

Examining the Source Credibility of User-Generated Beauty Contents (UGBC) on YouTube in Influencing Consumers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract

User-generated content (UGC) shared on YouTube is gaining popularity. Consumers view the videos and rely on product reviews to assist in their buying decisions. Yet empirical research on the credibility of UGC on YouTube is still lacking. This paper aims to investigate consumers' perception of the source credibility of UGC and whether this perception will influence their purchase decisions. 372 questionnaires were collected using purposive sampling. Multiple regression analysis reveals that all three dimensions of source credibility (i.e. attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness) have a significant relationship with purchase intention, with source expertise as the main predictor. The findings can enhance the understanding of UGC and vloggers' role in marketing.

Keywords: beauty products, purchase intention, source credibility, UGC, YouTube

Introduction

Consumers will seek product information and recommendation to make a quality purchase decision. Traditionally, advice from personal sources (i.e. friends and family members) are the most trusted compared to commercial sources (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). However, the Internet and social media have radically changed the communication landscape as now the consumers can interact and exchange information with other consumers online. The information that consumers generate and share on social media is called user-generated content (UGC) (Mir & Rehman, 2013). Social media refers to a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Simply put, social media is the personalized user-generated media. Now, UGC has become a significant source of trusted information for consumers to assist their decision makings. Consumers trust UGC because they believe the contributors of the UGC share both their negative and positive experiences in the spirit of full disclosure (Mir & Rehman, 2013). Moreover, the contributors are not perceived as having any

commercial interest, thus unbiased in judging the efficacy of products and services compared to producers who would only highlight the positive aspects of their offerings to uphold their commercial interests.

Nonetheless, the very nature of UGC triggers some concerns relating to its credibility. First and foremost, UGC contributors, though are fellow consumers, are strangers. As such, consumers are given the tricky task of evaluating the opinions of strangers (Dellarocas, 2003; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Considering that since an early age, people were given the wise words "don't talk to strangers" and "don't take advice from someone you don't know", yet somehow those wise words are forgotten as consumers listen to online product reviewers and trust their advice. Secondly, in an online setting, possible cues that could assist consumers to have a proper evaluation of opinions are unavailable. The nature of online reviews denies consumers the ability to make inferences from the person's facial expression, contexts used, words uttered, etc. Thirdly, content contributions in UGC websites may originate from a myriad of backgrounds of people -amateur, semi-professional and professional (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Last but not least, UGC can be vulnerable to all kinds of manipulation and abuse (Dellarocas, 2003) as online identities of contributors can be changed easily. Reports on these strategic manipulations are aplenty. For instance, Time Magazine (February 2012) reported that since online reviews are so critical, some businesses have been known to plant reviews by employees, pay strangers who have never been customers to write positive reviews, and even sabotage their competitors by the posting of harsh, negative reviews. Thus, this study aims to examine the consumers' perception regarding the credibility of UGC sources and how such perceptions may influence their intention toward UGC utilization for beauty products purchasing.

Literature Review

Beauty Product Purchasing and UGC

Beauty products or cosmetics refer to the materials made and sold to enhance the physical attractiveness of users. Nowadays, buying beauty products is an essential consumption in our society as people have a growing desire to improve their beauty and attractiveness. Moreover, many people are enthusiastic about sharing and exchanging their beauty products' buying and consumption experience

with others via social media. According to Statista (2018), most beauty brands have discovered the marketing and advertising potential of social networks, by making great use of the visual medium and user engagement to increase their brand loyalty. In the past, beauty products consumers often relied on the websites of beauty companies, consultants and intermediaries for beauty information and recommendation. However, according to Chung and Buhalis (2008), the type and relative importance of information sources have changed over time as nowadays consumers rely on fellow consumers to obtain their evaluations about products and services. As a result, a rising number of beauty consumers are referring to beauty websites and videos posted by fellow consumers rather than the beauty company's official contents (Getzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007). Since noncommercial information is perceived as more objective and credible, beauty consumers tend to regard information from their peers as more trustworthy (Litvin et al., 2008).

