



The Influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) on Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract

At the age of this rapid era, social media is becoming an increasingly central part which applied by brands to communicate with their customers. It also enables consumers to engage into the different platforms. Furthermore, User-Generated Content (UGC) is another method to offer the potential engagement with brands. Individuals could take part in any social platform to express their feelings or experiences either to a brand or other consumers. This is a quantitative study. 357 useful samples were collected from online questionnaires, and all the participants were Taiwanese. Smart PLS statistical software were used in the study. The results of the study showed that while consumers are using social media to search for brands' information, which the information and the interaction of UGC have a significant positive relationship on brand awareness, and brand association. Moreover, brand association and perceived quality have significant positive correlation with purchase intention. In conclusion, brands should pay more attention on consumers' perceived quality because it might affect their behavior. Brands also need to provide two-way communications for users to connect with each other. The study shows that the information of UGC have positive significant effect on brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality. When customers interact with other users to receive brand information on the social media would not influence perceived quality, but they also care about brand awareness and perceived quality while buying the brands. These results contribute to the enterprise to apply UGC as an important part of brand marketing, so as to pay close attention to consumers' behaviors..

Keywords: User-Generated Content (UGC); Brand awareness; Brand association; Perceived quality; Purchase intention; Social media

Introduction

According to World Stats [1], Internet users exceed four billion three hundred thousand around the world. With the improvement of information technology, the internet has brought people great convenience whether in social contact, purchasing behavior or living lifestyle. Nowadays, everyone has a smartphone. By using the devices, they could not only search for the information they are interested in, but also generate or share content by themselves to provide commodity information and make purchasing suggestions on the social platform to influence customers' behavior [2]. Mishra SA [3] founded that social media marketing efforts and online interaction tendency have significant positive impacts on users' social media engagement. User engagement has gradually become

the trend in social communication.

Unlike the traditional marketing methods which are focusing on the exposure of advertising, User-Generated Content (UGC) might not increase the unnecessary costs with limited affection. It has opened up a whole new way of social network communication that is no longer limited to marketers but allows consumers to share ideas with the public. Schivinski & Dabrowski [4] mentioned that UGC could affect brand equity. The idea is similar from Kim & Johnson [5] about the comments from consumers that has significant effect for the brand. UGC platform has become an important channel for content marketing and also for user-and-marketer relationships. Enterprise may apply UGC as a useful method to observe consumers' behaviors and brand marketing [2].

Due to the importance of social media and the rapid development of the Internet, Brands must pay close attention to social media and establish good communication content to achieve effective brand marketing [6]. Social media marketing (SMM) can create a positive brand attitude and the consumer experience may indirectly affect brand quality, leading to better brand equity [7]. Mosunmola, Kehinde, & Mayowa [8] also talked about customer-based brand equity, particularly referred to whether a brand could create value for them and establish a good interactive relationship with them.

Although users' expression posted online is very important to brand, the relationship between the information and interaction of UGC, brand equity and purchase intention remains unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the current situation of the information and interaction of UGC in Taiwan, to analyze the relationship between the information and interaction of UGC, brand equity and purchase intention.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

User-Generated Content (UGC)

Nowadays, UGC has made remarkable growth in technology, economy and society [9]. On the social network, UGC users could share their own ideas and opinions through various online platforms due to the rapid information transmission and the ability to receive feedback from other users [10,11]. UGC is a convenient tool established by the general public [12] and interact with others [13]. Because of the diversity characteristic of UGC, it has not only made the information richer and more reliable [2], but also became an important source for big data analysis [14]. For users who have the desire to express their ideas to realize them, so that they could accomplish self-achievement and get attention from others [15]. The interaction among users or between user and marketer are both important on social media. The interaction among users are primarily sharing their emotion, seeking for help, or for online entertainment [16]. Therefore, UGC could create both static behavior patterns of information dissemination and dynamic behavior patterns of interaction [17]. Furthermore, Chen FL [18] mentioned the orientation of UGC mainly focused on displaying product's functions, design or brand informative transmission as the main guide.

