



Article

The Content Effectiveness of User-Generated Content on the Purchasing Decisions of Consumers

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Abstract: The paper investigated the relationship between User-Generated Content (UGC) effectiveness and its influence on Filipino consumers' purchasing decisions. While the role of UGC in marketing was acknowledged, limited research explored its impact in the Philippines. The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between UGC content effectiveness, specifically content information richness and content trustworthiness to purchasing decisions. The result aligned with previous studies highlighting the importance of credibility and informative content within UGC. The study offered valuable insights for businesses operating in the Philippines. UGC presented an economical and impactful marketing strategy, fostering brand trust, credibility, and consumer connection. Recommendations included encouraging customer UGC creation and strategically utilizing various social media platforms. The research also highlighted the need to explore UGC's effectiveness further within specific industries and social media landscapes.

Keywords: digital marketing, small business, social media, user-generated content

1. Introduction

User-generated content (UGC) has reinvented marketing by affecting brand perception, engagement, and trust by engaging the end-users or consumers (Lariba, 2023). The goal of every business is to expand its brand and make brand recall, and awareness seem plausible on the business's end, and here enters the purpose of marketing. Murphy (2005) and Groenross et al. (2013) argue that marketing has no strategic role in businesses. However, in their book, Kotler et al. (2016) created a framework for how marketing management has a strategic role in the organization. This is why business firms, whether small or large, engaged in marketing activities, most commonly integrated marketing communication to enhance customer experience that leads to customer acquisition and retention. Customer experience is not only limited to handling complaints or returning products. It is beyond that. It is customer experience. Barnes, Mattsson, and Sorensen (2014) characterized this concept as a cohesive occurrence and the ongoing assessment process by customers of a product or brand. It is all about the overall experience that gave birth to the concept of UGC.

UGC is a phenomenon that happens in modern-day marketing. OECD (2007) defined UGC as content publicly available for the public on the Internet, content that more or less reflects creative endeavor, and content created outside of professionals and practitioners. Negoro et al. (2020) found that UGCs can build a solid community that allows people with the same interests to come together. Zhang (2015) argued that UGC may pose a problem for businesses since businesses will not have any control over the contents of the user. However, UGC has the potential to humanize brands and make them more relatable to consumers (Lariba, 2023). As an example, Mukoma and Oyugi (2016, as cited in Lariba, 2023) gave a scenario where a small coffee shop sharing user-generated photos of customers dining in their café on social media shows a sense of authenticity and connection

on a personal level. On the other hand, Zhang and Sarvary's (2015) findings show that user-generated content puts a firm position in the business's positioning and differentiation.

The research aims to uncover the relationship between the content effectiveness of UGC and the purchasing decisions of potential customers in the Philippine market. There is a gap in the literature regarding UGC and how it can be utilized in the Philippines. Businesses fail to capitalize on UGC in terms of affecting the purchasing decisions of potential buyers. UGC is important to study in the Philippines because of the rise of digital marketing and the country's social media usage. According to Kemp (2024), 86.98 million internet users are in the Philippines. In addition to that, there are 86.75 million social media users in the Philippines. That is almost 75% of the population. In a global setting, Dean (2021, as cited in Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022) discovered that there are almost 5 billion regular users of social media worldwide. Increasing use of UGC was also noted in the same study.

Statement of the Research Problem

The researcher would like to examine the relationship between the content effectiveness of user-generated content and its influence on consumers' purchasing decisions in the Philippines. This can address whether UGC can be an effective marketing communication tool that positively influences consumers' purchasing decisions. As discussed in related literature, for UGC to be effective, three characteristics must follow content trustworthiness, content valence, and content information richness (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). This leads to the research problem: Does the effectiveness of user-generated content affect consumers' purchasing decisions?

Research Objectives

On a more specific note, the following are the research objectives of the study:

1. UGC's content valence affects consumers' purchasing decisions.
2. UGC's content trustworthiness affects consumers' purchasing decisions.
3. The effect of content information richness of UGC on the purchasing decisions of consumers

Review of Related Literature

Regular, non-paid content creators create user-generated content or the public rather than paid professionals or an agency (Daugherty et al., 2008). The important part for content to be considered as UGC is that it is done on an amateur level, or there is no exchange of products or services and monetary values. UGC, according to Lariba (2023), has a vital role in building credibility and trust in brands. The reason behind this is that people see UGC, in general, as more authentic and genuine. Moreover, Lariba (2023) concluded that UGC greatly humanizes brands and makes them more relatable to consumers.

