. Love of brand community can be understood as a heightened willingness to support the community owing to a strong sense of emotional attachment an actor feels for a group through prolonged engagement. Findings suggest that emotional attachment develops over time in the form of feelings of closeness and affection for the brand community. This trigger is defined in this thesis as a *compulsion to provide support in value co-creation to the community due to the sense of duty fostered through emotional attachment*.

Brand community members often described one another as friends or family, even if they had not met in person. In the words of a councillor from Scotland *'It's a cliché to say it, but I will anyway [laughs], its like a big family'* (P29). This indicates a strong sense of emotional connexion felt amongst actors within the ecosystem. A social worker who was interviewed from London said *'I would do anything for my Momentum friends. We're a family'* (P14). Statements of this nature reflect that many actors do not see their political brand community as an informal connexion of people who share broad aims and objectives but as one routed more deeply and complex and emotional relationships.

Actors also identified the length of time they had been a Momentum member as a motivating factor in engaging fully with value co-creation activities. Members who had been with the organisation for more prolonged periods often felt invested and keen to participate in the online engagement platforms. Furthermore, well-established members related this to the personal network they had created at that time. An example is provided below, demonstrating the love of brand community that develops over time.

*'I've been involved since Jeremy's election campaign. Its lush [good]. I've known many other fantastic members in time. I'll always get involved when I can'* (P26).

Members of the brand ecosystem also demonstrated their admiration for how the community operates and that it encouraged them to engage and continue to do so. Actors particularly liked that Momentum was friendly and informal, making engagement more exciting. This high level of appreciation for how the brand community works is ultimately reflected in many members' sustained engagement.

*'A few political groups are a little clunky, there is no 'chemistry' among members, they're united in cause only. Momentum on the other hand has a really wonderful community and we operate in a really nice informal way, it makes it really easy to get involved and support one another. It reminds me of my student days, we can cut to the chase when needed. I really like that' (P7).*

Another aspect of this trigger is how actors overcome feelings that make an unequal contribution through their passion for the brand community. In the below example, a local organiser reflects how his passion for the Momentum community led them to take a more active role, even if this meant undertaking more activity than a typical member. Even though they felt other members did not contribute as much as they did, this did not matter because of their depth of feeling towards the community.

*'Being involved with the organisation of the local group is more work. But frankly, I don't care, I've been involved for a long time, I love this movement, I love what we are trying to do' (P22).*

*'I probably do spend too much online, but its what I care about!'* (P13).

Love of brand community has been identified as an important trigger of engagement behaviours. Actors initiated engagement out of strong affection for the brand the community centres around. This trigger relates specifically to an actor's appreciation of the particular norms and characteristics of the group.

#### 6.2.4 Peer Encouragement

The peer encouragement trigger relates to initiating factors brought about by the influence of an actors' peer group. The findings reveal that as social organisations, political brand communities encompass numerous interpersonal relationships which, through time, create spheres of influence over the actors involved. This thesis defines peer encouragement as *a desire of an actor to behave according to the expectations and encouragement of others within their social circle in engaging in value co-creation.*

The most fundamental aspect of the peer encouragement trigger is feeling welcome within the community. Several ecosystem members identified that feeling welcome and empowered to participate in value co-creative activities was a crucial initial motivator. One participant said, *'it's like when you walk into a party, if no one smiles, says hello, or starts a conversation with you, you're going to feel like you wish you'd never come'* (P1). This reflects that to begin engaging with the community and undertaking activities that create value with other members,

individuals must first feel like they are part of the group. Members of the ecosystem identified this might be as simple as more established members *'reaching out'* (P14), following them back, or liking their posts. Feeling welcome was seen as a *'green light'* (P17) to engage in value co-creation activities.

Actors may also be triggered into engagement behaviours by a desire to fit in. During the interviews, several participants described how many of their initial interactions on the online engagement platform were driven by a desire to fit in with the rest of the community by imitating their behaviours. Actors began regularly posting, liking, and retweeting other members' postings or sharing memes in the manner described in the previous chapter when they saw Momentum peers doing the same.

*'When I first joined [Momentum], I think I was a bit of a passenger. But around the [2017] election it was such an active community it didn't feel right standing on the side-lines. You learn as you go, picking up what people do and what people find useful'* (P9).

Finally, actors within the community are prompted to sustain engagement behaviours when they feel others positively receive their contribution within the group. In the words of one participant *'like anyone, whether you like sport or tv, whatever, you want everyone else to appreciate what you do'* (P31). Participants reflected upon the positive feeling this creates for themselves, believing that this ultimately contributes to a higher status. This form of peer encouragement often leads to actors seeking further approval through co-creative activities. In the example below, a student member from Exeter describes how they find the endorsement actions of other members motivating.

*'I love it when my friends or people I respect retweet me or like my posts, it really spurs me on. I guess I'd be talking to the wall if I didn't know they appreciated it'* (P13).

In summary, peer encouragement plays a key role in an actors choice to engage. When an actor feels that their contribution is welcomed, and valued, they are more likely to continue engaging in duration and frequency.

## 6.2.5 Personal Development

Personal development triggers relate to an actor's desire to improve themselves through engagement in the political community. Individuals may seek to improve various aspects of themselves such as their knowledge, debating skills or confidence. Actors consciously engage with value co-creating activities and roles, understanding that they can contribute to improving personal competency. Personal development is defined here as *the desire of an*

*ecosystem actor to improve personal abilities through engagement within value co-creation activities.*

Some actors felt that getting actively involved with the Momentum brand community it would contribute to broader personal development and contribute to them becoming an improved person. Actors felt that participation within the community might contribute to their effectiveness or responsibility. In the example below, the participant identifies that they get involved with the group because they see it as taking personal responsibility for societal inequality and injustices.

*'For me, it was about wanting to become a better person, to take personal responsibility for what's happening out there' (P4).*

Other actors within the ecosystem were keen to get involved with the Momentum online engagement platform as they saw it as allowing them to build their confidence. Participants identified that active engagement would help them build confidence in their understanding of progressive politics and their interpersonal and debating skills.

*'I think I'm probably a bit of an introverted person, getting involved with the community which supports causes I care about has allowed me to find my own voice' (P13).*

The above excerpt from an interview with a recently joined member of the brand ecosystem reflects how the participant viewed her social skill before getting involved with the community. She believes that becoming an active member within the engagement platform has allowed her to confidently articulate her points of view, aided by surrounding herself with a group of like-minded people. Therefore, personal development constitutes a significant stimulus to actor engagement, with actors having personal rationales relating to increasing their skills and knowledge of the subject.

### 6.3 Facilitators and Inhibitors of Engagement Behaviour

Facilitators and inhibitors of engagement behaviour relate to the key factors that aid or frustrate an ecosystem actors' involvement in value co-creation processes. This section first addresses facilitators of engagement behaviour, exploring the ideas of camaraderie, an open forum, free communication, low barriers to participation, and knowledge of group norms. Then, inhibitors of value co-creation engagement behaviour are examined. This part explores the ideas of bureaucracy, inauthentic experiences, fear of judgement, confrontation fatigue, and creeping political apathy.

### 6.3.1 Facilitators

**Table 6. 2** Facilitators of Engagement Behaviours

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Researcher Definition:</b>
Camaraderie	<i>Positive friendly relations between members of the brand community developed through extended value co-creation engagement.</i>
Open Forum	<i>The ability of individual actors to engage and share ideas freely and equally within the value co-creation exchanges of the brand community.</i>
Low Barriers to Participation	<i>As factors that an actor perceives to reduce their ability to actively participate in value co-creation activities.</i>
Knowledge of Group Norms	<i>An understanding group norms are the rules which govern interactions between members of the value co-creation ecosystem.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 6.3.1.1 Camaraderie

Camaraderie refers to positive friendly relations between brand community members developed through extended value co-creation engagement. At its core, a sense that Momentum members are part of a friendly community of like-minded people helps facilitate many of the key co-creation activities undertaken by the group. As a facilitator, camaraderie revolves around actors being made to feel comfortable to engage in value co-creation activities through positive social interactions with other members.

The positive effect of camaraderie begins with members feeling that engagement within the brand community is free from judgment, at least from fellow members. Many members of this brand ecosystem felt that other members would not be unnecessarily critical or cruel about other members' engagements. In the words of one participant, *'I feel like people won't judge me for what I say'* (P5). The fear of being judged by actors within the in-group was perceived as worse than by those in the out-group. This is because criticism is more easily reconciled when made by people of opposing political views and can be dismissed easily as a rival's tactic. One veteran campaigner said, *'it's been the same since day one, Tories are always going to come after you with anything that they can lay their hands on, it's like water off a duck's back for me now'*, they went on to say, *'my biggest fear is that those I have a lot of respect for will disagree or dislike what I say'* (P17).

The second aspect of group camaraderie as a facilitator of engagement behaviours is the feeling of group support experienced by members of the brand community. A supportive culture emboldens actors within the ecosystem to act with greater conviction and purpose. When

successful, a supportive culture reflects that all activities, roles, and levels of engagement offer a valuable contribution to the efforts of the political brand community. In a notion, group support contributes to an actor's self-esteem regardless of their engagement. A university student likened it to the support structure of a sports team, and they reflected that support was an essential aspect of undertaking value co-creating activities. Like a sports team, the players' performance depends on the fans' support.

*'I suppose a good metaphor for this, in a way, is a football team. The players on the pitch kick the ball around and score the goals, but there are many more, thousands more, in the stands cheering on and encouraging what the players are doing, and that's how it works isn't it? They want to see their team get the ball in the net, even if they won't personally get the glory. They know that the players need to feel supported, and that's what they'll do. It's creating a home game advantage' (P3).*

To build upon this further, the knowledge that the contribution, in whatever form it might take, is valued by others within the brand community was an essential engagement facilitator. Many actors are highly conscious of the degree to which others value their contribution to the ecosystem. A dedicated activist from the Northwest of England acknowledged, *'when I get involved on Twitter, I know that people will appreciate it, that's what makes it work, everybody getting into it'* (P11). This identifies that camaraderie contributes to the symbiotic relationship seen elsewhere in this study. Value is an essential aspect of either side of engagement.

Actors within the ecosystem particularly valued the idea that others in the community would intervene on their side if there was a contentious exchange with out-group members. One participant said, *'I like to know that my friends have got my back when I'm having a go at Tories [laughs]. It shows that you're not alone'* (P15). This suggests that the support felt by members of the brand community extended to a group norm of supporting one another through intervention.

### 6.3.1.2 Open Forum

Termed here as the 'open forum', this facilitator of value co-creation engagement relates to the ability of individual actors to engage and share ideas freely and equally within the exchanges of the brand community. For instance, one community member (P24) said *'there is no judgement, or rather, there is none from other people in Momentum'* they went on to say *'I think when you're part of a community, people are more prepared to disagree without falling out'*. As the literature review identified, facilitate engagement within value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions, there must be a free forum to discuss, critique, and modify ideas constructively. The first aspect of this is allowing all ideas, from all actors irrespective of

experience and status, to have a fair chance to be valued. In other words, there must be equity in the treatment of an engagement contribution. If an ecosystem actor feels that their contribution may be viewed as invalid from the start, they will modify or withdraw engagement. Participants in the interviews spoke about the anxiety they might feel towards contributing because it might be challenged unfairly by other members. Particularly if they felt domineering higher status members of the community might leverage their position to ensure a contribution is not seen as equal to theirs.

*'Sometimes I feel I don't really want to share my thoughts on something unless I know that it won't be dismissed as wrong by some 'know it all' who thinks they're better than everyone else' (P14).*

It is important to distinguish the idea of an equal opportunity to engage from the right for it only to be received positively. Ecosystem actors understand that a free forum to engage in relies not only on their ability to contribute but also on others to challenge their contribution constructively. Constructive feedback, therefore, is the second aspect of the Open forum, it can be understood as the availability of constructive feedback within the engagement platforms which contributes to the initiation and continual development of those engagement behaviours. In the transcript excerpt below, a participant identifies the role that constructive critical feedback plays in developing the brand community as a whole.

*'People in Momentum usually don't just rubbish your ideas if they think you're wrong, they will usually be constructive. Well, for other members anyway! I think that's the whole point, we develop together' (P26).*

The final aspect of the open forum relates to the degree of openness to new ideas that are apparent within the forum. Actors value openness to original ideas which they put forward. Several actors within the ecosystem felt that this allowed individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to be involved in the community value co-creation process. In the example below, the participant reflects upon their marginalised identity and how the brand community welcomed their perspective on the engagement platform.

*'I feel like all ideas shared within the group are treated as though they could be valid by the majority of other members. I've come across few people in Momentum who have ever wanted to diminish the place I come from as a non-binary person, if anyone' (P5).*

In Summary, the sense that an actor was able to freely express ideas was important to them when engaging in value co-creation activities. In particular, actors liked to believe that their ideas would be regarded as valid and that less sophisticated viewpoints would be treated fairly.

### 6.3.1.3 Low Barriers to Participation

Barriers to entry can be understood as factors that an actor perceives as reducing their ability to participate actively in value co-creation activities. When these are reduced to the lowest possible degree by the organisers of the political group, actors are more able to engage. The first aspect of low barriers to participation relates to the ease an actor enjoys in getting started with their engagement within the ecosystem. Actors are more likely to engage when they were able to make their contribution with little in the way of 'start-up difficulties', this can be understood through the analogy of one participant, *'to plug in and play'* (P5). Ecosystem members welcome when the process is simple and they can just start. In the quote below, a participant reflects on the first interactions within the engagement platform.

*'When I join Momentum I just wanted to talk to people like me, I was so surprised at how easy it was to get involved. It's not like a club in the real world, formal, where you sort of have to get to know people. You're accepted much more quickly'* (P3).

Participants also identified that they were more likely to engage in the value co-creation activities of groups like Momentum when they could get involved from anywhere. In other words, they were not encumbered by their geographical location or time zone. In the excerpt below, one brand community member praises how active the group is in online spaces. This meant they were able to be continuously involved whilst getting on with other day-to-day activities. Their response also references how they felt this approach represented a modern way of political activism.

*'I love that we [Momentum] are so active online, it's not like the old days where you'd have to drive to some cold and damp community centre or stand in the city centre shouting things. It's the way it's done now'* (P17).

To build on this further, participants were more likely to engage in co-creating value activities when technology was used effectively to maintain a sense of community while face-to-face meetings were not possible. Or as one participant put it, *'even when we're apart, we can still be together'* (P5). Several participants (e.g. P5, P7, P12, P24) appreciated that organisers and local groups utilised technology to maintain the bonds and sense of community after the government implemented limitations on in-person meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused most communications to move entirely online, and meetings were held over group video call platforms such as 'Zoom'. Below, a participant reflects upon communication technologies during the pandemic. The group was already well-connected online, and it was an advantage when they were able to meet in person.



*'Being so connected online has really come into play during the pandemic, holding the government to account even when we can't meet in person. To be honest, I've never met most of the people I talk to online but were still a community' (P19).*

Another aspect of low barriers to participation identified from the interview data related to the group's use of open public platforms instead of privately operated ones that remove the ability to interact with individuals outside of the ecosystem. Participants (e.g. P3, P4, P11, P26) appreciated that they could engage significantly on a public platform that they considered several benefits. First, it meant that they could engage with people outside of the community and broadened the spectrum of activities that could be conducted. Participants felt that this contributed to organic community-building and campaigning activities. Furthermore, it allowed participants to interact with potential allies outside of the community, ultimately benefiting Momentum. One participant said:

*'A platform like Twitter is so powerful because we want to work with people, to build a progressive coalition, and that doesn't always mean looking internally to Momentum members. If you are interested in building a better society, you can get involved regardless of who you are' (P26).*

Second, ecosystem actors appreciate the flexibility of using a public platform that they may use personally or for other reasons separate from the engagement with the brand community. This meant that they did not have a separate log-in and allowed for more 'spontaneous' engagement perceived by actors to be more 'organic' or 'natural'.

*'The great thing about Momentum on Twitter is that you don't need to go through all the rigmarole of signing up or verification just to be able to get involved. It's just a case of being on Twitter yourself and dipping in and out of it as you go about anything else you're up to. When it is on another platform, particularly closed one, it just makes it that bit harder to get involved so often' (P8).*

The final aspect of low barriers to participation relates to the accessibility of information needed by the actors to engage. Actors appreciated when information required to get involved with the group was easy to find within the engagement platform or elsewhere. One long-time member from Scotland said, *'There are some groups I've been a part of where you just can't get the info you want very easily. Momentum is much better than that'.* (P16). Members were more likely to engage when information such as dates of events, meetings, and campaigning was easily accessible, and the democratic processes and structure of the group were transparent.

In conclusion, the sense that there were as few entry barriers was important for facilitating engagement.

#### 6.3.1.4 Knowledge of Group Norms

Group norms are the rules which govern interactions between members of the ecosystem. To better facilitate engagement within the value co-creative activities actors must have, or have access to, an understanding of these norms.

The findings suggest that actors are more likely to engage in activities when they clearly understand their expectations. A veteran campaigner from South Shields said, *'I just think, with some of the things we've been talking about... when you know what to expect of the group, and what it expects from you in return, you can just get on with what you're doing'* (P25). Actors need to know the degree of induction they will receive relating to the group norms of the organisation. Members of the ecosystem found that Momentum facilitated engagement in this regard by having informal and transparent structures and allowing the flexibility and freedom for members to do as they felt appropriate. One participant reflected:

*'We often call ourselves activists, you know, 'oh I'm an activist', but what we do less is think about what that actually entails... when you think about it, it's very complicated. Of course, in many ways it's entirely self-driven, but at the same time we need to acknowledge that there is a need to act collectively with the group that you belong to. I think for Momentum it's pretty clear, we can act autonomously even in the name of the group but there are ways of doing it'* (P30).

The ambiguity surrounding group norms for new and established members causes members to modify behaviours or disengage their contributions altogether. One participant said, *'as a newer member I'm scared of getting things wrong, there isn't a manual'*. they went on to elaborate, *'I don't think it's laziness, but when there's too much to know, and too much to get wrong it's probably just best not to get involved'* (P13).

Awareness of group norms is just one part of this equation, the other aspect relates to an actor's understanding of how the community enforces norms. Within the examined brand community, group norms were primarily enforced informally. For instance, this meant that when a group norm such as how members should interact with one another was violated, the repercussion is more likely to be ostracising or derision from fellow members than it is formal sanctioning by group officials. It should be noted that the need to enforce group norms is welcomed by many members (such as P20, P25, P9) who see it as an essential aspect of the management of

the community. In the below quote, a participant reflects upon the issues that arise from the different approaches that can be taken to enforce group norms.

*'In some of the political groups that I have been a part of in the past, petty squabbles have been settled with dull procedures and committees. A political movement should be more flexible than that, it's not all black and white, communities are complex and nuanced... they don't fit into a code of conduct that no one will ever read. Ultimately this community belongs to its members and they're the ones who are the best placed to decide what happens when people act inappropriately' (P1).*

The participant in the above quote demonstrates a common belief among longer established members that individual members are best placed to enforce group norms, utilising experience and judgement (P15, P27 shared this). However, less experienced members (such as P11, P2, P3) felt that when violations of group norms were dealt with informally, they did not always fully understand the rationale behind what the group had opted to do. Furthermore, it can be perceived that there is a lack of transparency in the process, and individuals may interpret treatment as unequal or biased. Actors who held responsibility for local groups within this study explained that they also felt flexibility in managing group norms violations was important. One local organiser explained, *'I think as long as people are broadly aware of what can happen when you go against what the group expects, that's enough. why formalise it all into complex procedures and documents that no one would read and less they were looking to throw someone out?' (P23).*

Therefore, the management of group norms can be complex, and different actors within the ecosystem will have different perceptions of how it should be done. Aligning the culture of the group and the different expectations within it to enforce group norms is essential to enabling actors to engage in the community's activities.

### 6.3.2 Inhibitors

**Table 6. 3** Inhibitors of Engagement Behaviours

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Inauthentic Experiences	<i>Actors are inhibited by a sense that the value co-creation engagement experience is forced or managed.</i>
Fear of Judgment	<i>Actors are inhibited by a sense that their value co-creation contribution may be unwelcomed or critiqued.</i>
Confrontation Fatigue	<i>Actors are inhibited by a sense that their value co-creation contribution may not work overtime.</i>
Creeping Political Apathy	<i>Actors are inhibited by a sense that their passion for the political brand community is fading.</i>

*The Researcher*

### 6.3.2.1 Inauthentic Experiences

Brand community members do not appreciate inauthentic value co-creation engagement experiences that encourage members to partake in a 'gimmicky' or 'stage managed' way. As a grassroots movement, the group found calls to engagement behaviours led 'from above' unappealing, preferring member-led activities. Participants in this study exhibited disdain for the involvement of 'political managers' and managerial processes which detract from the work of activism. Healthy scepticism is maintained by the majority of participants for what was perceived as the corporatisation of politics, which was in the words of a participant, '*ruining the left*' (P8). This is, at least in part, a legacy of Momentum's 'grassroots' nature, but the perceived inauthentic nature of politics may work to inhibit actors within other political ecosystems. Members of the brand community felt that they were more capable of determining the correct engagement behaviours and activities than the '*interfering*' (P2) professional Labour Party brand. In the below excerpt, a trade unionist from Sunderland expresses how they feel when the Labour Party brand tries to stimulate engagement behaviours from members of its brand community.

*I hate it when Labour head office comes up with stupid gimmicks to get people talking about them positively. Try doing what the members want, then you wouldn't need to!* (P17).

The notion of gimmicks or stage-managed experiences was repeated by other participants which felt it was at odds with the purpose of a political movement and a 'real' activist. Participants (P26 and P30) identified their rationale for distrusting headquarters-led initiatives. Chief among them was a suspicion that the real purpose was to get the party members to 'toe the party line', which would make activist party spin doctors, which is seen as ingenuine, as reflected by a participant in the quotation below.

*I've no interest in being the Labour Party's new Alistair Campbell. I'm not into the 'party line', its fake if we're honest, I will say it as it is' (P7).*

Actors indicated that they felt inauthentic engagement experiences distracted from what they determined their purpose to be. A postgraduate student from Brighton reflected that '*being a real activist is about affecting change, how you do that is up to you*' (P5). This indicates that managers should not seek to encourage engagement to support their objectives but instead facilitate members of the brand community to act autonomously.

### 6.3.2.2 Fear of Judgment

Fear of judgement can be understood as anxiety that actors feel when other members within the group may respond negatively to their value co-creation contribution. While the effect of anxiety towards judgement has been touched upon in other parts of this chapter, this section offers further insight into its role as an inhabitant of engagement.

