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Vaibhav Shwetangbhai Diwanji
University of Kansas, vdiwanji@ku.edu

Jaejin Lee
Florida State University, jaejin.lee@fsu.edu

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Vaibhav Shwetangbhai Diwanji
Jaejin Lee

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Vaibhav Diwanji
University of Kansas
vdiwanji@ku.edu

Jaejin Lee
Florida State University
jaejin.lee@fsu.edu

ABSTRACT

This empirical study examines the effects of user generated vlogs (UGV) versus brand generated ads (BGA) on consumer decisions on YouTube. UGV refers to any type of review video content about brands or products, created and published by users on YouTube. BGA refers to brand generated advertisements on YouTube. Guided by the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, this online experimental research involved a 2 (source: UGV versus BGA) X 2 (involvement: high versus low) X 2 (gender: male versus female) between-subjects research design. Results showed that UGV elicited significantly greater effects on consumer brand attitudes and purchase intentions than BGA, when involvement was high. No significant gender differences were observed. In a constantly growing YouTube influencer economy, this study offers important theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords: *User generated content, Video review, Vlog, YouTube marketing, Online advertising, Elaboration likelihood model, Video SEO, Video marketing, influencers, Consumer behavior*

Abbreviations - ELM: The Elaborated Likelihood Model of Persuasion, UGV: User Generated Vlog, BGA: Brand Generated Advertising

INTRODUCTION

This empirical study examines the effects of user generated video reviews and brand generated ads on consumer decisions on YouTube. With over 500 hours of video content published every minute, YouTube is one of the biggest online content platforms (Dehghani et al., 2016; Febriyantoro, 2020; YouTube, 2022). YouTube is also the largest video search engine (McGoogan, 2016; Wu, 2021). A majority of video searches on the platform comprises of 'how to' related keywords, indicating that users are actively seeking brand-related information on YouTube that they perceived as useful for making a purchase decision (Boerman & Van Reijmersdal, 2020; Mogensen, 2015). YouTube has attracted the attention of advertisers and creators (Dehghani et al., 2016; Febriyantoro, 2020; Duffet et al., 2019). Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, YouTube has become an important communication channel for brands and consumers (Chen & Panyaruang, 2021; Mouninho et al., 2022).

As a people's platform, YouTube has brought about a seamless convergence between the traditional broadcasting and the internet-enabled narrowcasting, which focuses on the requirements of the smaller and specialized viewer groups instead of the traditional monolithic mass-appeal approach (Parsons, 2003; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Users on YouTube have now assumed the role of 'prosumers,' by actively participating in creating and publishing different types of brand-related videos such as product review vlogs ('unboxing' videos), home videos, personal diaries, parodies, memes, presentations, interviews, movies, and music videos (Gunelius, 2010; Munukka et al., 2020).

In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic-enforced lockdown, consumers created an enormous amount of video content on YouTube (Chen & Panyaruang, 2021). Rodriguez (2021) noted that YouTube was social media's big winner during the pandemic, as the platform saw usage grow from 73% of U.S. adults in 2019 to 81% in 2021. In addition to the growth of user generated content on the platform (Jaakkola, 2019; Lewis & Christin, 2022), the proliferation of brand generated advertising content has turned YouTube into a brand enhancer (Dehghani et al., 2016; Duffet et al., 2019). The goal for both brands and consumers when creating and sharing content on YouTube is to create value for the internal and external stakeholders of a firm (Dehghani et al., 2016). Duffet and colleagues (2019) asserted that the greater the value that consumers associate with brand-related content, the more favorable their attitude will be toward the brand. Despite the popularity of YouTube among brands and consumers, little attention has been paid to comparing the effects of user generated content and brand generated content on YouTube (Rehman & Maseeh, 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to expand the literature on investigating the effects of brand-specific content on YouTube on consumer decisions (Chen & Panyaruang, 2021; Dehghani et al., 2016; Duffet et al., 2019).

The present research focuses on brand-related user generated vlogs on YouTube and compared them with brand generated video ads. Brand generated ads refer to sponsored content created and published by brands and advertisers on digital platforms such as YouTube (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; 2021). The most popular form of YouTube advertising is pre-roll ads. For instance, users would view a brand-related ad for 15-seconds before they can skip to the main video content. The main goal of advertising is to convince consumers to take a brand-specific decision or action (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). YouTube offers several ad formats (e.g., display, pre-roll, mid-content) to brands for attracting consumers' attention (Mountinho et al., 2022). Thus, firms can use YouTube advertising to achieve different brand goals such as building brand awareness, influencing brand attitudes, and motivating brand-specific intentions and actions (Alalwan, 2018; Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Duffet et al., 2019).

A recent study showed that 75% of people surveyed said advertising on YouTube makes them more aware of new brands and products (Austin, 2022). The same study also showed that 70% of consumers surveyed said they bought a product after seeing it on YouTube. YouTube is the most widely used platform among video marketers used by 77% (Iskiev, 2022). On the other hand, the word 'vlog' refers to a video review blog that contains brand-specific information, opinions, thoughts, or experiences by a consumer (Le & Hancer, 2021; Pilkington, 2009). User generated brand-related vlog is defined as any type of video content about brand created and published by consumers to help other consumers with their decision making (Campbell et al. 2011; Mayrhofer et al., 2020).

Video blogs (hereinafter referred to as vlogs) are a user-generated form of online brand-related communication that serves as medium for social commentary, creative outlets or personal diaries (Snelson, 2015). In vlogs, users (also known as vloggers) share their product experiences, brand feedback, daily routines, offer tutorials, or play games (Molyneaux et al., 2008). For instance, when a consumer creates and posts a video of 'unboxing' a new product from a new brand, it is a form of user generated vlog. The popularity of vloggers has risen exponentially in the last few years (Le & Hancer, 2021; Xu et al., 2021). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, many consumers took to YouTube to express their opinions about brands and products (Huang et al., 2022). As per a recent study, 4 in 10 consumers watch vlogs every month (Young, 2022). Another study suggested that most vlog content on YouTube comes from users (Think with Google, 2022). Consumers on YouTube tend to engage with influencer content such as vlogs created by other consumers (Santora, 2022).

