
Research

THE IMPACT OF THE FIRM GENERATED CONTENTS AND THE USER GENERATED CONTENTS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND EQUITY ELEMENTS

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Abstract

It is an era of modern communication technology, where consumers are well aware and connected to products and brands. By generating content related to products or brands consumers can now make or destroy a brand. Communication through online social media has shaped the overall communication strategy of the firms, as more and more firms are struggling hard to understand and control the online social media communication for better and secured future of the brand and the firm. The aim of this study was to measure the impact of the firm generated social media communication and the user generated social media communication on the elements of brand equity. A conceptual framework was developed based on Aaker's Brand Equity model. The constructs and scale items were adopted from previous studies and had valid reliability. SEM was performed through AMOS. Findings of this research revealed that both the firm generated and the user generated social media communications have a positive influence on the brand equity elements.

Keywords: Firm Generated Contents, User Generated Contents, Perceived Quality, Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Brand Loyalty

JEL Classification: Z 190

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Introduction

Brand building activities through social media is one of the most discussed topics in the researchers' community these days (Laroche et al, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Brands are made stronger by placing the brand knowledge in consumer's mind. Customers respond positively to the marketing activities and programs of strong brands. To shape the brand knowledge in the consumer's mind the role of marketing activities is crucial (Keller, 2009). Organizations, thus are paying more attention for developing marketing strategies for gaining sales growth, brand equity and competitive advantages (Olof Holm, 2006).

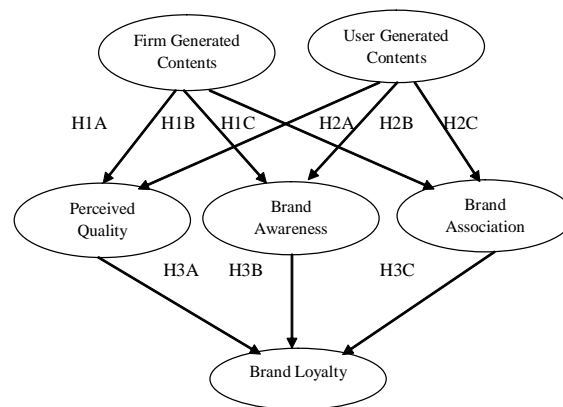
Traditional media has passed through a major shift in the last decade. It is an era of Web 2.0 technology, where users through their communications and viral marketing generated contents that significantly enhance marketing efforts (Thackeray et al, 2008). Marketers can build strong relationship with their customers through the use of this technology (Harridge-March and Quinton 2009). Companies are relying more on social media as the communication through it is becoming popular for both companies and customers (Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012). Company and its brand users have established online brand communities where consumers exchange their words, thoughts and information worldwide (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Park and Cho, 2012).

In Pakistan social media technology has attained a tremendous fame in a short period of time and has transformed the ways of communication, interaction and socializing among the youth of Pakistan (Hafeez, 2014). The companies in Pakistan are adopting digital marketing as marketing trends are changing as conventional techniques are not giving the desired outcomes. Digital marketing is comparatively more fascinating and attractive to consumers. Several local and multinational companies are now promoting their brand through facebook and twitter. Social media has now become a medium to understand consumer behavior and developing brand loyalty (Naveed, 2012).

Literature Review

The conceptual framework of this study is based on Aaker's Brand Equity model (1991). According to Aaker (1991), brand equity is the set of intangible assets and liabilities associated with a brand; assets add value to a brand, whereas liabilities deduct value from the brand. The elements of customer based brand equity are perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty (Aaker, 2001). Brand loyalty is considered to be the "heart" of brand equity as it increases brand's worth. A conceptual frame work is depicted in Figure -1 showing components of brand equity the effects of FGC and UGC on them.

Figure 1:
Conceptual Framework



Firm generated social media contents

The popularity of social media has motivated consumers to spend a significant amount of their time on internet which is a prerequisite for social networking. Social networking is a medium extensively used by consumers for sharing their experience about products, services, brands and other subjects (Chauhan and Pillai 2013; Li and Bernoff 2011). Social media communication created by firms by two-way interactions helps in developing brand loyalty (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Through social media communications marketing managers tend to stay connected with their loyal consumers.

