

The effect of user-generated content on consumer-based brand equity of major retailers in the Cape Metropole

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ABSTRACT

Negative and positive views on service and brand quality are generally shared on various social media platforms and are categorised as user-generated content (UGC). Both negative and positive UGC can either damage or enhance a company's reputation or consumer-based brand equity, and this may ultimately have an impact on the organisation's financial performance. This study sought to examine whether UGC does influence consumer-based brand perceptions, and if so, to determine whether negative or positive UGC exerted the most influence on these perceptions. The data for the study was collected using a mono-method quantitative research approach, which included a sample of 513 Generation Y respondents who completed self-administered online questionnaires distributed using Survey Monkey. Data analysis was based on both descriptive and regression models using SPSS version 27. As its major result, the study found that UGC does exert an influence on consumer-based brand equity, while positive UGC exerted a more significant influence than negative UGC. Similarly, both positive and negative UGC had an influence on other brand equity elements, such as brand credibility, brand loyalty and purchase intentions. From a policy perspective, it is imperative for companies to implement strategies or interventions in the form of promotional and information campaigns that enhance positive UGC while at the same time countering negative UGC that is damaging to the business.

Keywords: user-generated content, Generation Y, consumer-based brand equity, response strategies, communication strategy and secondary brand associations.



INTRODUCTION

By definition, brand equity is classified into two broad categories either from a financial or from a consumer perspective (Vinh, 2017:177). The consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework, where the brand value is based on perceptions that are formulated in the mind of the consumer, is more popular than the former category (Winit & Kantabutra, 2022:6). Proponents of this framework argue that brands no longer have complete control over CBBE (Arya et al., 2022:1384), as this one-way process has evolved significantly into a two-way process (He & Zhang, 2022; Ali et al., 2019:150).

Consumers are now generating their own content based on experiences and perceptions, referred to as user-generated content (UGC), and this has disrupted the traditional marketing ecosystem (Park & Lee, 2021:2). Ultimately, brand communication is no longer confined solely to the business-to-consumer interface because of the influence of UGC (Bolton et al., 2019:28). This implies that the balance of communication power is shifting to the consumer end of the marketing channel, since firms are no longer in control of consumer-driven communication activities (Arya et al., 2022:1393). UGC makes the control and measurement of CBBE rather complex, as it is consumer-based and founded on perceptions and human emotions, which ultimately affect purchase intentions (Mayrhofer et al., 2020:173).

Studies that have been conducted to determine the influence of UGC on CBBE include Eusebius (2020), Mishra (2018), Rachna & Khajuria (2017) and Schivinski et al. (2016). Most of these studies were purely qualitative, focused on financial aspects of brand equity and were conducted in regions other than Africa, while very little research on this phenomenon has been conducted on the African continent. In particular, studies pertaining to UGC's influence on CBBE in Africa which are specific to the retail industry are significantly less prevalent (Naeem & Wilson, 2020; Colicev et al., 2018). Using the Generation Y cohort, our study contributes to the body of knowledge by focusing on the CBBE perspective of major retail brands within the Cape Metropole of the Western Cape region of South Africa, which has the second largest concentration of retail businesses in the country (W&R WSP/ATR data, 2020/2021). By definition, Generation Y members are active online users who belong to the age group between 21 and 40 who are conversant with the use of internet-based technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The consumer revolution within the retail sector is currently a very real challenge as retailers battle to deal with the influence of UGC on CBBE. The Wholesale and Retail Sector Skills Plan (W&R SETA, 2021) attributes the key drivers of this revolution to the rapid adoption by consumers of smart mobile devices and digital media, and the following extract encapsulates the changes in the sector: "Gone are the days when a bad shopping experience remains isolated to a customer's circle of friends and family" (W&R SETA, 2021). Many retailers are still unclear on how to adapt their communication strategies around the prevailing increase in UGC, and they continue to pursue a firm-generated content (FGC) approach that is unidirectional, despite its waning effectiveness (Donthu et al., 2021:769). With UGC's influence on consumer perspectives, CBBE is being affected, and impacting on the brand equity of retail brands.

BRAND EQUITY

Brand equity is a concept that originates from the 1980s (Lassar et al., 1995:11; Park & Srinivasan, 1994:271) and has been the subject of numerous and often varied definitions, often dependent on the perspective from which the concept has been defined (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016:33). Brand equity is commonly defined as the attachment of greater value, higher levels of loyalty and increased confidence in a brand compared to competing brands (Winit & Kantabutra, 2022:6; Anabila, 2020:232). It also elicits the willingness of brand loyal consumers to pay more for the brand, relative to competing brands (Castillo et al., 2022:75; Lim et al., 2020:929). Due to the increasing prevalence of UGC, companies are gradually losing control over their brands and reputations online (Chelliah et al., 2022:425).

USER-GENERATED CONTENT (UGC)

A key finding in a study by Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) is that UGC can influence CBBE both positively and negatively. Positive UGC that is created by online users, and that contributes to high levels of engagement, seemingly has the most significant influence on CBBE (Arya et al., 2022:1392; Mishra, 2019:396). Ho-Dac et al. (2013:48) argue in their study that negative UGC only adversely affects the CBBE of weaker brands. Tang et al. (2014:43) in their frequently cited study assert that UGC, specifically mixed-neutral and indifferent-neutral UGC, simply serve to exaggerate and reduce the effect of both positive and negative UGC respectively.