Fear of judgment acts as an inhibitor when an actor feels that they may be rejected or judged by other brand community members, causing them to change or withdraw from the engagement. Actors (P20, P2, P3) feared judgment from higher-ranking members they admire. Some actors also interpreted a lack of response as damning as an explicit negative response. One participant said, *'the amazing thing about Twitter is that you can often engage with people who you otherwise wouldn't be able to. That comes with its own risks though, as more than once I have tried to interact with people I admire but I've got nothing back'*. (P10). Interview participants elaborated on the visceral anxiety they felt before sending a message to community members that they respected. In the quotation below, the participant reflects on how the comfort they feel in engaging has changed through time.

*'I don't want to think twice about sending a post or replying to someone else's. When I first got involved with Momentum, I used to tense up at the thought of sending something in case people I respect didn't like it'* (P6).

Fear of judgment also prohibits engagement when an actor feels like they may appear stupid. This does not necessarily refer only to their intellectual capacity relative to other actors, but social intelligence and ability to read social cues. One member of the brand community stated, *'I was always hesitant in get involved because I thought I might look like an idiot. There is so much to learn and so many different ways of offending people. Sometimes it is easier to take a back seat'*. (P20). Momentum is a diverse group with many individuals who hold different perspectives and fiercely defended viewpoints, this can be intimidating for less experienced members. This intimidation may cause an individual to modify or withdraw engagement. In summary, the fear of judgment was a significant inhibiting factor for actor engagement.

### 6.3.2.3 Confrontation Fatigue

Confrontation fatigue relates to a resistance felt by some actors at the prospect of re-engaging in conflict orientated value co-creation activities. Conflict orientated activities are well suited to some community members, such as those who assumed the role of the polemicist (see chapter 5). Still, to others, the perpetual adversarial nature can cause actors to modify or withdraw from engagement within some or all activities.

An actor may modify or withdraw from engagement when they feel the only value inherent within that engagement is to pursue sectarianism between the in-group and out-group for its own sake. These actors consider these engagements futile as, in the words of one participant, *'the lines are already drawn, it's not exactly news when the left clashes with the right in my opinion'*. (P15). This indicates a degree of boredom with the unending nature of these activities. In the excerpt below, a community member expands on this, showing disinterest in the predictability of what they describe as the 'us and them routine' and how it has caused them to withdraw their engagement in the past.

*'To be honest, I get a bit bored of the 'us' and 'them' routine. 24/7. Yeah, I don't want them [Conservatives] in power, and yeah, there's lots of things I change tomorrow about this country, but it's easy to get caught up in all the personal stuff. If we have confidence in our ideas, as I believe we should, debating shouldn't look like a war. I tend to go do something else when it gets too heated'* (P10).

Other members of the brand ecosystem withdrew from confrontational exchanges not simply because they had so little value in them but because they regarded themselves as conflict-averse and found a degree of intensity that they did not enjoy within those activities. One Momentum member said, *'I'm not a very confrontational person. I do not enjoy conflict. Unfortunately, a lot of what we do as a Movement is centred around just those things'* (P21).

Fatigue brought about by long-term, and sometimes unrewarding, engagement. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that the engagement experience is purpose driven and results in rewarding outcomes for the actors involved.

#### 6.3.2.4 Creeping Political Apathy

The value co-creation process of a political brand community is negatively affected when apathy towards the political system, political events, and political outcomes cause actors to disengage from the community and its activities over time.

Several actors (P15, P16, P29) reflected that two concurrent electoral failures for the community had impacted their desire to engage with the community on engagement platforms. The degree to which this affected the interest in engagement existed within a spectrum. Some members sought to be accepted as part of the political process and focus that energy *'onwards and upwards'* (P24), whereas others had acknowledged they had withdrawn over time. In the quotation below, an ecosystem actor explains the impact of electoral losses on themselves and the wider community.

*'Since the election [2019], a lot of the hopes that I had for what we could do as a movement has gone. I've lost heart to a certain degree, I don't see away in which Momentum's ideas could be implemented in a meaningful way. Of course, that's had an impact on the stuff we do as a community' (P13).*

Political apathy within the brand community has also grown in response to the demise of the Corbyn-led Labour era. Jeremy Corbyn was a central figure in the Momentum community, and as a spiritual figurehead, he enjoyed significant support from the group. Momentum members acknowledged that the loss of Corbyn and their influence within party leadership had reduced their engagement. Many members felt that Corbyn's successor Sir Keir Starmer was not an ally of the group and was not an inspirational leader. A participant in the following excerpt acknowledges the impact of the change in labour leadership.

*'The difference is Jeremy [Corbyn] stirred something in a lot of people, he showed a vision for another way the country could be and took a lot of people with him. He motivated a lot of what we do. That just isn't going to continue with Keir Starmer or anyone else I can think of in the Labour Party at the moment. We're going to have to deal with that' (P31).*

Members (P12,P19,18) also struggled to reconcile the significant Conservative victories within previously Labour-held strongholds. This caused some actors to feel that their engagement was futile as their preferred leader, manifesto and campaign efforts did not translate into power. One retired momentum member from Yorkshire reflected, *'Since Boris's election I started to doubt whether a socialist government is possible in this country, I have to say it does dampen the fun a little bit [laughs]' (P22)*. In conclusion, creeping political apathy is an inhibitor to long-term actor engagement.

## 6.4 Actor-Perceived Benefits of Engagement

In this section, the perceived benefits of actor engagement are discussed. Perceived benefits can be understood as the anticipated positive result of an actor's engagement with value co-creation activities within the brand ecosystem. Benefits have been categorised into two groupings based upon the time orientation they hold, long-term and short-term. Interview data identified seven long-term-orientated perceived benefits and five short-term ones.

### 6.4.1 Long-term Orientated

**Table 6. 4** Long-term Orientated Actor Perceived Benefits

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Belonging	<i>Being part of a community in kinship and a common sense of purpose in value co-creation engagement.</i>
Purpose	<i>Long-term value co-creation engagement is a source of purpose for many actors.</i>
Status and Power	<i>Long-term engagement within the political brand community can contribute to sense of importance and influence.</i>
Interpersonal Relationships	<i>Value co-creation engagement provides opportunities to build long-term interpersonal relationships with like-minded individuals.</i>
Vindication	<i>Value co-creation engagement within the political brand community can lend a sense of vindication to an individual whose beliefs are not appreciated by networks outside of the community.</i>
Acceptance	<i>Being part of a community of like-minded individuals lend a sense of acceptance to the value co-creation engaging actor.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 6.4.1.1 Belonging

Ecosystem actors valued the notion that they belonged to a group of like-minded value, co-creating political activists for whom they felt a kinship and a shared goal. Members perceive that long-term engagement within the brand community results in a valued sense of belonging. A vital aspect of this was the actor's feeling of being part of something, or in other words, they are included within the team or group.

The sense of being part of something was an essential benefit to several of the interviewed participants, though its rationale differed from actor to actor. For some, a sense of belonging is related to being surrounded by politically like-minded individuals who share a worldview with them, as one participant put it, *'there's a lot to be said for being with people that you share a mindset with. I think as people we need to know who our community is'*. (P4). For other actors, it is related to the importance of collective efforts: *'we can do more when we work together than when we work individually, for me, it is about being part of something positive really'* (P19). Ecosystem actors also value the ability to develop networks through their sense of belonging and have the ability to identify members of the in-group. Finally, actors appreciated that 'belonging' resulted in a shared understanding with other members and being part of a distinct culture. In the example below, a participant reflects upon this.

*'It's enjoyable getting to know your community's culture, to become part of it, to know and understand implicit cues. It's like your hometown or country, local knowledge is something that you acquire overtime, it's understanding the quirks of the place that makes you feel like you belong'* (P27).



In conclusion, the research identified that the feeling that an actor belonged was a significant longer-term orientated perceived benefit for many within the political brand ecosystem. This suggests that an essential facet of managing the value co-creation process is creating an engagement experience which offers an actor opportunities to belong to a group.

#### 6.4.1.2 Purpose

Engagement within the value co-creation activities gave members of the brand community a sense of heightened purpose and resolve outside of the engagement. Members of the brand ecosystem (e.g. P1, P5, P10, P14, P16, P22, P26, P30) felt that they had acquired a valued sense of purpose through extended interaction with the community. As identified in earlier sections of this chapter, the need for a purpose is a crucial initiator for many individuals engaging for extended periods. However, this again can be understood from different perspectives. Some ecosystem actors felt engagement resulted in a sense of accomplishment. In other words, they had achieved something through their engagement. Actors reflect upon individual and collective efforts to co-create value and the resulting sense of purpose. In the excerpt below, a local organiser within the brand community explained the valued emotion experienced when reflecting on the group's past activities and how this favours comparably to the sense of purpose available in other life settings.

*'I think it's brilliant when you can stand back and say, 'we did that', 'that was us'. You don't get that in many other places in life. I suppose work is the only other area, but usually that's the make someone richer, what we do is to make society richer' (P15).*

Ecosystem actors also believe they benefited from engagement behaviours that they perceived to contribute to society. One actor said, *'What we're doing is making a tangible contribution to ordinary people, acknowledging that there is too much inequality and suffering at the hands of this Tory government'. (P24).* Therefore, this research suggests that purpose is an important longer term perceived benefit.

#### 6.4.1.3 Status and Power

Some actors within the brand ecosystem value the social status that specific value co-creation roles offer them, both within the community and outside of it.

Members of the community received a significant benefit in feeling recognised for the significant contribution and impact that they have made within the ecosystem. one participant said, *'Getting involved day in and day out is actually hard work, it's stamina really, isn't it? I think it's only natural to feel a little bit satisfied when you're recognise for the level of contribution that*

*you're making, just like in any situation'. (P26). Members of the ecosystem also appreciated the idea that other, less experienced, members looked up to them as a role model. One long-time brand community member explained, 'I feel that when I make a popular post a lot of the younger members are looking up to me'. (P1). Finally, actors within the ecosystem felt there was value in having a larger than the average number of people follow them on the key engagement platform. Participants perceived that a more significant following relates directly to their status within the group, particularly status derived from long-term engagement. In the blue excerpt, a member of the community reflects upon this.*

*'I do, to be honest, like that I've developed a bit of a following over the years. I think it reflects the hard work that I put in' (P18).*

Power is sought by some actors who wish to enjoy greater influence over others and achieve positions in which they can alter outcomes. Some members of the ecosystem perceived the benefit of engagement as the ability to increase their power within the group. One participant stated, *'I think anyone that's honest will tell you that they'd like to build their influence online. Sure, this is a political group, but like anywhere, people want to build their followers and have greater clout'. (P11). Clout refers to the popular culture usage denoting someone that is said to be both popular and influential. Actors who placed value in gaining greater personal power often focused on external polemicist-type activities. Some actors who sought power as an engagement benefit were not only interested in power for its own sake but felt that achieving power within the group allowed them to experience it when their ordinary personal situation did not. One actor reflected, 'My life can be humdrum. my involvement online gives me an opportunity to make decisions about what I do, when I do, it and how I do it'. (P14). In summary, status and power can factor as a perceived benefit for actors within a political brand community.*

#### 6.4.1.4 Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships refer to an actor's perceived benefit when they can form a network of close personal friendships to engage with outside of the community.

Members valued that long-term engagement and involvement within the ecosystem could result in interpersonal relationships, which was perceived to be a primary benefit for many participants. One participant expressed This sentiment well, saying, *'when it comes down to it, a big reason why people join groups like this one is to meet people and have great experiences with them'. (P30). Actors within the ecosystem demonstrated an expectation that these interpersonal relationships could be 'life-long' and exist independently of their collective engagement in the community. In the following example, one participant explains this.*

*'I suppose the thing about meeting people in a political group is that the chances of you being alike are fairly strong. Let's face it, a lot of people that hold certain political views come at things from the same angle, perhaps even they've got a shared sort of background. I think personally you expect to meet kindred spirits when you get involved in a group like Momentum. You know, birds of a feather and all that'* (P1).

Friendships that were enabled by membership to the organisation but existed independently from it afterwards were of particular value to actors in the ecosystem. One participant stated, *'I've met genuine friends for life in Momentum, and our relationships are not just centred around our politics anymore, though of course, it remains a big part of it. I'm grateful for that'*. (P14).

Brand community members also appreciated the ability to meet new people in new circumstances. Here, the focus is not on the relationship's longevity but on the quantity. One student member of Momentum explained, *'I genuinely love meeting people, I find people fascinating. I knew joining Momentum that I'd have a lot of opportunities to interact and to meet new people, to hear their stories to see what makes them tick'* (P3).

The final perceived benefit relating to interpersonal relationships was the actors' desire to improve their social life. One retired actor reflected on how joining the group had enabled them to meet new people when the normal circumstances would not allow *'At my age you start meeting fewer people and joining active group like Momentum really helps to develop a better social life'* (P1). In conclusion, interpersonal relationships are sought as a benefit of engagement behaviours that co-create value.

#### 6.4.1.5 Vindication

Individuals join the brand ecosystem to find evidence that their thinking and ideological viewpoints are correct according to individuals they respect. Actors perceived benefits relating to notions of vindication in two principal forms: the ability to say, 'look I am right', and the ability to feel a large group of people shared their opinions.

Actors value in knowing that people agree with their assessment, opinion, or viewpoint. For some actors, engagement and involvement within the group was the only opportunity to know that others saw their opinion as correct. In the excerpt below, one member of the brand ecosystem explained how engagement in the group allowed them to feel vindicated in the absence of opportunities in day-to-day life.

*'I like to be part of something where I know my point of view is understood and accepted. many of my friends in the real world just aren't that interested' (P18).*

A variation of this vindication was for an actor to know that others felt the same way they did about critical issues and events. One participant reflected, *'it's good to spend time going through your Twitter feed and threats of people, I think it's important to know that people feel the same ways you do, otherwise you'd go mad, wouldn't you?' (P23).* Therefore, the research findings indicate that a sense of vindication was seen as a benefit to engagement.

#### 6.4.1.6 Acceptance

Individuals seek to find environments in which they 'fit in'. Within brand communities, actors find groups with which they identify and adapt to assimilate further.

The perceived benefit of acceptance is straightforward. As one individual participant put it, *'I like being with people that accept me for who I am and see my ideas as valid'.* (P5). Individual actors join the group aware of its explicit purpose in the knowledge that members will have many commonalities with themselves.

*'No one would be so naive as to believe that people that join a group like Momentum are unaware that they're going to meet a certain type of person, one who is in all probability very much like them, at least in the way that counts. Whilst there is, of course, room for disagreement and difference, overall, the members that we have are broadly aligned in terms of their profile and worldview' (P27).*

The above quotation demonstrates that group members are consciously looking for a like-minded community they can fit into easily and gain acceptance. In conclusion, actors perceive acceptance as a long-term benefit to engagement behaviours.

#### 6.4.2 Short-term Orientated

**Table 6. 5** Long-term Orientated Actor Perceived Benefits

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Enjoyment and Entertainment	<i>Actors enjoy engaging within the brand community and arrive various forms of entertainment.</i>
Emotional Support	<i>Actors gain emotional support from the network at times when they would benefit from it.</i>
Self-Expression	<i>Political brand community offers opportunities for self-expression which may not available through many individuals outside networks.</i>
Self-Esteem	<i>Political brand community offers opportunities for self-esteem building.</i>

*The Researcher*

#### 6.4.2.1 Enjoyment and Entertainment

Actors appeared to involve themselves within the ecosystem to gain satisfaction and happiness through value co-creating engagement in the brand community. Members of the brand ecosystem sought to attain positive emotions by undertaking community activities. The enjoyment sought was individual to the actor and was determined by the type of interaction under which their preferred value co-creation activities fell. For some members, the pleasure was derived from supportive engagements in cultivating the brand community itself. Positive emotions were focused on community nurturing activities for these actors, which helped develop the group on the online engagement platform. One participant explained, *'I've always loved helping new members to find their feet'* (P25). To other actors, enjoyment was derived from adversarial engagements with the out-group on the activism and campaigning side of the value co-creating activities. One long-time activist said, *'I get a real kick out of debating Tories, it's really satisfying when you get them to a point where they just block you. When they run out of lies'*. (P11). Participants reflected similarly on humorous interactions, *'with all the serious political stuff aside, sometimes it's just worth having a good laugh with your friends'* (P4) and serious ones, *'there is something particularly fulfilling about helping people learn new things'* (P25).

Aside from the activities, members of the ecosystem found enjoyment more broadly within the community. One participant reflected that being part of the community and having the ability to engage with their help to reduce feelings of stress that they might have when going about their day-to-day life, *'Taking a few moments to interact with others really helps me to distress on a busy day, we have fun'* (P9). Actors involved themselves within the ecosystem to be occupied by the events and happenings of the community through engagement in the wide range of value co-creating activities on offer.

Actors perceived value in other actors' stories and opinions and felt they were worthy of occupying their time. Appreciation was placed in the engagement platform as a source of entertaining stories and viewpoints. In the following example, a participant identifies why they are interested in the postings of other actors and why they constitute entertainment.

*'I'm genuinely interested in what other people have got to say, you have to open yourself up to other people's opinions, to their life experience. There's some truly fascinating people and they're more accessible than ever. I spend a lot of my time just reading what people have posted about their own experiences or of their take on the situation'* (P19).

In this quotation, the ecosystem actor acknowledges that engagement benefits from exposing than to perspectives and ideas that they may otherwise not have learned about. This can be understood as the novelty value of engagement. Brand community members also found the humorous interactions entertaining and provided a reason for them to engage within the platform. This included amusing conversations and memes, which was identified in the previous chapter. An example of this perceived benefit is described below by a participant.

*'You know, there's some genuinely funny stuff on Twitter. you should read some of the spats or left-wing meme pages, you would pay to see what people post. I have to admit, on more than one occasion, I've ended up reading an entire Twitter thread'* (P29).

In summary, actors seek what they perceive as enjoyment and entertainment from their engagement behaviours. The findings of this research suggest that as a short-term perceived benefit, actors should have the opportunity to engage in light-hearted engagements.

#### 6.4.2.2 Emotional support

Actors seek reassurance, encouragement, and compassion from others within the brand ecosystem. The reason for this emotional support may or may not relate to the activities of the brand community.

Members identified that the benefit of engagement was having a group of people they could rely on to comfort and encourage them when they felt negative emotions. In the experience of some participants, this would involve explaining the situation and discussing with other actors. One participant explained, *'we have a group of us who depend on each other for moral support. we have a WhatsApp group that's always active'* (P5). Members recounted that simply using the platform for some time would help them feel better. An NHS worker member from Kent reflected that the activities of others were enough to make them feel better even without participating themselves, *'I often log in and have a have a browse when I'm feeling down, a lot of the time, it really cheers me up'* (P21).

Members of the brand ecosystem also consider the benefit of engagement to be the 'confidence boost' offered by interacting with other members. In the following example, the participant explains how engagement within the online community has translated into increased confidence within real-world activities, *'Interacting with other people in momentum can give me a bit of a confidence boost to talk about my views to people in real life'* (P13).

Members also perceived a benefit that was less specific concerning emotional support. Several participants identified that they appreciated the sense of having people who would listen to

them. This benefit did not necessarily require a particular response from other participants, but knowing that an actor was heard was beneficial. A retired member from South Shields explained, *'Momentum is full of great people and a lot of them will take the time to listen to you, sometimes you just need that, sometimes you can't get it anywhere else'* (P1). Therefore, this research suggests emotional support is sought as a short-term benefit.

#### 6.4.2.3 Self-expression

Brand community members sought to better express their feelings, thoughts, or ideas to others inside and out of the community. Actors valued that engagement and membership in the political brand community allowed them to communicate their political views to others and provided an opportunity to reflect it as a matter of pride conspicuously. One participant stated, *'My politics is such a big part of who I am, it's really important to me, it's a big part of my identity'* (P11). Members of the ecosystem reflected that self-expression was a fundamental aspect of membership to a progressive movement. One long-time member stated:

*'There's an aspect of 'nailing one's colours to the mast' about being part of a group like Momentum, people wear their membership with pride, they're keen to show other people what they are about. Progressive politics is all about strongly held beliefs, knowing what injustice looks like. There's little point in being coy about those beliefs, you're not convince anyone of anything if you're not clearly an advocate of it in every respect'* (P28).

Members of the brand ecosystem perceived the benefit of engagement to be the ability to express themselves, or in the words of one participant, *'I just want to find places where I am free to be honest about who I am'* (P5). This benefit was particularly felt by individuals who consider themselves to be quote marginalised identity and belonging to the community constituted a significant aspect of their self-expression of that identity. In summary, the ability to express political views which an actor's ordinary network may not welcome.

#### 6.4.2.4 Self-esteem

Self-esteem relates to an actors' ability to feel better about themselves and to perceive themselves to be of greater worth.

Actors of the brand community perceive value in the confidence-building aspects of engagement. They felt that this helped to build self-esteem, in the words of one participant, *'If we're being honest, it just feels good when people agree with you or like what you say'*. (P8). In the example below, a charity worker member from Bournemouth reflects on how an

organisation like Momentum can help give people a positive vehicle from which to improve their lives.

*'Being part of a movement gives me hope for the future, it's something positive to look towards when things aren't so great. The last few years have not been great for me and getting involved in a group like this really helps me out' (P12).*

Members of the ecosystem also felt that being part of a community that works towards good causes made them feel good about themselves. Actors felt that being part of a community such as Momentum constituted action rather than what one participant described as, 'slacktivism' (P3), in which political ideas are supported via matters of low involvement or commitment. One participant said, *'Being involved with good causes is vital to me, it makes me feel good to know that I'm not just taking, you have to be giving back as well'* (P19). This research suggests that self-esteem maybe sought as a short-term engagement benefit.

## 6.5 Summary

Findings from the analysis of the interview data provided a rich understanding of three fundamental aspects of value co-creation within political brand ecosystems from the perspective of an actor's engagement. First, the analysis identified the initiating factors of engagement behaviour. These included: a sense of moral duty; a need for purpose; love of brand community; peer encouragement within the actor network; and personal development. Second, the facilitators and inhibitors of engagement behaviours were explored in detail from the actors' perspective. Facilitators included: a sense of camaraderie between other actors; the ability to contribute free from judgement; low barriers to participation, such as not having a private social media platform; and understanding of the group norms. Inhibitor's included a sense that the engagement experience was inauthentic; fear that an actor may be judged; fatigue from confrontational aspect of political brand engagement; and political apathy brought about by limited success. Finally, the benefits of engagement that the actors perceived were explored. The findings identify that actors engage within the value co-creation process for wide-ranging reasons. These included: belonging; purpose; status and power; interpersonal relationships; vindication; acceptance; enjoyment and entertainment; emotional support; self-expression; and self-esteem.