The ever-increasing popularity of YouTube vlogs and the success of YouTube celebrities or influencers have provided brands with an effective relationship marketing tool to connect and engage with consumers. Increasingly, consumers rely on reviews (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Huang et al., 2022), including video reviews in the form of vlogs on virtual communities such as YouTube, to plan their brand relationship journeys rather than blindly following what brands have to say in their sponsored advertising videos. Studies have shown that user generated content such as vlogs have

a significant influence on consumers' purchasing behavior, particularly on beauty, electronics, and tourism products (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; 2021; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Munnukka et al., 2019).

Despite the growing relevance of user generated vlogs especially on YouTube, scholars have paid little attention to comparing the effects of user and brand generated videos on consumer decisions. The comparison seems unexplored, because the studies so far tend to focus on one or another strategy (Dehghani et al., 2016; Duffet et al., 2019; Jaakkola, 2018; Smith et al., 2012), rather than considering both in a comparative analysis. Online advertising effectiveness has been extensively studied, with a specific focus on YouTube advertising (Dehghani et al., 2016; Duffet et al., 2019; Febriyantoro, 2020). Similarly, the effectiveness of user generated advertising has also been studied by researchers (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2021; Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Mathur et al., 2021). However, scant literature has been devoted to comparing the effects of these two sources of brand-related content on YouTube. This is important to research on persuasive effects on brand-related content, as different sources can elicit varying effects on consumer decisions (Muda & Hamzah, 2021).

This study contributes to the literature by extending the existing investigation specific to YouTube advertising and user generated content, as highlighted above. From a theoretical perspective, this study helps to shed light on the applicability and effectiveness of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion in the contemporary video marketing landscape where brands and consumers both compete for other users' attention, by creating brand-specific content. For advertisers, whether to rely on advertising or user generated content represents a 'catch 22' situation (Dunn & Harness, 2019). On one hand, advertisements are increasingly received consumer skepticism (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). Skepticism, in turn, can adversely affect the effectiveness of persuasive communication such as ads (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). On the other hand, as brands cannot control user generated content, they may use authority and authenticity in content when deploying user generated content (Diwanji & Cortese, 2021; Müller & Christandl, 2019). Thus, a comparative analysis, as proposed in this study, can help marketers in understanding the effectiveness of each strategy on YouTube.

Consequently, this research focused on examining the effects on user generated vlogs and comparing them with brand generated advertisement on consumer decisions on YouTube. The research objective was to understand whether user generated vlogs or brand generated ads on YouTube have a greater impact on users' attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, and accounting for their product involvement levels and gender. Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM) guided this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

YouTube has empowered consumers by giving them the freedom of expressing their feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards brands through various types of videos (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). There has been a proliferation of vlogs created by consumers wherein they share their product usage and purchase experiences (Gremler et al., 2004; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Molyneaux and colleagues (2009) posited in their research that sharing has become an increasingly popular activity in the new YouTube generation among all genders. Consumers on YouTube have evolved into a more dynamic and scalable role of active producers of brand-related content (Sánchez-Olmos & Viñuela, 2020). So, when consumers are exposed to user-generated brand-related vlogs on YouTube as against the brand-created ads, what exact comparisons take place inside their minds – was the aim of this study.

Using the simplest of the video production tools available at very low to no cost, the consumers can create their vlogs on YouTube wherein they express their views, opinions, reviews and perspectives about the brands (Molyneaux et al., 2008; Munnukka et al., 2019). Unlike the generic textual web blogs, YouTube vlogs offer vivid and user-friendly information about brands (Burgess et al., 2009). As a form of computer-generated communication (Frobenius, 2014), a vlog features a single speaker who is seen as an expert in a specific product niche, and sometimes a guest speaker. The speaker/presenter is called a vlogger, and more specifically a '*YouTuber*' as he or she uploads the blog videos on a dedicated channel on the platform (Lange, 2007). Vloggers have several subscribers who regularly follow the vlogs published on the channel (Zerdick et al., 2005). The followers seek brand-related reviews and advice from the vloggers, as if they were peers (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Munnukka et al., 2019).

User generated brand related vlogs are defined as the content originally created by consumers and then publicly distributed among other consumers that share a commonly recognized brand identity with the creator as well as with one another, in terms of perceived homophily (Campbell et al, 2011). Consumers' analysis of user generated vlogs vis-à-vis branded advertisements on YouTube was seen to offer a growing deal of interest and an expanding area of inquiry (Bayazit et al., 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Patel, 2018; Rahmi et al., 2016). Existing literature on consumer generated YouTube content have traditionally focused on brand-sponsored contests inviting the consumers to submit their video entries for a draw (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). However, that takes away the consumers' freedom of expression as they have to follow the brand's guidelines in creating their video content (Ozuem et al., 2021).

The present study was in line with Cha and colleagues' (2007) research, which provided useful insights into users' behavioral patterns as an outcome of their exposure to the consumer generated content versus branded ads on YouTube. However, that study did not examine the effects of each video source on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The present research was also inspired by the similar studies in the existing literature (Bayazit et al., 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Patel, 2017; Rahmi et al., 2016). Bayazit and colleagues (2017) found in their research that YouTube vloggers' characteristics played an important role in shaping users' attitudes and purchase intentions. Their research revealed that YouTube users saw vlogs as presenting true information about the brand and useful in purchase decisions. Lee and Watkins (2016) established that YouTube users who watched user-generated vlogs had a higher purchase intention than those who did not watch them. Patel (2018) posited that YouTube users found vlogs created by other users more important than brand's ads when evaluating cosmetic products.

Furthermore, Rahmi and colleagues (2016) examined the influence of beauty vlogs on consumers' purchase intentions. They found that an interaction between information source and previous experience in using the product in influencing purchase intentions. Specifically, compared to traditional advertising, vlog has a positive effect on purchase intentions. However, they used a traditional advertisement (television ad) to compare the effects on intentions with vlogs. For an investigation of this nature, it is important to compare similar message sources such as online ads and online vlogs. Online advertising platforms such as YouTube are constantly growing in popularity among consumers and marketers (Djafarova & Kramer, 2019; Terskikh, 2019). Prior research indicates that online video ads such as YouTube ads are more effective than traditional video ads (Dehghani et al., 2016; Jin et al., 2012; Panic et al., 2013). Therefore, the present research aimed to compare the effects of brand generated YouTube ads and user generated YouTube vlogs on consumer decisions.