This helps them (marketers) to learn more about consumers' perception and attitude towards their brand and services (Brodie et al. 2013). Social media communication is becoming popular as information through this medium spreads quickly and have a longer reach than the communication based on traditional medium (Li and Bernoff, 2011).

Organizations have full control on the Firm created social media and they use this medium positively for developing brand equity, brand trust and brand loyalty (Khadim, Younis, Mahmood and Khalid 2015). The firm created contents also affect customers' attitude and behavior significantly (Kumar et al. 2015). Social media marketing activities positively affect brand equity in a shorter time period (Kim and Ko 2012). Others also found that the firm generated social media communication have positive effects on perceived brand quality, brand association and brand awareness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014).

Highly advertised brands are generally considered to be of high quality (Gil, Andre's, and Salinas 2007). Smith et al. (2012) also mentioned that constructive firm generated contents on social media have a positive impact on brand equity.

Social media communication is helping the marketing managers in many ways; through effective communication they not only learn from their customers but also learn about the potential customers, and how they disseminate the information about the brand (Brodie et al, 2013). Brand equity is enhanced through effective communication, as it enhances the probability of the purchase of a brand by including it into the customer's consideration set to purchase. The firm created social media contents impact consumer based brand equity elements (Bruno Schivinski. & Dariusz Dabrowski., 2014).

H1: The elements of brand equity (a) brand awareness, (b) brand association and (c) perceived quality are positively influenced by the firm created social media communication.

User generated Social media contents

Web 2.0 technology and user generated contents through the use of this technology have revolutionized marketing, and the

popularity of social networking sites have reached new heights (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014). Among this new media, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube probably have gained the most publicity by communication managers (Social Media Marketing Industry Report 2015). Powerful communities based on user generated content (UGC) have emerged tremendously where individuals with common interests can easily interact (Winer 2009). According to Gangadharbatla (2008) with the increased trend of online brand communities there is also a rise in user-generated social media communication. User generated contents is considered a swiftly rising tool to gain insights of consumers. UGC is not created by marketing people of the firms but by the general public. The understanding of UGC is crucial for marketers (Christodoulides et al, 2012). According to Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008), marketers can keep costs lower than traditional channels by using the valuable contents generated by loyal consumers. Brand equity is positively influenced by the user generated contents (Christodoulides et al, 2012). The findings of Murphy (2014) also indicated that the user generated content influence brand equity and purchase intention. According to Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) perceived brand quality, brand association and brand awareness influenced positively by the user generated contents on social media.

The user generated contents are not usually guided by marketing people and are not under the control of company (Christodoulides. G. et al. 2012). The user generated contents that carry positive information related to the brand/product and the company can be particularly useful for customers and have an impact on the consumer based brand equity (Bruno et al. 2014).

H2: The elements of brand equity (a) brand awareness, (b) brand association and (c) perceived quality, positively influenced by the user generated social media communication.

Relationship among brand equity elements

Brand equity has a set of dimensions and these dimensions are inter-related (Yoo et al. 2000; Buil et al. 2013). Some authors describe the relationship as associative (e.g. Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo et al., 2000), while some describe the relationship as causal (e.g. Bravo et al., 2007; Martínez, Polo and de Chernatony, 2008).

Brand equity building process starts with increased brand awareness of customer related to the brand. Once the customer is aware of the brand it develops brand association (Aaker, 1991). The formation and strengthening of brand association is affected by the brand awareness (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). Positive perception of the brand results in enhanced loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Brand loyalty is enhanced through good perceived quality and constructive associations (Keller and Lehmann, 2003).