Eckes (2016:32) posits that negative UGC has a negative effect on CBBE and can be regarded as more influential than the marketing mix elements. Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) suggest that UGC needs to be integrated into the marketing strategy of businesses due to its influence on CBBE (Schivinski, 2019:599). Buzeta et al. (2020:94) and Wouters (2016:6) elucidate that both negative and positive UGC alter CBBE, while negative UGC has the greatest influence on CBBE and significantly damages brand reputations, the effects of which are lasting and formidable (Wouters, 2016:6). Lwin (2022:96) and Rachna and Khajuria (2017:7) assert that marketers need to focus and react swiftly when dealing with negative UGC in particular, using both their marketing and branding strategies to negate the influence of negative UGC on CBBE (Buzeta et al., 2020:94).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many retailers are uncertain on how to adapt their communication strategies around the increase in UGC, and the interaction between online consumers and retailers presents numerous challenges for them (Stackla, 2019). There is also a decrease in the ability of traditional marketing approaches to influence consumer decision-making and brand perceptions, as consumers are more trusting of UGC and social media as a source of information (Arya et al., 2022:1392; Stackla, 2019) as opposed to traditional media sources. Therefore, a greater likelihood exists that consumers will be influenced by UGC as opposed to FGC, especially from sources that are familiar to them when making purchasing decisions (Mayrhofer et al., 2019:173; Ahn et al., 2014:43). As the volume of both positive and negative UGC is steadily increasing, thus altering CBBE, the study endeavoured to determine whether positive or negative UGC has an effect on the CBBE of consumers, or none at all.

HYPOTHESIS

In line with the above discussion and with specific reference to the findings of Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013) and Christodoulides et al. (2012), the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

Studies outlined in the literature review above suggest that a correlation exists between UGC and CBBE. Schivinski et al. (2016:202) and Bruhn et al. (2012:770) displayed evidence of the positive influence of UGC on CBBE dimensions.

This study therefore hypothesised that UGC exerts a positive influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. As the influence of UGC on CBBE can be both positive or negative, the following hypothesis was also developed:

H2: UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of major retailers in the Cape Metropole.

UGC can be either positive or negative: while positive UGC emanates from positive consumer experiences, negative UGC originates from unsatisfactory consumer experiences (Hornik et al., 2015:273). Estrella-Ramon et al. (2019:8) confirm that negative UGC has a negative effect on brand attitudes, which negatively influences CBBE.

As this study hypothesised that UGC can exert either a positive or a negative influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole, the following null hypothesis has been developed:

H0: UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

Limited literature exists in which the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE has been measured (Tang et al., 2014:43). Bruhn et al. (2012:782) assert that UGC by its very nature can be regarded as a neutral form of communication, as it is seemingly mostly devoid of any firm influence.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The user-generated communication framework (UGCF) model shown in Figure 1.1 was used as the conceptual framework of this study to illustrate the relationship between UGC and CBBE within the retail industry. The conceptual framework is based on two main variables with UGC being the independent variable as it is theoretically assumed to have a causal effect on CBBE and has been confirmed in studies done in other regions. UGC is also regarded as a form of communication that is out of the ambit of control of the company, hence its classification as an independent variable (Schivinski et al., 2016:190). As CBBE is the primary variable of interest, it is affected by variances in the composition of UGC, i.e., negative or positive. Thus, CBBE is regarded as the dependent variable (Saunders et al., 2019:190). A sample size of 513 was used to assess the causal relationship between these two variables (Hallgren et al., 2018:12).

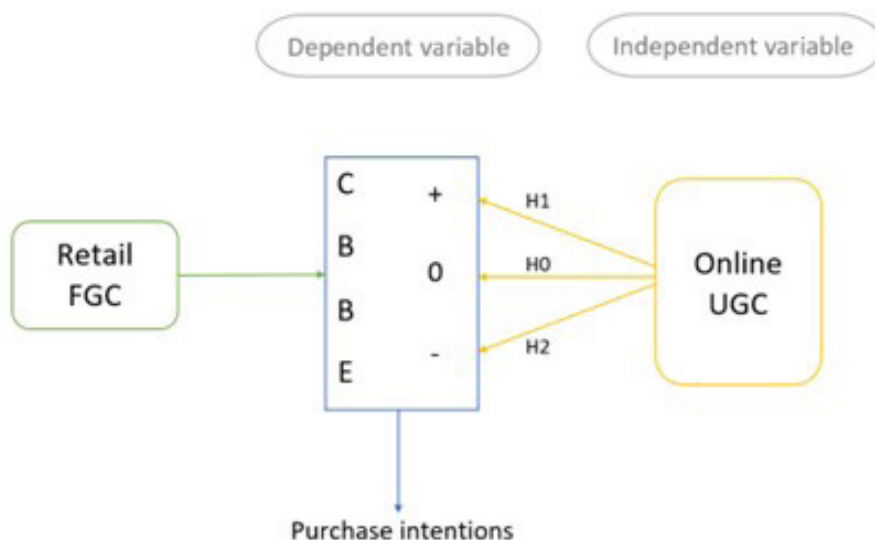


FIGURE 1: USER-GENERATED COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK (UGCF)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

A mono-method research methodology was used for this study (Saunders et al., 2019:179), with the adoption of a probability sampling technique, which aligned well with previously executed brand equity studies (Hussain & Ahmed, 2020). The use of the survey method as a research strategy for this study was well justified, as it is highly versatile for collecting primary data (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:243). The survey strategy is also well suited for collecting large amounts of information on motives, opinions, attitudes and intentions of both consumers and enterprises (Saunders et al., 2019:193).

The target population for this study was composed of members of Generation Y who are online shoppers, active on social media, and reside in the Cape Metropole.