As video-sharing websites and mobile applications are growing rapidly and information delivery through video content are receiving much consumer attention, it is expected that the influence of video content such as vlogs that can transmit visual information vividly in a casual setting will grow in significance (De Jans et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Consequently, it is necessary to study in depth the cognitive judgment that consumers take while watching vloggers' video content on YouTube. Therefore, this research offers important strategic and theoretical implications for marketers, brands, and researchers.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (ELM)

Petty and Cacioppo (1986)'s ELM has received wide application by researchers in the fields of marketing, advertising, and consumer psychology (Cho, 1999; Kitchen et al., 2014; Shahab et al., 2021). The model posits that consumers deploy two different routes to process the brand related message targeted at them (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The first route is called 'central processing,' which suggests that the message is the primary influence on the consumers' information processing behavior. Whereas in the second route, 'peripheral processing,' the source of the content impacts the way consumers process brand-related message. Segev and Fernandes (2022) applied the ELM in the context of viral online advertising and found that peripheral cues were dominant in such ads than central cues.

Further, the dominance of peripheral cues was also evident across product categories, particularly for technology products. Shahab and colleagues (2021) conducted a systematic literature review of the application of the ELM in consumer behavior research and its extension to new technologies such as online ads and user generated content. Their assessment indicated that the theory is suitable for addressing appropriate gaps in the literature such as comparing the effects of different types of online marketing strategies on consumer behaviors. Doing so will uncover the better-suited route between central and peripheral that causes a positive impact on consumer's attitudinal change and decision

making. It will ultimately help the marketers to create a better version of promotional messages online. Similarly, Moradi and Zihagh (2022) carried out a meta-analysis of the ELM in the electronic word of mouth (EWoM) literature. Their findings showed that the central route to persuasion is the dominant predictor of eWOM adoption on e-commerce sites, however on social media websites such as YouTube the peripheral route tends to dominate.

Table 1 summarizes the prior research using the ELM to examine the effects of different promotional strategies on consumer decisions. In line with the ELM literature, prior research as shown in Table 1 indicated that consumers' purchase decisions could be influenced by their involvement degree. More specifically, to what extent consumers process brand-related information depends on their involvement (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). Accordingly, when consumers' involvement is high, they would actively and carefully process the brand-specific information in order to make a satisfactory decision (Ballon et al., 2018). Therefore, the present study was set out to examine how both high- and low-product-involvement users would evaluate the user generated brand-related vlog versus branded ads on YouTube, based on the peripheral cues.

Table 1. The Application of the ELM in the Marketing Communications Research

Communication Medium	Popular Publications
Print media	Andrews & Shimp (1990), Kirmani & Shiv (1998), Dotson & Hyatt (2000), Maoz & Tybout (2002), Chebat et al. (2003), Priester & Petty (2003), Coulter & Punj (2004), Priester <i>et al.</i> (2004), Chatterjee & Hunt (2005), Jones et al. (2006), Malaviya (2007), Kredentser et al. (2012), Matthes et al. (2014), Kerr et al. (2015), Lee & Koo (2016)
Television	Macinnis et al. (2002), Frew et al. (2016), Kim et al. (2016)
Digital media (such as e-commerce, online reviews, e-brochure, crowdfunding sites, etc.)	Areni et al. (2000), Withers et al. (2002), Tormala & Petty (2004), Withers & Wertheim (2004), Yang et al. (2006), Briñol et al. (2007), Park et al. (2007), Tormala et al. (2007), Angst & Agarwal (2009), Wang et al. (2009), Trampe et al. (2010), Wang & Doong (2010), Lee (2012), Tang et al. (2012), Gregory et al. (2013), Luo et al. (2013), Cheng & Loi (2014), Bansal et al. (2015), Cyr et al. (2018), Han et al. (2018), Wang & Yang (2019), Kang & Namkung (2019), Leong et al. (2019), Manca et al. (2020)
Social media	Chang et al. (2015), Teng et al. (2015), Teng et al. (2016), Zha et al. (2018), Zhang et al. (2019)
Mobile media	Cho & Park (2014), Kim et al. (2016), Gu et al. (2017), Yoo et al. (2017), Chen et al. (2018), Lu et al. (2019)

Source of Brand-related YouTube Video

Jonas (2010) suggested that online consumers perceive the content provided by other consumers as more credible than brand generated ads. Similarly, Cheong and Morrison (2008) established that consumers trusted the product information as provided from peers more than the brand generated information. Consumers who were seen as being the experts about the brand-related communication by other consumers were considered to have a significant impact on how the brand related content is consumed and processed (Kelman & Hovland, 1953). On the other hand, brand generated ads refer to videos created and published by the brand on YouTube. The present study compared two different sources of video content on YouTube, namely user generated brand-related vlogs and brand generated ads and measured their effects on attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions.

Product Involvement Level

Product involvement plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of a brand-related content such as a YouTube ad or a vlog, in addition to the source of video (Phelps, 1991). It is defined as how a brand's product fits into the consumer's life (Cushing & Douglas-Tate, 1985). The consumer is likely to be more involved into a purchasing decision and hence the evaluation of brand-related YouTube video with a motivated state, if she or he is more interested in the product category being communicated or finds the brand to be of relevance (Batra & Ray 1985; Laaksonen, 1994; Zaichkowsky, 1996). Using the ELM model, the present study examined how consumers evaluated different brand-related videos on YouTube at different involvement levels, when forming attitude toward the brand and purchase intention (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

The ELM literature proposes that the concept of involvement and have posited that personal involvement is based on the accumulation of personal experience (Krugman, 1965; Sherif & Cantril, 1947). For instance, Zaichkowsky (1986) applied the degree of involvement to study the effect of advertising and explored whether and how it could influence consumers' responses to advertisements. Similarly, Knox and Walker (2003) suggested that consumers' degree of involvement in products is a common consistency and decision-making process. Another study revealed that the level of involvement with a product not only influences consumers' information collection and evaluation processes but also influences their purchase intentions (Chien et al., 2007). The impact of product involvement on consumer decision making is evidenced by the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1987, Zaichkowsky, 1996). Accordingly, consumers would generally use central path processing information for high-involvement products and peripheral-path processing for low-involvement products (Huo et al., 2020; Zhai et al., 2022). This was in line with the literature that in online advertising, product involvement would significantly influence attitudes, and purchase intentions (Flores et al., 2014; Park & Lee, 2008; Xue & Zhou, 2011).