According to Keller (1993), brand awareness has an impact on consumer decision making, as it influence the formation and strengthening of strong brand associations. Perceived quality and brand associations are positively influenced by the brand awareness (Buil et al., 2013). Brand loyalty is enhanced by the brand awareness and perceived quality (Aaker (1996; Buil et al. 2013). Brand loyalty is enhanced through strong brand associations (Buil et al. 2013). According to Chattopadhyay et al., (2010), brand association could be anything consumers' memory holds about the brand. Perceived brand quality is positively correlated with brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is also enhanced through brand association (Brogi, S. et al. 2013).

H3(A): Brand Loyalty is positively influenced by Perceived quality.

H3(B): Brand Loyalty is positively influenced by brand awareness.

H3(C): Brand Loyalty is positively influenced by brand association.

Methodology

This study tested a conceptual framework based on Brand Equity model developed by David Aaker (1991) illustrated in figure 1.

Scales and Measures

Constructs and scale items used in this study were acquired from previous studies, which had established reliabilities. Scale items were converted into seven point Likert scale.

Table 1:

Summary of the constructs

Measures	Author	No. of Items	Reliability
Firm Generated Contents	Magi, 2003; Tsiros et al, 2004; Bruhn et al, 2012	4	0.94
User Generated Contents	Magi, 2003; Tsiros et al, 2004; Bruhn et al, 2012	4	0.92
Perceived Quality	Pappu et al, (2005, 2006)	4	0.92
Brand Association	Brogi et al, (2013); Lassar et al, (1995), Aaker, (1996)	4	0.74-0.87
Brand Awareness	Yoo et al, (2000); Villarejo-Ramos & Sanchez-Franco (2005); Brogi et al (2013)	4	0.70-0.83
Brand Loyalty	Yoo et al. (2000)	4	0.90

Population, Sample and Data Collection

The targeted population for this study was the social media users in Pakistan. There are around 16.8 million active users of facebook and approximately near to 1 million users of Twitter in Pakistan by the end of June, 2015, and the bulk of them are in between the age of 18 – 34 (Pakistan’s Social Media Marketing Report-June-July 2015). In Pakistan 19.6 million people are active social media users (Digital, Social & Mobile in APAC in 2015). For appropriate sample size there are different guidelines by different researchers e.g. for factorial design 30 samples per cell recommended by Haier Jr et al. (2007). According to Sekran (2003) minimum 30 samples per variables must be selected. However, a larger than the minimum sample size was taken for this study. The sample size for this study was 1811. Data was collected from the students of selected business schools of Karachi. Respondents were the students of bachelor to doctorate level. The link of online questionnaire was sent to students to participate in the study, through the deans of selected business schools.

Table 2:

Respondents Profile

Variables		Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	1098	60.6
	Female	704	38.9
Age	Less than 21	1061	58.6
	21-30	650	35.9
	31-40	47	2.6
	41-50	18	1
	51 and above	35	1.9
Income	Upto-21,000	41	2.3
	21,000-30,000	35	1.9
	31,000-40,000	127	7
	41,000 and above	1606	88.7
Marital Status	Single	1652	91.2
	Married	159	8.8
Education	Intermediate	1178	65
	Graduation	487	26.9
	Masters	60	3.3
	MS/M.Phil	61	3.4
	PhD	25	1.4

Data Analysis Techniques

SPSS-v19 was used for statistical techniques such as reliability, descriptive and normality analyses (D. Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Caballero, Lumpkin, & Madden, 1989). For Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) AMOS- v18 was used. SEM was used in this study (Hair Jr, et al., 2010), including EFA, Normality of Data, Outliers Detecting, Reliability of data, CFA, Data validity, and testing

overall SEM model (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2005; Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991).

Table 3:
Classification of Fit Measures

Fit Measures					
Absolute		Relative		Parsimonious	
Test	Value	Test	Value	Test	Value
χ^2	p>.05	CFI	> .95	PNFI	>.50
GFI	>.90	NFI	>.90	PCFI	>.50
RMSR	<.05	IFI	>.90		
CMIN/df	<3.00	RFI	>.90		
RMSEA	<.10				

The reported fit indices for this study are (1) Chi Square (χ^2), Relative Chi Square (CMIN/df) and The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI) which are from Absolute Fit Measures. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fixed Index (NFI), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) are from relative Fit Measures. Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) and Parsimony Comparative Index (PCFI) are from Parsimonious Fit Measures.

