

USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON PURCHASE INTENTION FOR FASHION PRODUCTS: A STUDY ON WOMEN CONSUMERS IN BANGALORE

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ABSTRACT

Today's perpetually connected consumers have taken control of the marketers' message. They decide where, when, and how they want to engage with brands. They widely share their experiences — good, bad, and in between — on the products they use and the brands they love. These communications are highly influential because they are more trusted than typical brand messaging. But many marketers have yet to realize the brand building power of this immature but influential marketing discipline. To fulfill user-generated content's brand building potential, marketing leaders must solicit authentic, value-added content from their customers and measure results to build maturity.

Regardless of the perceived level of confidence in a product choice, there always exists some level of insecurity in that decision among consumers. For many consumers, User generated content provides that final litmus test to feeling that a right choice was made or the wrong one avoided. Younger consumers are significantly more likely than older consumers to mention that User generated content is "Extremely/Very" influential when making a purchasing decision. Conversely, older consumers rely more on word of mouth and consumers/industrial reports than younger consumers.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, Purchase Intention, Women Consumers

INTRODUCTION

Retail in India has gone through significant changes over the past decade. Consumers are stringent, value-conscious, and clear in terms of their preference of brand or retailers when it comes to purchases. From just being a "consumer" of a product or service, today's consumers demand a say in the design, manufacture, and outreach of the products that they intend to purchase. The emergence of the "prosumer" or the consumer who is also partly the producer of the product, poses sufficient rethink for marketers to strategize their marketing plans. Herein,

they find new web-enabled technologies to be an ideal interface for evolving consumers in not just the product, but in all 4P's of marketing. The consumer integrates with the producer on the Product through concepts such as co-creation; on the Place (or distribution) through crowdsourcing; on Pricing through e-auctions; and on the Promotions through online user-generated media. In all such cases, the consumer acts as an active participant in the marketing process for the brand in the question.

User-generated content of social media has become the new currency, "the gold" in social media. The importance of user-generated content in the world of marketing, branding, and advertising is its capacity to influence purchase decisions, brand affinity, and brand loyalty. User-generated content ranges from videos to photos to product commentary. The use of user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as an important component of the content marketing mix. Used by publishers, marketers and agencies alike, and driven by the surge of digital platforms, websites and technologies, UGC can provide an effective and compelling way to engage with consumers.

Fashion industry is one of the businesses where frequent changes occur and social media is the most convenient and cheapest mean to communicate. The emergence of social media has transformed the world and its entire way of functioning, bringing the world and its people closer. Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors among groups of people who gather online to share information, experiences and perspectives using colloquial media.

One industry which is considered to be perfectly suited and naturally fit for social media is Fashion. When we talk about social media for the fashion industry it refers to the social networking websites and other online platforms that enable the fashion industry to connect with their customers using the latest social networking technology. The fashion Industry is using social media to study trends and anticipate fashion behaviors. It is embracing social media which has enabled it to emerge in the forefront as a phenomenon. The development of social networking website such as Face book, Twitter has created a new muse among the Factionists. From the fashion blogs to the live streaming of catwalk shows, from the main fashion weeks to the social shopping we get diversity of opinions on different places through face book, twitter and other social networking websites. It has become a most important runway for the fashion industry. The power and influence of social media on fashion industry is undeniable.

While this integration has clearly been a game changer for most businesses, online media has brought key impetus to the fashion industry. Fashion products, given the quick turnaround time necessitated due to seasonal and trend-based changes, are dynamically moving towards shorter lead-times and faster mind-to-market solutions the growing number of players in this business has placed the consumer at the center of the product creation process.

Consumer generated or user generated promotion has been a concept practiced for fashion businesses since times before the advent of online media. Traditional word of mouth (WOM) has been a source of credible information for fashion products. However, the presence of Web 2.0 technologies has clearly enabled a wider dissemination of this content.

UGC is all about the users creating content. They're unpaid and do it for a number of reasons, whether it's to share their experience, build a connection with like-minded people, or to be in with a chance of winning something. It is considerably cheaper than forking out thousands or even millions for prime-time TV commercials and Times Square billboards.

Customer-orientated businesses are on the rise, because companies constantly have to keep up with the changing trends of their audiences. In this fast-paced, digitally-run world, attention-spans can be snapped away with the click of a fingers. If brands aren't catering solely to their customers, their customers will simply find another brand that is.