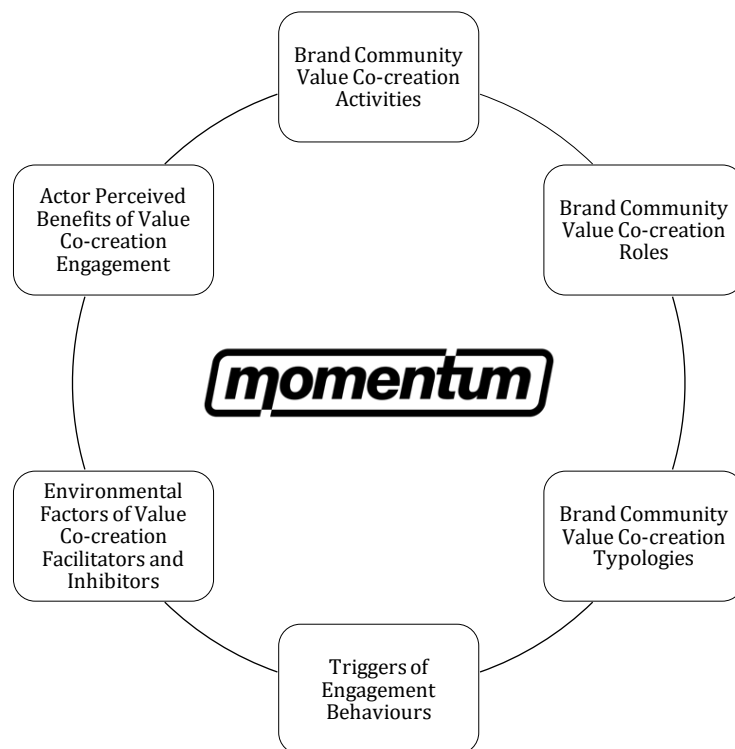


# Chapter 7 Discussion

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings in chapters 5 and 6, relating the analysis to the extant literature explored, the research objectives, and the conceptual framework of chapter 3. The first part of the chapter investigates how the research themes (Figure 7.1) relate to existing marketing literature. The second part of the chapter will revisit the conceptual model which has guided this research and expand it based on the analysis of the data findings. The final section considers how the findings fulfil what was defined as the research objectives.

**Figure 7.1** Core Thematic Findings of the Research



*The Researcher*

## 7.2 Theoretical Insights

### 7.2.1 Value Co-creation Activities

Analysis of the first data collection phase identified several value co-creating activities (brand community cultivation; negotiating brand parameters; authenticating the ecosystem; the business of activism; and brand advocacy) undertaken by members of the brand community ecosystem. To reiterate, value co-creation activities can be understood as something an individual or group of individuals within the brand ecosystem does to affect a specified or non-

specified outcome. This aspect of the research contributed to greater insight into the specific activities communities enact as part of the iterative process of actor engagement. This section explores how this research represents an extension to the theoretical interpretation of the existing literature and provides a novel understanding of activities that may be unique to political brands.

**Table 7. 1** Overview of Discussion

<b>Data Analysis Phase</b>	<b>Key results/finding</b>	<b>Response to research objectives</b>	<b>Why this matters for the way value co-creation is studied? Whose work it extends/contradict?</b>	<b>Why this matters for Political parties. What should they do differently in future?</b>	<b>Novelty of Method</b>
<b>Phase 1: Netnography</b>	<p>The findings suggest that actors within the political brand community undertook a range of value co-creating activities. This includes activities which: cultivate the brand community online; negotiate the brand parameters of both the Labour Party and Momentum; authenticate actors within the ecosystem; the groups everyday activism; and advocacy for the brand and its values. The findings of the research also indicate that an actor may assume six different roles in the undertaking of value co-creation. these are the roll of: storyteller; thought leader; supporter; educator; satirist; and polemicist. The netnographic analysis also indicates four value co-creation interaction types: adversarial; supportive; humorous; and serious.</p>	<p>Phase 1 of data collection and analysis (netnography) primarily addressed research objective 1: <i>'To explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem'</i>. This data collection and analysis phase identified and evidenced various forms of value co-creating activity, role, and interaction typology.</p> <p>The findings of this netnography indicate that political brand communities use online social media resources, such as Twitter, to co-create and consume value. It evidences that this is an ongoing interactive process largely driven by members of the community and uniquely determined but shaped by institutional norms.</p>	<p>The findings extend upon Schau, Muniz, and Arnold (2009) work, identifying a range of value co-creating activity within a political brand context. Further to this, greater detail is proffered than in this important earlier work.</p> <p>The research identifies that the co-creation a brand image is multifaceted within a political subgroup, as they co-create their own as well as party brand. This extends the work of Payne <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2011; Essamri, Mckechnie and Winklhofer, 2019 etc.</p> <p>The study extends the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), highlighting the importance of contrasting the community to rival groups and fractions.</p> <p>The research findings also contribute to earlier studies. While earlier work such as Healy</p>	<p>For political brands, the findings provide an indication that new approaches be considered in the management of communities of brand admirers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A wide range of value co-creating activities can take place on social media platforms.</li> <li>2) Social media platforms are an essential value co-creating platform – but should be managed strategically.</li> <li>3) Political brand community members are a valuable operant resource.</li> <li>4) Community members determine their own contributions.</li> </ol>	<p>This research has identified Netnography as a powerful and novel method which has been underutilised to date by the extant literature.</p> <p>This research has demonstrated that netnography can offer rich and useful data whilst being unintrusive to the environment which it is intending to study.</p>

		<p>Further to this, the research findings of the first data collection phase allow further detail to be applied to the conceptual framework and value co-creation process within a political brand community. In particular, it adds new understanding of the form value co-creation takes.</p>	<p>and McDonagh (2013) identify roles within interactions, this research considers institutional norms in which roles are assumed for extended periods. This study agrees with Akaka and Chandler's (2011) assertion that value co-creation roles may be understood as operant and operand resources.</p> <p>This research is the first to offer substantive discussion around the concept of value co-creation activities. The study extends the various typologies explored individually in earlier works, for instance Hua et al. (2020), McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), Irwin (2015), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).</p>		
<b>Phase 2: Interviews</b>	<p>Interview data was analysed and identified five triggers of engagement behaviours. These included: a sense of moral duty; a need for purpose; love of brand community; encouragement from peers; and personal development. Interview data provided insights facilitators and inhibitors of engagement behaviours. The factors included: camaraderie; open forum; low barriers to participation; and knowledge of</p>	<p>Phase two of data analysis principally answered the second research objective: <i>'to investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within a political brand ecosystem'</i>. The findings of this research increased understanding of initiating stimulus, helpful and unhelpful factors in the engagement environment, and identified</p>	<p>The findings of this research extend the work of Verhoef et al. (2010). The study identifies multiple factors which contribute to initiating an actors engagement. Most significantly, the study findings extend the contribution of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in that the 'sense of moral responsibility' identified by the paper acts as a trigger to engagement, and in the case of political brand communities, moral responsibility is felt for</p>	<p>Phase two of data collection and analysis also offers Organisers and others involved in political branding efforts new insights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A broad range of factors stimulates value co-creating engagement, understanding these will help practitioners increase the number of brand admirers</li> </ol>	<p>The findings of this research further validate established method of interviewing in the field of political branding. Of particular importance is the use of interviews in conjunction with netnography. this is allowed for greater insight to be gained</p>

<p>group norms. Inhibitors which were identified alone in authentic experiences; Fear of judgement; confrontation fatigue; and creeping political apathy. Finally, analysis of the data identified actor perceived benefits of actual engagement. Long term orientated perceived benefits included: belonging; purpose; status and power; interpersonal relationships; vindication; and acceptance.</p>	<p>the perceived benefits actor engagement within the political brand community.</p> <p>The findings of this research show that a diverse range factors initiates actor engagement in value co-creation activities. Further to this, environmental factors that facilitate and inhibit value co-creating engagement are more complex than previous studies suggest.</p> <p>The second phase of data analysis also contributed to a deepening understanding if the conceptual framework. To this extent, research objective 3 it also addressed by phase 2.</p>	<p>those outside of the community as well as those within it.</p> <p>The research concurs with Ha (2018a) that consciousness of kind is closely related to rituals and traditions.</p> <p>Analysis of the findings agreed with Verhoef et al.'s (2010) assertions that the external environment also proves a significant resource for factors initiating actors' engagement.</p> <p>The findings agreed with Verhoef et al.'s (2010) assertions that the external environment also proves a significant resource for factors initiating actors' engagement.</p> <p>The findings of this research concur with Laroche et al. (2012) in that a shared consciousness between members is a highly important facilitator of value co-creation practices amongst actors. This research furthers this understanding with an analysis from the multi-actor engagement value co-creation perspective.</p>	<p>engaging in value processes.</p> <p>2) Understanding of the best environmental conditions for engagement is of central importance to the successful response to actor engagement.</p> <p>3) the findings of this research give insights to practitioners and understanding why involved and further deepen understanding of the best engagement environments. in addition this should indicate to practitioners on their response to engagement.</p>	<p>as well as the opportunity to validate interpretation of the observations.</p>
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The literature reviews and conceptualisation chapter identified Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009) as an essential piece of research in developing this thesis. The paper establishes the forms of value creation engaged in by brand communities. The findings of this research relate to and expand on the work of these authors in several areas. First, this study found that brand communities engage in welcoming, empathising, and organisational activities. The data analysis findings of the previous two chapters offered a rich description of how brand communities go about what Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009) describe as social networking. Like the commercial contexts the authors explained, this research found political brand communities also welcome new members and make them feel part of the existing community. This research has identified that networking activities go beyond welcoming new members and extend to introducing new actors in the communities' institutional arrangements. Furthermore, existing members encourage current and new members to participate in the brand community's activities actively. An aspect that Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009) do not directly address, which this research has shed light on, is the activities which actors undertake to build networks and nurture a sense of belonging amongst its members. These include actively welcoming and inducting new members. Secondly, the authors identify groupings of activities which they describe as impression management. In particular, they talk of evangelising and justifying behaviours. This research identified similar insights within this thesis as 'the business of activism', though the related activities are far more extensive. This is partly due to the political nature of the brand under investigation. Where the authors discuss activities which amount to attempts to alter how a commercial brand is viewed positively by potential consumers, this research reveals that political brand ecosystem actors are actively engaged in 'always on' campaigning, which may also include direct intervention in countering narratives by other external actors. Finally, this research identified similar value-creating activities concerning community engagement, turned in this research as brand advocacy. Like Schau, Muniz and Arnold (2009), this research identified activities focused around working and documenting progress online.

However, there are a number of value co-creating activities this research has identified that are not adequately acknowledged in existing research in this area. First, this research contributes to understanding how brand communities collectively co-create value through engagement by negotiating the brand parameters. In other words, individual actors interact with one another to define what the political brand represents and what it does not. This reflects aspects of a body of literature exploring the 'co-creation' of brand identity (see Payne *et al.*, 2009; Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2011; Essamri, Mckechnie and Winklhofer, 2019), which state that brand identity is a consequence of a collective effort between an organisation and individual customers. It also builds upon McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig's (2002) thoughts that the negotiation of meanings is a universal function of a brand community. However, prior research does not adequately reflect the nature of the value created or its process. This thesis

recognises this as a continuous process, and the brand parameters constantly shift in response to internal and external factors. This organisational evolution can be considered a function of institutional arrangements. Of particular interest is the finding that political brand communities seek to define closely associated brands in addition to their own, reflecting a significant assumed role as definer and party sub-group. While the negotiation of brand parameters may be particularly pertinent to a political brand, these findings are of interest for traditional commercial contexts as well. Second, existing literature has not currently explored in great detail what has been termed in this research as ecosystem authentication. This research finds that actors authenticate an ecosystem by engaging in activities and interactions which seek to identify others in engagement platform (Twitter) as genuinely belonging or not to the community. This includes attempts to define actors as 'alien' to the community or simply less committed than institutional norms. Brand community literature, such as Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), references community members' acknowledgement of differences between their community and others. Ewing, Wagstaff and Powell (2013) have described oppositional loyalty of consumers as an essential characteristic of a brand community. Still, the extant literature has not previously explored this as an engagement activity that co-creates value by and for the actors who engage in it. It may be that political brand communities, owing to their confrontational nature, are more ardent in self-identifying through activities and interactions that clearly distinguish rival groups.

### 7.2.2 Value Co-creation Roles

The second aspect identified from phase 1 of data collection was value co-creating roles. Six value co-creation roles were identified in 7.4. Value co-creation roles can be understood as an assumed function or part played by an actor centred around organising activities. Roles may be clearly or less clearly defined by the community they serve but guided by its institutional arrangements. This section considers the findings presented in chapter 6 concerning existing literature on value co-creation through actor engagement. It considers the novel insights the study offers for understanding the broader process considered within the conceptual framework discussed in section 7.3.

The literature reviews identified that the notion of value co-creation roles had been explored inconsistently within the existing scholarship. For instance, Healy and McDonagh (2013) identify 7 co-creative roles within a community ecosystem: voice; loyalty; twist; entry; new-entry; re-entry. To summarise, the seven roles identified by the authors focus on specific interactions rather than long-term assumed roles or positions within a community supported by its institutional arrangements. The findings of this research do not strongly relate with the above identified co-creative roles as the focus of this study was an actor engagement rather than the process of cultural mediation within communities. Agrawal and Rahman (2015), on

the other hand, take a broader view on value co-creation participation, identifying 11 separate roles which a customer may play in the process of collective value creation: co-producer; co-distributor; co-promoter; co-manufacturer; co-consumer; experience creator; co-inventor; co-ideator; co-evaluator; co-designer; co-tester. As previously stated, the roles Agrwal and Rahman (2015) identified are broad in their focus and limited in explanation of how they are assigned or assumed by actors. Furthermore, they are orientated around a customer-firm assumption in commercial contexts, thereby not acknowledging the role of the ecosystem or brand community. Like Healy and McDonagh, these roles do not acknowledge institutional arrangements.

This research agrees with Akaka and Chandler's (2011) assertion that roles can be discussed as operant and operand resources. This research has identified that within a political ecosystem, 6 value co-creating roles are assumed by actors: the storyteller; the thought leader; the supporter; the educator; the satirist; the polemicist. As identified, these roles constitute operant resources and sources of value in their own right, in addition to the facilitating role they play for value-creating activities. The findings of this research expand upon existing literature in several areas relating to value co-creation roles. Several of the roles identified within this study's findings relate specifically to the political brand context and partisan confrontational participation by ecosystem actors which co-create value. These are the thought leader, satirist, and polemicist, which have not been identified in previous literature and primarily focused on commercial and tourism contexts. This research defines these roles as being closely related to political discords and less likely to be needed in less combative engagement contexts. The idea of storytelling as a means for value co-creation is explored in an emerging body of literature (see for instance, Pera, 2017; Stoica *et al.*, 2022; Wiczerzycki and Deszczynski, 2022), as is educating (see for instance Sowe, Stamelos and Angelis, 2007; Komulainen, 2014), and supporting (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). This research expands the understanding of these value creators by describing them as fully-fledged and specified roles assumed by actors for prolonged periods of engagement within the brand community ecosystem. This research has identified that an actor may assume a duality of roles. For instance, a storyteller may also seek to educate or support another actor or transition between their assumed roles over time in response to the activities they engage in and the feedback of other actors in the ecosystem. This research has offered new insights into the antecedents and rationale that lead to the assortment of actors in their roles within the brand community.

### 7.2.3 Value Co-creation Interaction Typologies

The final aspect from the first phase of data collection to be discussed is value co-creation interaction typologies. Interaction typologies can be described as the nature of network



exchanges within the ecosystem. In other words, the characteristics of interaction and activity are informed by the institutional arrangements of the brand community. In this section, the data analysis findings of interaction typologies are related to extant scholarship and new perspectives are offered.

Existing literature on actor engagement has rarely described the characteristics of value co-creation interactions, instead focusing on exchange actor valence, which Li, Juric and Brodie (2018) cite as central importance to actor engagement outcomes. Existing literature focusing on actor valence invariably describes behaviours of actors in broad terms, either as 'positive' or 'negative'. In other words, the depth of description of co-creative actor engagement behaviour is limited to the perspective of the firm or actor and as being constructive or destructive to value creation processes (Siddique *et al.*, 2021). In part, the focus on valence is related to the study of commercial dyadic contexts (firm-to-customer or customer-to-firm) where researchers sought to understand why engagement may be positive or negative for issues such as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2021). As understanding of the role of actor engagement in the co-creation of value has become increasingly focused upon networks, a need for further knowledge of the character of interactions has materialised to give more depth to how it affects the process of collective value creation (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2017). This study achieves this by considering the forms of interactions observed within the data collection, applying the lens of institutional theory. Furthermore, the lack of description of this in existing works is a missed opportunity for research utilising ethnographic methods which are well suited to offering 'thick descriptions' of the context of value creation. This thesis offers insight into the characteristics of interactions between actors, both with others within the ecosystem and those outside of it. The findings of chapter 5 identified four typologies of engagement behaviour: adversarial; supportive; humorous; and serious.

The existing services marketing literature does not currently explore interactions and activities marked by their adversarial nature. The nature of many political interactions on platforms such as Twitter is noted by Hua *et al.* (2020) and Guimaraes, Wang and Weikum (2017) as particularly adversarial. This was evidenced in this research as a common characteristic of engagement interactions within the political brand ecosystem. There are many reasons why the literature does not yet adequately reflect the adversarial characteristics of actor engagement within political ecosystems. In a widely cited paper by Ott (2017), the author argues that political discourse has become more contentious in recent years, with several significant political events taking place, such as the rise of populism. While this research reflects this, it also identifies that interactions between actors are multifaceted and can take complex or contradictory forms. Traditional commercial contexts, which comprise most of the relevant extant literature, typically focus on contention between the consumer and

firm and do not reflect new considerations of networked actors in other contexts. This research builds upon what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) describe as oppositional brand loyalty, which posits that members of a brand community drive a vital aspect of their experience and definition of meaning from opposing related brands and communities. The findings have identified that the unique nature of political brand communities indicates that they create value through adversarial interactions with others and amongst themselves, offering new perspectives on how behavioural valence can be understood in service ecosystems.

Supportive interactions and activities are similarly not directly addressed regarding engagement characteristics within the services marketing literature. However, brand community literature has discussed the notion of supportive networks since the outset of the construct. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002), for instance, identify that members of brand communities recognise the benefit of belonging to a supportive network that helps them fulfil their consumption goals. Other authors have also considered the role of support and supportive environments in creating co-creative communities, particularly from the firm's perspective to the consumer (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Schau, Muñiz & Arnould (2009) discuss the supportive activities which brand communities undertake, such as empathising, welcoming, and building a sense of belonging among members. But, this work is limited as it does not acknowledge other supportive behaviour or co-creation aspects. This research builds up on the ideas put forward by the earlier works. It presents a complete picture of how supportive interactions and activities are undertaken by the community and how they contribute to the co-creation of value within a political brand ecosystem.

The findings of chapter 5 identified that many of the political brand ecosystem under study were characterised by their humour. Humour is acknowledged in many papers outside of services marketing as playing a role within networks of actors, groups and communities (see Irwin, 2015; Ge and Gretzel, 2018). In some respects, humour can be seen as a glue that holds groups of actors who only share loose or informal connections and essential relief to the adversarial interactions. This research has provided insight into how political brand communities engage in actor engagement, characterised by its humour. Again, this should be understood as a complex and multifaceted interaction characteristic that serves many purposes. In one instance, it may simply be to facilitate camaraderie between members. In other contexts, it may be a de-escalator of in-group or out-group conflicts or a source of value creation in the defining out-groups.

Finally, many interactions studied were notable for the high degree of reverence the actors held towards them. In other words, some subjects discussed by the group or involving particular members saw actors show restraint in wishing to engage in conflict or to be inappropriately jovial. In their seminal work, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identify a shared

moral responsibility as a key marker of a brand community. The findings of this research reflect aspects of this as the seriousness the institution adopts to deal with particular issues, and situations indicate a shared sense of responsibility. The political context of this study may also suggest that it is the moralistic mission that actors feel they are engaged in, promoting an understanding that some issues should not be joked about or taken lightly.

#### 7.2.4 Triggers of Engagement Behaviours

This section considers the data analysis findings of phase 2, which are described as triggers of engagement behaviours. To restate, triggers of engagement behaviour can be understood as initiating phenomena which encourage an actor to move from a passive to active engagement state within the brand community. This section relates the data analysis findings to earlier works and contributes a new understanding of why actors engage in value co-creation within ecosystems. This research adds to a rich body of literature relating to the initiating factors of actor (formerly described as the customer) engagement and draws linkages to other relevant constructs.

In their important formative paper Verhoef et al. (2010) conceptualise three factors which contributes to an actors desire to engage: the characteristics of the actor; firm initiatives; and the environment. To begin the discussion of triggers of engagement behaviours, each of these identified aspects will be considered. First, the findings of this research identified several elements of actor characteristics in initiating the first value co-creating engagement. This research aligns with other studies that have identified emotional connection and moral compulsion or duty as a significant factor in their decision to engage in brand communities and various engagement behaviours. In particular, the findings of this thesis found 'the markers of a brand community' identified by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) to be closely related to initiating factors of engagement within the community. First, this research found that actors' shared sense of moral responsibility was a significant factor in their decision to engage with the ecosystem's value-creating activities. Actors identified that they felt compelled by a sense of moral duty to act for the benefit have others in the community and the brand itself. In the case of a political brand, a degree of oppositional brand loyalty factored into this sense of morality. This finding not only agrees with Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) conceptualisation of it as a marker of brand community but extends understanding of it as an essential driver of engagement behaviour. This thesis also extends the scope of what moral responsibility encapsulates for a political brand community, as the sense of moral responsibility held by participants of the study went beyond that which been explored in commercial settings to the welfare of individuals. These were not necessarily members of the community or party and could be an abstract group such as 'future generations'. This indicates that the political dimension of the brand raises greater morality-driven initiating factors than traditional

commercial contexts. Parallels can also clearly be drawn between what the findings of this research have described as 'love of brand community' and what was described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as consciousness of kind. Consciousness of kind can be understood as a strong emotional connection to the brand and others in the community. The findings of phase two show this strong emotional connection to the brand and surrounding community act as stimulus for engagement. The findings of this research concur with Ha (2018a), in that the effects of consciousness of kind are closely related to the rituals and traditions of the institution. Actors demonstrate a strong sense of attachment to the origins of the group and its development within the political landscape of the UK. Attachment to the organisation's past was a motivating factor in getting involved with the community and its value co-creation activities. This research has also identified the desire for personal development as a key customer characteristic-based trigger of engagement behaviour. Actors' early engagement represents the first step on what they see as a journey to self-improvement or an attempt to develop more significant meaning for them individually. This aspect of engagement trigger has not been explored within prior research. This may suggest that the political brand communities work slightly differently from commercial ones, with their unique drivers of and actors' first engagement behaviour. As previously discussed, the political sphere is often more meaning-laden to individuals and their personal life stories than mutual consumption habits.