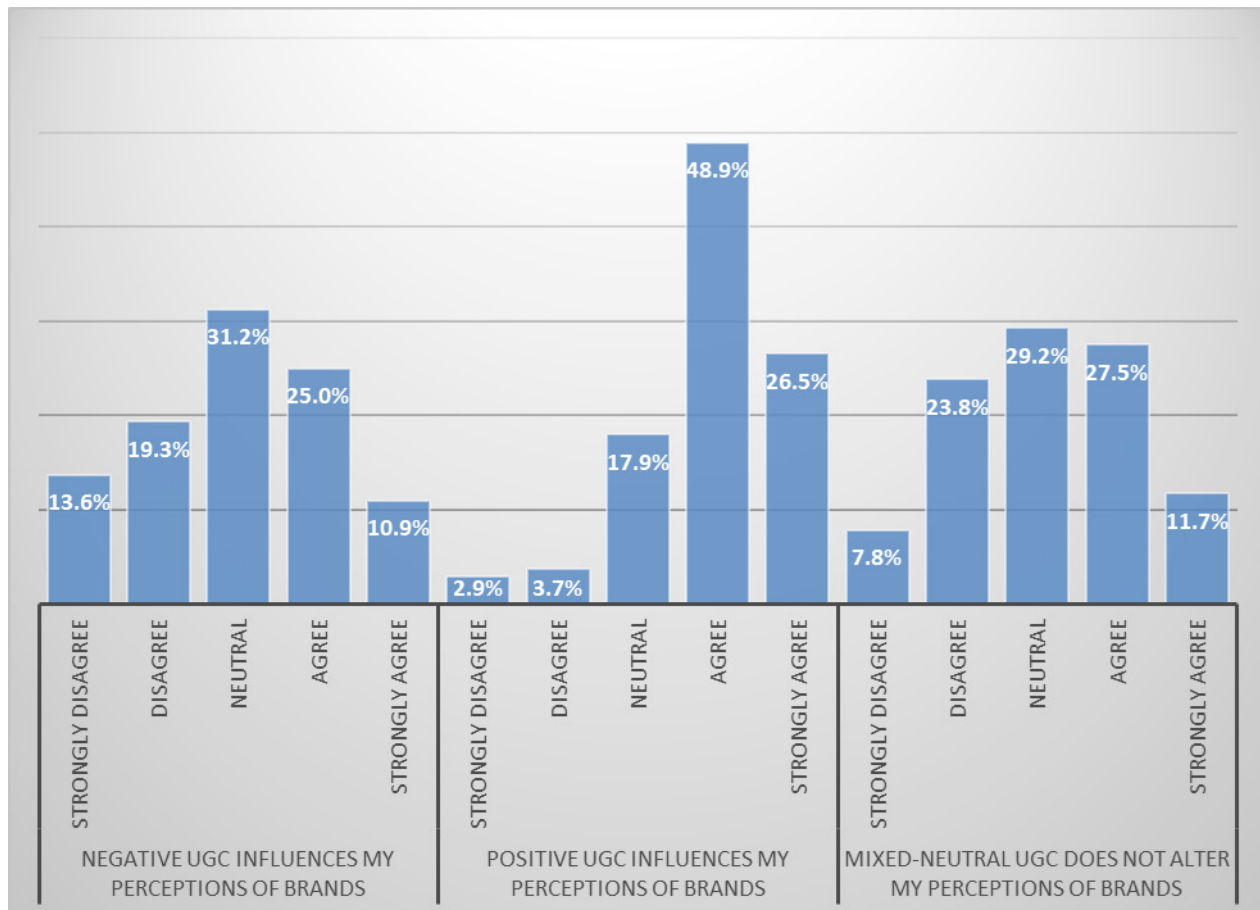
The sampling frame for this quantitative study was drawn from a database consisting of 40 000 respondents which was procured from a commercial syndicated market research company. The database is robust, demographically representative, and is the largest in South Africa. Database members are not self-selected, and a rigorous recruitment and registration process is maintained. Pre-screening of respondents was conducted. Through the manipulation of data in line with the pre-qualifying criteria of the sampling unit, a sample of 513 respondents was drawn.

The study used a questionnaire to collect data.

The primary data collected during the study was analysed using both descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis and chi-square measure of association, and regression analysis using SPSS version 27. The dimensions of CBBE were measured using descriptive statistics and the influence of UGC on CBBE was measured using regression analysis techniques (Maslikhan, 2019:149).

FINDINGS

The frequency distribution of the influence of positive UGC on CBBE in Figure 1 below shows that 75.4% of the respondents were of the opinion that UGC positively influenced their brand perceptions.



Source: Survey data

FIGURE 2: INFLUENCE OF UGC ON CBBE

A total of 35.9% of respondents indicated that UGC negatively influenced their perceptions of brands. This represents a significantly lower influence on CBBE relative to the influence of positive CBBE. This indicates that the relationship between consumers and retail brands is being negatively affected, resulting in the breakdown of trust and credibility between brands and consumers. Additionally, it implies the viral speed with which negative UGC spreads and further comprises brand equity.

The influence of neutral UGC on CBBE displayed a higher tendency of 39.2%. This high tendency suggests that respondents indicated that UGC has no effect on CBBE.

TABLE 1: POSITIVE, NEGATIVE AND MIXED-NEUTRAL UGC INFLUENCE ON BRAND PERCEPTIONS OF MAJOR RETAIL BUSINESSES

Factor Matrix	Positive UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
1.1	UGC positively influences my perceptions of brands	N	15	19	92	251	136	387	0,738
		%	2.9%	3.7%	17.9%	48.9%	26.5%	75.4%	
1.2	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being reliable, results in my forming positive perceptions	N	3	3	27	192	162	354	0,796
		%	0.8%	0.8%	7.0%	49.6%	41.9%	91.5%	
1.3	Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand performance, results in my forming positive perceptions	N	1	3	33	201	149	350	0,794
		%	0.3%	0.8%	8.5%	51.9%	38.5%	90.4%	
1.4	Positive UGC relating to positive service experiences influences my purchasing decisions	N	2	3	38	178	166	344	0,788
		%	0.5%	0.8%	9.8%	46.0%	42.9%	88.9%	
1.5	Positive UGC (pictures) influences my purchasing choices significantly	N	2	9	43	179	154	333	0,766
		%	0.5%	2.3%	11.1%	46.3%	39.8%	86%	
Factor matrix	Negative UGC		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
2.1	UGC negatively influences my perceptions of brands	N	70	99	160	128	56	184	0,469
		%	13.6%	19.3%	31.2%	25%	10.9%	35.9%	
2.2	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being unreliable, results in my forming negative perceptions	N	1	14	30	93	46	139	0,664
		%	0.5%	7.6%	16.3%	50.5%	25.0%	75.5%	
2.3	Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to poor brand performance, results in my forming negative perceptions	N	5	5	19	104	51	155	0,711
		%	2.7%	2.7%	10.3%	56.5%	27.7%	84.2%	
2.4	Negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influences my purchasing decisions	N	1	12	19	87	65	152	0,722
		%	0.5%	6.5%	10.3%	47.3%	35.3%	82.6%	
2.5	Negative UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	N	0	10	26	94	54	148	0,733
		%	0.0%	5.4%	14.1%	51.1%	29.3%	80.4%	

