

User-Generated Content (UGC) and Firm-Generated Content (FGC): Evaluating Customer Loyalty Towards Iphone Pro

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ABSTRACT

User-Generated Content (UGC) and Firm-Generated Content (FGC) are both digital advertising forms utilized by companies and consumers to increase brand awareness and communicate brand identity. However, minimal research has been conducted to determine the most suitable for generating brand loyalty among Filipino consumers, regardless of industry. A comparative study between FGC and UGC was implemented to discover the most effective strategy that can generate brand loyalty in the mobile phone industry, focusing on the brand Apple, specifically its iPhone product line. This study also aims to analyze the effectiveness of each digital advertising content through identified independent factors, specifically Perceived Credibility, Perceived Enjoyment, and Utilized Platform. Furthermore, this study examines how these factors can increase repurchase and customer retention among Filipino consumers. The researchers conducted quantitative research through online survey questionnaires disseminated through purposive sampling with a 95% level of confidence and a 5% margin of error. The chosen participants are composed of at least 385 respondents who are Apple product users and residents of the National Capital Region, Philippines, limiting to those aged 25 to 44 years old, known as Millennials – an age segment proven to be purchasers of Apple products. Through the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the researchers conclude that both UGC and FGC significantly influence repurchase decisions. However, in terms of generating customer loyalty, UGC is the best advertising strategy. This is supported by the most influential factor, Perceived Credibility. The findings of this study are beneficial for the future marketing efforts of the technology industry.

Keywords: User-generated content, firm-generated content, brand loyalty, perceived credibility, perceived enjoyment, utilized platform

INTRODUCTION

Traditional forms of advertisement, such as through TV, radio, print media, and more, are slowly losing their relevance due to advancements in technology giving rise to the internet, which in turn caused a shift in the market's preference towards digital methods of advertising. The prevalence of social media platforms in the 2010s further proved this phenomenon along with the birth of content creators known as influencers from blog sites and YouTube (Conti, et al., 2022). This then gave rise to a specific advertising strategy known as User-Generated Content (UGC). Alongside the significant boom in technology, mobile phones also experienced drastic evolutions. One of which is the iPhone, from the leading brand Apple, which rose to fame in the 2000s. Due to its constant evolution, advertisements for the product must also adapt to cater to the market's preference. By investigating the similar independent factors of both UGC and FGC, this study aims to determine which strategy would generate loyalty towards iPhones. Furthermore, this study shall be beneficial to fellow researchers in the field of marketing and marketing strategists for mobile phone brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

UGC vs FGC

User-Generated Content, also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), refers to content that has been created by users of online platforms and is seen through online reviews, social media,

and blogs (Timoshenko et al., 2020). UGC holds a striking contrast against Marketer-Generated Content (MGC), or Firm-Generated Content (FGC), which refers to marketing and promotional messages created by brand owners (Zhao et al., 2022).

Utilized Platform

Utilized Platform refers to the chosen social media platform, channel, or program of the organization they wish to deliver or post their messages to reach their target audience. Bilgin (2018) studied the effects of social media marketing activities on generating brand awareness, reputation, and customer loyalty; which leads to the discovery of how social media activities can affect consumers' behavior through informative and eye-catching posts and how it motivates information sharing among social media community members, leading to post-purchase behaviors. This study further evaluated how available social media platforms and business efforts can create opportunities to build brand-consumer relationships, from that previous research conducted added how the available social media platforms can influence trust/ loyalty and purchase intentions through information sharing among users.

Perceived Enjoyment

Perceived Enjoyment refers to a consumer's certain degree of pleasure and contentment towards a specific activity and stimuli. Furthermore, it is used to evaluate the extent to which how much enjoyment a person obtains from the said specific activity that influences their drive to keep pursuing it. In the context of advertising, Perceived Enjoyment measures its effectiveness through several factors including the characteristics of the ad message, the target audience's skill in absorbing the information, as well as its mental and emotional effect on the consumers.

With this, the Structure Delphi Approach is a structural model that presents the top dimensions in evaluating how an advertisement can affect its audience. According to Maheshwari et al. (2018), these dimensions are attention, relevance, excitability, and likings. This study also states that Perceived Enjoyment is a mediator for generating purchase intentions, involvement, and trial through advertisements.

