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Impact of emerging marketing channels such as user generated content on Intention to purchase in Bangladesh: A study of changes in consumer behaviour in the digital era

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Research aims: User-generated content may be defined as any form of content that is consumer-created instead of the brand. Due to a higher number of people sharing parts of their daily lives on social media, and greater trust in word of mouth over for ¹¹ advertising, user generated content has become increasingly useful for branding and marketing at low costs. This study aims to investigate the role of user generated content in driving purchase intention and shaping consumer attitude, and how ¹² marketers can develop strategies to leverage this new channel. The core aims of this study are: (1) To examine the influence of UGC on consumer trust and purchase intention, in the context of dominating platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok (2) Potential moderating factors that can strengthen or weaken UGC impact, such as demographic, literacy and internet access (3) Provide practical insights for marketers and brands to use UGC strategically to drive purchase behaviour and build trust.

Research Questions:

1. What are the different forms of UGC, and what types are most successful across the major social media platforms and e-commerce sites?
2. What are the key changes in consumer opinion, trust and attitudes when exposed to UGC?
3. How do demographic factors in Bangladesh such as generation and level of income influence the effectiveness of UGC?

Introduction

With more than 60% of the population under the age of 35 and over 77.36 million active internet users in 2024 [1], social media platforms have transformed into digital marketplaces where businesses from multinational companies to small entrepreneurs engage directly with users. Hence user-generated content, which includes reviews, testimonials, posts and short form content, can be a cost effective way for brands to attain higher engagement and reach, while also building community and influence purchase decisions.

Traditional advertising, which includes brand sponsored digital campaigns, is gradually losing ground to word of mouth advertising in the digital space. According to the daily star, 70-80% of social media users skip ads and 12.7% use ad blockers [2]. Hence, one of the best ways to drive organic engagement is user-generated content. Bangladeshi consumers are less sceptical of recommendations from close family and social networks than corporate messages. This is evident in Facebook marketing, where trust and authenticity conveyed through UGC may be the deciding factor in driving purchases [3]. Despite this shift, research in Bangladesh has shown limited attention to how UGC influences perceived trust and purchase intention.

Moreover, existing literature on UGC has predominantly been focused on developed economies where consumers' trust levels and digital infrastructure differ vastly from the emerging Bangladeshi market. Hence, it is important to see how Bangladeshi consumers respond to UGC across various platforms and contexts. This can help businesses build more effective digital marketing strategies that can further drive sales and take advantage of Bangladesh's growing digital economy.

Literature review

Various studies have concluded that UGC builds trust between sellers and buyers, as consumers perceive consumer-created content as more credible than polished corporate messages as the former may be more relatable and authentic [4]. This persuasive power can be explained by many theoretical frameworks such as the Social Proof Theory, which suggests that humans resort to conformative behaviour, especially in uncertain situations such as purchasing from unfamiliar online sellers. In Bangladesh, UGC takes on many forms such as customer testimonials, product reviews in Facebook groups, and short form videos on TikTok, and can help build trust in an online space where counterfeit goods and inconsistent customer service is prevalent [6]. Moreover, viral "scam alert" posts can very quickly damage reputation and discourage purchases.

Many studies have also shown that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) such as well articulated reviews positively impact purchase intentions [4][7]. One study conducted in Bangladesh has shown that electronics and beauty products are particularly influenced by eWOM, and that online brands foster loyalty mainly through peer interactions [8]. Another study has shown a positive correlation between UGC and purchase intentions in the automobile market in Sri Lanka, another South Asian market [9]. Regionally, demographic differences may moderate the UGC, as each consumer segment in Bangladesh is diverse. Young, urban consumers may be more influenced by short form videos on Instagram or TikTok, whereas rural consumers may rely more on Facebook and WhatsApp reviews [10].

The existing literature on other countries shows that UGC influences consumer behaviour and drives purchase intentions [4][7]. How applicable these findings are to the Bangladeshi market remains unexplored. Some studies done locally have emphasised on the importance of online reviews, and perceived trust and authenticity [8]. They also take a more broader approach than only focus on UGC. However, the role of different platforms in different demographics and social classes is not very well understood.

Research methodologies:

Design: This study will be conducted using the experimental design approach using controlled exposure. This will provide sufficient evidence to evaluate consumer response and measure purchase intention when exposed to UGC compared to branded content. It will be a between subjects experiment where participants are divided randomly into three groups, exposed to stimuli, and asked to complete a post exposure survey.

1. UGC exposure (varying pieces of UGC from Bangladeshi Facebook/TikTok/Instagram pages)
2. Branded ad exposure of the same product
3. Control (shown unrelated content in order to measure baseline attitudes)

Sample: Participants (n=200), (n~65) per group. They will be chosen from the mobile first generation (18-35 years old) and then using stratified data for an even representation of demographic according to socioeconomic status and education level.

Procedure: The groups will then be shown the corresponding stimuli, and then proceed to complete the same survey, which includes questions on perceived authenticity, trust, what types of content they were most drawn to, and purchase intentions, which would be rated on a 1-7 Likert Scale.

Analysis: Multi-group statistical methods such as ANOVA may be used to compare the main differences in mean across each group, along with t-tests to ensure participants have perceived the stimuli as UGC vs. branded content.

Project practicalities

Data collection may be manageable in 1-2 months using proper online recruitment forms. Mocked-up UGC may be used to avoid privacy issues, and consent must be ensured with participation, along with the right to withdraw at any time.

Conclusion

Analysing how UGC impacts consumer trust, attitude and ultimately purchase intention, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how consumer behaviour is evolving in Bangladesh. The findings will not only further theoretical insights into the Bangladeshi market, but also provide valuable information to local businesses and hence, help develop community-driven strategies. This research will aim to bridge the gap between businesses and the digitally literate consumers.

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