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The Impact of User-Generated Content on Consumer Purchase Intention

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THE IMPACT OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON CONSUMER PURCHASE
INTENTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

by

Alyssa Anderson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Digital Marketing
at
Lindenwood University

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THE IMPACT OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON CONSUMER PURCHASE
INTENTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: The Impact of User-Generated Content on Consumer Purchase Intention

Alyssa Anderson, Masters of Arts in Digital Marketing, 2023

Thesis Directed by: Andrew Smith, Digital Marketing Program Chair and Associate Professor of Communications

This project investigates how various forms of user-generated content impacts consumer purchasing decisions. Primary and secondary research is executed for a broader understanding of UGC implications on modern consumers. The final deliverable is a website that offers an in-depth analysis of the culture of creators and how the dynamic has shifted in recent years. Additionally, UGC cases are studied to determine the impact they have on consumers, and guides are offered to director brands on how ensure consistency and alignment with their brand identity and implement UGC into their marketing strategy.

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Introduction

In a time where digital media is incorporated into nearly every facet of consumer's lives, it is crucial to understand how different types of content impact consumer opinions. For years, one-way communication from the brand to the consumer was the primary way to promote products and services. However, a dynamic shift has taken place where consumers are now able to give their input and contribute to the message. This two-way stream of communication is happening on social platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and other digital communication platforms. Not only are consumers able to take part in the marketing experience by offering feedback to brands that want to connect with them, but with the rise of user-friendly media platforms, consumers are often the focal point of the message.

User-generated content, also known as UGC, is content created by consumers that is often in the form of a video, image, or review. UGC can be distributed by the creator directly, or it can be delivered by the brand through their business channels. This form of content seeks to influence consumer opinions by demonstrating how a brand's product fits into a consumer's life, the ways in which they will benefit from using it, and provide feedback about their experience. This form of marketing minimizes the top-down approach where brands are completely in control of the message, and instead creates a mutually beneficial relationship where brands can directly reach more of their target audience and consumers can participate in the company's marketing efforts.

Content created by consumers brings a level of authenticity that traditional marketing lacks, especially for the notoriously skeptical Gen-Z. User-generated content is often thought of as modern-day word of mouth, and is more frequently trusted than messages that are exclusively controlled by a company. While many factors affect the success of UGC, properly executed user-

generated content positively impacts consumer purchasing decisions by building trust and brand loyalty.

State of the Field

With so many platforms constantly circulating content, it can be difficult to identify which content carries information that viewers will find valuable. From TikTok videos listing all the things one “must have” from Amazon, to unboxings on YouTube, and product reviews discretely placed in videos where people share their daily routines, social media users are frequently overloaded with information. This creates a challenge for brands who are attempting to form a relationship with consumers and make them repeat customers and brand loyalists. For brands and marketers to effectively implement user-generated content, they must understand how consumers perceive it and what makes certain user-generated content (UGC) more effective than their less impactful counterparts. User-generated content can be a beneficial form of marketing and a great way for brands to connect with consumers, but when executed poorly, UGC can have the opposite effect.

The perception of source credibility is a common theme that emerges when discussing the effectiveness of user-generated content. UGC that is seen as credible has a positive impact on how consumers form a relationship with the brand and helps determine if they intend to make a purchase. However, if users do not believe that the source of the content they are consuming is credible, it is likely to have a negative impact on the consumer’s perception of the brand and products involved. Schouten specifies that there are two components to credibility: trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness refers to the perceived integrity and authenticity of the endorser, whereas expertise looks to the relevant knowledge, skills, or experience that the endorser appears to possess (Schouten 261). In other words, if users do not think the content they

are consuming was created by someone who is an expert on the topic and is also someone they can trust, they are not likely to deem the creator a credible source. Regarding credibility, the MAIN Model offers a framework to understand the importance of technology as it is used in online advertising and marketing.