The beauty of UGC is that the users run the show, while marketers don't have to empty their pockets on campaigns that may or may not perform well. Authenticity is so important in today's online world. Customers are no longer the passive consumers led by TV commercials and billboards. Instead, they're active choosers of their own fate and want a say in who they do and don't buy from.

User-Generated Content

User generated content (UGC) or also known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) works exactly like common word of mouth except that it spreads input through an online medium. By definition, UGC refers to any own created material uploaded to the Internet by non-media and it has a greater influence on people's consumption where the contents are generally being shared on social media such as on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

UGC is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet. Compared to producer-generated content (PGC) that usually hired endorsers and celebrities to speak the advantages and benefits of the products. Consumers have turned away from the common promotion practices as they have perceived UGC as more credible. The shared contents in UGC are based on consumers' own experiences. As such, it is proven to be more trustworthy, useful and unbiased. Potential consumers trust the content generated by other users in regards to brands and products mainly because they perceive the users do not have any commercial interest. Thus, online consumers always rely on the content generated by other users to assist them in making a purchase decision.

User generated content can be defined in multiple parameters. It is defined as a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumer intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues. In a media environment, consumers produce, design, publish, or edit content that makes this medium vibrant and attractive. Under various nomenclatures such as consumer generated content (CGC), user generated content (UGC), and customer created content (CCC), this content in online media involves consumers who generate content for the online medium under no monetary benefits.

- Key benefits of User Generated Content
 - ✓ Heightened Consumer Trust
 - ✓ Stronger Brand Affinity and Engagement
 - ✓ More Earned Media
 - ✓ Stronger SEO
 - ✓ New Research Opportunities
 - ✓ Cost-efficient Content Pipeline

Use of User-Generated Content in Online Media for Fashion Categories

The fashion business entails category-wise management, and hence marketers may be interested in analyzing the kind of user-generated content is preferred for each fashion category.

- Casual wear is a category that caters to the maximum number of consumers in the fashion business.
- Watches are a part of the fast emerging group in fashion accessories, making them less of a functional instrument more of a status symbol. This category is besieged with many sub-categories, including formal watches sports and active categories, specialized watches and ethnic watches.
- Formal wear covers fashion products, which comply with certain norms of dressing as indicated by the social circle of the consumer. Products such as trousers, shirts, formal skirts, shoes, blazers, and so forth are examples of this category. Formal wear is usually limited to workspaces, and may be indicative of the profession or social standing of the wearer.
- Footwear is a fashion category covers multiple retail formats-from-high-end footwear brands like Jimmy Choo to localized craft based products like Kolhapuri chappals.
- Ethnic wear is a high value category for Indian market, with consumers ready to spend on this category to meet their requirements for occasion wear. Currently, product categories like salwar-kameez-dupattas (SKDs), kurtas and churidars are also seen as being part of this category.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nithya Venkataraman & Sreedhara Raman, 2016

The advent of online media has been instrumental in providing consumers with quick, relevant, and convenient information on products and services. The success of such media has been established for businesses such as tourism, automobile, and consumer electronics- wherein consumers tend to decide on final purchases based on user - generated content (UGC) such as customer reviews and feedback rather than on traditional advertising media. With short lead times, quick turnaround of products, and frequent changes in offerings, the fashion industry is also exploring the use of such user-generated content for marketing its products.

Pervaiz Ali, 2011

Internet marketing is conceptually different from other marketing channels and internet promotes a one to one communication between the seller and the end user with round the clock customer service. Today, business internet marketing is the fastest growing segment of online commerce. The major difference between traditional and online selling is the extent of interaction between the consumer and the seller. There is much more electronic interactivity with the consumer in the form of emails and FAQs. Through FAQs, the consumer's questions on shipment, payment, product, policies and other customer concerns can be addressed effectively.

Fandos & Flavian, 2006; Halim & Hameed, 2005

Purchase intention is the implied promise to one's self to buy the product again whenever one makes next trip to the market. It has a substantial importance because the companies want to increase the sale of specific product for the purpose to maximize their profit. Purchase intention depicts the impression of customer retention. There are certain functions of the brand, which have a strong influence on the purchase intention of the customers i.e. brand image, product quality, product knowledge, product involvement, product attributes and brand loyalty.