Factor matrix	No influence		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree + Strongly agree	Factor loadings
3.1	Mixed neutral UGC does not alter my perception of brands	N	40	122	150	141	60	201	0,758
		%	7.8%	23.8%	29.2%	27.5%	11.7%	39.2%	
3.2	UGC (pictures) has no influence on my purchasing choices	N	11	17	31	88	54	142	0,806
		%	5.5%	8.5%	15.4%	43.8%	26.9%	70.6%	
3.3	UGC (video clips) has no influence on my purchasing choices	N	7	21	27	92	54	146	0,861
		%	3.5%	10.4%	13.4%	45.8%	26.9%	72.6%	
3.4	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is not influenced when exposed to UGC	N	8	14	39	89	51	140	0,845
		%	4.0%	7.0%	19.4%	44.3%	25.4%	69.7%	
3.5	The overall image I have of the brand is not altered when exposed to UGC	N	5	12	31	100	53	153	0,869
		%	2.5%	6.0%	15.4%	49.8%	26.4%	76.1%	

POSITIVE UGC

With specific reference to the frequency of the statements relating to the influence of positive UGC on brand perceptions, a high degree of generality exists whereby the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements (Table 1). The highest propensity (91.5%) related to brand reliability and the formation of positive perceptions. This was followed by 90.4% of respondents who agreed that positive UGC in the form of brand reviews relating to brand performance resulted in their forming positive perceptions.

86% of respondents indicated that positive UGC altered their purchasing choices significantly. With specific reference to the frequency of the statements relating to the influence of positive UGC on brand perceptions, a high degree of generality exists whereby the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. The propensity of UGC positively influencing perceptions (75.4%) represents the formation of positive perceptions; these positive perceptions are a significant indication and a summation of the tendency that UGC does alter the perceptions of consumers and therefore CBBE.

NEGATIVE UGC

With regard to the frequency of statements relating to the influence of negative UGC on CBBE, for participants who responded that negative UGC negatively influenced their brand perceptions, poor brand performance and poor service experiences displayed the highest tendency at 84.2% and 82.6% respectively. Pictures displaying negative imagery also reflected a strong tendency and displayed a notable influence on purchasing behaviour, with 80.4% of respondents indicating that pictures do alter their purchasing intentions. Negative brand reviews displayed an equally strong disposition, with 75.5% of respondents indicating that they form negative perceptions when exposed to negative reviews about the brand's performance. The statement measuring the influence of negative UGC on perceptions displayed the lowest propensity at 35.9%, which could be attributed to the highest neutral score of 31.2% of all the neutral variables.

MIXED-NEUTRAL UGC

Additionally, the statements relating to mixed-neutral UGC having no influence on brand perceptions displayed a strong propensity in favour of the agreed or strongly agreed variables. The statement that the overall image that respondents had of a brand is not altered when exposed to mixed-neutral UGC displayed the highest tendency of 76.1%. Mixed-neutral UGC in the form of video clips (72.6%) and pictures (70.6%) had no influence on perceptions, while 69.7% of respondents revealed that their overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand was not influenced when exposed to mixed-neutral UGC.

Overall, the highest tendencies were reflected in the influence of the positive UGC variables on consumer perceptions, with positive brand reviews relating to reliability and performance displaying the highest tendencies of 91.5% and 90.4% respectively. The most significant tendencies were therefore displayed by the influence of positive UGC, which was followed by negative UGC, then mixed-neutral UGC. These high frequencies are an indication that for this group of respondents, positive UGC had a significant effect on the CBBE of consumers, which positively impacted on the brand equity of major retail businesses.

Cronbach's Alpha scores were used to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the three constructs, and as scores for the three constructs – the influence of positive, negative, and mixed neutral UGC on CBBE – were 0.943, 0.948 and 0.891 respectively, the internal consistency was deemed to be robust and acceptable.

The factor loadings calculated to determine patterns of correlation between the variables displayed a factor loading above 0.5, with the exception of three variables, which were not eliminated from the study, as the majority of the variables displayed a high factor loading. The measurement device used in this study therefore displayed acceptable levels of convergent validity. The results of the one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test are presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: WILCOXON SIGNED RANK TESTS

Variables	One-Sample (test value = 3)		Related samples	
	p-value	Conclusion	p-value	Conclusion
Negative UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.04	Different (>)	0.00	Positive
Positive UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.00	Different (>)		
Negative UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.04	Different (>)	0.02	Negative
Mixed-neutral UGC relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand	0.02	Different (>)		
Positive UGC influences my perceptions of brands	0.00	Different (>)	0.00	Positive
Mixed-neutral UGC relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand	0.02	Different (>)		

For the variable that UGC does have a positive influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole, the p-value is 0, which is less than 0.05. The mean and median for this statement are greater than 3, which is an indication of a positive influence of UGC on brand perceptions. Similarly, there is support that UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of retail businesses in the Cape Metropole. The p-value of the negative UGC variable in Table 2: Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.04, which represents a lower value in relation to the statistical level of 0.05, indicating a less significant influence on CBBE in relation to positive UGC. The p-value of the mixed neutral variable is 0.02 which is also less than 0.05, and therefore represents statistical significance in terms of mixed-neutral UGC having no effect CBBE.

