A CO-CREATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CONSUMER-ORGANISATION RELATIONSHIPS (COR) ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

Uma Perspectiva Cocriacional nas Relações Consumidor-Organização (RCO) em Plataformas Digitais em uma Era Pós-Verdade

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to build forth on the e-CRM and SCRM processes of customer relationship management and to propose a consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process, which is indicative of the centrality of consumer co-creation and a post-truth view. A co-creational perspective is developed and centralised in the conceptual theoretical framework for

Resumo

Objetivo: O objetivo deste artigo é desenvolver os processos e-CRM e SCRM de gerenciamento de relacionamento com o cliente e propor um processo de relacionamento consumidor-organização (RCO), que é indicativo da centralidade da cocriação do consumidor e uma visão de pós-verdade. Uma perspetiva cocriativa é desenvolvida e centralizada no quadro teórico conceitual para as relações consumidor-

consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms in a post-truth era.

Method: The conceptual theoretical research was conducted through a combination of systematic and integrative literature review research designs for the purpose of describing and extending existing literature.

Findings: COR confirms the role of consumer co-creation and underlines disinformation as a result of the post-truth era. The proposed co-creational perspective demonstrates prominent considerations of consumer engagement and consumer centralism. Co-creation is indicative of the complexity of managing relationships on digital platforms, due to the centrality of consumer co-creation and a post-truth view.

Originality: The article advances knowledge on consumer co-creation in a consumer-organisation relationships process. It further offers new perspectives to customer relationship management in its advancement from e-CRM and SCRM to COR, as viewed from consumer and co-creational perspectives. It is contextualised in a post-truth era with consideration of the role of disinformation in consumer-organisation relationships.

Keywords: co-creation; content co-creation; consumer; post-truth; relationships.

organização em plataformas digitais na era da pós-verdade.

Método: A pesquisa teórica conceitual foi realizada por meio de uma combinação de projetos de pesquisa de revisão sistemática e integrativa da literatura com o objetivo de descrever e ampliar a literatura existente.

Resultados: o RCO confirma o papel da cocriação do consumidor e destaca a desinformação como resultado da era da pós-verdade. A perspectiva de co-criação proposta demonstra considerações proeminentes de engajamento do consumidor e centralismo do consumidor. A cocriação é um indicativo da complexidade da gestão de relacionamentos nas plataformas digitais, devido à centralidade da cocriação do consumidor e uma visão de pós-verdade.

Originalidade: O artigo avança no conhecimento sobre a cocriação do consumidor em um processo de relacionamento consumidor-organização. Além disso, oferece novas perspectivas para o gerenciamento de relacionamento com o cliente no avanço de e-CRM e SCRM para RCO, visto das perspectivas do consumidor e da cocriação. É contextualizado em uma era de pós-verdade com consideração do papel da desinformação nas relações consumidor-organização.

Palavras-chave: cocriação; cocriação de conteúdo; consumidor; pós-verdade; relacionamentos.

INTRODUCTION

Literature on Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) and electronic Customer Relationship Management (e-CRM) is scant, the latter being regarded as an "emerging pre-theoretical phenomenon" (Gamage et al., 2021, p. 4). Hence, this article aims to explore customer relationship management on digital platforms, including social media, and to situate consumer co-creation within this process as a form of consumer engagement. This is contextualised within a post-truth era, thereby considering the role of post-truth realities, particularly with regards to co-creation within customer relationship management on digital platforms. Profitability through consumer engagement and loyalty are central objectives for organisations, hence the urgency of organisations to offer greater and meaningful consumer experiences (Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 199) through interactive digital platforms.

This article considers digital platforms where interactivity in the form of content creation is evident. Further, since the consumer is at the core of marketing efforts in the digital era, organisations realised the need to address consumer relationships in some way, particularly the opportunities for co-creation in these processes. In this context, consumer-organisation relationships are no longer

controlled by the organisation, but by the interactions among consumers, and consumers and organisations (Baumõl, et al., 2016, p. 200). It is during these interactions that consumer co-creation takes place, which compels organisations to stay informed about how consumer-organisation relationships are impacted.

Much has been written about post-truth and politics, post-truth and social life, and post-truth and journalism (Lacković, 2020, p. 442). This article does not focus exclusively or aims to explain the existence of post-truth, but highlights the significance thereof for co-creation and consumer-organisation relationships, and considers its impact on consumer co-creation.
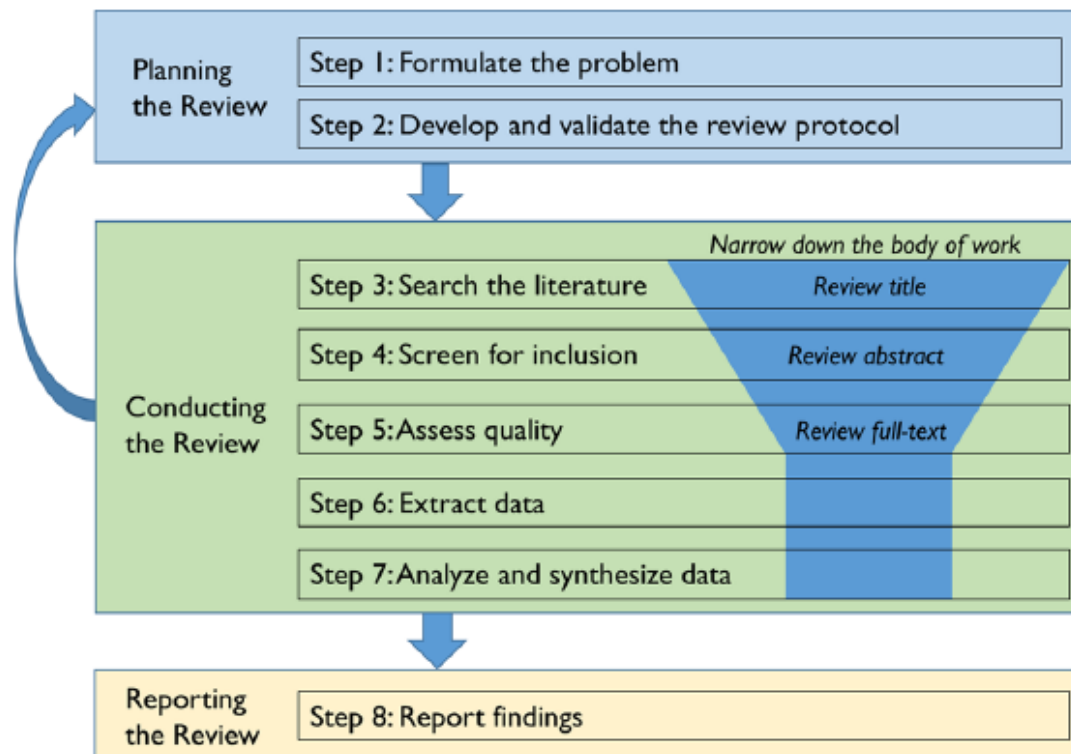
Since this article is specifically applied to consumer behaviour in the form of co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms, Kozinets et al.'s (2020, p. 131) notion on the institutionalisation of lies, persuasion, manipulation and exploitation in digital social environments, such as social networks, underwrite the need for an exploration of how post-truth narrates co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article makes significant and valuable contributions to knowledge on consumer-organisation relationships and co-creation in the field of consumer behaviour. This follows on rigorous conceptual theoretical research, which was conducted through a combination of systematic and integrative literature review research designs, for the purposes of describing and extending existing literature (Xiao & Watson, 2019; MacInnis, 2011; Torraco, 2005, p. 356). The article holistically conceptualises and provides a critical reflection (Moravčíková, 2020, p. 24) on the topic by reviewing, critiquing and synthesising "representative literature" (Torraco, 2005, p. 356), and in so doing, making a contribution to the discipline of consumer behaviour and the constituent topics of customer relationship management and co-creation on digital platforms. The article further generates new perspectives on the topic and proposes a conceptual framework for the role of co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms in a post-truth era.