This research also identifies firm initiatives as an initiating factor for an actor to move from passive to active engagement states within the community. However, this research found it to be a less significant than the external environment and actor characteristics. Actors appreciated sincere attempts to organise and make the online community activities more effective by the party sub-group (Momentum), which they felt acts more proactively in the interests of individual members and their strongly held beliefs. This notion relates two actors' keen sense of how the community should operate (i.e. its institutional arrangements). Actors responded negatively to centralised attempts at managing the community by the party brand, particularly if they felt it was inauthentic. This should be considered in the context of the political brand under investigation. As a grassroots 'movement,' a great deal of value is placed upon actions interpreted as authentic and people-orientated. There was a natural suspicion of any attempt to corporatise the group or impose management principals or strategies.

Analysis of the findings agreed with Verhoef et al.'s (2010) assertions that the external environment also proves a significant resource for factors initiating actors' engagement. This research contributes a new understanding of the external factors which cause actors to engage within the brand ecosystem to co-create value. As previously discussed in this chapter, actors within a political brand ecosystem exhibit a large degree of what might be described as oppositional loyalty (Ewing, Wagstaff and Powell, 2013). An intense dislike may drive their first engagement behaviour of a rival political brand rather than a love for the focal brand. In

this study, Momentum members identified firmly held oppositional feelings towards the Conservative Party, widely considered as the antithesis of the left wing of the Labour Party. Another external motivator of engagement behaviours was that of peer engagement, or in other words the influence of actors network or peer group. A number of participants of this study recalled how existing members of the ecosystem had encouraged them to take part and had provided both impetus to do so and motivation. Therefore, the findings of this research also reflect and build upon works such as McLean and Wilson (2019) and Lin et al. (2019), which consider the social component of engagement behaviours and further deepen the understanding of how social communities co-create value. Notably, as the notion of social relationships as motivating actor engagement as an external factor has not been widely explored.

### 7.2.5 Facilitators and Inhibitors of Engagement Behaviours

This section relates the data analysis findings of facilitators' and inhibitors' engagement behaviours to the existing literature and contributes new theoretical insight. Facilitators and inhibitors of engagement behaviour can be considered key factors that prevent an actor within the ecosystem from becoming involved in the engagement process.

First, consideration is given to the facilitators, or things which aided value co-creation engagements, identified in this study to be: a sense of camaraderie among participating actors; an open forum where actors are given an equal opportunity to contribute regardless of experience or network complexity; low barriers to actor participation in engagement; and knowledge amongst actors group norms and institutional arrangements (or ease of ability to learn them). From the early conceptions of brand communities, scholars such as McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) have recognised the importance of interpersonal relationships in engaging actors within a brand-orientated community. The findings of this research concur with Laroche et al. (2012) in that a shared consciousness between members is a highly important facilitator of value co-creation practices amongst actors. This research furthers this understanding with an analysis from the multi-actor engagement value co-creation perspective. This aligns with contemporary literature on value co-creation through actor engagement, such as Brodie et al. (2019b) and Storbacka et al. (2016). The findings of this research relate strongly to earlier academic work on brand communities and interpersonal relationships between different member actors. Perhaps the most significant of these would be the strong parallels between the notion of camaraderie and consciousness of kind first presented in the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). The authors identified this as a critical marker of the brand community, constituting the connection felt by actors to other members of the brand community. This phenomenon has also been observed within other necessary academic studies on brand communities (see for instance: Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009;

Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). This research adopts the term 'camaraderie' to describe this phenomenon as the previously adopted consciousness of kind does not adequately reflect that the feelings held by actors towards others are multifaceted, complex, and built upon the familiarity of long-term exchanges, as identified by this study.

Within the current value co-creation literature, the importance of an open forum to engage has been alluded to, if not directly addressed. In the seminal conceptualisation of an evolved brand logic by Merz, He, and Vargo (2009) emphasises the central importance of interactions between actors as the basis from which value may be co-created, stating that a brand and the value which it offers is the result of a continuous and iterative process of interactions. This sentiment was also reflected in Grönroos's (2012) widely cited conceptualisation of value co-creation. This suggests that any hindrance to an actor's ability to interact with any other actor would limit or deny them an opportunity to engage in value co-creation activities. Therefore, this research represents an original contribution to this field. It identifies engagement environments that should be utilised to be as inclusive and open as possible for value co-creation to take place and succeed. This finding is also in line with research focusing on brand community. Adamik, Nowicki and Szymańska (2018) identify that the quality of openness in the culture of a brand community helps to stimulate the processes of co-creation within organisations and, therefore, should be encouraged. It should be noted, however, that these authors are principally talking from the perspective of management practices and that this research has primarily focused on institutionally governed arrangements.

This research also identified that a critical facilitator of value co-creation engagement was the potential engagement actors perceived as few hindering factors as possible before becoming involved with the group's activities. This represents an original contribution of the study as no existing scholarship has identified factors such as the is in which an actor can become involved or use their general social media profile to engage.

The final facilitator this research identified in the data analysis findings was that actors felt ✓helped them undertake engagement that co-created value. In other words, knowing the institutional arrangements or the ability to find them out easily helped actors function as part of the institution. The finding of the research compares to Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder's (2011) paper which focuses on what the authors describe as 'micro-dimensions' of the value co-creation process, highlighting that brand culture, or what this thesis understands as institutional arrangements of the brand community, play an essential role in the collective creation of value. The findings of this research also agree with Hollebeek, Juric and Tang (2017) that learning and accumulated knowledge are vital for the engagement of the brand community. They find that applying group norms feeds into many other aspects of the value co-creation

process. This thesis also extends this understanding by considering the awareness amongst participating actors of norms in value co-creation activities.

Data collection analysis also identified several inhibitors to actor engagement within the brand community. These were: experiences which were perceived to be inauthentic by the actors of the ecosystem; the fear of being judged negatively by other actors within the engagement platform; confrontation both with actors inside and outside of the brand community; and fatigue from sustained engagement behaviours. In contrast to the discussion around facilitators of value co-creation behaviour, the political context on which the study is focused, identified some new and political brand-specific insights into factors which inhibit actor engagement. The first inhibitor identified from the data findings was inauthentic experiences. To reiterate, these are perceptions held by an actor, or groups of actors, relating to the authenticity of the engagement type or environment. In other words, an evaluation of how natural or organic the engagement experience is. Actors observed and interviewed in this study were sceptical of engagement opportunities that were perceived to be initiated by the wrong individuals or were in some respect 'forced' or 'twee'. The extant literature has not explored this notion concerning services marketing or brand community. This is perhaps because of the grassroots political nature of the organisation studied. As chapter 2 identified, Momentum regards itself as a serious political movement and is keen to distinguish itself from its associated party. A healthy cynicism was observed towards centrally (the Labour Party HQ) controlled engagement opportunities, particularly following the election of a new party leader who the group did not feel represented their interests. This finding reflects that value co-creation's circumstances and engagement preferences can be unique to the broad context and its micro-contexts.

Participants of this study identified that when they felt other actors might judge the quality of their engagement negatively, they would be hesitant to engage fully. In comparison, some literature has considered effects similar to the fear of judgment by others in social media interactions, they have not considered this from the perspective of actor engagement value co-creation or brand community (Brennan and Binney, 2010). It is likely that the fear of judgement plays a role in the majority of actor engagement online but is felt particularly strongly by those within a political brand ecosystem, as many of the co-actors may be well versed or knowledgeable about the subject and the community. It is also the case that unlike communities focused upon brands that produce physical goods, political brand community actors engage in a more subjective discourse that is more keenly orientated around personal points of view. In many of the observed engagements, actors with the strongest points of view were often the most prominent or visible. This research, therefore, builds upon insights into the fear many actors have of rejection when participating in online spaces by authors such as Brennan and Binney (2010) to understand that this has a detrimental effect on potential

engagement by actors. It is, therefore, evident that the organisation and facilitation of online community engagement should prevent individuals from feeling a form of judgement of the potential value of their contribution, as was evident in this study.

While the occasional confrontational nature of online spaces where engagement and interaction takes place (i.e. social media site and other forms of new media) has been established (for instance Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Kruse, Norris and Flinchum, 2018), the effect this has on actor engagement has not yet been recognised. Nor has its place in value co-creation. In part, the lack of acknowledgement of this issue relates to the extant literature focus on traditional contexts, as the likelihood of confrontation in engagement or interaction is much higher within a political brand community. This study has found that this is a complex inhibitor to actor engagement. Some individual actors are motivated by this aspect of the engagement exchanges, and others are subdued by it. This suggests that it is challenging to manage the confrontational nature of many of the outlined value co-creation activities found in the findings of this thesis.

Finally, a key inhibitor of value co-creation engagements identified by this research is termed as creeping political apathy. To reiterate, this can be considered a form of 'battle fatigue' an actor feels initiated through engagement behaviours participated in for prolonged periods. This may occur for multiple reasons and can be specific to an actor. However, the most common cause for engagement fatigue identified by the participants of this study was a feeling that the engagement behaviour was doing little to achieve the group's objectives or that conflict with other groups was less successful than initially considered. Within the existing literature around actor engagement or value co-creation more broadly, the concept that actors (or groups of actors) feel fatigued from engagement and that this can consequently become an inhibitor of ongoing participation is not present. Again, this is an artefact of the commercial brand focus identified in chapter 3 in this area and that political brand communities engage in a much greater degree of conflict with other groups. Furthermore, political brand community members feelings to constantly be engaged, exhibiting an 'always on' approach to these activities. This thesis, therefore, offers new insight into a form of inhibitor to value co-creation within political brand communities. This understanding can be used to devise strategies by organisers of political groups.

#### 7.2.6 Actor Perceived Benefits of Engagement

The final theme of phase two of data collection analysis focused on actor-perceived engagement benefits. Actor perceived benefits for engagement can be described as an anticipated positive result, on the part of an actor, regarding their engagement within the value



co-creation ecosystem. This section discusses these findings concerning existing scholarly work in this area and identifies new theoretical understanding.

#### 7.2.6.1 Long-term orientated

The idea of belonging as a benefit to long-term actor engagement has been acknowledged within both brand community and services marketing literature. Widely cited seminal brand community papers such as Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) and Bowden et al. (2018) identify a sense of belonging as why actors engage in various altruistic behaviours and show me information that assists existing actors or welcome new members. Wajid, Malik and Khurshid (2019) refer to the sense of belonging as 'cultural embeddedness', where actors become acclimatised to their cultural surroundings and take value from further exposure to that familiar environment.

An individual's sense of purpose has not been widely discussed as a perceived benefit of actor engagement in literature exploring commercial settings, despite its likely influence on altruistic behaviour patterns (Smith, 2018). However, this effect has only been alluded to outside of commercial contexts. In commercial contexts, actors may be drawn by a shared love of a brand or product, but political brand actors levitate around a love of collective action. For instance, Lizzio and Wilson (2010) have considered the relationship between students' sense of purpose in higher education engagement. Despite its clear relevance to co-creative environs such as political brand communities, no existing work has given attention to this before this study. To broaden the consideration of a sense of purpose as a perceived benefit of engagement, the purpose could be considered an action-oriented extension of self-identity benefits as there is a degree of cross-over in the constructs. The idea of self-identity has been considered in brand community (Heere *et al.*, 2011) and engagement literature (Baker *et al.*, 2021). The relevance of psychological ownership in particular, represents clear similarities in the constructs. Within this study, purpose was found to be derived, in part, to psychological ownership by the actors of the brand community. This aligns to the findings of Barker et al. (2021), which more broadly found collective psychological ownership as an antecedent to actor engagement.

Within and outside a peer group, status is a widely understood aspect of brand community membership and engagement but less so as a perceived actor benefit. This research agrees with Ha's (2018b) assertion that status is a characteristic of brand community hierarchies and that some community actors often see higher status positions. The author also argues that status can be derived from multiple different sources, from being recognised as having greater experience or knowledge of some aspects of the brand community or assuming a leadership role in its activities. Madupu and Cooley (2010) identify what they describe as the social

enhancement motive as a causal factor in a brand community members' participation but do not discuss it in terms of perceived actor benefit. However, it is logical that a factor which drives engagement behaviour would be closely related to a perceived accrued use for the actor. In a research article that addressed virtual brand community engagement practises, Hollebeck, Juric, and Tang (2017) directly address the role of status engagement practises within the community. Building up the understanding made by Madupu and Cooley (2010), the advert status answer engagement may relate to a member's role or position. Although valuable, this contribution does not contribute to understanding the role of status as a perceived benefit. This research has provided a greater understanding of status as a consciously perceived engagement benefit. The actors who partake in the activities, even altruistically, of a brand community do so, desiring an uplift in their social status within the group.

The interpersonal relationships between actors within a brand community have received attention within existing scholarly work. McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig (2002) describe the importance of interpersonal relationships in brand communities and how they facilitate the activities of marketplace groups, but this was not the primary focus of the study. Luo et al., (2016) consider how interactions between actors contributed to a harmonious community environment and stronger relationships. The notion of interpersonal relationships being of central importance to developing and maintaining a brand community is similarly reflected by Madupu and Cooley (2010). However, none of the addressed papers has provided insight into interpersonal relationships as actors' perceived benefit of engagement behaviour. Therefore, this thesis contributes to understanding that actors of political brand ecosystems understand interpersonal relationships as a potential benefit of engagement.

The notion of vindication is not explored within current services or brand community literature. Obtaining a vindication, or in other words, to be proved right in regard to a belief, is less likely to be an important factor of membership outside of a political brand community. This research has found that individuals attracted to political brand communities are often driven by strongly held personal beliefs and seek to share an environment that supports their viewpoint. Consequently, this can be seen as a context-specific extension to the factors explored around the sense of belonging.

This thesis found that some actors engaging within a brand community may similarly seek a sense of acceptance by others within or outside of it. While scholars in the field of sociology have explored the concept of seeking acceptance in online communities, it has received very little attention concerning brand communities, and less still as a perceived benefit of actor engagement. Acceptance has, however, been linked to status within the brand community (Postmes, Spears and Lea, 2000; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). This thesis has contributed an understanding that acceptance works as a perceived benefit of actor engagement, with

members of political brand communities not only feeling a sense that they belong to a larger group but that this represents an ability for them to feel the approval of others who they respect.

The notion of power has predominantly been discussed in relation to the shift of the business or its management to the customers (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011), stating that power is now primarily exercised by brand communities. This thesis presents a more complex view, showing the distribution and use of power amongst members, might be colloquially described as 'clout' (Jones, 2010). In the same way that an actor may pursue status as a perceived benefit of engagement, individuals may also hope to exercise influence and authority within the group. Despite what seems a logical development from what is already known, the idea of power as a perceived engagement benefit has not been explored within the existing literatures. This thesis, therefore, offers new insight into how actors may pursue to increase their influence and view it as an ultimate benefit to their engagement behaviour.

#### 7.2.6.2 Short-term orientated

This section considers the theoretical insights this research offers regarding short-term orientated perceived engagement benefits. This discussion begins with the perceived benefit of enjoyment. The perceived benefit of enjoyment has been widely alluded to within the brand community literature. Enjoyment is an acknowledged motivator of participation, as described in this thesis engagement. Sukoco and Wu (2010) consider enjoyment as a self-related form of motivation instead of a socially-related one. Within their study, the authors further break down enjoyment brought about by participation within a brand community to be orientated around interests or experiences offered to an individual. This results in a feeling that stimulates or energises an individual to be a brand community member. The findings of this research concurs that engagement within the value co-creative activities and associated practises causes enjoyment for many actors, but consider this to comprise of complex and myriad factors not thoroughly addressed within the study as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, this study has focus on an anticipated benefit rather than an assumed contributor to participation. Another existing study done this was by Wang, Chan and Yang (2013), but this was limited to the enjoyment of discussions and problem-solving. This research considers more broadly enjoyment actors exhibit in engaging in several different value co-creating activities and associated processes. Although less frequently, enjoyment has also been discussed as a factor in actor engagement literature. Turel and Serenko (2012) discuss how enjoyment plays a role in using social media websites but did not identify this as a key perceived actor benefit.

This research also identified emotional support as a short-term perceived benefit by engagement actors. Emotional support can be understood as a feeling that an actor is offered

moral support and bolstering by others or the actions of the community as a whole. This research contributes to an emerging body of literature in this area. This research agrees with Shawky et al. (2022) that multi-actor engagement through social media often creates the benefit of emotional support for those involved. This research also further contributes to this understanding with an explanation of support types offered within a political brand community. This context has been previously neglected within the academic scholarship. Significantly, the role of emotional support has been primarily explored outside of commercial contexts. Stadtelmann, Woratschek and Diederich (2019) consider actor engagement in online health communities. As was the case in this research, the researchers found that seeking empathy in the form of support or solace is a common feature of online health communities. Whilst not specifically focusing on a brand community, this paper does give insights into the feature shared with this research. The fact that emotional support is not a common feature of existing brand community literature suggests that it is highly specific to the context. Non-commercial contexts appear to sponsor more altruistic behaviour and can be characterised by a greater likelihood of empathy seeking being positively received by the wider community. This suggests critical differences exist between different types of brands.

This research found that one short-term orientated perceived benefit of co-creative engagement was the entertainment value. This was a particularly common feature of humorous or antagonistic exchanges, especially with those from opposing political brand communities. Actors of the study ecosystem derived enjoyment from many of the engagement practices the brand community undertook. While research of commercial contexts (for instance Kim and Ko, 2010) has alluded to the significance of an entertainment value on social media engagement, no existing studies have identified the impact of the 'entertainment value' as a perceived benefit of actor engagement. Furthermore, there is little understanding of current works of how this influences the intrusive process and evaluation on the part of the actor regarding their continued engagement. This research offers new insight into how an individual's sense of entertainment influences their behaviour around engagement activities which co-created value. In this sense, at least, the research agrees with studies such as Kim and Ko (2010) that the presence of entertainment should be a high priority for organisers and other influences of online engagement activities.

Self-expression can be viewed as the short-term orientated aspect of the perceived benefit of acceptance and status within the group. This distinction has been made between this and the other factors as an actors' ability to engage and benefit in self-expression can almost immediately be obtained. To this end the actor may be able to change it frequently or retain it to acquire one of the longer-term perceived benefits. This research agrees with Hung's (2014) perspective that self-expression allows an actor to feel free to be his or hers true self and axe to enable the process is of the group and develop the groups unique identity and that the

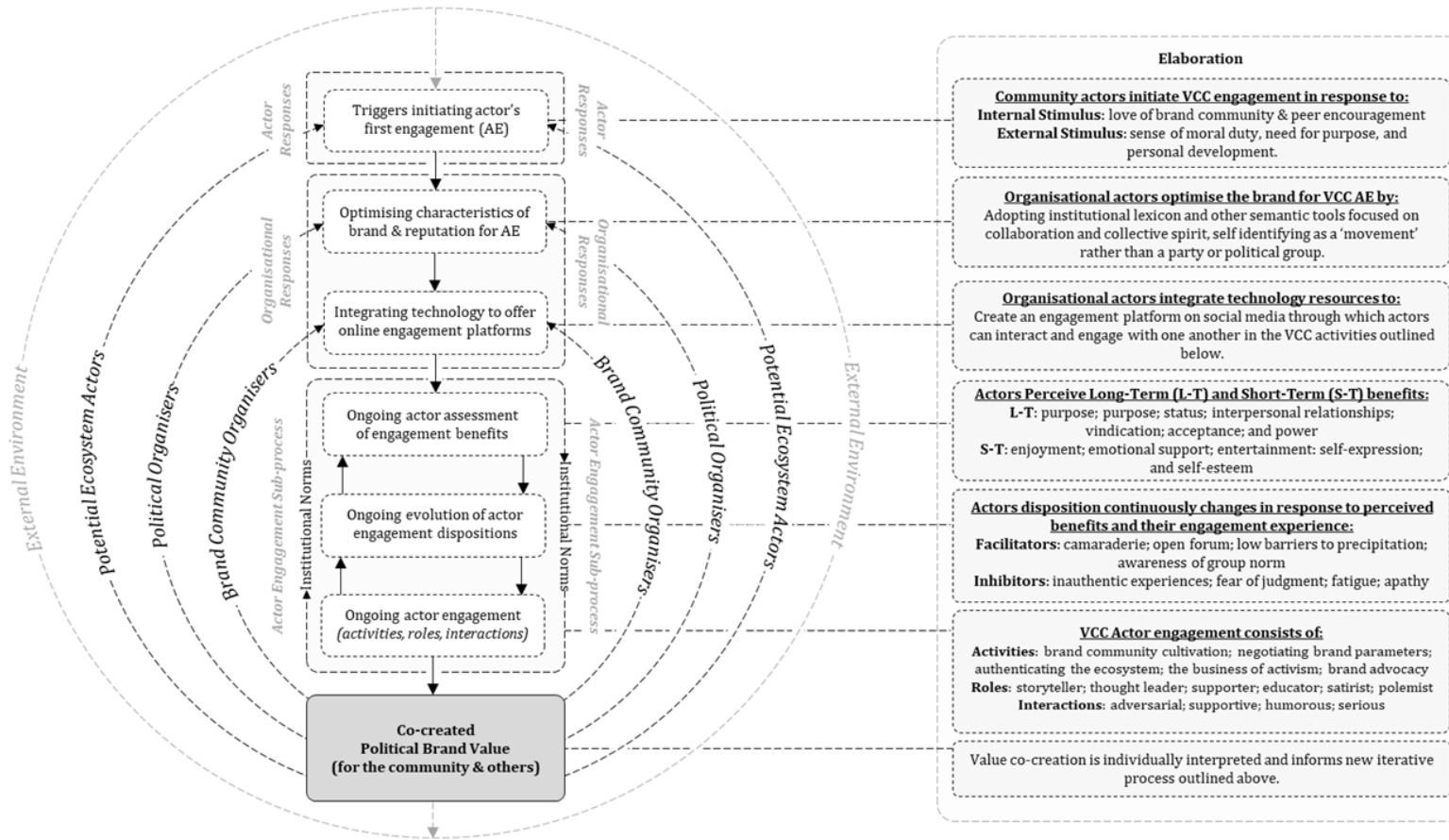
perception of other values offered are interpreted to some degree by their ability for self-expression. While the factor of self-expression has been discussed in relation to multiple areas of brand community management (for instance Ruane and Wallace, 2015), it has not been widely acknowledged within the literature as a factor in the value co-creation process by multiple actors. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding the role of self-expression as a perceived benefit of actor engagement within a political brand community.

The final short-term oriented perceived benefit of actor engagement was self-esteem. To recap, these were feelings by an actor that engagement led to them feeling more inwardly positive about themselves in multiple different regards. The findings of this research agree with those of Wilcox and Stephen (2013) that engagement with a close network of like-minded individuals can boost the self-esteem felt by an actor. This research extends understanding of the perceived benefits of actor engagement by identifying self-esteem as an important short-term perceived benefit to actors within a political brand ecosystem.