The results of the Wilcoxon matched-pairs test show that the influence of positive UGC on CBBE is statistically different from the negative influence of UGC on CBBE, as well as the influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE, revealing that positive UGC influences CBBE more significantly than does negative UGC, while the lack of influence of mixed-neutral UGC on CBBE is noteworthy.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The three models are highly significant at 1% level of significance. Taking Facebook as the base category, the results in Table 3 show that those who use YouTube, LinkedIn and Google are less likely to have negative UGC effect on CBBE than those who rely on Facebook. Professional tools such as LinkedIn and Google also facilitate positive UGC or neutralise the UGC effects on CBBE (see Table 3 below).

TABLE 3: FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BRAND PERCEPTIONS

		Negative UGC on CBBE		Neutral UGC on CBBE		Positive UGC on CBBE	
		Coeff	Std. Err.	Coeff	Std. Err.	Coeff	Std. Err.
	WhatsApp	-0.015	0.034	0.036	0.042	-0.017	0.038
	YouTube	-0.004*	0.037	0.043	0.052	-0.021	0.047
	LinkedIn	-0.027*	0.037	0.031*	0.059	0.019***	0.037
	Google	-0.034*	0.036	0.096*	0.074	0.015**	0.012
Read posts		0.013	0.008	0.017	0.011	0.039***	0.007
Hours on the internet		-0.002	0.005	0.004	0.006	0.001**	0.004
Gender		0.002**	0.013	-0.042**	0.018	-0.004	0.003
Expenditure	251 – 500	0.039***	0.018	-0.021	0.023	-0.010	0.011
	501 – 750	0.051**	0.021	-0.056**	0.027	0.017	0.015
	751 – 1000	0.045**	0.024	-0.025	0.031	0.005	0.017
	1001 – 2000	0.038	0.034	0.021	0.043	0.023	0.020
	2001 - 3000	-0.073	0.053	0.022	0.068	0.001	0.028
	3001 - 4000	-0.040	0.065	0.087	0.083	-0.074**	0.045
	> 4000	-0.019	0.046	0.098	0.059	-0.063	0.054
Age	26 – 30	0.016	0.017	0.011	0.022	0.014	0.014
	31 – 35	0.001	0.019	0.050*	0.025	0.023**	0.016
	36 – 40	-0.020	0.020	0.006	0.027	0.014	0.017
Education	Metric	-0.017	0.035	-0.124***	0.045	-0.058	0.029
	Post metric	0.063	0.075	-0.113**	0.043	0.028***	0.062
Race	Coloured	-0.005	0.023	0.027	0.029	-0.010	0.018
	Indian	0.045	0.040	0.162***	0.051	-0.028	0.126
	White	0.066	0.150	0.188	0.194	0.037***	0.033
Constant		0.661	0.051	0.719	0.065	0.698	0.042
Obs		511		511		511	
F (..)		13.64		22.49		9.43	
Prob > F		0.0008		0.0000		0.0003	

Source: Survey Data

These results also suggest that those who spend more time on the internet and read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service- or product-related experiences are more likely to have positive UGC effects on CBBE. Similarly, those who spend less money on average per month using digital platforms are more likely to have negative UGC effects on CBBE. Women are more likely to have negative UGC effects on CBBE and less likely to have neutral perceptions than men.

The results show that consumers (31 – 35 years) are more likely to have positive or neutral UGC effects on CBBE than the relatively younger generation of consumers (21 – 25 years). This is likely to be true because this is the category of consumers that has more time and income to spend on the internet since they are most likely to be employed and have relatively smaller families than the 36 – 40-year-old group. While the metric and post-metrics are less likely to have neutral UGC effects, the post-metrics are more likely to have positive UGC effects on CBBE than the grade 8 - 11 group,

CONCLUSIONS

Three hypotheses were tested to establish the significance of positive and negative UGC influences on brand perceptions and they are as follows:

Hypothesis: H1: UGC has a positive influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

To determine statistical significance, a statistical level of 0.05 was used for this study; the p-value less than 0.05 is an indication of statistical significance. The p-value of the positive UGC variable is 0. The high probability of a relationship between these two variables is corroborated by the significant frequency distribution of the data tendencies related to the respective variables that constitute the building blocks of CBBE, viz., brand performance, brand reliability, brand credibility and brand loyalty.

To conclude, it is therefore highly probably that Hypothesis H1 is supported by the collected data, and that positive UGC exerts an influence on CBBE.

Hypothesis: H2: UGC has a negative influence on the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

The p-value of the negative UGC variable Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.04, which displays a significantly higher value in relation to the statistical level of 0.05. Therefore, this indicates a significantly lower or limited influence of negative UGC on CBBE, in relation to the influence of positive UGC on CBBE. Similarly, the frequency distribution of the data tendencies of the elements that have a negative effect on CBBE, such as brand loyalty, brand credibility and the influence of negative recommendations are also less pronounced.

To conclude, it is therefore highly probably that Hypothesis H2 is also supported by the collected data and that negative UGC exerts a medium influence on CBBE.

Hypothesis: H0: UGC does not influence the CBBE of major retail businesses in the Cape Metropole.

The p-value of the mixed-neutral UGC variable Wilcoxon signed rank tests is 0.02, and as it is also less than 0.05, it is therefore an indication of statistical significance that mixed-neutral UGC does not alter CBBE. However, this null hypothesis cannot be completely accepted. The frequency distribution of the data outlining the number of respondents who indicated that mixed-neutral UGC has no influence on their brand perceptions potentially presents a possible inverse relationship, whereby mixed-neutral UGC could potentially influence the CBBE of a larger percentage of respondents. Additionally, the elements that influence CBBE, such as reading and engaging with UGC, as well as the use of UGC content to make more informed purchasing decisions, contradicts the null hypothesis.