Sundar's MAIN Model focuses on the affordances of technology that influence perception including modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability (Spates et al 155). Sundar explains that when interacting with digital media, there are specific surface-level characteristics that trigger heuristic responses leading to assumptions about the credibility of the source (78). Heuristics are mental shortcuts that allow individuals to make quick decisions based on their past experiences without exhausting all of their mental resources (Spates et al. 74). With the abundance of content consumed regularly, these mental shortcuts have become more prominent than ever. The helper heuristic, for instance, follows the logic that "it's trying to help, so it can be trusted" (Spates et al. 85). This heuristic allows conclusions to be made without deeply investigating each content creator that a user comes across. Zac Hartley is a fitting example of a creator that is likely to trigger the helper heuristic. He is an investor and entrepreneur who creates videos on YouTube and TikTok that provide free information about how to start investing, updates on different financial news, and examples from his own life that show his methods in action. If a user were to come across his TikTok video "8 Ways to Invest," their helper heuristic may be triggered because it is a free video packed with information that is intended to benefit them. Spates et al. explain that when this thought process is in motion, "online users may assign a positive disposition to the user, which, consistent with the notion of the halo effect, bolsters favorable credibility perceptions" (157). The halo effect occurs when one trait of a person or thing is used to make an overall judgement and does not consider negative

traits. This effect, as well as the heuristic responses, results in consumers forming opinions about source credibility in a short amount of time as they constantly consume content. If a consumer's trust in a brand is high, they are more likely to form a relationship with the brand. Robertson with Dot Digital supports this concept with his report that "UGC acts as the beacon of trust between a brand and its customers, with 93% of marketers agreeing that customers trust content created by other customers more than the messages created directly by brands" (Robertson). Kim and Song agree with Robertson's claim and emphasize that "information from peers has greater influence on consumers' perceptions and behaviors than marketing-generated information" (120). Furthermore, Xiao et al. support this idea with the results of their study. The study demonstrates the benefit of perceived credibility of YouTube videos and their creators, and how it can be used to predict a consumer's purchase intentions for a product mentioned in the video due to the correlation between attitudes and behavioral intentions (Xiao et al. 2006). This dynamic is beneficial for brands, because once the viewer gains trust in the creator of the UGC, future content that includes the brand is more less likely to result in hesitation from the viewer.

While content created by other consumers is trusted more often than brands, it is not trusted automatically or with certainty simply because it is user-generated. A key factor in deeming source credibility is the endorser fit. Schouten concludes that UGC content is less likely to be trusted "when they endorse products that do not fit their specific 'niche' specializations and may only be perceived as credible information sources if in endorsements that fit well with their domain of interest" (263). In other words, if the consumer does not think the content creator truly uses the product they are promoting, they will be deemed less credible which negatively impacts the perception of the brand. Preston gives the example of when Khloe Kardashian, an American media personality, was criticized for promoting a detox tea with the claims that it has contributed

to her physical appearance. Kardashian faced backlash after promoting “weight loss teas” that “reportedly have no scientific backing to their health claims” (Preston). Rather than addressing the condemnation, she deleted comments including one that said, “Own up to the fact that you have a personal trainer, nutritionist, probable chef, and a surgeon to achieve your aesthetic rather than this laxative product” (Preston). Flat Tummy Co. assumed that collaborating with a well-known figure in popular culture would positively influence consumers’ intent to purchase the product, but it resulted in quite the opposite. Not only is the collaborator’s character in question, but the brand is shining a light on negative opinions that surround their product. Demba et al. agree, and they specify that consumers are “more inclined to make their decisions not based on what brands are being promoted, but rather based on what others say about the brand” (137). Clearly, collaborating with a creator that does not use the product can draw attention to negative consumer opinions about it, which consumers consider when deciding on a purchase. This is an important component of UGC for brands to understand, because if they choose to collaborate with a creator who does not align with their brand, it could negatively impact consumer opinions of the product, the brand, and the credibility of both.

In addition to source credibility, consumers also consider if there is a persuasion attempt when forming their opinions about the content they are consuming. According to Friestad and Wright, the Persuasion Knowledge Model focuses on how individuals use their knowledge of persuasion motives to interpret, evaluate and respond to influence attempts from marketers and others (2). The Persuasion Knowledge Model is a reference point that identifies how and when consumers will cope with persuasive messages like advertisements, which allows marketers to understand how to better utilize UGC to avoid persuasion triggers. Mayrhofer et al. also believe that if people know they are being marketed to, “coping mechanisms are triggered, which may

lead to more critical processing of the message” (167). In line with Friestad and Wright’s theories, Mayrhofer references a 2020 study about the influence of brands on social media revealing that “the coping mechanisms that users employ to resist persuasive intent are not triggered if the displayed source of the persuasive content is a fellow user,” and the UGC led to higher purchasing intentions compared to disclosed advertisement and brand posts (179).