Results

Descriptive and Reliability

Descriptive statistics was carried out to ascertain the univariate normality of the constructs (Huang, Lee & Ho, 2004).

Table 4:
Reliability of constructs

Construct	Reliability	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Association	0.81	4.19	1.26	-.07	.05
Brand Loyalty	0.79	3.44	1.28	.30	-2.5
Brand Awareness	0.80	4.51	1.39	-.27	-7.0
Perceived Quality	0.86	4.51	1.36	-.30	-.45
Firm Generated Contents	0.87	3.93	1.35	-.12	-.62
User Generated Contents	0.84	4.12	1.34	-.26	-.51

Table 4 shows that the reliability of firm created contents was the highest ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.35$) followed by perceived quality ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.36$), user generated contents ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.34$). The reliabilities of rest of the constructs are within the range of 0.79-0.81. According to Leech (2010) the reliability should be between 0.50 – 0.90. The reliability analysis indicates that the constructs used in this study have reasonable internal consistency. Since all the values of skewness and kurtosis ranged between ± 3.5 , it can be safely assumed that the constructs fulfill the requirements of univariate normality (Bryne, 2001; Haier 2010).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

To ascertain whether the data meets the requirements like linear relationships, independent sampling and moderate correlation exploratory factor analysis were performed. Table 5 is showing summarized results of EFA.

Table 5
EFA summarized Results

Construct	KMO	Barley Test of Sphercity	Cumulative Factor Loading	Items
Brand Association	0.78	2376.27	63.80%	4
Brand Loyalty	0.74	2725.49	63.07%	4
Brand Awareness	0.71	2611.87	63.16%	4
Perceived Quality	0.81	3440.68	70.81%	4
Firm Created Contents	0.82	3852.43	72.74%	4
User Created Contents	0.81	2883.41	68.06%	4

Convergent Validity

The scale items adopted for this study were developed in the western culture, therefore their construct validity was re-ascertained in Pakistani culture. Convergent and discriminant validity are used to ascertain construct validity (Bhardwaj, 2010; fieldman 2010). The reliabilities of each construct are greater than 0.60 (refer to table 4) and variance explained are greater than 0.40, therefore, the constructs fulfill the requirement of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Subsequently discriminant validity was re-ascertained for uniqueness and distinctiveness of the constructs. According to Haier et al. (2010) the square root of total variance explained should be greater than the square of correlation of each pair of construct. Thus, confirming variables used are unique and distinct. Correlation of each pair should be less than 0.85 (Kline, 2005; Shammout, 2007). Inter item correlation results are presented in table 6.

Table 6:

Inter-item correlation

	BA	BL	BAW	PQ	FGC	UGC
Brand Association	1					
Brand Loyalty	.49	1				
Brand Awareness	.49	.36	1			
Perceived Quality	.42	.34	.40	1		
Firm Generated Contents	.49	.45	.34	.31	1	
User Generated Contents	.47	.47	.37	.32	.59	1

The relationship (correlation) between firm generated contents ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.35$, $N = 1811$) and user generated contents ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.34$, $N = 1811$) with $p = 0.0 < .01$, was the strongest and the weakest was for perceived quality ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.30$) and firm generated contents ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.35$, $N = 1811$) with $p = 0.0 > .01$. Since all the correlation values are lesser than 0.90 it can be safely infer that there is no issue of multi-collinearity and constructs are unique (Brymann, 2010).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The summarized results of CFA results of the six constructs are presented in Table 7

Table 7:

