


Leveraging User-Generated Content As A Marketing Communication Strategy

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: User-Generated Content, Marketing Communication, New Media, Brand Image.</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the use of User-Generated Content (UGC) as an effective marketing communication strategy in increasing consumer engagement and building brand image. In the digital era, UGC, which is user-generated content such as reviews, photos, videos, and testimonials, has become an influential marketing tool because it provides authenticity and trust to consumers. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection through literature studies. The results of this study indicate that the use of User-Generated Content (UGC) in marketing communication strategies can have a positive impact on consumer trust and engagement. UGC, which is considered more authentic because it comes from real consumer experiences, has succeeded in increasing user interaction with brands and expanding marketing reach through content sharing. Additionally, while UGC has many benefits, the study also identified several challenges, such as moderation issues, negative content, and the importance of maintaining brand consistency. With the right strategy, companies can overcome these challenges and maximize UGC's potential to build stronger emotional connections with consumers and improve overall brand image .</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The increasingly dynamic development of communication technology has brought about major changes in the way individuals and groups communicate, both personally and en masse. Marshall McLuhan argued that technology has fundamentally changed the way we interact, with each new innovation reshaping human communication patterns (iao 2008). The transition from the analog to the digital era has not only accelerated the flow of information but also expanded the reach of communication across geographical and cultural boundaries. In a social context, digital technology enables more interactive, instant, and personal communication through various platforms such as social media, instant messaging applications, and virtual conferences (Aminullah & Ali, 2020). In the business world, this change opens up new opportunities in digital marketing, where brands can reach consumers directly through digital channels that are oriented towards personalization and user experience. Meanwhile, in education, digital technology has created a distance learning method that connects educators and students in various parts of the world (Herawati, 2011).

The presence of the internet has become a major catalyst in the development of various new media which have now become an inseparable part of modern life. New media refers to platforms that use digital networks as their operational basis, including internet technology, wireless communication networks, and various other channels that support fast and efficient information transfer (Fantini & Tamba, 2020). Unlike traditional media which is one-way, new media enables interactive, dynamic, and participatory two-way communication. The presence of new media has not only revolutionized the way individuals and groups communicate, but also created a virtual public space where various communities can meet, discuss, and share information without geographical limitations (Permana & Abdullah, 2020). Platforms such as social media, video sharing sites, and online forums have become the main means of building relationships, spreading ideas, and creating social movements globally. In addition, new media also accelerates the development of the digital economy, by providing opportunities for businesses to reach audiences personally and in real time (Effendi & Nasution, 2022).

One of the significant impacts of new media is a fundamental change in marketing communication strategies, which are now increasingly oriented towards direct interaction and personalization. New media opens up opportunities for brands or companies to reach consumers quickly and efficiently through various digital platforms such as social media, content sharing sites, and mobile applications (Muslichia & Irwansyah, 2019). Through this channel, companies can present messages that are more segmented, relevant, and in accordance with the needs of the audience. Social media, for example, is not only a means of promotion but also a two-way dialogue space between brands and consumers, where companies can respond to questions. This approach not only increases consumer engagement but also strengthens brand image and drives long-term loyalty (Feroza & Misnawati, 2020). By utilizing new media strategically, companies can adapt to increasingly competitive market dynamics and meet consumer expectations in the digital era.

Marketing communication strategies become more effective when companies utilize content generated by users, also known as User-Generated Content (UGC) (Nisrina, 2021). UGC includes various forms of consumer contributions, such as product reviews, testimonials, photos, videos, or even personal stories shared through social media and other digital platforms. This content has a high authentic value because it comes directly from the real experiences of consumers, so it is considered more credible compared to messages conveyed through traditional advertising (Dwitas, 2016). For example, a positive review from a customer on a platform like Instagram or TikTok can be social proof that encourages others to try the same product. In addition, UGC also allows consumers to feel more involved and appreciated by the brand, especially when their content is appreciated or re-shared by the company. This creates a stronger emotional connection between consumers and brands, which can ultimately increase loyalty. By strategically utilizing UGC, companies not only save on content production costs but also expand the reach of their marketing campaigns through consumers' social networks (Purba & Irwansyah, 2022).