Furthermore, sources that appear more attractive, familiar, and share commonalities with the user can positively impact persuasion attempts. According to Thompson and Malaviya, “sources who are known to, liked by, or similar to consumers are attractive, and consequently, persuasive” (34). This can be observed in countless examples of UGC on popular social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube where people are cultivating brand relationships and promoting products without the intervention of brands. One category of UGC that often avoids triggering persuasion knowledge is “a day in the life mini vlogs” on TikTok. These are short videos, typically sixty seconds or less, that show the highlights of someone’s day. They feature products that the creator uses, emphasize certain steps in their routine, and do so in a visually pleasing fashion. An example of this is a TikTok creator named Emani, whose bio information reads “Self-care | mini vlogs | lifestyle.” She shared a mini vlog of a day in her life, and it resulted in hundreds of comments praising the video for being “aesthetically pleasing,” having “immaculate vibes,” and asking for links to the products she showed (Emani). The brands that are highlighted in these videos benefit from it because their products are authentically showcased by a creator that other consumers feel similar to, trust, and enjoy watching. Having products authentically highlighted by a creator who consumers deem to be trustworthy avoids triggering persuasion knowledge, which is more likely to result in positively impacting a consumer’s decision to purchase the product.

Consumers identifying similarities between themselves and the UGC creator is not the only way that brands can avoid triggering persuasion knowledge. Along with deeming the creator trustworthy and credible, wishful identity is another factor that impacts the effectiveness of persuasive messages. Wishful identity is the idea that consumers watch content from other users, often influencers, because they have a desire to reflect their lifestyle or behavior. Schouten et al. reference a 2019 study where influencer endorsements led to “higher wishful identification with the endorser than celebrity endorsements” (274). Schouten et al. explains that consumers view influencers and content creators as more similar to them than celebrities, so they can be trusted more while simultaneously sparking inspiration to drive consumers desires (276). This idea is also supported by a 2014 study revealing that “a main reason for following Instagram bloggers was a combination of admiration on the one hand, and the feeling of connectedness to the influencer on the other” (Uzunoglu and Kip). This is important because effectively implementing content that appeals to wishful identification requires the message to come from someone who is similar enough to the user that the user does not feel overly persuaded, but different enough from the user to evoke a degree of jealousy or urge to mimic them. Whichever side of the coin consumers fall on, both can be beneficial for brands and avoids triggering persuasion knowledge.

While UGC is less likely to trigger persuasion knowledge, it is important to clarify that the dynamic between consumers and content creators has shifted in recent years. As creating content has become accessible to nearly everyone with a smart phone, viewers understand the need for persuasive advertising, and they are aware that brands often collaborate with content creators for promotional purposes. This has led to consumers more easily identifying the signals of a brand collaboration. Thompson and Malaviya explain that “although previous research

points to a positive effect of disclosing consumers as ad creators, there is also reason to expect that this knowledge may trigger skepticism about the ad creator that would hinder persuasion” (35). Kim and Song agree with Thompson and Malaviya, and they add to the discussion about content that appears to be UGC but is marked as an ad by stating that “this activated persuasion knowledge induces unfavorable responses” (110). While it is still true that ad disclosures can cause hesitation from viewers, Mayrhofer et al. points out a more recent 2020 study explaining that “when viewers were aware that a user-generated post was commercial content, they did not cope with the persuasive intent of the post. Instead, they took the role of an ad critic and, for example, gave suggestions about the lighting or editing of the presented pictures” (169). This shows that even when consumers realize they are being marketed to, their persuasion knowledge may not always be triggered because there is a mutual understanding that creators need to make money, so the feeling of deception is less prominent. The dynamic between brands, consumers, and content creators is constantly shifting, and regular examination provides important insight on the types of UGC that will positively influence consumer purchase intention and brand loyalty.