Gigi De Vault, 2016

User-generated content of social media has become the new currency -- the gold -- in social media. The importance of user-generated content in the world of marketing, branding, and advertising is its capacity to influence purchase decisions, brand affinity, and brand loyalty.

Yuling Bai, Cong Li, Jishun Niu 2016

With the development of other online shopping platforms, the concept of online clothing brands continues to broaden. This concept refers to clothing brands that are sold online without a

physical store. To differentiate themselves from others, some online shopping platforms have developed themselves into a brand incubation base to help online brands grow rapidly. Viewed from the current development, the concept of online clothing brands is also undergoing changes. Clothing brands that began online have started to set up their own physical stores and have begun to achieve an operational mode of “e-commerce + physical store business”. A new era that features the combination of online and offline business has begun.

Cleveland and Laroche, 2007

Globalization has catalyzed the growth of fashion industry and the marketplace attractions have driven the cultural attributes of consumers significantly across various consumer segments. Shifts in the cultural values, consumer preferences, and purchase intentions towards designer products is arguably the most critical issue faced by the marketing managers today. Many researchers argue that increasing globalization is reducing the homogeneity of consumer behaviors within countries, while increasing communalities across countries.

Horowitz, 2009

Most firms manufacturing designer apparel are trying to bridge intercultural differences and building cultural consonance across consumer segments on a variety of contexts that stimulates interest in fashion apparel. Customer centric market strategy developed on self-esteem attributes of consumer is used by the firms to enhance purchase intentions towards fashion apparel.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the factors that influence the usage of online media by fashion products.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of user generated content on the purchase of customers in Bangalore.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Industry: Fashion Industry

Products: Apparel- Casualwear, watches, Apparel- Formalwear, Footwear, Apparel- Ethnic, Lingerie, Home Furnishing, Jewelry, Eyewear, Home Décor, Bags, Clutches, Wallets, Scarves and stole

HYPOTHESIS

H0: Factors of User-Generated Content do not have a significant impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

H1: Factors of User-Generated Content have a significant impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive study

Sample unit: People using online for purchasing fashion products

Sample size: Population of his research are women who are living in Bangalore keeping in view the limitation of time and resources, to take the sample size is up to 100.

Average, Percentages, and regression are used to find out the impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

Table 1: Category-wise Online Media Reference

	Apparel-Casualwear	Apparel-Ethnic	Apparel-Formalwear	Footwear	Watches	Lingerie
Reference	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents
Always	21	7	7	15	7	4
Often	31	33	32	31	26	30
Sometimes	41	38	34	36	14	28
Rarely	2	18	18	11	16	16
Never	0	6	9	7	11	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Reference	Jewelry	Home Furnishing	Eyewear	Home décor	Scarves and Stoles	Cosmetics
	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents
Always	5	8	5	8	3	5
Often	25	25	36	29	32	32
Sometimes	36	35	31	37	36	29
Rarely	16	25	12	14	14	20
Never	19	11	16	12	15	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

It is seen that customers for Apparel -casualwear tended to use user-generated content the most, followed by watches, ethnic wear, footwear and wallets/clutches/bags

Table 2: Category-wise Online Media Reference

	Information Accuracy	Social Media Reference	Social Connectedness	Usage Influence	Online Comparison
	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents
Strongly agree	17	19	19	14	21
Agree	57	61	55	46	53
Neither agree nor Disagree	23	19	22	30	21
Disagree	3	1	4	9	5
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	1	0
Total	100		100	100	100

Internet is a very rich source of information these days. There is always the possibility that the information one gets from the internet is either inaccurate or downright false. There have been questionable contents – information or stories – that came out in the social media. More than half of the customers find online information more accurate.

The most important factor is Community Feeling and Being updated. User- Generated content clearly gives these customers not just a chance to purchase products but also helps them retain a feeling of belonging to a specific community.

Studies have demonstrated that young people often interact with friends using social networking sites, instant messaging, and mobile phones. The extent to which one feels that one is a part of one or more social groups, it is sensible that belonging may be fostered through digital mediums.

Social networking plays a vital role in broadening social connections and learning technical skills, its risks cannot be overlooked. Only the lack or difficulty in self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure makes adolescents vulnerable to evils. Majority of the customers admit that they use online media due to friends/ family/colleagues’ influences.

The comparison feature of online media facilitates the user to compare and contrast the products available with its competitors and gives a right to choose quality products at its best price.