According to Fan, Zhu and Zhao [19] UGC could be divided into 5 parts: entertainment, social, business, interest and public opinion. Krishnamurthya & Doub [20] constructed a rational motivation (including knowledge sharing, advocacy for an issue or focus on world information), with an emotional motivation (including building social relationships or self-expression with friends, relatives or other users) of UGC. Moreover, Fan and Ma [21] divided online interactive content into two categories. "Instrumental interaction" means searching for information and solving problems or looking for the required materials on the

Internet. "User interaction" are between users, consumers, and enterprises, such as experience sharing, giving recommendations, making comments from word of mouth, etc. Ma YH [22] said "information" refers to the degree of informative transmission contained in UGC on social media platforms. "Interaction" refers to the degree of UGC publishing content on social media platforms or using communication to provide purchase advice or product information to other users directly.

Brand equity

Aaker AD [23] defines brand equity as "... a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or detract from the value provided by of a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". Dimensions of social media content could assist brands to build brand equity, such as entertainment, interaction and word of mouth [24]. Moreover, when brand participates in social network interactions, it might have a positive impact on consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) [25]. The reason why brand equity is important because when consumers are not familiar with the brand, they would only consider the price, the function or the convenience of the product [23]. The study is going to investigate and explore brand equity from three dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality.

Brand awareness: Aaker [23] defined brand awareness as the ability of buyers to identify or recall a brand belonging to a product category. Huang, Sarigöllü, [26] and Keller LK [27] mentioned that brand awareness contains recognition and recall. For the frequently purchased product, brand awareness does not affect consumer purchase decisions greatly. The delivery message after using and experiencing the product would enhance brand awareness. When the related information exposure and become a topic would get customers' attention and the company would get higher brand awareness [26]. In addition, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer BD [28] mentioned that no matter the users' information is positive or negative to the brand, they could enhance brand awareness.

According to Seo and Park [29], if a brand with low awareness can actively manage Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs), the company could improve its brand awareness and develops loyal customers. However, compared to traditional media, the communication of social media had a greater impact on the brand image [28]. In consequence, the brand awareness of consumer decision-making is very important. For building a brand, customer-orientation is the foundation to set up brand asset while developing a brand image to jointly create with the consumers [30]. Therefore, the researcher proposed:

H1: The information of UGC has a positive influence on brand awareness.

H4: The interaction of UGC has a positive influence on brand awareness.

Brand association: Brand association is anything that can connect with customers psychologically with the brand, it is also a series of combinations of people's feelings and expectations on the brand. It could reflect the brand's personality or product recognition [31]. Combined with consumer participation in Social Media Marketing (SMM) campaigns, it could strengthen brand associations [7]. Speaking to the value of a brand, which needs to convey a clear message to consumers, and echo with the core brand to strengthen the brand association [23]. A strong brand can radiate its own value, which is formed by consumers' loyalty to the brand, perception and association of products [32]. Brand association is not only for positioning or extending the brand but also creating a positive attitude and feeling towards the brand [33].

Positive emotional arousal can be enhanced by the dissemination of the brand and expand positive influence on the behavior, from creating word-of-mouth to the final impact for other consumer of the brand recognition and add deep personal loyalty to form a good brand equity [34]. Both enterprise-generated social media content and user-generated content have a positive impact on brand association [35]. Based upon the literature, the paper assumes that the information and interaction of UCG on the social media could be changed by brand association. There are two following hypotheses below:

H2: The information of UCG has a positive influence on brand association.

H5: The interaction of UCG has a positive influence on brand

association.

Perceived quality: Aaker [23] defined the perceived quality as "the consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives". When the brand name or logo could be recognized by consumers, it indicates that the product or service of the brand has good potential value, thus generating positive customer evaluation [36]. On the other hand, perceived quality is an intangible brand value of the product and it is an overall construction of the brand. In this new era, consumers begin to expect companies not only provide products and services, but also provide consumers spiritual pleasure through interaction and conversation to understand the needs of each customer [27]. In order to enhance brand association and perceived quality, companies must provide the interactive motivation to further establish a good reputation and brand image [8].