UGC is the most beneficial when consumers create and share content reflecting their personal experience. This leads to the perpetual question: how do brands get consumers to authentically create content related to their brand? Muntinga et al. have identified personal identity, integration, and social interaction as major motivators for taking part in UGC authentically (19). Mayrhofer et al. agree with these major motivators and add that “many users upload pictures displaying brands in order to express their connection to a brand’s image and popularity as well as their inclusion in the social group that uses the brand” (168). This provides some insight as to how certain content goes viral, and why specific trends gain traction. Furthermore, the Individual Media Dependency Theory explains why people are inclined to post

content on social media, and how repetitive use creates a dependency. McKeague and Leidman explain that people's recurring needs from the media include entertainment, interpersonal connection, and understanding information (37). These three needs are crucial for brands to understand, because they keep users active on the platforms that are used to connect with consumers. McKeague and Leidman expand on consumer's recurring needs by adding that users are not only more likely to contribute to the media that they depend on, but when they can fulfill most of their goals and needs through a particular media, they become both dependent on that medium and affected by that medium.

One of the three recurring needs identified in the Individual Media Dependency Theory is always being met with modern day social media platforms. Whether the need is satisfied by taking part in the latest TikTok trend, viewing a viral video, or several other types of content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, engagement rates are high because consumers can meet their recurring needs through these actions. One example of a recurring need being fulfilled with UGC involves a 54-year-old woman sharing her insecurity of her under-eye bags when viral on TikTok (Sandoval). Her eye bags were more exaggerated than the average person, and she explained that she was never able to find something that helped reduce them. She proceeded to show the Peter Thomas Roth Instant FIRMx Temporary Eye Tightener, a product that she then demonstrated using. In real time, she applied the product to one of her under eyes; viewers could see the bags nearly disappear, and she goes on to say that they stay that way all day (Sandoval). According to Flora, the video has been viewed by over 23 million people, caused the product to sell out several times, and resulted in other consumers sharing their experience with the product. Peter Thomas Roth, the brand's founder and CEO said that the eye cream is a 10-year-old product, and said for the last ten years he has "done so many before-and-

afters, and hers is the one that went crazy” (Flora). This is a great example of how UGC can satisfy users' need to seek information through media and speaks to the power of content that comes from a credible consumer as opposed to the brand. In addition to seeking information, consumers are often pursuing entertainment from UGC. A pilot study conducted by McKeague and Leidman investigated YouTube users' reasons for consuming UGC and concluded that 100% of both heavy and casual users watch YouTube to entertain themselves (41). Additionally, 100% of heavy users and 88% of casual users report that they use UGC to learn new information. (McKeague and Leidman 41). The same study also concluded that heavy users prefer media with lower-quality lighting, low-quality audio, and made on a smaller budget. (McKeague and Leidman 41). This is mutually beneficial because the average consumer can produce content with the resources available to them, and brands do not have to spend much money to give their audience what they want to see. These examples of UGC and the studies that analyze their impact provide an understanding as to why UGC plays an integral role in satisfying user needs and how it contributes to media dependency.

Trends are also a fundamental part of modern-day social media, and they are known for rapidly increasing UGC. Participating in these viral trends fulfills interpersonal connection and entertainment media needs and often needs to understand information. One way that users are encouraged to create content is through trending music and sounds, especially on TikTok. TikTok released an article to the community saying that “music and sound are TikTok's universal language; they play an integral role in the community's creativity, liveliness, and cultural impact” (TikTok). The article explains that users can create content easily by recreating an existing trend accompanied by the correlating sound, and consumers are more likely to feel connected to a brand when they create content that aligns with the trends that users are interested

in. According to TikTok's 2021 survey, when a brand features songs that consumers like in their videos, "68% of users say they remember the brand better, 58% say they feel a stronger connection to the brand, 58% say they're more likely to talk about the brand or share the ad, 62% say they're curious to learn about the brand, and 61% say they like brands better when they create or participate in a trend on TikTok" (TikTok). These powerful statistics are a representation of how UGC platforms are connecting with brands to fulfil the three-recurring media needs to increase user dependency.

