User-generated Content across Social Media: An Apparel vs. Service Brand Comparison

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Introduction Social media have emerged as the next media for marketing. In 2014, 88% of companies with more than 100 employees in the U.S. used social media for marketing activities (eMarker, 2014). As firms attempt to facilitate conversations on social media to connect with and better understand consumers, research evidence is accumulating that consumer-generated content on social media play an important role in consumer brand experience (Gensler et al., 2013; Schivinsk &Dabrowski, 2014); however, an answered question remains: *How does variance in brand-related user-generated content (UGC) across social media platforms vary by the type of retail brands?* The purpose of this study is to address this question by examining disparity inherent to the brand user-generated content in existing social media channels and compare the disparity between goods and service retail brands as opposed to service retail brands. It is among the first to investigate brand-related user-generated content in social media of apparel retail brands as opposed to service retail brands.

Literature Review and Hypotheses The present study draws upon Smith et al.'s (2012) framework of brand-related user-generated content (UGC), which identified six key dimensions of UGC: (a) promotional self-presentation (expression of the self via brands); (b) brand centrality (brand-oriented posts); (c) marker-directed communication (consumer initiated messages toward marketers); (d) response to online marker action (consumer reply to marketer actions directed toward the marketer and/or other consumers); (e) factually informative about the brand (posting hard information about the brand like price, store location, etc.); and (f) brand sentiment (valence of being positive, negative, neutral or unclear). Research supports that various dimensions of UGG work differently across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, creating differential effects on consume-driven brand experiences (Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, social media types (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) will exhibit differences in promotional self-presentation (H1a), brand centrality (H1b), market-directed communication (H1c), response to online market action (H1d), factually informative about the brand (H1e), and brand sentiment (H1f).
Further, the differences across social media types may vary between goods (apparel) and services brands due to unique attributes embedded in each (e.g., simultaneous production/consumption, perishability, inconsistency)(Levy, Weitz, & Grewal, 2014). Therefore, social media types will exhibit differences in promotional self-presentation (H2a), brand centrality (H2b), market-directed communication (H2c), response to online market action (H2d), factually informative about the brand (H2e), and brand sentiment (H2f) by retail brand types (apparel vs. services).

Method Netnography (Kozinets, 1999) was used to collect data from four social media sites: social networking site (Facebook), microblogging (Twitter), photo sharing site (Instagram) and

video sharing site (YouTube). Netnography was appropriate for this study owing to the capability of systematic and objective (not confounded by the researcher's presence) comparison and interpretation for large sample sizes of computer-generated contents (UGC) (Lugosi et al., 2012). A total of 1200 individual brand-related user-generated postings were randomly drawn on each 150 postings with four social media sites along the conversation on *Gap* and *Starbucks* brand pages within the six months period (September, 2014- March, 2015). *Gap* and *Starbucks* were chosen as an apparel and service retail brands, respectively, given their proactive use of social media marketing as demonstrated by multiple case studies (Chua & Banerjee, 2013; Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010). Data coding was done by two coders individually (inter-reliability = 0.97).

Results and Discussion A chi-square test was performed for hypothesis testing. All hypotheses were supported at the level of $p < 0.001$ (frequencies in Table 1). First, significant differences were found across four social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) in promotional self, brand centrality, market-directed communication, response to online market action, factually informative about the brand, and positive, negative, neutral, and unclear brand sentiment, supporting H1a – H1f. Notably, market-directed communication is more prominent in brand-related UCG on Twitter (*f*=109) and Facebook (*f*=54) than that of Instagram (*f*=15) and YouTube (*f*=13). Brand-related UCG on Instagram (*f*=179) features positive brand sentiment greater than others; while negative brand sentiment was devoid of Instagram (*f*=17) as compared to YouTube (*f*=64), Twitter (*f*=66), and Facebook (*f*=94). Next, the differences in each dimension of brand-related UCG across the social media sites were also varied by retail brand types (Gap vs. Starbucks), yielding support for H2a – H2f. Particularly, positive UCG brand sentiment on Facebook is the most significantly different feature between *Gap* (*f*=82) and Starbucks (*f*=31). Similarly, negative UCG brand sentiment on Facebook is significantly less featured on Gap (*f*=31) versus Starbucks (*f*=63).

Theoretically, this study enriches current understanding by showing users' active participation in and experience with apparel retail brands' social media. It also provides evidence that retail brands (apparel vs. services brand) attract features of UGC differently. Practically, this provides managerial insights into how to plan and execute effective social media marketing for apparel retailing.

Table1. Frequency of UGC by Social Media

Sites	1	2	3	4	5	6 (positive)	6 (negative)	6 (neutral)	6 (unclear)
Facebook	2 (1)	22(11)	24(30)	7(13)	5(14)	82(31)	31(63)	31(51)	6(5)
Twitter	10(3)	20(5)	50(59)	67(78)	6(4)	66(66)	34(32)	31(50)	19(2)
Instagram	3(1)	15(9)	7(8)	8(5)	1(0)	85(94)	46(43)	46(43)	8(7)
YouTube	2(0)	2(7)	5(8)	10(7)	6(6)	44(66)	58(51)	58(51)	9(8)

Note. f on Gap (*f* on Starbucks in parentheses). 1= promotional self-presentation, 2= brand centrality, 3= market-directed communication, 4= response to online market action, 5= factually information about the brand, 6= brand sentiment. ******References upon request***