

The role of user-generated content (UGC) in enhancing digital marketing strategies to increase Brand Awareness

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Abstract

As UGC becomes more prevalent, understanding why consumers are drawn to create content becomes increasingly important, especially as the media industry moves toward a user-centric model of consumption. Identifying motivational sources that influence the formation of consumer attitudes toward UGC also may result in a more robust predictive model of audience behavior, which is increasingly important to both scholars and industry professionals. As a result, it is imperative to gain an understanding of how consumer attitudes interact with motivational sources for the creation of UGC to recognize how such content might benefit advertisers and marketers. User-Generated Content (UGC) has revolutionized digital marketing by empowering consumers to actively participate in brand storytelling. This study examines the role of UGC in enhancing digital marketing strategies, with a particular focus on its impact on brand awareness. Consumer generated media encompasses opinions, experiences, advice and commentary about products, brands, companies and services-usually informed by personal experience-that exist in consumer-created postings on Internet discussion boards, forums and blogs. CGM can include text, images, photos, videos, podcasts and other forms of media. (Sandeep,2008) Despite UGC's extraordinary growth, advertisers and agencies remain hesitant to embrace this unproven media wholeheartedly, citing concerns such as fear of intruding on a "consumer" environment, a lack of understanding of UGC users and their behaviors, and lack of control over the context in which their advertising gets exhibited. In summary, advertisers' wait-and-see attitude toward this new media seems mostly due to a lack of understanding of the characteristics and functioning of this new media. (Sandeep,2008) The findings of this research will contribute to the growing discourse on digital marketing by providing a deeper understanding of how UGC influences brand awareness. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this research aims to highlight the transformative power of UGC in shaping modern digital marketing landscapes.

Keywords

User-generated content, Digital marketing strategies, Brand awareness.

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Introduction:

In the digital age, the rise of social media and online platforms has transformed the way brands interact with consumers. Traditional marketing strategies, once dominated by brand-controlled narratives, have evolved into more interactive and consumer-driven approaches. One of the most influential elements in this shift is User-Generated Content (UGC) content created by consumers rather than brands. UGC includes social media posts, reviews, testimonials, blogs, videos, and other forms of content shared by users, often showcasing their personal experiences with a brand. This phenomenon has reshaped digital marketing, providing brands with an organic, authentic, and highly engaging means of communication.

Brand awareness, a fundamental goal of digital marketing, refers to the extent to which consumers recognize and recall a brand. In a crowded digital marketplace, achieving high levels of brand awareness is crucial for consumer trust, loyalty, and purchasing decisions. UGC plays a pivotal role in this process by amplifying brand reach, fostering community engagement, and enhancing credibility through peer recommendations. Unlike traditional advertisements, which consumers often perceive as promotional, UGC is considered more trustworthy and relatable. Studies indicate that consumers are more likely to engage with and trust content created by their peers, making UGC a powerful tool for enhancing brand visibility. This study explores the role of UGC in digital marketing strategies aimed at increasing brand

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awareness. Specifically, it examines how brands effectively leverage consumer-generated content, the impact of UGC on consumer perceptions and engagement, and the challenges brands face in managing and utilizing this content. Using an applied research approach, this study analyzes real-world brand campaigns, consumer behaviors, and engagement metrics to provide actionable insights into the effectiveness of UGC-driven strategies.

Problem Statement:

- 1- Although UGC has become one of the major tools in digital marketing, there are challenges related to content management and quality checking. The research asks the following questions:
- 2- How does user-generated content affect consumer trust in a brand?
- 3- What is the role of UGC in enhancing digital engagement on social media platforms?
- 4- How do successful brands use UGC in their marketing campaigns?
- 5- Does UGC significantly increase brand awareness?

Aims and Objectives:

- 1- Analyze the role of UGC in building consumer trust in a brand.
- 2- Identify the relationship between UGC and increased engagement with digital content.
- 3- Understand how major brands exploit user-generated content in their marketing campaigns.