In high product involvement conditions, consumers are more motivated to process and understand brand-related content (e.g., Warrington & Shim, 2000). Contrarily, low product involvement often leads to low motivation to process and understand brand-related content (Park et al., 2007; Petty et al., 2007). Therefore, in line with prior research, this study aimed to examine the effects of different levels of product involvement on consumer decisions. Specifically, it was posited that when consumers are more involved in the product, they would actively look out for brand-related information such as vlogs in addition to brand generated ads.

Attitude Toward the Brand

Ajzen and Fishbein (1975) defined attitude as a person's feelings and evaluations, both positive and negative, toward a specific behavioral function or object. Mitchell and Olson (1981) explained that attitude toward the brand was composed of directed attention toward a brand, an evaluative aspect and an internal state. Attitude toward the brand was seen to contribute toward formation of behavioral intention as posited by (Daugherty et al., 2008; Kraft et al., 2005). The ELM suggests that the two types of persuasion route, central and peripheral, shape consumers attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1987). The attitude of consumers toward products is easily influenced through information persuasion concerning product properties. Therefore, consumers handle the received information from rational and objective perspectives. If the information content is persuasive, consumers are likely to react positively (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

Advertising has been shown to either directly or indirectly influence consumer attitudes toward the (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Spears & Singh, 2004). Studies have shown that consumers would evaluate a brand more positively when they assess content created by other consumers than by a firm (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Kim & Johnson, 2016). On YouTube, consumers are exposed to brand-related information from brands and other consumers. These two different message sources can elicit varying effects on consumer attitudes and perceptions, as explained earlier. Therefore, in line with the literature, this study examined consumers' attitude toward the brand based on their exposure to the source of YouTube video, their involvement into the product, and also their gender. Therefore,

H1: Exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly more positive attitude toward the brand than brand generated advertising.

H2: In high product involvement condition, exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly more positive attitude toward the brand than brand generated advertising, when compared to low involvement condition.

Purchase Intention

Consumers seek other consumers' advice as well as reviews and try to learn from their experiences before forming purchase intention (Brown et al. 2003b). They would show a stronger purchase intent, if they are convinced with the information they receive about the brand from their peers (Horst et al., 2007). Mir and Rehman (2013) found that that consumer generated content on YouTube had a significant influence on users' future purchase-related intentions. Furthermore, Diwanji and Cortese (2020; 2021) established that consumers' purchase intentions would be significantly higher for user generated content than brand generated advertising. In line with the ELM, when consumers are more involved in a brand's product, they would actively search for brand-related information from other consumers to make an informed decision (Demba et al., 2019; Mathur et al., 2021; Mayrhofer et al., 2020). On YouTube, consumers are exposed to a variety of brand-related user generated content in the form of vlogs. Users voluntarily create such vlogs about brands and products to share their experiences with other consumers. This, in turn, can shape other consumers' brand-specific decisions in the form of their purchase intentions (Mayrhofer et al., 2020). Furthermore, in agreement with the ELM, highly involved consumers can be said to be more motivated to take the central route of information processing to make a purchase decision (Cheung et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2016). Le and colleagues (2018) asserted that the effect of user generated content on purchase intention would be stronger for consumers who are highly involved in the product. Therefore, based on the literature the following hypotheses were proposed:

H3: Exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly higher purchase intention than brand generated advertising.

H4: In high product involvement condition, exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly higher purchase intention than brand generated advertising, when compared to low involvement condition.

Gender

Existing literature showed evidence of important gender differences in consumption of brand-related advertising (Darley & Smith, 1995; Yang & Lester, 2005). Gender is often used as part of the social and cultural meanings associated with developing marketing strategy such as advertising. According to Darley and Smith (1995), this is because gender differences and effects are easily identifiable, accessible, and measurable. Evidence has been found of important gender differences in human communication, including advertising (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2003). Gender differences were believed to be the primary attributes of how consumers make their online purchase decisions (Rodgers & Harris, 2003). Studies suggested that female consumers tended to engage more with online content, which was both interpersonal and interdependent, than male consumers (Jackson et al., 2001; Wolin, 2003; Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2003).

The current study borrowed from Okazaki's (2007) research, which analyzed the gender effects in mobile advertising context. Additionally, prior research suggested that gender as a covariate might not always be significant (Chou & Singhal, 2017; Wu et al., 2021). Consequently, this study aimed to examine the differential effects of gender on consumer decisions in line with the literature (Fiset et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2021). Furthermore, there has been little to no research on how gender differences affect consumer's evaluations of brand-related content on YouTube, especially when they are created by their peers. Prior research suggests that gender may be a key variable in influencing consumer's evaluative judgments (Darly & Smith, 1995; Garaus & Wolfsteiner, 2022; Holbrook, 1986). Indeed, a variety of research indicates that consumers of different genders, primarily males and females, might use significantly different processing strategies to form brand-specific decisions (Garaus & Wolfsteiner, 2022; Sethna et al., 2017). In agreement with the ELM, the literature showed that females tend to take more central route to processing information than males (Heppner et al., 1995; DePaulo et al., 1985).

DePaulo and colleagues (1985) argued that in some situations female consumers would be more motivated to process information more accurately about a brand and its offerings than males. This was in line with Petty and colleagues' (1983) assessment of gender effects in advertising evaluations. Similarly, in the context of user generated content, prior research showed that it can have significantly greater effects on female consumers than male consumers (Assaker, 2020; Huang et al., 2019; Sethna et al., 2017). This is important because advertising is a major way that marketers communicate with (i.e., access) different target segments. Similarly, on YouTube, consumers communicate with other consumers in the form of user generated content such as vlogs. If gender processing differences exist, it is important for advertisers to understand them in order to produce effective promotions for each segment. Similarly, it would help consumers in understanding the effectiveness of vlogs and brand generated ads depending upon their gender. Therefore, in line with the literature, the purpose of this research is to examine the "selectivity model" and its prediction that males and females process advertisements using different strategies. Therefore,

H5: For females more than males, exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly more positive attitude toward the brand than brand generated advertising, in a high involvement situation.

H6: For females more than males, exposure to a user generated brand-related vlog on YouTube will result in significantly higher purchase intention than brand generated advertising, in a high involvement situation.