Following Google and Facebook, YouTube has become the third most visited website all over the world since its establishment in 2005 (Alexa, 2014). Molyneaux and O'Donnell (2009) report that online video sharing had become a widespread phenomenon as a media format. Millions of people have uploaded their self-made videos and share them online with the rest of the world. According to its website, YouTube has over 800 million unique visitors each month. Approximately 4 billion hours of video are watched monthly, and 100 million people like, share, or comment on videos each week. YouTube becomes a favourite channel for beauty products reviews because of its distinctiveness as it encourages users to "Broadcast Yourself" and be the stars and celebrities by uploading their videos (Burgess & Green, 2009). Besides, YouTube can provide the audience with a variety of ways to consume information including text, video illustrations and audio cues, which will increase the overall engagement the videos receive.

Source Credibility

Credibility can merely be defined as the believability of some information and its source (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). O'Keefe (2002) describes credibility as judgments made by perceivers regarding the believability of communicator. Likewise, Tseng and Fogg (1999) explain that credible people are believable people and

credible information is believable. The credibility of a message depends on the recipient's perception of its source as high credibility of the message source has a positive effect on consumer attitudes toward the brand (Erdogan, 1999; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Ohanian, 1990; Muda, Musa, Mohamed & Borhan, 2012). According to Ayeh et al. (2013), the concept of source credibility has been applied in different contexts to different entities including human, media, technology, and information. The area of source credibility is also studied for practical applications in communication, marketing, law and political science (Tellis, 2003). Several dimensions of source credibility have been proposed (e.g. attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, dynamism, authoritativeness, character, competence, composure, etc.). However, many of these dimensions have been later contested. According to Wang, Qian, and Zhu (2018), there seems to be a general agreement on the dimensions of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* to describe source credibility. In spite of this, for the context of video reviews such as UGC on YouTube, source *attractiveness* should be included. This is because user-generated beauty content in YouTube is given by consumers who appear in videos to provide the review themselves. Thus, in this study, we conceptualize source credibility as a three-dimensional construct, with expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as distinct dimensions.

Source expertise refers to the extent that a source of a persuasive message is seen to be knowledgeable about the topic of the message. Ohanian (1990) explains that expertise or expertness, also known as the authority, competence, and qualification a communicator possesses. Much research has proven that the more credible a person is, the more behaviorally compliant the receiver of that message will be. A source perceived as an expert has sufficient knowledge in a particular area of interest, in this case, beauty. It explains how consumers are persuaded based on the overall perceived credibility, regardless of format. As long as viewers perceive that the YouTuber or vlogger knows the product, the YouTuber is considered an expert (Haig, Lowry & Wilson, 2013; Loggerenberg, Waldt & Wehmeyer, 2009). However, Ohanian (1990) stresses that "highly credible sources are not always more effective than less-credible ones" (p. 42). Nonetheless, compared to non-experts, expert sources have been considered to elicit more processing of persuasive messages because of expectations that the information is likely to be valid or accurate.

Trustworthiness describes the degree of confidence in the source's intent to communicate the assertions that he/she considers as most valid (Hovland et al., 1953). Trustworthiness is "the listener's degree of confidence in, and level of acceptance of, the speaker and the message" (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). Several studies have proven that trustworthiness is directly correlated with persuasion and message effectiveness. For example, Miller and Baseheart (1969) found that the more trustworthy a communicator is, the more effective their opinion will be to the receiver of that message. Trustworthiness and transparency work hand in hand. Honesty, integrity, and believability are core characteristics in a good message source. A large part of trustworthiness lies in the likeability of the endorser (Loggerenberg, Waldt & Wehmeyer, 2009). The culture of YouTube allows users to be transparent with vlogging, face-to-face production setups, and interactive conversation.

Attractiveness is another dimension that plays a vital role in the initial judgment of the communicator (Baker & Churchill, 1977). Physical appearance is essential and seldom goes unnoticed. Source attractiveness focusses on an endorser's physical attributes or characteristics (Erdogan 1999). Attractiveness has been defined by many researchers as chicness, sexuality, and likability (Mills & Aronson, 1965; Steadman, 1969; Maddux & Rogers, 1980). Joseph (1982) concluded that attractive communicators are "consistently liked more and have a more positive impact" than less attractive communicators (p.42). Several other researchers have agreed with those findings, reporting that attractiveness enhances positive attitudes (Simon, Berkowitz & Moyer, 1970; Kahle & Homer, 1985). According to Loggerenberg, Waldt, and Wehmeyer (2009), "endorsers who are perceived to be attractive are more likely to lead to purchase aspiration". Given the nature of the cosmetics industry, beauty and attractiveness continue to be significant factors in the selection of models, endorsers, and spokespeople.