Content Effectiveness of UGC. In their paper, Al-Abdallah and Jumaa (2022) concluded that for UGC to be influential in content and influence, three textual characteristics must be present: content trustworthiness, valence, and content information richness.

The researcher agreed with Petty & Wegener (1998, as cited in Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022) that content trustworthiness is a construct encompassing its source's credibility and the information's believability. There is a rising number of content creators. In the Philippines, top content creators gather millions of followers and views. It drives brands to partner with them, albeit it does not necessarily fall under the category of UGC because of the monetary exchange. However, it shows the importance of the credibility and trustworthiness of the content and the creator. Warner-Söderholm et al. (2018, as cited in Sonninen, 2023) reinforce the importance of trust by saying, "Trust is the foundation of all communication." Moturu and Liu (2010) described the three elements that make a social media post trustworthy: reputation, performance, and appearance. Content trustworthiness contributes to UGC's content effectiveness. Hence, the researcher, using a 5% level of significance, proposed the hypothesis:

H1: Content Trustworthiness of UGC influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

The second characteristic of UGC's content effectiveness is content valence. Content Valence pertains to the inherent or negative sentiment, emotion, attitude, or appraisal toward a brand or product that may be illustrated via the negative or positive use of terms (Goh et al., 2013, as cited in Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). Content valence is about how the UGC made the person feel. The researcher examined whether that emotion also extends to the brand UGC is posting about. In another study, their findings pointed out that users do not only look for positive reviews regarding their purchase intention. Users intentionally look for negative reviews as well before making a purchase decision. Hence, the researcher, using a 5% level of significance, proposed the hypothesis:

H2: Content Valence of UGC influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

The last characteristic is content information richness. Content information richness is practically a measurement of communication effectiveness (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). It defines the quantity and quality of data about the features, experience, and benefits of the brand and other important information that improves the overall usage of consumers (Daft & Langel, 1986, as cited in Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). Content information richness is a factor in eWOM or electronic word of mouth. eWOM (an alternative term for UGC) depends on the content richness of a particular post for it to be effective. This is validated in the recent study by Liu et al. (2024), which found that information richness contributed to the consumer behavior of posting reviews online. However, a study by Li et al. (2022) suggests that information richness somehow negatively influences public engagement, specifically in the health field. Hence, the researcher, using a 5% level of significance, proposed the hypothesis:

H3: Content Information Richness of UGC influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

Digital marketing paved the way for the accessibility of information due to the presence of social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and, recently, TikTok. Digital marketing uses technologies to help marketing activities improve customer knowledge by matching their needs (Chaffey, 2013, as cited in Bala & Verma, 2018). Social media usage also contributes to the rising number of UGCs. In the past, FGC or firm-generated content was utilized more than UGC. However, at present, UGCs are more popular than FGCs. You and Joshie (2020) found that UGC is good at customer acquisition. However, FGC is more effective in terms of customer retention.

3. Theoretical Framework

The main goals of a company's marketing efforts boil down to four things: making sure people know about their brand, getting more customers to buy from them, beating out competitors, and keeping customers happy for as long as possible (Kotler et al., 1996). The research used the 4Ps of people, place, promotion, and product regarding marketing management principles. Moreover, as seen in Figure 1, the research will look at how a simple marketing system can be utilized by using UGC.

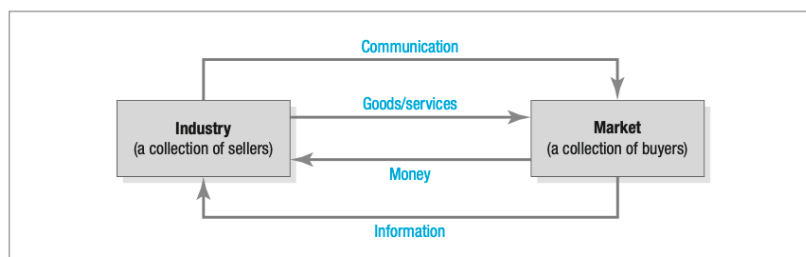


Figure 1. Simple Marketing System (Kotler et al., 2016)

Figure 1 shows how sellers and buyers are connected through four pathways. Seller gives goods, services, and messages to the market. In return, they get money and information, like feedback and sales data, from the buyer. The inner loop exchanges money for goods and services, while the outer loop exchanges information.