However, behind the great potential offered by new media, there are a number of challenges that need to be overcome to ensure that its use can provide maximum results.

One of the main challenges is the risk of spreading false information (*misinformation*) which can damage brand reputation if not managed properly (Marlena, 2022). Misuse of consumer personal data is also a sensitive issue, especially with increasing concerns about privacy in the digital era. In addition, there are still obstacles to digital literacy in some groups of people, which limits their ability to utilize technology optimally (Umbara, 2021). This challenge serves as a reminder that while *new media* offers a variety of opportunities, companies must be careful and responsible in managing their presence in the digital space. Clear policies and strategies that focus on safety and consumer education are key to overcoming these challenges.

This study focuses on how *new media* , especially *User-Generated Content* (UGC), can be utilized as an effective marketing communication strategy, despite these challenges. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the great benefits of UGC in building consumer engagement, such as increasing trust through authentic content and creating stronger emotional connections with audiences. In addition, this study also explores the challenges faced in integrating UGC. By exploring optimal strategies to overcome these obstacles, this study is expected to provide practical guidance for companies in utilizing the potential of UGC to improve the effectiveness of marketing communications, build a strong brand image, and create long-term relationships with consumers in the digital era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze how User-Generated Content (UGC) is utilized as an effective marketing communication strategy. Secondary data were obtained from literature studies, journals, articles, and industry reports related to the use of UGC in marketing communications. The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis, which aims to identify patterns, themes, and strategic insights related to the benefits, challenges, and optimal ways to integrate UGC in marketing campaigns. Data validity was maintained through triangulation techniques, by comparing secondary data results to ensure the accuracy and reliability of research findings. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the potential of UGC in increasing consumer engagement and building a strong brand image.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to any type of content created by users or consumers of a product or service, rather than by the company or brand itself. This content can be in various formats, such as photos, videos, text, reviews, or testimonials shared on social media, websites, or other online platforms (Pinuji & Safitri, 2019). This UGC is often generated spontaneously by consumers who feel inspired to share their experiences with the products or services they use. Unlike advertisements produced by brands, UGC comes from a more authentic consumer perspective, so it has the power to influence audiences in a more natural and less forced way (Pratiningsih & Al-Sukri, 2023).

One of the main attractions of UGC is its more organic and voluntary nature. This content is not created with direct compensation from the brand, although in some cases,

brands may provide incentives such as prizes or recognition for consumers who produce high-quality content. UGC can be created by anyone, from loyal customers who are committed to sharing their positive experiences, to influencers or even ordinary people who voluntarily capture their moments with certain products or services (Aprilia & Racmawati, 2021). UGC is not only limited to large platforms such as Instagram or YouTube, but can also be found in various online communities, forums, and blogs that have their own audiences. The uniqueness of UGC is that this content often comes from consumers who are proud or satisfied with the products they use, so they are encouraged to share their experiences (Sihotang & Malau, 2020).

For businesses, UGC plays a vital role in building brand trust and credibility. User-generated content can serve as powerful social proof, influencing potential customers' perceptions and decisions. For example, positive product reviews from consumers can increase the trust of potential buyers because they are more likely to trust other people's experiences than advertising messages coming directly from the brand itself. UGC can also increase engagement and interaction between brands and consumers, creating closer relationships and building loyalty. By leveraging UGC in their marketing strategy, brands not only save costs on content creation, but also expand their promotional reach through consumers' wider social networks. This makes UGC a highly effective marketing tool in this highly connected digital age.

There are several benefits that can be taken in using UGC as a strategy in marketing communication. The author has summarized several benefits that can be taken, including:

Increase trust

One of the main benefits of using User-Generated Content (UGC) in a marketing communications strategy is its ability to increase consumer trust in a brand or product. UGC is considered more credible than content produced by the company itself because it comes from the real experiences of users who have no direct interest in the brand. Consumers tend to trust opinions or testimonials from others who have had similar experiences, rather than brand-sponsored ads that may seem biased or forced. By seeing others share positive experiences about a product or service, consumers feel more confident and trust that the product actually meets their expectations.