With the understanding that UGC positively impacts consumer opinions and leads to increased purchase intentions and brand loyalty when the source is credible, avoids triggering persuasion knowledge, and fulfils recurring media needs, it is also important to recognize how the Theory of Planned Behavior contributes to UGC success. According to LaMorte, "the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) started as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 to predict an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place" (LaMorte). This can apply to a consumer's intention to purchase a product, participate in a trend, or create different forms of UGC. This theory consists of three main constructs including the attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen). This can be better understood using the example of a consumer looking to purchase a new item. If someone is looking to buy a new coffee maker, they may browse through the aisle and select one that they think could suit their needs. After looking at its features and deciding that this coffee maker would make a good contribution to their daily routine, they might want outside information to ensure it will live up to its advertised promises, and that the decision will be accepted by those around them. This construct is referred to as subjective norm, where cultural norms, group beliefs, and social networks are considered. At this point, they could look to UGC like online

reviews, YouTube tutorials on how to use it, or even search the product on social media to see what kind of people are using this coffee machine. After forming an individual belief and looking to surrounding factors for validation, the third construct in this theory, perceived behavior, is considered. This refers to an individual's belief of how easy or difficult it is to display a certain behavior or act in a certain way. In the case of the coffee maker, they might consider how long it takes to brew a pot of coffee, if it is easy to clean, and if it is user friendly where a learning curve is not significant. Dreiling agrees that the three pillars of the TPB are the best predictors of forming behavioral intention. He explains in his video breakdown on YouTube that if the attitude toward the behavior is positive, it is seen as normal, and there is perceived behavioral control, the consumer is more likely to carrying out the act (Dreiling). If the coffee maker appeals to them personally, they feel like it is socially accepted as a good coffee maker, and they think it will easily work into their daily routine, they are likely to make the purchase. This theory provides insight into how consumers make purchasing decisions, how UGC plays a role in this decision-making process, and even how users decide if they will create UGC about a certain topic. Understanding this theory about behavior can be beneficial for brands because they can review the UGC surrounding their brand to verify if it will be relevant to consumers during this process.

While properly implemented UGC is essential to modern day brands, its shortcomings should not be overlooked. Kashif believes that one of the major downsides of UGC is the lack of control a brand has over the message being shared. Though authentically created content from consumers is better received by other consumers because they are directly sharing information of their own free will, this same characteristic can be a disadvantage to brands. Unless a brand is supervising a collaboration, they do not have a say in what consumers are saying about the

brand. This means that one negative customer experience can have a domino effect resulting in a bad reputation, loss of brand image, or the brand message becoming overshadowed and tarnished by negativity (Kashif). One example of a brand being tarnished by negativity due to a creator collaboration is the mass public backlash against the cosmetic brand Morphe. Makeup lovers shared their outrage across several public platforms after the brand stayed silent about sexual harassment allegations made against one of their major affiliates, James Charles. According to Insider Magazine, “the hashtag ‘#BoycottMorphe’ appeared in over 200 tweets and in dozens of Instagram comments on Morphe's account” (Tenbarge). While the previous success of Morphe was attributed to UGC on YouTube, Tenbarge also credits the tarnishing of its reputation to UGC when consumer opinions became more prominent than the brands messages. The boycotting of Morphe is an example of how UGC can negatively impact consumer purchase intention and brand loyalty.

Another opposing viewpoint that should be addressed is how the desire for consumer engagement and viral content can negatively impact original creation. This issue has recently become more conspicuous as the desire for virality has become increasingly important, particularly in the music industry. While previously discussed integration of music on TikTok can positively affect UGC creation, brand image, and contribute to fulfilling media needs, it has also caused turmoil for music artists. Time Magazine reported that established artists such as Halsey and Florence and The Machine have spoken out about how their labels would not let them release a new song without a plan to make it go viral on TikTok (Chow). Halsey posted a TikTok video, “everything is marketing. And they are doing this to every artist these days. I just want to release music, man. And I deserve better [to be honest]. I’m tired.” (Halsey). This is an example of how the push for UGC and viral content can have a negative impact on creators who

are attempting to make original content. It is important for brands to keep these limitations in mind when incorporating UGC into their marketing strategy.