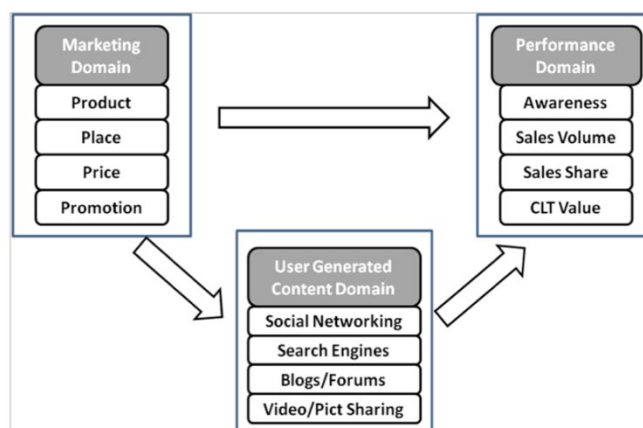


Figure 2. UGC Connectedness to Marketing Activities (Koch et al, 2012)

UGC is about two-way communication between the customer and the brand that allows more engagement in a more authentic way (Lariba, 2023). UGC allows small businesses to develop a simple marketing system (Alzaanin, 2020). That is why the researcher aims to define UGC and its role in improving the brand awareness, recall, and brand equity of the business for its consumers.

In addition, Koch et al. (2012) highlighted a theoretical framework in their research paper. The framework seen in Figure 2 indicates the relationship between user-generated content caused by the marketing domain and performance (Koch et al., 2012, p. 4). The framework connected UGC as a variable between marketing efforts and the business's marketing performance. Hence, in this framework, UGC is a complimentary marketing activity that makes it a more seamless connection among consumers, marketing activities, and the business.

The Koch et al. (2012) framework allows integrated marketing communication through UGC, which can increase brand awareness, sales volume, sales share, and CLT value. However, the research will focus more on the effect of UGC's effectiveness on consumers' purchasing decisions, which the conceptual framework can be seen in Figure 3.

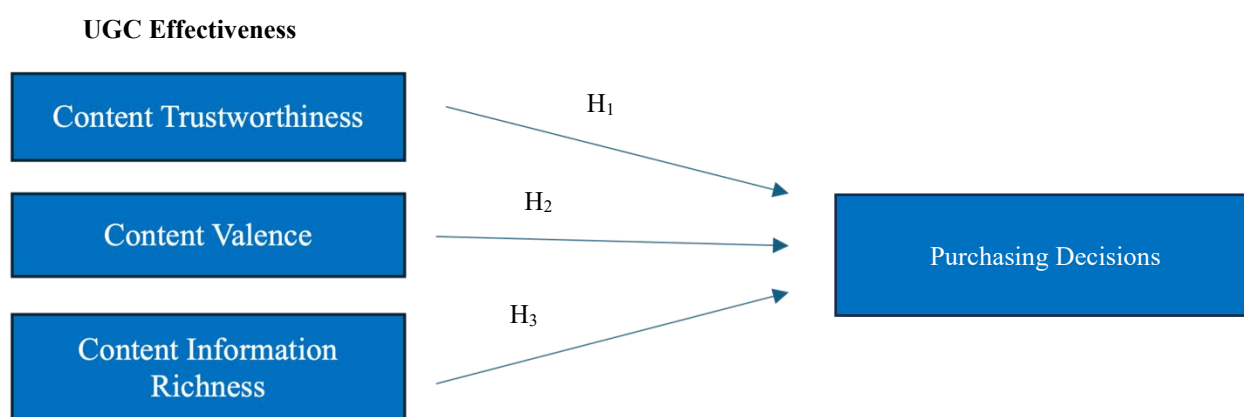


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework based on Al-Abdallah & Jumaa (2022)