In addition, if enterprises could maintain a good interactive relationship with users and let consumers participate in brand-related activities, the brand could have a well sustainable development [37]. It would also influence their purchasing behavior [38]. According to Netemeyer GR, et al. [39], perceived quality was regarded as a very important factor in brand equity, which also affects consumers' consideration of brand selection, premium intention and purchase intention. Therefore, this research assumes that the information and interaction of UCG on the social media could be changed by perceived quality. There are two following hypotheses below (Figure 1):

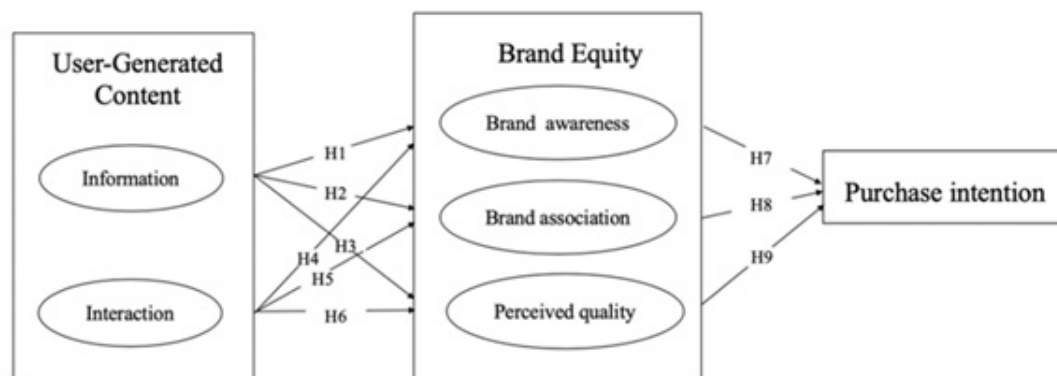


Figure 1: Conceptual structure.

H3: The information of UCG has a positive influence on perceived quality.

H6: The interaction of UCG has a positive influence on perceived quality.

In general, there is an important impact on brands when they communicate with their customers on internet. People who apply the words on social media could easily produce positive and negative

reactions to brand equity [13]. According to Rachna & Khajuria [13], UCG has a significant influence on consumer-base brand equity (CBBE) dimension (brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality). Additionally, self-concept is the most important driver of consumer cognition of UCG (Bonhomme, 2010). On the social media platform, when the brand provides a friendly and fair platform for other users to participate in, the social communication of the brand will not only affect the equity of the

relationship between firms and customers, but also have a positive effect on the equity of the brand [40]. When exchanging generated content with other users, consumers can increase social value, content value and brand equity by contributing useful information, creating new content, or providing consumption experience, thus enhancing the perception of brand equity [41]. For multi-channel retailers, the quality of UGC information can directly enhance their brand equity [2].

Purchase intention

Purchase intention refers to the possibility that consumers may act on purchases in the future [42]. Nowadays, everyone could express their opinions on the Internet, leading to the rise of information and interactivity, overcoming the problem of information asymmetry, searching information, sharing content or generating content for other users for reference to influence consumers' purchase intention [2]. Malthouse, Calder, Kim, & Vandebosch [43], said that when a consumer engages in the UGC, any experience on the Internet could influence consumer behavior. Moreover, it effectively enables to let consumer enhance the interest of the brands, drive the creation of purchase intention and strengthen the relationship between customers and enterprises [40].

On the online platform, if consumers create UGC, it could promote users to elaborate or think about their needs that related to the brand, thus influencing the purchase decision [43]. Morra, Gelosa, Ceruti, & Mazzucchelli [44], mentioned that UGC could predict not only how dependent consumers are on a brand, but also their potential buying behavior. On the Internet, Maksimova [45], also noticed that UGC publish opinions, comments and news about brands with consumers, so as to improve the interaction between users and consumers and the understanding of brand impressions, as a result, other users could obtain relevant information to make purchase decisions.

The creators of UGC could promote consumers' willingness for buying the brand products, whether they are posting articles or filming videos, which are the important factors to influence consumers' purchasing behavior before they buy the products [46]. Sethna, Hazari, & Bergie [47], mentioned that consumers promote brands by sharing product experiences to increase brand quality, and leverage consumers' interactions and expectations for UGC to influence others' purchasing decisions.

Brand equity and purchase intention

On the social media, the level of user engagement will not only have a positive impact on brand image and attitude, but also can improve brand equity [48]. If the brand loyalty of consumers reaches a certain level, it will not only increase the repurchase intention of consumers but also enhance word of mouth. Perceived quality can provide consumers with better value and also influence their purchasing behavior [38]. However, brand preference is

influenced by brand equity. The higher the brand equity level is, the higher the consumers' brand preference will be. Purchase intention is significantly affected by brand preference, and consumers will be more willing to continue using the goods or services of the brands [49].