Moreover, numerous studies have discovered a positive correlation between the relationship between source attractiveness and consumer attitude as well as purchase intention (Petty et al. 1983; Erdogan 1999). McGuire (1985) noted that source attractiveness directly influences the effectiveness of an endorsement. As such, an attractive vlogger on YouTube can affect consumers with positive outcomes. A product reviewer with attractive features can exert a positive attitude

toward consumers, subsequently with a purchasing intention (Till & Busler 2000). In general, social media influencers with fantastic appearance are more inclined to capture followers' attention.

Purchase Intention

Intention can be defined as "the person's motivation in the sense of his or her conscious plan to exert effort to carry out a behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 168). Purchase intention, on the other hand, represents a person's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand of product (Spears & Singh, 2004). Accordingly, the purchase intention construct is defined as the implied promise to buy the product when the chance is available. Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) discover that intention to purchase is influenced by online reviews which provide information and recommendations, hence make a significant impact on purchase intention and buy. Today's consumers are facing a myriad of issues when buying products. A wide range of product types, various brand names, and confusing commercial messages make it a difficult task for consumers to decide. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), many factors may influence consumer purchasing decision making - product characteristics, consumer's characteristics, and environmental characteristics. Within a complex market environment, consumers tend to make a purchase decision based on a variety of factors like price, quality, brand, advertisement, friends' and family members' recommendation as well as consumers' previous buying experience.

Hung et al. (2011) suggest that interpersonal influence plays a significant role in consumers' beauty products purchasing because most cosmetics advertisements fail to carry credible information due to overestimated using effects. In many beauty products advertisements, companies commonly hired celebrities or models who are already beautiful and attractive. As such, beauty consumers are typically more influenced by their friends' and family members' opinions. With the increasing accessibility of the Internet and social media like YouTube, consumers can rely on the product reviews shared by other consumers. Online consumer reviews, especially professional reviews can significantly influence consumers' purchase intention (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Furthermore, in their 2005 article, Geissler and Edison introduced the concept of "consumer market mavens", referring to consumers who have

detailed insights about consumer products, places to shop and upcoming product information. Cheong and Morrison (2008) consider the consumer market mavens as opinion leaders who are technology savvy and have an affinity for Internet-related communication. In a similar vein, vloggers on YouTube who post a product review video that help others to make a purchase decision can be considered as market mavens (Wang, 2015). Therefore, it can be postulated that vloggers perceived as credible could influence the viewers' purchase intention. Based on the above discussion, several hypotheses are proposed for the study:

H1. There is a significant relationship between source expertise and intention to purchase beauty product viewed in the UGBC on YouTube.

H2. There is a significant relationship between source trustworthiness and intention to purchase beauty product viewed in the UGBC on YouTube.

H3. There is a significant relationship between source attractiveness and intention to purchase beauty product viewed in the UGBC on YouTube.

Research Methodology

To empirically test the hypotheses, multi-item scales used in past studies were identified and modified to suit the study setting. A questionnaire with four constructs was designed to capture the respondents' evaluation of the credibility of UGBC on YouTube. The perceived UGBC credibility was operationalized as consisting of three dimensions. Dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness were measured using Ohanian's (1990) established scales. Each dimension has five items respectively. Purchase intention for beauty product reviewed in UGC on YouTube was measured using five items from Hsu and Tsou (2011) and Saxena (2011). Each of the four constructs was measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Data for the study was collected from a sample of 372 university students of the largest public university in Malaysia. University students were chosen because they are part of the digital natives (DNs), those borne after 1980 (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010), who make up the majority of the audience for YouTube (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Samples were drawn using purposive sampling procedure where only students who have experience watching user-generated beauty contents on YouTube were recruited. An offline self-administered questionnaire was distributed to each respondent with a set of ballpoint pens as a souvenir. Brief Profile of the respondents are as follows: 75.0%

were female, and 25.0% male, the average age for the respondents was 22 years old and 85.5% students were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs, while the remaining 14.5% were from postgraduate programs.

The reliability of the measurement items was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. To validate the instrument, construct validity using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was utilized. The data was examined using principal components analysis as the extraction technique and Direct Oblimin as the method of rotation. According to Pallant (2013), this technique was used to eliminate poor items. Table 1 displays the dimension for each factor. Principal Component Analysis revealed the presence of four components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 43.725%, 12.975%, 9.952% and 6.410% of the variance respectively. The four-component solution explained a total of 73.063% of the variance. The factor loadings for all items ranged from 0.656 to 0.957, well above the threshold value of 0.35 for practical and statistical significance. Therefore, none of the scale items was dropped.