In addition, the authenticity of UGC also makes it more acceptable to the audience. Content created voluntarily by consumers often reflects a more natural and less polished impression than formal promotional content. This can create a more personal relationship between the brand and the audience, as consumers feel that they are receiving honest information and that there is no hidden agenda. UGC such as product reviews, user photos, or video testimonials provide strong social proof that the product or service actually has the quality it promises. Thus, the use of UGC helps brands to build a more solid reputation and increase consumer trust which can ultimately drive more positive purchasing decisions.

Increase engagement

User-Generated Content (UGC) has a strong appeal in increasing user engagement due to its engaging and shareable nature. UGC often reflects real, authentic experiences that can touch an audience's emotions, such as personal stories, creative photos or videos,

or thought-provoking reviews. When consumers see content that is relevant to them or the products they love, they are more likely to engage with it, whether by liking, commenting, or sharing it with their friends on social media. This creates a two-way communication channel between brands and consumers, which can strengthen their relationship and increase engagement in brand conversations.

Additionally, UGC facilitates the viral spread of content. When consumers relate to or are inspired by a particular piece of content, they are more likely to share it with their social networks. This process can significantly expand the reach of a brand's marketing campaign, without the need for additional promotional costs. Each time content is shared, the brand gains new exposure to a wider audience, who may not have been exposed to the product or service before. Therefore, UGC not only drives direct engagement but also helps create buzz and increase brand awareness organically. This engagement contributes to increased consumer loyalty and deepens the relationship between the brand and its audience.

Save costs

The use of User-Generated Content (UGC) in marketing strategies can help companies save costs, especially in terms of content production. In traditional marketing, companies have to spend a lot of money to create advertisements, photos, videos, and other creative content that can be used to attract the attention of the audience. This process involves costs for developing ideas, hiring professionals such as photographers, videographers, and designers, and distribution costs to ensure the content reaches the right audience. However, by utilizing UGC, companies can reduce or even eliminate most of these costs, because this content is created by consumers voluntarily at no additional cost to the company.

Additionally, UGC offers the advantage of having a variety of content that can be used without having to spend a large budget. Different consumers create different types of content with their own styles and perspectives, so companies can get a variety of content that reflects their wider audience. For example, a brand can use product photos uploaded by customers, video testimonials, or product reviews from users on social media platforms to build reputation and increase visibility without having to create the content themselves. This not only saves production costs, but also allows brands to be more flexible in designing marketing campaigns that can be easily tailored to the preferences of a wider and more diverse audience.

Increase reach

One of the main advantages of User-Generated Content (UGC) is its ability to significantly increase brand reach. When consumers are satisfied with the products or services they use, they are more likely to share UGC content, such as photos, videos, or reviews, with their friends, family, or followers on social media. This act of sharing creates an organic distribution channel that expands brand visibility without requiring additional investment in paid advertising. Every time content is shared, the brand gets the opportunity to be introduced to a new audience, who may have never heard of the brand before.

This sharing process creates a sort of snowball effect, where branded content can reach more people, often beyond the boundaries of the company's original target audience.

This is especially effective because information shared by friends or followers tends to be more credible than paid advertising or promotional messages from the company itself. Shared content has the power to build social proof, strengthen brand credibility, and attract new potential customers. Thus, UGC not only helps in increasing direct interaction with consumers but also expands the audience reach and introduces the brand to a wider and more diverse market .

Creating authentic content

User-Generated Content (UGC) is often considered more authentic because it comes directly from the real experiences of users, rather than from messages that are crafted or filtered by brands. This content reflects the perspective of consumers who have no commercial interest or bias in promoting a particular product or service. When customers share their experiences, whether through reviews, photos, or videos, the content is considered more honest and unpolished, making it more relatable and relatable to audiences. Audiences are more likely to trust and respond to content that is perceived as real and not overly produced.