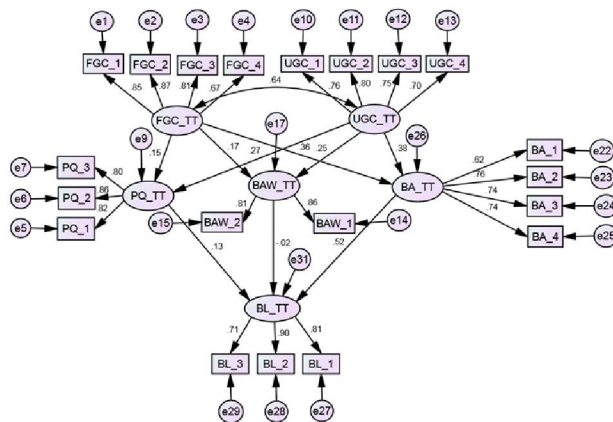
Summary of CFA results

	Chi Sq	DOF	Probability	CMNI/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Brand Association	45.56	2	.000	23.28	.987	.936	.981	.111
Brand Loyalty	33.29	2	.000	16.64	.991	.957	.989	.093
Brand Awareness	.172	1	.678	.172	1.00	1.00	1.00	.000
Perceived Quality	39.90	2	.000	19.95	.989	.946	.989	.102
Firm Created Contents	9.99	2	.007	4.998	.997	.987	.998	.047
User Created Contents	17.58	2	.000	8.795	.995	.975	.995	0.66

As the standardized residual are below ± 2.58 and factor loading for each observed variable is at least 0.40, so fulfilling the lowest requirements (Hair Jr. et al, 2007).

Overall Model

The overall model comprises of two exogenous models including firm generated contents and user generated contents and four endogenous model perceived quality, brand association, brand awareness and brand loyalty. The overall model is presented in Figure 2.



The Chi square value for the model was significant ($\chi^2 = 1331.26, DF = 161, P = .000 < .05$). The CMIN/df (Relative χ^2/df) was $8.26 > 5$. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = $0.063 < 0.08$ and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = $0.927 > 0.90$ meet both absolute badness of fit and goodness of fit criteria. The comparative Fit Index (CFI) = $0.937 > 0.900$ and Normed Fixed Index (NFI) = $0.929 > 0.900$ meet Relative Fit Measures. However, Parsimony Adjusted Normed Fit Index (PNFI) = $0.787 > 0.50$ and Parsimony Comparative Fit Index (PCFI) = $0.794 > 0.50$ fulfills Parsimonious Fit Measures. According to the results of CFA the overall model is a good fit model.

Hypothesized Results

As per the SEM model four hypotheses were accepted, and one was rejected. Summarized results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8:

Results of Hypothesis

			Estimate	S.E	C.R.	P
PQ_TT	<----	UGC_TT	0.298	0.041	7.334	0.001
BAW_TT	<----	FGC_TT	0.193	0.042	4.599	0.001
BA_TT	<----	FGC_TT	0.255	0.024	10.659	0.001
BA_TT	<----	UGC_TT	0.291	0.027	10.678	0.001
BAW_TT	<----	UGC_TT	0.316	0.047	6.68	0.001
PQ_TT	<----	FGC_TT	0.153	0.036	4.263	0.001
BL_TT	<----	PQ_TT	0.129	0.024	5.297	0.001
BL_TT	<----	BAW_TT	-0.013	0.022	-0.595	0.552
BL_TT	<----	BA_TT	0.719	0.045	16.052	0.001

Discussion and Conclusion

The conceptual framework was based on Brand Equity Model by David Aaker (1991) and extended successfully in the domain of online brand communication. This study was designed to check the impact of firm generated social media communication and user generated social media communication on brand equity elements. In this study five hypotheses were developed and tested.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1(a) on the affect of firm generated contents (M= 3.39, SD= 1.35) on perceived quality (M= 4.51, SD= 1.36) was accepted (SRW= 0.153, CR= 4.263, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 1(b) on the affect of firm generated contents (M= 3.39, SD= 1.35) on brand awareness (M= 4.51, SD= 1.39) was accepted (SRW= 0.193, CR= 4.599, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 1(c) on the affect of firm generated contents (M= 3.39, SD= 1.35) on brand association (M= 4.19, SD= 1.26) was accepted (SRW= 0.255, CR= 10.659, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