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.924	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		5334.896
	Df		190
	Sig.		0.000
	Factor		
	Trustworthiness	Attractiveness	Intention
TRUST1	0.931		
TRUST2	0.905		
TRUST3	0.870		
TRUST4	0.850		
TRUST5	0.656		
ATTRACT1		0.843	
ATTRACT2		0.838	
ATTRACT3		0.836	
ATTRACT4		0.729	
ATTRACT5		0.690	

INTENT1			0.907	
INTENT2			0.891	
INTENT3			0.848	
INTENT4			0.832	
INTENT5			0.826	
EXPERT1				0.957
EXPERT2				0.883
EXPERT3				0.843
EXPERT4				0.743
EXPERT5				0.727
Eigenvalues	8.745	2.595	1.990	1.282
% of variance	43.725	12.975	9.952	6.410
Total variance				73.063

Results

The descriptive statistics, reliability statistics and correlation analysis of the data are presented in Table 2. The results show that source attractiveness is the most highly rated variable ($M=5.32$, $SD=0.90$), followed by expertise, trustworthiness and purchase intention. The reliability coefficient of the scale items, also presented in Table 2, was found to be reliable with values ranging from 0.847 to 0.923. The values of Cronbach's alpha for all the variables are well above the cut-off limit of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The level of correlation between the variables is calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient and the value of the correlation coefficient as well as the level of significance is also presented in Table 2.

It can be found that significant positive correlations exist between all constructs. It is interesting to find that the dependent variable, purchase intention, has a significantly positive correlation with all the independent variables of expertise (0.64), trustworthiness (0.6) and attractiveness (0.26) at a significant level of 0.001. It can be concluded that all three independent variables are moderately associated with the dependent variable, purchase intention.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Statistics and Pearson Correlations (N=372)

Construct	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4
Purchase Intention (1)	4.49	1.13	0.91	1.000	0.308	0.526	0.505
Attractiveness (2)	5.32	0.90	0.81		1.000	0.400	0.261
Expertise (3)	4.49	1.02	0.91			1.000	0.645
Trustworthiness (4)	4.54	0.91	0.90				1.000

Multiple regression was used to assess the ability of three independent variables (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) to predict purchase intention for beauty products UGC on YouTube. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. The total variance explained by the model as a whole was 33.4%, $F(3, 2228) = 373.252$, $p < .001$. Results from Table 3 illustrate that expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness have a positive significant relationship with purchase intention as their t-value is greater than 1.96 and significant at 0.001 level. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are accepted. The perceived expertise of the source in the UGC video proved to be the strongest predictor of purchase intention for the brand of a product reviewed on YouTube ($\beta=0.297$, $t=12.455$, $p=0.000$), followed by perceived source trustworthiness ($\beta=0.283$, $t=12.515$, $p=0.000$) and perceived source attractiveness ($\beta=0.116$, $t=6.148$, $p=0.000$).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results

Independent Variable	Beta	T Values	Significant
Attractiveness	0.116	6.148	0.000
Expertise	0.297	12.455	0.000
Trustworthiness	0.283	12.515	0.000
R ²		0.334	
Adjusted R ²		0.334	
F Value		373.252	0.000

*significant at the 0.001 level

Discussion and Implication

As online consumers increasingly seeking information from various social media platforms and trusting the UGC shared by other users, source credibility has become a key concern. This paper has demonstrated the relevance of source credibility theory in understanding online consumers' intention to purchase the product reviewed on YouTube. The study conceptualizes source credibility as a construct with three distinct dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) as opposed to two dimensions (trustworthiness and expertise) commonly examined in social media researches. Since vloggers who post a video on YouTube appear and act in it just like a model/endorser, the attractiveness of the source should be evaluated as well. More so when the video on beauty product was uploaded.

Consistent with previous studies (e.g. Mir & Rehman, 2013; Ayeh et al., 2013) this study has shown that source credibility has a strong influence on intention to purchase a brand of product in UGC. According to Wunsch-Vincent (2007), once a user uploads a video on YouTube, it may invite numerous comments, ratings, favourites, and subscription by other users. Subsequently, the comments, ratings, favourites, and subscriptions would enhance the perceived credibility of the UGC on YouTube (Han et al., 2009). Those popular user-generated videos that are viewed and reviewed by numerous people shape public opinion, attitudes, and sentiments (Bachrach, 2008). The findings point to credibility traits of videos shown on YouTube – expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness – as important predictors of trust in UGC on social media, with source expertise as the main influencer of purchase intention.