Methodology and Data Gathering

The approach encompassed locating as many case study papers as possible within the realm of UGC from academic journals, which predominantly pertain to business, marketing, and UGC. The research used a quantitative approach using descriptive statistics and PLS-SEM to identify the effect of the three constructs of UGC effectiveness and UGC itself on consumers' purchasing decisions. PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to maximize explained variance and its prediction-oriented nature. Moreover, PLS-SEM effectively deals with datasets of limited sample size with robustness. As per Hair et al. (2019), PLS-SEM effectively analyzes the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and can provide a clearer picture of the strength of that relationship and its statistical significance. Constructs were formed from different literature. Validity and reliability are good, as seen in Table 1. Regarding the sampling design, 84 respondents met the criteria of a person using social media regularly. A power analysis was conducted to ensure the study could detect a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.5$) with 80% power and a significance level of 0.05. This yielded a minimum sample size of 84 participants. The minimum age of the respondents is 18 years old to avoid having respondents with a weaker purchasing power to garner a more accurate result. The researcher used the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin test to establish sampling adequacy. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin=0.860 means that the sampling is adequate.

The researcher conducted the survey questions using Google Forms, which was mainly online. The demographics, education, and age were gathered. The average social media use time per day was also part of the

data gathering. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS. PLS-SEM was computed in Smart PLS 4 as Ringle et al. (2015) suggested to identify the constructs' relationship to the dependent variable.

4. Results and Discussion

This part presents, analyzes, and interprets data to examine the relationship between the effectiveness of user-generated content and its influence on consumers' purchasing decisions in the Philippines. The demographics show that the majority of the respondents (41.5%) belong to the profile of students, working individuals (50.0%), and self-employed participants (3.7%). This is a good representation of respondents because these groups have purchasing power.

In terms of age, the majority of the respondents belong to the group 18-23 years old (42.7%), followed by 24 to 29 years old (28.0%) and 30 to 35 years old (17.1%). In terms of generational terms, most of the respondents are Gen Z and Millennials. The age distribution is significant as it aligns with the demographics most active on social media, thereby impacting the relevance and reach of UGC.

The findings in the Time Spent on social media per day show that more than 60% spend more than 4 hours a day scrolling on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok. The more consumers spend time on social media, the more chance they can encounter a UGC. In addition, Daughterty et al. (2008) discovered that the more consumers spend on social media, the higher the probability that they will create their content. Hence, time spent is vital in the consumption and creation of UGC. This leads to small businesses creating an online environment wherein social media users will be motivated to consume and create more online content (Santos, 2021).

Table 1. *Construct Reliability and Validity*

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho a)	Composite Reliability (rho c)	Average Valence Extracted (AVE)
Content Trustworthiness (CT)	0.77	0.78	0.87	0.69
Content Information Richness (CIR)	0.81	0.83	0.87	0.68
Content Valence (CV)	0.79	0.80	0.88	0.71
Purchasing Decisions (PD)	0.73	0.74	0.88	0.79

Table 1 evaluates where there is internal consistency, reliability, and validity. Hair et al. (2019) suggest using composite reliability. The constructs content trustworthiness (Cronbach's alpha=0.77, Composite Reliability=0.78), content information richness (Cronbach's alpha=0.81, Composite Reliability=0.83), content valence (Cronbach's alpha=0.79, Composite Reliability=0.80) and purchasing decision (Cronbach's alpha=0.73, Composite Reliability=0.74) are high with the composite reliability computed values more 0.74 which is good and acceptable but does not reach 0.95 that deems the values problematic (Hair et al., 2019). The Cronbach's alpha of all the constructs is also high but not too high to deem problematic. Moreover, all the constructs gained a high AVE, which suggests that constructs explain at least 50 percent of the variance of the items (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity has been established; all values are at 0.85 and below.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics*

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Content Trustworthiness (CT)	3.48	1.24	Agree
Content Information Richness (CIR)	3.61	1.06	Agree
Content Valence (CV)	3.55	0.99	Agree

Based on the result, all the constructs got an overall "Agree" response, which means that the respondents initially attribute the constructs to the dependent variable, the purchasing decision. In hindsight, the participants agree that the content effectiveness of UGC affects consumers' purchasing decisions. However, the researcher needs to investigate further the relationship of the three constructs to the purchasing decision regarding the hypotheses. In their paper, Hair et al. (2019) indicated performing factor analysis and removing factor loadings if the value is below 0.708. CT1, CT2, CT4, and CT5 were removed from Content Trustworthiness. CV 2 and CV4 were removed from Content Valence. CIR1 was removed from Content Information Richness. PD1, PD3, PD4, and PD6 were removed from Purchasing Decisions.