Perceived Credibility

Brand Credibility is defined as the consumer's level of trust in a brand based on their understanding and belief in its information, promises, and actions (Rather et al., 2022). The consumer's trust can come from several sources such as public figures, expertise in the product, eWOM, and many more. A study in China conducted by Shaozi (2020) provided further evidence, analyzing the power of online opinion leaders (OOLs) as credible sources of information. This resulted in a positive effect in consumer response due to the consumers' trust built upon the online opinion leader.

Customer Loyalty

Loyalty, as defined by Handoyo and Mani (2021), refers to consumers' continuous patronization of the same brand or product. It is noted that in relation to iPhones, customer loyalty towards Apple products was observed to suggest a "cult-like" following and surpassed the levels of one of its main competitors, Samsung (Almeida et al., 2021). To assess how UGC and FGC could have an effect in this observed loyalty, the study of Ali and Shaiq (2023) stated that the advertisements should be placed in social media to stay relevant and allow for good reputation in terms of brand personality, image, and features. As a result of the good brand image that will be gained from this action, the brand will be able

to enjoy an increased repurchase intention, therefore creating a high possibility of customer loyalty (Tunjungsari et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a quantitative research design in gathering data to standardize the opinions of the respondents through the collection of numerical data which is analyzed through mathematical treatments. Hence, a comparative study approach was applied to both UGC and FGC, independent variables, in relation to their effectiveness on customer loyalty, the dependent variable. The respondents for this study were selected through the stratified sampling method based on the current mobile phones used. A total of 385 respondents were selected. This number was calculated through the use of the Raosoft calculator utilizing the population of Millennials residing in NCR, which is 4.151 million, with 95% level of confidence and 5% margin of error. This is to target consumers who are repeat buyers of Apple products since 92.6% of the current iPhone users, 96.4% are millennials who have intentions to repurchase another iPhone as their next mobile phone.

The statistical treatment utilized for this study is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). With SEM, researchers can conveniently set up reliable tests on hypothetically interconnected variables, and relationships of latent constructs used in a framework (Structural Equation Modeling, 2022), this was applied to this study on analyzing the relationships between the IV, MV, and the DV. This will allow for each variable - i.e the independent factors namely Perceived Credibility, Perceived Enjoyment, Utilized Platform, and the advertising strategies namely UGC and FGC - were tested as to their relationship with each other in leading to Customer Loyalty.

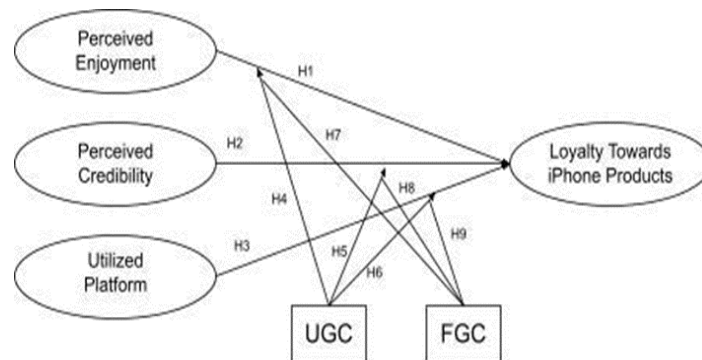


Figure 1. The conceptual framework

Figure 1. The conceptual framework shows how the similar factors of UGC and FGC affect Customer Loyalty towards iPhone products. This schema shows the relationships of the variables involved in this study. As adapted from the S-O-R model and Theory of Planned Behavior, which some researchers have used as the theoretical foundation (Hua & Chiu, 2022), the researchers carefully utilized existing theories to form its own conceptual framework. The independent variables (IV) included in this study are Perceived Enjoyment, Perceived Credibility, and Utilized Platform – all similar factors of the two digital advertising strategies that serve as the moderating variables (CV), UGC and FGC. Thus, the data gathering and analysis was able to conclude which among the three (3) factors is the most significant in supporting the dependent variable (DV) which is loyalty of users towards Apple products.