These findings are consistent to some earlier studies. According to Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) firm created contents positively influence on brand association, brand awareness. Khadim, Zafar and Younis (2014) measure the impact of company created content on overall brand equity and found a positive influence on company created contents on brand equity.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2(a) on the affect of user generated contents (M= 4.12, SD= 1.30) on perceived quality (M= 4.51, SD= 1.36) was accepted (SRW= 0.298, CR= 7.334, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 2(b) on the affect of firm generated contents (M= 4.12, SD= 1.30) on brand awareness (M= 4.51, SD= 1.39) was accepted (SRW= 0.316, CR= 6.68, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 2(c) on the affect of firm generated contents (M= 4.12, SD= 1.30) on brand association (M= 4.19, SD= 1.26) was accepted (SRW= 0.291, CR= 10.678, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

These findings are consistent to some earlier studies. According to Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) user generated contents positively influence on brand association, brand awareness and perceived quality. Khadim, Zafar and Younis (2014) also measure the impact of user generated communication on overall brand equity and found a positive influence of user generated communication on brand equity.

Hypothesis 3(A, B, C)

Hypothesis 3(A) on the affect of perceived quality (M= 4.51, SD= 1.36) on brand loyalty (M= 3.44, SD= 1.28) was accepted (SRW= 0.129, CR= 5.297, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 3(B) on the affect of brand awareness (M= 4.51, SD= 1.39) on brand loyalty (M= 3.44, SD= 1.28) was rejected (SRW= -0.013, CR= -0.595, P= 0.552 < 0.01).

Hypothesis 3(C) on the affect of brand association (M= 4.19, SD= 1.26) on brand loyalty (M= 3.44, SD= 1.28) was accepted (SRW= 0.719, CR= 10.052, P= 0.001 < 0.01).

These findings are consistent to some earlier studies. Brand loyalty is enhanced through high levels of perceived quality and positive associations (Keller and Lehmann, 2003; Pappu et al., 2005). Brand associations have positive impact on brand loyalty (Buil et al. 2013). Perceived brand quality is positively correlated with brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is also enhanced through brand association (Brogi, S. et al. 2013). According to Buil, Chernatony and Martinez (2010), perceived quality and brand associations have a positive impact on brand loyalty.

Implication, Limitation and Future Research

This research has implications for both the academics and practitioners, as the firm and consumers both view the brand related communication on social media important. Through social media communications marketing managers tend to stay connected with their loyal consumers. This helps them (marketers) to learn more about consumers' perception and attitude towards their brand and services. Organizations by adopting this new communication technology can effectively augment their promotion expenses and in a way product prices can be adjusted to some lower level. It may help a poor man to adjust their monthly budget. Managers by creating strong and interesting contents about the brand, product or company on social media can build a strong brand/company image. Managers can also motivate consumers to generate contents about the product, brand and/or firm, which will also help the firm in better understanding of the consumer insight about the brand, product and company. For academics, the better understanding of the concept for theory development and for the practitioners better understanding of the concept for better strategy and customer relationship. The better understanding and knowledge of the customers who 'like' the brand on facebook will help the marketers to strengthen the brand by engaging them in brand related communication on social media.

There are some limitations of the present study. The data was collected from a major city i.e. Karachi, Pakistan; therefore generalizability of the finding is limited, however Karachi is a metropolitan city of Pakistan and there is a strong representation of different ethnic groups. Future research can explore other cities of Pakistan. We have different cultures in Pakistan under the influence of one culture. Future research can be design by focusing specifically on the subculture. This research was quantitative in nature. We used survey questionnaire method to collect the data. Questionnaires were close ended; therefore the respondent's opinion was limited. Other methods e.g. focus group discussions and interviews can also be used which can give more detailed responses of consumers and more insights about the phenomenon. Gender difference on the selected variables was not measured in this study. Future research can be designed to measure the variable of gender difference contributing to online marketing and content generation.

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