METHOD

This empirical research involved a 2 (source: UGV versus BGA) X 2 (involvement: high versus low) X 2 (gender: male versus female) between-subjects research design. Prior to execution, the research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participants

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, data were collected from a major Southeastern USA public university through a research participation pool consisting of students taking various levels of marketing communication courses. College students are suitable for this study, in line with the literature (Boerman et al., 2018; Shi et al., 2018; Weismueller et al., 2020), considering that young consumers have frequently been targeted by major video marketing campaigns in Europe, America and the Asia-Pacific region as younger consumers are heavy users of social media platforms such as YouTube (Aslam, 2022; Needle, 2022). Behavioral sciences have increasingly relied on student participant pools for research recruitment (Rocchi et al., 2016). Research participant pools offer specific advantages to researchers. First, they increase the rates of participation in research, which, in turn, helps minimize issues related to self-selection bias and promotes more representative normal distributions of participants based on several characteristics such as intelligence, socioeconomic status, openness to experience, and motivational orientations (Sharp et al., 2006). They can also help colleges and universities achieve their objectives of providing experiential learning opportunities for their students (Taraban & Logue, 2012), which can enhance students' educational experiences (Lopatto, 2007). Participation in research studies through a participation pool is associated with increased understanding of psychology and its concepts (Landrum & Chastain, 1995; Moyer & Franklin, 2011). For many students, their experience as a research pool participant is an interesting and enjoyable interaction with scientific research (Sullivan & Lashley, 2009). Additionally, research suggests that participating in subject pools inspires an interest in research as well as teaches transferable skills that are useful in other domains (Trafimow et al., 2006). Therefore, the sampling frame and technique used in this study were suitable to the purpose of the research.

A total of 194 undergraduate students ($n=194$) were recruited for the study. Students received extra credits in exchange for their participation from their course instructors. Among the 875 students in the participation pool, 198 undergraduate students signed up for the study by clicking on the Qualtrics survey link included in the invitation email. The Qualtrics survey took about 25-30 minutes to complete. Four students did not completely survey after signing up for the study, resulting in 194 valid responses. The average age of participants was 21 years. The sample was normally distributed in terms of the gender of participants, with 52% females ($n=100$) and 48% males ($n=94$). The participants

represented different racial backgrounds adding to the validity of outcomes by avoiding any situational biases, with 78% Whites ($n=151$), 14% Hispanics ($n=27$), 7% Blacks ($n=14$).

Research Design

After consenting to participate in the study, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, each involving an authentic YouTube video published either by a user or by a brand. Multiple pre-tests were conducted to determine the appropriate stimuli for this study (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; 2021; Mishra, 2015).

Stimuli

The stimuli videos for the brand-generated condition were taken from the brands' official YouTube channels. Whereas, for the user-generated condition, the videos were selected based on the fact that they were created by the users of the brands and they did not showcase specifically stronger or weaker arguments about the brand. Though the user-generated videos were neutral in nature, they were of the similar quality as that of official brand-generated ads. Two external researchers and two digital marketing practitioners were consulted to ascertain the neutrality of the consumer generated video. This helped in eliminating any sort of bias in the select and also ensured researcher and data triangulation (Ritala et al., 2013) and increased the face and ecological validities of the stimuli (Herziger et al., 2017). The lengths of the videos were identical to one another in each experimental condition. The stimuli were designed in line with the prior research (Blythe & Cairns, 2009; Copley, 2004; Kaandorp, 2010). To determine the stimuli, separate pre-tests were conducted to identify a product category and features.

Pretest 1. Product Category.

In the first pre-test, 42 participants ($n=42$) were recruited from a major South-eastern USA public university. Participants were asked to select the most popular product category from the given list of 20 different categories as obtained from the FCB grid (Ratchford, 1987). The FCB grid helped in assessing the level of product involvement, in terms of level of thinking (high/low) and level of feeling (high/low) (Ratchford, 1987). This was in agreement with the prior research (e.g., Claeys et al., 1995; Geuens et al., 2011; Shamdasani et al., 2001). Two independent lists of product categories were used for both high- and low-involvement conditions. For each list, subject's interest in a particular product category was measured on a 7-point scale anchored by 'Not Interesting as 1' and 'Interesting as 7' (Hansen et al., 2014; Zaichkowsky, 1996). As a result, a candy bar ($M=5.18$, $SD=2.78$) was selected as a product category for the low involvement condition and a video game console ($M=5.50$, $SD=3.10$) was selected as a product category for the high involvement condition.

Pre-test 2. Brand Familiarity.

In pre-test 2, another set of 42 participants ($n=42$) were recruited from a major Southeastern USA public university. Participants were asked to rate their familiarity for different brands of the selected product category from the first pre-test. A 7-point three item semantic scale was used to measure subjects' brand familiarity for high- and low-involvement conditions (Biswas 1992; Hansen et al., 2014). This was in line with the literature (e.g., McClure & Seock, 2020; Kuehnl et al., 2019; Vaidyanathan, 2000). Two independent lists of brands were used for both high- and low-involvement conditions. From the responses collected in the pre-test 2, two brands with moderate familiarity scores were selected for each experimental condition (Hansen et al., 2014). After analyzing the responses from the second pre-test, the Reese's Peanut Butter Cups brand was selected for the low involvement condition ($M=6.42$, $SD=1.22$) and the Nintendo Switch brand was chosen for the high involvement condition ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.16$).

In addition to the pre-tests, a pilot test including a separate sample of 60 participants ($n=60$) was also conducted to ensure that users could easily differentiate between the two sources of YouTube video, thus supporting the manipulation of the stimuli. The participants were recruited from a major South-eastern USA public university. It was found that of those who were assigned to the brand-generated ads condition, 94% identified the source as the brand/marketer. Similarly, participants who were assigned to the user generated brand-related vlog conditions 89% identified the source as another consumer. Additionally, another manipulation check was conducted regarding the level of involvement. The independent samples t-test results showed that the participants showed greater level of

involvement ($t_{(58)}=1.94, p<.01$) with the product shown in the high involvement condition and they showed lesser involvement ($t_{(58)}=1.89, p<.01$) with the product shown in the low involvement condition.

Procedure

An online experimental survey was used on Qualtrics, wherein the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, namely, a) high involvement brand generated video, b) high involvement user generated vlog, c) low involvement brand generated video, d) low involvement user generated vlog. After watching the complete video, the participants answered the manipulation check question. The manipulation check for the user generated and brand generated content conditions helped in ensuring that the participants were able to recognize the type of brand-related information they were randomly exposed to (Dai & Sheng, 2022; Pass et al., 2018; Roy & Sharma, 2015). The example manipulation check item was 'I believe that the video I just watched was created by a consumer like me (1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly agree). Additionally, multiple attention check questions were used across the questionnaire to ensure that the participants paid attention to the questions (Ahn et al., 2022; Oppenheimer et al., 2009; Wang & Kim, 2019). The participants were asked to answer a series of questions to measure brand attitude and purchase intention. After the questions about the main dependent variables, they were asked demographics-related questions to determine the participant characteristics. At the end, they were debriefed and thanked for their time.

