Differences in Brand-Related User-Generated Content Across Three Social Media Sites: an Inductive Content Analysis

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Consumers today are spending more time on social media sites than ever before (Radwanick 2011). As they engage with these sites—including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—many become involved in the process of creating, modifying, and consuming user-generated content (UGC). UGC is an increasingly important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online (boyd and Ellison 2008); it may be thought of as published content that demonstrates a degree of creative effort that is produced “outside of professional routines and practices” (OECD 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61). Facebook ‘wall’ posts, status updates, and posted photos, tweets on Twitter, and consumer-produced videos and comments on YouTube are some of the many forms UGC takes on. UGC may be facilitated by firms, or produced more spontaneously by consumers (Berthon, Pitt & Campbell 2008; Christodouides 2009), while occasionally referencing brands and products.

Our study thus goes beyond prior research to compare and contrast the content of brand-related UGC posted on three of the most popular social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Our work builds on prior research to make two valuable contributions. First, it provides a grounded framework that illuminates similarities and differences in the content that consumers create when they make posts that refer to brands. Second, it helps us to better understand how specific social media may influence or shape the brand-related messages that consumers create (cf. McLuhan 1964).

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Consumers today are spending more time on social media sites than ever before (Radwanick 2011). As they engage with these sites – including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube – many become involved in the process of creating, modifying, and consuming user-generated content (UGC). UGC is an increasingly important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online (boyd and Ellison 2008); it may be thought of as published content that demonstrates a degree of creative effort that is produced “outside of professional routines and practices” (OECD 2007, Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61). Facebook ‘wall’ posts, status updates, and posted photos, tweets on Twitter, and consumer-produced videos and comments on YouTube are some of the many forms UGC takes on. UGC may be facilitated by firms, or produced more spontaneously by consumers (Berthon, Pitt & Campbell 2008; Christodoulides 2009), while occasionally referencing brands and products.

Academic marketing research on UGC, while still nascent (Burmann 2010), has investigated a number of aspects of UGC, including motivations behind its creation (Daugherty, Eastin and Bright 2008), its value to firms (Dhar and Chang 2009; JPRM09), and its connection to brand communities (Mutziz and Schau 2007). Daugherty, Eastin and Bright’s (2008) work is distinct in that it incorporates data about multiple types of UGC, such as videos, pictures, audio, and blogs, whereas other marketing studies typically examine a single type of UGC, or UGC originating from a particular site. However, as their focus is on motivations to produce UGC, Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008) provide limited insight into the distinctive characteristics of the UGC that is created in different social media channels; moreover, their focus is not exclusively on brand-related UGC, arguably the form of greatest interest to marketing and consumer researchers. Our study thus goes beyond prior research to compare and contrast the content of brand-related UGC posted on three of the most popular social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Our work builds on prior research to make two valuable contributions. First, it provides a grounded framework that illuminates similarities and differences in the content that consumers create when they make posts that refer to brands. Second, it helps us to better understand how specific social media may influence or shape the brand-related messages that consumers create (cf. McLuhan 1964).

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were chosen for this research because they are among the most popular social media sites for consumers and marketers, and because they belong to different social media niches: Facebook is a social network; Twitter is a microblogging application; and, YouTube is a content community. Each site encourages UGC of different forms, from 140-character tweets to posted photos to 8-minute videos. The data for this study consists of 600 brand-related UGC posts – 200 each from each of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube – for two brands: Lululemon and American Apparel. The posts, which were published between June, 2010 and January, 2011, were selected at random from Google search results for: ‘brand’ on ‘site”: (e.g.) ‘Facebook.com’. The two brands were selected because they generate enough interest from consumers to be featured in UGC, and are in the same category: clothing manufacturing and retailing. Moreover, one brand (Lululemon) has had no major scandals or challenges, while the other (American Apparel) has come under negative scrutiny for various reasons. The project comprised three steps. Initially, a coding scheme was created inductively by the three authors who analyzed posts on each medium for both brands. The main dimensions for coding (all binary, except for valence) were whether the post reflected: consumer self-promotion; brand reference; content about user-generated content; communication with company (via social media); and, valenced evaluations of the brand.

Next, each post was manually coded by an independent coder, and one member of the research team, using the inductively developed coding scheme. Intercoder reliability, as calculated using Perreault and Leigh’s (1989) formula, was approximately 0.9, falling within the accepted range of 0.8 to 1.0; any discrepancies in coding were examined and adjudicated by a second member of the research team.

Finally, coding frequencies were tabulated, and statistical differences were assessed using Chi-square tests. Prior to testing for differences between content on the three media sites, Chi-square analyses were run between brands, along each of the coded dimensions, to test for homogeneity. Since between-brand differences were detected, comparisons across the three media sites were run separately for the posts for the two brands.