Therefore, to conclude, the null hypothesis is rejected, and previous studies and the frequency distribution of data suggest that the possibility of a relationship exists between the elements of mixed-neutral UGC and CBBE.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the FGC that is generated to deal with the influence of negative UGC, as well as the positive FGC that is propagated, needs to be more measured and comprehensive, as opposed to being impersonal, fast, and inaccurate. The FGC should therefore be customised and personalised in order to be effective

Customised FGC enhances the reputation of the retail brand, as online users view this customised attempt as an acknowledgement that they are valued as consumers and are made to feel appreciated. It is also viewed as making a special effort to resolve the issue at hand by acknowledging the consumer by using their correct name and surname. This type of responsive approach also allows the retail brand to respond to the negative UGC in a more personalised and accurate manner, which enhances the credibility of the retail brand and reduces the negative virality of the UGC (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2016:30).

This study found that the presence of UGC influences CBBE both positively and negatively. An additional recommendation would therefore be that retail brands need to develop innovative ways to use their communication strategies to build a relationship with their online consumer markets. By increasing the participation and interaction levels between the retail brand and online consumers, an analogous increase in the associated levels of trust and commitment occurs.

Negative UGC relating to retail brands is often a direct result of product and service failure and the UGC post is often written highly emotively prior to being shared on a social media platform. Retail staff who are expected to respond to these complaints need to be adequately trained to respond to the negative UGC or complaint without being distracted or drawn into the emotive aspects of it. Therefore, retail staff who are responsible for the handling of negative UGC need to be actively engaged with the various social media platforms and they also need to be conscious of the factors that aggravate the generation of additional negative UGC.

High levels of active engagement on social media platforms are crucial to the establishment of high levels of positive CBBE, as this negates the influence of negative UGC on CBBE, as negative UGC seemingly only effects the CBBE of brands with weaker brand equity.

Consistent with the findings of other studies, this study has also concluded that UGC in the form of pictures and video content exerts a more pronounced influence on CBBE. UGC in the form of pictures and videos should also be used by retail brands to create interest and points of engagement for online consumers.

Retail brands should consistently strive to create opportunities for active engagement with online users, as increased engagement between a retail brand and online consumers results in the creation of UGC, which contributes to increased brand loyalty and attachment

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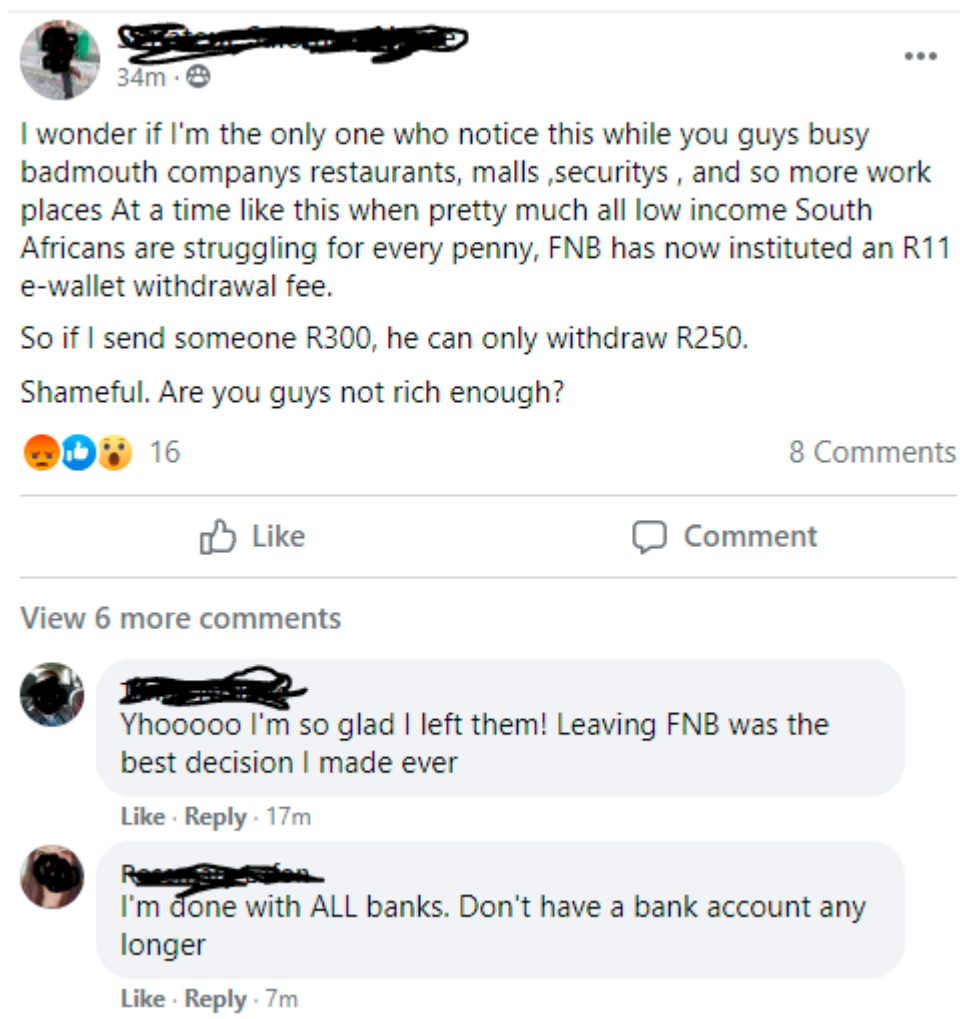
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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE


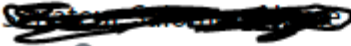
USER-GENERATED CONTENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant

Thank you for voluntarily participating in this survey on user-generated content (UGC or E-word of mouth), which includes social media conversations about brands and retailers, etc. (refer to the example below). The survey will not take longer than 10 minutes to complete and no personal information is required. Responses are confidential and will provide valuable information on UGC and the impact it has on consumer behaviour. It will only be used for academic purposes.