Thus, the hypotheses outlined within this study are as follows:

H1. Perceived Enjoyment has a significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users

- H2. Perceived Credibility has a significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users
- H3. Utilized Platform has a significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users
- H4. UGC moderates the effect of Perceived Enjoyment on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products
- H5. UGC moderates the effect of Perceived Credibility on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products
- H6. UGC moderates the effect of Utilized Platform on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products
- H7. FGC moderates the effect of Perceived Enjoyment on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products
- H8. FGC moderates the effect of Perceived Credibility on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products
- H9. FGC moderates the effect of Utilized Platform on Brand Loyalty towards iPhone products

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical evidence derived from the dissemination of survey questionnaires.

Table 1. Respondent's awareness of advertising on social media

Items	Scale	Count	Percent
Are you aware of digital ads of iPhones posted by Apple?	No	37	9.3
	Yes	359	90.7
Are you aware of digital content about	No	26	6.6
	Yes	370	93.4

iPhones posted by online users?			
How often do you use or browse through social media?	Less than an hour	11	2.8
	1-2 hours	37	9.3
	2-3 hours	75	18.9
	3-4 hours	105	26.5
	4-5 hours	87	22.0
	6 hours and above	81	20.5
How often do you see iPhone advertisements on social media platforms?	Never	3	0.8
	Rarely	47	11.9
	Sometimes	150	37.9
	Often	142	35.9
	Always	54	13.6
Was your previous/current iPhone purchase influenced by online content?	No	165	41.7
	Yes	231	58.3
Was your iPhone purchase influenced by online content?	No	143	36.1
	Yes	253	63.9

Table 1 provided a comprehensive overview of the respondents' social media advertising awareness in which the scope included both Firm-Generated and User-Generated Content (FGC, UGC), social media engagement, and factors influencing iPhone purchase decisions. The data revealed that 90.7% of respondents were aware of FGC, indicating significant visibility and reach achieved by Apple's marketing efforts. In contrast, UGC garnered an even higher percentage of 93.4%. This variance suggests that UGC may have better performance in communicating with its target

audience. The study also measured the potential exposure to both FGC and UGC through the use of respondents' social media habits. A significant proportion of respondents (26.5%) indicated spending 3-4 hours on social media, followed by those spending 4-5 hours (22.0%), and those who spend at least 6 hours (20.5%). This implied that the respondents actively engage with social media on a daily basis, which qualified the sample for the study.

Encountering iPhone advertisements on social media and their frequency were also examined. Majority (37.9%) reported seeing these ads only "sometimes." This was closely followed by "often" (35.9%), "always" (13.6%), and "rarely" (11.9%), while only 0.8% had never seen iPhone ads. Warranting a comprehensive analysis of exposure, there was considerable prevalence of iPhone ads on social media due to a significant portion of respondents who have come across the ads, regardless of the frequency. Moreover, there was a predominance of those who had been influenced by online content to purchase their previous and current iPhones, specifically 58.3%. Therefore, Table 1 implied that the respondents' heightened social media usage and exposure to iPhone advertisements were fundamental to the popularity of social media as an advertising platform used to persuade users through content.

Table 2. Type of advertising respondents

Items	Scale	Count	Percent
Content posted by Apple (FGC)		200	50.51
Content posted by online users (UGC)		196	49.49

In Table 2, the respondents were asked about the type of advertising strategy that they encounter most via online platforms to assess the most prevailing content seen by users. The data presented a nearly equal distribution between the 2 strategies.

However, 50.51% claimed to see content posted by Apple (FGC) more often, whereas only 49.50% frequently come across content posted by online users (UGC). From these results shown in Table 3, it can be concluded that the dynamics of both advertising content strategies were highly significant and held substantial influence on the respondents' minds. Yet, FGC proved to be dominantly widespread among social media platforms due to a minor difference in results.

With the differences between the two content strategies, Apple kept its positive brand image and product perception by allocating its budget to distribute free trials to UGC creators and its online in-brand advertising (Hiremath & Gupta, 2022). As per the results, the two types of content were almost equally seen and deemed relevant by respondents in portraying loyalty towards Apple iPhone products.