Consumers create the UGC related brand can promote the contact between brand and consumer, indirectly improve user interactions with the enterprise, which affect the consumer purchase behavior directly. The information on the social media can influence consumers' brand attitude and the willingness of buying products or services provided by the brand. Moreover, an attractive message can have a positive impact on brand attitudes and purchase intention [48]. Today's advance technology leads to increased interactivity, and consumers' acquisition of new information through UGC to participate, in order to lead consumers' purchasing behavior [2]. Moreover, enterprises should attach the importance to the media transmission interaction between brand and users, which has a positive impact on brand assets and purchase intention [35]. According to the above of the theories, this paper assumes that brand equity: (1) brand awareness, (2) brand association and (3) perceived quality could be changed by purchase intention. The hypotheses are as below (Figure 1):

H7: Brand awareness has a positive influence on purchase intention.

H8: Brand association has a positive influence on purchase intention.

H9: Perceived quality has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Methodology

Study design

This quantitative research was conducted in Taiwan. This study focuses on the information and interaction of UGC that influence on purchase intention and the relation of brand equity. UGC mentioned in this study is refer to users who upload or browsing on the international social websites or platforms which provides two-way communication, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The specific target of customers' age is around 16-65 years old of which social media they use most frequently and the brand they follow the most in their daily life. Data were collected by using an online survey called Survey Cake which contained questions designed to measure the variables. SPSS, Smart PLS and Sobel were tested as the tools to analyze the data and confirm the hypothesis.

Research instrument

The questionnaire was written in both Chinese and English and was designed to evaluate the hypothesis in the study. The questionnaire consists six parts: The information of UGC (four items), the interaction of UGC (four items), brand awareness

(three items), brand association (three items), perceived quality (three items), and purchase intention (five items). The survey used a 5-point Likert scale to measure from “Completely disagree”, “mostly disagree”, “generally”, “basically agree” and “Completely agree”. Giving 1 to 5 rating to evaluate the study. The lower the score, represents the lower level of agreement for the items. The

questionnaire took about 25 mins to complete. A wide-ranging review of literature was accompanied to search for suitable measures for the research concepts in the proposed model (Table 1). Measures were implemented or adapted from previous research based on the pre-test of validity and reliability.

Table 1: Research Measurement and its Source Analysis

Construct	Source	Format After Adapted
The information of UGC	Ma (2017) [22]; Wang & Zhang (2015) [2]	4-item scale
The interaction of UGC	Ma (2017) [22]; Wang & Zhang (2015) [2]	4-item scale
Brand Awareness	Yooa & Donthu (2001)	3-item scale
Brand Association	Yooa, Donthu (2001); Wang & Zhang (2015) [2]	3-item scale
Perceived Quality	Yooa, Donthu (2001); Wang & Zhang (2015) [2]	3-item scale
Purchase Intention	Schivinski, Dabrowski (2015) [37]	5-item scale

Respondent characteristics

After deducting incomplete questionnaires, the actual valid questionnaires were 357 (Table 2). There were 131 males (36.69%)

and 226 females (63.31%) in the answers, and the main ages were between 16 and 65 years. The usage of social media is Facebook (31.37%), Instagram (43.14%), YouTube (17.93%) and Others (7.56%).

Table 2: Demographic profile.

Characteristic	Percent %	Characteristic	Percent %
Education		Time spend on Internet per day	
High school or below	9.8	Less than 1 hour	2.24
College	72.27	1-2 hours	14.29
Master up	17.93	3-4 hours	34.17
		Above 5 hours	49.3
Age		Time spend on Social media per day	
16-25	50.42	Less than 1 hour	15.97
26-35	20.17	1-2 hours	43.42
36-45	13.72	3-4 hours	27.73
46-55	12.04	Above 5 hours	12.89
56 up	3.64		

Note n= 357

Reliability and validity

Table 3: Individual project reliability evaluation results.