Measures

Attitude Toward the Brand

To operationalize the attitude towards the brand measure, the present study used a 7-point semantic differential items scale. The pool of five items for measuring attitude toward the brand (Ab) were adapted from (Spears & Singh, 2004) ($\alpha = .94$). The items comprised of unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable and unlikable/likable.

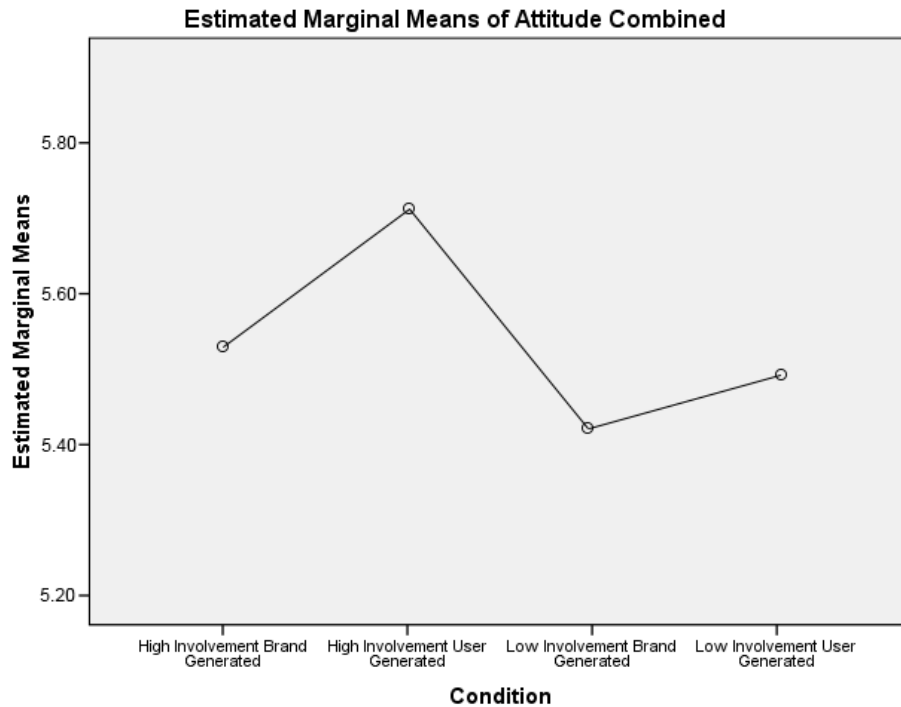
Purchase Intention

This study borrowed from Spears & Singh's research (2004) for the items of measurement for purchase intention with a composite alpha of 0.97. The five item 7-point semantic differential scale included: never/definitely, definitely do not intend to buy/definitely intend, very low/high purchase interest, definitely not buy it/definitely buy it and probably not/probably buy it.

RESULTS

The manipulation check items were tested to ensure that the manipulations worked as expected. The independent samples t-test showed that the participants in both user-generated ($t_{(190)}=2.11, p<.001$) and brand generated video conditions ($t_{(190)}=2.01; p<.001$) were able to correctly identify the type of content they were exposed to. Thus, the manipulations were successful. The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted for each group separately to check the normality assumptions. The data was normally distributed as $p>.05$ for each condition (Yap & Sim, 2011). Similarly, Levene's test was carried out and assumptions for homogeneity of variance were met ($p>.05$) (Chen et al., 2015; Permarupan et al., 2014).

In *H1*, user generated brand related vlog on YouTube was predicted to have a greater impact on attitude toward the brand than branded ad. The independent samples t-test showed that there was a significant difference in the scores of the user generated brand-related vlog condition ($M=5.67; SD=1.18$) and the brand generated ad condition ($M=5.58; SD=1.26$); $t_{(190)}=2.79, p<.01$. Hence, this hypothesis was supported. *H2* posited that in high involvement condition, user generated brand-related vlog would exert a greater impact on attitude toward the brand than branded ad, as against low involvement condition. The test of between-subjects effects showed that there was a significant difference in the scores of the user generated brand-related vlog and branded ad, $F_{(1,188)}=2.92, p<.05$, for high product involvement. Thus, *H2* was supported. (See Figure 1).

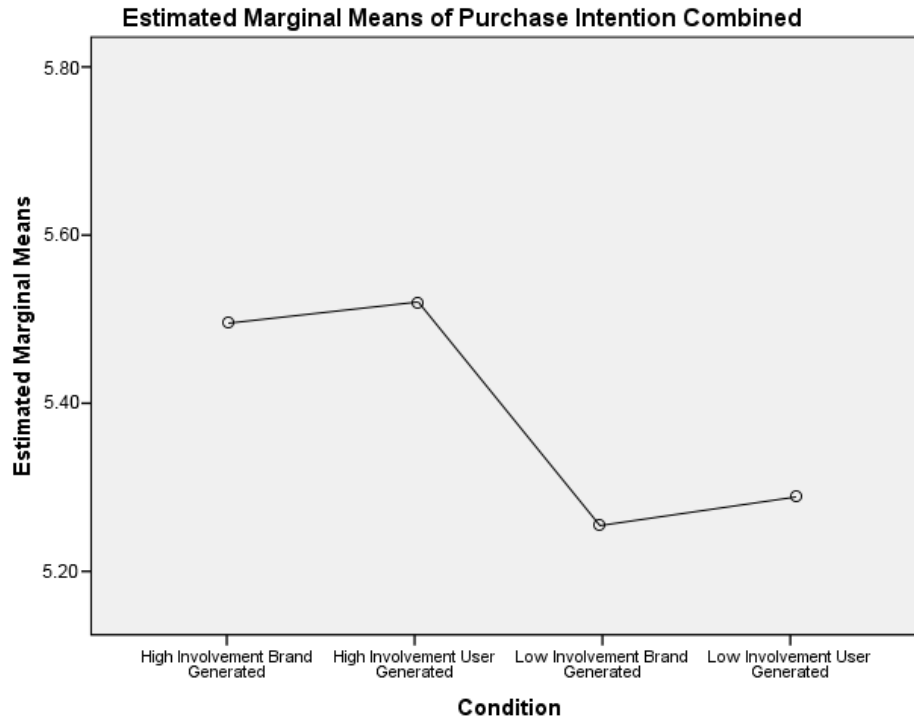
Figure 1. Interaction Between Attitude Toward the Brand and YouTube Video Source and Involvement Level.