Table 3. Respondent ranking of platforms and percentage that see UGC/FGC

Platform	Median Rank	USG Count	USG Percent
Facebook	3	200	50.5
Twitter	2	181	45.7
Instagram	3	234	59.1
Youtube	3	238	60.1
TikTok	4	323	81.6

Table 4 illustrates the path coefficients of the latent factors wherein Loyalty is the dependent variable. The effects of Enjoyment, Credibility, and Platform – all independent variables – are measured through the use of the Structural Equation Model (SEM). Furthermore, it determines the effects of the above-

mentioned variables on both types of digital content: UGC and FGC. The path coefficients, which predict the positive or negative impact for the latent variables Enjoyment, Credibility, and Platform on the dependent variable customer, Loyalty, can still be furtherly affected by the path coefficient if it were to directly be involved to the moderating variables' UGC and FGC. Both UGC and FGC are treated as binary variables which means path coefficients can affect only one variable and not affect the other because of its dichotomous nature.

Table 4. Path Coefficients in the Structural Model

Items	Estimate	SE	P	Decision
Intercept	-0.066	0.036	0.070	
Enjoyment	0.310	0.047	< 0.001	Accept
Credibility	0.525	0.046	< 0.001	Accept
Platform	-0.017	0.036	0.634	Reject
FGC Content	0.115	0.051	0.025	Accept
Enjoyment x FGC Content	0.098	0.065	0.134	Reject
Credibility x FGC Content	-0.196	0.065	0.003	Accept
Platform x FGC Content	-0.006	0.051	0.900	Reject

Enjoyment

Enjoyment (Coefficient: 0.310, p-value: < 0.001) has a notable positive impact on Customer Loyalty, suggesting that respondents who report high levels of enjoyment are more likely to exhibit increased loyalty. As a result, tapping into consumer's emotions does allow an opportunity for the brand to engage, leading towards customer loyalty attainment (Lin and Bautista, 2018). The p-value

of the construct is less than 0.001 which confirms that Perceived Enjoyment is highly significant in creating customer loyalty. The construct, Enjoyment, addresses H1 and H4.

Hypothesis 1 tests whether the construct, Perceived Enjoyment, has a significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users. Thus, the hypothesis (H1) is accepted due to the evidence shown in Table 9, which has a path coefficient of 0.310 and a p-value of <0.001 . This indicates that a positive significant relationship exists between the two variables. Therefore, an increase in user enjoyment directly results in an increase in brand loyalty to the Apple iPhone. Coinciding with H1, Hypothesis 4 states that Perceived Enjoyment has a significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users as a factor of UGC. With a coefficient of 0.310 and p-value that is >0.001 , this is accepted and identified as having positive significance towards brand loyalty for iPhone users. Thus, online users who find enjoyment in the experience of viewing UGC are more likely to demonstrate brand loyalty towards the iPhone.

Similarly, H7 is accepted in favor of Perceived Enjoyment having significant effect on brand loyalty as a factor of FGC. With a coefficient of 0.408 and p-value of 0.134, Perceived Enjoyment through FGC ought to have no significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users. However, its acceptance is supported by further analysis and related literature, specifically the studies of Ballister (2021) and Tuti & Sullistia (2022). Thus, the acceptance of H7 aligns with the acceptance of H4, further proving that UGC is the better type of digital advertising content in terms of generating enjoyment among users, which translates to brand loyalty.

Credibility

As for the second construct, the coefficient for Credibility (Coefficient: 0.525, p-value: < 0.001) suggests that Perceived Credibility has a substantial positive impact on customer loyalty. Thus, a credible perception amongst users directly results in high levels of loyalty. Likewise, its p-value is also less than 0.001 which indicates that Perceived Credibility is significantly impactful towards customer loyalty. Meanwhile, Credibility x FGC (Coefficient: -0.196, p-value: 0.003) exhibits a lower and negative impact towards Customer Loyalty. This suggests that Perceived Credibility decreases and weakens for users when exposed to FGC, as it will form a coefficient of $0.525 - 0.196$ equating to 0.329. With that said, it can be observed that there is a notable difference of Perceived Credibility between UGC and FGC. The latent variable, Credibility, is accepted with H2 and H5.