The process that was followed is based on Xiao and Watson's (2019), and Snyder's (2019) criteria for a systematic literature review, and Snyder's (2019) and Torraco's (2005) criteria for an integrative literature review. The research was, therefore, conducted along the following phases: designing the review and formulating the problem, a search of the literature, screening literature for inclusion, assessing the quality of the literature (Xiao & Watson, 2019, p. 107), and a critical analysis and evaluation of the literature. The topic was deconstructed (Torraco, 2005, p. 361) according to its main concepts, namely, consumer co-creation, consumer-organisation relationships, digital platforms and post-truth. Subsequently, the relationships between these main concepts were indicated and applied in the proposed conceptual framework, which laid the foundation for critiquing by "identifying knowledge that should be created or improved" (Torraco, 2005, p. 362). Subsequently, a better understanding of this topic is offered through synthesis, which "integrates existing ideas with new ideas to create a new formulation of the topic" (Torraco, 2005, p. 362). This article offers this through the proposal of a conceptual framework and possible new relationships between the main concepts mentioned above.

The article further adheres to MacInnis's (2011) requirements of a conceptual study in terms of identification, delineation, differentiation and advocacy of constructs, relationships, theories, domains and disciplines. Figure 1 illustrates Xiao and Watson's (2019) process of a systematic review. The process followed in this article is, in part, based on this model.

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Planning        Step 1: Formulate the problem
the Review
                Step 2: Develop and validate the review protocol

                                                    Narrow down the body of work
Conducting      Step 3: Search the literature           Review title
the Review
                Step 4: Screen for inclusion             Review abstract

                Step 5: Assess quality                   Review full-text

                Step 6: Extract data

                Step 7: Analyze and synthesize data

Reporting       Step 8: Report findings
the Review
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Source: Xiao and Watson (2019, p. 103)
Figure 1. Process of a systematic literature review

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Post-Truth Era

The existence of uncertainty and instability in knowledge and information proceeded to a post-truth era and the resultant questioning of the existence of a pure "pre-truth" era. These reservations about a pure "pre-truth" era are based on the notion that unreliable information and knowledge could have been in existence for decades or centuries (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 583). However, due to technological advancements and the adoption of digital platforms for all spheres of life, objective facts and evidence (Rochlin, 2017, p. 386) are mostly replaced with subjective misinformation and mistruths globally (Andrei et al., 2019, p. 1429). Post-truth is mostly rooted in a socio-political and popular political context where the shaping of public opinion is based on subjectivity (Braun, 2019, p. 434). The concept of post-truth, however, was revealed in sociology and psychology decades ago when lying and deceit were studied (Kozinets et al., 2020, p. 130; Jacques et al., 2019, p. 2), but also manifested in media studies, cultural studies, semiotic and linguistic studies (Moravčíková, 2020, p. 23). This article attempts to situate post-truth within the realm of marketing communication and consumer behaviour, particularly on digital platforms, including social media. The notion of post-truth applies to marketing and marketing communication in terms of mistrust of organisations, brands and marketing communication messages due to misinformation, betrayal and brand rumours by marketers (Kozinets et al., 2020, p. 132). This article, therefore, considers "uncritical consumption" (Lacković, 2020, p. 442), however, not in terms of product purchasing and consumption, but in terms of information, message and content consumption, and the resultant co-creation of content on digital platforms.

Regardless of the context within which post-truth manifests, it is usually associated with concepts such as power struggle, subjectivity, dysfunctional democracy, uncertainty, instability, identity contention and fragmentation of information (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 583) leading to a re-evaluation of the aptness of objectivity. Pertinent manifestations of post-truth include fake news, alternative facts, misrepresentation, misinformation, mistruths, hoaxes, rumour bombs, plagiarism,

half-truths and multiple truths (Kozinets et al., 2020, p. 130; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 585; Harsin, 2018, p. 7; Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018, p. 67).

The position of post-truth, previously, has mainly been associated with the political context, however, it can be expected to similarly impact different fields. Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2019, p. 548) refer to politicians' "covering up" and offering of "alternative facts" as original causes of the post-truth phenomenon. However, the inability of information users, in all contexts, to distinguish between trustworthy and unreliable sources further contributes to the existence of post-truth. Information users prefer information that confirms their choices and knowledge, resulting in a lack of critical thinking (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 584), hence contributing to post-truths in all information contexts.

With the onset of the digital revolution and age wherein the use of digital platforms resulted in consumers mistrusting traditional media (Moravčíková, 2020, p. 23), consumers have adapted to seeking, consuming, and using information, content and messages online. The post-truth era is equated with the advent of alternative and social networks (Moravčíková, 2020, p. 23) on digital platforms, as these contribute to the notion of post-truth. In this information era, digital platforms dominate information exposure, exchange and consumption, causing a decrease in expressions of truth and truth-telling (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 585).