Overall, there are many factors that contribute to user-generated content positively impacting consumer purchase intention and brand loyalty. Source credibility is essential to effectively conveying information, particularly information about brands. Credibility can be broken down into trustworthiness and expertise, and elements such as heuristics, or mental shortcuts formed by previous experiences, aid consumers in the formation of perceived credibility. Additionally, characteristics of UGC, such as endorser fit, can also impact perceived source credibility. UGC contributes to media dependency which is formed by when three recurring needs of a user are met including entertainment, interpersonal connection, and understanding information. When one or more of these needs is continually met, users form a dependency on the media source and are more easily influenced by it. UGC can be made to meet these needs, making it a critical tool for brands to use when trying to connect with consumers. Avoiding triggers of persuasion knowledge is an essential step for brands when they are attempting to form a relationship with consumers. When persuasion knowledge is triggered, consumers are less likely to be influenced because they know they are being marketed to. Finding a careful balance between circumventing persuasion knowledge triggers and also avoiding covert strategies is a key to influencing consumer purchasing intentions and their opinion of a brand. The Theory of Planned Behavior considers a consumer's experience with UGC and can predict their intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place. This theory gives insight into why brands should evaluate the type of content surrounding their brand to ensure a positive impression is made during the consumer's decision-making process. There are noteworthy drawbacks of UGC such as a brand's lack of control over the message, and the

lack of creative freedom and originality that could potentially result from an overbearing push for virality. While there are limitations to its effectiveness, UGC is a powerful tool that allows brands the opportunity to connect with consumers and guide them to brand loyalty. Creating UGC provides a mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and brands because consumers can become part of the brand's marketing efforts where they feel their opinions are valued, become part of a community, and often creates a personal following that allows for additional opportunity both socially and financially. Brands benefit from UGC because they can continually push out content that appeals to their target audience and on a much smaller budget than if they were to create it on their own, UGC is less likely to trigger negative emotions in consumers, and using creators as a bridge to connect with consumer is more likely to lead to a positive impression of the brand. Overall, user-generated content is a valuable tool in modern day marketing, and it has a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions and brand loyalty.

Methodology

The cultural studies methodology was used to evaluate components of popular culture and current digital media outlets that directly reflect the modern state and relevance of user-generated content. Since cultural studies seek to investigate how all types and levels of art in culture can inform us about the prominent beliefs during a given time, evaluating a wide range of subject matter including social media, advertisements, and popular literature can provide clarity about the current dynamic between brands and consumers. Referring to psychological theories, models, and effects that influence consumer perceptions and impact responses to persuasion attempts provided a strong foundation to tie in cultural references and examples. Qualitative methods such as case study research, analysis of pilot studies, real-world examples, and reviewing secondary sources such as peer-reviewed articles have also been analyzed and provide

a valuable framework for further contribution. Additional, primary research in the form of a consumer behavior survey was virtually distributed to consumers across the United States. Survey respondents were asked a series of multiple choice questions in order to understand how they perceive user-generated content. Free response questions were optional, and allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences and further explain how user-generated content impacts their purchase journey.

Production and Analysis

A multiple-choice survey was distributed to consumers between the ages of 18 and 55 with optional free response sections that provided the opportunity for consumers to expand on their answers. Questions covered various aspects of user-generated content including how the consumer interacts with it, what kind of UGC they trust more, and how it impacts their purchasing journey. The survey concluded with a total of 50 participants with twenty-three in the age category 18-24, twenty-one participants in the age category 25-34, three participants in the age category 35-44, and three participants in the age category 45-54. The six participants over the age of 35 have been group together for analysis due to the minimal number of respondents and comparable age ranges.

A cumulative analysis revealed that if consumers can find user-generated content, they are more likely to trust the brand. When considering a product purchase, 32% of consumers refer to UGC all of the time before making a purchase, 48% refer to it most of the time, and 16% refer to it sometimes. The majority of consumers trust user-generated content less if it is sponsored, but 90% of consumers that see an unsponsored video positively reviewing a product are more likely to purchase it, while 10% say that it does not affect their decision. The majority of consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they see a creator that they frequently watch

use it, and 48% said that they have purchased a product that they have seen passively in a creator's video where no effort to sell the product was made. Credibility is a major factor in determining how user-generated content impacts consumers. 74% of respondents say they are always or somewhat more likely to trust user-generated content more than traditional marketing. 10% are less likely to trust UGC, and 14% are unsure which one they trust more.

Consumers age 18-34 rely more heavily on user-generated content for their purchasing decisions than those who are 35 and older. Consumers age 18-34 also refer to the creators they frequently watch for trusted opinions on what to purchase, while those 35 and old do not find as much value in the opinion of their frequently watched creators. More specifically, when consuming content from their most frequently watched creators, 16.7% will never be influenced to make a purchase, 16.7% will occasionally be more likely to make a purchase, and 50% are only more likely some of the time. This is a vast contrast from the younger age groups that rely heavily on the products their favorite creators use and promote.