### 7.3 Model of Value Co-creation in Political Brand Ecosystems

The framework presented earlier in the thesis drew together an analysis of the existing literature to conceptualise the value co-creation process in a political brand ecosystem. The findings of this research support the conceptualised process and offer deeper insight into the various elements. In the following sections, the framework is revisited, and further detail is offered on the various stages outlined by important earlier works based upon the findings of this research.

**Figure 7.1** Elaborated conceptual model of value co-creation processes through actor engagement (AE) within political brand ecosystems



The researcher

### 7.3.1 Actor Responses

Assuming value co-creation as an iterative process, the conceptual model acknowledges that value co-creation by ecosystems is initiated in response to an earlier stimulus. The research identifies that actor responses originate from existing value, co-created by the brand community (internal), or by initiating stimulus outside the actor-network, such as rival political groups and factions (external). The findings presented in chapters 5 and 6 confirm that actors within a political ecosystem begin to engage in value co-creation due to the actions of others within their network or those perceived to be outside of it. The following section (9.3.1.1) discusses the triggers initiating actors first engagement identified from this data collection.

#### 7.3.1.1 Triggers initiating actor's first engagement (AE)

Interviews with members of the brand community identified five triggers of engagement behaviours, to recap, these included a sense of moral duty, a need for purpose, a love of the brand community, encouragement from peers, and personal development. These findings contributed new detail to this stage of the conceptualised process of value co-creation. Notably, the products of previous value co-creation were not directly identified by interviewees as a significant basis on which they began their own engagement. However, it was evident through netnographic observations that this was a factor. This often fell under the other categories identified in the previous chapter. It was typically the case that interviewees interpreted altruistic community-focused actions as the guiding initiator in many circumstances. This section first considers internally focused triggers which initiate an actor's entrée to engagement. These are a love of brand community and encouragement from peers. Actors felt compelled to engage with the activities of the brand community owing to an emotional connection they felt toward other members or affinity held toward the brand. Therefore, this research has identified that an actor may begin to engage out of a sense that they need to 'play their part' in the community to which they belong, to help and support their fellow members. An actor may also engage as the result of encouragement from their peer group, such as their interpersonal relationships within the brand community. Actors who take some form of leadership capacity within the organisation often encourage more passive members to engage in the organisations value co-creating activities.

Analysis of the data also identified several initiating triggers of actor engagement relating to the external environment: a sense of moral duty, a need for purpose, and personal development. As identified in earlier sections of this chapter, a sense of moral duty reflects earlier work in the area of brand community. This research has extended an understanding of this beyond that consciousness of kind not only shown other members of the group but to non-affiliates as well,

which an actor may or may not know personally. The findings of this thesis show that actors felt a moral compulsion to resist external actions that were perceived as negative or immoral. Moral duty has been identified as a significant factor in motivating an actor's first engagement in value co-creating behaviours. The need for the purpose was also identified as a trigger initiating the actors' first engagement. Participants in the interviews describe how engagement within the brand community helps them to feel more purposeful and allows them to fulfil their self-actualisation needs. Finally, personal development was identified as an external trigger of actor engagement. During the second data collection phase, individuals identified that engagement within the ecosystem offered them opportunities to develop personally, such as gaining knowledge, confidence, or debating skills.

### 7.3.2 Organisational Responses

Following on from actor responses, the conceptual model assumed that as an iterative process, the value co-creation within the brand community must require ongoing inputs from organisers of the political brand. Similar to brand community member actors, the research confirmed that organisational actors seek to play a part in shaping ongoing and future co-created value, specifically from a management perspective. The research verified that organisational responses can be separated into two main groups: (1) organisational actors will optimise the brand's characteristics to encourage value co-creating actor engagement and (2) organisational actors will integrate technology resources to offer online engagement platforms to facilitate actor engagement.

#### 7.3.2.1 Optimising characteristics of brand and reputation for AE

Analysis of the study data agreed with earlier literature, which identified the importance of firm-based antecedents in valuing co-creating actor engagement. In particular, organisational actors would seek to enhance the characteristics of the political brand and its reputation to enable member actors to engage better. This research found that the organisation under study actively sought to define the political brand centred around its members' actions. Organisational actors within Momentum were keen to stress that the group was a 'movement' inferring the role of all members engaging with the political process. Organisers of Momentum also utilise other semantic tools to optimise the brand characteristics for engagement, references to 'the people' and 'the many' were frequently observed within the netnographic phase of data collection. This exemplifies the desire for political organisations such as Momentum to trigger actor engagement, with members offering their time to activities that benefit a broad group. The research also identified that the political brand sought to gain a reputation for being active on social media, responsive to online engagements, and supportive



to its members innovations. Momentum and its various local groups actively encouraged the use of technology to share its message and engage in the various ways identified by this study.

#### 7.3.2.2 Integrating technology to offer online engagement platforms

This study focused on Momentum's online engagement platforms and its various localised branches. It confirmed the conceptual model's assertion that organisational actors integrate the technology resource to facilitate unhindered interactions and engagement between various actors of the political brand ecosystem and enable the value co-creating activities identified by the study to occur. This study has focused upon the extensive use of a social media platform, Twitter, as this represented the key forum used by the group. The creation and use of an official social media account, which can centre brand community engagement, indicates a desire to facilitate new co-creating activities and respond to earlier community members' demands. Netnographic observations identified that the social media pages (Twitter) the political brand provides and maintains act as a 'town square' where free expression of thoughts, ideas and opinions is allowed and encouraged.

#### 7.3.3 Actor Engagement iterative sub-process

The conceptualised model presented in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.5) interpreted existing scholarship to identify a sub-process governing actor engagement that co-creates value. To reiterate, this sub-process consists of (1) continual actor assessment of engagement benefits; (2) continual evolution of actor engagement disposition; (3) the activities and interactions in which actors co-create value. The process of actor engagement is given the status of a sub-process within the broader process of the conceptual model as this reflects continued engagement by many actors through various forms of engagement. The data findings of this research have evidenced that each stage identified by the model is compelling and contributes to the wider process of value co-creation within political brand communities. The following sections explore these findings in further detail and elaborate on the understanding presented in the original conceptual framework.

##### 7.3.3.1 Ongoing actor assessment of engagement benefits

This research confirms that actors continuously assess the benefits of the various forms of engagement they seek. In line with Vargo and Lusch (2016), this research is found that actors individually interpret the value of engagement within the ecosystem. Phase two (chapter 6) of this study gave a deeper understanding of these perceived benefits of actors, finding that they fall into two distinct categories: long-term oriented and short-term focused. Long-term orientated perceived benefits included: belonging; purpose; status; interpersonal relationships;

vindication; acceptance; and power. Short-term orientated perceived actor benefits included: enjoyment; emotional support; entertainment: self-expression; and self-esteem. Interviews with brand community members identified that many prolonged engagement behaviours focused on what actors perceived as longer-term benefits. Longer-term benefits were often quite personal in nature and related to interpersonal relationships and status within the group. Actors appreciated the feeling of purpose or belonging that many engagement behaviours could provide them with; it made them feel useful and made them feel that they were making a material change in the world around them. Actors within the political ecosystem also perceived that their engagement facilitated stronger friendships with likeminded people. In other cases, actors wanted to feel status within the group and that they had influence. Actors also acknowledged within the second data collection phase that some benefits of engagement may have a shorter-term focus. Short-term perceived benefits include enjoyment or entertainment derived from an actor's activities. Actors may also seek ready access to emotional support or improve their self-esteem.

#### 7.3.3.2 Ongoing evolution of actor engagement dispositions

The findings of this research give a detailed insight into a component of the conceptualised sub-process governing the continuously evolving actor disposition in relation to their engagement. In line with earlier work in this area, the research finds that actors adjust their disposition depending upon various factors and conditions of the value co-creation engagement. Discussion around factors which affected engagement disposition fell into two categories according to the participants of the second phase of data collection, these were 'facilitators' (i.e., things which improved actor disposition) and 'inhibitors' (i.e., the things which worsened actor dispositions).

This research has identified that actors can identify factors that positively affect their disposition to engagement within a political brand community. Chapter 6 identified that this revolves around four key facilitators: camaraderie amongst the participating actors; the ability for actors to engage and share ideas freely through a genuinely open forum; ensuring that there are no unnecessary barriers to participation in the engagement; and knowledge (or easy access to knowledge) of group norms and behaviours. By their own recognition, the absence of these facilitators was also noted to cause a change in the valanced behaviours of engagement in addition to specific inhibitors. For example, if an actor did not feel that the contribution was equal to that of other actors it made them less willing to engage regularly, in turn it may cause a re-evaluation of the engagement benefits. When the four identified facilitators are present, political brands may expect more positively valanced behaviour in relation to the online engagements discovered within this study.

Regarding factors which create negatively valenced actor dispositions, the research found a further four issues directly contributable to the downgrading of actor disposition. These were: an engagement experience which was perceived to be inauthentic to the relevant actors; the fear of judgement from others (particularly those of perceived higher status); fatigue from relentless exposure to confrontational interactions; and a creeping political apathy in which actors begin to doubt the purpose of their efforts. Correspondingly, the absence of these particular issues was necessary to ensure the maintenance of positively valenced actor dispositions.

### 7.3.3.3 Ongoing actor engagement (activities, roles, and interactions)

The final aspect of the sub-process identified in the conceptual model is ongoing actor engagement. The model drew upon earlier scholarship on actor engagement and value co-creation, which suggested that networks of actors (in this case, a brand community) collectively undertake activities, voluntarily assumed roles, and interact with one another to create value collectively. The conceptualisation acknowledges that an iterative cycle involving the assessment of engagement benefits and evolution of disposition results in continuous amendments to an actor's engagement behaviour. This research has confirmed this and that an extensive range of activities, roles, and interactions can be clearly evidenced within the political brand community. This section offers an elaboration of the activities, roles, and interactions undertaken by a political brand community.

First, the value co-creating activities surrounding the political brand are identified. To recap, the netnographic phase of the study identified four groupings to which activities could be categorised: the cultivation of the brand community; ongoing negotiation of brand parameters; authenticating members of the ecosystem; undertaking activism work; and advocacy of the brand to which actors 'belong'. The findings of this research give insight into a more diverse and complex range of value co-creating activities than earlier work in the area has identified. While aspects of brand community building have been acknowledged within the literature, this research has identified six separate components including: the recruitment of members; the welcoming and inducting of new members; building networks; the sharing of learning; nurturing a sense of belonging; and the encouragement of participation in engagement. This research contributes that this aspect of value co-creation is enjoyed by community members, both in its creation and consumption. This research also extends understanding of how a community negotiates brand parameters, noting that political brand communities seek not only to define their own brand but of associated brands as well. The conceptual model of value co-creation within a political brand ecosystem further elaborates the findings of this research that a key activity undertaken by political brand communities is to authenticate the ecosystem. In other words, to work to categorise actors within the ecosystem as belonging or not. A further

category was identified of allyship, which recognises that actor is separate but friendly towards the community. Perhaps the most substantial category of activity undertaken by the brand community was that of activism, building upon the earlier work used in the development of the conceptual model, the research found that actors proactively seek to influence how individuals perceive the group and associated groups in addition to other 'administrative' roles. Finally, the research identified activities related to brand advocacy.

This research has also expanded our understanding of actors' roles in co-creating value. The netnographic observations of this research identified six assumed roles by actors within the brand community: the storyteller; the thought leader; the supporter; the educator; the satirist; and the polemicist. This reflects the diverse undertakings of a political brand community and the specialisms which actors exhibit within the institutional norms of the political brand. These findings help enrich the conceptualised model, demonstrating insights than earlier work has identified. Finally, the research identified four typologies of value co-creation interactions: adversarial; supportive; humorous; and serious. These findings again elaborate on the conceptualised process, helping to understand the characteristics of value co-creation in political brand contexts.

Figure 7.1 shows elaborated conceptual model of value co-creation actor engagement within a political brand ecosystem. This figure condenses the findings of this research into the identified conceptual model of chapter 3 and can be used within practice to identify how the political organisations can positively harness the power of collective value creation surrounding a political brand.

## 7.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theoretical insight offered by the findings of this research project. It identified that this research builds upon an existing body of literature concerned with value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions, the factors that initiate actor engagement behaviours, the aspects of the engagement process that inhibit or facilitate value co-creation, and the benefits which engaging actors perceive. It shows the clear contributions which this research has made which further understanding and united it into a consistent model, it also demonstrates how it is expanded knowledge in a way which practitioners in brand communities can utilise. In addition, this chapter revisited the conceptualised model of Chapter 3 and related the research findings to those earlier works. The following final chapter provides the concluding discussions of the research project.

# Chapter 8 Conclusion

## 8.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a conclusion to the thesis by identifying its contributions to theory and practice, acknowledging its strategic limits, and making suggestions for future research. The chapter begins by discussing how the research aim and objectives have been achieved. The following section focuses on the contributions to theory and practice. Then, the strategic limits of the thesis are described, and potential issues around the characteristics of the timeframe and methodology are looked at. Finally, areas for further research identified by this study are suggested. Three research objectives were set and determined at the beginning of the thesis, the following paragraphs consider each one in relation to the research findings. Research objective 1 was to 'explore value co-creation activities, roles, and interactions within a political brand ecosystem'. Research objective 2 was to 'investigate the triggers, facilitators, inhibitors, and actor-perceived benefits of value co-creation engagement behaviours within the political brand ecosystem'. Research objective 3 was to 'conceptualise the processes of value co-creation in actor engagement by members of a political brand ecosystem and to identify the actors involved'.

## 8.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

This research seeks to understand further the value of the co-creation process within a political brand community. In doing this, several significant contributions have been made to the existing theoretical understanding. This section of the conclusion chapter discusses the contribution this research has made to scholarship. Principally the contributions to scholarship can be understood in three separate areas, which are discussed in below: (1) value co-creation; (2) political branding; (3) brand community.

### 8.2.1 Application of Value Co-creation Theory to Political Branding

This research has contributed to the value co-creation literature in respect to its application to the context of political branding. First, this thesis has offered an expanded understanding via a newly conceptualised process of iterative value co-creation by actor-network engagement within political brand communities. The identified process reflects previous studies highlighting key factors and stages affecting engagement outcomes in political brand communities. The conceptualised process, which was elaborated in Chapter 7, based upon the findings of the phases of data analysis, offers one of the first holistic interpretations of value co-creation in the actor networks of a political brand community. This conceptualised process provides a useful illustration to scholars seeking to investigate co-creation in brand

communities and organisers of political brand communities seeking to facilitate or maximise positive outcomes of actor engagement.

This research has provided a valuable focus on the role of actor engagement in value co-creation of a political brand community. As the literature review chapters identified, actor engagement is still a relatively new perspective within this field, therefore, a significant research project focusing upon it from this perspective is useful for further development and theorising this area of the value co-creation discourse. This approach is particularly useful because it addresses earlier criticism faced by the value co-creation literature stating that studies can be vague in their application of value co-creation terminology. Addressing the vague conceptualisations of earlier literatures, this study sought to identify the specific activities in which actors engage and the factors affecting engagement, such as the perceived benefits of this behaviour. For instance, this research has been specific in the types of activity undertaken by actors within the political brand community, such as welcoming new members or in-grouping and out-grouping those within the engagement platform. This research has gone further than previous studies (for instance Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009; Essamri, Mckechnie and Winklhofer, 2019; Manser Payne, Peltier and Barger, 2021) even in this specificity, highlighting the roles and interactions within the engagement platform under observation.

Many papers in this area have only offered data captured after the value co-creation has taken place. This study has offered insights from a deep, prolonged immersion within a specific context, which is a rare quality in research in this area (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Consequently, this study contributes to 'thick description' value co-creation processes, as before, unoffered within the political brand and brand community literatures (Lin and Himelboim, 2019). As service-dominant logic theory specifies, value is uniquely determined by the beneficiary and is, therefore, contextual (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). This thesis, thus, represents valuable insight into the process given its research design and explanation of research findings.

While earlier studies have identified that groups of actors undertake value co-creation, few have gone on to provide insight into how or why engagement takes place, the benefits which actors perceive it to render, or how disposition to engagement changes through time (Storbacka, 2019b). The study has helped to address the research gap. This research has contributed to understanding these factors, including the triggers to actor engagements, the benefits actors perceive it to offer, and facilitators and inhibitors to the engagement process within a political brand community. First, this research has identified that actors begin their engagement for various reasons. Triggers to engagement behaviour include a love of the brand community, peer encouragement, and a sense of moral duty. This research has contributed that

actors perceive both long-term and short-term benefits to their engagement. In the short-term, they consider enjoyment, emotional support, entertainment, self-expression, and self-esteem to be key benefits of engagement. In the longer term, actors perceived benefits to include a sense of purpose, gaining status, valued interpersonal relationships, vindication, acceptance, and power. This research has also identified that actor disposition continuously changes in response to the presence of facilitators and inhibitors building upon recent work by Brodie, Fehrer and Jaakkola (2019a). Facilitators included a sense of camaraderie between fellow members, the feeling that contributions are always valid, low barriers to participation, and awareness of group norms. Inhibitors included the sense that engagement experience was inauthentic, the feeling that others and fatigue may judge them from long-term engagement.

As previously identified, this research has also significantly contributed to the political marketing literature, particularly around the political branding construct. The literature review of chapter 3 highlighted the fragmented nature of the literature in this emerging marketing context (Pich and Newman, 2020). Of particular note, the literature reviews identified that the contemporary marketing theory of SDL had not been widely considered for these constructs. Therefore, a significant contribution of this study is the application of SDL principles to the political contexts of marketing. This study has identified that value co-creation is central to political brand communities.

Importantly, this study is one of the first to substantively address political brand communities aside from Black and Veloutsou (2017) and Lin and Himelboim (2019) and the activities they undertake for the broader political entity. In particular, this thesis has identified that political branding, and the creation of value for political brands, is a continuous process involving many actors you cooperate with, interact with, and otherwise engage with one another in the pursuit of the creation of this shared value. As the previous section of this chapter identified, a significant contribution of this study is to conceptualise the value co-creation process in political brand communities. The highlighted framework acts as a practical tool in the management and planning of co-creative endeavours by organisers of political brand communities. This helps to address the lack of political brand frameworks identified in the literature review. The research contributes on this basis that a new approach is required to management and practice for organisers of political brand communities. These aspects are directly addressed in subsequent sections of this research.

If the current predominant characterisation of brand community is accepted, political brands are non-geographically bound communities, and accordingly, forms of free communication are highly important (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This research has contributed to the fact that technology is a key facilitating resource for value co-creation within political brand communities. The provision of social media accounts for the political brand constitutes a

central aspect of a brands' wider openness and facilitation of actor engagements by community members.

This thesis has contributed to the fact that political brand communities are made up of actors of networks who work as key resource integrators. Meaning that those who are admirers of a political brand consciously, or otherwise, initiate and use services other actors who create value. This aspect will be directly covered in the following section.

This research has identified that the actor networks, which make up political brand communities, are among the most significant attributes a political brand possesses. Political brand community members can be regarded as the champions of the brand and as such are amongst its biggest advocates. Study has shown that brand community actors engage with others inside and outside the political brand ecosystem and offer various services and resources. However, it should be noted that the relationship is complex and has evolved over time. The following sections will consider this in greater detail.

### 8.2.2 Contributions to Brand Community Theory

This research offers several contributions to the brand community literature. As with the discussion around political marketing, these contributions primarily relate to applying service-dominant logic principles to lesser-explored marketing areas, considering the brand community construct outside the traditional commercial context, and the role of institutional norms in governing engagement behaviours. First, the findings of this research put forward that brand communities, can be conceptualised as consisting of actor networks that integrate resources through their interaction and engagement (for instance: time, skill, or knowledge). Second, this research has confirmed that actors of a brand community, consciously and unconsciously, undertake engagement behaviors that co-create value. This value is used and phenomenologically interpreted by others within and outside the brand. These factors, therefore, extend the traditional interpretation of brand communities as representing like-minded individuals who simply come together to share their individual passion for a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), to one which states they are motivated networks of actors proactively working together to share value. Accordingly, this thesis offers a new definition of a brand community:

*Brand communities are networks of actors who, based upon a shared admiration for a brand, come together and integrate resources through engagement with the community to co-create value for themselves and others.*



The new definition offered above reflects the central role played by individuals surrounding a brand and the importance of co-created value. This research demonstrates that political brand communities are complex and represents an interconnected ecosystem.

This thesis contributes to a limited body of literature exploring the application of the brand community concept outside of traditional commercial settings. This thesis has explored how actors in a prominent brand community engage with one another as it is seeking to create value. It has shown that the political context raises unique values in the co-creation activities that are undertaken. For example, engaging in adversarial interactions and activities with actors inside and outside the community constitutes a unique aspect of value co-creation in this area. A further example would be that the consciousness of kind, said to be a marker of brand community in previous studies (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), was not only felt towards those within the community but those outside of it as well. Understanding non-commercial brand community settings is an important development in the conceptualisation of brand communities.

Finally, this research contributed further understanding of institutional norms and attitudes held by community members towards the wider brand community (Thornton and Ocasio, 2012). Of particular interest were attitudes relating to psychological ownership, identified by participating actors and the attitude of autonomy from the associated political entity. This psychological ownership manifested within the brand community's actors, who felt that their contribution was more important and valued than that of the centralised political brand entity. The following section details that actor networks can now be understood as effective 'co-owners' of the brand and its community.

### 8.3 Contribution to Practice

In addition to the extensive theoretical contributions of this research, several key learnings have emerged for managers and practitioners in the field of political branding. This section considers four key contributions to management and practise from the study:

1. A new political brand community management approach based upon co-ownership with actor networks.
2. The need to embrace digital culture and the technology resource.
3. The requirement to pursue brand characteristics which encourage actor engagement-led value creation.
4. The importance of creating authentic engagement experiences.

This study has highlighted that the actor networks comprising a political brand community are the primary determinant, creators, and users of its value. The research also indicated that, in line with SDL theory, the role of brand managers and organisers is to facilitate rather than determine the value which a brand offers. This, therefore, challenges the dominant logic of many practitioners who continue to view brand meaning and value creation as a management process. Consequently, the research identifies a need for a change in approach by managers and organisers of political brands, reflecting the evolved service dominant-logic applied by this study to their context. The research indicates that practitioners should consider themselves to co-own the political brand with its community. This would reflect the research findings, which identified that the actor network which make up the community continuously negotiates the parameters of the brand, irrespective of the intentions of brand organisers. Clearly, the primary creators and users of value, associated with the political brand, feel a degree of psychological ownership over it. They increasingly perceive their autonomy from the brand message decided upon centrally by the political entity.

Building upon the discussion in the earlier section, this research has identified that practitioners should further embrace digital culture and technological resources to encourage actor engagement and value co-creation. This research has identified that the digital culture, governed by institutional norms, is adopted by actor networks of political brand communities as a powerful force in shaping, and growing, political brands. This research, therefore, provides practitioners with an additional resource to supplement the 'always on' campaign philosophy discussed in earlier chapters. In this approach, practitioners should recognise that actor engagement, facilitated by the integration of the technological resource, has empowered the individuals in the actor-network of a brand community to forge their path in the form and preference of engagement behaviours. Whilst the power of this can be harnessed for the benefit of the political entity, it requires management to alter their outlook. The research identifies the need to work alongside actors, rather than against them, to embrace their digital culture, even though this results in less control.