Hypothesis and Methodologies:

- 1- UGC enhances brand credibility and increases consumer confidence in it.
- 2- There is a positive relationship between the use of UGC and increased engagement rates with digital content.
- 3- Brands that rely on UGC achieve better results in digital marketing compared to brands that do not use it.
- 4- Using UGC can contribute to increasing brand awareness.

The study has adopted the descriptive analytical approach to evaluate the impact of UGC on brands.

Research Importance:

This research is important because it highlights innovative strategies for digital marketing through user-generated content and provides guidance on how to leverage it to increase customer loyalty and sales. It also helps in understanding the impact of this content on the brand image.

Theoretical Framework:

1. User-generated content (UGC)

User-generated content (also known as consumer-generated content) is a powerful way for marketers to increase brand awareness. The expression "User-Generated Content" gained widespread recognition in the mid-2000s, especially in journalism and social media discussions. (Diana,2023)

The term UGC can also define content that is voluntarily developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through an online platform. (McKenzie,2012)

UGC may also be result of the combination of different sources: a person, a group of people, a multitude, a topic (such as a hashtag search) or even automated gathering and generating mechanisms (such as bots, crawlers, algorithms, feeds etc.) could be behind the generation of content. In other words, individual content, to be considered UGC, not necessarily must be meaningful on its own, it may be the result of different combinations that might involve different bits of content or different formats (or both). In the end such bits of content are meaningful to someone or something. (Marcelo,2021)

In the UGC media environment, consumers produce, design, publish, or edit content that makes this medium vibrant and attractive. Consumers thus sit at the center of a UGC advertiser's strategy planning process, because the media would be a barren land for advertising without the active participation of consumers. (Sandeep,2008)

One of the great advantages of user-generated content is that the content is created by another person, endorser, customer, or social media fan rather than the brand itself, so it carries more weight as word-of-mouth promotion. This content includes various forms such as social media posts, photos, videos, video clips, images, and other forms.

User-generated content is a great way to humanize your brand and show people the human side behind your product or service. It can make you more approachable as a brand, more likable, and ultimately more sellable.

2. Understanding Brand Awareness

2.1. Definition of Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is a fundamental concept that delves into the extent of familiarity individuals possess towards a particular brand; this familiarity directly correlates with the likelihood of consumers considering the purchase of products affiliated with said brand. The perception of a brand as being reliable and widely recognized significantly heightens consumer interest in engaging with the brand through purchasing its offerings. Furthermore, the ease with which a brand is recollected by individuals plays a pivotal role in

shaping consumer preferences, potentially leading them to favor the brand over competing alternatives, even in the absence of extensive knowledge regarding its attributes. Brand Awareness consists of: (Chakkaravarthy,2024)

- Brand Recognition – The ability of consumers to recognize a brand when they see its logo, name, or colors.
- Brand Recall – The ability of consumers to remember a brand without any external prompts.

High brand awareness means a brand is top-of-mind when consumers consider making a purchase.

2.2. Factors Influencing Brand Awareness

- Consistency in Branding (logos, slogans, packaging)
- Social Media Engagement (shares, likes, comments)
- Influencer and Peer Recommendations
- Word-of-Mouth Marketing
- Advertising and Content Marketing

UGC plays a significant role in these factors by providing authentic, consumer-driven content that increases visibility and credibility.

3. Types of User-Generated Content (UGC)

There are many types of user-generated content, the most important of which are:

3.1. Text Content

This is one of the simplest types of content, as users write and share their experience using a particular product or service on their personal accounts. This type often contains a lot of detail due to its ease of production.

3.2. Carousel or Image Content

This content consists of a collection of images of the product and is easier to create than other types of video content. This type of content is used to showcase services or products that are in high demand by the public. It often includes customer reviews and real-life images of the product after purchase, which increases the credibility of the product and the customer experience.

3.3. Video Content

This type is the most popular worldwide and achieves the highest rates of engagement among audiences. Therefore, most companies rely on it to promote their new products in an attractive manner and with various presentation methods. There are multiple forms of video production, such as animation, 3D and 2D designs, as well as video reviews provided by specialized content creators and regular users.