Disinformation is arguably the most significant consequence of the post-truth era in which information is created, distributed and shared unrestrictedly. Wardle's (2020) typology comprises of three types of information disorder, misinformation (misleading content without a specific intent), disinformation (purposely created harmful content, i.e. false content) and malinformation (harmful content, i.e. hate speech). Kirchknopf et al. (2021) adopt a more general view of information disorder, namely, that it refers to content that provides information that is fake or misleading. For purposes at hand, the term "disinformation" is used when referring to content that is intentionally false and designed to cause harm.

Disinformation on digital platforms is a recurrent phenomenon worldwide, where content, either unintentional or deliberately, is spread to audiences and co-consumers (Moravčíková, 2020, p. 23; Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018, p. 70). This could moreover be attributed to the shift in power from marketers (West, 2021, p. 144), organisations and advertisers, which allow consumer participation and interaction on social media and similar digital platforms. This suggests reduced authenticity, which forces participants and consumers to constantly cross-reference and make logical deductions to establish falsifications and seek truth in this post-truth online reality (West, 2021, p. 144; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2019, p. 585). Human beings and human thinking are extended onto social media and digital platforms where a constant interplay between truth and non-truth, objectivity and subjectivity take place (Koro-Ljunberg et al, 2019, p. 585), not only in terms of false claims by marketers, advertisers and brands, but also in terms of the manner in which consumers interact with information (Jacques et al., 2019, p. 1).

This interplay is evident in consumers' rates and reviews of brands, organisations and services on digital platforms. Ratings and reviews are "a constant in the aesthetics and rhetorics of digital space being more user-centered and democratic than pre-digital markets" (West, 2021, p. 144). Brands could gain from reviews and ratings on digital platforms, which provide support as information commodities and promotional vehicles, however, in a post-truth era, these could result in ambiguities because of disinformation (West, 2021, p. 144).

Due to the interactive, conversational and dialogical nature of digital platforms, consumer participation could be seen in terms of conversations taking place in the market. West (2021, p. 145) contributes value creation to consumers' participation and conversations on digital platforms and puts forward that brand success could be attributed to these types of "consumer-driven action". Due to the ability of consumers and organisations to place disinformation on digital platforms, digital information is generally regarded as manipulative and laden with promotionalism, hence the resultant distrust in digital platforms, co-consumers and digital information (West, 2021, p. 146).

Kozinets et al.'s (2020, p. 131) notion that post-truth manifestations, such as lies, manipulation and disinformation are notably evident on social digital platforms, supports the need for this article to consider post-truth manifestations in consumer co-creation in consumer relationship building.

Customer relationship management on digital platforms: The transformation of CRM to e-CRM and SCRM to Consumer-Organisation Relationships (COR)

Customer relationship management is widely addressed in the literature, usually with the aim of proposing processes for organisations to build and manage relationships with customers, to ensure engagement, loyalty from consumers and, ultimately, profitability for the organisation. At the core of this process is trust (Laksamana, 2020, p. 23), which is improbable if disinformation occurs from interactions, dialogue or conversations, which are evident in the context of post-truth. Customer relationship management is grounded in the relational paradigm, displays a relationship orientation towards consumer empowerment and stems from the relationship marketing approach (Mosa, 2022, p. 193; Gamage et al., 2021, p. 2).

There has been a paradigm shift from customer relationship building and management to e-customer relationship management (e-CRM) and social customer relationship management (SCRM), due to technological advancements, which include the use of social media and digital platforms (Mosa, 2022, p. 196; Arora et al., 2021, p. 217; Gamage et al., 2021, p. 1; Hendriyani & Auliana, 2018, p. 116; Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200). With the growth of digital platforms and social networks, and the resultant integration of social media and traditional CRM, organisations adopted structural changes to accommodate increased interactions (Gamage et al., 2021, p. 2) and the ability to address a group of customers or individuals directly to build consumer trust, brand loyalty and engagement, and to increase profitability, sales and retention for the organisation (Kassem et al., 2022, p. 202; Dewnarain et al., 2021, p. 673; Hendriyani & Auliana, 2018, p. 116). In addition, more opportunities for customers to participate, interact and engage commenced, as customer relationship management adopted digital platforms, and the possibilities for message co-creation and UGC arose. As a result of interactions on digital platforms, organisations are no longer in control of consumer relationships; consumers are now in control of these relationships, because of their interactions with organisations and co-consumers (Laksamana, 2020, p. 22; Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200). While e-CRM uses websites, e-mail marketing and social media to build and manage consumer relationships, SCRM uses social media to establish direct contact and engage with customers (Kassem et al., 2022, p. 202; Arora et al., 2021, p. 217; Gamage et al., 2021, p. 2). Thus, the emergence of digital platforms and social media introduced a reconsideration of the traditional consumer relationship management processes, platforms and approaches, to incorporate the interactive, engagement and conversational opportunities that arose for both consumers and organisations.

Dewnarain et al. (2021, p. 674) recognise that the migration from customer relationship management to e-CRM and SCRM centralises a consumer-centric management approach and initiated considerations for consumers as "collaborative partners" (Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200) and brand co-creators by exchanging information, knowledge and opinions (Oncioiu et al., 2021, p. 1702). This view emphasises the importance of consumer co-creation (Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200), hence the focus of this article on the role of consumer co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships. In the digital context, organisations can benefit from co-created messages, content generated by consumers and shared knowledge via real-time interactions and conversations (Dewnarain et al., 2021, p. 683). Content is created and shared by consumers in a participatory and collaborative manner (Oncioiu et al., 2021, p. 1703), hence the motivation to focus on the role of consumer co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms. It is argued that in the context of digital platforms, consumer relationship management strategies could underline the emphasis on consumer orientation in a consumer-centric approach further, as the online digital context allows for building and strengthening consumer relations and associations (Arora et al., 2021, p. 217; Hendriyani & Auliana, 2018, p. 116).