This research identified that the political brand under study had consciously adapted the brand characteristics to emphasise openness to co-creative actor engagement behaviours. For instance, it widely refers to itself as being a 'movement', an expression that infers its 'grassroots' nature and desire for members to be actively involved within the political context. This has contributed to Momentum being one of the best examples of a political brand community in terms of engagement amongst its actor-network and co-created value, documented in this thesis. Consequently, this research has contributed that managers and organisers for other political brands should evolve the brand characteristics to illustrate to their actor networks that co-creation is encouraged and facilitated by the political entity. Demonstrating this willingness clearly impacts the degree to which actor networks undertake

engagement. Furthermore, the absence of actor engagements may create competitive disadvantage.

The second phase of data collection and analysis identified that in the new political marketing context, where actor networks are central to value creation, there is an expectation that the actors themselves will authentically lead this. Managers and other practitioners should relinquish 'absolute' control of the brand community environment and allow participating actors to engage freely from constraint. This research has contributed that the authenticity of the engagement environment is critical to the outcomes of a value co-creative engagement. Where actors perceive engagement to lack authenticity, to be forced, or in any other way orchestrated by a centralised hierarchy, there is a tendency to lead to disengagement.

## 8.4 Limits of the Study

Like all research, this study is subject to many strategic choices, resulting in some limits that should be recognised and used to help orient future research. Within this chapter section, study limits have been divided into two broad groupings, timeframe and methodological limits.

### 8.4.1 Timeframe Limits

Timeframe limits relate to the period in which this research was conducted. The research was conducted over a fixed time frame (May 2020-December 2021), during which several characteristics can be noted that may have had an impact on the actions of those within the studied brand community or the responses of interview participants. First, the research was conducted over a significant period for Momentum, immediately following Jeremy Corbyn's resignation as leader of the Labour Party in April 2020. Jeremy Corbyn strongly closely related and its community, an indisputable affinity exists between Momentum and Labour's former leader. It is therefore highly likely that the findings may be somewhat different should the research have been conducted a few months prior or after. Furthermore, Corbyn successor significantly at odds with the group and its objectives (Whiteley *et al.*, 2019). This again may have impacted the actors' behaviour during the observation period. However, it should be acknowledged that this is a common feature of research in politics, which has been recognised as particularly fast-moving. It is, therefore, difficult to have true replicability in this regard (Roland, 2004). If it is even a desirable characteristic when sufficient description of the context is provided.

The second timeframe limit to be acknowledged is that the data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a period of significant upheaval in the public discourse and individuals' everyday lives. The impact of these unique conditions on

engagement within the ecosystem is difficult to assess. It is possible that the degree or type of engagement was affected by the national lockdowns and other factors. Future research should consider this as the context when considering the findings of this thesis. In addition, much of the second phase of data collection took place entirely online. Whilst some of the specific issues arising from this will be addressed in the following section, it should be noted that interview dynamics did change when conducted online or by phone. This was a necessity in the case of this research.

#### 8.4.2 Methodological Limits

This section critically reflects upon the limits of the selected methodological approach. Researchers often consider and acknowledge the limits of their research so that they can be consciously minimised and addressed in relation to the aims of the research project. The discussion first considers broad limits raised of qualitative research. These include dependence upon subjective interpretation; lack of systematic process; high volumes of data; and labour intensity (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007). This section seeks to address these in relation to the context of this study specifically. Secondly, limits of netnography are considered, principally, sampling.

##### *Subjective Interpretation*

Qualitative research, particularly ethnographies, have been criticised for a perceived reliance upon a researcher's subjective interpretation of the observed phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Netnography is primarily concerned with observations and analysis dialogue taken from the 'natural setting', allowing the researcher a degree of autonomy in selecting and interpreting data. The two significant issues with subjective interpretation are the possibility for researcher bias and recall error (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Research bias refers to partiality by the researcher in the selection and interpretation of the data. Recall error refers to the dependence upon one person's recollection which may be inaccurate (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019).

To address this limit the research followed the netnographic process identified by Kozinets (2020) for their more systematic nature. These processes are designed to reduce the degree researcher biases may affect the data collection and analysis. Bias was further minimised through reflective practice and note-making. Furthermore, the netnographic data collection stage was followed by interview data collection, which allowed the opportunity to ensure that the interpretations of the political group members were accurate. Whilst recall error may constitute an issue in traditional ethnographies, all observational data in this netnography were in recorded forms.

### *Systematic Process*

As previously noted, there is increasing focus upon systematic processes in research aims to make scholarship more reliable and transparent. Qualitative research, especially ethnography, has been critiqued for lacking systematic rigour and being structurally unsuited (Hammersley, 2006). However, these criticisms fail to appreciate the purpose of qualitative research and that various approaches can be taken to become more rigorous, systematic, and transparent.

This potential limit was a significant factor in the design of this methodology, and several approaches were utilised to overcome it. First, multiple research instruments were utilised to avoid over exposure to the weakness of any single approach (Kozinets, 2020). Second, the most appropriate approaches to those research instruments were identified from relevant literature. For instance, the netnographic components of the strategy followed the procedural approach put forward by Kozinets (2020). Third, transparent descriptions of the data collection were offered of each stage which was taken.

### *High Volumes of Data and Labour Intensity*

As a form of ethnography, netnographic approaches produce a large amount of 'raw' data (Dilger, Pels and Sleeboom-faulkner, 2019). A criticism which originates from this characteristic is that such qualitative approaches are, therefore, wasteful and labour-intensive. The researcher often collects information which will not be used in data analysis or to inform findings, meaning that the research is not fully utilised (Saunders, Lewis and Thornnhill, 2018). A further issue with the volume of data generated relates back to the addressed issue of researcher interpretation and bias, in that there is a need to select what is of interest and what is not (Mack and Woodsong, 2005).

Like other contemporary qualitative research projects, this thesis has used laboursaving software to help overcome to labour intensity of the approach. For instance, NVivo software has transcribed and analysed recorded interview data. This research aimed to generate rich insight into the co-creation of value within the ecosystem of Momentum, for the reasons identified throughout this chapter, the qualitative approach is the most appropriate means of achieving this. As previous sections elaborated, researcher bias has been minimised through the procedural application of the research methods. The research utilised Kozinets's (2020) writing on netnographic data management.

### *Sampling*

The sampling method is a critique against many qualitative research instruments (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). As addressed in previous sections, netnography has unique attributes in relation to sampling method, which raise issues which should be addressed. First, relates to the anonymity of the user of social media sites, this makes it impossible to verify that identity or their intent. This raises questions about what value observations can offer when there is potential for contributions from inauthentic users. Second, this research has utilised purposive sampling, which again represents an opportunity for a researcher to exercise bias in selection (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2018). Third, there is an inability to control the sample within. Then the graphic context due to the digital nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, this includes fewer barriers to withdrawal from the observed space.

Regarding the issue of anonymity and participant identity. This research takes the view that as observations are made without the presence of a researcher, and that the participants cannot practically asked for consent prior to observations being taken, even disingenuous actors form part of the observed phenomenon and the co-creation of value within this ecosystem. The transparency will further mitigate researcher selection bias in reporting the criteria used to make selection decisions. The transient nature of social media observations are accepted as a reality of the observed phenomenon.

## 8.5 Advantages of the Study

The previous section outlined the study's potential limitations, while this section highlights the key strengths. These benefits serve to balance the previously mentioned limitations. The study benefits from a combination of netnography and semi-structured interviews, allowing data triangulation from multiple sources. Netnography captures spontaneous interactions and user-generated content, while semi-structured interviews provide a more in-depth look into participant perspectives, motivations, and experiences. This approach enriches the data pool and enhances the analysis's depth and breadth. Using netnographic observations and semi-structured interviews, the study can capture the contextual intricacies of online political brand communities and contextualise value co-creation's socio-political landscape and digital platform dynamics. This research can uncover the underlying drivers, constraints, and facilitators shaping collaborative value creation processes. The study's qualitative nature allows for flexible data collection and analysis, enabling iterative exploration and adaptation to emerging themes and insights, which is particularly beneficial in the dynamic and rapidly evolving context of online political engagement. Semi-structured interviews empower participants to articulate their perspectives, priorities, and experiences, fostering a sense of ownership and agency in the research process. By giving voice to community members, the study enriches its findings and fosters a participatory approach to knowledge generation, aligning with principles of democratic discourse and inclusive research practice. The preceding

section outlined the study's potential limitations, while this section highlights the key strengths. These benefits serve to balance the previously mentioned limitations. The study benefits from a combination of netnography and semi-structured interviews, which allows for data triangulation from multiple sources. Netnography captures spontaneous interactions and user-generated content, while semi-structured interviews provide a more in-depth look into participant perspectives, motivations, and experiences. This approach enriches the data pool and enhances the analysis's depth and breadth. By using both netnographic observations and semi-structured interviews, the study can capture the contextual intricacies of online political brand communities and contextualize value co-creation's socio-political landscape and digital platform dynamics. This research can uncover the underlying drivers, constraints, and facilitators shaping collaborative value creation processes. The study's qualitative nature allows for flexible data collection and analysis, enabling iterative exploration and adaptation to emerging themes and insights, which is particularly beneficial in the dynamic and rapidly evolving context of online political engagement. Semi-structured interviews empower participants to articulate their perspectives, priorities, and experiences, fostering a sense of ownership and agency in the research process. By giving voice to community members, the study enriches its findings and fosters a participatory approach to knowledge generation, aligning with principles of democratic discourse and inclusive research practice.

## 8.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Like all scholarship, the conclusion of this thesis offers an opportunity to reflect on future research direction in this field of study. In addition to the extensive contributions obtained during the construction of this thesis, several areas of interest outside the scope of the research objectives have been identified from its limits and findings, representing opportunities for future research.

The significant contribution of this thesis is a conceptualised framework for value co-creation within a political brand community ecosystem. This allows future research to analyse political brand communities within other contexts such as non-UK or other political organisations and movements.

This research has primarily revealed the positive aspects of value co-creation from the perspective of the actors who engage in it. Consequently, much of the attention has been on positive actor behaviours and outcomes for the brand and members of the community. However, this study has also identified that some of the activities, from which actors derive value, are routed in creating negative consequences. This has therefore identified that negative, as well as positive, valence actor intensions play a role in value processes of political brands. Scope exists for future research to gain richer insight into the consequences of one actor

groups' impact on rival political brand value processes, and the consequences this may have on issues such as brand identity and reputation. In particular, application of the emerging literature on value co-destruction would be useful in this context (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, understanding value co-destruction within the group itself would benefit the discipline. In the case of Momentum for instance, the change in leadership of the closely associated Labour Party, may also provide opportunities to consider further how actors of the network assume paradoxical positions of both supporting and critiquing the community to which they belong. Future research focus on the relationships of other political brands/brands within the ecosystem at large, map out and expand the ecosystem.

The methodology adopted in this study has provided a rich description of the process and characteristics of value co-creation in actor networks, it has not however offered understanding of the scale of these activities. This thesis has not offered quantitative insight of this kind, however, future studies could consider how many actors are engaging, the difference between political factions, number of engagements over time and lifecycles. On a further point of methodology, a longitudinal study would offer understanding of how actor networks change over time in response to election and news cycles. While in this case the research has focused on the notion of a brand community outside of an election cycle, netnography has further uses for researchers to explore this critical environment within future studies.

This research has focused on one political brand selected for its activities' significance and as a leading group of its kind in terms of impact. While an important and useful research context, like many political groups, it is characterised by many unique factors that may not be universal. Whilst this has meant that valuable and in-depth data could be collected and contextualised, aspects of the value co-creation process may differ depending upon institutional norms and political orientation. Accordingly, it is therefore recommended that future research should consider multiple contexts from across the political spectrum. For instance, comparative research from left and right-leaning political brand communities would be beneficial in understanding the wider environment in which these activities occur. Mapping the broader political environment and flows of value co-creation and co-destruction would represent a significant development in applying SDL principles to the political marketing literature.

This research has been conducted outside of an election cycle or any other significant campaign. Therefore, the study focuses on the everyday activities of a political brand community and is orientated towards the 'always on' campaign. While this is useful in terms of its impact on management, practice and scholarship, future studies may wish to build upon the conceptualised value co-creation process within the election cycle, to see how it differs from these 'everyday' observations. Both in terms of the activities of value creation in which they



are engaged and the volume frequency and range of actors involved. Scholars may also wish to consider specialist contexts, like leadership campaigns or significant policy launches.

## 8.7 Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate the value co-creation process undertaken by actor networks of a political brand community. The research project has been conducted over several years, utilising two principal phases of data collection: an 18-month netnography and a second phase, consisting of 32 semi-structured interviews. This project has provided a new understanding the of value co-creation activities undertaken by actor networks of political brand communities, in addition to the wider process and determining factors outlined by this document.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

These are prompts of the interview structure and themes which will be discussed.

### Opening – Introduction

- Introduce myself and supervisory team
- Outline research to the interviewee:
  - Purpose/ role of interviews
  - Identify Institution/ funding
- Explanation of confidentiality, use and storage of data etc.

### Momentum

- What is Momentum/ The role of Momentum
- The distinction of a Momentum Member and Labour Party Member/ Supporter/ Voter

### Discussion of Netnographic Findings

#### Co-creative Activities

- Brand Community Cultivation
- Negotiating Brand Parameters
- Authenticating the Ecosystem
- The Business of Activism
- Brand Advocacy

#### Co-creation Roles

- Storytelling
- Thought Leadership
- Supporting
- Educating
- Satirising
- Polemics

#### Interaction Types

- Adversarial
- Supportive
- Humorous
- Serious

## Engagement with the brand community

Triggers of Engagement

Facilitators and Inhibitors of Engagement

Perceived benefits of Engagement

Close

- Questions for me
- Ethical Procedures
- Contact Information

## Appendix 2: Example of Interview Transcript

<b>Participant Position:</b>	Ordinary Member
<b>Interview Date:</b>	09/09/21
<b>Interview Location:</b>	Online (Zoom)

*The following is a verbatim record of the above interview.*

**FIRST**, a standardised introduction was offered by the researcher covering a range of basic information. This included an explanation of the purpose of the project, their interview and use of data (as well as reiterating the institution and funding source). Further to this, aspects of confidentiality and anonymity were reiterated to the participant and confirmation sought that they were happy to continue.

### **Part 1: Icebreaker Questions**

#### **Researcher:**

Great, so, let's make a start, I think it would be a good idea if we just begin by talking a little bit about what journey you've been on to become a member of Momentum...

#### **Interviewee:**

So, I joined Momentum just under two years ago, after Boris [Johnson] won his election. But it goes back a bit further than that really. Although I had always been interested in progressive politics, it wasn't really until freshers at Uni that I became actively involved. I was looking for societies to join, like we all do, and I found the Labour Society. Most of the society members here lean towards the more progressive side, and there's a lot of Jeremy [Corbyn] fans. I was a bit too young to vote for Jeremy as leader, but I always loved what he stood for. Me and my friends had been to a couple of rallies when we were at college [sixth form college] and we noticed it was always a good atmosphere and really good vibe. Even though he's old, he is the politician of our generation. And momentum embodies that idea and wants to advance our generations politics.

That's it really.

#### **Researcher:**

So, you're relatively recent to Momentum?

**Interviewee:**

As a member, yes. But I have been aware of them since my college days, like I was saying. I've run a blog on politics with an associated Twitter account, so I've always been in that sphere, but for whatever reason I never joined until I met other members at uni.

**Researcher:**

So, would you say it was their encouragement that led to you joining?

**Interviewee:**

Erm, partially. I guess it was also part of something bigger in my life. When I got to university, I'd politically matured, I understood what I was about, and I knew how I could get involved to make a difference.

My parents are quite conservative, and I always knew, instinctively, that I didn't feel comfortable with that. Going to uni, and being away from that environment, meant that I was able to meet new people that were more like me, and have those new experiences meant allowed me to think carefully about who I was politically.

I'm on the side of the people that want to help and build a better future, both environmentally and socially.

I grew up in quite a small rural market town, there wasn't many people like me, and it wasn't till I went to the college in the nearest big town that I met anyone with my political views. That was my political awakening, along with uni, I was introduced to amazing books and theorists and people who belonged to groups like Momentum. I knew then that I had some channel that I could use to make a difference.

It's a really supportive group, and I guess that's evidenced by the number of members we've got.

**Researcher:**

So, in some respects you are 'drawn' instinctively to the politics of Jeremy Corbyn and Momentum, and in other respects it's about the way the group helps you to follow your beliefs?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, I guess.

I am in the LGBTQ+ minority, so, I'm very aware of all of the discrimination and inequality that exist out there. So in many ways my political leanings are intertwined with my identity. Jeremy has always fought on the issues that affect me, even though plenty of politicians have only come to that way of thinking recently, mostly due to the societal pressures of campaign groups like Stonewall.

So, Jeremy and Momentum have created a home for displaced peoples like me and many others. AND offer a platform from which they can be themselves, and challenge those that don't want them to be.

**Researcher:**

That's a really powerful idea, and I'd like to come back to that later because it relates to something that I've got on my list here.

But, let's stick with what we're talking about for now.

I was interested in what you were saying about Jeremy being the politician of your generation and how Momentum embodies this. How would you describe the politics that momentum represents?

**Interviewee:**

Well, just what I said already really, and that the Labour Party, and progressive politics more generally, has excluded voices like those of Jeremy Corbyn and Momentum members, in the UK, for a very long time.

The logic of Miliband back to Blair was that the Labour Party needed to broaden its appeal in order to win seats [in Parliament] outside of the inner cities and deprived areas. As some of my tutors put it, to 'suburbanise' the Labour Party.

In appealing to middle-income voters, they had to tone-down any discussion of radical change like social justice or redistributive taxation etc. You know... appealing to the 'Mondeo man' [phrase used in connection to 'new' Labour]. In addition to this, Blairites believed that they had to make the party very corporate to win power. Labour MPs needed to look like consummate professionals, equal to any Conservative. They needed to be credible statesmen on the world stage, even if that meant ignoring the interests of deprived and minority citizens. They wanted to remove the character and stories of their public figures. They wanted to create a script or a mould for what a good 'new' Labour politician should say and do.

Social justice or disparities in income and wealth were not major concerns for our parents' generation, in the way that job security or education spending was.

But this is less and less true all the time for younger people.

Younger people, including those of greater privilege, are far more interested, and concerned, by the significant social justice issues and wealth inequality that are prevalent in modern society. This is played out in almost any research conducted on the matter.

Younger people also want an authenticity to their politicians. They're not interested in faux-infallibility or smartly dressed politicians. They want passion and they want someone that represents them. Someone who is true to themselves. That's what Jeremy and his government would have been.

The press lampooned Jeremy for the way he dressed, whereas a lot of us actually respected the fact that he wasn't trying to present himself as something he wasn't. We knew what that felt like and how pointless it was.

**Researcher:**

So, it's fair to say you consider Momentum, and its policies, as a kind of antithesis to those of 'new' Labour or Blairite politicians?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, that's the point of Momentum really. Momentum is a movement which aims to create a more authentic Labour Party. A labour party run, organised, and controlled by its ordinary members, not career politicians.

There are, of course, other key differences, such as on policy as I described. For me, the Labour party as it has been, and appears to be returning to, is only concerned a veneer of being capable of addressing the key issues of today. Momentum is also therefore a driver of policy change, not just structural change, but we believe the latter would naturally drive the former in any case.

The people will always work in the interest of the many in my view.

**Part 2: Momentum as an organisation**

**Researcher:**

Let's talk about momentum on that basis in a bit more depth, shall we.

I'm very interested in what you are saying about Momentum, or more specifically, the values of it routed around creating a version of the Labour Party that is more democratic than it has been in its recent past.

Is Momentum itself routed in this philosophy? For instance, in how it is structured and organises itself etc.

**Interviewee:**

Yes, definitely. It's a pity that it is such a rare way of doing things in a supposed democracy. And Labour has since removed the more democratic membership cost structure introduced in the lead up to Jeremys leadership victory...

**Researcher:**

But... Would you say Momentum is led by its membership or by its management? Is it top-down or bottom-up in its approach?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, er, very much a bottom-up approach. Momentum's strength, and sometimes its weakness, is that it is run by its members for its members, to borrow a cliché. Members play a role at all levels of decision making and campaigning.

The main leadership group decisions are made at Momentum by the NCG, or national coordinating group. take me to discuss issues affecting the organisation like policy or campaigning, specific campaigns. Er, this is obviously now quite important that we don't have a momentum friendly labour leadership.

**Researcher:**

Okay, interesting. and who makes up the NCG is it stick members is there some kind of election?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, basically. I think the idea is that it is representative of not just 'members in general' but particular types of members that we have in momentum. So there are representatives from counsellors and MPs, I think the trade unions have quite a big representation and of course just normal members.

of course as well there is an attempt to make members of the NCG truly representative of different identity groups to avoid the lack of representation that effects of the groups.

**Researcher:**

How are those members selected?

**Interviewee:**

So, er, there is this platform Momentum have called 'My Momentum', or I think it's 'my.momentum' actually. It's just a website really but all key issues a voted for by any member.

**Researcher:**

Is there any kind of head office? Because, surely, given the number of members the community has now they need some kind of administrative unit?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, I think there is, well, there definitely is.

But they still don't make all the decisions. There is 'the council', or well, what they call the 'members council'. The council is made up of randomly selected members to direct the head office and tell them what to do about campaigns or activities or funds even. My housemate at Uni was part of it once, I can introduce you to her, if you like.

**Researcher:**

Yeah, that would be great actually.

I've seen people discussing how they represent a certain region of the UK on the NCG. Does that mean there are specific localised groups within Momentum as well?

**Interviewee:**

From memory, there are five regional divisions of Momentum, which, just breakdown the country into more easily manageable chunks if you like.

Each of these regions are represented on the NCG. Beyond that you've also got small groups within towns or geographical areas, they're affiliated but it's not as much of a structure if you know what I mean.

My understanding is that they try and allow the local groups to operate as independently as possible. Of course, you've got big decisions which need to be taken on a national level, but being closer to the areas, and the problems of those areas, is important in campaigning effectively.

**Researcher:**

Would it be fair to say that members have an opportunity to engage at a level that they're comfortable with in Momentum? by which I mean, it would be okay to be a fairly passive member and offer only financial support, and other kinds of less substantial forms of help, through to being a highly active member who is involved with NCG etc?

**Interviewee:**

Yes. I've never felt under any kind of pressure to be more or less active.