In *H3*, user generated brand-related vlog was predicted to have a greater impact on purchase intention than branded ad. The independent samples t-test showed that there was not a significant difference in the scores of the user generated brand-related vlog condition ($M=5.51$; $SD=1.46$) and the brand generated ad condition ($M=5.48$; $SD=1.58$); $t_{(190)}=1.19$, $p=.061$. However, it can be said that the relationship was approaching significance. Hence, *H3* could be said to be partially supported. *H4* posited that in high involvement condition, user generated brand-related vlog would have a greater impact on purchase intention than branded ad, as against low involvement condition. The two-way analysis of variance showed that there was a significant difference in the scores of the user generated brand-related vlog condition and the brand generated ad condition, $F_{(1,188)}=7.28$, $p<.05$, for high product involvement. Thus, *H4* was supported. (See Figure 2).

In *H5*, it was posited that female consumers on YouTube more than males, would have a significantly higher attitude toward the brand for brand-related vlog than branded ad, when they are highly involved into the product being shown in the video. The findings showed that there was not a significant three-way interaction, $F_{(7,184)}=1.691$, $p=.113$. While product involvement and source of video had a statistically significant impact on attitude toward the brand ($p<.05$), gender did not have a statistically significant impact both at individual interaction and at aggregate interaction levels ($p=.958$). Thus, *H5* was not supported.

H6 proposed that female consumers on YouTube more than males, would have a significantly higher purchase intention toward brand-related vlog than branded ad, when they are highly involved into the product. As per the results, there was not a statistically significant three-way interaction effect of product involvement, source of video and gender on purchase intention, $F_{(7,184)}=.807$, $p=.582$. Once again, both product involvement and source of video had a statistically significant impact on purchase intention ($p<.05$), however gender didn't seem to have a statistically significant impact ($p=.516$). Therefore, *H6* was not supported.

Figure 2. Interaction between Purchase Intention and YouTube video source and involvement level.



DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this research was to compare the effects of user generated vlogs and brand generated ads on YouTube on consumer decisions. ELM guided this empirical investigation of the ever-increasing phenomenon of vlogs. The findings of this research provided some interesting insights. Results showed that there were no significant differences in how consumers of different genders were likely to develop attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, as a result of their exposure to either user generated vlog or branded ad on YouTube, based on their involvement level. These findings were not in line with the literature, which suggested that females were seen to develop a higher amount of skepticism for online purchasing than males based on their exposure to the brand related content as well as their involvement level (Rodgers & Harris, 2003). A possible interpretation of this scenario, could be that consumers regardless of the gender differences, tend to still rely on the traditional brand-generated information, when it comes to making purchase decisions for higher involvement products. But, conversely, for products with low involvement decisions, relying solely on what others said about the product or brand was considered to be significant enough to develop a positive purchase intention, accounting for the relatively lower amount of risk involved as an outcome of the purchase behavior. This was in agreement with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This finding has important implications for advertising practitioners and influencers on YouTube who still follow traditional reasoning and highlight the subjective aspects of product purchase and use when either gender is their target market (Darley & Smith, 1995). The findings leave the content creators with more flexibility when choosing attributes to emphasize (i.e., tangible or intangible) in brand-specific video content such as ads or vlogs.

The results also helped in extending the implications of the ELM by incorporating the gender effects in consumer evaluations of brand-specific communication originating from the firm as well as other consumers in the form of YouTube vlogs. Keeping gender effects aside, consumers on YouTube would develop a higher attitude toward the brand as a result of exposure of user generated brand-related vlog as against brand generated ad, when they are highly involved into the purchase. On the contrary, their level of involvement did not seem to have a significant impact on how they formed purchase intention for either user generated vlog or brand generated ad on YouTube.

Given these findings, online advertisers on YouTube could consider incorporating user-generated vlogs as part of their campaigns in order to gain higher responses toward their brands. Thus, this study confirms that consumers prefer more experience-based, objective, and logical information about a brand and its offerings, often in the form of consumer generated content such as vlogs on YouTube, when they are highly involved in the purchase situation (Filieri et al., 2018). The high involvement consumers, hence, follow a central route of processing brand-specific information and accordingly form their brand-specific attitudes and intentions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Hollis, 2005).

As evident in this research, social media such as YouTube can be an important tool for brand managers. In particular, user generated vlogs can be useful for establishing relationships with consumers (Tanha, 2018). Consumers who view vloggers as similar to them will likely develop relationship with the vlogger and have the same positive brand evaluations as the vlogger (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Gannon & Prothero, 2019). This study supports the use of YouTube vlogging for developing consumer-brand relationship. For example, user generated testimonial videos could be a great way to promote brand-specific content among users on YouTube. It could also help brands in identifying influencers in their niche with whom they can collaborate to spread the awareness and engagement of their products and services. The user generated brand-related vlogs created on YouTube could be promoted on other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Sharing the spotlight with consumers could help brands in growing a stronger base of loyal customers and add authenticity to brand marketing (Silaban et al., 2022). Brands can benefit from user-generated vlogs without having to create and publish expensive video advertisements on TV and other digital platforms.