Construct	No.	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor	t*** Value	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
The Information of UGC	A1	0.73	0.725	0.049	0.73	15.021	0.867	0.794	0.619
	A2	0.802	0.801	0.023	0.802	35.381			
	A3	0.823	0.822	0.02	0.823	41.023			
	A4	0.789	0.787	0.028	0.789	28.335			
The Interaction of UGC	B1	0.71	0.703	0.039	0.71	18.293	0.834	0.746	0.564
	B2	0.557	0.545	0.07	0.557	7.936			
	B3	0.847	0.846	0.025	0.847	33.962			
	B4	0.85	0.849	0.022	0.85	38.224			

Brand Awareness	C1	0.634	0.634	0.049	0.634	12.886	0.847	0.734	0.654
	C2	0.895	0.894	60.982	0.894	0.894			
	C3	0.871	0.871	45.548	0.871	0.871			
Brand Association	D1	0.854	0.853	45.191	0.853	45.191	0.918	0.866	0.789
	D2	0.904	0.904	0.012	0.904	73.780			
	D3	0.906	0.905	58.563	0.905	58.563			
Perceived Quality	E1	0.871	0.869	50.555	0.869	50.555	0.914	0.859	0.780
	E2	0.906	0.906	68.063	0.906	68.063			
	E3	0.873	0.872	57.707	0.872	57.707			
Purchase	F1	0.717	0.714	18.492	0.714	18.492			
Intention	F2	0.832	0.831	43.317	0.831	43.317	0.845	0.757	0.578
	F3	0.796	0.796	27.926	0.796	0.796			
	F4	0.687	0.684	14.946	0.684	0.684			

Through the data analysis, from Table 3, the outer loadings of all individual items are greater than 0.5 and reached the significant level. Both CR value and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of each construct are reached a standard value of 0.7. Also, the average variance extracted (AVE) reached the standard value of 0.5 or more and all the p value smaller than 0.01 (extremely significant). According to the above analysis results, the measurement model

of this research has good reliability and validity. It shows that this study scale has a high degree of internal consistency, reliability and effectiveness.

As shown in Table 4, AVE for each construct was greater than the estimates of squared correlations between constructs, confirming discriminant validity.

Table 4: Correlations of discriminant validity.

Constructs	BA	BAA	PQ	PI	IFUCG	ITUCG
Brand Association (BA)	0.888					
Brand Awareness (BAA)	0.714	0.809				
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.674	0.577	0.883			
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.602	0.496	0.542	0.76		
The Information of UGC (IFUCG)	0.492	0.402	0.548	0.464	0.787	
The Interaction of UGC (ITUCG)	0.473	0.392	0.303	0.538	0.382	0.751

Table 5: Structural model analysis and hypotheses testing results.

Related Variables	Path Coefficient	Mean	Std.	t Value	p Value	Support or not
H1: The Information of UGC and Brand Awareness	0.295	0.296	0.046	6.464	< .01	Support
H2: The Information of UGC and Brand Association	0.364	0.362	0.043	8.487	< .01	Support
H3: The Information of UGC and Perceived Quality	0.506	0.505	0.044	11.608	< .01	Support
H4: The Interaction of UGC and Brand Awareness	0.28	0.287	0.051	5.462	< .01	Support
H5: The Interaction of UGC and Brand Association	0.334	0.34	0.055	6.023	< .01	Support
H6: The Interaction of UGC and Perceived Quality	0.11	0.114	0.056	1.967	0.051	Not Support
H7: Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention	0.089	0.095	0.064	1.403	0.161	Not Support
H8: Brand Association and Purchase Intention	0.38	0.376	0.069	5.494	< .01	Support
H9: Perceived Quality and Purchase Intention	0.235	0.239	0.065	3.627	< .01	Support

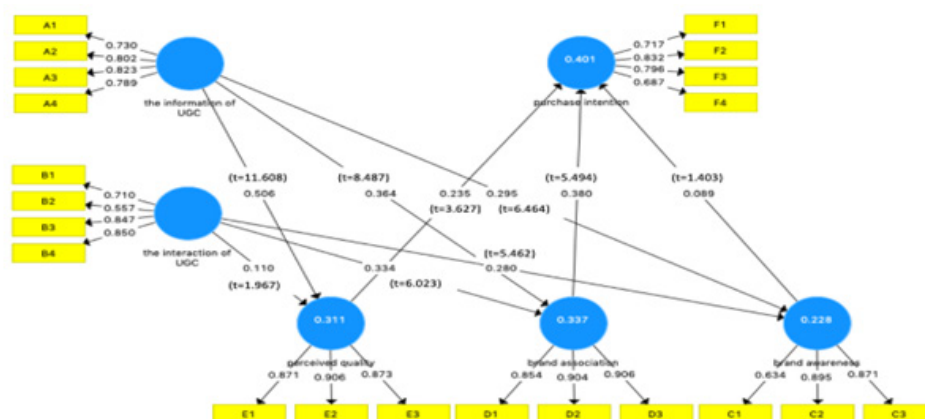


Figure 2: Structural model analysis results.