The image shows a screenshot of a social media post. The post is from a user whose profile picture and name are redacted with black scribbles. The post text reads: "I wonder if I'm the only one who notice this while you guys busy badmouth companys restaurants, malls ,securitys , and so more work places At a time like this when pretty much all low income South Africans are struggling for every penny, FNB has now instituted an R11 e-wallet withdrawal fee. So if I send someone R300, he can only withdraw R250. Shameful. Are you guys not rich enough?". Below the text are reaction icons (sad face, thumbs up, shocked face) and the number "16". To the right, it says "8 Comments". Below the post are "Like" and "Comment" buttons. Underneath, there is a link "View 6 more comments". Two comments are visible: the first says "Yhooooo I'm so glad I left them! Leaving FNB was the best decision I made ever" and the second says "I'm done with ALL banks. Don't have a bank account any longer".



  34m · 🌐

I wonder if I'm the only one who notice this while you guys busy badmouth companys restaurants, malls ,securitys , and so more work places At a time like this when pretty much all low income South Africans are struggling for every penny, FNB has now instituted an R11 e-wallet withdrawal fee.



So if I send someone R300, he can only withdraw R250.



Shameful. Are you guys not rich enough?

🙄👍😱 16 8 Comments

 Like  Comment

View 6 more comments

 
Yhooooo I'm so glad I left them! Leaving FNB was the best decision I made ever
Like · Reply · 17m

 
I'm done with ALL banks. Don't have a bank account any longer
Like · Reply · 7m

1. Filter: Do you use any social media platforms that include UGC? 1.1 Yes 1.2 No
2. Which social media platforms do you use? Tick ALL that apply.
- 2.1. Facebook 2.2. WhatsApp 2.3. Twitter 2.4. Instagram
 2.5. LinkedIn 2.6. YouTube 2.7. Other _____
3. Which digital platforms do you engage with? Tick ALL that apply.
- 3.1. Google 3.2. Yahoo 3.3. Bing 3.4. Facebook
 3.5. Instagram 3.6. Twitter 3.7. YouTube 3.8. Daily Motion
 3.9. Vimeo 3.10. Wordpress 3.11. Tumblr 3.12. Gmail
 3.13. WhatsApp 3.14. Pinterest 3.15. TikTok 3.16. Other _____
4. How often do you read posts that have been written by other consumers (UGC) that contain service or product experiences? Tick ONE.
- 4.1. Rarely 4.2. Sometimes 4.3. Often 4.4. Always
5. Why do you read posts related to other consumers' brand and service experiences? Tick all that apply.
- 5.1. To stay informed about brands 5.2. To make more informed purchasing decisions 5.3. I just read them to pass the time 5.3. I am just curious
 5.4. Other _____
6. How many hours do you spend engaging online per day? Tick ONE
- 6.1. Less than ½ hour 6.2. ½ to 1 hour 6.3. 2 hours 6.4. 3 hours
 6.5. 4 hours or more
7. How much do you spend on average per month using digital platforms? Tick ONE.
- 7.1. Less than R250 7.2. R251-R500 7.3. R501-R750 7.4. R751-R1000
 7.5. R1001-R2000 7.6. R2001-R3000 7.7. R3001-R4000 7.8. R4001 or more
8. Demographic factors
- 8.1. What is your gender?
- 8.1.1. Male 8.1.2. Female 8.1.3. Non-binary 8.1.4. Prefer not to mention
- 8.2. To which age category do you belong?
- 8.2.1. 21-25 8.2.2. 26-30 8.2.3. 31-35 8.2.4. 36-40
- 8.3. What is your highest level of education?
- 8.3.1. Grade 8-11 8.3.2. Grade 12 8.3.3. Completed Grade 12 8.3.4. No qualification
 8.3.5. Post-matric diploma/certificate/degree 8.3.6. Postgraduate degree 8.3.7. Other
- 8.4. With which population group do you associate yourself most?
- 8.4.1. Black 8.4.2. Coloured 8.4.3. Indian 8.4.4. Asian
 8.4.5. White 8.4.6. Other

9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree regarding user-generated content (UGC) and brand perceptions (CBBE) of major retail businesses. **(TICK ONE block per statement):**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
9.1. UGC negatively influences my perceptions of brands	9.1.1.	9.1.2.	9.1.3.	9.1.4.	9.1.5.
9.2. Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being unreliable, results in my forming negative perceptions	9.2.1.	9.2.2.	9.2.3.	9.2.4.	9.2.5.
9.3. Negative UGC (brand reviews) relating to poor brand performance, results in my forming negative perceptions	9.3.1.	9.3.2.	9.3.3.	9.3.4.	9.3.5.
9.4. Negative UGC relating to poor service experiences influence my purchasing decisions	9.4.1.	9.4.2.	9.4.3.	9.4.4.	9.4.5.
9.5. Negative UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	9.5.1.	9.5.2.	9.5.3.	9.5.4.	9.5.5.
9.6. Negative UGC video clips influence my purchasing choices significantly	9.6.1.	9.6.2.	9.6.3.	9.6.4.	9.6.5.
9.7. Negative UGC pictures of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	9.7.1.	9.7.2.	9.7.3.	9.7.4.	9.7.5.
9.8. Negative UGC video clips of poor service quality experiences negatively influence my perceptions	9.8.1.	9.8.2.	9.8.3.	9.8.4.	9.8.5.
9.9. Negative UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	9.9.1.	9.9.2.	9.9.3.	9.9.4.	9.9.5.
9.10. I remember the negative UGC for a long time after being exposed to it.	9.10.1.	9.10.2.	9.10.3.	9.10.4.	9.10.5.
9.11. I remember the associated negative brand perceptions for a long time after being exposed to negative UGC.	9.11.1.	9.11.2.	9.11.3.	9.11.4.	9.11.5.
9.12. Negative UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	9.12.1.	9.12.2.	9.12.3.	9.12.4.	9.12.5.
9.13. Negative UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	9.13.1.	9.13.2.	9.13.3.	9.13.4.	9.13.5.
9.14. I tend to dislike the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	9.14.1.	9.14.2.	9.14.3.	9.14.4.	9.14.5.
9.15. I no longer regard the brand as being credible after I am exposed to negative UGC about the brand	9.15.1.	9.15.2.	9.15.3.	9.15.4.	9.15.5.
9.16. My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to negative UGC	9.16.1.	9.16.2.	9.16.3.	9.16.4.	9.16.5.
9.17. I will not consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to negative UGC	9.17.1.	9.17.2.	9.17.3.	9.17.4.	9.17.5.
9.18. My relationship with the brand is negatively affected after being exposed to negative UGC	9.18.1.	9.18.2.	9.18.3.	9.18.4.	9.18.5.
9.19. Negative UGC results in my no longer being loyal to the brand	9.19.1.	9.19.2.	9.19.3.	9.19.4.	9.19.5.
9.20. I will no longer actively engage with the brand after being exposed to negative UGC	9.20.1.	9.20.2.	9.20.3.	9.20.4.	9.20.5.