At the core of consumer relationship management is consumer engagement, which is evident in high levels of interactivity, responsiveness and elevated levels of consumer contributions (Dewnarain et al., 2021, p. 685). Further, through engagement, communication is established (Arora et al., 2021, p. 217), which, on digital platforms, translates into conversations due to the interactive nature of these platforms and consumers' ability to co-create and generate messages. Value for the organisation and the consumer now lies in the engagement of consumers with the organisation and not with the conventional "one-way delivery of products and services" (Dewnarain et al., 2021, p. 685). Gamage et al. (2021, p. 2)

affirm that traditional models and definitions of customer relationship management overlooked the central concept of engagement, which is fundamental to e-CRM and SCRM. Hence, with the adoption of e-CRM and SCRM models, the concept of engagement can be underscored.

Elements of e-CRM and SCRM

Mosa's (2022, p. 197) notion that e-CRM is multidimensional and consists of several pillars/elements is underlined in the conception of this article. Even though this article is situated within the first pillar, namely the *communication and access to information* pillar, the *technology adoption* and *complaint handling* pillars are mentioned for clarifying the role of digital platforms and organisational awareness. Mosa (2022, p. 198) claims that no consumer relationship management approach can be followed if it is not rooted in technology in the *technology adoption* pillar. Communication and information technology developments are effective in the interaction and communication with consumers to enhance relationships, ensure engagement and probable profitability. In addition, all the available applications on digital platforms enable improved relationships with consumers when technology is adopted. Furthermore, one of the vital pillars of an effective e-CRM approach is *complaints handling* (Mosa, 2022, p. 198), to deal with consumer dissatisfaction. In support of managing relationships with consumers, an effective complaints management system should be in place to ensure continued consumer support, engagement and loyalty.

It is, however, within the first pillar of Mosa's (2022) framework for e-CRM, namely, the *communication and access to information* pillar where the core of this article resides. The emphasis is on consumer co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms and, therefore, coincides with the *communication and access to information* pillar, which focuses on the new opportunities that digital platforms create for communicating and exchanging information with consumers (Mosa, 2022, p. 197). In the context of digital platforms and for the purpose of satisfying digital consumers' needs, organisations turned away from one-way communication to utilising multiple digital channels (Mosa, 2022, p. 197) for interaction and conversational opportunities. In this space, consumers are able to co-create and generate content leading to the need for organisations to consider consumer relationships, especially in a post-truth era where disinformation undoubtedly generates distrust. Within the *communication and access to information* pillar, an emphasis on dialogue and conversation should be present, as building and maintaining relationships with consumers does not occur without dialogues and conversations (Oncioiu et al., 2021, p. 1703).

Mustaphi (2020) identified digital marketing strategies for customer relationship management, hence aligning with e-CRM and SCRM. To effectively manage customer relationships via digital marketing strategies, thus on digital platforms, digital and physical spaces must be integrated to enhance consumers' experiences, referring to *phygital marketing* (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 379). Phygital marketing is extended to include *Augmented Reality (AR)* to enable consumers to "superimpose virtual 3D objects onto their physical world with a mobile device or any other device with a camera" (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 379). More pillars for customer relationship management on digital platforms include the use of *Virtual Reality (VR)* to enable consumers to experience the artificial world by interacting with it, as well as *360 Degree Video* as an interactive technology, which enhances brand engagement (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 380). All these applications require *cultural relevance* as consumers have to be able to relate to be able to participate in two-way conversations between organisations and consumers. More so, since *User Generated Content* is occurring on digital platforms where consumers create and post content among online communities (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 381). This article considers consumer co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms, therefore, underscoring this pillar in Mustaphi's (2020) digital strategies for consumer relationship management. Co-creation and UGC are further enhanced by *Interactive Websites* (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 381) where consumers are able to interact with content and, thereby, engaging and participating in two-way conversational opportunities. These conversations are stimulated by chatbots, which exemplify interaction between humans and machines (Mustaphi, 2020, p. 382).

Baumõl et al. (2016, p. 200) identified the use of *social media to publish advertisements* as one of the key pillars of SCRM. When social media is used to publish advertisements, a broad consumer

audience can be reached, hence improving marketing initiatives. During social CRM processes, consumers are encouraged to *share their positive experiences* via social media, which results in brand loyalty and increased profitability (Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200). Further, organisations gain *consumer insight* when they study consumer co-created content, UGC and interactions on digital platforms. Those insights are valuable in managing consumer relationships and to align products and services with consumers' needs and wants (Baumõl et al., 2016, p. 200).

This article speaks to customer relationship management, e-CRM and SCRM, however, for its purpose refers to consumer-organisation relationships (COR) on digital platforms. In particular, the aim is to explore consumer-organisation relationships where the consumer interacts with the organisation and, presumably, earns the opportunity to co-create. It is further accepted that this migration to include social media and digital platforms in consumer-organisation relationships (COR), in addition, allows for consumer co-creation and the consideration of consumers as relationship agents during these processes. Hence, the aim of this article is to propose a co-creational perspective on consumer-organisation relationships (COR) on digital platforms in a post-truth era.

A co-creational perspective

Consumers were traditionally regarded as fulfilling a passive role in the value creation process of the organisation, which was limited to "value exchange and attraction". In this predominantly organisation-centric approach, consumers were merely viewed as *targets* of the organisation and excluded from the value creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 6). Apart from largely portraying a narrow view of the potential of consumers in the process of value creation, the value of interactions with customers for relationship building is disregarded and mainly involves the "targeting and managing" of the *right* customers (ibid). As already mentioned, the use of digital platforms in a post-truth era empowered and afforded consumers the opportunities to originate and share information, but it is crucial that organisations recognise their expectations of being involved in the co-creation of content, as digital platforms decentralise communication by permitting consumers to become *senders.*

Additionally, in the current context, it might relate to the relationship the consumer hopes to build with the organisation through their co-created content. This represents the transition to a *co-creational perspective* that is characterised by active consumers and multiple points of interaction, which is founded on interaction (cf. Sarasvuo et al., 2022) and posited as an underlying process for co-creation. In López et al.'s (2017, p. 970) view, the focus shifts to consumer-organisation interaction in which the roles of the consumer and the organisation converge and value is created to benefit both counterparts (cf. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 11). Sarasvuo et al. (2022) offer a simplified description of co-creation as "creating together", while Verwey and Benecke (2021, p. 16) regard a co-creational perspective to comprise of a focus on the co-creation of meaning and the building of relationships. For purposes here, consumer content co-creation can be defined as "a collaborative activity in which consumers actively contribute to content on digital platforms".