Table 5 and Figure 2 showed the results of the structural model analysis of this research, the value on the line between constructs indicates the path coefficient, and the value in the constructed circle represents the R² value. The path coefficient is used to confirm whether the standardized path coefficient reaches the statistical significance, and the R² value is used to evaluate the interpretive ability of the model, the value is between 0 and 1. Which present the closer to 1 the stronger the explanatory power. In this study, we used the t value to determine the significance of the path coefficient, the higher the value is, the more significant the representation. R² value is used to estimate the interpretive ability of the model, the value is between 0 and 1, the closer to 1 the stronger the explanatory power.

The R² value of brand awareness is 0.228, the R² value of brand association is 0.337, the R² value of perceived quality is 0.311, and the R² value of purchase intention is 0.401. According to the model fit analysis, SRMR is 0.131 and the NFI is 0.716. Hair Jr, et al. [50] mentioned that SRMR is the difference among the observed correlation and predicted correlation of the variables. When SRMR < .08 and the NFI > .9, it would reach a significant level. The value of NFI is between 0 to 1, and the closer to 1, the better the fit it is. However, in this data analysis, the study does not have a powerful significant explanatory power for constructs. Therefore, the results of the research hypotheses are shown Table 5.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the study, the information of UGC and brand equity (brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality) do have significant positive relationships. The results are consistent with the previous studies. Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer BD [28] found that no matter positive or negative users created on Internet social media communication, can enhance brand awareness. He [35] mentioned that enterprise-generated or user-generated content on the social media, both of them have a positive impact on brand association. Bashir, Ayub and Jalees [12] said that UGC and social media communication have a positive impact on perceived quality.

This study also created the hypothesis that the interaction of UGC and brand awareness/ brand association have significant positive relationships. For H4 and H5, Schivinski and Dąbrowski [4] found that UGC has a greater impact on the overall brand awareness. Chen FL [18] said that positive emotional arousal could expand and influence customers' behavior, from creating word-of-mouth to actual impact to other consumers through brand recognition. However, H6 has been rejected. It indicates that in the process of consumers using social media to receive brands information, the higher the interaction of UGC that consumers perceived, does not equal to a better perceived quality.

This study found out that H8 and H9 are supported. In Rachna and Khajuria's study [13], they suggested that while choosing between brands, the brand association will positively influence consumers' purchasing behavior because of the development of social media has changed people's social behaviors and purchasing behaviors. Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey [38] also indicated that perceived quality can provide consumers with better value and also influence their purchasing behavior. The results are consistent with the study. However, H7 was not supported. He [35] mentioned that when brands created social media messages, it could be well perceived by consumers based upon their brand awareness development and positive brand image building. Even though higher brand awareness that consumers gained from social media, it does not mean that the better purchase intention would be convinced.

In conclusion, the management implications are:

The results found that the information of UGC have positive significant effect on brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality. In addition, brand association and perceived quality also has a positive effect on purchase intention. In other words, although customers received brand information from other users created contents on the social media would rise brand awareness, customers are more concerned about brand association and perceived quality when buying the products. However, the interaction of UGC does not have significant effect on perceived

quality. It means that when customers interact with other users to receive brand information on the social media would not influence their perceived quality, but they care about brand association and perceived quality while buying the brands.

According to the above explanation, when brands want to use social media for marketing, in the selection of social media, the researcher recommend giving a chance for the platform that provided two-way communication for users to connect with each other. To get more information through different users' opinions and interactions could not only update the latest news but also to communicate with the consumers directly. In the meanwhile, the brands should pay more attention on perceived quality that would might effect consumers' behavior.

Limitation and Future research

In this study, the questionnaire was used to collect data. Although the meaning of the UGC and social media have been explained at the beginning of the questionnaire, some participants may still have few misunderstandings of the concepts and it does influence their answers. In addition, some topics of the questions resulting in similarities that might let participants feel confused while reading.

This study was conducted in Taiwan, the follow-up researchers could focus on a smaller scope of area or gender group to assist brands clarify their target consumers. Besides, follow-up studies could consider using qualitative research in order to obtain deeper and detail knowledge. Last but not least, the brands' products were tested in this study contains a wide range of categories including clothing, cars, food, smartphones, etc. If the future study could narrow it into certain category, it might conduct a more precisely research.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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