10.1. UGC positively influences my perceptions of brands	10.1.1.	10.1.2.	10.1.3.	10.1.4.	10.1.5.
10.2. Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand being reliable, results in my forming positive perceptions	10.2.1.	10.2.2.	10.2.3.	10.2.4.	10.2.5.
10.3. Positive UGC (brand reviews) relating to brand performance, results in my forming positive perceptions	10.3.1.	10.3.2.	10.3.3.	10.3.4.	10.3.5.
10.4. Positive UGC relating to positive service experiences influences my purchasing decisions	10.4.1.	10.4.2.	10.4.3.	10.4.4.	10.4.5.
10.5. Positive UGC pictures influence my purchasing choices significantly	10.5.1.	10.5.2.	10.5.3.	10.5.4.	10.5.5.
10.6. Positive UGC video clips influence my purchasing choices significantly	10.6.1.	10.6.2.	10.6.3.	10.6.4.	10.6.5.
10.7. Positive UGC pictures and video clips of service quality experiences positively influence my perceptions	10.7.1.	10.7.2.	10.7.3.	10.7.4.	10.7.5.
10.8. Positive UGC video clips of service quality experiences positively influence my perceptions	10.8.1.	10.8.2.	10.8.3.	10.8.4.	10.8.5.
10.9. Positive UGC alters the overall image I have of the brand	10.9.1.	10.9.2.	10.9.3.	10.9.4.	10.9.5.
10.10. I quickly forget about positive UGC after being exposed to it.	10.10.1.	10.10.2.	10.10.3.	10.10.4.	10.10.5.
10.11. I quickly forget about the associated positive brand perceptions after being exposed to positive UGC	10.11.1.	10.11.2.	10.11.3.	10.11.4.	10.11.5.
10.12. Positive UGC alters my feelings towards the brand	10.12.1.	10.12.2.	10.12.3.	10.12.4.	10.12.5.
10.13. Positive UGC affects the confidence I have in a brand	10.13.1.	10.13.2.	10.13.3.	10.13.4.	10.13.5.
10.14. I tend to like the brand more after being exposed to positive UGC	10.14.1.	10.14.2.	10.14.3.	10.14.4.	10.14.5.
10.15. I regard the brand as being more credible after I am exposed to positive UGC about it	10.15.1.	10.15.2.	10.15.3.	10.15.4.	10.15.5.
10.16. My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is influenced when exposed to positive UGC	10.16.1.	10.16.2.	10.16.3.	10.16.4.	10.16.5.
10.17. I will consider the brand when making my next purchase after being exposed to positive UGC	10.17.1.	10.17.2.	10.17.3.	10.17.4.	10.17.5.
10.18. My relationship with the brand is positively affected after being exposed to positive UGC	10.18.1.	10.18.2.	10.18.3.	10.18.4.	10.18.5.
10.19. Positive UGC results in my being loyal to the brand	10.19.1.	10.19.2.	10.19.3.	10.19.4.	10.19.5.
10.20. I tend to actively engage with the brand after being exposed to positive UGC	10.20.1.	10.20.2.	10.20.3.	10.20.4.	10.20.5.
11. UGC (brand reviews) relating to a brand does not alter my perceptions of a brand	11.1.	11.2.	11.3.	11.4.	11.5.
11.1. UGC (pictures) has no influence on my purchasing choices	11.3.1.	11.3.2.	11.3.3.	11.3.4.	11.3.5.
11.2. UGC (video clips) has no influence on my purchasing choices	11.4.1.	11.4.2.	11.4.3.	11.4.4.	11.4.5.

11.3.	My overall opinion regarding the quality of the brand is not influenced when exposed to UGC.	11.5.1.	11.5.2.	11.5.3.	11.5.4.	11.5.5.
11.4.	The overall image I have of the brand is not altered when exposed to UGC	11.6.1.	11.6.2.	11.6.3.	11.6.4.	11.6.5.
11.5.	UGC does not alter my confidence in the brand as I do not trust UGC	11.7.1.	11.7.2.	11.7.3.	11.7.4.	11.7.5.
11.6.	My feelings or emotions towards the brand are not influenced by UGC	11.8.1.	11.8.2.	11.8.3.	11.8.4.	11.8.5.
11.7.	I will continue to engage with the brand after being exposed to UGC	11.9.1.	11.9.2.	11.9.3.	11.9.4.	11.9.5.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!