The authenticity of UGC also creates a stronger bond between brands and consumers. When consumers see content produced by others who have had similar experiences to theirs, they feel more connected and confident that the brand can meet their needs. UGC serves as a form of social proof that indicates that a product or service is truly effective and reliable, because it is based on real experiences. This also gives the impression that the brand is transparent and cares about the opinions and experiences of its consumers, which further strengthens the positive image and increases loyalty.

Establishing emotional connections :

User-Generated Content (UGC) has the unique ability to forge deeper emotional connections between brands and consumers. When consumers create or share content related to a brand's products or services, they are not only providing a testimonial or review, but also participating in a larger narrative about the brand. This creates a sense of involvement and ownership, which makes consumers feel valued and recognized. When brands respond to or share UGC, it shows that the company is listening and values the customer experience, which can strengthen that emotional bond.

Additionally, consumer-generated content often has a stronger emotional element, such as personal stories, special moments, or inspiring experiences. This type of content can generate positive feelings among other audiences , reinforcing the perception that the brand is not just selling a product, but is also connecting with consumers on a more human and emotional level. This helps brands to not only focus on the functional aspects of the product, but also create a deeper and more lasting connection with their audience. This emotional engagement can play a big role in increasing consumer loyalty, as consumers feel closer and more connected to brands that treat them with respect and care .

Building a community

By encouraging users to share their content, brands can build an active and engaged community, which in turn strengthens the relationship between the brand and consumers. When consumers feel that their opinions and experiences are valued and can have an

impact on the brand, they are more likely to participate in the community that the brand has created. UGC is an effective way to create a space for consumers to interact with each other, share experiences, and discuss the products or services they use. This creates a sense of community and collective identity within the wider community, which motivates consumers to engage more with the brand.

Additionally, building a community through UGC can result in stronger loyalty. Community members feel valued for their contributions, which are seen not only by the brand, but also by fellow community members. This strengthens social bonds among consumers and increases positive perceptions of the brand. Communities built around brands can also be a place for consumers to help each other and make recommendations, making the consumer experience more valuable. A well-connected community can be a very powerful marketing tool, as the recommendations and interactions that occur within that community are often more trusted by potential customers than conventional advertising.

User-generated content (UGC) has become an integral part of modern marketing strategies, allowing brands to harness the power of their customers' voices and experiences. While UGC offers many benefits, it also has challenges and pitfalls that brands must navigate carefully. In this section, the author will list the top five challenges associated with user-generated content (UGC):

Quality Control

User-generated content (UGC) provides a huge opportunity for companies to leverage consumer experience and creativity, but it also poses challenges in terms of quality control. Because UGC is created by a variety of individuals with diverse backgrounds and skills, the quality of the content produced can vary greatly. Not all content will be up to the standards or brand image a company wants to convey, and sometimes it may be unprofessional or uninteresting. Poor or irrelevant content can damage the audience's perception of a brand, which will have a negative impact on a company's marketing goals.

Additionally, while UGC is often more authentic and can strengthen relationships with consumers, quality challenges still need to be addressed in an effort to keep the message consistent. Companies need to have the right mechanisms in place to filter and select content that is in line with their brand identity, and ensure that the content used is not misleading or potentially damaging to the company's image. This can involve a careful curation process, as well as strict monitoring of user-uploaded content, to ensure that only content that meets quality and relevance standards is used in marketing campaigns.

Moderation Issues

Moderating user-generated content (UGC) is a major challenge for companies, especially when the volume of content being generated is so large. The process of effectively reviewing and filtering content requires significant resources, both in terms of time and manpower. Every user post or comment needs to be evaluated to ensure that it complies with brand guidelines and does not contain content that could potentially damage the company's reputation. With the volume of content continuing to increase, companies need to have an efficient and reliable system in place to thoroughly review content so that this process does not become a burden that burdens internal resources.