Table 3 shows the relationships among variables. The path coefficient (β), t-value, and p-value indicate the presence and direction of the relationship between cause and effect (Hair et al., 2019, as cited by Viernes and Pasco, 2023), while the effect size reflects the strength of the relationship (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Hair et al., 2019; Funder & Ozer, 2019), which can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationships among Variables

	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Indication
CIR → PD	0.363	3.69	0.00	0.147	Significant positive impact on PD.
CV → PD	0.180	1.45	0.15	0.038	Relationship is weak and statistically insignificant.
CT → PD	0.284	1.15	0.01	0.121	Significant positive impact on PD.

Content Information Richness to Purchasing Decisions of Consumers

Table 3 shows that content information richness has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchasing decisions: $\beta = 0.363$, $t = 3.69$, $p = 0.00$, $f^2 = 0.147$. The relationship has a p-value ($p = 0.00$) less than 0.05. The researcher accepts that UGC's H3 Content Information influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

UGC's content information richness influences consumers' purchasing decisions at a 5% significance level. The result is the same as the findings of Al-Abdallah and Jumaa (2022), that content information richness significantly affects consumer buying behavior or purchasing decisions. Information richness is significant in purchasing because consumers appreciate the product or brand used or tested in real-life situations. If a UGC adds value to the consumer, it is more likely that the UGC can influence the consumer to buy the brand or product. Another research confirmed that information richness exerted a positive regulatory effect on the relationship between the retrospective and prospective information and the breadth of public participation (Li et al., 2022, as cited by Liu et al., 2024).

Content Valence to Purchasing Decisions of Consumers

Table 3 shows that content valence is weak and has an insignificant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions: $\beta = 0.180, t = 1.45, p = 0.15, f^2 = 0.040$. The relationship has a p-value ($p > 0.05$). The researcher rejects H2 Content Valence of UGC influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

This interpretation is that UGC's Content Valence does not impact consumers' purchase decisions. The result contrasts the study of You & Joshi (2020), which discovered that valence has a strong positive impact on UGC and customer acquisition. The literature correlates UGC and traditional media. Researchers in a related paper found that the motives of online impression management and emotional appeals are related to each other, and together, they influence users' motivations to achieve the desired goals (Mishra & Maheswarappa, 2018).

Given the majority of the respondents, Gen Zs and Millennials, the researcher uncovered that the UGC's emotional messaging does not affect purchasing behavior. As other literature suggests, it may affect customer brand perception but does not influence purchasing decisions.

Content Trustworthiness to Purchasing Decisions of Consumers

Table 3 shows that content trustworthiness significantly positively impacts consumers' purchasing decisions $\beta = 0.284, t = 1.15, p = 0.013, f^2 = 0.121$). The relationship has a p-value ($p = 0.013$) less than 0.05. The researcher accepts that H1 Content Trustworthiness of UGC influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

The result contradicts the findings of Al-Abdallah and Jumaa (2022), who concluded that UGC Trustworthiness has no statistically direct effect on consumer buying behavior. A possible reason is that the former's research was conducted in Iraq, and the culture differs. Their culture is authoritarian, and it influences their consumption of news and social media. While in the Philippines, trustworthiness is vital due to the rampant use of fake news. However, the findings of Aggad and Ahmad (2021) agree with the researchers' finding that trustworthiness, among other constructs, influences consumers' purchase intention. The credibility of the UGC and its content creator is important to move the consumer to buy the product that's being posted.

