

Naem, Muhammad and Okafor, Sebastian (2019) User-generated content and consumer brand engagement. In: Bowen, Gordon and Ozuem, Wilson, (eds.) Leveraging computer-mediated marketing environments. IGI Global, Pennsylvania, US, pp. 193-220.

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Chapter 9

User-Generated Content and Consumer Brand Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Debates on the importance of user-generated content (UGC) and consumer brand engagement have increasingly gained attention amongst researchers, practitioners, marketing managers, and business leaders. UGC is a concept popularized in the 21st century with the advent and rise of Web 2.0 technology. Web 2.0 has gained recognition due to its novel features that include openness, participation, and the facilitation of the creation and sharing of content. It revolutionized interactions amongst people, and users are now able to share and create personalized content on the internet instead of merely using the content available. The primary objective of this chapter is to evaluate the influence of UGC on consumer brand engagement and discuss its impact on customers and organizational marketing practices.

INTRODUCTION

User Generated Content (henceforth UGC) which is alternatively known as ‘user created content’ is content published by users on various online platforms (Shneiderman, Preece & Pirolli, 2011). UGC has been described as content created by a consortium or an individual and published through diverse online platforms (McNally et al., 2012). Leung (2009) notes that UGC is any form of content that is developed by users of a service or system and published openly on an associated online platform or system. Most traditional UGC definitions describe the importance of online platforms and technologies that support the generation of such content. These online platforms and technologies are forms of social media, social computing, Web 2.0, collective action tools, social Web, read/write Web, consumer-generated media, virtual communities, computer-mediated communication, online communities, and socio-technical systems (Shneiderman, Preece & Pirolli, 2011). However, prior research presents a clear restriction upon the definition of UGC: when any user copies any content and uploads or posts it on a social media

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7344-9.ch009

application then he/she is not creating new content or fulfilling the criteria for UGC. UGC is something which generates the content with transformativity or originality or a combination of both (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Other researchers have highlighted the fact that UGC became popular in 2005. UGC comprises various forms of media content that should meet three conditions. The content must be published on any social networking sites or website; it must be created outside professional practices and routines and it needs to highlight some unique or creative effort (Kumar et al., 2016). However, most social media applications are used with the purpose of forwarding the copied content of others. All types of social media have their own culture, norms, architectures and unique features. Users visit social media sites with different intentions and interact in diverse ways. McNally et al. (2012) describe the various forms of UGC such as audio, multimedia productions, individual texts, images, and videos. These are distributed through Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, and personal blogs. They are also distributed across software applications or modifications that are generated to operate within hardware platforms or in existing databases (e.g. game or virtual world modifications, iPhone apps, and utilities that influence publicly available databases); and informal or formal groups that generate and disseminate UGC (such as Linex or Apache, open source software, and Wikipedia).

It has become necessary for nations to make a policy framework in order to create and distribute UGC because these contents can bring creative expressions, innovation, and economic growth (Tang, Fang & Wang, 2014). In certain situations, UGC can bring revenue for its creators through voluntary donations, direct payments, content licensed to third parties and advertising revenues. About 80.7 percent of US internet users seriously consider product reviews before making a purchase decision (eMarketer, 2016). Marketing communication using social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr has increasingly gained the attention of many fashion brands, service providers and consumers.

The recent past has witnessed the advent of a new capability acquired by humans. The internet has become omnipresent, enabling users to share newly generated content with other users by delineating their buying intentions, product, and transaction-based experiences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Ozuem, 2016). Content generated by users can be accessed via applications ('apps') or websites viewed by visitors with an internet connection. Such content can include textual comments, video, images, profiles, votes, usernames, 'hearts' and likes and other media (Ryan & Jones, 2012). Adverts however are not considered to be examples of the type of User Generated Content (UGC) seen on social media platforms (Ryan, 2014). Voluntary contributors contribute UGC to increase numbers and support each other, generating new content that involves a wide range of creative media. Other users co-create such content beyond the prevailing professional traditional environments. UGC as a concept was popularised in the early 21st century with the advent of "Web 2.0" (Charlesworth, 2014).

Web 2.0 has brought about dramatic changes, often characterised by participation, openness, and sharing. This has revolutionised interactions amongst people and users are now able to share and create personalised content on the internet instead of simply using content already available (Weiger et al., 2011). UGC has rapidly evolved as a result of Web 2.0 and has also increased the participation of users in creating such content (Wan & Ren, 2017; Ozuem et al., 2016). Its popularity is increasing because users can create audio, video, text, and other files on the internet and share content with each other on platforms like YouTube, Blogs, Twitter and Facebook, amongst others (Goh et al., 2013). Due to the growth in popularity of sophisticated mobile phone cameras, the creation of video content on the internet has increased exponentially (Kim et al. 2010; Ozuem & Mulloo, 2016).

UGC in the context of social media can be defined as the sum of all ways of supporting the sharing of unique content by using social media applications (Kumar et al., 2016; Kim & Johnson, 2016).

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