That said, the more active members of momentum tend to hold union jobs, charity-based positions (such as housing association officers) or are counsellors or of course members of parliament. So, for them their role within, and membership to, momentum is much more closely aligned to you that you would call there day job.

**Researcher:**

Thank you, that's really interesting. I noticed on your social media profile that you are active within other political organisations separate to momentum, that's really interesting to me because one of the things that I'm trying to understand, is the unique characteristics of Momentum. That is, what makes it different to other political organisations in terms of its culture etc. From your experience and understanding of Momentum, what would you say are the hallmarks, if you like, of the group and what makes it different to other groups you are involved with?

**Interviewee:**

Ah, I see. Erm. I think that Momentum is very different to the other organisations that I am in with, even within a similar space. Like I said before, it is totally member focused it feels very



much to me like a community, like a family, in a way. When I say that, I don't mean it in a cheesy way. It's just that we're often portrayed as an organisation, as nutters on the radical left and difficult to get along with, but that's not what I see with inside Momentum. There is a huge, and caring, majority of members who not only want to make positive change within the world and within Britain - to fix what's gone wrong in the last 20 years. But to do it from a really positive place, they're friendly, they're caring, and they're not primarily concerned with their social status, which I found to be true in some other organisations. I remember when I joined, I felt very welcome. I felt like people wanted me to be me contribute in my own way. I think for me, that's what separates momentum to other groups around the Labour Party and trade union/ socialism.

**Researcher:**

I was interested in what you were saying about social status. In what ways is that being a factor in other organisations you've known and not in Momentum?

**Interviewee:**

Just that in some of the other groups I've been in the priority of some of the existing members is, sometimes, to assert their position within an established hierarchy. In momentum it's much more a case of as I say welcoming, caring and being creative together.

**Researcher:**

What kind of things did they say or do to suggest an interest in the position or status?

**Interviewee:**

Well, many felt that if they were there before you, they were a 'true' member. Of course, many groups within labour are quite old now, and if they've been there for 10 years say, they see you as the baby.

**Researcher:**

Do you think Momentum, and in particular the online community surrounding, is a good place to meet new people and make contacts?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, I do. I think one of the things I most enjoy about the community is how active it is and how easy it is to meet new people.

**Part 3: Discussion of the Netnographic Findings and Engagement Behaviours**

**Researcher:**

And what kind of things do you like to do on the online community space?

**Interviewee:**

I like to engage in ideas with people. I like people to challenge my ideas and, I in turn, like to challenge their ideas. I like to get to grips with the big ideas, the big problems that we're facing as a society, particularly in terms of social justice, etc. So, I like to Yeah, explore ideas online and engage with people that way.

**Researcher:**

And what does political debates, or exchanges of views, look like when it comes to Momentum?

**Interviewee:**

Well, it depends really. Within the group itself it feels very constructive. We all leave as friends. You know, it's not a nasty place, or an angry place or anything. When it comes to people outside of the group, such as the other groups in Labour or particularly people to the right of UK politics, it becomes a lot less pleasant and a lot more confrontational, and nasty, and people tend to be a lot more argumentative. And it doesn't feel like anyone comes away feeling as though they've convinced the other one of anything.

**Researcher:**

And why do you think that might be?

**Interviewee:**

Well, I think because it's a group of people that think broadly the same, or have the same kind of worldview and references. Critique tends to come down to the finer details which people are happier to disagree about. So, when you have a Tory, and then you have a member of the Labour Party, it's obvious that we're so opposed just even in the way that we see the world that, you know, debates, even impassioned debates become a lot worse.

**Researcher:**

And when you say worse, tell me maybe a specific example of this.

**Interviewee:**

Well, I suppose the main thing is just that it quickly breaks down from two points of view being expressed to either a shouting match in which it may become personal, or there's just a sort of a more ridiculing kind of atmosphere, where I guess you might see people like regard each other's arguments as totally stupid or without any foundation, whereas, obviously, they're coming at it from probably a reasonable place in their mind, but to other people it isn't.

**Researcher:**

And do you have any examples of when you've had a constructive argument with someone that you disagree with fundamentally?

**Interviewee:**

Um, I suppose it does happen. I have definitely had conversation with people I disagree with which are amicable not that, you know, say we've changed each other's mind or anything, but I think it is sometimes the case that you can have a conversation where you agree to disagree and that's probably quite rare though.

**Researcher:**

Do you ever have negative arguments with people inside of the group?

**Interviewee:**

Well, I suppose, it can be. With the, sort of, shifting focus towards it identity politics. There are issues which are sometimes difficult to address between people of different identities, and particularly, in relation to their rights. I suppose the most prevalent one, at the moment, is the issue of TERFs versus people from the trans community.

**Researcher:**

Sorry, what's the TERF?

**Interviewee:**

Oh, a TERF is a feminist that doesn't believe in trans rights. They think that it affects women's rights in some way. I think it stands for trans exclusionary revolutionary feminist or something.

**Researcher:**

I see. So, you're saying that there are some groups even within Momentum that have at least a partially antagonistic aspect of them?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, I think that's right. But It's definitely the case that most of the problems come from people that disagree on a worldview basis.

**Researcher:**

And when that kind of thing happens, when you have people with inside the group, erm, disagreeing. Do you, or do other people seek to remind them of the sort of collective purpose of Momentum, what it's there to ultimately to achieve, as you were discussing earlier?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think there is a sense that we need to remind people that, we're all on the same side, we all we all want broadly the same thing, and the only way we can achieve it is if we were pulling in the same direction.

**Researcher:**

This is similar to a finding from my online observations. Do you think it's important to defend the group against people outside of it? So, you've mentioned this in terms of debate. But let's say that you hadn't even interacted with the people who are dismissive of Momentum, generally. Would you pull up anything that was claimed in the media, or in other people's social media profiles, which in some way criticised the group?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, definitely. I follow people that I, you know, don't like, or disagree with, to sort of keep my eye on what they're doing and watching their space. And if I see something which I disagree with, obviously I'll call him out on it. Also, you know, I don't only follow Momentum members so the people that I know from outside of the group, like friends or whoever, if they say something that I disagree with, of course, I'll bring them out and say, what you doing.

**Researcher:**

And what about people that are not necessarily within the group, but it may be associated with some of its politics or its worldview. So, for instance, would you defend someone like Jeremy Corbyn or Owen Jones if they were attacked by opponents online?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, absolutely I would. I believe that whilst we have members and, um, people inside the group officially. We also have, you know, solidarity with people who, for whatever reason, are not inside Momentum, but, you know, hold many of our principles, we will defend those who compete on the same values as within the political sphere.

**Researcher:**

What about discrediting opponent opposing group?

Would you do that without the interaction, or provocation of them?

Would you, for instance, raise people's attention of a negative story relating to the Conservative Party, for instance?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah I was just posting today about the sleaze in Johnson's government. I think you have to be on attack, as well as defense.

**Researcher:**

Interesting. Something which I find Interesting about people within the group, online. Is that they tend to, you know, clearly mark their connection to the group. For example, they have mentioned it in their bio or perhaps they use the red rose emoji to show that they are affiliated Labour.

Is that something that you do? and if so, why?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, I mentioned it in my Twitter bio. I think it's important to show your colours. It helps people navigate social media tells them who to listen to and who not to listen to. I don't know if people do the red rose emoji as much since Stammer got in, there was a lot of disappointment after Jeremy left as leader.

**Researcher:**

Do you think it's important to di credit rival groups claims of they're performing. So, if a political party like the conservatives claim that they we're doing really well would you try to find explanations for why that is. To help explain it to others within the group?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think they talk a load of cr\*p a lot of the time, and I like to call them out on it. I think a lot of people in the group realise that it probably is too, but maybe they don't have the right sources of information to understand how it happens.

**Researcher:**

Is it important to show support to other members within the group, perhaps even those that don't have the same kind of following as you?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, I support a everyone who is within the group. If someone follows me whose associated the Labour Party I, of course, follow them back.

**Researcher:**

Research In what ways do you show your support for others in the group?

**Interviewee:**

Well the main way is, sort of, just as, I say, following them, linking their posts, making comments, if you agree with them, maybe retweeting, sending a private message of support private message. Reassure them that you know it's all going to be okay, particularly after last election.

**Interviewee:**

To summarise what we've talked about so far. Would it be fair to say that you see yourself really a something of debator within the online space surrounding Momentum. You like to exchange views, get involved stuff, you know, trying shape the way that people see certain issues etc., perhaps even involving the critiquing of other political groups?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, I think, absolutely. I Just one to show people that we are on the right track, and we have the moral authority in the argument.

**Researcher:**

So just one final question on that. What do you think the nature of the interactions we've described?

Are they predominantly positive or negative?

**Interviewee:**

I think they're a bit mixed. Within the group itself, the people that support us on a worldview basis are great, they're supportive and I consider them friends. But people out aside of the group obviously make it a less pleasant space. What we tend to do with them, is to report them, or to block them.

**Researcher:**

Okay, thank you very much. I think I've got everything I was going to ask. Please get in touch if you have any questions after today, and once again thanks for agreeing to meet with me.

**Interviewee:**

No problem. Hope your study goes well.

## Appendix 3: Momentum Website

The screenshot shows the Momentum website in a browser window. The browser's address bar displays 'peoplesmomentum.com'. The website features a red header with the 'momentum' logo and navigation links for 'Join', 'Donate', 'Transforming Labour', and 'Members Login'. The main content area is a large image of a diverse group of people. Overlaid on this image is a sign-up form with the following fields: 'Email \*', 'Postcode (optional)', and 'Mobile (optional)'. Below these fields is a red 'SIGN UP!' button. A small disclaimer text is located below the button, stating: 'By clicking "Sign up", you agree to Momentum using the information you provide to keep you updated via mail, email, telephone, text and social media about Momentum's campaigns and opportunities to get involved, both locally and on a national level. For more information please see our [Privacy Policy](#).' Below the main image, there is a campaign banner for 'Ban Dark Money'. The banner includes the Momentum logo, the text 'WE NEED TO CLEAN UP OUR POLITICS', and the hashtag '#BanDarkMoney'. The background of the banner shows a close-up of a hand holding a £20 banknote.

Appendix 4: Momentum Twitter Account Heading

← **Momentum** 🌹  
29.5K Tweets

**momentum**

**Momentum** 🌹  
@PeoplesMomentum

Momentum is a people-powered movement. We aim to transform the Labour Party, our communities & Britain in the interests of the many. Join us [peoplesmomentum.com](https://peoplesmomentum.com)

📍 United Kingdom [join.peoplesmomentum.com](https://join.peoplesmomentum.com)  
📅 Joined September 2015

5,156 Following 173.1K Followers

## Appendix 5: Ethical Approval

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

### APPLICATION FORM FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROJECT - 2018

For use by members of academic staff and postgraduate research students

PLEASE NOTE THAT IT NORMALLY TAKES BETWEEN 3-6 WEEKS TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS, DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE APPLICATION NEEDS TO GO TO A FULL MEETING OF CREC (PLEASE SEE GUIDANCE NOTE: BLSS/Ethics 01 – PAGE 6). IF YOU ARE ASKED TO REVISE YOUR APPLICATION, IT MAY TAKE LONGER.

Who should use this form?

You should use this form if you are a member of academic staff or a research degree student (including the D Psych but not students on other professional doctorates, taught postgraduate or undergraduate courses). If you are a student on a professional doctorate other than the D Psych, you should follow the procedure laid down by PDREC. If you are a student on a taught masters or undergraduate programme, you should follow the procedure laid down by your School REC.

If you are a PhD student you should normally have received Project Approval before you apply for ethical approval. If there is a problem with this seek advice from your PhD supervisor. Please note, that if following your application for project approval you find that you need to revise your research plans such that this ethics application no longer covers all aspects of your intended project, you will need to submit a revised application for ethical approval.

Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?

If your project requires ethical approval (see overleaf and Section 1) you must not undertake primary data collection until a favourable ethical opinion is received from the College Research Ethics Committee or from an external REC. Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval, or in the face of an adverse ethical opinion, may constitute a disciplinary offence.

If, after receiving ethical approval, factors beyond your control change your project such that the information provided in this form no longer holds, the approval will automatically become void, and you should re-apply for ethical approval.

Is there any help available to complete this form?

Yes. Guidance on filling in this form can be found in Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01. If you are a member of staff you can find the guidance document on the research SharePoint site [here](#). If you are a PhD student please click this [link](#) which will take you to NOW, and then follow this pathway to access the form: NOW Homepage > Student Communities > NTU Graduate School > Content > Ethics Guidance.

In this site, you will also find documents dealing with specific issues in research ethics, and also some examples of participant information sheets and consent forms.



Further advice is available through the College Research Support Office. Please email [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk)

Please note that any subsequent amendments to approved projects need to be re-submitted to CREC for further consideration. Application forms and associated documentation, including issuance of approval, will be retained indefinitely. No research or personal data will be retained, with the exception of contact details of researchers.

Please make sure that you complete the Declaration at the end of the form. Postgraduate research students must ask their Director of Studies to countersign the form before it is submitted.

## Completing the Form

Which sections should I complete?

Different sections of this form should be completed for different kinds of projects:

If your project involves:	
Desk-research only, using only secondary or published sources	See Section 1
An application to an external research ethics committee (for example, those relating to research in the NHS)	Complete Sections 1-4
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, identifiable, living human beings (either in laboratory or in non-laboratory settings)	Complete Sections 1-7  Please also complete the checklists in Sections 8-14 and provide information, as requested, if any of the checks is positive
Collection and/or analysis of data about the behaviour of human beings, in situations where they might reasonably expect their behaviour not to be observed or recorded	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about people who have recently died	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, existing agencies or organisations	
Investigation of wildlife in its natural habitat	Complete Sections 1-5. and 15

Research with human tissues or body fluids	Do not complete this form. Please contact the College Research Office for advice
Research with animals, other than in their natural settings.	Do not complete this form. Please contact the College Research Office for advice

Please type or write legibly in dark ink. You are asked to keep your answers as brief as possible but you should provide sufficient detail for members of the Research Ethics Committee to form a view on the ethics of your proposed research. Where it is really necessary, you may use up to one continuation sheet for each Section of the form

Submitting the form

The form should be submitted by email, to:

The Research Office of the College of Business, Law and Social Sciences,

Arkwright Room B113

Email: [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk)

1 Does this project need ethical approval?

	Yes	No
Does the project involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings?	x	
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died, other than data that are already in the public domain?		x
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind, other than data that are already in the public domain?	x	
Does it involve research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*? *The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result the common octopus ( <i>Octopus vulgaris</i> ), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.		x
Does the project involve any of the following activities: Access to websites normally prohibited on university servers, for example pornography or sites of organisations proscribed by the UK Government. Investigation into extremism or radicalisation. Accessing and using data of a potentially damaging nature which has been obtained from a source which may not have the requisite authority to provide it. Here, potentially damaging can mean anything from information on cases of domestic abuse to data on international spy networks. In case of uncertainty please consult the Research Support Office or your School Associate Dean for Research. The acquisition of security clearances, including the Official Secrets Act.  Hereinafter referred to as 'Special Risk Research'		x

FOR STAFF ONLY: If you have answered NO to all the questions above, you do not need to submit your project for ethical approval.

FOR PhD/D PSYCH STUDENTS ONLY: If you have answered NO to all the questions above, please complete the section below.

Name
School
Name of Director of Studies

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Student)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have read this form, and confirm that, due to the nature of the research, this project does not require the approval of a research ethics committee.

Countersigned \_\_\_\_\_ (Director of Studies/Lead supervisor)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have answered YES to any of the questions above, please proceed to Section 2 below.

## 2 Information about the project

<p>Title of Project:</p> <p><i>An investigation of the value co-creation process of political brand ecosystems: A case-study of a U.K. political group</i></p>
<p>Name of Principal Investigator (PI)</p> <p>Adam Harris (NBS)</p> <p>Student ID: N0826621</p>
<p>Names of co-investigators (CIs) (If any of the CIs are not employed at NTU, please give the name of their organisation)</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>How many additional research staff will be employed on the project?</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Please give their names (if known) and their organisational affiliation</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Project start date</p> <p>Enrolled as PhD student in October 2018. Project anticipated to commence November 2019.</p>
<p>Estimated end date of the project</p> <p>Anticipated end date October 2021 with the latest possible submission September 30<sup>th</sup> 2022. Data collection scheduled to be completed in August 2021.</p>
<p>Who is funding the project?</p> <p>Nottingham Trent University (Vice-Chancellor Scholarship)</p> <p>Has funding been confirmed?</p> <p>Yes</p>

(For PhD students only) Have you applied for and received project approval?

Yes (Applied for 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2019)

If so, please give date of approval

Project approval was granted on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019

(For students only) please provide the name of your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor and any other members of the supervisory team

Dr. Christopher Pich (Director of Studies)

Dr. Sheilagh Resnick

Professor Matt Henn

Which learned society's code of ethical practice is most relevant to your project? (*for example, the Social Research Association, the British Psychological Society, the Socio-legal Studies Association*)

Social Research Association

3 Does the project require Data and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly CRB checks)

More information on DBS checks can be found by consulting document BLS Ethics 01 Guidance Staff and Students and/or from your College HR team (staff) or School Office (students):

	Yes	No
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with children, (under 18 years of age), vulnerable adults or adults in the custody of the criminal justice system??		x
<p>If you have answered Yes to the above question, please explain the nature and frequency of the contact required by the project, and the circumstances in which it will be made. Please note that you may require DBS clearance and enquiries should be made of your College HR team to determine whether you do. This is not part of the CREC process; it must be obtained through College HR (staff) or your School Office (students). See section 3 in the Guidance Notes BLSS/Ethics 01.</p> <p>N/A</p>		

4 Is this project liable to scrutiny by external ethical review arrangements?

	Yes	No
Has a favourable ethical opinion been given for this project by an NHS or social care research ethics committee, or by any other external research ethics committee?		x
Will this project be submitted for ethical approval to an NHS or social care committee or any other external research ethics committee?		x

If you have answered YES to either of these questions, please sign the declaration at the end of the form, and send a copy to the Research Support Office. Accompanying this should be a copy of the external body's ethical approval.

Ethical approval obtained at an institution with whom you are collaborating: please note that it is the responsibility of researchers to remain vigilant for unethical behaviour (defined as being in opposition to the NTU Research Ethics Policy and Code of Practice for Research) of any members of the project team, regardless of institutional affiliation and the location of the ethics committee who have approved the research. If such concerns arise they should inform the Chair of the most appropriate NTU REC along with their School ADR and line manager.

Ph.D./D Psych students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign the form before submitting it.

Note - if you are applying to an NHS or Social Care REC, you are advised to consult Guidance Note BLSS/ Ethics 01

If you have answered NO to both these questions, please proceed to Section 5



## 5 About the project

If the information required below is provided in a succinct form in a previous document, such as your application for external funding or for approval of a PhD/ D Psych project you may submit this document (or preferably the relevant section from it) either in whole or partial answer to the questions below.

What are the aims and objectives of the project (maximum 250 words)?

The aim of this research is to investigate the process of value co-creation within the ecosystem of the political brand.

The following objectives have been developed to achieve this aim:

- To explore value co-creation roles, activities and interactions within a political brand ecosystem.
- To investigate how brand communities co-create value within the political context.
- To theoretically conceptualise value co-creation within the political brand community ecosystem.

Briefly describe the principal methods, the sources of data or evidence to be used and the number and type of research participants who will be recruited to the project (maximum 500 words).

This project explores how value is co-created within brand ecosystems, namely those within the political setting, and the roles, activities, and interactions which are performed by individual actors to participate. Focusing upon a single case study of Momentum, a U.K. political group (<https://peoplesmomentum.com/>), the project adopts ethnographic and netnographic approaches to data collection.

Three principle qualitative techniques have been selected to achieve the aims and objectives outlined in the previous section: Netnography; Observation (Ethnography); and Interviews. The following sections discuss each method and identify its support for the projects aim and objectives in chronological phases.

### Phase 1 – Netnography

The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods defines netnography as "a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications" (Jupp 2006, p.194). Principally, netnography involves observations of online behaviours and content, as in traditional anthropological observation, this may be active (participant-observer) or passive (observer only) (Kozinets 2002). Netnography has been argued to be faster and simpler than traditional ethnographic methods. Kozinets (2006) states that it is

unelicited, more naturalistic and less obtrusive than established techniques such as surveys, interviews and focus groups. Key to its inclusion in this research design is its capacity to focus upon grassroots or 'bottom-up' generated data of the ecosystem the project explores.

Netnography will be used to study value co-creating activities and roles the membership of Momentum online, through their interactions (messages, postings, endorsement and propagating of communications etc.) between community members and others in the ecosystem on a variety of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.). The participants of this method will be made up of any internet users present within the observations, it is anticipated that these will predominately members of Momentum and other supporters of the Labour Party. It is important to recognise that no identifiable features of participants will be included in published work, and only data in the public domain will be used. Within this data collection, the researcher will adopt a complete observer role. Due to the nature of these forums, an appropriate sample size cannot be specified at this time. Instead, netnography will be consciously used until the point of 'theoretical saturation', in other words, when no new information is realised from its use (Sanders et al. 2017).

## Phase 2 – Ethnography

### Observation

Ethnographic observation can be defined as the "systematic viewing, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people's behaviour" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016, p.354). In this study, observations of public events will be conducted to understand the value co-creating activities of Momentum members within the field. In this application, observation is used to investigate the role and actions of the collective group rather than those of individuals or smaller groups. It is anticipated that observations will be conducted will cover a broad range of key public events, including protests, demonstrations, conferences and speeches. All events observed will take place in the public domain and will be overt in nature. There are four forms which participant observation can take, these are complete participant, complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). In this project, the role of the researcher largely one of the complete observer, acting as audience to the event rather than a participant.

Targeted participants of ethnographic observations will be individuals which can be identified as being part of the group events described above. The number of participants cannot be identified at this stage as it is dependent upon the events which are available to observe. As with the netnographic approach of phase 1, public observations will be conducted until the point of theoretical saturation, it is anticipated that that this will be between 5-15.

## Phase 3

### Interviews

Phase three will include semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have been described as 'non-standardised' conversations with a purpose. In addition, semi-structured

interviews are supported by an interview schedule structured around broad themes developed from the existing academic literature (Appendix 4) (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The semi-structured approach allows for greater flexibility (Gray 2017). Within interviews the researcher will utilise projective techniques, these are a tool used for accessing sub-conscious needs, motivations, attitudes and perceptions of participants (Maison 2018). Projective techniques are activities that can be incorporated into semi-structured interviews as a method to gain deeper insight compared with standardised semi-structured interviews.

The targeted interviewees of phase 3 will consist of individuals who participate in activities explored by the methods of phases 1 and 2, principally active members of Momentum. 30 interviews will be conducted in total.

Interviews will take place in person, by telephone or video call (MS Teams). Interviews will only be recorded if permission is granted by the participant.