3.4. VLOG Content

Vlog is an English term that is an abbreviation of the two English words "Video Blog" and refers to visual content, i.e., content created using video. It is content provided by a person called a "vlogger," and it is a diary or personal experience. The vlogger documents their experience with a product or service without excessive editing in these videos, and they are posted on their social media platforms, linking to the company's account, which quickly influences the audience using the product.

4. How UGC Enhances Brand Awareness

4.1. Increase Reach and Visibility

UGC allows brands to expand their reach beyond traditional marketing channels. When consumers share content about a brand, it reaches their network of friends and followers, leading to increased exposure.

For example:

- Hashtag campaigns (e.g., Nike's #JustDoIt) encourage users to share their experiences, generating thousands of organic posts.
- Customer review platforms like Yelp and Google Reviews boost search rankings and brand visibility.
- It is one of the most successful hashtag campaigns because it gains extensive user engagement. The significant advantage of the #JustDoIt campaign is user-generated content that appears on social media platforms every day.



Figure (1) represents User-generated content #JustDoIt on Instagram.³²

4.2. Authenticity and Trust:

Consumers perceive UGC as more authentic than traditional advertisements. Authenticity strengthens

Example:



Figure (2) represents One of the cameras of GoPro brand.³³

4.3. Emotional Connection with the Audience:

UGC fosters an emotional connection between consumers and brands. When people see others sharing genuine experiences, they feel a sense of community and belonging. This emotional engagement enhances brand recall and encourages new customers to explore the brand.

4.4. UGC and Social Proof:

Social proof refers to the psychological tendency of consumers to follow the actions of others. When potential customers see positive experiences shared by real users, they are more likely to trust and recognize the brand.

Examples of social proof include:

- Customer reviews and testimonials on e-commerce sites.
- Influencer UGC collaborations where influencers showcase real product usage.
- Unboxing videos and product demonstrations on YouTube.

4.5. SEO Benefits of UGC:

UGC improves search engine rankings, making a brand more discoverable online. Customer reviews, social media engagement, and blog posts generate fresh, keyword-rich content, which search engines favor.

Example:

- TripAdvisor's user reviews contribute to higher search rankings, making the platform a

brand credibility, leading to higher consumer trust and engagement.

go-to source for travel recommendations.

5. Benefits of User-Generated Content (UGC)

5.1. Unique and distinctive content:

Some marketers go to great lengths to create perfect advertising content that showcases a product's features, believing this is what consumers want to see to motivate them to purchase. However, consumers are looking for more than just authenticity.

5.2. Increased trust and brand loyalty:

User-generated content strengthens brand loyalty among consumers and makes them feel like they are more than just sales numbers. This happens when consumers share their personal experiences with products and the brand interacts with them, deepening the relationship between the company and its customers and increasing trust. Continuous interaction strengthens the brand's image among customers and makes them more loyal to the company.

5.3. Low cost:

Many companies spend a lot of money designing media and advertising campaigns across all digital or compatible platforms, while UGC is very low cost because the user is responsible for creating and sharing this content. The company may even promote it if it is attractive and motivates customers to purchase at a low cost.

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5.4. Influencing Consumer Purchasing Decisions:

When you purchase a product after seeing someone else wearing it or ordering a meal at a restaurant after noticing it at a neighboring table, this indicates that you were influenced by their story. This is because people tend to imitate each other's actions, and companies can exploit this to influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

6. Challenges in Implementing UGC:

Despite its advantages, brands face challenges such as:

- **Content Moderation:** Filtering inappropriate or off-brand content.
- **Brand Consistency:** Ensuring UGC aligns with brand messaging.
- **Intellectual Property Issues:** Addressing copyright concerns with user-submitted content.

Case Study:

User-generated content (UGC) has revolutionized digital marketing by allowing consumers to create and share content related to brands. This case study explores how leading global brands have successfully leveraged UGC to enhance brand awareness, engage their audience, and drive marketing success.

First Campaign:

Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" Campaign is a multinational marketing campaign of Coca-Cola at 2011. It debrands the traditional Coke logo,

replacing "Coca-Cola" from one side of a bottle with the phrase "Share a Coke with" followed by a person's name.