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications for beauty and cosmetics companies. Presently the young consumers belonging to the cohort of Millennials or Digital Natives account for the highest percentage of valuable consumers with high purchasing power for many industries. Moreover, they are heavy users of social media. Most likely these consumers will be the market mavens (Cheong & Morrison, 2008) as well as the consumers of the UGC at the same time. As such, beauty companies can build platforms to support effective UGC. Beauty brands can collaborate with beauty mavens to influence purchase intention of

Millennials, who find the influencers as a credible source of product reviews on YouTube. However, the companies must carefully choose influencers with expertise in beauty products as a criterion to evaluate the power of a YouTube influencer as a potential advertising partner. According to Gass and Seiter (2011), expertise is not only about having a credible title but could also mean being knowledgeable in an area and having the experience of doing something. Company marketers must also select potential influencers who are trustworthy and attractive for their beauty brands as these dimensions of source credibility also have a significant influence on purchase intention.

In the era of the Internet and social media, one-way communication between the brand and its target audience is becoming obsolete. Consumers and users have the upper hand in getting information and recommendation from the sources they deemed most trusted – the UGC. Companies should take in this new development positively as it provides storytelling and engagement much needed by their consumers. It alleviates the stress and challenges faced by marketers to create endless compelling and consistent contents and communication. As company-controlled UGC campaigns are becoming a trend, the proliferation of these sponsored-UGC campaigns will pose a threat to the credibility of the communication process of UGC as it is seen as lacking sincerity. The content contributor will be perceived as solely pursuing economic gain compared to true UGC shared by consumers who want to share their consumption experience with their peers. Therefore, companies must manage their UGC campaign with genuine intention to protect its integrity.

The findings of this study suggest that online consumers are likely to use UGBC for their purchase planning for beauty products so long as they perceive the source to be credible, regardless of whether the contents reflect the actual truth or not. This may imply that negative reviews and comments about products and services posted by some consumers may be taken at face value and consequently will have a detrimental effect on the beauty brand's reputation, sales, and profitability. As such, the beauty companies must set in place mechanisms for monitoring the UGC and ongoing discussions related to their products on social media platforms such as YouTube. It is of paramount importance that companies identify negative UGC on their offerings and take necessary actions particularly

when such UGC is dishonest or defamatory. Moreover, companies may come up with some strategies to negate negative UGC and respond professionally when faced such a situation.

Conclusion

The last two decades have seen tremendous changes took place in the way people and businesses communicate. Consumers use social media platforms to generate verbal, visual and multimedia content. This user-generated content then is referred to by fellow consumers to shape their perceptions and images about the product and assist their purchase decision. The present study confirms that UGBC on YouTube is important sources of information for beauty consumers, which influence their decisions and behaviour. Moreover, the study highlights the significant influence of the dimensions of source credibility namely expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness on consumers' behavioural response of purchase intention.

The model tested in this study only produces 33.4 per cent of the total variance explained. Although the predictive power of the model presented in this study is deemed sufficient for a social science study (Pallant, 2013), it highlights the fact that other possible or potential variables may be important in determining the use of UGC for beauty products' purchase intention. For future research, the author suggests the inclusion of additional variables to explain the complex relationship among variables to explain online credibility and the use of UGC in the beauty industry context. For instance, the inclusion of mediating and moderating variables such as attitude has been confirmed to play a fundamental role in terms of the direct and indirect effects on the intention to purchase. It would be interesting also to look at other aspects of online communication credibility such as corporate credibility, message credibility, and channel credibility.

Another limitation of this study relates to the sample drawn. The findings reported in this paper are limited to responses from university students who belong to the Digital Natives age cohort. Even though the findings may generally apply to similar generation elsewhere, the extent to which the results can be generalized to other generation cohorts or age groups remains to be investigated, as other cohorts are reported to be less engaged with social media platforms. Furthermore, this study used beauty products UGC as the context to investigate the sample's perception

towards its source credibility and the resulting impact on behavioural intention. Therefore, caution must be exercised in an attempt to generalize the results to other settings. It is hoped that future research may replicate this study in other contexts to further validate these findings.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledged the financial support from MACFEA Mini-Grant 2017.

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