Our findings reveal a number of differences in UGC across the three channels. For example, consumer self-promotion was most common in YouTube UGC and least common in Twitter UGC, reinforcing YouTube’s slogan of ‘Broadcast Yourself.’ Across both brands, YouTube UGC was least likely to focus centrally on the brand of interest and was most likely to feature it alongside a constellation of other brands. For Lululemon, YouTube UGC was least likely to be used to communicate with the company (for American Apparel, no form of UGC was used to communicate with the company, which may reflect the ambivalent attitude that many consumers have with the brand’s founder, and the company’s social media engagement strategy). For both brands, YouTube was least likely to be used to respond to some company action made online or offline. These findings convey that, while the medium is not, strictly speaking, the message, the different social media sites and their unique cultures foster variance in the brand-related content generated by the consumers who use each medium. Our research offers other scholars a preliminary scheme upon which they may build when seeking to understand differences in brand-related UGC, and insights into the factors (characteristics of medium, as well as the perceptions and actions of the company) that shape UGC in particular ways.

REFERENCES


Shape-Shifters: Exploring Dynamic Culture Through The Shaping of Bicultural Identity

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The growing number of individuals with mixed cultural identities in the global workforce and consuming market has given rise to the awareness of and opportunities to understand biculturals and their role in the global market. Biculturals are typically described as people who have internalized two cultures to the extent that both cultures are alive inside of them (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). They are people who have deeply internalized, and operate fluidly between, two or more distinct cultural meaning systems, inherently carrying with them critical intercultural adaptability skills that guide their thoughts, feelings, and subsequently their behavior (M. Brannen, Garcia, & Thomas, 2009; Hong, et al., 2000). However, the small number of studies on biculturalism in the international marketing and management contexts have mainly focused on the adaptability skills, cultural knowledge, and metacognitions of bicultural individuals (M. Y. Brannen, 2009), assuming a fairly static perspective of culture.

Even though biculturalism is relatively new to the international marketing field, it has been examined more so from the social psychology discipline. Hong et al.’s (2000) study on Westernized Chinese students in Hong Kong found that cultural icons have the ability to prime bicultural individuals, in which a particular cultural identity is readily accessible and promote cultural frame switching (Hong, et al., 2000). Furthermore, Briley & Wyr (2001) found that even though chronically accessible cultural values and norms may influence a particular cultural identity, transitory situational factors may also activate cultural values that may be inconsistent with a person’s cultural inclinations (Briley & Wyr Jr, 2001); furthermore, these activated cultural values may impact individuals’ judgment or decision behaviors. Benet-Martinez et al (2002) empirically examined how bicultural individuals managed and negotiated their dual cultural identities, and found that Chinese-American biculturals who perceived their cultural identities as compatible (high bicultural identity integration or BII) responded in culturally congruent ways to cultural cues (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). However, Chinese-American biculturals who perceived their cultural identities as oppositional (low BII) exhibited a reverse priming effect (i.e. responded to cultural cues that were directly inconsistent with cultural norms). Finally, Lau-Gesk (2003) found that biculturals responded favorably to values-promoting appeals that were congruent with the activated cultural disposition; and the response differed among individuals based on whether they tended to compartmentalize or blend the two cultures (Lau-Gesk, 2003). Taken together, these studies suggest the need for a more dynamic view of culture.

To explore this dynamic perspective, this study proposes to understand meaning making of the bicultural identity. Specifically, the aim here is to understand the meanings bicultural consumers attach to their social identity through food consumption, in an effort to illustrate how one’s culture is shaped by the socio-cultural environment. Studies have shown that food consumption is at the heart of most ethnic cultures and carries cultural meanings (Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983). However, unlike prior studies that focus on cultural meanings of food, this study focuses on the (consumption) experience to understand meanings of the bicultural identity. Because experiences are inherently dynamic, by focusing on bicultural consumers’ consumption experiences, this study is able to capture the dynamic nature of culture. As such, this study seeks to understand how bicultural consumers make sense of their consumption experience by exploring their meaning interpretations to which they act/react in constructing their identities.

Meaning making has a long history in consumer research in which the investigator attempts to get at the how’s and why’s of consumer behavior. Meaning making is the process by which consumers interpret and make sense of their environment. It provides an understanding of the environment from the consumer’s perspective. Understanding meanings are important because they provide the individual with a framework to which people then act/react. In this sense, meanings are causal. Much of the research has focused on the meanings of monocultural consumers, who may see things differently than bicultural consumers. Given the prevalence of bicultural individuals, it is important...