The campaign, which uses a list containing 250 of each market country's most popular names (generic nicknames and titles are also used in some cases), aims to have people go out and find a bottle with their name on it, then share it with their friends.

How UGC was used:

- Consumers were motivated to purchase personalized Coke bottles with their own names or the names of their friends.
- They shared photos of themselves with bottles on social media platforms using hashtags like #ShareACoke.
- Coca-Cola encouraged users to upload their photos, turning the campaign into a global success and increasing audience engagement with the brand.

Results:

- The campaign helped boost social media engagement, with millions of photos shared by users.
- Brand awareness increased significantly, and Coca-Cola was able to achieve a high level of brand loyalty.
- The campaign began in Australia in 2011 then rolled out in over 80 countries.



Figure (3) represents samples of the different names on Coca-Cola bottles.³⁴

Second Campaign:

Starbucks' White Cup Contest allowed customers to design their cups, increasing emotional investment in the brand.

In April of 2014, Starbucks launched the White Cup Contest, inspired by the photos posted to social media sites of customers doodles on their mostly white Starbucks paper cups, Starbucks decided to take things one step further.

How UGC was used:

Starbucks encouraged their customers to doodle

away, post a photo of the finished product to Twitter or Instagram with #WhiteCupContest, and the winner would have their design printed on a limited-edition Starbucks reusable plastic cup. The contest generated nearly 4,000 entries in just three weeks and changed the winner's life.

Results:

Starbucks has sold millions of reusable cups globally since the launch of the campaign. Social media engagement spiked, with the hashtag #WhiteCupContest generating over 40,000

mentions on Instagram and Twitter combined | during the campaign.



Figure (4) represents samples of customer designs on Starbucks cups.³⁵

Third Campaign:

The “Shot on iPhone” campaign was launched in 2015 as part of Apple’s strategy to promote the iPhone 6s, which featured a new 12-megapixel camera. The campaign aimed to highlight the phone’s impressive photography capabilities by encouraging users to share their photos taken with the device on social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter.

How UGC was used:

- Users shared their iPhone photos with the hashtag #ShotoniPhone.
- Apple selected the best photos and shared them on large billboards and in print and TV ads.
- The campaign demonstrated the capabilities of



Figure (5) represents samples of user’s professional photos with iPhone cameras.³⁶

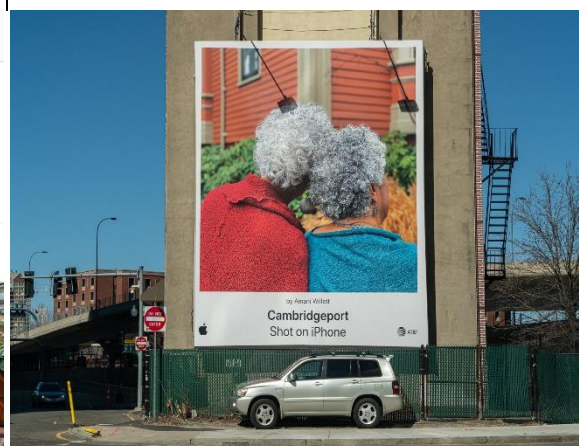
Results:

- 1- User-generated content is a powerful tool for enhancing digital marketing strategies, improving engagement and increasing brand awareness.
- 2- Expect an increase in the level of trust between

iPhone cameras through real user experiences.

Results:

- The campaign demonstrated the ability of iPhone cameras to take professional photos, which increased phone sales.
- User-generated content increased audience confidence in the product by showing real-life results.
- The campaign generated significant buzz on social media, with over 70 million interactions (likes, comments, shares) on Instagram alone. Users enthusiastically participated in the contest, submitting over 100,000 photos and videos.



consumers and the brand when using UGC.

- 3- Boost engagement rates on social media platforms that use UGC.

Recommendations:

- 1- Companies should invest in strategies to motivate consumers to produce content related

to the brand.

- 2- UGC should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy that includes social media, websites, and even traditional media like television and billboards.
- 3- The need to verify the quality of user-generated content before using it in marketing campaigns.
- 4- Develop tools to analyze the impact of UGC on sales and brand awareness.

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