Table 3: Category-wise Online Media Reference

	Online Media as a Platform of Expression	Comparison Advantage	Shopping Experience	Online Media Reliability	Quality Assessment Information Prior to Purchase	Ease of Understanding	Online Media Interaction with Advertisements	Usefulness of Online Information v/s Advertisements	Online Media Information Availability with Advertisements
	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents
Strongly agree	20	26	12	10	8	10	13	15	15
Agree	50	50	60	46	50	60	63	51	51
Neither agree nor Disagree	23	20	20	38	33	20	19	31	31
Disagree	7	4	8	6	9	10	5	2	2
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The internet as a public sphere encourages discussions of political issues and disagreement expression, which is a necessity to form public opinion.

The comparison feature of online platform allows for quick and easy comparison between different offering’s features and characteristics.

Based on the survey, customers have a better and reliable experiences online. Retailers still have a long way to go toward meeting consumer expectations, particularly when it comes to the post-purchase experience for online shoppers.

Online users make clear distinctions between different sources of information. People are much more trusting of news websites, and far more skeptical of the accuracy in personal weblogs.

Quality and product experience quoted by online users facilitates the purchase decision of the customers.

Customers find it easier to understand online information than advertisement. Advertisement is a sort of day-dreaming for the people. These days it is taking the people away from reality and into the realm of artificiality. People tend to believe that the experiences from other users could be more reliable than fancy advertisements.

Customers find that online information is more interactive than advertisements. Interactive online websites facilitate users to express their feelings towards the product or services.

Majority of the customers find online information more useful than advertisements.

More than half of the customers find online information more available than advertisements.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H0: Factors of User-Generated Content do not have a significant impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

H1: Factors of User-Generated Content have a significant impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

Testing Tool: Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	Ease_in_understanding	.610	.084	.623	7.243	.000
	Useful_information	.311	.087	.308	3.584	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase_intention						

Consumers have turned away from the common promotion practices as they have perceived UGC as more credible. User-generated content is easy to understand as it is generally created outside of professional routines and practices. It often does not have an institutional or a commercial market context.

User-generated content facilitates the purchase intention of customers based on the inputs, experiences, loyalty etc. towards the products/services. UGC could be a positive or a negative feedback. Based on the study conducted, it is found that women consumers are more reliable to the reviews and feedback that they encountered against the products/services.

Since the significance value is less than .005, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

The study concluded that the factors of User-Generated Content have a significant impact on the purchase intention of consumers for the fashion product categories.

FINDINGS

- The influence of technology in people is be high.
- The comparison feature of online media facilitates the user to compare and contrast the products available with its competitors and gives a right to choose quality products at its best price.
- Online users make clear distinctions between different sources of information. People are much more trusting of news websites, and far more skeptical of the accuracy in personal weblogs.
- Quality and product experience quoted by online users facilitates the purchase decision of the customers.
- Customers find it easier to understand online information than advertisement.
- Customers find that online information is more interactive than advertisements. Interactive online websites facilitate users to express their feelings towards the product or services.
- Online information more useful than advertisements.
- Online information more available than advertisements.

CONCLUSION

Man is a social animal, and the business of fashion not only caters to the physical and aesthetic requirements of its wearer, but is also an important criterion for her social identity. Likewise, it is not surprising to note when a consumer looks for user-generated content, her purchases are most likely influenced by content that satisfies her social needs. For casual wear brands, content that creates an online community needs to be combined with content that is easy to access. The consumer for this category is looking for products of frequent use and hence content that is easy to obtain becomes a pre-requisite for enhancing purchase intention. For watches, it is important for the consumer to be aware of quality parameters, considering long shelf-life of the product. Marketers would need to focus on user-generated content that satisfies these requirements. For formal wear, consumer is clearly looking for social acceptance. Brands hence need to create and access user-generated content that makes the consumer feel part of the community. Footwear brands clearly need to engage their audience in content that gives them social gratification, as well as keeps them updated on the latest trends. Ethnic wear is a category that clearly needs

social performance. When engaging with user-generated content, ethnic brands clearly need to follow the same dictate on giving a sense of social identity to its consumers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- User-generated content can be effectively used by fashion marketers in creating a positive purchase intention amongst consumers.
- Fashion marketers can encourage the creation of blogs or review communities for their brands, with a clear focus on the kind of content that is most likely to create a positive intent for purchase for the specific product category

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