Theoretical Implications

The present study extends the existing literature related to consumer generated content as it examined the influence of product involvement, source of brand related content and gender on attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. The outcomes of this study were in line with Laurence and colleagues' (2013) findings that consumers tend to have higher trust in the content generated by other consumers rather than by the advertiser. This was also supported by the literature (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Munnukka et al., 2019). The study also found support in Diwanji and Cortese's (2020; 2021) findings that consumers prefer brand-related content created by other consumers rather than relying on only brand-generated information. So, by developing a positive attitude about the brand, the consumers who produce brand-related vlogs on YouTube can potentially influence the purchase decisions of the other consumers (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Tolunay & Ekizler, 2021). Also, the empirical evidence as provided by this study support the findings of prior studies that set out that consumer generated content is seen by the consumers as assisting in their purchase decisions (Batra & Ray 1985; Diwanji & Cortese, 2020; Laaksonen, 1994; Phelps, 1991; Zaichkowsky, 1996). The findings of this study were also in line with the main theoretical construct, the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The findings help advance the application of the ELM in the context of influencer-follower relationships on social media (e.g., Lou, 2022), as well as the literature on advertisement-involvement fit (De Cicco et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; Till & Busler, 1998). Drawing on the ELM and the principles of product involvement, the findings showed that the involvement level plays a significant role in the interplay between the congruence between brand-related content either as ads or user generated vlogs and people's evaluations in terms of attitudes and purchase intentions. Thus, this study contributes to the ELM and product involvement literature (Bronnenberg & Vanhonacker, 1996; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010; Gordon et al., 1998; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) in relation to comparing the effects of brand generated versus user generated content on YouTube users' purchase decisions. This study explicated a dual information-processing (i.e., central or peripheral) approach among consumer when they are exposed to either brand generated or user generated content on YouTube. The findings are consistent with an underlying principle of ELM—that consumer take a central route to process a message when they are exposed to a highly relevant brand message. In summary, these findings support the principles of ELM and product involvement in the context of the influencer and vlogger economy on YouTube that level of product involvement serves an important role in influencing consumers' brand-specific attitudes and behavioral intentions. In addition, the study contributes to extending prior work on consumer behavior within the social media context and consumer generated content such as vlogs via social media (Cheong et al., 2021; Kim & Lee, 2017; Weber et al., 2021). It provides empirical evidence of comparisons between brand generated and consumer generated content on YouTube in terms of their effects on user decisions. Especially in the post-COVID 'next normal,' as consumers increasingly turn to non-traditional sources of brand-related content such as user generated content, this study can encourage prospective scholars to investigate the effects of consumer

generated content in different formats and across different digital platforms on other consumers' decisions. It could be said that marketers may want to find a suitable trade-off between their advertising on YouTube and the brand-related vlogs created by consumers on YouTube, in order to shape positive brand attitudes. Additionally, this study also offers an important future avenue research for comparing the effects of sponsored versus non-sponsored consumer generated vlogs.

Practical Implications

This study had important implications for the marketers who use YouTube as a platform to promote their brand. The online advertisers on YouTube should look to include the vlogs generated by consumers about their brand as a part of their overall content strategy on YouTube (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Vlogs are fruitful for brands looking to connect to the modern consumer. Brands can use a vlog channel to put a face on an otherwise faceless company. Consumers can better relate to and engage with the individual in the vlog who shows them how this brand impacts his or her own life. Vlogs also help connect with the audience to build a community around the channel. With more channel viewers comes a higher engagement and impression rating of related prospects. When brands have a strong community of viewers, they can then create a strong batch of customers who are loyal to the brand's mission, lifestyle, and products or services. Moreover, vlogs are a great opportunity for strong search engine optimization (SEO). A brand's search presence and online visibility are amplified when they use user generated vlogs on a variety of channels, back-linking between the vlog and other web pages owned by brand. Basically, vlogs can help create an interwoven map of backlinks that can strongly boost brand's search engine presence. Plus, consumers will like and subscribe to brand's YouTube channels, which is taken as a social proof by search engines' optimization algorithms.

Another important implication of the present study for the marketers was that they can include consumers as endorsers in their YouTube messaging rather than using the celebrity endorsers. The YouTube advertisers can also use such user-generated brand-related vlogs as an effective market research tool to find out about the tastes, preferences, and attitudes of their target audiences with reference to the dissemination of information, as suggested by Puri (2007). On the other hand, vloggers who regularly generate and publish brand-related videos on YouTube should look use this in their advantage for getting sponsorships from the advertisers, in the form of endorsements. Indeed, it should be worth mentioning here that the findings of the current study are limited in nature, so the implications should not be used in favor of user generated brand-related vlogs on YouTube, by completely disregarding the traditional brand generated advertising. Overall, user generated vlogs on YouTube can help puts a face to a brand to help engage with the audience, build a community, and show off brand personality. They can also help brands rank higher in search results, increase conversion rates, widen marketing impressions and reach, and strengthen relationships with consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There were certain limitations in the present study that can contribute to the potential future studies on consumer generated content on YouTube. Firstly, as is common with the most experimental design studies, the size of the sample limited the generalizability of the research outcomes. The study sample consisted only of the university undergraduate students, who may not represent the opinions and views of different types of real consumer segments. Therefore, the findings of the present study could not be generalized to larger populations of consumers who use YouTube to access user generated brand-related vlogs. Another important limitation was that the present study only used two actual brands as stimuli. The present study did not make comparisons between those who subscribe to the vloggers' channels on YouTube as against those who don't. And for this purpose, the study of such nature should approach the actual subscribers and not just students as participants in order to get precise information about attitude toward the brand and purchase intention based on the exposure to the user generated brand-related vlogs.

The future research in this area has the opportunity to fix the limitations of the present study as mentioned above. First, the current research can easily be replicated in the future, but with a much larger sample size. Similarly, conceptual replications of this study can use different product categories and brands, including fictitious brands, than used in this research to better understand the comparative effects. Doing so will increase the statistical power and add to the statistical significance between the independent and dependent variables, in the presence of a covariate. Additionally, future studies can attempt to replicate the present study by deploying different product and brand involvement levels (e.g., brands with low familiarity). Further, the sample should be pulled from the general

population rather than from the students in a university, as it helps in enhancing the generalizability of the outcomes of the future study. The future study should use fake brands instead of using actual brands to eliminate the effects of brand familiarity and knowledge. The future studies that measure the influence of consumer generated brand-related content on users' brand attitudes and purchase intentions, should definitely look at other important platforms such as the brand's own websites, online brand-related discussion forums, as well as social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to name a few. A cross-platform comparison of the results could provide a superior understanding of how consumers evaluate brand-related user generated messages as against brand's own advertising.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vaibhav Shwetangbhai Diwanji (Ph.D., Florida State University) (he/him/his) is an assistant professor in the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Kansas. Dr. Diwanji's research interests include media consumer behavior, new and emerging media technologies, sustainability, multicultural marketing, and diversity, equity and inclusion in marketing communications. His teaching interests include digital consumer behavior, strategic message development, and international strategic communications.

Jaejin Lee (Ph.D., University of Florida) is an associate professor in the School of Communication, College of Communication and Information at the Florida State University. Dr. Lee's research interests include consumer behavior, branding, strategic marketing communications, cause-related marketing, social marketing, new media, and health communication. Her teaching interests include media consumer behavior, creative strategy, and foundation of integrated marketing communication.