Consumer roles and outcomes in co-creation

The research by Sarasvuo et al. (2022) reveals three ways in which co-creation can be initiated, either by the organisation (seeking consumer involvement), by the consumer (consumer-to-organisation) or instances where the marketer adopts a facilitation role of consumer interactions and aspects related to the brand that represents a joint effort of co-creation. Noteworthy is the notion that the roles might not be equal and, therefore, asymmetric and even skewed to either of the participants of co-creation.

In line with the focus at hand on the consumer in co-creation, both the consumer-to-organisation approach and the joint sphere (marketer as facilitator) are pertinent as they could be initiated by the consumer. According to Sarasvuo et al. (2022), there are specific outcomes which are unique to a specific co-creation context. For example, in branding, the outcomes might include brand experience, brand image and branded content, among others (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). In the joint sphere, outcomes might include brand identity, brand value, etc. This suggests the importance of having knowledge of the context in which consumers co-create their content and the perceived benefits thereof.

Value co-creation

The link between co-created content and engagement is already recognised and is widely supported by scholars (cf. Fujita et al., 2019, p.3). It can, therefore, be expected that the organisation gains some kind of value when it engages with consumers through co-created content. Piligrimiene et al.'s (2015) research suggests it could be categorised into three value dimensions, namely, economic, social and functional value, all of which can be regarded as relevant in context.

Table 1
The three value dimensions of co-creation

Value through co-creation	
Economic (brand awareness, loyalty, strengthen as grow brand communities)	Increased brand awareness Increased WOM Consumer loyalty
Social (creating brand awareness)	Authenticity (reliability, trustworthiness) Opinions of consumers who are engaged are trusted
Functional (obtaining information about the consumer)	Continuous communication Ideas for product and service development Stay informed about the needs of consumers The consumer is the value (information about him/her)

Source: Adapted from Piligrimiene et al. (2015, p. 457)

Ranjan and Read (2016, p. 16) define value co-creation as "a theoretical representation of an extended exchange process of joint production and consumption of value". It can moreover be seen as a "form of participation" (López et al., 2017, p. 971), which signifies the involvement of both the consumer and organisation in creating and transforming co-created content to benefit both participants. Moreover, value co-creation is dependent on communication and information exchange between these participants, which is in line with the first pillar of Mosa's e-CRM framework, which underscores its relevance to this investigation (Riana et al., 2022).

As the value of co-creation content from a consumer perspective serves as the focus of this article, insights by different scholars reveal supposed benefits of consumer involvement in co-creation activities. Their views are that by participating consumers contribute to favourable word-of-mouth, the development of positive relationships with the organisation, and increased trust and loyalty (Piller et al., 2012; Haro et al., 2014). As the value is reciprocally created and, thus, also in favour of the consumer, it seems that they gain personal value when partaking in co-creation, such as participating in dialogue, attaining specific goals, developing relationships, collecting information and experiences, among others, as seen by Alves and Mainardes (2017) (cf. López et al., 2017).

Co-creation and consumer engagement

Fujita et al. (2019, p. 3) describe co-created content as the process in which organisations engage with customers on social media to create original or co-created content. Consumer-brand engagement can be linked to "the quality of consumers" relationships with brands (Gómez et al., 2019); their "self-brand connection" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 160); and their satisfaction with, trust in, sense of empowerment derived from, and emotional bonds with brands (Brodie et al., 2013), as cited by Zhang and Su (2022, p. 3).

A recent study by Zhang and Su (2022, pp. 3,4) mentions the views of Liu et al. (2021) that engagement with brand messages on Twitter comprises three distinct types of behaviour, which are "consumption (numbers of views and clicks on URLs), contribution (numbers of retweets and 'likes') and creation (numbers of tweets mentioning the brand)". In the context of this article, creation – particularly content which is co-created – is of interest, yet insights, specifically from a consumer viewpoint on their perceived role in co-creation, are scarce.

Consumer satisfaction, trust and social sharing

According to research by Riana et al*.* (2022), the degree of co-creation enhances interaction and engagement, which in turn increases commitment, satisfaction and trust. Inherent to the creation and sharing of content are feelings of accomplishment, as consumers socially share experiences and related emotions that is said to enhance consumer satisfaction (López et al., 2017). Moreover, it is assumed that the act of sharing experiences during the co-creation of content, for example, via word-of-mouth (WOM), elicits positive emotions, a consciousness of the value that is created and pride in their active participation therein (López et al., 2017). As digital platforms allow consumers to connect socially, it is pertinent to realise the importance of recognising the contributions of and value added by consumers, thus appreciating the importance of humanising the experience (cf. Roberts & Darler, 2017).

Co-creation and relationship building

The notion that co-creation is a novel approach to relationship marketing is acknowledged by Riana et al*.,* 2022). The term "relationship" is described as a representation of the "overall impression that a customer has concerning the whole relationship", pointing to the importance of following a holistic approach thereto (Riana et al., 2022). In literature, relationship marketing (RM) and customer relationship marketing (CRM) are often equated, but for purposes at this point, consumer-organisation relationships (COR) will be used when referring to creating powerful and emotional connections with the organisation/brand that is said to promote WOM and, thus, extending the reach of positive experiences (cf. Aberle, n.d.). Riana et al*.'s* (2022) research *inter alia* aims to investigate the impact of co-creation on relationship quality, which is a determinant of RM/e-CRM. The scholars identify communication, interaction and value creation as the stages of building relational marketing, which was already mentioned as elements of co-creation. Relational marketing is associated with increased interaction and engagement, which increases "satisfaction, trust, and commitment" (Riana et al., 2022). Despite highlighting the lack of research into consumer co-created content, Zhang and Su (2022) underscore the urgency to investigate the aspects that organisations need to be informed about and to consider in their approaches to handling co-created content by the consumer.

DISCUSSION

The discussion shows the progressive stages taken to conceptualise the contribution, namely, the conceptual theoretical framework for a co-creational perspective on COR on digital platforms in a post-truth era. It, firstly, develops theoretical criteria and sub-criteria for consumer relationship management, a co-creational perspective and post-truth. It subsequently reflects the processes of e-CRM and SCRM as a theoretical foundation for the progression to COR and, then, develops theoretical criteria for the COR process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective, from which the proposed conceptual theoretical framework is developed.