Hypothesis 2 evaluates whether Perceived credibility, as a construct, significantly affects brand loyalty on iPhone users. Likewise, the hypothesis (H2) is accepted as it holds a positive path coefficient of 0.525 and a p-value less than 0.001. Therefore, online users who perceive the content as credible are more likely to exhibit higher levels of loyalty. With a coefficient of 0.525 and p-value < 0.001, Hypothesis 5 is accepted. Therefore, Perceived Credibility, as a factor of UGC, has a positive significant effect on brand loyalty towards the Apple iPhone. With this, brand loyalty is highly probable for those who are exposed to the iPhone product through UGC and find this type of content credible. It is essential to acknowledge that the data for FGC and UGC are dichotomous in nature. The negative coefficient for the interaction between Credibility and FGC (Coefficient: -0.196, p-value: 0.003) suggests that the construct is statistically significant, but there is less Perceived Credibility for users when exposed to FGC. Therefore, Perceived Credibility has a significant effect on brand loyalty as a factor of both UGC (refer to H5) and FGC. In comparison, this

effect is more favorable to UGC due to the weakened state of Perceived Credibility as a factor of FGC, which can be determined with the decrease from the coefficient of H5 (0.525) to the coefficient of H8 (0.329). Among the three latent variables, Perceived Credibility is the most significant due to its p-value of 0.003.

Platform

For the third construct, Utilized Platform has a coefficient of -0.017 and a p-value of 0.634, which is greater than the significance level. Therefore, it is deemed irrelevant in consideration of the dependent variable, customer loyalty. This construct is rejected in H3, H6, and H9. Subsequently, H3 is rejected with a coefficient of -0.017 and a p-value of 0.634, which does not pass the threshold. This affirms that Utilized Platform has no significant effect on brand loyalty among iPhone users. In fact, the path coefficient value suggests a low, negative impact of the latent construct to the dependent variable. Similarly, H6 and H9 are rejected. Therefore, Utilized Platform, moderated by UGC and FGC, proves to have insignificant effect on the dependent variable. This is supported by the findings that reveal Utilized Platform to be a single-dimensional construct instead of a latent variable.

When examining the effect of FGC to customer loyalty, it is suggested that exposure to FGC has a positive significant impact on the dependent variable with a coefficient of 0.115 and a p-value of 0.025. Respondents generally have an immediate boost in their perceived loyalty when seeing FGC when isolated from UGC. To support this, a study pursued by Hermaren & Achyar (2018) concluded that FGCs have more influence on customer loyalty as compared to UGCs, as the latter can influence awareness more. On the other hand, the respective interactions for both Perceived Enjoyment and Utilized Platform with FGC/UGC have been

observed to hold an insignificant moderating effect due to each p-value ($p = 0.134$, $p = 0.900$) exceeding the threshold of 0.05. Thus, it is concluded that the level of Enjoyment is the same for users whether it is received through FGC or UGC. As such, this statement also applies to the lack of divergence in customer loyalty between the two advertising content in terms of Platform.

Perceived Enjoyment as a factor used to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing advertisements in general is applied to a structural modeling approach study in the Indian mobile industry (Maheshwari et al., 2018). Studying consumers' perceived enjoyment of the advertisement in that manner is said to figure out the involvement, intention, trials, and retention/loyalty of consumers towards a brand. As a result of this study, it has been confirmed that the presence and amount of enjoyment consumers achieve from the advertisement can positively influence their perception of loyalty to the iPhone. Other than that, the relevance of social media platforms that can generate the most effective marketing metrics are being shown in a study named Going Digital. Informative and eye-catching posts from social media platforms are said to affect consumer behavior (Bilgin, 2018), whereas some distinct platform features are also capable of influencing the trust/loyalty of consumers through information sharing of a specific brand (Zhang & Li, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Advertising and marketing are crucial for businesses to achieve their objectives. The study focused on determining the most effective online advertising strategy, UGC or FGC, for achieving customer loyalty for iPhones. Factors such as Perceived Credibility, Perceived Enjoyment, and Utilized Platform were identified as crucial in evaluating advertising content's

effectiveness. Perceived Credibility and Perceived Enjoyment significantly impacted customer loyalty towards iPhones, with TikTok being the most suitable platform for online advertising. Utilized Platform was considered relevant but less significant. Perceived Credibility was the most influential factor in enhancing UGC and FGC, making UGC the most suitable for generating customer brand loyalty. The findings of the study can be useful for future marketing efforts of technology industry products similar to smartphones, which require in-depth product specifications. However, the study has opportunities for enhancement, as the data retrieved contains a level of noise which suggests further examination and potential refinement of the measurement model used to strengthen the reliability of the study.

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