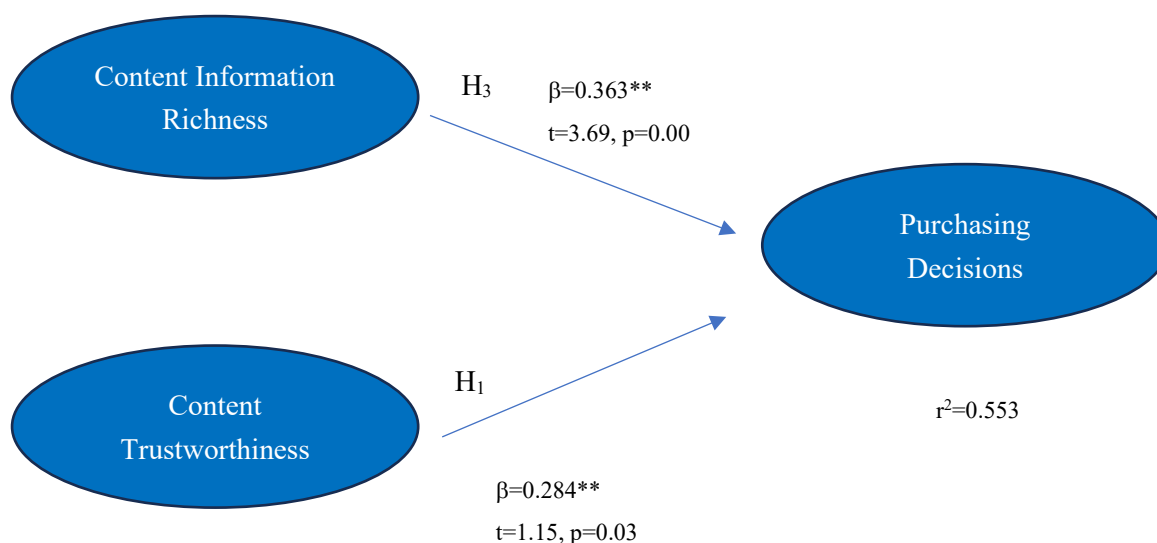


Figure 4. Final Model

5. Conclusion

These findings show that only the richness of content information and trustworthiness significantly impact consumers' purchasing decisions. Content information richness has the most decisive influence on consumers' purchasing decisions. The implication would be for marketers to utilize an informative UGC that can add value to consumers regarding the trustworthiness of the UGC and its content creator. Trust is an important factor when promoting a brand and a product.

The result also explains why "cancel culture" is customary in the social media realm. Building a credible social media environment is crucial for brands and content creators. Hence, brands must be particular and stringent in UGC content creators they will trust. The research concludes that the positive interaction effect between UGC volume and traditional media on customer acquisition and retention implies that "how much is said" is more important than "how good is said" by consumers to exert synergies with traditional advertising on consumer purchases (You & Joshi, 2020). UGC is essential in improving brand trust, credibility, authenticity, and emotional bridge among consumers (Lariba, 2023).

Regarding businesses, the managerial implication is to create strategies to encourage customers to create UGC for the brand. Stube et al. (2011) found out that one of the motivations of UGC content creator is to "share their experiences." Nowadays, social media users would like to share with their friends or audience how they enjoy their food, travel, or opinions (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). UGC is also economical for businesses to promote their products or services. Businesses will not be spending anything from UGC, unlike creating FGC or firm-generated content and traditional media marketing such as mass media marketing.

However, there are concerns about UGC's ability to identify customers' needs (Timoshenko, 2018). It is an excellent tool, but some consumers, especially boomers, are not into UGC and social media because of the technological gap. Businesses should understand their market well to understand whether UGC can fit the market and what they are trying to achieve. Again, the study's findings suggest that UGC effectively influences consumers' purchasing decisions, specifically content information richness and trustworthiness.

Recommendation and Limitation of the Study

Future researchers should recommend broadening the study scope or focusing on specific industries such as food and beverage, fashion, or hospitality. This could give the said industries a tailored-fit application of UGC. This research is a good jumpstart in studying UGC in the Philippine context; however, it needs more improvement. In addition, the researcher suggests conducting a more detailed study of how specific social media platforms perform in terms of UGC. The researcher also suggests using more respondents to understand better how certain groups of people respond to UGC. Moreover, the researcher recommends that businesses utilize UGC to improve their brand equity, brand awareness, and brand loyalty. UGC is inexpensive and effective in improving a business's overall brand image. It is more authentic and natural. That is why businesses nowadays tap so-called micro-influencers. Also, other users tend to relate more to content created by other users because it is a realistic approach.

Finally, the recommendation is for the academe to explore UGC more and help educate students and soon-to-be entrepreneurs or marketers to have a solid foundation for maximizing and using UGC. UGC has different facets and applications, so it is good to have a theoretical and industry approach to studying the subject matter.

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