Key theoretical criteria and sub-criteria were originally developed from the preceding theoretical discussions, where the proposed co-creational perspective and consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process were proposed, and the contexts of digital platforms and post-truth explored. Table 2 presents the key theoretical criteria and sub-criteria of consumer relationship management, a post-truth context and a co-creational perspective.

Table 2
Key theoretical criteria and sub-criteria of consumer relationship management, a co-creational perspective and post-truth context

Key theoretical sub-criteria	Key theoretical criteria		
	Consumer relationship management	**Post-truth**	**Co-creational perspective**
Consumer engagement	Consumer relationships are managed from an organisational perspective to ensure consumer engagement	Engagement is characterised by a lack of critical thinking – no critical engagement and disengagement	Types of behaviour: consumption; contribution; creation
Trust	The process of managing consumer relationships to ensure engagement, loyalty and profitability is based on trust	Digital information is generally regarded as manipulative and laden with promotionalism, hence the resultant distrust in digital platforms, co-consumers and digital information – post-truth causes post-trust	The degree of co-creation enhances interaction and engagement, which in turn increases commitment, satisfaction, and trust
Relationships	Relationships with consumers are built to steer consumer empowerment. Consumer participation contributes to positive relationships between organisation and consumer, and increased trust, loyalty and favourable word-of-mouth	Disinforming consumers and resultant break in relationships between organisations and consumers, and among co-consumers	Consumers desire to build relationships with organisations through their co-created content. Roles of consumers and organisation converge and value is created through relationship building, based on the consumers' expectations. Increased interaction and engagement, which increases satisfaction, trust and commitment, thus, improved relationships
Digital platforms	The development of e-CRM and SCRM	Decreased expressions of truth and truth-telling. Disinformation on digital platforms – either unintentional or deliberate	Decentralise communication by permitting consumers to become senders
Social media	Management of consumer relationships on social media	Pertinent manifestations of post-truth on social media include fake news, alternative facts, misrepresentation, misinformation, mistruths, hoaxes, rumour bombs, plagiarism, half-truths and multiple truths. Constant interplay between truth and non-truth, objectivity and subjectivity, not only in terms of false claims by marketers, advertisers and brands, but also in terms of the manner in which consumers interact with information	Co-creation on Twitter: consumption (numbers of views and clicks on URLs); contribution (numbers of retweets and likes); and creation (numbers of tweets mentioning the brand)

Interactions, participation, information consumption and collaboration	Increased consumer interactions due to digital platforms and social media must be managed	Uncritical consumption of content, messages and information	Interactions, consumer participation and collaboration create value for the organisation and consumer when it engages with consumers through co-created content. Unrestricted access and opportunities to collaborate and participate
Consumer control	Consumer interactions on digital platforms initiated consumers being in control of relationships	Inability of information users to distinguish between trustworthy and unreliable sources inhibits the formation of trustworthy relationships. Reduced authenticity which forces participants and consumers to constantly cross-reference and make logical deductions to establish falsifications and seek truth in this post-truth online reality – little control over false information/messages/content	Active consumers who interact at multiple points of interaction, as communicators, thus consumers act as originators of content
Consumer-centric and consumer orientation	The online digital context allows for building and strengthening consumer relations and associations	Digital space is consumer-centric and emphasises consumer orientation – organisations depend more on consumer reviews and ratings than in pre-digital markets, yet are mainly organisation-initiated	In a consumer-centric approach and consumer-centric view, consumers are at the core and are able to create content and value
Consumer roles and satisfaction	Increase in consumer co-creation, interaction, participation, collaboration and dialogue because of digital platforms	Consumers form opinions of the organisation and brand based on co-created content. Dissatisfaction and distrust associated with disinformation	Co-creation is initiated by the consumer (consumer-to-organisation). Consumer satisfaction results from feelings of accomplishments when creating and sharing content
Organisational management perspective	Management of consumer relationships to ensure loyalty, trust, commitment and the humanisation of the co-creation process	Shift of power from organisations and marketers to consumers, resulting in reduced authenticity. Organisations should manage this by cross-referencing and establishing falsifications to ensure that the truth is spread	Organisations should recognise the expectations of consumers to be collaborators in the co-creation of content. Focus shifts to consumer-organisation interaction that could be initiated by the consumer or in a joint sphere
Value co-creation	Through content co-creation in the consumer relationship management process, value for the organisation and consumer is created	Value co-creation favours the organisation and consumer, and if built on truth and trust, could initiate personal value gain (recognition, self-expression, relationship	Value co-creation is dependent on communication and information exchange between organisation and consumer (participants) in

		building and skill development)	the consumer relationship management process. Consumers are cognisant of the value that is created when they co-create. Emphasise value-creation for both consumer and organisation
Disinformation	As a result of disinformation on digital platforms, consumers may distrust relationship building	Disinformation as a result of post-truth	Irrespective of decentralised communication, which may comprise disinformation, value is created

Source: Authors' own conceptualisation

Further, to propose a COR process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective in a post-truth era, the processes of e-CRM and SCRM, as put forward by Mosa (2022), Mustaphi (2020) and Baumõl (2016), were synthesised and adapted for this study, as indicated in table 3 below.

Table 3
The processes of e-CRM and SCRM

	Mosa (2022)	**Mustaphi (2020)**	**Baumõl (2016)**	**Explanation**
e-CRM and SCRM Processes	Communication and access to information	Cultural relevance User Generated Content	Consumers share positive experiences	New opportunities for consumers to communicate, exchange, inform, interact and converse via multiple digital platforms. Consumer content co-creation and UGC. Communication and content have to be culturally relevant to ensure participation. Results in brand loyalty and increased profitability.
	Technology adoption	Interactive websites Chatbots	Social media to publish advertisements	Communication and information technology assist in consumer interaction and communication. It enhances relationships, engagement, conversational opportunities and profitability. Broad consumer audience can be reached. Consumer contributions to content co-creation is possible.
	Complaint handling			Deals with consumer dissatisfaction.
		Phygital marketing		Integrate digital and physical spaces to enhance consumer experiences, including Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and 360 Degree Video – enhance brand engagement.

			Consumer insight	Organisations gain consumer insight when studying consumer co-created content. Trust relationships allow organisations to understand the needs of consumers.