The interview schedule is included in Appendix 4.

What research instrument(s) will be used to collect data?

If you are using an externally validated scale, please specify:

If you are not using an externally validated scale, please attach a copy of the research instrument you will use to collect data (for example, a measurement scale, questionnaire, interview schedule, observation protocol for ethnographic work, or, in the case of unstructured data collection, a topic list).

<https://my.ntu.ac.uk/dashboard/home>

Interview Schedule (Themes) – Please see appendix 4

Concepts to be explored by Netnography – Please see appendix 5

Concepts to be explored by Ethnographic Observation - Please see appendix 6

## 6 Confidentiality, anonymity, security and retention of research data

	Yes	No
		×

Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the project?		
Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, or people associated with them, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs from this project?		x
Is there a significant possibility that confidential information could be traced back to a specific organisation or agency as a result of the way you write up the results of the project?		x
Will any members of the project team retain any personal or confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?		x

If you have answered NO to any of these questions, please explain briefly how you will ensure the confidentiality, anonymity and security of your research data, both during and after the project.

Data generated in the duration of this research project in the form of text, field notes, participant documents, photography, audio, and video will only be accessible to me and my director of studies (DoS). Data will be used in accordance with established data protection and research ethics protocols of the institution.

Precautions will be taken to ensure that the data collected cannot be viewed by anyone other than the researcher and DoS. Any data collected in paper form will be securely stored or kept with the researcher at all times. Once the paper copies have been transcribed or digitised, the original copies will be destroyed. Any data stored electronically will similarly be stored securely using encryption and password access. Data will be destroyed after five years.

A likely ethical concern of this study is that it relates, to a degree, to the political opinions held by the participants. Whilst the study does not seek to directly explore this, steps are to be taken to ensure participants political opinions are not identified by the study. Personal or confidential information (for example names, roles, positions of members) will be completely anonymised in the completed thesis so individuals could not be identified by the study. After the completion of the project, all data will be erased from computers and cloud storage, resulting in no data which is not anonymised.

Data will be anonymised by referring to the individual participant (in published work) by a broad noun from which they cannot be identified, even by others within the organisation (e.g. Group Member 13B or Leader 24C).

If the answer to any of these questions is YES, please explain:

why it is necessary for the research to be conducted in the way you propose, such that the usual standards of confidentiality and security cannot be respected;

what steps will you take to maximise confidentiality and security, within the constraints imposed by the research design;

what steps you will take to ensure that participants understand and consent to the implications of these constraints.

N/A

## 7 Informed consent

Please see Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 02 for examples of model participant information sheets and participant consent forms, together with advice on how to use them

	Yes	No	N/A
Will all participants be fully informed before the project begins why the project is being conducted and what their participation will involve?	x		
Will every participant be required as a condition of their participation to give fully-informed consent to participating in the project, before it begins?	x		
Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with these data during and after the project?	x		
If audio, video or photographic recording of participants are to be used, will fully-informed consent be secured as a condition of participation before recording begins? If yes, please provide further details below.	x		
Will every participant understand what rights they have not to take part, and/or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project if they do take part?	x		
Will they also understand that they do not need to give you reasons for exercising these rights and that there will be no repercussions as a result?	x		
Will the project involve deceiving or covert observation of participants?  If YES, please provide a justification and explain the debrief process in the box below.		x	

If you have answered YES to any of the above questions, please explain briefly how you will implement your answers.

On and offline anthropological data collection methods are often associated with issues around informed consent. In this project, the research design has sought to avoid these common drawbacks.

Informed consent will be achieved, where necessary, by fully informing the participants from the beginning to end of the data collection process. This includes both verbal communication during the event and written confirmation in the form of a participant sheet (Appendix 1). Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher regarding participation, additionally, contact information will be provided on the participant sheet. The aim of this being to ensure each individual contributing to the study have enough information during and after the session to make an informed choice regarding their continued participation. The following paragraphs give more detail of how each method will specifically address the ethical consideration of informed consent.

#### Interviews

Interviews will be conducted with various actors [participants] of the ecosystem. Written consent will be requested as part of the invitation to interview. Attendance will be voluntary, and participants will be given sufficient information about the project prior to the interviews commencing. On the day of the interview, I will reiterate the key points and distribute a participation form (Appendix 1), which the interviewee can take away for further reference. In the case of interviews conducted by telephone or video call, a copy will be made available electronically. Again, the participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw their data without justification.

#### Netnography

Netnography will be utilised to study online behaviours and interactions which 'pre-exist' this research and are readily available, being conducted on open platforms (i.e. social media websites) data would be considered 'public domain'. No identifiable features of the individual actors will be included in the study. For these reasons, it is not necessary to seek consent for participation.

#### Ethnographic Group Observations

A number of observations will take place in public settings such as speeches, demonstrations and protests. In this study, observation is used to investigate the role and actions of the collective group rather than individuals.

The Social Research Association states that observation is acceptable in public spaces:

‘There can be no reasonable guarantee of privacy in ‘public’ settings since anyone from journalists to ordinary members of the public may constitute observers of such human behaviour and any data collected thereby would remain, in any case, beyond the control of the subjects observed.’

As identified in section 5, the researcher takes a complete observer role at these events and any individuals observed will not be identified by the study.

You are advised to attach copies of your participant information sheet and consent form as evidence of your plans.

If You have answered NO to any of questions 1-6 above, please explain:

the reason for you proposing to conduct the project without ensuring that all of its participants give prior fully-informed consent, and

why you consider that reason to be sufficient justification to proceed on this basis.

N/A

## 8 Risk of harm – to researchers, individual participants and participating organisations

(If there is any possibility that the project involves significant risks to researchers, you are advised to consult section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 on the assessment and management of risk, and to submit a risk assessment form to the relevant authority).

<p>Could your research be classified as Special Risk research (see section 1 of this application form). If so please consult Section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 for more information. If Yes your application will be required to be endorsed by your School Associate Dean for Research (please see foot of this application document). This applies to both members of staff and Postgraduate Research Students.</p>		
<p>Is there any foreseeable risk that your project may lead to:</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>No</p>

Physical harm to participants or researchers?		x
Psychological or emotional distress to participants?		x
Harm to the reputation of participants, or their employers, or of any other persons or organisations?		x

If you have answered YES to the question on Special Risk research please explain/confirm:

Explain why it is necessary to conduct the research in such a way as to qualify it as Special Risk research.

If applicable, confirm that access to websites which may be proscribed by the UK Government or may be subject to surveillance by security services will be undertaken using the University network.

Explain what, if any, steps will be taken, in addition to those listed in Section 6, to ensure that data obtained during the research project will be stored securely.

If applicable, confirm that the transmission of data obtained during the research project to any co-investigators outside of the University network will be in encrypted format and using Zend, which encrypts files during transmission.

If applicable, explain why the transportation of research data or materials is required and that an encrypted memory stick will be used where such transportation is necessary or unavoidable.

If you have answered YES to any of the remaining questions, please explain:

the nature of the risks involved, and why it is academically necessary for the project to incur them;  
how you propose to mitigate them;

the arrangements by which you will ensure that participants understand and consent to these risks;

any arrangements you will make to refer participants to sources of help, if they are seriously distressed or harmed as a result of taking part in the project;

your arrangements for recording and reporting any adverse consequences of the research.

## 9 Risk of disclosure of harm or potential harm

If the project is likely to involve work with children, or the discovery of physical or mental abuse of children, you should consult section 9 of the Guidance Note: BLSS/Ethics 01 before completing this section of the form.

	Yes	No
		x



Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?		
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or are at risk of harm?		x
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		x
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <p>why it is academically necessary for these risks to be incurred;</p> <p>what actions you would take, if such disclosures were to occur;</p> <p>whether you will take advice before taking these actions, and from whom;</p> <p>what information you will give participants about the possible consequences of disclosing information about criminal offences or risks of harm.</p> <p>N/A</p>		

## 10 Payment of participants

	Yes	No
<p>Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any other kind of inducements or compensation for taking part in your project?</p> <p>If the answer is NO please proceed to section 11.</p>		×
Is there any significant possibility that such inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		×
Is there any significant possibility that the prospect of such inducements will systematically skew the data provided by participants in any way?		×
Will you inform participants that accepting inducements does not negate their right to withdraw from the project?		×
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <p>the nature of the inducements or the amount of the payments that will be offered</p> <p>the reasons why it is necessary to offer them</p> <p>why you consider that they are ethically and methodologically acceptable</p>		

## 11 Capacity to give valid consent

Please note that, from October 2007, research involving people who are mentally incapacitated and cannot give valid consent must be cleared through the NHS research ethics procedures, not through a university REC

Do you propose to recruit any participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
Children under 18 years of age.		×
People with learning difficulties.		×
People with communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited facility with the English language.		×
Very infirm people.		×

To your knowledge, people with mental health problems or other medical problems that may impair their cognitive abilities.		x
Any other people who may not be able fully to understand the nature of the research and the implications for them of participating in it.		x
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain how you will ensure that the interests and wishes of participants (and in the case of children, the wishes of their parents or guardians) are understood and taken into account.</p>		

12 Is participation genuinely voluntary?

Do you propose to recruit participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
Employees or students of NTU or of organisation(s) that are formal collaborators in the project.		x
Can your research be considered to be pedagogic research, as defined as the use of student-related data for academic research purposes? See section 12 of BLSS Ethics 01 Guidance Document for further detail, particularly the distinction from learning analytics. If YES please explain how you will ensure voluntary participation, informed consent and clarification of your role as researcher as distinct from teacher.		x
Employees recruited through other business, voluntary or public sector organisations.		x
Pupils or students recruited through educational institutions other than NTU.		x
Clients recruited through voluntary or public services.		x
People who are resident in social care or medical establishments.		x
People recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed services		x
People in the custody of the criminal justice system.		x
Other people who may not feel empowered to refuse to participate in the research		x
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain how your participants will be recruited, and what steps you will take to ensure that their participation in this project is genuinely voluntary.</p>		

## 13 Online and Internet Research

If you intend to conduct any part of your project online, please consult Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 03 before completing this section

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve collecting data by means of electronic media, such as the internet or email?	x	
Is there a significant possibility that the project will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?		x
Is there a significant possibility that the project will cause participants to become distressed or harmed, in ways that may not be apparent to the researcher(s)		x
Will the project incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?		x

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please explain:

why you propose to use electronic media;

how you propose to address the risks associated with online/internet research, especially those flagged above (if relevant).

Please ensure, too, that your answers to other questions in this form address them in ways that are relevant to online research.

As identified in previous sections, one of the methods utilised in this study intends to collect data electronically. Netnography will be used to qualitatively analyse communications of the group on social media sites. This is an important component of the research design, as much of the value-creating activities take place online. All data collected online will be in the public domain and readily available, all identifiable features will be removed.

Online tools will also be utilised to facilitate interviews. Primarily, this will include video call/meeting applications such as MS Teams or Skype. Recordings will only be taken with the participant's permission and will only be used to aid the researcher in transcribing the collected data. If any platform other than MS Teams is used to conduct interviews, then no NTU documentation will be shared other than any material directly linked to this project (e.g. the consent form).

14 Other ethical risks

	Yes	No
<p>Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by your project that have not been covered by previous questions?</p>		<p>×</p>
<p>If you have answered YES, please explain:</p> <p>the nature of these issues and risks            why you need to incur them,            and how you propose to deal with them</p> <p>Note that if your professional code of conduct requires you to report misconduct in other members of your profession, you should deal with any risks that your research might trigger this obligation in this section.</p>		

15 Research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986).

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result the common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.)

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?		x
Will your project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside of the control of the researcher?		x
Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?		x
Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		x
Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species or those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		x
Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?		x
Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than <i>Octopus vulgaris</i> ?		x
<p>If you have answered Yes to any of these questions, please explain:  the reasons for conducting the project in the way you propose, and the academic benefits that will flow from it  the nature of the risks to the animals and their habitat  how you propose to mitigate these risks</p>		

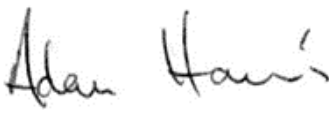
## Principal Investigator's Declaration

Please tick all the boxes relevant to your project, and sign this form. PhD/D Psych students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign it before it is submitted.

<p>I request that this project is exempt from review by the College Research Ethics Committee, because it will be, or has been, reviewed by an external REC. I have completed Sections 1-4 and attach/will attach a copy of the favourable ethical review issued by the external REC</p> <p>Please give the name of the external REC here:</p>	
<p>I request a statement of ethical approval from the College of BLSS Research Ethics Committee, and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this form honestly.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described above, and that I will request a fresh ethical approval if the project subsequently changes in ways that materially affect the information I have given in this form.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the code of research ethics issued by the relevant national learned society, and that I have ensured that all members of my research team (if any) also do so.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the university's <a href="#">Research Data Management Policy</a>, and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the university's Research Integrity policies, and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have read the appropriate guidance documents: BLSS Ethics 01 (Staff and Students General Guidelines); BLSS Ethics 02 (Informed Consent); BLSS Ethics 03 (Online Research).</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have completed all sections of the application form as appropriate.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have attached a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Questionnaire and any other relevant documentation as appropriate.</p>	✓
<p>I confirm that I have signed and dated the application form.</p>	✓

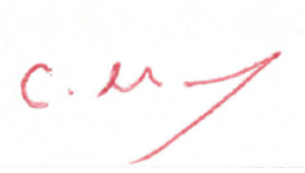


PhD/D Psych Students Only: I confirm that I have ensured that the application form has been endorsed by my Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor.	
PhD Students Only: I confirm that I already have Project Approval.	✓

Signed:   
 (Principal investigator or student)

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019

I have read this form, and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the candidate, and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Countersigned:   
 (Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor)

Date: Date: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019

Note: If you are submitting this form by email, you should type your name in the signature space: an email attachment sent from your university inbox will be assumed to have been virtually signed by you.

If you are a student and are submitting this form by email, please attach an email from your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this form: this email will be taken as a virtual countersignature.

Special Risk Research Only

I have read this form and confirm that appropriate steps have been taken to mitigate the special risks associated with the proposed project.

Countersigned \_\_\_\_\_ (School Associate Dean for Research)

Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 6: Interview Participant Information Sheet

<p>Participant Information (Interviews)</p>	
<p>Thank you for considering participation in this research project. This document has been prepared to provide you with relevant information, which I hope may be useful to you throughout your participation in this project. I would be grateful if you would take the time to read through, I welcome and encourage any questions which you may have. Additionally, my contact details are included in the last section of this sheet if there is anything you wish to be clarified after the data collection has ended.</p>	
<p>What is the purpose of the study?</p>	<p>It is clear that Momentum plays a significant role in terms of supporting the Labour Party. This research project focuses upon the collaborative actions and roles of the Momentum membership which create value for themselves and others. We know Momentum members are active and passionate about their politics, but no research has explored what groups like this actually do when they work with others.</p> <p>Interviews conducted in this research intend to gain greater insight into these collaborative and community centred activities, both how this is achieved within Momentum but also how this is interpreted outside of it.</p> <p>Interviews will commence on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019 and will end in November 2021.</p>
<p>Who is running this study?</p>	<p>The project is being coordinated by Adam Harris, a PhD Student at Nottingham Trent University. Adam's research is supervised by Dr. Christopher Pich and Dr. Sheilagh Resnick from the Marketing Department of Nottingham Business School (NBS) and Professor Matt Henn (Department of Politics and International Relations) at Nottingham</p>

	Trent University. Between the group, there is a long track record of successful research.
Who is funding this study?	<p>The project is centrally funded by Nottingham Trent University.</p> <p>This funding allows the project to be undertaken as a piece of independent, academic research.</p>
Why have I been chosen to take part?	<p>Participants have been invited to take part in interviews on the basis of their membership of Momentum in order to discuss issues concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What Momentum is</li> <li>What Momentum members do and why</li> <li>Collaborative activities and the meanings attached to them</li> </ul> <p>We would like to interview you as we feel that you have specific insight which would be beneficial to this research.</p>
Do I have to take part?	<p>Participation is entirely voluntary and, of course, is much appreciated. If you do decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep for continued reference. You will also be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time, even after the interview has ended. If you decide not to take part, or to withdraw at any stage, you will not be asked to give us any reasons.</p>
What will happen to the collected data?	<p>Data will be collected in the form of field notes and sound recordings. Data will, of course, be securely stored and only available to the research team. This data will be transcribed in order for it to be interpreted for analysis.</p>
What will happen to the results?	<p>The data collected in the interviews will form part of the findings of a doctoral thesis which will be published and deposited in the archive of research material of Nottingham Trent University. This is usual practice because it makes valuable research data available to other researchers. However, it will be completely anonymised and you will not be identifiable in any way.</p>

<p>What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?</p>	<p>We are confident that the arrangements described above will prevent any of your information being shared with anyone outside the research team. For this reason, we believe that the risk of detriment is very low. As described the study does not seek to identify individuals who take part in the research.</p>
<p>How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?</p>	<p>The interview transcripts will be handled only by members of the research team, in line with data protection principles and our approved research approach. Hard copies of research notes are kept in locked filing cabinets, and electronic files are kept on password protected computers which are not accessible to anyone internal (or external) of the university.</p> <p>You will not be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this project. No unpublished opinions or information will be attributed to you, either by name or position or other identifiable descriptor. We will exercise all possible care to ensure that you and the organisation you work for cannot be identified by the way we write up our findings.</p>
<p>How can I ask questions after data collection?</p>	<p>I welcome any further questions regarding the study, I maybe contact via the details below:</p> <p>Adam Harris  Nottingham Business School,  Nottingham Trent University,  50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham,  NG1 4FQ</p> <p>Email: adam.harris2018@my.ntu.ac.uk</p>

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Name .....

Please read and confirm your consent to being interviewed for this project by initialling the appropriate box (es) and signing and dating this form

- 1. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research
  
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any implications for my legal rights
  
- 3. I give permission for the interview to be tape-recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the tape will be destroyed at the end of the project

4. I agree to take part in this project

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of respondent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*PROJECT ADDRESS:*

*Adam Harris, Nottingham Business School (NBS), Nottingham Trent University. Email: [adam.harris2018@my.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:adam.harris2018@my.ntu.ac.uk)*

*Dr Christopher Pich, Nottingham Business School (NBS), Department of Marketing, Nottingham Trent University. Email: [christopher.pich@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.pich@ntu.ac.uk)*

## Appendix 7: Kozinets Ethical Considerations for Netnography

<b>Research Ethics Concept:</b>	<b>Definition:</b>	<b>Ethical guidance for use in Netnography:</b>
<b>Public Site</b>	Online platform or web application that has Open Access to the public, does not require registration or password to log in and is usually indexed by and accessible using common search engines such as Google.	Public sites presented public data that has been shared under conditions that do not require special ethical procedures for netnographic study.
<b>Private Site</b>	Online platform or web application that requires some kind of registration or password to login is not indexed by and accessible using common search engines such as Google.	Private sites require extra levels of ethical procedure for netnographic study, potentially including reasonable compliance with platform policies, researcher disclosure, and moderator permission.
<b>User Rights</b>	All platform and web application users have legal and ethical rights regarding research and research use of data, which are constantly changing and differ according to national law and academic custom.	Netnographers should stay responsibly informed about general user rights as well as the specific rights accorded to platforms and web applications used in the researcher project.
<b>Reasonable Compliance</b>	Specific procedures negotiated with authorities in charge of the data on private platforms.	When using private sites, netnographers must negotiate the procedures that constitute reasonable compliance with the site's policies prior to engaging in study.
<b>Moderator Permission</b>	Permission to study at private data site, granted by an authority or official off the data site.	When using private sites, netnography hours must gain moderator permission in writing prior to engaging in the study.
<b>Sensitive Topics</b>	Discussion topics, text, images, or other data that reveal personally sensitive information such as stigmatised behaviours, images of the body, illegal acts, and sexual behaviours.	The use of netnographic data that depict sensitive topics must be justified by an initial assessment of benefits versus risks, and then handled in special ways, including providing extra levels of data security and anonymizing the data and site.
<b>Vulnerable Population</b>	Populations who are unable to give full consent, such as children, teenagers, people with mental health issues, and the deceased.	The use of netnographic data from vulnerable populations must be justified by an initial assessment of benefits versus risks, and then handled in special ways, including gathering an extra level of informed consent, providing extra levels of data security, and anonymising the data and sites.
<b>Data Security</b>	The steps taken to ensure that only appropriate individuals involved in the research project have access to its sensitive or confidential data.	Depending upon the sensitivity of the data and the need to protect participant and informant identities, data security operations can include password protection, encryption and sensitive data storage on dedicated external hard drives which are kept in a locked location.
<b>Benefits</b>	An assessment, performed by the researcher, off the potential benefits to participants, science, and society accruing from conduct and completion of the research project.	Benefits assessment in netnography is a consequentialist ethics-based procedure that often attempts to describe the public benefits from a greater understanding of online behaviours, specific groups, and the particulars.
<b>Researcher Disclosure</b>	The public disclosure of the identity and presence of a researcher studying a particular online site, usually accompanied by a general	Researcher disclosure is necessary Is necessary when interacting in anyway with any other persons online (e.g., liking a

	description of the purpose and possible value of the research.	comment, replying, posting); Disclosure often occurs through a post combined with sending people to a more detailed profile or separate web page.
<b>Informed Consent</b>	The granting of knowledgeable permission to be researched by those who are being researched, the acceptance of the terms of the research engagement by someone who is fully apprised by the researcher about those terms.	Permission is usually not necessary when dealing with publicly available data; informed consent is essential whenever there will be direct personal interaction between researcher and participant, as with an interview or in situ engagement.
<b>Anonymizing Data</b>	Providing pseudonyms knew names for people who are cited in research so that their identity is not exposed and cannot be determined from the data by a reasonably motivated individual.	Quoted public online data can easily be back traced from a netnography using a search engine; additional safeguards may be required to change the name of online sites, as well as altering data so that it is no longer traceable to original quotes.
<b>Uncloaked Data</b>	No changes made to the presented identity of social media posters, other research participants, and the precise contents of their traces.	Where risks are minimal, or the quoted information is from a public figure, the online pseudonym or the real name of the poster or participant is revealed in the researcher representation and their data is presented intact and unchanged.
<b>Cloaked Data</b>	Reasonable safeguards taken to conceal the presented identity of social media posters, other research participants, and the precise contents of the traces.	Where risks are low to moderate (a situation that will cover the vast majority of cases) , the social media site off the traces is mentioned, but actual names , pseudonyms, identifiers, and verbatim are altered to prevent identification.
<b>Highly Cloaked Data</b>	Strong efforts made to conceal the presented identity of social media posters , other research participants, and the precise contents of their traces.	Where risks are high, social media sites , actual names, and pseudonyms are all altered before being presented , the basin quotes either changed or not used , and fabrication strategies may be employed.

*Adapted from Kozinets (2020, pp. 182–184)*