In addition, moderation also involves the need to identify and remove inappropriate content, such as spam, offensive material, or even content that is offensive or harmful. This adds complexity to the moderation process, as companies need to balance user freedom of expression with protecting brand image. Neglecting adequate moderation can lead to inappropriate or harmful content spreading on the platform, which can damage relationships with audiences and reduce brand trust. Therefore, companies must have clear policies and effective moderation tools to maintain the quality and integrity of published UGC.

Negative or Inappropriate Content

Negative or inappropriate content is one of the main challenges in using User-Generated Content (UGC) as a marketing communication strategy. While UGC can bring benefits in the form of higher engagement and authenticity, sometimes user-generated content can contain elements that damage a brand's reputation, such as negative comments, unconstructive criticism, or even spam. Content like this can quickly spread widely, especially on social media, and if not managed properly, can damage a company's image and reduce audience trust in the brand.

To address this issue, companies need to adopt a careful management approach and proactive actions. This includes regularly monitoring content, using automated moderation tools to detect harmful comments, and responding appropriately to complaints or criticisms that arise. For example, responding with empathy to a customer complaint or clarifying misinformation can help defuse tensions and demonstrate a company's commitment to listening to consumers. In some cases, companies may also choose to remove content that does not comply with their brand guidelines, but this should be done carefully to avoid appearing overly censorious or harming relationships with consumers.

Legal and Copyright Considerations

Legal and copyright considerations are important aspects to consider when using User-Generated Content (UGC) in a marketing strategy. When companies leverage user-generated content, it is important to obtain explicit permission from the contributor or content owner before using it for commercial purposes. Without proper permission, companies risk facing copyright infringement claims that can lead to legal disputes, fines, or even significant reputational damage. This becomes even more complex if the content involves elements such as music, logos, or images that are copyrighted by a third party.

In addition, companies also need to ensure that the use of UGC complies with privacy and data protection regulations, such as the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in Europe or other data protection regulations in various countries. Companies should be aware of the importance of protecting users' personal data contained in UGC, such as information that can identify individuals, and ensure that the content uploaded does not violate privacy rights or unauthorized exposure. To avoid these potential legal issues, companies should develop clear policies regarding the use of UGC, including obtaining written permission from content creators, and comply with applicable data protection rules to maintain transparency and reduce legal risks.

Maintaining Brand Consistency

Maintaining brand consistency is a major challenge when using User-Generated Content (UGC) in marketing strategies. Since UGC comes from a variety of individuals, the content generated can vary widely in style, tone, and message. This can create gaps in brand communication, which in turn can confuse consumers or even damage the brand image. For example, if a user posts a photo or video with elements that do not align with the brand's values and aesthetics, this can cause a mismatch in how the brand is perceived by the audience.

To address these challenges, companies need to have clear guidelines regarding the use of UGC, including visual and narrative guidelines that reflect their brand identity. While UGC is authentic and comes from consumers, companies should strive to ensure that any content shared remains consistent with the brand voice and message they want to convey. This can be done by providing clear direction to users about how the brand wants them to present their products or services, as well as selecting content that already reflects the brand's values and aesthetics. With a careful approach, companies can maintain brand consistency while harnessing the potential of UGC to strengthen consumer relationships and expand marketing reach.

CONCLUSION

In the digital era filled with the development of new media, User-Generated Content (UGC) has become an important element in marketing communication strategies. UGC offers a variety of benefits, such as increasing consumer trust, driving higher engagement, saving content production costs, expanding brand reach, creating authentic content, and building stronger emotional connections with consumers. All these benefits make UGC a highly effective tool in building deeper relationships between brands and audiences, as well as strengthening brand image in an increasingly competitive market. However, behind this great potential, there are a number of challenges that companies need to face, such as maintaining quality control, content moderation, handling negative content, paying attention to copyright, and maintaining brand consistency. To do this, companies need to design a well-thought-out strategy by utilizing UGC carefully and in accordance with brand guidelines, while addressing the legal and ethical challenges that may arise. With the right approach, UGC can help companies not only increase consumer loyalty, but also strengthen their competitiveness and brand existence in the long term.

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