Source: Adapted from Mosa (2022), Mustaphi (2020) and Baumõl (2016)

In the final stage of the development of the conceptual theoretical framework for a co-creational perspective on consumer-organisation relationships in the said era, the theoretical criteria and sub-criteria, and the processes of e-CRM and SCRM were synthesised into a proposed co-creational perspective on a consumer-organisation relationship process, consisting of specific pillars. Moreover, the progression from *customer relationship management* and *post-truth* to a *co-creational perspective* is illustrated.
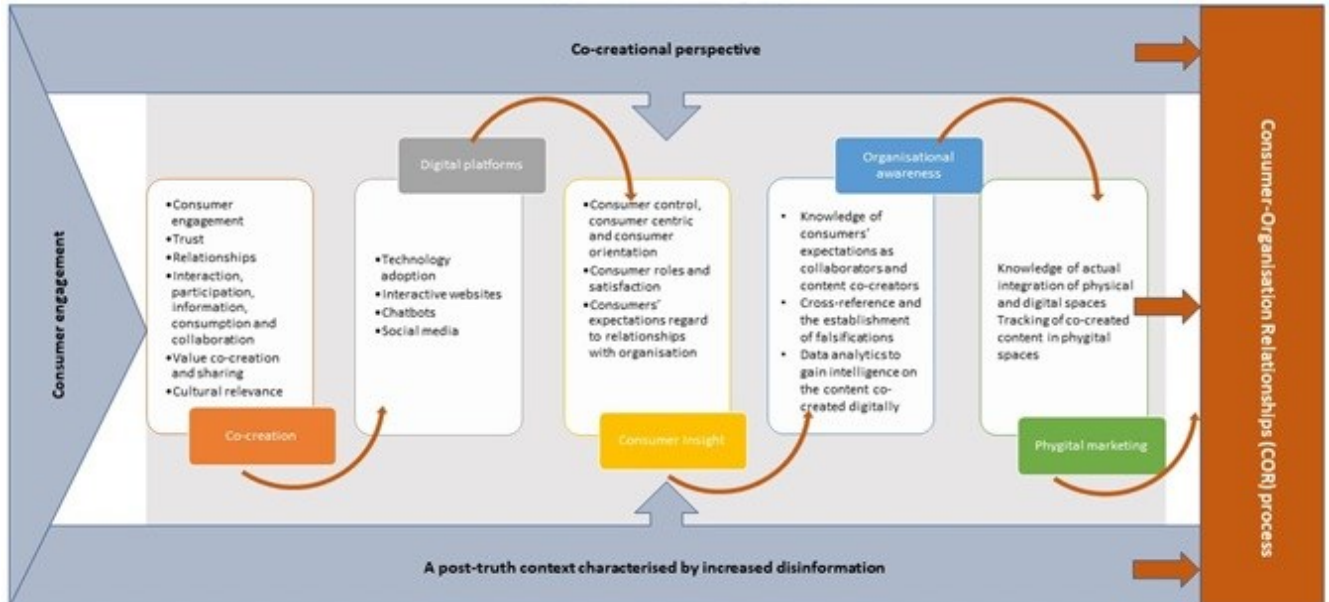
Table 4
Theoretical criteria for the consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective

Consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process	Pillars	
Co-creation	Consumer engagement Trust Relationships Interaction, participation, information consumption and collaboration Value co-creation Access, content co-creation and sharing Cultural relevance	**Co-creational perspective**
Digital platforms	Technology adoption Interactive websites Chatbots Social media	
Consumer insight	Consumer control; Consumer-centric and consumer orientation Consumer roles and satisfaction Consumer's expectations regard to relationships with organisation	
Organisational awareness	Knowledge of consumer's expectation as collaborators and content co-creators Cross-reference and the establishment of falsifications Data analytics to gain intelligence on the content co-created digitally	
Phygital marketing	Knowledge of actual integration of physical and digital spaces Tracking of co-created content in phygital spaces	

Source: Authors' own conceptualisation

A conceptual theoretical framework for the Consumer-Organisation Relationships (COR) process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective in a post-truth era

Figure 2 illustrates the proposed conceptual theoretical framework that depicts the consumer-organisation relationship (COR) process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective in a post-truth era.

Source: Authors' own conceptualisation

Figure 2. A conceptual theoretical framework for a co-creational perspective on consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms in a post-truth era

The consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective in a post-truth context

While information on the role of co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships on digital platforms is scant, this article contributes to existing literature by putting forward new insights into the progression of e-CRM and SCRM to COR on digital platforms. The co-creational perspective could be essential in aiding organisations to address disinformation, ascribed to the post-truth context, during the building of consumer-organisation relationships.

Consumer engagement

Consumer engagement is argued to be central in the COR and co-creational processes. In the post-truth era, engagement is characterised by a lack of critical thinking and resultant disengagement. Therefore, the co-creational perspective on COR suggests an emphasis of the fact that the creation of relationships between consumers and organisations are mainly or equally controlled by the consumer. Moreover, it strives to allow consumer engagement to ultimately establish trust, favourable relations and to increase profits. In such instances, consumer engagement behaviour is embodied by creation, consumption and contribution as a result of the opportunities presented by digital platforms. Adopting a consumer outlook for COR is thought to promote engagement and resultant loyalty and profitability.

Co-creation

It is put forward that the role of co-creation in the consumer-organisation relationships process on digital platforms encapsulates consumer engagement; trust; relationships; interactions,

participation, information consumption and collaboration; value co-creation; access, co-creation and sharing; and cultural relevance.

With the aim of centralising consumer engagement, trust is key, which, from a co-creational perspective, is further increased by the degree of co-creation that enhances interaction and engagement. In a post-truth era, digital information can be manipulative and laden with promotionalism, resulting in distrust in digital platforms, co-consumers and co-created content. Organisations should take cognisance of disinformation and the resultant breaks in consumer-organisation relationships. This should be addressed, since consumers desire to build meaningful relationships with organisations through their co-created content. In so doing, the roles of consumers and organisations converge, and value is created through relationships, based on consumers' expectations, increased interactions and engagement, which as a result, increases consumer satisfaction, trust, commitment and empowerment.