Another notable comparison between the different age ranges of the respondents is their opinion on sponsored content. Consumers 18-24 are skeptical of sponsored content with 47.8% saying that they trust sponsor content somewhat less than unsponsored content, and 34.8% trusting it significantly less. Results from consumers above the age of 35 are most similar to age category 18-24 with 66.7% trusting sponsored content somewhat less than unsponsored content, and 16.7% trusting it significantly less. Consumers age 25-34 have more trust in sponsored content than the other two age groups, with 28.6% saying that they trust it somewhat more than UGC. They do not fully trust sponsored content, as the remaining 71.4% trust sponsored content somewhat less or significantly less than unsponsored UGC.

The analysis of the survey data indicates several key findings related to consumer behavior and perceptions of UGC. Overall, the results suggest that the presence of UGC positively impacts consumer trust in a brand. A significant proportion of respondents refer to UGC before making a purchase, with the majority trusting unsponsored UGC more than traditional marketing. Additionally, seeing an unsponsored video positively reviewing a product significantly increases the likelihood of consumers making a purchase. Credibility is crucial, as a majority of consumers trust UGC more than traditional marketing. However, there are notable differences among age groups. Consumers ages 18-34 heavily rely on UGC for purchasing decisions and value the opinions of creators they frequently watch. In contrast, consumers ages 35 and older do not find as much value in their frequently watched creators' opinions. Skepticism towards sponsored content is prevalent among younger consumers, with a significant portion trusting it less than unsponsored UGC. The 25-34 age group displays slightly higher trust in sponsored content compared to the other age groups, but a majority still trusts it less than unsponsored UGC.

Overall, this survey reveals that UGC plays a significant role in consumer purchasing decisions, particularly among younger age groups. Trust in UGC is influenced by factors such as credibility and sponsorship, with consumers tending to trust unsponsored content more. These findings provide valuable insights for brands seeking to leverage UGC effectively and tailor their marketing strategies to different age demographics. These survey results combined with the aforementioned secondary research provide the foundation for the website that accompanies this written report. The website provides examples of various UGC, explores the culture of creators and the impact they have on consumers, and addresses the recent shift in dynamic between creators and consumers. Considering these elements in unison provides valuable information for

brands to consider in order to better understand how UGC impacts a consumer's purchase intentions.

Conclusions

These findings highlight the importance of source credibility, media dependency, and avoiding persuasion knowledge triggers in maximizing the effectiveness of user-generated content. By properly executing UGC, brands can establish a mutually beneficial relationship with consumers where they feel valued, become part of a community, and contribute to the brand's marketing efforts. This research emphasizes the need for brands to carefully navigate the UGC and the platforms where it resides, understanding the preferences of different age groups, and leverage UGC to foster brand loyalty and drive consumer purchase decisions.

In addition to the findings and implications discussed, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. One notable limitation is the relatively small size of the survey respondents, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research should aim to survey a larger and more diverse group of consumers, particularly in each age range, including a greater number of respondents over the age of 35. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different age groups perceive and engage with user-generated content, allowing for more robust conclusions.

Despite these limitations, the information provided in this study contributes to the field of digital marketing, particularly in the context of evolving consumer behavior and the recent shift in user-generated content on social media. As digital media platforms continue to change, it is crucial to examine and adapt marketing strategies accordingly. This study sheds light on the effectiveness of user-generated content in influencing consumer opinions and behaviors, offering insights into the changing dynamics between brands and consumers. Given the limited existing

research on this topic, the findings presented here provide valuable knowledge for marketers and researchers aiming to navigate the ever-changing landscape of digital marketing and effectively leverage user-generated content.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the power of UGC and its positive impact on consumer behavior. The results indicate that UGC significantly influences consumer trust in brands, with consumers relying heavily on it during the decision-making process of a purchase. This underscores the importance of credibility and authenticity in UGC, as well as the need for brands to adapt their strategies to meet the expectations of digitally native consumers who are more knowledgeable about the nuances of UGC. By implementing strategies that increase authentically created UGC and ensuring that content overseen by brands is understood by consumers to be altruistic, brands can build stronger connections with their target audience, drive brand loyalty, and have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions.

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