Empowered consumers participate and contribute to positive relationships between consumers and organisations, resulting in increased trust and loyalty. It is further put forward that organisations must prioritise consumer-organisation relationships as consumer interactions, participation and collaboration creates value for the organisation and the consumer. This value creation, however, is unbalanced in favour of the consumer due to the relationship building process taking place on digital platforms, therefore, prioritising consumers. Value co-creation is dependent on communication and information exchange between the organisation and consumer during the consumer-organisation relationships process, provided that consumers are cognisant of the value that is created when they co-create. Co-created content must be culturally relevant to ensure participation in the consumer-organisation relationships process, as it creates opportunities for consumers to communicate, exchange, inform, interact and converse via multiple digital platforms. This essentially requires organisations to be informed about their consumers, their needs and expectations, which ultimately contributes to achieving organisational objectives.

Digital platforms

Due to digital platforms, customer-organisation relationships resulted in e-CRM and SCRM, and because of the co-creational perspective and post-truth, proposed to advance to COR. This article purports the consumer-organisation relationships process on digital platforms from a co-creational perspective, hence focusing on decentralising communication by permitting consumers to become creators and senders in the communication process. This exploration is further warranted by the realisation that interactions on digital platforms result in decreased expressions of truth and truth-telling and that the dissemination of disinformation on digital platforms is a recurrent phenomenon worldwide. Digital platforms promote consumer interactions, communication and participation in such a manner that relationships, engagement, conversational opportunities and profitability are enhanced as a result of broad consumer reach. In line with the co-creational perspective, digital platforms, interactive websites, chatbots and social media allow for consumer contributions to content co-creation.

The most recognised digital platforms that allow co-creation are social media. Pertinent manifestations of post-truth on social media include fake news, alternative facts, misrepresentation, misinformation, mistruths, hoaxes, rumour bombs, plagiarism, half-truths and multiple truths. Social media further allows for constant interplay between truth and non-truth, and objectivity and subjectivity, especially in the manner in which consumers co-create and interact with information, hence the significance of managing co-creation in consumer relationship building.

Consumer insights

In an organisation-centric approach and pre-digital markets, consumers fulfilled a passive role and were viewed as targets. In a consumer-centric approach and consumer orientation view, consumers are at the core and are able to create content and value. Hence, the focus of this article on the co-creational perspective on digital platforms, which feature digital spaces as consumer-centric spaces and emphasise consumer orientation, such as consumer reviews and ratings. However, it is believed that in a post-truth era, information users usually do not have the ability to recognise trustworthy and unreliable sources, which inherently inhibits the formation of trustworthy relationships. In this post-

truth online reality, consumers have little control over false information, messages and content and this necessitate them to constantly cross-reference and make logical deductions to establish falsifications and seek truth. However, consumers have more control on digital platforms as they actively interact at multiple points of interaction, as communicators, consumers or originators of content. Consumers further form opinions of the organisation based on co-created content by others, and are dissatisfied and do not trust the organisation when it is associated with disinformation. Consumers are, therefore, put at the core as co-creation is initiated by consumers, resulting in co-creation, interaction, participation, collaboration and dialogue. Consumer satisfaction, thus, results from feelings of accomplishments when creating and sharing content. This puts consumers in control of relationships with organisations, hence the notion to actively oversee consumer relationships and co-creation on digital platforms. Consumer insight could be gained when organisations study consumer co-created content.

Organisational awareness

It has been established that consumers are central in consumer-organisation relationships due to their co-creational roles on digital platforms. Therefore, it is put forward that organisations must take cognisance of the needs and expectations of consumers. Moreover, organisations must oversee digitally co-created content to ensure organisational awareness. Complaint handling allows organisations to oversee consumer dissatisfaction. Due to the functionality of digital platforms, power shifted from organisations and marketers to consumers, resulting in reduced authenticity and satisfaction. It is proposed that organisations should oversee this by cross-referencing and establishing falsifications to ensure that the truth is put out. Organisations should further recognise their expectations of consumers being collaborators in the co-creation process, hence effectively overseeing consumer-organisation relationships to ensure loyalty, trust, commitment and the humanisation of the co-creation process.

Phygital marketing

Phygital marketing is indicated as a pillar in the consumer-organisation relationships process, due to its reference to the integration of digital and physical spaces, which include Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and 360 Degree Video. The importance of tracking co-created content in the phygital space is underscored to ensure enhanced brand engagement and consumer experiences, which in turn, could enhance co-creation and strengthen consumer-organisation relationships.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As a theoretical conceptualisation of consumer-organisation relations from a co-creational view, this investigation has some limitations. Firstly, this article focuses on the identification of theoretical criteria. It is essential that the conceptual framework be empirically tested, verified and refined. Secondly, having merely obtained theoretical insights into the topic urges further research into the views of consumers. Consequently, this lends itself to further research. Finally, as evident in the literature, there is increased need for research into co-creation strategies that consider the level of involvement by the organisation and stipulate the role/s of consumers, particularly in the relationship building process (Roberts & Darler, 2017). The aspects that organisations should reflect on are relationships, collaboration, dialogue, creativity and humanising the co-creation process.

CONCLUSION

This article spoke to the scant literature on the role of co-creation in the consumer-organisation relationships process by building forth on customer relationship management to the proposed consumer-organisation relationships (COR) process, which incorporates a co-creational perspective. The co-creational perspective underlines the role of consumers in the creation of relationships, due to the pre-eminent opportunities on digital platforms including content, value and relationships. The adoption of a consumer view expresses the promotion of engagement and, subsequently, loyalty, trust, favourable relations and profits.

The prominence of digital platforms further underlines the recognition that consumers became creators in the communication process, therefore, promoting consumer interactions, communication, dialogue and participation. However, in a post-truth era, these interactions could simply be aimed at disseminating disinformation. It is, therefore, recommended that organisations should be aware of, consider and address matters related to co-creation in consumer-organisation relationships.

The co-creational perspective on consumer-organisation relationships put forward in this article further underscores a consumer-centric and consumer-orientation view, especially since digital spaces here are regarded as consumer-centric spaces. This puts consumers at the core of the consumer-organisation relationships process.

Research ethics statement
The authors declare that this article is original, and was not submitted for evaluation or published in another journal.

Author contribution statement
The authors Hanekom and Swart were equally involved in the conceptualisation, research, and writing of the article.

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The authors have no conflict of interest with the publication of the article in CBR.

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